

**New Year's address by the Federal Chancellor
of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Angela Merkel,
on 31 December 2020**

My fellow citizens,

What a year we have behind us!

In 2020, our world was struck by something completely unexpected. A previously unknown virus that has invaded our bodies and our lives. It hits us in the places where we are most human: in close contact, in hugs, conversations, celebrations. The virus turns normal behaviour into a risk – and turns previously unfamiliar protective measures into something normal.

2020, this year of the pandemic, was a year of learning. In spring we had to react to a virus while having hardly any knowledge or information about it. We had to make decisions at a point when we could only hope that they would turn out to be correct.

The coronavirus pandemic was and is a once-in-a-century political, social and economic challenge. It is a historic crisis that has demanded a great deal of all of us and too much of some of us. I know that mustering this historic effort has required tremendous trust and patience on your part, and continues to do so. For that I am sincerely grateful to you.

At the end of this relentless year, we should also pause to catch our breath – and to mourn. We as a society must not forget how many people lost loved ones, and were not able to be close to them in their final hours. I cannot ease their pain. But I am thinking of them this evening.

I can only imagine how painful it must be for those who are mourning for loved ones lost to coronavirus or are themselves struggling with the lingering effects of this illness to see wilful deniers disputing the virus's existence. Conspiracy theories are not only dangerous and untrue, they are also cynical and cruel to those who are suffering.

2020 was a year of worry and uncertainty. But it was also a year when so many went above and beyond themselves without asking any attention for it. We have seen this in the doctors, nurses and care workers in our hospitals, nursing homes and other facilities. We have seen it in the employees of our health offices, who found themselves suddenly thrust into the centre of the battle against the virus. We have seen it in the dedication of our Bundeswehr, who are providing support in every corner and at every turn.

Countless people have helped make it possible for our lives to go on despite the pandemic: in supermarkets and freight transport, at post offices, on buses and trains, at police stations, in schools and day-care centres, at churches, in editorial offices.

I am also thankful for the discipline that the vast majority of people show in wearing their masks and maintaining social distancing. To me this is an expression of what makes it possible to live in a humane society in the first place: consideration for others, awareness of when to show restraint, and a sense that we are part of a larger community.

This attitude on the part of millions of our fellow citizens has helped us greatly to get through the pandemic so far. And it will remain necessary in the new year.

But I feel hope, and in recent days this hope has been reflected in the faces of the first people to be vaccinated: the oldest among us and those who care for them, and the medical staff of intensive care units – not only here in Germany, but throughout Europe and around the world. Their numbers are growing daily. Step by step, other age groups and professions will join them, until finally the vaccine is available to all who want it. I too will be vaccinated when my turn comes.

Another thing that gives me hope are scientists – around the world, but especially here in Germany. The first reliable coronavirus test was developed here, and so too was the first vaccine to be approved in Europe and many other parts of the world. It came out of the research of a German company, and is now being produced as a German-American collaboration.

Uğur Sahin and Özlem Türeci from Mainz, the founders, told me that people from 60 countries are working for their company. I can think of no better example of how European and international cooperation, the strength of diversity, is what brings progress.

The tasks that the pandemic has placed before us remain formidable. Many business owners, employees, freelancers and artists fear for their livelihoods. In this emergency situation, which is no fault of their own, the Federal Government has not abandoned them. Government support on an unprecedented scale is helping them. Improved rules for short-time work are taking effect. These measures can protect jobs.

So will everything be about coronavirus in the new year? No, and it wasn't this year either. Even before the pandemic, the world we live in was changing rapidly and fundamentally.

This makes it all the more important for Germany to devote all of its energy and creativity to developing bold ideas for the future. For our economy, our mobility and our lives to become climate-friendly. For all people in Germany to benefit from equivalent living conditions and genuine fairness in educational opportunities. For us, as Europeans, to better hold our own in a globalised, digital world.

My fellow citizens,

There is no way around the fact that these are difficult days and weeks for our country. And this will remain so for quite a while. For some time to come, it will be up to all of

us to determine how we get through this pandemic. This is a hard winter, and it is far from over.

We know how we can combat the virus. Besides the vaccine, the most effective tool lies in our own hands: it is for every one of us to follow the rules. All of us together.

Finally, I would like to say something personal. There will be federal general elections in nine months, and I will not be running for re-election. Today I am likely speaking to you on New Year's as Federal Chancellor for the last time. I don't think I am exaggerating when I say that never in the past 15 years have we all experienced such a difficult year – and never have we greeted the new year with so much hope, despite all of our concerns and some scepticism.

And so you and your families have my very best wishes for good health, confidence and blessings in the New Year 2021.