

# Wilhelm II, Speech at the Outbreak of War (August 6, 1914)

## Abstract

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In this appeal to the German public dated August 6, 1914, Wilhelm II once more repeats the early assertion (which developed into official propaganda) that Germany, surrounded by enemies on all sides, had been forced to go to war to defend its national security and interests. Wilhelm further cites Germany's obligation to remain loyal to its alliance with Austria-Hungary, which he declares a question of "power and honor." The text was printed on August 6 in the *Reichsanzeiger*, the government's official gazette, and reprinted the next day in numerous German daily newspapers. Two days earlier, Great Britain had declared war on Germany. Wilhelm, whose mother was the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, making him and King George V cousins, was particularly angered by this as he had expected Britain to stay neutral. This audio recording of his message was not made until January 1918 though, when the situation for Germany in the war was already hopeless. It was recorded by linguist Wilhelm Doegen, who built a collection of voice recordings of leading politicians and other well-known personalities for the Prussian State Library.

## Source

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To the German people! Since the founding of the Reich, it has been my fervent desire and that of my ancestors for 43 years to preserve peace in the world and to promote our powerful development in peace. But our enemies envy the success of our work. We have endured all open and secret hostility from East and West, from across the sea, in the awareness of our responsibility and strength. But now they want to humiliate us. They demand that we stand by with folded arms and watch our enemies prepare for a treacherous attack. They will not tolerate our standing in resolute loyalty to our ally, who is fighting for its status as a great power and whose humiliation would also mean the loss of our own authority and honor. The sword must now decide. In the midst of peace, the enemy attacks us. Therefore, to arms! Any wavering, any hesitation would be treason against the fatherland. The very existence of our empire, which our fathers re-established, is at stake. The very existence of German power and the German spirit is at stake. We will defend ourselves to the last breath of man and horse. And we will prevail in this struggle, even against a world of enemies. Germany has never been defeated when it was united. Forward with God, who will be with us as he was with our fathers!

Source: Wilhelm II, Aufruf des Kaisers an das deutsche Volk, August 6, 1914. Recording date: January 10, 1918. Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv

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<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/wilhelmine-germany-and-the-first-world-war-1890-1918/ghdi:audio-5141>> [September 26, 2025].