



**Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps  
on 11 January 2016  
at Schloss Bellevue**

“The new year has come yet again, although the old one would have kept us going for months.”

Those working in the area of international affairs might have occasion to call these words by the author Michael Augustin to mind at the start of the year 2016. While the past year offered moments of triumph such as the 25th anniversary of the reunification of Germany, the year was, by and large, a year of crises – a year that defied imagination and was not at all what we would have wished for.

It began in January with the violence and horror of a terrorist attack in Paris. And it was Paris that was, once again, the scene of a series of bloody attacks towards the end of the year, on 13 November. The fact that extremists – in the name of a gang of terrorists that calls itself “Islamic State” – murdered defenceless people who wanted to spend a Friday evening at a café, restaurant or at a rock concert leaves us in no doubt that the terrorists are bent on attacking our entire way of life.

It is therefore one of the tasks facing the international community to prevent the seeds sown by the terrorists with their inhumane acts from germinating in the first place. Dividing free societies at their core, turning them against Muslims and spreading fear – these are the perpetrators’ aims. We will not surrender our freedom, however, even if we will now pay greater heed to public security.

Open societies will need to protect and defend themselves. At the same time, however, they need a measure of composure – so that citizens can overcome their fears and continue to lead their lives without feeling that their basic freedoms are restricted. It is important in this regard to guard against stereotypes and to remind ourselves that Muslims in particular are made to suffer under the so-called Islamic State’s rule of terror, and that IS is also rejected, or indeed

treated with contempt, among the peoples of Muslim-majority countries. Even though murders have been committed in the name of every world religion throughout history, terror has no religion.

The events in France are especially close to home here in Germany. Our actions are characterised by solidarity with our neighbour, our partner and our friend. And yet it goes without saying that transnational terrorism is a global problem. In 2015, scarcely a month went by without an attack being carried out by IS somewhere in the world – you reminded us of this, Archbishop. And so we also call to mind today the victims of terror around the world – in Lebanon and in Yemen, in Mali and Turkey, in Tunisia, Egypt, Russia, and in many other countries. They can all rest assured that our thoughts are with them. And we all acknowledge the fact that the international community must stand and work together to counter terrorism – beyond borders and beyond world-views.

Speaking of working together, in 2015 we celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations and, at the same time, a number of remarkable successes in the area of international cooperation. At a time when almost sixty million people have fled their homes and 100 million people are dependent upon humanitarian assistance, it is also clear that we must continue to strengthen the United Nations and do our part to achieve this. I myself recently gained an impression of what the subsidiary organisations of the UN are doing to ease suffering and in the area of crisis management on a visit to a UNHCR refugee camp in Jordan. The fact that the great majority of people fleeing their homes find refuge in their region means that the international community has an obligation to do its utmost to support neighbouring countries hosting refugees in particular. Moreover, a great challenge has also emerged for the countries of the European Union. Especially at a time when some political forces would prefer national responses, it is important to remind ourselves of the advantages of solving problems as a community. Europe will only be able to master a challenge of such magnitude together, and only with solidarity in action.

We know that people flee their homes for a wide range of reasons. Alongside terror, war, failing states and poverty, hunger and a lack of prospects, especially among the younger generation, are the great challenges that we as the international community must face. It is these challenges that spawn desperation and hopelessness that compel people to leave their homes.

Diplomacy is indispensable precisely at times such as these. I would like now to call to mind just one great success of the past year that is currently at risk of being pushed into the background. In the summer, we experienced how successful diplomacy can be and the stamina that it sometimes requires. After years of economic sanctions,

and also after twelve years of lengthy negotiations, an agreement was finally reached with Iran. The Vienna agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme gives us hope – it must be implemented consistently, however. It is perhaps a good omen that the conference on Syria has also started in Vienna. Many countries are once again at the negotiating table, and Germany is also playing an active role. The aim must now be to use the Vienna format to find a peaceful solution that is in the interests of the Syrian people. This must be accomplished at a time when regional tensions are considerable and great responsibility is expected of the negotiators.

The year 2015 also witnessed another major breakthrough at the negotiation table in the form of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by 193 member states of the United Nations. If we manage to work together to achieve only but a fraction of these targets, then this will help to mitigate many causes of conflicts in the long term – and help to prevent others from arising.

Perhaps the greatest signal of hope emerged recently from the city that had previously been so hard hit. Almost all of the world's countries agreed to a historic climate protection agreement in Paris. This climate summit in particular showed us how challenging the tasks of diplomacy are. International climate diplomacy has made an important contribution to ensuring that humankind is able to appreciate its fundamental togetherness and finally act together. This task will continue to keep us busy for many decades yet.

It is clear therefore that, alongside crises and wars, we have achieved successes in the area of international diplomacy. Such breakthroughs help to stabilise our world order at a time when it is coming under pressure. We are therefore starting a new year with the reassuring knowledge that we can do something – that this world is and remains something we can influence.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Permit me to thank you all today for our excellent and reliable cooperation in the past year. I have held many constructive talks with heads of state from your countries on my trips and at meetings held here in Berlin. I look forward to every possible opportunity to work together with you to strengthen the cohesion of the international community and to seek, preserve and promote peace in the world.

Allow me to wish you and your families a happy, peaceful and successful year 2016!