



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a reception to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the
University of Haifa
on 10 March 2023
in Schloss Bellevue**

Fifty years, half a century of proud history! Professor Robin, I would like to express my sincere congratulations on this very special anniversary of this very special university. What a pleasure to welcome you here today! And also all of you, who are so closely linked to the University of Haifa: Sonja Lahnstein-Kandel, Manfred Lahnstein, members of the German Friends of the University of Haifa. I bid you all a very warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue. I am delighted that we have come together today for this celebration.

I have fond memories of the days I spent in Haifa, high up on Mount Carmel when – back then in a different capacity – I had the privilege of opening the Haifa Center for German and European Studies in 2008. It was my first visit to the city and I was deeply impressed by the spirit which marked Haifa and its university: a spirit of openness, tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

Up there on Mount Carmel, where the god Baal was once worshipped, where the Order of Carmelites was founded in the 12th century, there stands today this architecturally impressive campus where young people from Israel and around the world study. The University of Haifa is an internationally renowned centre of academic excellence. However, it is also a centre, indeed a laboratory, of peaceful co-existence: Jews and Muslims, Druze and Christians learn and research there together – but that still sounds more evident than it is in reality. Multiversity, Ron Robin, that is your concept for the university of the future. And I am certain that this will enable your institution to have an even greater impact from Mount Carmel on the city, the country, and hopefully on the entire world.

When we look back together today on this half century, we also see this University's very special bond with Germany. Perhaps I should

talk of a Haifa-Hamburg axis. After all, almost as long as the University of Haifa exists, there has been a group of dedicated people in Hamburg with a mission: to support this University – and, in particular, to support students for whom it is often difficult or even impossible to attend a higher education institution.

Shalom, peace, was the vision which guided Eric M. Warburg, who himself was persecuted by the National Socialist regime. Shalom, peace, that was meant to be more than a greeting. It was meant to become day-to-day reality. That was Eric M. Warburg's dream, and it was and remains the dream of the German Friends of the University of Haifa to this very day. The University of Haifa epitomises a liberal, a cosmopolitan and diverse Israel.

The fact that young Arabs make up one fifth of the students is partly thanks to you, to the German Friends of the University of Haifa. And the fact that young Arab women in particular are receiving an excellent education at the University is also thanks to your programmes. Professor Mouna Maroun, you tell your young female Arab Master and doctoral students that the sky's the limit for them and that they can become the stars of Arab society. What wonderful words of encouragement!

The sky's the limit – I believe that describes the work of the German Friends of the University of Haifa very well. From the Jewish-Arab Community Leadership Program to the Werner Otto Graduate Arab Women Program, from the Haifa meets Frankfurt project to the welcome given to academics who have fled Ukraine – your commitment is truly impressive and wide-ranging. This close link with Haifa has long since become an integral part of German-Israeli relations. Relations which actually began in the academic sphere and paved the way for the subsequent political and economic cooperation. Today our two countries are bound by a deep friendship. We Germans cannot be grateful enough for the reconciliation which Israel has afforded us.

And it is primarily the young people of our two countries who are living out this friendship in a very tangible way today, with a dense network of personal, academic and cultural contacts and projects. The role of the University of Haifa in this cannot be overestimated. It stands for the dream of a better, more peaceful world in which people of all cultures and religions have the same rights and live together in peace.

Unfortunately, this dream has slipped further into the distance in the Middle East during the last few weeks. The escalation of hate and violence we have seen in the past weeks and months, which you experience first-hand there, is giving us all great cause for concern. And we are also concerned by the Government's plans to reform rule-of-law structures – particularly because we Germans have always viewed with great admiration the strong and vibrant rule of law in Israel. Especially because we know how necessary this strong and vibrant rule of law is in

the region. I have regular exchanges with my friend and counterpart Isaac Herzog and I know that we can count on his wise and conciliatory voice in the Israeli debate. Those who champion understanding and détente, as well as dialogue, deserve our full support – so that the dream to which the University of Haifa is committed can actually be realised one day.

Today I would like to thank all German Friends of the University of Haifa most sincerely. And if I may express one more wish today, then it would be this: keep up your good work! Do not give up your dream! Anyone acquainted with you, Ms Lahnstein-Kandel, knows that you will continue to work tirelessly for this German-Israeli friendship and peace project. Especially in difficult times such as these, it is immensely important and remains a great symbol of hope.

Thank you very much!