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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the ceremony marking 50 years of development policy
cooperation between the State and Churches
on 6 September 2012
in Bonn**

It is a particular joy to take the floor here today on this momentous occasion. After all, those working to combat poverty and injustice need to be strong-willed, courageous and confident – character traits which are especially important to me and which I want to boost. Today, just like this morning for the service, many people have gathered who display precisely that – the courage to stand up to shrugs of resignation and take action.

Everyone here knows that a billion people are going hungry in our world. In the least developed countries, every tenth child does not reach its first birthday. Every two and a half years, 50 to 60 million people are dying worldwide of avoidable diseases or poverty – the same tally of victims as World War Two.

Everyone here knows that alongside these worrying trends, global development has also chalked up successes. For example, more and more children are now attending school and fewer and fewer people are dying of malaria. And you have played your part to ensure poverty does not gain the upper hand worldwide.

Fifty years of cooperation between State and Church development work is thus a good opportunity to think about how to move forward with the seemingly overpowering Goliath that is poverty and injustice, to look more closely at how we can prevail.

I'm sure you recall: Things looked pretty lamentable for David as he faced Goliath. But David didn't lament his fate. He met the giant head on with his five pebbles. In development cooperation, there are five fields which I feel are especially important if we want to win the battle against poverty and its causes. In all five, the courage and confidence of the stakeholders, that is also the Churches, play a role.

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Firstly, development cooperation has to convince our people at home. "Those who have seen the poorest of this world feel rich enough to help," as Albert Schweitzer realized in his day. It was Easter 1959 when the Catholic Church first collected for the poor in the Third World using the name MISEREOR. Back then, not many people in Germany had seen for themselves the poverty beyond Europe's shores. But they remembered the hunger and need during the last War and thereafter. Even today, we often see how the poorest of the poor take in refugees from neighbouring countries without asking questions and then share the little that they have. How can we anchor this sense of solidarity in a rich society? It is curious that this obviously becomes more difficult the richer and more saturated the society.

Back then, the first MISEREOR collection generated more than 35 million marks. A regal sum. This success gave the bishops the good idea of making this into an institution. The Protestant version was Brot für die Welt. Compassion, solidarity and social commitment were incidentally not just important for Christians in the West. They were not restricted to one half of Germany. Also on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, Christians in their parishes were committed to international cooperation – often with considerable success which was not necessarily to the taste of those in power. When I worked as pastor in a Protestant parish, development cooperation was intended more as socialist solidarity amongst our so-called sister nations. We did what we could to swim against the tide.

The Churches brought their weight and their mission to bear to combat poverty as a whole thus also helping distant neighbours. If we read documents from the early years today, the terms sometimes seem strange. We use different language nowadays but the basic approach is similar to ours today. Don't sit back but take action in a spirit of solidarity. Two years before the United Nations set the target of 0.7% of GDP for development cooperation, the Land Protestant Churches set their own target. In 1968, they decided to spend 2% of their budget on development projects, a figure which was to increase to 5% in 1975. They did however fail to meet the target, something I mention as an aside.

Some 3% of the 2011 federal budget was earmarked for development cooperation. Now, you can argue about whether this is too much or too little. We have so many people here with us today who could do that superbly. But there is one thing where there can be no dispute: If we want to convince the people that this money is being used sensibly, we need feedback about the results in the partner countries.

But solidarity is never something to be measured exclusively in euros. What matters is the impact it has on people's daily lives. Building a new school is often the easy bit. It is more difficult when the

teachers working in the school lack training, curricula or perhaps even motivation.

Those of us who can report back on experience abroad play a key role in the work to get the public on board. This we need to promote. The Churches have had a major input in creating development services providing highly motivated experts for developing countries. As early as 1960, groups of tradesmen headed off.

Today, there are many different ways of playing a role in development cooperation. There are more than twenty thousand people working on German State development cooperation worldwide. Most of them are highly dedicated to the cause. But of course there are also the cynics who consider development cooperation to be a well-paid but pointless job. I think we all agree: a "development industry" must never be allowed to put its own interests above the development of our partners.

I know many people working in development cooperation have started to have second thoughts about the impact of their work, about poverty and plenty, and about the meaning of solidarity. I believe it would be good for our society if these people were to share their thoughts with us in our communities, of course also with political leaders but also with their families at home on their sofa.

Those working in distant lands need much support from home. That is why the Churches are engaging in programmes to increase the acceptance of their development policy activities. This acceptance is incredibly important and must be maintained. These programmes tell us where things are happening, the conditions under which children have to work in many countries and what we can do to give these children better opportunities.

The Churches can use their many years of experience and a unique network of contacts to shed light here in Germany on abstract global questions, also to encourage us to look at what we are doing as families, authorities and businesses. This means compassion can take on concrete form day by day and that is a good thing.

Despite the frustration about failures which also happen in development cooperation, the Churches are particularly well placed to keep alive the will to combat the causes of poverty. The Churches are not to be discouraged, so it is no surprise that Church-run development cooperation tends to have a better reputation than that of the State. For this reason it is, I believe, important that we were reminded during today's service of the sources of our hope. I have seen in other political contexts that believers are sometimes better able to keep their hopes alive than those who have adapted to a supposed mainstream and slackened their efforts. We need to build on this experience and you, those who are doing the work on

development cooperation, have the strength that is rooted in your experience. You have the strength to reanimate the hope of the many people who have not yet recognized the problems we consider important and thus open the way for new possibilities.

My second hypothesis is that development cooperation is a community task based on partnership with the people on the ground. Some may find that a banal statement. It is you that have devised and developed the principles for precisely this thinking. But let's be honest. How many major development plans have been drawn up around a distant negotiating table without anyone sitting down with the partners and the needy to talk to them? You may well say that was a problem in the past but not any longer. I don't really want to know. But I do believe that even today we have to invest a considerable amount of energy in these discussions with our partners to lend shape to what we feel is important. The American development economist William Easterly was able to fill a whole book on this topic entitled "The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good". Many of you may know it.

The Church development services, however, did endeavour to work with their partners to find out about what was needed on the ground. Also for the Churches, this was initially uncharted territory. After all, the missionaries that headed off to South America, Asia and Africa in colonial days played a major role in setting up education and health services, one that is occasionally even recognized today. But these institutions were based on European thinking and yardsticks – there were many white know-alls at work back then.

The partner Churches in these countries have for some time been taking a closer look at the role of European Churches in colonial times. It was Desmond Tutu, whom I think of fondly, who famously said, "When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land." It is a wonderful quote – but it is worth looking more closely. After all, just to set the record straight, it was not so much the missionaries who had the land but in fact their compatriots who were keen to make a penny or two. But one thing for sure, the Churches often failed to comment on the situation Tutu criticizes.

Working with the respective Churches on the ground in a spirit of partnership also meant coming to terms with the colonial past. That was not always easy. But in real partnerships you have to address problems from both sides and not somehow suppress lingering feelings of guilt out of misguided political correctness or, I might add, gratitude. What is more, it was the mission schools, and this we should remember, that opened the door to good education in many countries

and ultimately to political emancipation in many, many countries, particularly in Africa.

Unlike State-run development cooperation which had to create new structures, the Churches could tap a dense network of contacts worldwide even fifty years ago and used this network to implement projects. Abiding by the principle that evangelical missions are not to be supported, the Churches in Germany have a high level of autonomy in administering State funds for development cooperation.

That was an important decision and both sides benefit: the Church and the State. After all, with their partners on the ground, the Churches can reach people who would otherwise be difficult or impossible to reach. So I am pleased that two representatives of this treasure trove of international partners will tell us more about their experiences today: Ms Richardson from India and Archbishop Kaigama from Nigeria. I am going to listen very carefully to you and to the representatives of German Churches and our Federal Minister.

The motto of today's event "trust in the strength of the poor" is one I like. The Churches also take care not to create, with their development cooperation, a mentality where people come to expect subsidies making them dependent. Archbishop Zollitsch, you made this point very clearly in your words of welcome. What we are trying to do is enable people to take their lives in their own hands and tap their potential which lies dormant or has been crushed by circumstance. So for me the key question is: What provides encouragement, what unleashes the strengths we have in us, the strengths we need to tap?

I know the process to encourage people to shoulder responsibility is neither smooth nor easy. It takes a very long time to change mindsets. But these inner developments which people go through are always exciting and fulfilling to watch. So wherever we can help people live out their own potential for responsibility, we are achieving much and I am certainly happy to be on board.

There is another point about partnership which I feel is important. When we take on a task together, our partners expect us to be reliable and in for the long term. There is a great temptation in development cooperation to arouse unrealistic expectations. After all, transfers alone were not enough to create blossoming landscapes in east Germany either – they can only ever be building blocks in a wider community effort.

Nor can we expect within just a few decades to achieve the level of material prosperity built by many generations in Europe. The conditions and the policy also have to be right. Just look at how things are developing in Korea: South Korea has long left the ranks of developing countries and in North Korea people are still going hungry.

This brings me to my third point. We must not mix up development cooperation and the giving of alms. Of course people sometimes end up in a desperate situation through no fault of their own, whether after an earthquake, a flood or suchlike. Of course we cannot just sit back and do nothing. Then we need to make donations to provide emergency assistance. But the Churches didn't ever leave it at that. They didn't see their work as a quick-fix solution. What they wanted to do was give people better development opportunities in the long term.

And that can't happen without fair conditions, that is without politics. This was plain to see as early as the 1960s at the Second Vatican Council and the Geneva Conference of the World Council of Churches. Back then, the Churches called upon rich countries to remove the barriers to exports from the Third World. Like many others, they criticized trade barriers and export subsidies as they distort economic competition. The Churches did not restrict their criticism of global conditions to the North. They also registered their disapproval of situations where the upper echelons in developing countries defend their privileges and try to block the necessary social and economic progress. Thus, at an early stage, the Churches were part of the social movements working to combat structural injustice on the ground.

Armed with determination, the Churches also helped ensure that the long journey towards debt relief for highly indebted countries was completed at the start of the millennium. Of course this year of celebration did not mean all the problems of these countries had been solved – we can see that for ourselves everyday – but budgets were considerably eased meaning more money was available for social tasks and for building economic opportunities for the future. The coherence of our policy remains a subject of debate which has a direct impact on our credibility. If we simply transfer environmentally harmful production sites to other countries, it somewhat takes the sheen off the clean environment in Germany. When fields used for food production are suddenly growing energy crops, many people are concerned. We know there is a wider picture. The Churches, however, made the connection at a particularly early stage. With their daily dealings with the poor of our world, they know what they are talking about. So that is why I hope that the Churches will continue to play an active role in all discussions on the direction of development cooperation. This is not undesired input, to put it plainly this is input we want to have.

My slant on these questions which are linked to our role in preserving Creation shows you that to my mind we have to take the matter of our viable development further, we cannot just call it a day at combating poverty. Development and development cooperation, and this brings me to my fourth point, have long been a question of our own personal lifestyles.

Not all that long ago, I was declared a climate ambassador by a group of dedicated primary school children here in Bonn. This is a weighty responsibility and each and every one of us can try to shoulder this responsibility in our own way. I know many of you are miles ahead of me. Each and every one of us can calculate our carbon footprint on the computer and calculate how many planets we would need to give everyone the lifestyle we deem essential. But we only have one planet. You can call into question individual aspects of the calculations, just as you can do with the figures on the climate. But we simply cannot transfer our level of resource consumption in Germany to the whole world. And by extension that means development cannot aim to produce a carbon copy of our lifestyle. As this is often precisely what the so-called developed countries want, we also have to talk about our own lifestyles when we enter into debate with them. So it is clear that we, too, have to develop.

But it is not just due to climate protection that we need to rethink the lifestyles of highly industrialized societies. Through growth, more and more societies beyond Europe's borders are seeing that the correlation between spiritual well-being and material prosperity only goes so far. A Study Commission of the German Bundestag is currently looking at the links between growth, prosperity and quality of life with respect to sustainability. In Latin America, people are thinking about "Buen Vivir", living well, which has to be seen in the social context with other people and with nature. Also in Asia, there is a trend to look at culturally established alternatives to lifestyles rooted in excessive affluence. It is important that we are all thinking together rather than the saturated Western societies doing it on their own on their self-constructed pedestal.

"Living well instead of having much" – that was how MISEREOR and BUND put it in 1996. The encyclical of the Catholic Church on the development of peoples published at Easter in 1967 talks about justice as a guiding principle with which to overcome "soul-stifling materialism". So the Churches have long been looking at preserving Creation, a culture of peace and social justice. They are not the only ones, but they remain an irreplaceable voice amongst the many who know a life of plenty is not decided by bank balances or credit cards.

I have kept what is perhaps my favourite point for last. The aim of development cooperation is inherent. The early appeals for donations by the Churches included a multitude of exemplary motives: love of thy neighbour, compassion, spiritual benefits for the donors, but also the memory of what Germany had received in assistance and the need to pass this on. There was no lack of experience after the World War and reparations. The time had come to act.

In the early years of State development policy, there was the clear desire not to be subject to foreign policy objectives. Today, there are a host of important aims: preserving peace, protecting the environment, preventing international migration and promoting German economic interests, to name but a few. Admittedly, not all the goals can be achieved to the same degree. Can we simultaneously build infrastructure, protect the rainforest and reduce the number of AIDS sufferers?

Here, too, we need to be careful not to overburden development policy with expectations we cannot fulfil. This would only lead to frustration and cast a shadow on the success stories on the one hand and on the other reduce the level of commitment: those who are frustrated tend not to be dedicated.

Sometimes I wonder: Should the fight against poverty and injustice not be enough of a justification to keep working and building on development cooperation? Here, too, the Churches could make an essential contribution. They are at their strongest when they combine their spiritual messages, for example "justice for the poor" or "I'm fed up with others going hungry", with intelligent support strategies and when they develop amongst donors a culture of sharing and at the same time a culture of responsible action amongst recipients.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, my five pebbles are far from lightweights. But I am absolutely sure that we should not shy away from taking them up in the fight against what currently seems far too mammoth and threatening. We know what happened with the biblical Goliath. A society which has as its cornerstone the commitment to work to combat poverty and injustice, such a society has laid important foundations to work with partners to tap the full potential of the people and reflect critically on its own lifestyle. Development in this sense is an all-embracing task which needs no further objective. It takes in everything and everyone: politics and society, State and Church. That is why it is so important for us to cooperate closely. Compassion and justice, MISEREOR and Brot für die Welt are the crucial start of church work, but never its end.

We all know that the poverty and injustice threatening the lives of people across large stretches of our planet are man-made. But man can also overcome them. And all of you gathered here today have played your part in ensuring more people can live in dignity and, insofar as we have a say, free from need and want. For this, you deserve respect as you did not let yourself be disheartened by the sheer magnitude of the task. And you deserve thanks, which I voice today in all sincerity.

I would like to thank all those who are working on development cooperation near and far and those in positions of responsibility in the Church and politics. Inherent in this gratitude is the joy that our

society and our country is not just influenced by the dynamism of the ruthless but also by the spirit and strength of those who see and want to alleviate need. We can only respect ourselves and our country if we remain committed to this principle.