



**Speech by Federal President Frank Walter Steinmeier  
at the opening of the 30th International Africa Festival  
on 31 May 2018  
in Würzburg**

I am not sure, Mr Oschmann, if 30 years ago you would have thought that representatives from the municipal, land and federal governments would show up at one of your birthday parties or that you even wanted them to show up. In fact, the President of the Regional Parliament, a Minister of State, a mayor and the Federal President are all here today! What clearer proof could there be that, here in Würzburg, you have accomplished a major feat with the Africa Festival. For that, we want to say thank you. This is a vibrant event, and its significance extends far beyond the circle of fans of African music. It truly warrants a celebration. To mark this special occasion, let us begin with the most important thing:

Happy birthday to 30 years of African music in Würzburg!

Thinking back to the festival's beginnings in 1989, that was a historic year on many counts. The Monday demonstrations, the fall of the Wall and major steps towards German unification. Against that backdrop, there was also a major event in Würzburg that marked the beginning of a special story – a story that began with the first Africa Festival. Back then, probably no one envisioned the incredible, transnational and transcontinental trajectory that this festival would take.

What began with a few hundred visitors is now a red letter day on the African music calendar – far beyond Franconia, Bavaria and Germany. Exactly ten years ago, I came here and had the honour to open the Festival. Back then, I was here on my own and in my role as Foreign Minister. Today, I am doing the same as President. I am accompanied by my wife, who is equally pleased to be here.

We all know that now, with the festival in its 30th year, tens of thousands of guests congregate here each year from all parts of the country, from all over Europe and of course from Africa. When I

consider who has performed in the big circus tent over these 30 years – Miriam Makeba, Angélique Kidjo, Manu Dibango, and today the fantastic Sona Jobarteh – then I really don't need to worry about the future of this wonderful tradition! "Don't trust anyone over 30", they used to say. But I do trust that you and your team will accomplish a great deal, also over the next 30 years.

Ms Berg, you once said that African music is "heartbeat music" which speaks to everyone alike. That is true in every respect. However, anyone who has attended a high life concert in Africa knows that the music not only speaks to your heart, but also gets your legs moving. It is simply impossible to sit still when the music starts. When I think about George Darko, Charles Amoah or K. Frimpong – now that's music that really moves you, in the truest sense of the word! It is not the only reason, but it is one of the reasons, that I was happy to come back here!

Of course, my last visit to the festival ten years ago was not just because of the music. Already then, I gladly seized on the opportunity to finally advocate for a balanced view of Africa in Germany. To many Germans, Africa is still the dark continent, the continent of crises and conflicts. Those certainly do exist. But more than anything, Africa is always totally different – different than what we think it is, and incredibly diverse. There is no such thing as one Africa.

Poverty and need do exist. They are far too prevalent. But Africa also has its young people. They are full of curiosity, confidence and a desire to help their own countries progress. It has countries that are overflowing with culture. We here do not see enough of their cultural wealth, and we certainly do not take it seriously enough.

My first Africa trip in this new position took me to Ghana and the Gambia last December. It was a trip to see old and new friends. Friends, indeed, who share many values with Germany and who work to promote the same ideals as we do:

It was also a journey to learn about the hopes and expectations of the people there. I met young people who want to take on responsibility for their own future in their country – and I believe that we need to do our very best to help them in that endeavour. We owe that to these people. The world cannot be in good shape if Africa continues to be in bad shape. I am therefore especially delighted to see you, Sona Jobarteh, here again today.

I met you only a few months ago in Banjul, the capital of the Gambia. It was not a random moment, but rather just after the people there had ended the twenty year reign of a brutal dictator, through a peaceful revolution. I was privileged to hear Sona Jobarteh play the kora and bring alive her love for the Gambia and its deep cultural roots.

Sona gives people hope not only through her music; she is also constantly busy lending young people a helping hand. She has established a school, hidden down a side street in Banjul, which promotes the education of children and young people through dance and music. She started this school to pay tribute to her father's memory. It is a place that encourages the next generation to develop self confidence and passion. My visit there was one of the most beautiful and moving moments of my trip to these two countries.

Mr Oschmann, Festival team, the event that you organise here year after year with the support of many helping hands sends out a strong and beautiful message of understanding and unity between Germany and the African continent. In this way, you also express the sentiments of many people in our country who can trace their roots back to African countries.

Anyone walking across the grounds here with the stages and the booths by the River can literally sense that the diversity of African music not only exudes a passion for life, but also builds bridges and helps forge new friendships between the people. We need more international exchange, not less, and we need more opportunities for encounters within our society and interaction between our societies, not less. The Africa Festival provides a platform where this can take place – a festival of encounters, partnership and exchange.

Let me say thank you once again for inviting me to Würzburg. I am looking forward to my interactions and exchange with you, and I wish you all a magical time enjoying African music.

And now for the words you have all been waiting for: I hereby declare the 30th International Africa Festival open!