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**Speech by
Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a reception for "Afrika kommt!"
at Schloss Bellevue
on 18 February 2016**

This morning, we are turning our attention to individuals from the emerging African continent. I am delighted to be able to welcome young experts and leaders from seven countries of the sub-Saharan region here in Berlin – women and men who are taking entrepreneurial responsibility in their home countries and who want to help to shape the future of their economies. It is wonderful that you have come to us in Germany. Welcome to Schloss Bellevue!

As fellows of the programme "Afrika kommt!", you have been guests in our country for almost a year now. You have gained insights into German economic life, worked at partner companies and received further training in the area of international management. You have had the opportunity to establish valuable contacts and friendships and to immerse yourselves into our culture and learn the German language. Last but not least, you have been and continue to be an asset to your partner companies. Your German colleagues have learned a great deal from you about African working methods and African markets. In short, you, esteemed fellows, are learning from Germany – and Germany is learning from you.

You will be returning to your home countries in a few days' time. Many of you will continue to work for your German partner companies there while others will return to their previous companies or become self-employed in order to develop their own business ideas. Your prospects are bright no matter what. Almost all participants of your programme are sought-after experts in the area of economic cooperation between Germany and Africa. As mediators between cultures, they open doors to German and African companies. And they

ADDRESS	Bundespräsidialamt 11010 Berlin
TEL / FAX	+49 30 2000-2021/-1926
E-MAIL	presse@bpra.bund.de
WEBSITE	www.bundespraesident.de

are role models for their young compatriots. Their success stories encourage others to also get going and to live their dreams.

"Afrika kommt!" is a fascinating project. It is a project that encourages exchange of knowledge and helps networks to grow, and which builds bridges between the German economy and the economies of African countries and promotes cultural understanding. It is a project that is worthwhile for both sides. For the fellows, whose careers are often boosted when they return to their home countries. And for the German companies, who thanks to their partners in the region are in a better position to gain a foothold in African markets, which are becoming ever more important for them. Last but not least, the project is a motor of development as the fellows' countries of origin can reap the benefits of well-educated young professionals, new ideas and targeted investments.

The history of many countries shows that development is only possible on the basis of stable economic growth. This is why it makes sense to supplement state development cooperation strategies with private-sector initiatives. Permit me to thank the German companies that fund "Afrika kommt!" and admit fellows. You are all aware of the potential of the Sub-Saharan region. You are all helping to promote economic development. And you have realised how important it is to promote young talent in Africa, also in countries where German companies have yet to make any inroads.

We need more initiatives such as "Afrika kommt"! We need more handshakes between companies from Europe and Africa. And we must convince still more people in Germany and Europe of our neighbouring continent's strengths.

In these unsettled times in which terror and war and flight and displacement are dominating the headlines, Germany and Europe risk succumbing to a unidimensional image of our neighbour Africa. It is an image that ignores the many bright facets that are a source of encouragement and hope. During my visit to Nigeria a few days ago, I saw some of these very facets for myself – economic strength and cultural diversity, social change and democratic renewal.

"Afrika kommt!" puts these positive dimensions into the spotlight. You, esteemed fellows, all stand for the many self-assured, cosmopolitan Africans who are taking their future into their own hands and cooperating beyond borders. You present us with an image of your continent that is only rarely communicated by the media. I am certain that your stay in our country has also helped to overcome stereotypes in Germany.

I wish your initiative every success for the future. "Afrika kommt!" is an impressive example of partnership between Europe and Africa in action. Above all, cooperation in a spirit of partnership is

about looking, listening and learning to understand. I look forward to meeting you!