



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the reception launching the anniversary year 2018
"70 years since the founding of the State of Israel"
Berlin, 15 December 2017**

I am delighted to have the opportunity to celebrate Hanukkah together with you today. In the Jewish tradition, it is a particularly joyous and jovial festival celebrated with the family. Thus, Ambassador Issacharoff, I would like to thank you most sincerely for your invitation!

But, my friends, I want now without further ado to address what is preying on my mind. The very week that our fellow Jewish citizens lit the candles of their menorah, Israeli flags were on fire on German squares. I am horrified and appalled but above all else I am ashamed.

Anti-Semitism has not been overcome, also not in our country, and it raises its evil head in many different guises: In extreme actions such as the burning of the Israeli flag and ignorant slogans of hatred and violence. But also in habits which are less obvious and the spreading of prejudices against what some consider to be the "real Jewish". And it is apparent when nationalistic ideology finds its way once more into political speeches. None of these elements, neither blatant anti-Semitism nor creeping, neither old anti-Semitism nor new, must we tolerate in Germany – anti-Semitism must have no place in this Republic!

I spoke on the telephone yesterday with the Israeli President, my friend Reuven Rivlin, and my message to him was: there are good reasons to doubt that the unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as capital will make a contribution to a more peaceful Middle East. The position of Germany here is not unfamiliar, nor is mine. But that does not justify hatred towards Israel or the humiliation of our Jewish citizens on Germany's streets and squares.

Yes, we are indeed living at a time of turmoil – in the Middle East, but also in Europe – and, clearly, a time of change.

But, there are simply things which do not change. There are constants and we need them. There are things which are part of Germany. And one of these is our responsibility for our past: the lessons of two World Wars, the lessons of the Holocaust, the responsibility for Israel's security, the rejection of any form of racism and anti-Semitism.

For this responsibility, no line can be drawn under the past, not for post-war generations and not for those who came to our country later. It is non-negotiable – for all who live in Germany and want to live here!

So those setting fire to the Israeli flag on German squares are not just demonstrating unbearable hatred towards Israel but are also failing to understand and respect what it means to be German. And then the German state has a particular duty to unequivocally affirm its commitment and to intervene where necessary.

Only if Jews are completely at home and at ease in Germany is this Republic completely at ease with itself.

Particularly for this reason, it is important for me to call to mind the light that is burning here on this menorah, a light that symbolises hopes fulfilled in such wonderful fashion. Jewish teaching recounts how there was only one cruse of pure oil to keep the eternal flame of the menorah burning in the temple. This oil would only be enough for one day. But the light burned for eight whole days - until more oil had been found.

That is the miracle of Hanukkah. A miracle that was created by those who worked so hard to gather more oil – regardless of all the doubters and the sceptics. At the end of the day, all the hope and trust that even the seemingly impossible can be made possible paid off.

It must have been similar for the women and men who, after the abyss that is the Shoah, worked to fulfil the vision of a Jewish homeland in the State of Israel. Next year, you celebrate the 70th anniversary of your independence and we celebrate with you!

And it was also nothing short of a miracle when courageous women and men, on both sides, in Israel and in Germany, embarked on the infinitely difficult and infinitely painful journey to move closer to one another. Germans and Israelis reached out to one another across the abyss of history.

More recent history, it has to be said, is less blessed by miracles. That makes it all the more pressing to hold on to those we had. "Nes Gadol Haja Scham. Nes Gadol Haja Po." – "A great miracle happened there. A great miracle happened here."

Let us hold on to this, our miracle.

Thank you very much.