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**Speech by  
Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the inauguration of the memorial  
commemorating the terrorist attack  
at the 1972 Munich Olympics  
Munich, 6 September 2017**

"The joyous games are over." On the evening of 5 September, Federal Chancellor Brandt spoke these words in a strained voice on Bayerischer Rundfunk, and he ended by saying, "Many of us cannot yet comprehend what exactly that means."

He was right. We couldn't comprehend what the hostages – or what you, their family members – suffered through during those painful hours: the shock of the hostage-taking, and the terrible anxiety about your loved ones. A feeling of overwhelming despair, interspersed with glimmers of hope that events may take a turn for the better – hope that grew dimmer and dimmer as time went on. Above all, there was a sense of powerlessness – the fact that one's husband or father had fallen into the hands of brutal terrorists and that one could do nothing but hope and pray. Ultimately, the horrible moment came when it became clear that everyone's worst nightmares had come true.

Dear family members: No, we cannot fathom the depth of your suffering. To be honest, we cannot fully know it to this day. However, there is something we can do: We can remember. And remember we must! As that 5th of September drew to a close, twelve innocent people had lost their lives. Eleven were Israeli-Olympic-team hostages, young Jewish athletes who had come to Munich in the good faith that they were welcome here and would be safe.

Remembrance – collective and public remembrance, here at this site – also requires affirmation. Today, 45 years on, we affirm that yes, that day hasn't simply been relegated to the history books. We can still feel its impact. It has left deep and painful scars – in your lives, in your families, in your home country Israel, as well as here in our country, in the city of Munich and throughout Germany.

ADDRESS	Bundespräsidialamt 11010 Berlin
TEL	+49 30 2000-2021
FAX	+49 30 1810200-2870
E-MAIL	<a href="mailto:presse@bpra.bund.de">presse@bpra.bund.de</a>
WEBSITE	<a href="http://www.bundespraesident.de">www.bundespraesident.de</a>

The Olympics 45 years ago were intended to be such "joyous games". At first, that's just what they were. That's how we and the Israeli team experienced the games during the initial days, after the festive opening ceremony. They were meant to be cosmopolitan, joyful and relaxed. The intention was for them to stand in stark contrast to the games held 36 years earlier, when the National Socialist regime had seized the Olympic idea and misused it to stage a propaganda show. Munich in 1972 was meant to showcase an entirely different, new and democratic Germany. The Federal Republic was, after all, no longer the Germany of 1936. It had returned into the fold of the free world. It was a member of the community of democratic states. That's the image Germany wanted to portray.

But at the same time, the safety of guests from around the world had been entrusted to this young Federal Republic, including the safety of young Israeli athletes – for the first time since the founding of the State of Israel. And Germany – of all countries, Germany – failed to provide this security.

Part of the truth about 1972 is that no one was prepared for the possibility of an attack – even though the origin of international acts of terrorism will certainly not be traced back to 5 September of that year in Germany, or in Munich.

Part of the truth about 1972 is that honest efforts to present Germany as a cosmopolitan, peaceful and peaceable country failed in a tragic way. And so – as you, President Rivlin, have just said – the Olympic Village, a place for celebrating the peaceful community of nations, became a stage for Palestinian terrorists of the Black September movement. A stage that drew maximum attention and sent a message of fear and terror around the world, a stage for infinite hatred of Israel and Israelis.

That should never have happened.

To this day, we, too, feel the burden of this disaster. This bitter realisation is part of our act of remembrance today – and I think it is long overdue, and we owe it first and foremost to you, dear family members.

Yet I cannot speak to you today without being as candid about the present as I am about the past. There are still people whose hatred for the State of Israel knows no bounds. There are still people who preach and try to justify anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. There are still people who want to perpetrate terrorist acts with the aim of attacking and destroying the freedom that is fundamental to our way of life. Their tools are more dangerous and possibly more perfidious today than ever before.

We Europeans – German, French, Belgian, Spanish and British citizens – have in recent years been dramatically targeted by the

scourge that is terrorism. As you have mentioned, we must face up to this threat. Being fully aware of, and assuming responsibility for, our history, including the mistakes made in 1972, can only mean that we must become even more resolute.

Therefore, dear President Rivlin: Yes, the threats posed by terrorism are great, but our resolve is all the greater. We will resolutely set about defending our democracy, our open society and our way of life.

Dear Reuven Rivlin, we share a commitment to freedom and human dignity. We share fundamental legal principles – the rule of law and human rights. An overwhelmingly large number of people in both our countries want to live without violence and without the nightmare of never-ending hate.

There is one more thing we share: the strength of a vigilant democracy, of a state that owes part of its strength to the fact that it is built on freedom and the rule of law. Freedom and security, I'm firmly convinced, are not mutually contradictory. They are interdependent. Free societies strive to be open, and for this they need the security that enables openness in the first place. Maintaining a balance between freedom and security, and restriking this balance time and again in response to changing conditions, is the responsibility of politics. Such a free society will not be able to completely prevent every perfidious crime – but it will maintain its way of life.

When I say "our way of life", I'm presupposing that we know where we come from. That is why, in Germany, one thing is inseparable from our way of life, namely the fact that we assume responsibility for our history, also for the history of the Shoah, including our responsibility for Israel's security as a result of this, and that we fully reject any form of anti-Semitism.

This also means that, just like German Jews, Israeli citizens living in Germany must be safe. Israeli artists, intellectuals and scientists must be welcome here. We need to engage in discussion, we need to meet and exchange ideas with one another. We must make all of this possible, and we must by no means allow such encounters to be prevented – like some people recently attempted to do at a large cultural event in Berlin.

This is part and parcel of our country's obligations. Therefore, dear family members, today stands not only for the urgent need to remember, but also for an eternal promise: Only if Jews in Germany feel completely safe and at home will Germany be completely itself.

To be German means being aware of our history – a history that for young generations brings with it not personal blame, but enduring responsibility.

And, ladies and gentlemen, becoming German means knowing, understanding and accepting this history. This applies also to those who come here from other cultures and bring with them a different history. Someone who becomes German cannot simply say, "That's your history, not mine." Being German means belonging to this country, which brings with it many advantages, but also historical responsibility. The lessons, and let me add the irrevocable lessons, of German history apply to everyone. They must apply to everyone who wants to build a future in Germany.

Dear family members, dear guests from Israel, this new memorial that is being inaugurated today is an important place – for Israelis and for us Germans. First and foremost, however, it is dedicated to the victims of 5 September 1972. For far too long, a place of commemoration was missing. For far too long, the victims had faded from the public eye, whereas the perpetrators had not. It is right to not give in to terrorism, and to keep our lives from being overshadowed by it. But this must not lead us to suppress the pain of the victims and of their loved ones. On the contrary, when we stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims, we also stand up against terrorism.

We are united by our sorrow. We are united as we silently honour your husbands, fathers and friends. And we say to you, dear family members, as well as to all those following this ceremony from home, and to all those who mourn and whose bodies and souls bear scars from that day: You are not alone in your grief!