



**Christmas message
from Federal President Joachim Gauck
in Schloss Bellevue
on 25 December 2015**

Good evening from Schloss Bellevue.

I wish each and every one of you a merry Christmas.

A merry Christmas – that’s what we wish each other every year. But many of us are finding it difficult to enter into the Christmas spirit this year, even if the majority of the German people looked back with joy and gratitude on 25 years of reunification, 25 years of living in a free and democratic country.

But the year was notable largely for disasters, violence, terrorism and wars. We remember the dreadful plane crash in the Alps. We recall the succession of crises, most of which are still unresolved, and which have left countless people in uncertainty and fear. By way of example, we have the financial crisis and the growing differences within the European Union, as well as the intense debates on the future of Greece. I am also thinking of Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, and those parts of Africa beleaguered by terrorists. And today, on Christmas Day, my thoughts are above all with those people who are persecuted because of their Christian faith. I salute gratefully the civilian helpers who work tirelessly in the midst of famine, deprivation and civil war. I likewise salute the servicemen and women who are engaged in the dangerous fight against the root causes of terrorism, which recently reared its ugly head in Paris.

However, the question most vexing us now is how we are to deal with the many refugees who want to make a new life for themselves in our country.

We have faced and continue to face tremendous challenges. You, my fellow citizens, made the people feel welcome here when the official machinery was faltering. You stepped into the breach spontaneously, as a matter of course. Thousands of helpers gave food

and drink, blankets and clothes, organised language courses and helped the new arrivals with all the red tape.

You became the face of a kind and caring country.

Countless people have also done everything they could as part of their jobs – in district and municipal offices, in the social services and healthcare authorities, in schools and nurseries, in local and national police forces, and in federal agencies and ministries.

At work and after hours, we have shown what we are made of – we have demonstrated our goodwill, our professionalism, and an ability to improvise. And we have seen that individuals and society alike can constantly discover new sides to themselves and improve themselves. Our country will thus be able to find its true nature by the challenges it accepts and which, I am sure, it will also master.

At present, many people are disturbed by the intensity of the debate. But I would like to remind you that controversy is not a breakdown of coexistence, but part and parcel of democracy. Let us turn our backs on spurious attempts to polarise. It is often precisely our compassionate and active citizens and mayors who bring unresolved problems to our attention.

However, it is crystal clear that violence and hatred are not legitimate forms of debate. Arson and attacks on defenceless people deserve our contempt and should be punished.

It is equally clear that only through unprejudiced discussion and debate will we be able to find solutions that will stand the test of time and win widespread support. It is us, the citizens and their elected representatives, who will develop and defend everything that makes our liberal and democratic country a pleasure to live in and worthy of our love. It is us who will find the solutions that meet our ethical standards without jeopardising social cohesion. Solutions that take account of the well-being of our own citizens, but which do not lose sight of the plight of the refugees.

Compatriots, fellow citizens,

Christmastime reminds us that we human beings need a source of strength in order to cope with our lives – both in politics and in our private lives.

For many, it is family that gives them a sense of comfort and security. Others draw their strength and motivation from their friends and loved ones.

But it is also Christmas itself, and the Christmas message, which help us find ways to show our humanity in times of difficulty.

The Christian holy scriptures tell how God's love of humanity is revealed in the Christmas story. It is wonderful to be embraced by this

love. But it is even nicer to live this love of humanity oneself, and to carry it out into our world.

With these words of gentle encouragement let me wish each and every one of us a happy and blessed Christmas. May we enter into a new, good year together.