

# **Towards a new culture of cooperation with Africa**

**Speech given by former Federal President Horst Köhler**

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*English translation, original in German.*

## I.

I would like to start by congratulating the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag on holding this conference. The ongoing refugee crisis is absorbing so much political oxygen that there appears to be little time and energy left to address other important issues. This would be particularly fatal in the case of Africa, because we can and must learn from this crisis, which also affects our relations with the African continent.

But let me first say a few words about the current political situation, which is not any easier in the wake of the regional state parliament elections last Sunday. Yes, the world is a complicated place at the moment. The situation is murky and gives us little cause for cosmopolitan optimism. We can thus perhaps understand the emotions behind the re-nationalisation trends and the oversimplified identity politics that we see erupting everywhere at the moment – they respond to the desire for clarity that people feel. But politically they are short-sighted, and economically they are dangerous. We cannot pick our own problems – and there is no simple solution to complex problems.

This is particularly true of refugee policy. And that is why I would like to say very clearly that I believe that the Chancellor is right in her efforts to find a European solution and a solution that takes into account the mutual dependencies in our world. It is the right way forward for moral, economic and political reasons. Let us give this process time.

It is an uncomfortable truth, but no country can simply cut itself off from the problems in the world, and Germany, which owes its prosperity to the openness of the world, can afford to do so even less than other nations. Every child learns sooner or later that you cannot hide by closing your eyes. The irrevocable interconnectedness of all that happens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century forces us to open our eyes, to accept responsibility, and not to seek prosperity at the expense of others, because otherwise the problems will rebound on us like a boomerang – with twice the force.

And that brings us to the heart of the matter. What do we see when we look at Africa?

Perhaps we should stay with the refugee crisis for a moment and see how this crisis colours our view of Africa, and the way we speak about Africa.



## II.

Firstly, we must differentiate between refugee movements and migration. The fact that here in Germany we often lump the two together is not merely slovenly use of language; it reflects decades of refusing to bring our immigration policies into line with reality. And now we are being presented with the bill. Because we have never bothered to put in place a properly managed system for legal migration, all those who want to come to Germany are now trying to force their way through the narrow door marked asylum – a door which was only ever intended to serve a very limited group of people. Now we do have a term that pretends to make the distinction between refugees and migrants – ‘economic refugee’. I don’t like the term, because it takes us in the wrong direction. It is redolent of moral judgement, and it takes on the guise of a magic spell that appears to relieve us of all responsibility for these so-called economic refugees. But this is not the place for moral judgement. In 1979, John Kenneth Galbraith wrote, ‘Migration is the oldest action against poverty’. Our ancestors in Germany and elsewhere in Europe warmly embraced this philosophy. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than 1 million ‘economic refugees’ emigrated every year from Europe to the USA. And the human race would not exist if the first migrants had not had the courage to leave Africa 50,000 or 60,000 years ago. Migration has always been one of the main drivers of innovation. Don’t misunderstand me. I am not condemning steering mechanisms in immigration policy. Indeed quite the reverse is true. But we must not condemn migration across the board. Instead we must realise that the growing migration born of poverty is an urgent signal that the extreme inequalities between countries and continents cannot persist in the long term, and must not be allowed to do so. The label ‘economic refugee’ may relieve us of any humanitarian responsibility, of the responsibility to provide asylum, but it forces us all the more to accept political responsibility.

Allow me to mention another expression that I don’t like. And I believe it is important to engage with this expression, not because I am a semantic pedant intent on splitting hairs, but because it too takes us in the wrong direction in our relations with Africa. The expression is ‘combating the root causes of refugee movements’.

So, you might ask, what can we have against efforts to address the root causes of refugee movements? Obviously nothing at all. But the expression itself suggests that all we need to do is to adjust a few screws here and there – perhaps just drill a few wells – and everything will be fine. If we are serious about addressing the root causes of refugee movements, we need a new and major transformation that aims to enable all people on this planet to live in dignity, while respecting the limits of our planet. This will require us to rethink the economic and social model of industrialised countries in particular. And, at international level, the correct structural framework will have to be put in place in order to give developing countries better opportunities for economic development.

Instead of this, we are simply labelling development cooperation as our way of addressing the causes of refugee movements. We must not instrumentalise development cooperation as a method of steering migration, however. Development cooperation must take a much longer-term view, and if we pretend that we could use it to check migration in the short term, not only will we raise false hopes, we will be twisting the facts, because experience shows that

development in fact often fosters migration rather than reducing it. Conversely, migration itself can drive development. The World Bank estimates that the African diaspora will send 34 billion dollars back to sub-Saharan Africa alone this year.

If we equate our cooperation with Africa with development cooperation, and then equate development cooperation with efforts to address the root causes of refugee movements, we will reduce Africa to a potential threat. That would be a fatal signal of arrogance and distance, a message that we are only interested in development in Africa to keep Africans out of Europe. An attitude like this cannot be the basis for the close partnership we so urgently need.

Like the term ‘economic refugee’, the concept of combating the causes of refugee movements reinforces the notion of superiority and inferiority. It perpetuates a habit from days gone by of defining Africa purely in terms of its purported shortcomings in comparison to Europe. But it is precisely this inability to see Africa as separate and valuable in its own right that has done much to aggravate the problems we see today.

What we need is a fresh, unprejudiced view of Africa. We need to discuss Africa in new terms, free of Eurocentrism, open and eager to learn more about our neighbouring continent in all its diversity and contradictions, with the opportunities it offers and the challenges it faces.

This is not an attempt to gloss over anything or to assert that all is well with Africa and that we do not need to worry. The refugee crisis is, of course, a loud warning that should be a wake-up call for us. Because it reveals the fact that our political thinking has not yet caught up with the era of international interdependence, that we cannot cope with global problems that do not stop at national borders and can only be resolved through international cooperation. This ability to define our national interests in the light of the global common good in our common long-term interest too is nowhere as important as in our relations with Africa. We can and must hone our global senses in this context and develop a new culture of cooperation, because Europe can only look forward to a bright future if it works with Africa.

### III.

And the challenges we face are, indeed, immense. Today Africa is already home to over one billion people. Many of them live in poverty with no prospects of taking charge of their own lives. Africa’s population is set to double to over 2 billion people by 2050. At that point about 20 per cent of the world’s population will be African, and only about 5 per cent European. Are we quite clear about what that implies for our ecosystems, for the global economy, and for international politics? Climate change, caused not by Africans but primarily by the rich countries of the world, and the concomitant desertification are threatening the livelihoods of millions of people. And while in recent years everybody has been praising Africa as the continent of growth, the vulnerability of African economies is now becoming increasingly apparent: plummeting oil prices have torn massive holes in the budgets of countries such as Nigeria and Angola, and many countries that have long relied on exports of natural resources, and have failed to diversify their economies, are suffering a rude awakening, as demand slows and prices hit rock bottom. Politically, some countries are showing worrying trends towards becoming autocratic states. Fortunately, civil society is becoming more and more vibrant, and

countries like Nigeria and Tanzania have recently demonstrated that professional government ministers of integrity in Africa are seriously addressing reforms.

Africa's largest challenge, however, and its greatest opportunity, is its youth. About one third of all Africans are under the age of 35. And they want what young people all over the world want – they want to learn, to work, to have a say, to live. According to calculations by the International Monetary Fund, 18 million jobs will have to be created every year in Africa up until 2035 merely to absorb the young people entering the job market. That is a task unparalleled in human history.

I would like to tell you the story of Thiat from Senegal. I met him a few weeks ago during the Berlin International Film Festival, where a documentary about him and his hip hop group had its premiere. With their protest movement in Senegal in 2012, Thiat and his fellow rappers helped to ensure that President Abdoulaye Wade, who intended to stand for a third term in office, was voted out by the people. The movement called itself 'Y'en a marre', which roughly translated means 'fed up'. The most important slogan of the entire campaign was 'Your polling card is your weapon'. If you talk to Thiat, you will find him to be an intelligent, angry, creative young man who does not merely make empty demands of politicians, but who has a clear political philosophy of civic engagement. He makes it quite plain that revolutions must start with every individual, and that a new Senegal and a new Africa cannot be built without individual responsibility, without integrity, and without public spirit. The revolutionary rapper not only rails against corrupt elites, but fights successfully to overcome the lethargy of the people.

For Thiat and for me, perhaps the most important question for Africa's future is this: What weapons will young Africans take up – polling cards or guns? The answer to this question is also crucial to Europe's future, because if hundreds of millions of young Africans see no prospect of living in dignity, we can expect massive instability on our neighbouring continent, and we can expect an influx of migrants that will make the numbers we have seen over the last few months pale into insignificance by comparison. The increased incidence of terrorist attacks like that seen only a few days ago in Côte d'Ivoire clearly demonstrates that the destabilisation of African regions and the seduction of African youth is part of the strategy of the butchers of Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

#### IV.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will be perfectly blunt – the main responsibility for Africa’s future lies with the Africans themselves. Africa will only enjoy sustainable prosperity if the continent’s political culture is dominated by the fight to stamp out corruption and poverty and to embrace the rule of law. Ramphela Mamphela and Mo Ibrahim, both of whom have each strongly advocated good governance in Africa in their own way, will no doubt give us their valuable insights on this in a moment.

But we cannot escape one question – what weapons will Germany and Europe supply to the young people of Africa? When Africa is at stake, it appears to me that the immensity of the challenge is strangely disproportionate to the timidity of our response. The answer cannot be merely to increase development aid. Not that I have anything against more development aid, of course, but we must ask ourselves whether that is enough, whether we can really expect a different outcome if all we provide is more of the same.

We need a large-scale strategic response, and we need a new way of thinking both in Africa and here.

Allow me to outline a few elements of this new approach:

Firstly, the German economy with its strong industrial capacity is the natural partner for Africa, in order to push ahead with the urgently needed diversification and transformation of African economies. Our family-run enterprises in particular, with their strong roots in the local community and their belief in social responsibility, can play a crucially important part. I am delighted to see the German economy currently rediscovering Africa’s potential for growth. One good example is a new large-scale project to train electricians, mechanics and mechatronic technicians being implemented jointly in Nigeria by the German Engineering Federation, the Nigerian industrialist Aliko Dangote and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. In the interests of ensuring a robust, strategic economic partnership with Africa, I would also like to see the German Government make it possible to use financing and guarantee instruments even more flexibly.

Secondly, Africa has good plans for generating growth to create jobs and for overcoming poverty. They include regional integration and the creation of a pan-African free trade zone. But the full potential of these drivers of growth can only be realised if it becomes easier for African economies to become integrated into international value chains. The agricultural and trade policies of industrialised countries currently still present an obstacle to this in key areas. Europe should play the role of advocate here and pioneer changes. In the same vein, European Partnership Agreements – and TTIP of course – should be reviewed to determine whether they actually obstruct the development of the manufacturing industry and a dynamic service sector in Africa rather than fostering it.

Thirdly, let us offer more young people from Africa the opportunity to come to Germany and to Europe for a while, to learn, to study and to conduct research. Let us massively expand

exchange programmes and scholarship programmes. Whenever I ask young people in Africa what they would like to see from Germany and Europe, they say, 'Let us come to you. We don't want to be locked up in our country. We want to learn from you for one or two or three years, and then come home and help rebuild our own country.' We should respond to this request not with fear and small-mindedness, but with openness, generosity and the joy of a teacher encountering an inquisitive student who is eager to learn.

Fourthly, let us abandon our arrogance towards Africa and learn more about its history, its reality and its culture. Let's learn to differentiate. And let's learn more from Africa. And I say this expressly here in parliament: the African continent deserves the attention of our best minds, it deserves more encounters and meetings of parliamentarians and much more travel and dialogue than we have seen to date. And it deserves a mutual learning process, a process of learning about one another. I am also convinced that this process will help us understand ourselves better – understand what it means to be European, to be German in this world of mutual dependencies.

V.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I realise that resolving the acute crisis must be our first priority, and that this ties up resources – not only financial resources but also much of the finite reserves of political attention. But I also know that this is precisely why any real effort to engage with the African continent is simply put on the back burner time and time again.

That is why I say to you here today, let us direct our attention towards Africa now – not in spite of the crisis but because of it. Let us stop avoiding the major issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let us find the courage to mount a response commensurate with the challenges, because they will not get any smaller.

And let us please stop producing illusory solutions that will resolve nothing, and building new walls in our heads and at our borders. Any genuine, long-term solution to the current disorder in the world can only come from the political realisation that we must turn our faces to the world, from the awareness of the extent to which the fates of all peoples are intertwined. It also calls for a different, more serious, more international economic policy, trade policy, environmental policy, agricultural policy and transport policy. In short, it calls for policies that, taken as a whole, constitute a new international policy for peace and development.

That is why I see the refugee crisis as an opportunity too, as a wake-up call to rouse us from the lethargy of our prosperity and enable us to develop a new empathy for humanity as a whole. I see it as a chance to introduce new policies capable of addressing the major global challenges and learning from them.

A European-African learning community could achieve great things.

Thank you.