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**TOAST SPEECH BY PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB AT THE STATE
BANQUET IN HONOUR OF PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF
GERMANY FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER, ON 2 NOVEMBER 2017, 1945
HRS, AT THE ISTANA**

Your Excellency, Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier,

Madam Elke Büdenbender,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you this evening.

2 It is a remarkable coincidence that I am hosting Your Excellency and your distinguished delegation to a State Visit today. 95 years ago on this exact date, Mr Albert Einstein stepped foot on Singapore. Mr Einstein and his wife spent a night here on transit, as part of a long voyage aboard a steam ship from Germany to Japan. Almost a century later, Your Excellency is making the first ever State Visit by a German President to Singapore. This is a historic milestone in the bilateral relationship.

3 Your Excellency is no stranger to Singapore. You have been here before, around 10 years ago, in your former capacity as the Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister.

4 Since your last visit, much has changed in our two countries and the world. But I am glad that the close partnership and friendship between Singapore and Germany remain. In fact, over the years, bilateral cooperation between our two countries has strengthened significantly. Today, Germany is one of Singapore's top economic partners; and a trusted friend at international fora, or what is more charmingly captured in the German language as: "Vertrauter"¹.

5 On the surface, Germany and Singapore could not look more different. Germany is much larger than Singapore. Your country has natural resources, while Singapore does not. Our two peoples are linguistically and culturally different. Even our histories never really overlapped. Despite these differences, our two countries have forged a tight bond because of like-mindedness and shared strategic interests. Leaders of our two countries have enjoyed good personal ties since the 1960s. This has laid the foundation of the strong bilateral relationship between Singapore and Germany, and more importantly, good cooperation between ASEAN and the European Union.

¹ This word means "trusted friend" in German.

6 Your Excellency and I had good discussions earlier today. We agreed that in today's world – where the tide appears to be turning against globalisation and integration – it is more critical than ever to continue to be steadfast proponents of free trade, multilateralism, and the rule of international law.

7 As export-oriented economies, trade is the lifeline of our two countries. It is also the cornerstone of our bilateral relations. The first German traders from the Free and Hanseatic State of Hamburg sailed to Singapore as early as the 1840s. After Singapore's independence in 1965, German investors were one of the first to recognise Singapore's economic potential, both as a regional hub and manufacturing base. Today, Germany is Singapore's largest trading partner in Europe. At 20 billion dollars², Singapore's trade with Germany accounts for a fifth of our total trade with the European Union. I am confident that our economic partnership will reach new heights when Singapore's Free Trade Agreement with the European Union comes into force.

8 I am pleased to see that Your Excellency is accompanied on this visit by an impressive business delegation from Germany. There are more than 1,600 German companies in Singapore. They have contributed not just investments, but also to the development of Singapore's professionals and workers, especially in the advanced manufacturing and biotechnology sectors. As a former unionist, I still remember the old Rollei camera factory in Kampong Chai Chee, which

² Amount in SGD.

employed thousands of Singaporean workers. The Rollei 35 camera model, which was made in Singapore, remains one of the smallest existing cameras in the world today.

9 Economic ties alone do not paint the whole picture. Singapore and Germany enjoy good cooperation in a range of other fields: defence, education, culture, and science and technology. Singapore soldiers conduct regular live-firing armour exercises in the eastern part of Germany. The Singapore Navy conducts submarine training in Germany's Baltic Sea coast. On the R&D front, Singapore's economic agencies – led by A*STAR – will be collaborating with their German counterparts in a new public-private partnership in areas of mutual interest. Next year, Singapore also looks forward to hosting Industrial Transformation Asia Pacific – A Hannover Messe event, one of the world's leading trade fairs for industrial technology.

10 I am happy to note that our students have benefited from Germany's world class education and vocational training system. More than a hundred Singapore students are enrolled in top German universities, and many of Singapore's Polytechnic and ITE students have gained valuable experience through vocational training programmes in Germany. There is much that Singapore can continue to learn from Germany on vocational training and lifelong skills development. Or even in language and culture. Indeed, many Singaporeans are learning the German language at the Goethe Institute here, owing to some extent, I suspect, to their love for football.

11 Friendship cannot be taken for granted, so we must work hard to ensure that the friendship between Singapore and Germany endures. On this note, I would like to once again extend my warmest welcome to Your Excellency.

Your Excellency Dr Steinmeier,

Madam Büdenbender,

Distinguished Guests

May I now invite you to join me in a toast to:

- The good health and success of President Steinmeier,
- Madam Büdenbender;
- The progress and prosperity of the people of Germany; and
- The close friendship between our two countries.

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