



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the official ceremony to mourn the victims of the  
Munich shooting held by the Free State of Bavaria  
in Munich  
on 31 July 2016**

Fellow mourners,

I stand before you as Federal President, of course, but also as Joachim Gauck, as your fellow citizen, as a fellow human being, grieving with you. When beloved people are wrenched from our lives, nothing can take away our pain. Nothing and nobody can reverse this loss. No one can fill that gaping hole or remedy what has happened.

But sensing that there is a community around us in moments like these – people who share our pain, listen and are there for us – can help us to get through the next hour and the next day. That is why we are here together today, and allow me to assure you, the families and friends of those who were killed, that you are not alone in your grief. And not only are countless people mourning with you – the highest representatives of the state are here to show you this. They want to be close to you. We want to be close to you.

Nine innocent people are dead because a tenth decided to end their lives. And suddenly we see an empty space where they should be, at the breakfast table, in the classroom, next door:

We miss ARMELA.

We miss CAN.

We miss CHOUSEIN.

We miss DIJAMANT.

We miss GIULIANO.

We miss JANOS.

We miss SABINE.

We miss SELCUK.

We miss SEVDA.

In their surroundings and families, nothing is the same as it was before.

That is also the case for the 35 people who were injured. They will bear the scars of the attack of 22 July, both physically and psychologically.

The attacker ended by taking his own life. The tenth body was his. And hence we will probably never know what really motivated him and drove him to commit this heinous act.

At times like this, we find ourselves standing aghast in the face of the darkest side of human existence. We are appalled anew by man's inhumanity to man, not only in some far-off place, but here in Germany – in our neighbourhood and familiar surroundings – so shockingly close and therefore so extremely frightening. Acts like this leave us feeling paralysed, and bring us to the limits of what we can endure.

Anyone who thinks that grandiosely and indiscriminately taking as many lives as he can will give greater meaning to himself or his existence should know that we will not join him in that odious belief. Never.

But what we need to think about – indeed, need to think about once again – is what drives people such as the perpetrator in Munich to commit such murderous acts. What we find are young men with unstable personalities who feel humiliated, marginalised or rejected by their environment. They often sit at their computers searching for role models who took their revenge on this environment with a complete lack of empathy, thus achieving notoriety in the media. We encounter a reality that frightens us in many ways. Once again, we need to ask what responsibility lies in such cases with these individuals, with family and friends, with doctors, indeed with society as a whole. However, there can be no place for over-simplified conclusions. Not everyone with a personality disorder is a criminal, and nor does having such a disorder automatically relieve a criminal of personal responsibility. But what we can be certain of is that these people often spend a long time planning their acts and mostly plan them precisely. There are signs of such developments – if one is able and willing to see them. In such cases, society must not leave these people alone, particularly young people, and allow them to become dangerously marginalised.

Despite all the shock, grief and unanswered questions, 22 July also showed what people can rise to at their best. It is in the face of accidents, disasters and crimes that people also reveal their wonderful and human side. Just over a week ago, the act of one individual was met by the solidarity of countless individuals. This act was intended to spread fear and terror, but the people of Munich responded by opening

their doors and offering help. I was very moved by that, and by the expressions of sympathy that we received from all around the world. In that community of the many people who want to live together in peace, we can rediscover the sense of trust that we so urgently need right now.

Fellow mourners,

We are horrified by the series of new acts of violence we have experienced in recent years – suddenly so close to home and so frequently, seemingly endlessly. I can understand very well why many people are saying that they are worried or wondering whether they can still go to concerts, shopping malls or church.

These events exceed our capacity to distinguish one incident from another. It is very difficult for us to determine whether an act was committed in the name of a religion or ideology, to know if it was motivated by fanaticism, nationalism or racism. And yet we human beings constantly yearn to make sense of what happened and look for motives behind it. We see events that are concurrent, but not necessarily connected. However hard we may find it and however much it may cost us, we have to make this distinction and admit that we simply don't know in some cases. If we look closely, we realise that we are dealing with abysses of senselessness and destructiveness. When something like this happens, it poses a threat to both our image of human beings and our sense of a God-given order – indeed, for some people it calls their beliefs utterly into question.

If spree killers and terrorists have something in common, then it is their intention to rob us of our feeling of security, of normality. Spree killers want to revenge themselves through their acts on a society that they feels disregards or discredits them. For their part, terrorists want to spread fear – fear for our lives, coexistence and laws. They despise the peace enjoyed by those who uphold and cherish the law and democratic coexistence. But we will not give one thing to all those – the attackers, spree killers and terrorists – who want to turn our homes into places of fear and terror. We will not give them our submission. They will not force us to hate the way they do. They will not keep us imprisoned in perpetual fear. We will remain what we are – a society of compassion and solidarity.

And we will remain a society that stands up to the threats. We saw this in Munich, when police officers proved themselves equal to the extreme emergency situation, when every patrol that ended up being involved and every member of a special unit was able to do what needed to be done. I would like to thank all our security forces for this. Munich showed that the police are fully operational and that the state – our state – is capable of taking action. That is the way it should be and that is the way it must remain because we know that the threats will continue. The politicians with responsibility for such matters have

taken note of this and are increasing expenditure on safeguarding our coexistence.

There is no such thing as absolute protection against attackers who are determined to bring despair or death to people – particularly against attackers who act on their own. A state cannot provide that level of security – and a democratic state can certainly not do so. My fellow citizens, this means that you may demand everything your politicians are capable of doing, but you may never demand that they be able to do everything. That is not the sort of state we have. This type of state does not exist anywhere in the world, and nowhere in the world will you find politicians who can provide such guarantees. However, what we can do is something that we will have to strive to achieve once again, namely an alliance of state bodies and an alert and active civil society. And this is the best possible defence against the cynical calculations of those who espouse violence. In times of threats, the strength of an open society is found in such an alliance.

I would like to say the following to the bereaved families.

Pain does not fade quickly, and mourning takes time. It will be a long time before your lives regain direction and meaning. Even if we – your neighbours, friends, compatriots and fellow human beings – cannot walk this path for you, please know that we want to be with you, to accompany you, to comfort you in any way we can, and to be at your side.

In all grief and compassion, I ask all of the families of those who were killed to allow us this community. Allow us to be there for one another – as a community that provides room to remember the deceased and brings peace to the living.