



**Subject to change.
Translation of advance
text.**

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**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the German International University (GIU)
in Cairo/Egypt
on 12 September 2024**

Twenty-five years ago, a Japanese man programmed 176 small images that could be used in addition to the – at the time limited – number of characters in a text message. There are now more than 3000 of these pictorial symbols, and it is impossible to imagine our digital communication without them. I bet that almost everyone in this room has already sent one today. After all, around six billion of these images are incorporated into messages around the world each day.

The purpose of some innovations may not be immediately apparent to everyone. But emojis are now much more than a question of zeitgeist – they have become a cultural technology that actually helps not just young people to express feelings in the age of digital communication – above and beyond all linguistic and national borders.

There is a much older form of pictographic writing that people are familiar with around the world. You have surely guessed that I am referring to hieroglyphs. These ancient symbols – painted on the walls of Egyptian temples, drawn on fine papyrus – might not be smartphone-compatible. However, for centuries, people from all over the world have gazed in astonishment at these images, which were created here in your country at a time when, elsewhere, no one had yet thought of writing.

When we visited the pyramids of Saqqara yesterday, I once again sensed the very special fascination that these characters inspire. It is our fascination with communication, with social exchange.

People have always sought ways in which to convey their knowledge to their counterparts, to share their knowledge, their experience, their stories and their emotions with one another. After all, exchange is the prerequisite for mutual understanding, for the

emergence of new ideas, for forging ahead together – and also, and I do not even have to say this here at this university, for science, teaching and ground-breaking innovation.

Already on my first visit to Egypt, I was impressed by just how much you can sense what is expressed in the term “umm ad-dunia” – “Mother of the World”. Egypt, the cradle of civilisation, depends both on its rich heritage and its capacity for innovation. Egypt has one of the oldest healthcare systems in the world, one of the oldest universities still in existence, and it was the first country to have its own national currency. In its laboratories, Robert Koch, a German, made important discoveries for the fight against cholera. In short, in countless areas of civilisation, Egypt provided impetus that changed the world, enriching it, making it a smarter, better place.

It goes without saying that I don't just want to talk about the past in this modern lecture hall with all its glass. I would like to talk about the present – and about what the future may hold.

And where better to do this than at this new campus in Cairo.

The Egyptian capital has many faces. Some call Cairo “the city that never sleeps”. I am impressed by the most vibrant combination of tradition and modernity, such as the confluence of Egypt's ancient architecture and modern architecture, which is on display here in the new administrative capital.

Just as Egypt has a rich, fascinating cultural heritage, it also has a big asset for the future: its people. Because of them, great things can come about and impacts make themselves felt all over the world. After all, I sense here in Egypt that it is this creative power, this curiosity and creativity, to envision and create new things here on the banks of the Nile.

“Think big” – that could be the Egyptians' motto. But much more than outstanding prestige projects are required in order to shape the future. Three things are needed to my mind in order for societies to develop and continue to develop: education, a good economy, and living in peace and freedom.

Let me briefly expound on these three points. It is decisive for the future of each and every country to offer access to high-quality education to as many children and young people as possible. Relations between our countries in the area of education have long been close and intensive, and interest in education and science remains high – as does interest in my country's language. Despite the fact that it is so difficult, more than 400,000 Egyptians are learning German vocabulary and grammar – including many of you. Just yesterday, I visited the Deutsche Schule der Borromäerinnen (German School of the Sisters of St Charles Borromeo), which is celebrating its 120th anniversary this year – an inspiring place.

I firmly believe that educated, self-confident, critical people are the foundation of sound economic development, as well as peaceful and forward-looking social development, people who are able to develop their talents and skills freely and who also have the good of society in mind.

Here in Egypt, you are aware of the power that rests in the educational ideal of the Enlightenment, which guides our two countries. And you are aware of the power of communication, of exchange, which is a precondition for achieving good solutions time and again, for improved coexistence and, ideally, for living together in peace and freedom.

Your fellow countryman, Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, put this most beautifully in one of his last interviews. Allow me to quote his words now: "In spite of all what goes on around us I am committed to optimism until the end," he said. He went on to say the following: "Were it not for the fact that victory is always on the side of Good, [our forebears] would not have been able [...] to grow and multiply. They would not have been able to form nations, to excel in creativeness and invention, to conquer outer space, and to declare Human Rights."

In his texts, Mahfouz was guided by a humanistic concept of humanity. He believed in the power of society and democracy. He knew that it is social fabric that develops countries. And this requires education in addition to internal and external freedom.

I am delighted that German educational institutions have an excellent reputation in Egypt. With the agreement in the area of higher education and research that we are signing today, we are building on this and we want to strengthen the freedom of science and academia. And I am delighted that we are here at the German International University to do this today.

The German International University is a key pillar of our scientific cooperation already now. But our cooperation in the educational sector pursues another big goal. The future is being shaped in a very practical way here, with teaching, research and development in both robotics and electrical engineering. We were already able to see this for ourselves during a tour of the campus, which greatly impressed me. Whether metal coils installed in roads for charging electric cars while driving or the development of new factories with the help of artificial intelligence, we Germans and Egyptians share an interest in and an enthusiasm for technological and economic development, sustainability and energy efficiency.

And this brings me to business cooperation. Later on, we will take a look at the new capital's Siemens Mobility railway station, a major project that is in our mutual interest. Germany is Egypt's biggest European trading partner and its fourth-largest worldwide. The country's

development is especially important also with this in mind. Egypt has enormous potential and tremendous dynamism with its many young people. The challenges here in your country are indeed great against the backdrop of increasing inflation and youth unemployment. But I firmly believe that there have never been as many opportunities for motivated and highly trained young people as there are today, also in Germany. You are equipping yourselves here at the GIU with the knowledge required for this, and excellent opportunities are available to you.

Education and a flourishing economy contribute to a country's social peace. However, a country's development needs one other thing, and this is my third point, namely external security and peace in the region. Germany and Egypt are working together also to this end. We are united by our common interests in foreign policy. Egypt is an important partner, a mediator, also in the Middle East. And we are pursuing common goals in this regard: putting an end to the suffering in Gaza at long last, achieving an agreement leading to a ceasefire and the release of the hostages, and doing our utmost to prevent an escalation of the war in the region. I held discussions about this with your President yesterday.

Exchange, the need for communication, is eternal.

This is what hieroglyphs show us, and this is also what emojis show us today – if I may say so with a little “smile”. If we remain in dialogue, if we seek to interpret our counterparts' symbols, if we learn together and develop new things, then we are on the right track towards a more peaceful future.