



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a reception for fellows of the
Alexander von Humboldt Foundation
on 23 June 2022
at Schloss Bellevue**

For two years here in Schloss Bellevue, we had to forego the visit of the Humboldt family because the pandemic rendered such an event impossible. I did not share the experience of Alexander von Humboldt back then who, as you know, was often extremely bored in Schloss Tegel, even without corona. However, I can assure you that we did very much miss meeting with you and having you all with us here in this beautiful park.

So all the better that you can be with us again this morning: more than 600 scholars from 75 countries from around the world, this year including Moldova, Mauritius, Mongolia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. You have all been living and researching for a time in Germany, in many different places all across the Republic. And you are enriching our country – with your knowledge, your expertise, your life story and also with your personality. I would like to bid you all a very, very warm welcome to Berlin!

The COVID 19 pandemic has unfortunately forced us to make one concession today: your partners and children, who you have brought with you to Germany, were not able to join us today in the Park. Please pass on my warm greetings because of course we are also delighted to have your families here with us in our country.

Pleased as we are to gather here, the brutal war of aggression that Russia has been waging against Ukraine for four months now also casts a shadow on this reception. The images and reports of the murdered and tortured, of destroyed towns and villages, of displacement and forced migration, all of this shocks and distresses us, making us feel sad, angry and aghast.

This murderous war for which Russia is responsible, this war is bringing untold suffering to the people in Ukraine, it is causing energy

crises and famine in many parts of the world and pushing us back on our path to a bright future for our planet.

After the pandemic stalled global exchange, it is now the war that is hampering cross border cooperation, not least in the field of science. Cooperation with Russian researchers has been suspended, joint scientific projects put on ice, including those designed to boost climate change mitigation.

This war is costing us valuable time – in science, in politics, in business and society. It is exacerbating the major problems facing humanity, which we can only solve in peace and through worldwide cooperation.

However, Putin's war does not paralyse us. On the contrary, it has increased our determination, also in the global scientific community. I am grateful to the German academic organisations that they are continuing their projects with Ukrainian researchers despite the difficult conditions caused by the war. And I am grateful to the Humboldt Foundation and many others who are supporting students and researchers who have fled Ukraine.

We know many Russian scientists are just as horrified by the war of aggression as we are, many have to endure censure and oppression in their country, many are seeking refuge in exile. It is right and proper for the Humboldt Foundation to continue supporting Russian and Belarusian scientists, to help those who are under threat and who want to teach and research in freedom. Thank you so much also for this.

I am delighted that we have some Ukrainian and Russian scholars with us today. I address our guests from Ukraine and Russia, you all jointly stand for the principles of peaceful co existence, freedom of opinion and information, for the search for facts and for truth. The fact that you are here together during this dark chapter of war is perhaps also a glimmer of hope. It's a pleasure to have you here today and I extend an especially warm welcome to you!

After his voyages to South and Central America, Alexander von Humboldt, the explorer and cosmopolitan, left Berlin in April 1829 on his last major expedition. From Schloss Tegel, he took a carriage through the Baltic region, through Russia to the Urals before passing through Siberia on his way to the Altai Mountains on the Chinese border.

The observations Humboldt made back then led him to conclude that humankind changes the climate – for example by cutting down forests or through the steam and emissions generated by industry. What he had in mind at that time was nothing short of systematic, global climate research.

Humboldt's ideal of a free, globally networked world of science is one that we again need to defend today. Let us speak out against those who scorn good sense and freedom and who are fanning the flames not

just in Russia but unfortunately in many parts of the world, also in democracies on both sides of the Atlantic. And let us today show our commitment together to overcome violence and hatred, to overcome oppression and moves to retreat into nationalism, to overcome imperialist megalomania. Let us show this commitment together today, ladies and gentlemen!

It is my ardent wish for you, honoured guests, that your work can deepen and flourish here in Germany, in a positive research climate so to speak. I hope that you will also have the opportunity to get to know our beautiful country, its manifold nature and varied culture and that you above all encounter many open minded people to inspire and enrich you.

And if you like it here, do tell others when you get back home. Do uphold your ties with Germany, nurture your new friendships, serve as ambassadors of free research!

We look forward to talking to you now. One thing is for sure when the Humboldt family comes together: it's certainly not going to be boring.