

VERANSTALTUNGSBEITRAG

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

AUSLANDSBÜRO JORDANIEN

22nd April 2014

FELICITAS WEILEDER

IMKE HAASE

DR. OTMAR OEHRING

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"Assessing Recent Developments in the Middle East

- Shedding Light on Intercultural Relations -"

Event: Workshop

Date, Place: 30th March 2014; Le Meridien Hotel Amman, Jordan

Organization: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Jordan Office (KAS),
European Abrahamic Forum (EAF)
Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIFS)

Program:

Opening Remarks

Session I: The Arab Uprisings and Interreligious Relations in Jordan

Session II: Egypt: Christian-Muslim Relations after the "Second Revolution" – from Coup D'Etat to the New Constitution

Session III: Lebanon in the Shadow of the Syrian Civil War

Session IV: Future Challenges and the Role of the West in Promoting Intercultural Dialogue

List of Participants:

H.E. Mr. Hasan Abu Nimah (on behalf of H.E. Michel Hamarneh)

Senator

Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS)

Jordan

Dr. Otmar Oehring

Resident Representative

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Jordan Office

Jordan

Prof. Dr. Stefan Schreiner

Senior-Professor of Comparative Study of Religious and Jewish Studies/University of Tübingen, Germany

Member of the Board of the Foundation Zürcher Lehrhaus: Judentum, Christentum & Islam, Switzerland

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Coordinator of the European Abrahamic Forum (EAF)
<p>Mr. Marwan Al Husaini Media, Social Media, Online Technology and Conferences Specialist Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) Jordan</p>
<p>Mr. Ali Aslan Host of the international talk show "Quadrige" on Deutsche Welle TV Co-funder of the "German Islam Conference" Germany</p>
<p>Father Rif'at Bader Priest of the Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarchate Founder and General Director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media, Amman Jordan</p>
<p>Dr. Asiem El Difraoui Senior Fellow at the Institute for Media and Communication Policy Germany</p>
<p>Prof. Dr. Wajih Kanso Lecturer for the master's program on Christian-Islamic Relations at the Saint Joseph University, Beirut Lebanon</p>
<p>Dr. Naseef Naeem Consultant to the German Association for International Cooperation (GIZ) Germany</p>
<p>Mrs. Djénane Kareh Tager Franco-Lebanese journalist and writer France</p>
<p>Prof. Dr. Muhammad A. Sharkawi Professor of Islamic, Philosophy and Comparative Religion Cairo University Egypt</p>

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Introduction

The political and socio-economic situation in the Middle East are currently facing new challenges: the war in Syria is increasing interreligious tensions in Lebanon; refugees fleeing from Syria are affecting the socio-economic situation in neighboring countries; and the Coup D'Etat in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood was further deepening tensions in the region. These factors have a significant impact on the situation of minorities and on intercultural relations in the Arab World. In this context, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Jordan Office (KAS), the European Abrahamic Forum (EAF) and the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS) organized a workshop on 30th of March 2014 in Amman, Jordan on the current intercultural and interreligious relations in the region. Around fifteen participants from Europe and the Levant discussed the changing relations in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Germany.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Otmar Oehring, Resident Representative of KAS Jordan Office, welcomed all participants and thanked EAF and RIIFS for their efforts and commitment. He stressed that the Western world today tends to focus more on intercultural than on interreligious dialogue, as religion does not play such an important role in the Western every day life anymore. In contrast, in the Middle East religion is still a significant factor in the political and social sphere which stresses the importance of the workshop. He emphasized in this framework that the workshop should not discuss theological differences between the denominations, but the daily life which is influenced by many misunderstandings between different sects.

Prof. Dr. Schreiner, Coordinator of the EAF, welcomed all participants and thanked KAS Jordan Office and RIIFS for facilitating the workshop. Prof. Schreiner emphasized that the Middle East and especially Syria have not been the first priority in European politics, even though proxy fights and the continuous influx of refugees not only in countries neighboring Syria but also into Europe. Therefore, a better understanding

of the region, its populations and its relation to Europe is necessary to promote intercultural dialogue which is a premise for peace in the region but also between Europe and the Arab World.

On behalf of HE Michel Hamarneh, Director of RIIFS and special advisor to HRH Prince Hasan Bin Talal **H.E. Hasan Abu Nimah** welcomed and thanked all participants for their coming. He further thanked EAF and KAS. RIIFS was established in 1994 to support interreligious and intercultural dialogue through worldwide conferences, meetings and an exchange of ideas, expertise and knowledge. In this framework HE Abu Nimah stressed the importance of this workshop and wished all participants a fruitful discussion.



From left: Prof. Dr. Stefan Schreiner, Dr. Otmar Oehring, HE Hasan Abu Nimah

Session 1: The Arab Uprising and Interreligious Relations in Jordan

The Jordanian way of living together is often referred to as the "model of Jordan" and a reason why Jordan is still described as a "heaven" of stability. In this context, the efforts of King Abdullah II for furthering the dialogue were stressed which is one of the reasons why the Arab Spring in Jordan led to a reform process, but not to a revolution.

4 percent of the Jordanian population is Christian, its community dates back to the Apostles and the first congregation and has, thus, always been a part of Jordan and the region. The model for good relationship between Christians and Muslims goes back to the principle of good leadership which led to opportunities for Christians and promoted their presence in all fields, working together

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with the Muslims for the benefit of the country. Despite these positive relations, Christians in Jordan are facing also challenges. In order to address these challenges a new terminology should be defined as the terms tolerance and coexistence have a negative connotation in Arabic. Also, instead of using the terms 'majority' and 'minority' groups should be addressed as 'communities'. Moreover, religious freedom needs to be mentioned explicitly in the constitutions, as all Arab constitutions include freedom of worship, but not freedom of religion. Another challenge for Christians in Jordan is the lack of teaching on the Christian-Arabic heritage. Jordanian public school curricula, for instance, do not mention the church, Christian Arabs or even a second religion next to Islam. Just private schools include these topics in their curricula which deepen the gap between private and public schools. Therefore, the public curricula need to be amended to better teach young people about respect for diversity. Participants further referred to the Amman Messages, issued in 2004, as a positive example for cooperation: the first Message was Christian, stating that terrorism should not be connected to the Arab World, the second Message from 2005 was Muslim. The third Message thus, should be released as a Christian-Muslim message condemning violence, call for the release of the Christian cleric hostages in Syria, and demand religious freedom. Finally, three priorities for a peaceful living together were pointed out: do not live along each other but together as a community; create a result oriented inter-religious dialogue; remind everyone that religion and violence contradict each other.

It was further stressed in this session that despite the hope of many Jordanians the beginning of the Arab Spring, the uprisings also brought setbacks. The Jordan opposition, which is neither strong nor united, is coinciding on two things: it does not call for a regime change and wants to maintain the security as well as stability of Jordan. In addition, it was not the positive impact of the events in Tunis that influenced the Jordanian 'Spring' but the approximately 1.3

million refugees from Syria which have led to significant challenges for Jordan in particular with regard to the humanitarian crisis and the related socio-economic problems, as well as the security crisis, in case of a spillover of extremists fighters from Syria to Jordan. The Arab Spring in Jordan has therefore rather been based on reforms instead of an open uprising as in other countries of the region. It was further emphasized that many governments, including the Jordanian, spread the propaganda that a country can either have reforms or stability but not both, which led many people choose stability over democracy. Nevertheless, if the establishment of a civil society would be supported and strengthened the sensed imbalance between change and stability by people would decrease.

Session 2: Egypt: Christian-Muslim Relations after the "Second Revolution" – from Coup D'Etat to the New Constitution

At the beginning of the session it was highlighted that the revolution in Egypt started with the hope to achieve democracy, encompassing civil rights and citizenship. While the Egyptian military was not able to fulfill these hopes it was stated that also the government of Mohammad Mursi went along with some political mistakes. The Coup D'Etat against the Mursi Administration however, worsened the situation and led to an elimination of the opposition, to torture and killing members of the opposition and to an exclusion of young people from political decisions. The recent death sentences against more than 500 members of the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated the injustice of the judicial system. In this context, it was pointed out that Egyptian Christians are not united in their standing towards the second revolution. Nevertheless, while Christians played a very important role in the first revolution many promises that had been made to them were not kept; under Mursi the situation between Muslim and Christian became even worse. Mainly due to Salafi and Jihadist propaganda,

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Christians became a 'hatred object', with few counteractions through Mursi and the Brotherhood. Also the security services failed to protect Christians which was subsequently, used as propaganda against the Mursi regime. As Copts always searched for protection through a strong ruler they were - due to the lack of security under the regime - instrumental for the downfall of Mursi and the Brotherhood. This development consequently led to vicious hate campaigns and the destruction of churches as well as to attacks and killings of Christians. Today most Copts are supporting Al-Sisi but are rather co-opted and instrumentalist through the military which is, however, not to their advantage, as their status is still not stable. On the other side, however, since the Ottoman Empire the Christian church has been protected and acting independent through the 'Millet-System' which means that only the Church leadership can represent the Christians in Egypt. This system led to an accumulation of power for the patriarchs but not for the majority of Christians. Instead, rights for Christians on the grassroots level need to be applied. Despite all these challenges, there is no possibility of a development or scenario in Egypt that could be similar to Sudan, as Christians, being part of Egypt for a long time, will not seek to build their own state. It was further emphasized in this framework that the situation between Muslims and Christian is also linked to the political structure which negatively influences interreligious relations. Religion is not used as a proxy for social problems, as Copts are both under the richest and the poorest Egyptians, but as a proxy for political problems. Furthermore, as an identity crisis can be observed in the Middle East, religious identity seems to replace national identity in Egypt. This crisis was deepened through the tries of Mursi to create a pan-Islamic identity; by Salafists to create a Wahhabi identity; as well as by Mubarak and Al-Sisi by recreating the pharaonic identity and a ruler with unchecked powers.

Session 3: Lebanon in the Shadow of the Syrian Civil War

In this session, the impact of the Syrian crisis on the escalation of ethnic conflict in Lebanon was examined. The exceptional relationship between Syria and Lebanon was highlighted which makes Lebanon highly influenced by the Syrian crisis and extremely vulnerable to changes in the region. This vulnerability is deepened due to the number of Lebanese parties that are involved in the war, especially Hezbollah. Furthermore, the ethnic conflict is a result of the importance of the sect, the smallest entity in the Lebanese society, which is the main characteristic of the Lebanese state. Citizenship therefore depends only on the belonging to one of the 18 existing sects in Lebanon which creates a conflict of loyalties, between the loyalty to the sect on the one side and to the state on the other side. Also, the fact that the sect significantly shapes the basic identity of the Lebanese population prevents the formation of an effective civil society which subsequently, contributes to the lack of effectiveness of the state. Another crucial issue in Lebanon is the specific type of leadership which can be described as a tribal leadership. Leaders in Lebanon act therefore primary as defenders of their particular sect. Moreover, Lebanon's vulnerability roots also in the fact that it is not an historic developed nation but rather an outcome of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Sykes-Picot-Agreement. Subsequently, the question was addressed whether Syria's war could also be seen as a chance for Lebanon. The speaker stressed that in most of the discussions only the negative effects of the crisis in Syria for Lebanon are mentioned but besides the unquestionable negative impacts of the Syrian war, there might be also chances for the Lebanese state on different levels. With regard to the security situation the clashes and car bombs are no new features and not directly caused by the Syrian conflict. However, the influence of the Lebanese army is significantly growing and it increasingly manages to get clashes more under control, a development which is new for Lebanon since a strong army has always been pro-

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hibited by the Syrian state. This leads to a greater sense of security among the Lebanese population. Concerning the political situation in Lebanon discussions are as heated as before, yet there is also a difference: Elections are going to be held in May 2014, with the struggling Syrian dictatorship and far-reaching secret service, a real debate is expected. It was empha120

sized that on the economic level the Syrian conflict and the large numbers of refugees fleeing to Lebanon are indeed exacerbating the already strained situation which subsequently, leads to increasing tensions between the Lebanese population and the Syrian refugees. Taking these considerations into account, the Syrian conflict can be seen as both: A curse and a chance for Lebanon. Finally, it was focused on possible solutions of the interreligious part of the conflict in Syria. Three crucial factors and an internal/external distinction were introduced: Firstly, the issue of majority in the Syrian conflict: who holds the majority in Syria? While Sunnis think that they are the majority in the country they do not try to efficiently represent themselves as a majority to the external. The same principle applies vice versa to the minorities of Syria; while they are aware of their status they do not define themselves externally as minorities. The third factor is the influence of Islamists who use the lack of external coherence of Sunnis and try to represent themselves as the Sunni majority. Moreover, on the basis of the prior considerations three possible solutions were outlined: First, the majority should define themselves externally as Sunnis and take responsibility. Second, Alawites should receive a guarantee for their right of existence in Syria and third, the possibility of a division of Syria should be generally accepted. A division would tie to the historical fact that Syria as a nation has no integrity, but resulted from an artificial division of the French mandate in 1925. The thereby resulting lack of identity in the Arab World was again mentioned in the discussion as most countries were created in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, these missing national identities are replaced by religious identities.



The participants of the seminar

Session 4: Future Challenges and the Role of the West in Promoting Intercultural Dialogue

During the last session, Germany's efforts to strengthen a dialogue with the Islamic world were analyzed. With the forum "Dialogue with the Islamic World" Germany was the first Western country that launched an intercultural dialogue with a political focus. The introduction of a state promoted dialogue followed a series of misunderstanding and a rather narrow view on what is happening in this region. Four million Euros are invested in intercultural activities every year, mainly in cooperation with German foundations as the Goethe Institute or German political foundations. In a region where over one third of the inhabitants are under 29, it is significantly important to reach this young generation and establish exchange. As Germany itself is becoming more and more diverse – 4 Million people are Muslims, most of them from a Turkish background – it is of high importance to further promote intercultural dialogue. It was stated that forums such as the 'German Islamic Conference' aim to take these new developments into account and reflect a change of thinking of political decision-makers in Germany. In this framework, the role of media in promoting intercultural dialogue was discussed. Using the example of Germany, broadcasts like 'Deutsche Welle' are presenting efforts to strengthen intercultural dialogue in Germany as well as abroad through media. However, at the same time, also in Germany media that is reinforcing mistrust can be found. It was further highlighted that dialogue is taking place on three levels: the political level, the religious level – mainly

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between churches and the Muslim community – as well as on the academic level. Participants remarked the parallel phenomena occurring in Germany and the Arab world; it was pointed out that questions about identity and citizenship in times of changes through migration are a main characteristic in modern times and a global phenomenon.

Conclusion

At the end of the workshop participants pointed to the fruitful and lively discussion and the need to promote the topic of intercultural dialogue through an exchange of knowledge and ideas. The discussions made clear that the question of language and meaning in regard of intercultural relations is not yet fully developed. In order to create a common language and thus a common understanding appropriate terminology has to be promoted. Furthermore, participants agreed that the question of citizenship and belonging is a crucial point in discussion on intercultural and interreligious dialogue.