Open Letter to the Federal President of Germany, Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Dear Federal President Dr Steinmeier,

Nowruz is the most important Iranian New Year festival, with roots going back at least to the Achaemenid era. This festival is deeply rooted in Iranian culture and society.

A special feature of this festival is that different peoples within Iranian society, as well as in many other countries – such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and the Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iraq – identify with it. It is even celebrated among Jews of Iranian origin in Israel.

Nowruz is the only festival in Iran that is celebrated equally by different ethnic groups and that unfolds a special unifying power. Religious, ethnic and cultural affiliations play no significant role. Over thousands of years, this shared value has helped to maintain connectedness, collective identity and unity in Iranian society as well as in the Iranian diaspora.

This special and significant festival of Iranian-Persian culture has endured and been preserved for thousands of years despite historical upheavals, changes and threats. Moreover, this collective cultural awareness has created a foundation on which the Iranian diaspora – in Germany, among other places – can gain a foothold in its new home, integrate and meet other customs and traditions with openness, while preserving its cultural roots.

In Iranian culture, the New Year festival (Nowruz) coincides astronomically with the beginning of spring, and the international significance of Nowruz is also reflected in its growing official recognition by democratic states. Since September 2009, Nowruz has even been inscribed on UNESCO's "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". This shows that the recognition of

Nowruz is not only a cultural but also a political signal of solidarity and appreciation towards the Iranian diaspora – a signal that would be of particular importance at this difficult time.

This festival symbolises hope, courage, strength, confidence and a future. At this special time, when many people in Iran long for freedom, democracy and peace, we, as people directly affected, celebrated our New Year this year in the shadow of deep grief, pain and dismay.

The recognition and appreciation of this Iranian New Year festival is both a symbol of connectedness and an expression of solidarity, support and moral encouragement towards the Iranian diaspora and towards the people in Iran, who for 47 years have suffered systematic repression, arbitrary arrests, torture and executions – suffering that has reached a new peak in recent months. Every form of recognition, attention and care encourages our family members, relatives and friends in Iran, who likewise long for freedom, equality, freedom of expression and democracy.

We, the undersigned members of the Patriotic Doctors of Iran (PDI), therefore sincerely ask you, Mr Federal President, to officially recognise the Nowruz festival as well and, through a public statement or greeting, to send a signal of solidarity with the Iranian diaspora, which has also found its home in Germany – and which unites its cultural identity, its hope and its resilience in this festival. We would have wished to receive more attention and care from you as our Federal President at this difficult and extraordinary time.

Yours sincerely,

Patriotic Doctors of Iran