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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
speaking in Schloss Bellevue on 24 May 2013 at
the Africa in Germany matinee
celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the
Organization of African Unity**

I do not enjoy the reputation in Germany of being an expert on Africa. When I was visiting Ethiopia, I wondered who could help me get to know this continent and its problems a little better. The first step was deciding to issue this invitation. We want to generate a bond with people who live here – people who know our country well, who have adopted it as their own country, but who nonetheless have a connection with their African roots. And we are quite deliberate in doing this at a time when Africa is celebrating 50 years since the establishment of the Organization of African Unity.

Having only little knowledge leaves a large gap that can be quickly filled by prejudice – which is definitely not something a President can afford. That is what makes it so vital that we are meeting here today, and we will be putting thought into how we might have one or other of you back or perhaps repeat the pleasure in a similar form.

I wonder how many of us were aware as we listened to Ivy Quainoo's music just now that she is in fact a Berliner with Ghanaian roots who won a popular contest to find Germany's most beautiful voice. She is enjoying great success and has been an Ambassador for the schools campaign run by the UNITED FOR AFRICA action group since February.

Africa in Germany is personified, first of all, by the Ambassadors representing the countries of the African continent. Excellencies, I am delighted that your Doyen, Ambassador Paka, will be speaking right after my own address.

Africa in Germany is furthermore generated by the many people here whose origins do not link them to our neighbouring continent but who have found their way to it in the course of their lives, whether in

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politics, business, the arts or development cooperation. I have met many of them during my term in office so far.

Primarily, for me, Africa in Germany is embodied today by the people with African roots who live here – who have not forgotten, here in Germany, where they come from and what has made them who they are. Some were born here; others came later. Some came here and then moved on elsewhere. Others came because they knew they would definitely stay. For all those differences, they all belong among us. I intend this event as an expression of joy in that fact. Many among us think, "They are only coming to us with their troubles and their worries – their own and their families'." But to concentrate on that is to forget that they are also coming to our country with dreams and skills. They join companies, enter politics, take part in clubs; they are artists; they are scientists; and they can be encountered in so many different places across the country. I am glad that so many have come.

I know that living in Germany is not always easy for people with African roots. We need only look at football, so often an arena where highs and lows collide. On the one hand, players who put in the effort and do well can quickly reap rich rewards. Most clubs now have players with African roots. On the other hand, it can happen that racist animosity manifests itself particularly quickly in football grounds. It is vital that the clubs affected keep working to counter that tendency. They are already doing so – but they really must not let up in their efforts. There are many who have been doing this work for a long time. I remember, for example, the last event I attended as Chairman of the Against Oblivion – For Democracy association. It was an ice hockey match hosted by Berlin's Eisbären, a club that, like many others, takes a very clear and active anti-racism stance.

Ladies and gentlemen, many of you will have had to face discrimination in all sorts of areas of our society. This makes it all the more important to do what we can at all levels and to find others to join the fight. Our society provides countless different opportunities to counter racism, in clubs, unions and grassroots movements both in Berlin and throughout Germany. It is not as if we, the majority of Germans, are powerless and vulnerable in the face of a crowd of right-wing extremists, nationalists or racists who would exert control over the whole country. We need to keep reminding ourselves, we are the majority. And even though that is the case, we intend to actively combat minority groups that lower the tone of public discourse.

I am always especially pleased to see people who have immigrated here, whether from Africa or elsewhere, getting involved in political parties. We are experiencing a culture of suspicion towards the political class and towards political parties. However, surely we all know how important it is to join parties. Without parties, democracy would prove a good deal more difficult than it is. I am therefore

particularly glad to have office-holders among us here today who have made their way to the top, expressing their willingness to assume responsibilities in the public sphere. I look forward to hearing from you, Dr Sylvie Nantcha, later on today. I hope to learn a lot about your experience as a City Councillor.

There are so many different stories behind people's journeys from Africa to Germany. Political persecution is a particularly disturbing theme. When I visited the Bad Belzig centre for asylum-seekers last December and spoke to people there, I soon gained a sense of how fateful and how hopeful each one of their journeys was. I have huge amounts of respect for the courage demonstrated by people who have left their homes behind. They come to Germany aware of the great freedoms we have fought for and achieved here, respectful of democracy and confident in Germany's respect for the rule of law.

But asylum seekers represent only one aspect of immigration. Many Moroccans and Tunisians came as "guest workers" under bilateral recruitment agreements in the 1960s. Long before then, large numbers of students had started coming to Germany from, for example, the former colony of Cameroon. There is as much diversity among the origins and histories of people with African roots living here as there is within the African continent.

They are all living in a country that, especially in light of demographic change, is going to need immigration in the coming decades. And when you need immigration, you can't regard immigrants with fear and see them primarily as a threat. That means first and foremost grasping the simplest of facts, namely that belonging to Germany really isn't the exclusive prerogative of one particular phenotype. Regrettably, that most simple of facts has not yet reached everyone, with the result that many Africans find their oft-cited "migrant background" becoming a "migrant foreground". "Migrant background" – what a charming expression – sounds so technical, somehow so distant from actual people. What we need, though, is to foreground real human faces.

Let us not forget that our constitution contains that crucial sentence asserting the dignity of all people, with no subdivisions created or intended for applying differing levels of human dignity; no matter what colour people are, what language they speak or what religion they belong to, they all have human dignity! And it is only going to become less and less possible to define our state according to the national origins of its citizens. Instead, our state will serve to unite all those disparate people, and it is disparate people who will most respect and strive for the common good. I see Germany as a country which can be home to anyone who wants to be at home with our Basic Law. Under such a roof, the various can grow together into something

shared and united, and when that happens, we will be right to take great pleasure in it – and a little pride as well.

Many people in Germany don't know that large numbers of migrants from Africa have good qualifications. So let's work together to spread the word. That should help open doors for immigrants to find more ways of participating in society. What's more, many of those coming to Germany from Africa bring yet another asset: for most people from African countries, multilingualism is something completely normal. Alongside African languages, many also speak English, French, Portuguese or Spanish. Learning German is thus not as far-off a goal as it might otherwise be. In Africa, at least in many countries there, accepting diversity is also a far more real and present aspect of everyday life than it is here. News often reaches Germany of the continent's ethnic conflicts, but we actually know very little about the peaceful coexistence enjoyed in most of its multiethnic states.

Now, I do not intend to just concentrate on positive things today. I didn't in Addis Ababa either, when I spoke before the African Union there in March; I talked about Africa's problems too. It is not helpful to keep quiet about bad governance. Keeping quiet about poverty is not a virtue, turning a blind eye to war sometimes even ought to be a crime, and failing to address human rights violations is to forfeit a degree of one's own humanity. So we have to talk about these things. Millions of people are fleeing starvation and violence. We should remember that most refugees don't come to Europe but are looked after in countries next-door to their own – many receiving help from the UNHCR, but many, too, finding shelter in communities that have little or nothing themselves. The solidarity that is demonstrated towards refugees within Africa is often awe-inspiring.

During my visit to Ethiopia, I learned a lot about mobility in Africa. For many people, it is normal to up sticks and go somewhere else – be it to make up for a bad harvest, explore new trade routes or simply make use of better job opportunities. In West Africa, several million people are living in places other than their countries of origin. As a result, freedom of movement – one of the principles of our European Union – is also a major issue in the African Union and regional organisations. In some areas of the continent, it is already very uncomplicated to become resident in a new country.

Here, of course, we encounter the question of how Europe and Africa should deal with migration issues. With its ageing population, Europe will not be able to shut itself off from its neighbour, a continent whose population is young and growing – and nor should it. Europe certainly won't be able to take in every African, but nor will every African want to come and live long-term in Europe. It's worth noting, too, that in times of crisis, it is perfectly normal for Portuguese job-seekers, for example, to compare their chances of finding work in

European countries with job opportunities in Portuguese-speaking countries such as Angola and Mozambique. Six of the world's ten fastest-growing economies are in Africa. Many African countries represent important markets for forward-looking economies, including Germany and not least Germany's SMEs. Doesn't it make perfect sense to better use the knowledge and skills of the people here who have African roots, to help foster the best possible business relations as well as everything else? I believe we still have a lot of untapped potential in that regard. Our two continents should therefore put our heads together to figure out how migration between them can be managed to meet the interests both of the people migrating and of their host societies.

The African Union has its vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa". Germany will stand by it in partnership as it pursues this objective. As Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, underlined for me in Addis Ababa, peace, security and development go hand in hand. I have great respect for the African Union's active commitment to peace and security.

However, the road towards a peaceful Africa is a difficult one – and there have been setbacks. I am thinking particularly of the crisis in Mali. Thousands of people fled from the violence of the Islamists, many of them still displaced. In some parts of the country, law and order have still not been reasserted, despite the efforts of the French military and its African allies. Nonetheless, Mali is not without civil society action. Forty renowned musicians, for instance, have collaborated to record a song declaring their support for peace and unity in Mali. One of the vocalists involved is here today, and we'll be hearing her sing later on: Fatoumata Diawara.

Singing, I need hardly point out, will not suffice when it comes to combating extreme violence. A military response was entirely appropriate in the case of Mali. However, the next stage will present the people of Africa and their supporters in the international community with a major challenge. Germany is helping by military and more especially civilian means. Last week's donor conference in Brussels was such an impressive demonstration of international solidarity with that African country. But the conference also named the essential political steps needed to overcome the crisis. In the end, the crisis can only be resolved from within Mali.

I am confident, all in all, that despite all the difficulties, Africa is on the right track. The men and women of Africa are demanding a greater stake in their societies. They want to make them better, and they will. And the fact that they want this ought to be more widely known here. The many events being held this week to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity can provide the impetus.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, the famous Senegalese philosopher and statesman who was held as a prisoner of war by Germany when fighting for France in the Second World War, would have had every reason to hate the Germans. Instead, though, he learned German in order to explore German literature. After reading Goethe, he had this message for Africa: "He teaches us first of all what very great danger lies in isolating one's culture, looking only inwards, and aspiring to build only on one's own race, one's own nation, one's own values." Senghor advocated mutual inspiration – and inspiration is precisely what we need in the crises of our times. I look forward to enjoying Africa in Germany, and indeed, as it is manifest today, Africa in Schloss Bellevue.