



BUNDESPRÄSIDENTIALAMT

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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the tolerance and solidarity vigil
("Zusammenstehen – Gesicht zeigen")
on 13 January 2015
at Pariser Platz in Berlin**

Friends of democracy and freedom!

We have gathered in the name of solidarity. And we have also gathered to affirm what unity and right and freedom mean to us today.

The callous murders in Paris were an attack on freedom of speech, on the pluralist society and on the right to life. Journalists had to die because they expressed their opinion. Jews had to die because they were Jews. Police officers had to die because they defended their country's laws.

The attacks showed us how vulnerable an open society is. But they have also made us think again. The terrorists wanted to divide us. They achieved the opposite. They brought us together. On Sunday, it was the French who avowed the values of their republic in Paris and other cities. And yesterday, today and tomorrow, it is we who are doing so, here in Berlin and in other German cities.

Terror is international, but the alliance of the free and the peaceful is even more so. The world is moving closer together. Freedom and human rights are not only French or German or European; they are not only Western. They are universal. Background, colour or religion are not what counts. Freedom, the right to life, and human rights belong to everyone, regardless of where they are born and regardless of where they live.

Our defence against the fundamentalism of the Islamist perpetrators of violence is democracy, respect for the law, respect for each other and the upholding of human dignity. This is our way of life!

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I thank you, the Muslim communities and all Muslims who are here today to say: "Terror – not in my name!" This is a patriotic "Yes" to the country where we live together – to our country!

All of you have come here to take a stand. Like all of us, you want to unmask those who corrupt and appeal to those who are vulnerable to corruption. Like all of us, you want to protect this state and the freedom of its citizens. The vast majority of Muslims feels they belong to our open society and appreciates this society's opportunities and values. And they, this majority, are also willing to stand up for this.

Immigration has made Germany more diverse in terms of religion, culture and outlook. This diversity forms part of what makes our country successful, interesting and appealing. Open society derives its strength from its differences in particular. This holds true as long as we express our opinions peacefully and with respect for others.

However, we do not want to ignore nor do we want to gloss over the fact that certain things in our country worry us. The enemy stereotypes and the conflicts in the Middle East reverberate as far away as our streets. Fundamentalist sentiments have emerged alongside the xenophobia that has long since been familiar to us. Hundreds of young men from Germany have even allowed themselves to be enticed to go to war against innocent people in a foreign country – supposedly in the name of Islam. What an abuse! What a perversion of religion! To these fanatics and terrorists, I repeat today what I said at the start of my presidency as regards right-wing extremists: We will not make you a gift of our fear. Your hatred spurs us on.

We stand by our country and its values. This is also the reason why we stand resolutely against any type of hatred.

There have been attacks on mosques, including arson attacks. It is not only up to Muslims to resist this – it is up to all of us. And another thing needs to be mentioned. New anti-Semitic slogans were heard some time ago on the streets here, too – imported slogans. Slogans that we never want to hear again in this country. And it is not only up to Jews to resist this – it is up to all of us.

Together, we oppose any type of demonisation and marginalisation. Politicians, by reacting resolutely and calmly. Citizens, by standing up against xenophobia and supporting an open society. We are all standing up for our beliefs!

And we know that diversity requires interaction between people. Distance between immigrants and Germans, as well as distance that sometimes exists between immigrants from different backgrounds, is still all too seldom overcome. The way we are standing here together today is the way I would like to see society as a whole. Let us therefore consciously look to interact with others, as we know that we

belong together because of our shared constitution and our common values. Trust, which we so urgently need for the cohesion of our society, will then grow.

We will not allow ourselves to be divided. Each and every person should live by this maxim in their own place and in their own way:

- politicians, by combining determination with calmness
- journalists, by making use of their freedom and reporting responsibly
- religious people, by following their own beliefs without vilifying the secular order
- citizens, by putting democracy into practice with joy, courage and dedication.

We are all Germany! WE democrats who represent such a wide range of political, cultural and religious beliefs. WE who respect and need one other. WE who dare to shape a life that, after all, we all want – in unity and right and freedom.