



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a reception for fellows of "Afrika kommt!"
at Schloss Bellevue
on 10 July 2019**

"Africa kommt!" – that is a twofold promise. Africa is coming – firstly, that means quite literally that Africa is coming to Germany, and Africa is also coming here to Schloss Bellevue. For that we are very grateful. My wife and I are particularly delighted to welcome fellows of the "Afrika kommt!" programme for the second time.

With this reception we also want to send a message. Because "Afrika kommt!" also means that Africa is up and coming. Africa is moving forward. Yes, that contradicts the general perception of Africa as a continent plagued by crises, conflicts and famine. It contradicts the perception of Africa as a continent which young people in particular leave as soon as they possibly can in search of a better life. That is not only a one-sided but also a false perception. My travels frequently take me to African countries – I have fond memories of my last trip to Ethiopia. We have also travelled to South Africa and Botswana together, and we saw close-up and quite clearly, there and in many other countries, how great the desire for a fresh start and for change is.

We in Europe still talk far too much about Africa rather than to Africa. We therefore all too often overlook the diversity of the African continent. Africa cannot be pigeonholed. It is not a homogeneous entity. Rather, it comprises 54 countries with very different cultures and languages. That is what defines Africa's diversity and richness.

Africa also stands for inspiration, creativity, surprise. I would love to tell you about my experiences of the endlessly creative African music scene, but you know more about it than I do. Many people in Germany and throughout Europe would be surprised, however, to learn that African countries are leading the way in reducing or eliminating the use of plastic bags – an issue of heated debate here at the moment. Or that more women have a seat at cabinet tables in South Africa and Ethiopia than here in Germany. From these small examples

alone, we can see that stereotypes and simplifications are not helpful. On the contrary, they distort our view. I strongly believe that we should take a closer look; if we were to do that, we Europeans could also learn a lot from Africa.

That's why it's so important to obtain your own impressions. And that's why it's so important for us to interact and to talk more to instead of about one another. That's exactly what you have done: you have gained a first-hand impression. You have lived here in Germany for a year, you have learned the language and made friends, you have got to know German enterprises and gained further qualifications. We are as delighted about that as you are.

"Afrika kommt!" is also so important because it is not a one-way street. As fellows from many African countries, you bring with you such diversity, such knowledge and such a wealth of experience! You are already bridge-builders between Germany and many African countries – in the best sense of the word! "Afrika kommt!" means that you learn from us, and we learn from you.

We are looking forward to our discussions with you, we are looking forward to listening to you and learning how you have found your time in Germany and what your plans are. We can already read about the experiences of some alumni thanks to Farirai Mubvuma from Zimbabwe, who had the great idea of recording and compiling them in a book. Thank you very much. I am looking forward to reading it!

You are among the young, outstandingly qualified top executives of the future of whom I have met many during the last few years in Africa. That's something else we Europeans fail to recognise. And many of you are bursting to assume responsibility and shape the future of your countries. I want to thank you warmly for your engagement, for your passion. I would also like to thank the German enterprises, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the ZEIT-Stiftung, which are actively engaged in "Afrika kommt!" and have now been backing the programme for eleven years. We are especially grateful to them because they don't receive any public funding for this programme.

I don't believe any more upbeat words are necessary. The fact that the programme is ever better known and ever more popular speaks for itself. I wish "Afrika kommt!" continued success. And now that you are returning to your home countries, I wish all of you personally every success!