



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
on a visit to the monastery
of the Community of Sant'Egidio
on 9 October 2017
in Rome, Italy,**

It was particularly important to me to combine my visit to the Holy See with a trip to the monastery of Sant'Egidio. We enjoyed close links during my many years working in the field of foreign policy, and so I am even more grateful for the opportunity to engage in discussions with you and also to pay tribute to the important and exemplary peace work of the Community of Sant'Egidio.

A few weeks ago, the German press ran with the headline "The United Nations of Trastevere" in its reports on the international peace meeting organised by the Community in Münster and Osnabrück this year. That is a profoundly secular, yet also appropriate comparison. The objectives of the Charter of the United Nations – peace and international security, preventing conflicts and settling international disputes by peaceful means, developing friendly relations on an equal footing among peoples and nations, and international cooperation to solve international problems of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character – these are the objectives to which your Community is also committed.

You have pursued your peace work with unerring optimism and great dedication for decades – for the most part far from the gaze of the public and media, which is probably the reason why you have been so successful. However, you would not have enjoyed such success were it not for your persistence, which is necessary if you intend to overcome alienation and animosity. The picture behind me recalls the peace treaty whose signing here in this room, the Hall of Peace, on 4 October 1992 heralded the end to the civil war in Mozambique. This successful mediation illustrates how important organisations such as yours – and how important church organisations in general – can be for international relations. This is not something that can be taken for granted. And many people still have not understood this. However,

wherever you, unlike politicians, manage to be perceived by the population as impartial and credible, you open up scope and opportunities for reconciliation that are among the best attributes of international diplomacy. Especially in times when religion is invoked and abused as a pretext for conflicts, hostility and violent acts, religious communities have a particular duty to live up to their responsibility for peace. The Community of Sant'Egidio has been doing this for decades in its unassuming, yet most effective and exemplary way.

Part of this peace work is the dialogue with and among churches around the world, as well as exchange in a spirit of trust regarding issues that affect us all and which will shape our lives in the future. I am not only referring to climate change and environmental degradation here, but also to waves of migration triggered by underdevelopment and poverty. This is a key topic in Europe's political debates at the moment. A debate that has already changed Europe, and not for the better. This gives me great cause for concern. Religious organisations can help to facilitate a dialogue across society on polarising issues that have the potential to divide communities.

I am particularly grateful for your commitment in the area of refugee policy, which is rooted in quite practical rationality and solidarity. With the creation of humanitarian corridors, you have turned the spotlight onto a path that offers many of the world's most vulnerable people protection and refuge in Europe, without them having to put their fate into the hands of unscrupulous human-traffickers. In recent years, Germany has also enabled almost 50,000 people to enter the country legally via humanitarian admission programmes. The thing that sets your humanitarian corridors apart in particular is the fact that refugees are given intensive support upon arrival. Your sponsorship programme ensures that integration is supported and can therefore be successful. This is a model that we can learn from in Germany.

Diplomacy often has a reputation for operating in very abstract spheres. Yours is the best counterexample. One reason behind the success of Sant'Egidio's peace work is doubtlessly its proximity to people. From the very outset, when you dedicated yourselves to children from socially deprived areas with the Schools of Peace, you sought to fathom the things that concern and distress people. You, more than most, understand what gives them new hope and what enables them to overcome the divisions of mistrust and deep-seated enmity. The most personal, most human dimension of each negotiation process is at the heart of your work in the service of peace. This brought us together once again in our efforts to support the peace process in Colombia.

This is why I can say from my own personal experience that Sant'Egidio's peacemaking potential, stemming from its proximity to people, is important and necessary in every way and is what is needed in this conflict-ridden world. Your work is an inspiration and a source of encouragement for all who are committed to the objective of making this world a more peaceful place.

Permit me to thank you for your great and important commitment. I hope that we will remain in touch in my new role and, of course, I would like to thank you for inviting me here today.