



**Toast by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a banquet on the occasion of his state visit to Gambia
on 13 December 2017
in Banjul/Gambia**

On my way here, I listened once again to Sona Jobarteh and her song called "Gambia". The sound of her voice and the music of her Kora express a loving bond with your country that words cannot describe. Through her concerts in Germany, she brought these emotions to a great number of my countrymen and women – and they were fascinated to listen to her and to learn about Gambian art and culture. She is here with us now – and I'm very much looking forward to listening to your performance tonight, Sona!

But: I am also very happy that this is not the only good news from The Gambia that Germans and people around the world have heard in recent times. The Gambian people made history in late 2016 and early 2017 – with the first regular and democratic transition of power after 22 years of autocratic rule. What a remarkable achievement – an achievement made possible by a wise and impressive act of co-operation between different players from the former opposition and from civil society, as well as through the strong support from Gambia's regional partners in ECOWAS and the African Union. Many of those who played a role in this effort are here among us today. Let me congratulate you on behalf of the German people: virtually overnight, this transition has made Gambia an important partner for Germany and Europe again. I am pleased to see that our countries have already started to co-operate once more and in many areas.

As a German, the project of a Gambian truth and reconciliation commission caught my particular attention. We Germans know how important it is to face history and to draw strength from the effort of dealing honestly and openly with past injustices. And by the same logic, Gambia's adjustment of its foreign and human rights policy has become an important example in the region, and I welcome your country's return to the International Criminal Court. Building stability

both internally and externally is the task at hand – and this is not a short sprint, but a marathon, and it will take some time.

And although the expectations, especially within civil society, are high, your supporters will need some patience and should give you some time. It's not easy to change a country after 22 years of dictatorship within weeks and months. But I am sure, Mr. President, you will keep the determination for this political change.

Germany is determined to support Gambia in strengthening its democracy – with joint efforts in the fields of energy, security, culture, and – most importantly – the creation of jobs. I am happy to have a high-level business delegation with me who are eager to learn about the investment environment here in the new Gambia and the basic conditions for economic cooperation in and with Gambia. I am convinced that aid can lead to short-term improvement in specific, targeted areas, but it is investment and local economic policy, education and training that will determine long-term success. Only then can there be a bright future for the young generation.

We owe them our best efforts. When thousands of young men and women risk their lives in the Sahara and on the Mediterranean Sea, when some of Africa's brightest and strongest end up in the nightmare of modern-day slavery, when the criminal exploitation of young people's hopes and dreams has become a profitable business model, then one thing is certain: a lot remains to be done, and local economic efforts are the key to creating lasting and sustainable opportunities.

I am hopeful that we can kindle a renewed spirit of partnership between our countries. During Germany's G20 presidency, we launched the "Compact with Africa" that focuses on private investment and local enterprise. Tomorrow, I will visit the GTTI, the Gambian vocational training institution, that has strong links of co-operation with Germany and I hope that the GTTI will become the seat for co-operation in this field with German companies and the German government. The recent EU-AU summit in Abidjan has shown that Europe is watching developments in Gambia very closely – not least because your country does have great potential in areas such as tourism and agriculture, for example. I certainly wish you all the best!

In this spirit, Mr President, and again with respect for the courage and determination of civil society here, I would like to raise my glass and propose a toast to relations between our two countries and to the people of The Gambia.