Mr President,
Mrs Pohamba,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Once again, Mr President, I would like to bid you, your wife and your delegation a very warm welcome here in Schloss Charlottenburg. We are delighted that your first visit to Europe as newly elected President of the Republic of Namibia has taken you to Germany.

I.
This year, Mr President, both Germany and Namibia can look back on fifteen turbulent and successful years. Fifteen years ago the German nation regained its unity and freedom. Fifteen years ago the freedom struggle of the Namibian nation culminated in independence. Since then your country has made impressive progress. Today Namibia counts as one of Africa's most stable democracies, a country that respects human rights and the rule of law, a country in which all sections of the population participate in the political process and which actively fosters national reconciliation. May I offer you and your compatriots my heartfelt congratulations on these achievements.

Since your inauguration, Mr President, you have, in the unassuming style that is your hallmark, sought a dialogue with the Opposition and the country's white minority and stepped up the fight against corruption and mismanagement. On that, too, we congratulate you.
II.
During our talks today, however, you also spoke, Mr President, of the tremendous challenges your country still faces, the first and foremost being the fight against poverty. You want to boost the economy and create new jobs. The fight against HIV/AIDS is an ongoing mammoth task. Much depends on the success of these efforts if your country is to have a bright future. Last but not least, you are planning a land reform that aims to redistribute commercial farmland and make better use of communal land. We very much hope you will continue on your chosen path, land reform in accordance with the rule of law. The success of such a socially and economically sustainable land reform is of crucial importance for Namibia. But also outside Namibia land reform along these lines could serve as a model for the whole of southern Africa.

Namibia supports the recently established African Union and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development NEPAD, both of which are encouraging signs, I believe, of new thinking in Africa. With my Partnership for Africa Initiative, whose inaugural event took place on the Petersberg near Bonn a few weeks ago, I hope to contribute not only to the continent's development but also to a frank and honest dialogue between African countries and the industrialized nations. I would like to see the good and friendly relations between Germany and Namibia helping to forge a true partnership between Africa and Europe.

III.
For us Germans, Mr President, your country holds a special charm and fascination. Virtually everyone who has seen your country with their own eyes, from the early nineteenth-century missionary Johann Hinrich Schmelen to the around 60,000 German tourists who visited Namibia in 2004, returns home thrilled by the friendliness of Namibia's people, the beauty of its landscape and the richness and diversity of its culture.

Our two countries have traditionally close and amicable relations. And those are no empty words. With no other African country does Germany have such close ties. In no other country is German "one of the tribal languages", as is sometimes said part in jest and part in earnest. Nowhere else in Africa are there so many people of German descent. In 1989 and 2004 the German Bundestag solemnly recognized Germany's special responsibility towards Namibia and instructed the German Government to foster close and friendly ties with your country. As its leading bilateral partner in development cooperation, Germany has supported Namibia's efforts to overcome the legacy
of colonialism and apartheid and build a just, democratic and economically viable society.

IV. While there is every reason to be pleased our relations are so good and to explore ways to intensify our cooperation in the economic, academic and cultural field, it is also most important that we make a serious and honest effort to come to grips with the past. That is something we in Germany have not always done. I am very glad that last year for the first time Namibians and Germans paid tribute together to the many thousands of Herero and Nama who lost their lives in Germany's colonial wars. At the ceremony to mark the centenary of the Battle at the Waterberg you were joined, Mr President, by representatives of the Federal Government. Namibia's outstretched hand of reconciliation is something we in Germany greatly appreciate. We well understand that only those who know the past and acknowledge the responsibility they bear for it can look forward to a good future.

So it is much to be welcomed that we in Germany now want to know the full truth also about our colonial history. A host of novels, non-fiction works and documentaries testify to a new and growing interest in this aspect of our history. The ZDF, one of our leading television channels, is currently running a prime-time documentary series on Germany's colonial past. The major exhibition on German-Namibian history shown this year and last year in Cologne and Berlin has attracted thousands of visitors. And the recent book by Namibian author Lucia Engombe about her years as "Kind Nr. 95" in the GDR has shed a new light on this almost forgotten chapter of German-Namibian relations.

V. As we see, there is a great deal of mutual interest in each other. We have no need to be concerned about the future of our relations. This is above all because the ties that link us are forged not primarily by officials but by ordinary people in Namibia and Germany. Thanks to the activities of the German-Namibian Society, joint projects between schools such as the Martin Luther High School in Omaruru and the Geschwister-Scholl-Gesamtschule in Lünen as well as numerous exchanges at municipal level, there now exists a dense network of cooperation involving ordinary people on both sides. I know that many of those who give their time and energy to this very worthwhile cause are with us this evening. I would like to bid you a warm welcome and thank you very much indeed for your commitment and hard work.
VI.
Ladies and gentlemen, coming back to the Namibia-Germany Exhibition I mentioned earlier, I would point out that its subtitle in German was deliberately ambiguous, namely "Eine geteilte Geschichte". The German word "teilen" means both "separate" and "experience together". My hope is that this state visit will help focus our attention on what we share: a common past and above all a common future.

On this note may I now invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to join me in a toast to the health of President Pohamba and his wife, to the welfare of the Namibian nation and the friendship between Namibia and Germany.