



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
Speech at the memorial ceremony on the first anniversary  
of the attack in Hanau  
in Hanau  
on 19 February 2021**

The events of 19 February 2020 are deeply etched in our memories. One year after the brutal murders in Hanau, we have come together again today in this city to remember those terrible events – but, above all, to remember the victims. We have come together to state their names, to remember their names, and to ensure that their names are never forgotten.

On this day, it is difficult for us all to face up to the pain and grief once more. First and foremost, however, that applies to those of you who were injured, as well as the families and close friends of the victims. You who are either with us today or – due to the pandemic – are joining us on screen. You have all lost someone who belonged to you, whose face and character were familiar to you, indeed who were a part of your lives.

All of these loved ones were unique, one of a kind. And therefore – even if the victims, and even if you, the families, have been affected by a shared horrendous experience – the grief and loss which each of you feels is unique and quite special.

That is why we are remembering every single name today, as well as the life stories bound up with each name. And that is why everyone can express their very personal grief here once more, the very personal pain of parting which each and every one carries with them. No one can really take away the burden of this pain, no matter how much we support and comfort each other.

Of course, we cannot ignore the link between those we are mourning. They were all victims of a perpetrator who, in his murderous delusion, believed that they had something in common. In his eyes, none of the victims belonged here, not here in Hanau where they lived, where they were born, where they had moved, where they were at home and

from where they had made their plans for life and intended to realise them.

The perpetrator presumed the right to decide who belongs here and who does not. He presumed to have the right to differentiate between "them" and "us"; to decide who has the right to live here and who does not. He presumed to have the right to decide over the life and death of others.

Every individual whom we are mourning was, in one regard, a random victim because they just happened to be where the perpetrator decided to carry out his deadly scheme. In another sense however, the victims were anything but random. They were the precise target of the perpetrator's deadly plan because they did not belong here in his hate-filled mind. For that reason, too, this crime provoked so much horror, not only but especially among all those with a migration background. As you know, any such individual could have become a victim of this brutal attack. And it is most likely that the perpetrator wanted his crime to be seen in that way: as a red flag, as a declaration of war on the established forms of peaceful co existence.

This perfidious message thus spreads not only horror but also fear. Many people have this fear, not only in Hanau. And I can understand why people are afraid. After all, the perpetrator did not simply find these ideas within himself or develop them on his own. Through his environment, through the internet and social media, he had become acquainted with a world view by which his own racism and his "them" and "us" way of thinking were encouraged and intensified more and more. This world view, marked by hatred and extermination fantasies, is still being spread day after day – by misanthropes who know what they are doing.

Just as the murder of Regional Commissioner Walter Lübcke was not random, or the attack on the synagogue in Halle, these murders were not random either. These crimes stemmed from targeted hatred, and the perpetrators were emboldened by that.

Hate, racism, abuse directed against Muslims and Jews, supremacy fantasies: all of this is very specifically directed at certain people. People living among us, who belong to us, to our city and our neighbourhood, who go to the same school, shop in the same stores and do the same work. The fact that we share so much of our daily routine shows that we belong together – despite our differences!

However, the truth is that there are individuals who react to mere diversity with hostility; who live in a world where only their own ideas have a place; who boost their own self-worth by denigrating others; for whom it is clear that diversity must be combatted. They seek to hammer these very ideas into our minds through ideology and lies, incitement to hatred and exclusion

The evil inhumanity to be found on the internet or elsewhere is the dangerous toxin of a small minority – but a toxin with an impact. A toxin which, time and again, leads people to believe that they have the right to act in the name of a supposed will of the people to humiliate, threaten, chase or even murder others.

What can be our answer to the terrible crimes committed in Hanau? What must our answer be?

Many answers, many good answers have already been given.

Hate and revenge were not among them. For evil is not conquered by evil.

Among the good answers, I am thinking, for instance, of the many spontaneous demonstrations and vigils which took place across the country immediately after the horrific reports started coming out of Hanau. "Hanau stands united" was one of the spontaneous actions which subsequently gave rise to others.

I know that our reasonable fellow citizens with a heart want to live in harmony side by side. They do not want to differentiate between "them" and "us". They want an "us" – and many are working throughout our country to ensure that hate and violence, contempt and disrespect do not take root here. They are seeking to ensure that all of us can be different without having to be afraid, that we can all live without fear of each other, with one another.

I am thinking of the many things which have been done here in Hanau for and with you, the families of the victims – but in particular of what you yourselves have done. I am thinking with gratitude of my meeting with you in Schloss Bellevue, where we attempted to revisit this abhorrent crime and the impact on each individual family. That was certainly not easy for you.

I am thinking of the practical, the psychological and also the financial support which Hanau, Hesse and the Federal Government have given but, above all, I am thinking of the many gestures of simple compassion. Many ordinary people, with no office or mandate, did something for which I am certain they did not expect any special thanks. Especially today, however, I want to turn to all those who offered kindness and their help when they knew they were needed and thank them for everything they did and continue to do for a good – a better – future here in Hanau.

This city and its citizens have shown a commitment which I have truly seldom seen in this form or diversity. As Federal President, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks once more.

The name Hanau not only stands for terrible crimes but also for a pleasant city where people know each other, help each other and are there for one another.

Above all, the initiatives launched by committed members of the public – important initiatives which cannot however be taken for granted – include the sponsorships, the “Initiative 19. Februar Hanau” or the “Bildungsinitiative Ferhat Unvar” (education initiative Ferhat Unvar) and so many other things small and large, as well as the erection and preservation of the memorials for the dead and the graves of honour or the digital memorial on this anniversary today.

We know that nothing that happened can be put right.

However, the many small contributions I have mentioned can perhaps lead to something which may still sound a little too ambitious to some people today but that could be the goal of all our, of all your efforts: the restoration of confidence – confidence in this city, in this country, which is and should remain our common home.

I know that despite all the good things that have happened, pointed criticism and questions regarding the state’s actions continue to arise.

I am not here as Federal President because I have the answers to all the questions still unresolved. No, I am here because I am deeply saddened that, in the case of your relatives, our state was unable to fulfil its pledge to provide protection, safety and freedom, a pledge it makes to everyone living together peacefully here.

I know that this has had an impact on your confidence in this, in our, in your state. We cannot be indifferent to that, for the state, for democracy, need our confidence. The justice system and police need our confidence. What police officers have to endure and how hard they work, especially in extreme situations, is all too often neither seen nor appreciated. And I want to expressly include emergency doctors and paramedic staff in this.

However – not even the state, or all those who have responsibilities within it, are infallible. In no country, and that includes Germany. And wherever mistakes or errors of judgement have been made, they have to be investigated. Investigation and subsequent action are not up to the discretion of those involved. Rather, they are the active duty of the state vis à vis the public and, above all, the families of the victims. The confidence lost can only be regained to the extent that the state fulfils this active duty and provides answers to unresolved issues. We therefore have to make every possible effort.

The state has an obligation. However, each and every one of us has to play our part, too.

Many, very many, show this every day: in the way in which people live side by side without giving it a second thought or in special initiatives aimed at protecting and nurturing our commonweal.

And we see and sense that we are not alone!

Those who work to foster peaceful co-existence in our society are in the best of company. Anyone who rejects exclusion finds friends, neighbours and fellow citizens who think and act just like them. I assure you, the bereaved, that the overwhelming majority of people in our country are against exclusion, against racism and for democracy. However, it is also true that this majority has to become more visible!

A year has passed.

Has the grief faded away now?

Has the pain lessened, the anger disappeared?

Have all the questions been answered?

No. By no means.

Yet, I stand here as Federal President and say to you: do not allow this evil crime to divide us! Let us not overlook the evil in our midst, the hate, the marginalisation, the indifference. But please, let us believe in the better spirit in our country, in the strength to come together, in the will to be united as one!

If we take this message to heart again today and take it home with us, then this act of remembrance and of grief will be an act of hope and faith in the future: for Hanau, for Hesse and for the whole of Germany: our shared home.