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page 1 to 2

**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a state banquet
hosted by President Michelle Bachelet
on 12 July 2016
in Santiago de Chile, Chile**

“Life in this country is beyond compare!”, once swooned a German settler, one of many immigrants to find a new home in Chile in the 19th century. A piece of fertile land of one’s own and a favourable climate – what a blessing, despite all the hardships of a new start.

Daniela Schadt and I feel that our first day in Chile has been a blessing, too. We have enjoyed so much hospitality, so much cordiality, so much intensity – thank you very much!

Chilean-German relations are characterised by long-standing personal ties and multifaceted cooperation in a spirit of mutual trust. These ties are a good example of the fact that nations can be close despite their geographical distance from one another. We are cooperating closely with each other both bilaterally and multilaterally – in the area of peacekeeping, democracy and human rights, the promotion of trade and growth, as well as the protection of the natural environment.

Our countries also share, as I mentioned just now, the experience of migration in all of its many different forms. Madam President, your own personal story is also part of this Chilean-German history. Many Chileans sought and found refuge in East or West Germany during the military dictatorship. You yourself lived in the GDR, and continue to work to promote the friendly relations between our countries to this day.

New migratory movements are currently challenging us throughout the world. I would like to take this opportunity to mention and express my gratitude for Chile’s willingness to host Syrian refugees. And even though your country is – as you yourself say, Madam President – a “small nation”, Chile has once again proven itself to be a responsible partner in efforts to tackle major international tasks.

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Your country has developed into a successful – perhaps the most successful – democracy in Latin America. I have great respect for the comprehensive reform plans with which your Government intends to reduce inequality in your country. While I apologise for using such words as inequality, our friendship must not shy away from appreciating reality. Such terms will come to the fore when we do appreciate reality. You ascribe particular importance to the role of education in this regard. I am delighted to note Chile's great interest in the German system of vocational training. We are happy to pass on these experiences to others whom we can help by doing so.

We enjoy close economic cooperation in such important areas as the extraction of raw materials and mining. Combining economic, social and ecological concerns in the extraction of mineral resources is in the interests of both our countries.

Moreover, we are aware of the increasing importance of renewable energies – for the economy and for climate protection. Chile is also feeling the worrying impact of global climate change. You intend to promote the use of regenerative energies with ambitious political guidelines, and I am delighted that Germany is assisting you in this endeavour.

It goes without saying that, in order to shape the future, we also need the creativity of artists, the thirst for knowledge of researchers and the pedagogical passion of teachers at schools and universities. The lively exchange in these areas shows most impressively how vibrant and future-oriented relations between our two countries are. In no other country outside Germany are there as many schools that set great store by learning the German language and teaching German culture as here in Chile. Doors to the future are opened at these schools – for young people, and also for the German-Chilean partnership.

I would like to add another observation to the speech that I prepared, one which has to do with your reference, Madam President, to the endeavour that is coming to terms with the past. We talked, of course, about the Colonia Dignidad, even though this occupies but a minor role in the wider narrative of efforts to come to terms with dictatorships. Madam President, we cannot convey everything to your country that our nation had to learn the hard way. After the great cataclysm of war and the Holocaust, there was, also in our country, initially a widespread willingness to, as swiftly as possible, forget and suppress the guilt that should actually have been high up on the nation's agenda. It goes without saying that both victims of the regime and committed, sensitive people drew attention to this topic from an early stage. However, the majority of the nation's population was happy to forget and to block out these memories.

And then came the economic miracle – thank goodness – which put an end to the suffering and hunger of many people. But it was also a distraction from facing up to something that the nation should have tackled. And then, after about a generation, the knowledge and suffering of the few spilled over to the many, and suddenly it was apparent that it is useful for a country's people to ponder their own personal guilt and responsibility. To ask, was I complicit? Do I have blood on my hands as well? Did I just look away? Or what else did I do?

And so there were painful discussions in countless families and between the various political spheres of the country. I am talking here about West Germany, where freedom made this possible. In the East, this issue was entirely state-controlled and instrumentalised. I do not wish to go into that any further, however. What conclusions can be drawn from the fact that I mention this? What is the point of all this?

The point is that, even when the act of remembrance is especially difficult – because we are burdened by guilt and shame and mourning and remorse – something quite peculiar happens. By reflecting on guilt and long-denied responsibility, we not only acknowledge the plight of other people, the victims of the past, but we also discover a new relationship with ourselves and learn to think differently about ourselves – with an open mind, even if the process of getting there had been extremely difficult.

And I tell you this in all humility because I believe that we must share with each other the things that worked. We have learned lessons that I cannot withhold, and this is why I believe that all nations that depart from the strategy of hushing up, concealing and ignoring the past are on the right track for the sake of the victims of the past and for the sake of their partners and friends today – but, above all, always for their own sake.

And with this certainty, I welcome you from the bottom of my heart and with all of my political knowledge. It is helpful to see that we, building on a foundation of shared values – freedom, democracy and the rule of law – are able to talk to each other about the things that have happened and about the things that have not been done that we must get under way and that, should they prove to be successful, we can rejoice in together. The freedom of thought empowers us to face the challenges of the future. And it would be a terribly great shame if you were to take a break, allow time to slip by, in a process of remembrance and freedom of thought that has just begun. This is an observation in which political knowledge, knowledge about the traits of mankind and extremely personal experiences come together. And I think that you grasped precisely what it was that I spoke about just now. I spoke on Germany's behalf and about Germany. And the way that many of you looked at me tells me that you understood me most

profoundly. Alongside the friendship that unites us, the many bridges that we have built and the fine events that we have enjoyed with each other, as well as the future that we are shaping together, this is a particularly great cause for celebration and for a special empathy and closeness that I feel for everyone in this world who works to promote human rights, freedom and the rule of law.

And, with this in mind, Madam President, I would like to propose a toast to the Chilean-German friendship and to a happy future for Chile.