Federal Foreign Office (Germany) — auswaertiges-amt.de

Opening speech by Foreign Minister Wadephul at the Berlin Peace Dialogue 2026

2026-10-08

Dear Dr. Leininger, dear Mr. von Borries,

Dear Members of the German Bundestag,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests!

When a country returns to peace after a war, it is not simply because the guns have fallen silent.

Of course, that marks the end of physical destruction, but not necessarily the end of internal conflicts.

To achieve a just and lasting peace, more is required than a mere cessation of hostilities.

Let us take Syria, for example.

In December 2024, the Assad regime finally came to an end – after a brutal 14-year war against the Syrian people.

That was a historic moment.

One that we in Germany followed very closely.

Because we have a profound interest in the fate of Syria.

Not least because over a million people from Syria have found refuge in Germany and for many of them, Germany has become their new home.

But also because, as Europeans, we have a strategic interest in the long-term stability and reconstruction of the Syrian state.

Building a statehood that guarantees security, freedom and a life in dignity is an immense task.

As a lawyer by training, I am convinced of this:

There can be no peace without justice and no justice without accountability.

When we talk about dealing with the massive human rights violations of the past in order for a country to emerge from conflict, we speak of “transitional justice”.

But what does that mean in practice?

It means something very concrete:

We must secure evidence of atrocities.

We must systematically categorise this evidence, and we must preserve it for the long term.

For it is only through these rigorous steps that we can create the necessary foundation for a genuine and thorough process of reckoning.

Beyond collecting evidence, transitional justice is also about finding new ways of living together.

Because sometimes, not every single atrocity can be addressed in a courtroom.

Besides justice, we also need mechanisms for social healing. Both are essential for peace.

This is the case in Syria, where hundreds of thousands of people are still missing, where divisions in society are deep, and where massive traumas from the war prevail.

Yet, every day, local peacebuilders do fantastic work in bringing people together, in starting dialogues between neighbours in Homs, Aleppo, Latakia and Damascus.

Cities where communities – after all that has happened – want to find ways to live together again:

In peace and mutual respect.

Why am I telling you this?

Not only because the Federal Foreign Office is supporting the work of local peacebuilders in Syria.

But because this example teaches us a fundamental lesson about peacebuilding:

Sustainable peace and security are often created not at high-level meetings, but in persistent conversations within a community – led by those who are part of the local society and are most familiar with the conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet today at a time that can only be described as turbulent. We find ourselves in a world that seems to be unravelling. The number of conflicts and crises is steadily increasing.

How to jointly address these was one of the key topics of the many bilateral and multilateral talks in New York during the General Assembly.

In our ever more interconnected world, conflicts that at first glance appear to be regional are having global consequences.

That is because terrorist activities, the impacts of fragmented trade routes and climate change or social media disinformation campaigns do not stop at national borders:

Where Russia's attacks on Ukrainian ports are preventing Ukraine from exporting grain, people in Africa suffer from hunger.

When terrorism causes regional instability in the Sahel, people seek refuge. And often try to come to Europe.

That is why supporting regional stabilisation initiatives is in our very own interest!

Who would agree more than the members of the Advisory Board on Civilian Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding present here today?

Because regional stabilization ensures that the crises and wars in our neighbourhood do not escalate further and do not spill over to us.

That the root causes of a crisis, of displacement and migration, can be addressed on the ground.

And that terrorism is not given the opportunity to infiltrate societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One thing is particularly important to me:

Looking at the regions in Germany's and Europe's immediate

neighbourhood

, the threat of war becomes tangible.

For the first time since the Cold War, we had to – and we have – massively invested in our military to be able to defend ourselves against the rising threats, the most imminent being Russia.

Rightly so.

And of course, we will continue to support Ukraine – not only militarily and financially – but also with regard to civil defence.

Because civil defence is urgently needed to restore the water supply and the electricity grid after daily attacks by Russia.

However, we must not forget that our security is not only determined in Europe.

Alongside our endeavours for self-defence, we also need to invest in civilian crisis engagement, mediation and peacebuilding worldwide.

That is in our very own interest.

We need to invest in dialogue rather than division.

In fighting for mutual understanding and peaceful conflict settlement.

In people who are holding societies together.

That is why in the Sahel region and West Africa, we are supporting stabilisation programmes to prevent and push back violent extremism and to make local communities resilient against recruitment by terror groups such as Boko Haram.

And in Lebanon, we are supporting the return of state institutions as well as dialogue between Christian, Druze, Shia und Sunni communities.

Just to give two more examples.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Any new regional order, any new security architecture, begins with dialogue.

I truly believe that it is possible to create an order that ensures sustainable peace.

History proves this to us.

Just six years after the devastation caused by Germany in the Second World War, Germany and France were ready to start a peaceful future on the basis of dialogue and cooperation.

Their agreement on a common market for coal and steel was the first step in what would become the greatest peace project in human history:

The European Union.

At the time, only a few visionaries believed such a path was possible. They tirelessly pursued their vision and were proven right.

Today, it is our shared responsibility to shape the future in the interest of peace and security.

This forum provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss and to exchange views.

It is a place to mastermind new ideas and to join forces in carving out pathways from war to peace.

Germany continues to be a committed partner in this endeavour.

Thank you.

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