

Interview with Federal President Gauck in the Nigerian daily newspaper *The Guardian* on the occasion of his visit to Nigeria from 8 to 12 February 2016

1. Your Excellency, welcome to Nigeria. May we have a peep into your person and background and what may have informed your visit to Nigeria at this time?

The main aim of my visit is to pay tribute to the good relations between our countries. And it is important to me to promote even closer friendship between Nigeria and Germany. As the most populous country in Africa and an economic heavyweight, Nigeria is an increasingly important political and business partner for Germany.

Naturally I am aware that your country also faces great challenges, namely international terrorism, flight and displacement, and poverty reduction. All of this will play a role in my talks in Abuja with politicians and representatives of civil society. I also want to pay tribute to the achievements of the United Nations and aid organisations, which work to support hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons in Nigeria. I am eagerly awaiting my meeting with representatives of the various religious groups, from whom I would like to learn about the interfaith dialogue in your country. And I am looking forward to giving a speech at the seat of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and to meeting Nigerians from the worlds of business and culture in Lagos. By the way, a high-ranking German business delegation is accompanying me on my visit.

Another very important purpose of my visit is to honour the recent democratic handover of power in your country. I myself come from East Germany, the GDR – that is, the part of our country that was under communist rule until 1989 and was not free or democratic. As a Protestant minister, I actively supported the civil rights movement in the GDR, which was particularly prominent in church circles. We fought for democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights in 1989 – and achieved them after almost 40 years of repression and a lack of freedom. This is why my visit to your young democracy is also something that means a great deal to me on a personal level.

2. At the advent of the present administration, there was enthusiasm from the German government, among many industrialized nations to help in combating terrorism, insurgency, and its likes in Nigeria. In concrete terms, how has Germany helped?

The violence perpetrated by Islamist fundamentalists has become a global threat. In Nigeria, terrorism comes in the shape of Boko Haram, which poses a threat to security, freedom, democracy and human rights in your country. Politically, Germany stands side by side with you in the fight against this.

A global challenge like that of terrorism requires a globally coordinated response. As a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, Germany is therefore also contributing military resources to the fight against the IS terrorist organisation. The German Government is supporting the development of effective operational measures to combat terrorism on the

international level and is involved in international anti-terrorism initiatives in organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the OSCE. We are taking a comprehensive approach. If we want to combat terrorism and violent extremism effectively and permanently, we also need to address its political, social and economic causes and to strengthen human rights and rule-of-law structures.

3. Much of the criticism against the German government accepting refugees from other countries, especially from the Middle-East has come from among Germans; what efforts are being made to reassure the citizens that the influx of refugees will not have the negative impacts they dread?

Fortunately, most Germans continue to take a nuanced view of the refugee issue. Plenty of German citizens are still willing to help people in need of protection, such as war refugees from Syria. But of course people in Germany are also talking about the fact that we cannot take in everyone who would like to come and stay in our country. The large numbers of refugees are a cause of concern to part of the population. And politicians are increasingly taking note of these concerns. Incidentally, the intense public debate that we are currently conducting shows that very many Germans do not simply say “no” to taking in refugees. However, quite a number of people fear that we are simply reaching a limit as regards our ability to help. As a result, German politicians are working very hard and on many levels both to integrate those in our country into German society and to reduce the numbers of refugees. The latter can only be achieved if Europeans work together. Beyond that, dealing with flight and tackling the reasons why people flee – such as poverty, war and climate change – is a task for the international community.

4. German businesses or others with German affiliations that do business in Nigeria have tended to thrive causing what some analysts see as an imbalance in trade, or a relationship that is skewed in favour of Germany; how does the German government hope to help correct this?

An imbalance in our trade relations to Nigeria’s disadvantage? That is not what I can see. The figures tell a different story. Nigeria is Germany’s second-largest trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the German economy imports far more from Nigeria than it exports there.

If I see things correctly, however, it is still very important for Nigeria to diversify its economy. German companies can play a part in this – not least because they are showing increasing interest in the Nigerian market. This can be seen simply in the German business people who are accompanying me on my visit to your country. Some German companies have already started manufacturing in Nigeria and are investing in staff training, so we can certainly say that there is a new dynamism in our economic relations. However, if we want to expand these relations, the conditions for foreign investors must improve further. This involves adhering to contracts, improving infrastructure and working to establish a reliable administration.

5. What are the efforts that the German government is making to help Nigeria with poverty reduction

Nigeria is also an important partner country for Germany as regards development cooperation. Just recently, our Governments further intensified their cooperation. The projects focus on tackling the severe poverty faced by large numbers of people in Nigeria and on giving low-income groups new opportunities. As Federal President, I do not belong to the Government, so I would just like to mention a few examples of our development cooperation. These include support in setting up the Development Bank of Nigeria, as well as environmental and agricultural projects aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and food security. There are also joint educational and training projects funded by Germany, such as the Safe Schools Initiative aimed at enabling young people in very unsafe areas to attend school. Our Governments are also working closely on sustainable economic development and in the energy sector.

A special initiative for refugees to support internally displaced persons and the host communities is a new development. As of this year, Germany will support this initiative for five years by providing funding of 13 million euros. However, I am particularly happy that so many German citizens who live here in Nigeria are committed to fighting poverty and constantly find ways to help.