



**Christmas message
by Federal President Joachim Gauck
in Schloss Bellevue
on 25 December 2016**

Good evening from Schloss Bellevue.

I wish you a happy and blessed Christmas.

Yes, Christmas is here again. Once again, countless people have listened to the Christmas story and celebrated the birth of Christ. Once again, Christmas trees sparkle in millions of apartments.

And yet something is different this year.

The terror we have been experiencing worldwide for years has suddenly made its way to our capital. While we all knew that Germany would not be spared such terrorist attacks, the many people killed and injured at a Christmas market in Berlin shocked and unsettled us to the core.

And, as a result, rage and fury, but also feelings of fear and powerlessness, came over us.

However, if we look very closely now, we see that there is more to this.

We feel fear, but we are not consumed by it.

We feel powerlessness, but we are not consumed by it.

We feel rage, but we are not consumed by it.

Instead, we have moved closer together as a community of those who defend humanity. Very different people sought one another out, reassured one another, offered one another warmth and support. Faced with murderous hatred, they reiterated their commitment to a peaceful and humane society – their commitment to life.

By no means does this imply reluctance to engage in discussions on political topics, such as refugee policy. These discussions are necessary. We also need to talk about whether we must do even more in the future to ensure people's safety. But particularly in times of

terrorist attacks, we should not make the rifts in our society wider. We should not turn entire groups into suspects or blame politicians as a whole. We should keep a sense of proportion and remain respectful towards our political opponents. And at this time in particular, we should recall what Christmas is all about and how it has become part of our culture for Christians and non-Christians alike.

The Christian message of Christmas is that we experience God's love in the person of Jesus Christ. If we apply this message to ourselves, it can inspire us to live mindfully, to be open to others and willing to help. And then rage and fury will not turn into hatred. Rage and fury can instead turn into strengths that oppose hatred, violence and contempt for others. And as a result, our society will remain a place where people live together in a spirit of solidarity.

I am not describing wishful thinking here. I am talking about reality, such as the Berliners whom I met, witnesses to the attack who followed an inner impulse and immediately rushed to help the dying and injured, who did not baulk at the danger to themselves.

This is just one example. However, I constantly meet people who make our country a better place to live through their own endeavours, people who make our country a reliable and trustworthy place – in their jobs, free time, families or voluntary work. In my years as Federal President, these people have made me feel increasingly optimistic.

On this special day, let us state clearly that this country deserves its citizens' trust. And that also applies now, as it is struggling with unresolved problems. We owe this fundamental trust to countless people, such as the nurses and carers who look after each and every patient in our hospitals and nursing homes reliably and devotedly, who give love and warmth, despite low pay;

the kindergarten staff and teachers who strive to do justice to everyone, even the most difficult children;

the soldiers and police officers; the dedicated trade unionists and responsible company owners; the social workers and community managers; and all those who make our laws come to life.

We also owe this trust to the many voluntary workers who, for example, help refugees, thus showing that one does not need to reject and expel others in order to preserve and live one's own way of life.

Particularly in times of uncertainty, we value the reliable work of so many people, not because they do something extraordinary, but because they do the usual things extraordinarily well. As a result, we can feel at home in our country. And I would like to thank you for that.

But in conclusion, I would very consciously like to return to the Christmas story. In view of all the discord in the world and the wars in

our neighbourhood, the message "peace on earth" will certainly have touched the hearts of millions of people this year. It inspires our innermost dreams and is something we long for.

And we sense that this message of peace is meant for us. It seeks out our courage, our willingness to take on responsibility, our wisdom and our ability to be a human being. After all, we know that peace on earth has yet to come.