Federal President Joachim Gauck
opening a podium discussion at the Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social, during his state visit to Peru
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Anyone who visits this place perched high above the sea has to travel a long distance from the entrance gate down below. They have to travel a long distance to this impressive building, in whose rooms history and histories will be told in future. The long road to remembrance – that should be seen symbolically. For remembrance and commemoration do not develop overnight – they need time to evolve. But I will come back to that later.

I have just spoken of a long distance. During the last few days, I have seen a Peru which has successfully negotiated a long, arduous and demanding road. When we look at the country as a whole, today we find a quite stable democracy and, for the last few years, a dynamic economy. As a result, poverty has been effectively combated, although not completely eliminated. Considerable successes are visible, and we see that people who lived for decades in the dark valleys of despair have found new hope.

Today's Peru is an outward looking country. There are good reasons for the German President to come here on a state visit after more than 50 years. I have great respect for what Peru has achieved to date. Just think: the end of the tragedy to which this building is dedicated took place not so long ago. 15 years ago, Peru resolved its violent internal conflict, which had cost the lives of tens of thousands of victims. And you, the citizens of Peru, did not give up on yourselves, you did not sink into anarchy, but created peace, thus strengthening your democracy. You established a framework – the Acuerdo Nacional – which brings together political, economic and civil society forces and which today reaches the most important political decisions by consensus. We will come back later to consensus and the difficulty in defining it. First of all, however, I want to commend the work done

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within this framework. And, in this connection, I would like to greet Mr Vargas Llosa most cordially.

Whenever a problem is identified, initially it is not society as a whole which recognises it. Whether it is the implementation of democracy, of the rule of law or a culture of remembrance – it is always individuals and small groups who bring about progress in any society. And we do not know exactly at what point the rationale behind these key decisions made by individuals or small enlightened groups changes the sometimes entrenched consensus within society. That is why it is important that we offer the people who were pioneers in those developments which are so crucial to a viable society our goodwill and gratitude, as well as our support. I would like to thank all of you for taking on the task of shaking up society at such an early stage and with such commitment.

What is needed by societies which find themselves moving towards democracy based on the rule of law is a more profound inner conviction which, in some South American states, can be expressed in just two words: "nunca más". Never again do we want to have what we had. However, how does this shared conviction evolve into what might be termed a new vision of one's own nation? How does this identity, which differs from the earlier identities of a nation, develop – fragmented into friends and foes, top and bottom, clans and pre modern loyalties. We are familiar with all of this on this continent.

At the same time, we are aware of the development towards the ideal form of government in which people are free to elect or vote out of office governments which – and this is of prime importance – uphold the rule of law no matter how powerful they are and no matter how strong their popular endorsement is in terms of votes. No democracy can survive without a strong legal framework. When we remember we not only ensure that the dignity of the victims become part of the nation's collective consciousness but we also lament an absence – namely the absence of the rule of law in institutions, the absence of humanity in ideological movements, as well as the inner weakness of the legal framework.

For that reason, this museum will – in a very comprehensive manner – become a forum for learning about civilisation. It will be a forum for learning about political strategies which never focus exclusively on just one perspective – by that I mean the perspective of the powers that be – but, rather, always take into consideration the perspectives of the oppressed or society's victims. Despite all breaches of the law, despite all misdirected actions – in some places also committed by organs of the state – it is vital out of respect for the suffering of the victims that the nation in question agrees: alongside the dignity of the individual, we want to restore the dignity of the law. That is why this place has a special significance for a visitor from far

away Europe. For me, this is like a monument, even though the content of this exhibition is not yet on display. However, the approach you have adopted for this project shows that what I have just outlined to you will find its place here. And I promise you that if you bring this place to life in this spirit, many other presidents and champions of human rights from around the world will come to visit you. They will come to express their respect, but also to offer to help wherever they can.

Now I would like to turn to what we Germans can contribute from our own experiences. I was delighted to hear how much help, including financial assistance, has been provided by the German Government and German civil society – although the Government played a bigger role, just for once. I have come here today without a single euro. However, I come with experiences. These are experiences of varying kinds of how my country came to grips with its past.

Many of you know that I lived in east Germany, in a dictatorship, and that I did not enter politics until 1990. That year, I became a member of the opposition in the first freely elected People's Chamber. However, the opposition and government coalition worked together to pass laws intended to make it easier to examine the GDR dictatorship openly and critically. These laws were principally related to the Stasi files, that is to say the files of the Communist secret police. After the peaceful revolution, we found around 160,000 kilometres of files in the Stasi's various offices. Some had been destroyed. And in these files we could read all about acts of repression. We regarded them as a tool used by the regime to control east German society. We were faced with the question as to whether we should open the files. Many said, "We can't. It would lead to murder and violence in our society". However, we had experienced a peaceful revolution and so we did not believe that civil war would break out. We said no. We said that we did not want to let the then ruling class be the only ones who knew the truth. For this would have left the oppressed at a disadvantage when they came to demand their rehabilitation. There was therefore a large parliamentary majority across all political parties in favour of opening the files. If the files had been placed under archive law, they would have been locked away for 30 years.

Many European societies which underwent transformation were faced with the same questions after the old regimes collapsed: how do we deal with the files? Are they state files? Do they really have to be under lock and key for 30 years? Or are they the files of a dictatorship which should be made available to us, the oppressed, rather than to selected experts. That is why we decided to open them. This decision in favour of those who had been oppressed was the result of the change in perspective which I outlined: if you look at the victims' situation you will make better political decisions. And why was Germany able to be so resolute and adopt such an enlightened

approach to its history in 1990? It could do so because Germany had experienced another dark chapter in its history.

Let's look now at the more iniquitous German dictatorship, that of the National Socialists. It ended in 1945, in military defeat. At that time, the very first victims forced to leave Germany came back. The families which had suffered at the hands of Hitler's regime were certainly able to point out the crimes of the National Socialists and the allies which governed Germany also encouraged such publications. However, the discourse on the victims of the Nazi regime was conducted within a limited circle. It took place but it did not reach society at large.

After the war, the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt visited Germany. She looked around the country and stated, "There is a loss of reality". The Germans – when asked about the war and its causes – started to talk of the sins committed by others. Along with this loss of reality, Hannah Arendt sensed a loss of empathy with the victims. Both losses were counterbalanced by other factors: the loss of reality was counterbalanced by an excess of views, while the loss of empathy with the victims, for whose situation one is to blame, was counterbalanced by self pity. We could see both phenomena quite clearly in this first phase of dealing with the victims and with guilt after the war.

Now I would like to come to my main hopes and wishes for this museum. This way of dealing with the past, this limited acceptance or even denial of the facts, this empathy and sympathy with the victims did not remain this way in Germany: it changed. Enlightened people, the victims, academia, as well as the judiciary and key war trials all helped to change people's mentality. The next generation began in the late 1960s to talk to their parents about guilt, about their own guilt. Where were you during the Hitler regime? Where were you during the war? What did you do? Were you in Oradour? Were you in Lidice? These discussions were held in countless German families of my generation.

Step by step, this led to great shock and horror. Academics, psychologists and committed individuals from the heart of society played their very own and important role in this before politicians changed course completely. The last act in this political sea change was a famous speech by one of my predecessors, Richard von Weizsäcker, in 1985 when he finally spoke of the end of the war as a liberation. Many left wing liberals had long understood this. However, for many Germans it was important that a conservative President could say: it was a liberation, not only a defeat. He spoke of guilt and pointed out that failure to recognise the past damages the prospects for the future.

Thus came to an end a process which had led to a denial of facts as well as a failure to develop a fundamentally human empathy for the victims and the suffering they endured. East Germans were able to build on this foundation, on the political and cultural identity of the – still west German – Federal Republic when they began revisiting their dictatorship in 1990. This twofold experience of coming to grips with dictatorship, has placed us Germans in a special position. That is why a German minister has offered you financial assistance for this memorial. She did so because we Germans have profound and formative experiences with guilt, with the denial of guilt and, ultimately, with the recognition and addressing of guilt. I say to you: our nation did not lose itself when it spoke of its own guilt. Rather, it came into its own in a quite unique and non patriotic way. It gained an inner freedom when it ceased to use the term "nation" as a yardstick for examining its past. Rather, it achieved this freedom when it was able to make universal human rights the yardstick for measuring what we call the culture of remembrance and for what remembrance means in the collective sense.

We cannot influence the memories of an individual but a state can do a lot to ensure that this remembrance based on humane values encompasses my own guilt and my own crimes. Allow me to repeat my core message: Germany did not lose itself along this difficult path, along which initially there were many disagreements between the camps. Rather, it won itself back. It gained an own identity. It was able to believe and have confidence in itself. That brings me to a keyword in societies undergoing transformation. Not only here in South America but wherever new democratic structures have to be built, the process starts with debate rather than blissful happiness. The value of trust at such times is so important that it really is difficult to overestimate it. That was why at the start of my speech I was so keen to highlight the role of the law in a society which is reforming itself.

What does this mean for you in your concrete situation? Of course, I cannot say exactly. I am not familiar enough with the situation here to do that. However, the presence of several ministers at this event, as well as my in depth talks with President Humala, has reinforced my belief that it will be possible for you, for Peruvians, to move on from a fragmented remembrance to a collective culture of remembrance. There will still be times when members of the armed forces or police, who used to protect the state and citizens, will say: we are heroes. We did everything we could to combat terrorism. That may be true for many, but all of you here know that many serious mistakes were made in this just fight for the state's authority and that, yes, some incurred guilt.

I can imagine that there is an ongoing process among military leaders in which the generals are asking themselves: how should this country cultivate its traditions? Which traditions does a democratic

military need? Then it will be possible to differentiate between justified acts of defence and what simply have to be called crimes or state terror. We often lose our values in the fight. However, why should we not talk about it? Is it all soldiers and officers who were guilty? Did they instigate a coup against the Republic? No, they did not.

Therefore, it will be necessary to talk about how we, when we think of state institutions, upheld the law, our state and democracy and when we left the path of righteousness. That hurts. However, when a group is able to admit its guilt, the victims are incredibly generous. Victims are gracious when the perpetrators do not flee from the truth. The truth is something which sometimes hurts, but eventually heals. In the New Testament there is a verse in the Gospel According to St John which could certainly be applied to politics: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free". I can also put that into very political terms with the words of a great poet and President, namely Václav Havel, who spoke of living in truth. We can devalue life. We can conceal, lock up, repress or simply avoid mentioning the truth. However, we would not be doing ourselves any good. We would perhaps save the names of our families but not the honour of our nation.

Now I would like to talk about the other side. Back then when the Shining Path was recruiting, it was often the sons and daughters of urban middle class families who rushed to join. They had strange, in some cases romantic, ideas about the liberation of the masses and they wanted to do this through military force and not just debate. Some of them were motivated by idealism and some of the liberation pathos was clearly genuine. Step by step, a way of thinking inspired by terror evolved, such as we have seen time and again in the history of liberators since the Jacobins, and most especially the way in which Moscow and Beijing sell dictatorship to people as Communism. Whenever this has happened, it has resulted in countless lives being lost. It has resulted in due process being trampled under foot and brought neither political nor cultural progress. In this camp, we say to those who once began a so called struggle for liberation with idealistic ideas: when did you betray your ideals? How many people did you have to kill to show that you wanted to lead the world to a better future? It goes without saying that this is just as difficult for them to admit as it is for many members of the armed forces.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't come here so often. I have therefore taken the liberty of looking somewhat more closely at current crises in my speech. But please don't misunderstand me. I wanted to show you that our experiences strengthened rather than broke our nation. I hope there can be more exchanges between Peru and Germany on these issues. Let us discuss together how this dialogue, which has to evolve in society, can be intensified. And how can first the facts and then the truth be put on the table. And then how – on the

basis of these facts – can a sometimes brutally honest but ultimately satisfying discourse be initiated.

We Germans want to stand by your side. We want to assist you as we do when it comes to helping to strengthen infrastructure, improve governance or make the legal system more secure. I consider all of these levels of cooperation and exchange to be important and good. However, there is also the exchange between those who have had to face up to their countries' past. If they stick by the real truth, then there will be a truthful future.

Thank you very much.