



**Christmas address
by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
Schloss Bellevue,
25 December 2022**

Fellow citizens, this evening I would like to tell you about the children I met a few days ago: fifty girls and boys who, together with their mothers, have fled from the war in Ukraine and come to Germany. They have had to leave their country and they have lost their homes. And many of them have experienced terrible things. They are so frightened that even a door banging shut leaves them shaking.

I met these children in Freiberg in Saxony, where they attend primary school. Their teacher told me how often she has to comfort the children. "Sometimes I feel like crying with them," she said, "but I can't because I have to stay strong." Another teacher only came to Germany from Ukraine in May. At that time, she could not speak a word of German – but today she speaks it so well that she teaches Ukrainian children in German. How do you cope with all that? The head teacher said to me, "There were so many who needed our help – so we simply got on with it."

I am telling you this story not only because I am grateful for the kindness and love given to these children. It is also because this evening I want to thank everyone who has helped others this year.

I am aware of the sacrifices this crisis demands of you all; that many of you have to make do with less. However, no one can take away from us our generosity towards each other. A friendly word, a small gesture of kindness, understanding for others, openness towards strangers: you yourselves, my fellow citizens, all of you living in this country, are helping to make life a bit brighter for others.

My wife and I wish you a happy Christmas! A Christmas when you can gain some distance for a moment from everything that shocked, frightened or upset you this year. A Christmas when you can enjoy

meeting others, getting together with your family, as well as peace and quiet at the end of a trying year.

At Christmas, we Christians celebrate the arrival of the child who brings hope to a dark present. And many non-Christians celebrate with us and are moved by the promise of the Christmas story: warmth and protection, closeness and harmony, hope and peace.

Yes, this year our most fervent wish is most certainly that peace reigns again. The brutal Russian attack against Ukraine, the return of war to Europe, the Ukrainians' terrible suffering, as well as the fear that the hostilities will spread: all of this unsettles and frightens many people in our country.

The primary school children in Freiberg and their families in Ukraine long for peace even more ardently than we do. However, this peace is not yet within reach. And it must be a fair peace which neither rewards the land grab nor abandons people in Ukraine to the arbitrary actions and violence of their occupiers. Until this peace can be established, it is a humanitarian imperative that we stand by those who are being attacked, threatened and oppressed. By doing this, we are shining a light of hope in the darkness of injustice.

Fellow citizens, you, too, are feeling the impact of this war, especially the economic impact. However, you bear the burden because you are not unmoved by the fate of the Ukrainians; because you are not indifferent to their fight for freedom; because you care and want to show your solidarity.

Yes, times are tough. We are facing headwinds. Nonetheless, Christmas in particular is the right time to look at those things which give us hope. They do exist! Ukraine is holding its own with great courage. Europe stands united. Our country is once again rising above itself in the face of this challenge. We have not panicked, nor have we allowed ourselves to be divided. Our democratic state has reduced the heaviest burdens. In our companies, many are working to ensure that we emerge stronger from the crisis. And all of you have played your part in this.

If there has been one good thing about this year then it is the experience that we will get through this time together. And that is why my wish this Christmas is that we take this sense of optimism with us into the new year. That we strengthen everything that unites us.

No matter how preoccupied we are with other worries at present: the fight against climate change has lost none of its urgency either. It cannot wait and it needs all of us to address it. I hope that older people, even late in life, are prepared to change once more. And that the young will get involved, that they are critical – without damaging the cause of climate action by alienating others. For we need both: the ambition of the young and the experience of older people. After all, we all share a

common goal: that the young are not the "Last Generation" on this planet. Rather, that they are the first generation in a climate-friendly world.

Fellow citizens, we were capable of so much more this year than we would perhaps ever have thought possible. We acted with resolve when our help was needed. We stood up for each other. I am proud of our country, in which so many people are playing an active role – not because they have to but because they feel a responsibility for others and for society as a whole. What lies at our core, what has always made us strong, will endure: we are creative, hard-working and willing to show solidarity. We can draw strength and hope from this for the new year.

In particular, I would like to thank all those working today and over the festive period, in hospitals and nursing homes, in police and fire stations, everywhere where the service provided to others continues unceasingly. I thank you most sincerely for that!

Fellow citizens, I wish all of you a happy Christmas!