First Honorary Doctorate for Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o from Germany

For immediate release!

On May 5, 2014, the University of Bayreuth, through its well-known Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS), will award an honorary doctorate to Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan author, scholar and Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California-Irvine, USA. Ngũgĩ is a renowned author who has left his mark on the literary scene across a multiplicity of genres, including the novel, play, short story and children literature. Ngũgĩ, who is Kenyan, has a 30 year connection with Bayreuth; he was based in Bayreuth while he was working on his critically-acclaimed book, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). His creative and critical works, translated into several languages are on school and university curricula in Africa as well as other parts of the world. He has influenced generations of students and scholars as one of the most profound and critical witnesses of the legacy of colonialism and the nature of post-independence experiences in Africa and beyond.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was born in 1938 and has a prolific writing career spanning more than half a century. His diverse body of works represents and interrogates the nature and implications of economic, social and political power constellations at the global, national and regional level. In *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature & Society* (1997), Ngũgĩ asserts that writers have the responsibility to speak out with regard to political issues that shape their societies. His criticism of political malpractices in Kenya led to his detention in December 1977, and he was only released a year later thanks to a strong campaign led by Amnesty International which named him as a Prisoner of Conscience. With great resilience, Ngũgĩ continued to write even under these difficult conditions. His first novel in his native Kikuyu language, entitled *Caitaani mútharaba-Inī* (*Der gekreuzigte Teufel*) (1982), was written on prison-issued toilet papers. Interestingly, the prison years strengthened his conviction on the need to use the mother tongue as a socio-cultural tool for raising awareness against social injustice. He did not waver in speaking against dictatorial practices in his country, leading to his exile in 1982, after many threats and attempts on his life. He could only visit Kenya in 2002 after relative political calm. Ngũgĩ’s works continue to constitute fertile sites for the imagination of alternative futures and for the respect of cultural diversity. According to Ngũgĩ, there is no periphery, rather there are mutually enriching centres.

End.

For more information, please contact Prof. Dr. Dymitr Ibriszimow and Dr. Shola Adenekan
Notes to the editor:

The Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, BIGSAS, is funded by the Initiative for Excellence since 2007 and embedded in a very special academic environment.

The University of Bayreuth with its research focus on Africa stands for:

- Nearly 40 years of interdisciplinary research in the humanities on Africa in close collaboration with African colleagues
- Long-standing experience in training and mentoring young academics from Europe and Africa

BIGSAS is one of a kind worldwide in terms of its:

- Research environment of 21 disciplines which focus on Africa and are integrated into the Institute of African Studies (IAS)
- Close and active collaborations with six partner universities across the African continent, enabling joint supervision.
- Currently 112 doctoral students from more than 30 different countries are working on their dissertation projects