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.