

The Arab Spring – how do we continue from here on?

Symposium by UPF Frankfurt on occasion of UN International Day of Peace

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16 guests, among them many active members of the Muslim congregation of Wiesbaden and the head of the Islamic community in Griessheim, Frankfurt, joined some 10 UPF members at the premises of UPF Frankfurt. The subject of the symposium, which was organised on occasion of the UN International Day of Peace, was: “The Arab Spring – how do we continue from here on?”.



Following a piece of musical entertainment, **Thea Kuenzig**, head of the Youth-UPF Frankfurt presented an overview of “The Five Principles of Peace”, explaining some of the activities of UPF International with focus on the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI). The short but moving youtube video “Sun Myung Moon unites Abrahamic Religions” led over to the next speaker.



Dr. Marco Frenschkowski, Prof. in Protestant Theology and Comparative Religions at the University of Leipzig, shared his impressions during the three pilgrimages to Israel and Palestine, which he attended over the past years. He was especially impressed by the “Bereaved Parents Association”, which provides an opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians alike to share their experiences of having lost their child in the conflict and working jointly for peace. The UPF, in the words of Prof. Frenschkowski, is the one organisation that brings together people from all walks of life. He wished more of his colleagues at the university could profit from the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue provided by UPF.



After another piece of music, **Hamid Faruqi**, an architect from Afghanistan and UPF Ambassador of Peace, talked on the subject: “Afghanistan on the road towards democracy – the first free election after 11 years of war”. Faruqi began with an overview of the history of his country, which originally was much larger than today and consists of quite many ethnic groups. Unfortunately the foreign powers involved in Afghanistan today, namely the USA and NATO, were not able to defeat the radical Taliban. It remains unclear, if the election planned for March 2014 can go ahead successfully, since people in certain areas of the country are afraid of approaching the polling station out of fear from reprisals. This causes the future of the country to be rather uncertain. On a positive note, he mentioned a change of mindset among the young people towards the involvement of women in public life and a better acceptance of democracy. But as long as violence reigns the streets of major cities, real development is nearly impossible.



Dr. Tareq Ali, physician and coordinator of the Islamic communities of Wiesbaden, gave a short overview on the beginnings of the Arab Spring. It all started, when the Tunisian student and vegetable salesman Mohamed



Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the police station in December 2010. Mainly young people then went to the streets, not only in Tunisia, aided by modern communication technology like internet and mobile phone. In Egypt this uprising made it possible for free and democratic elections for the first time in modern history, when Mohammed Mursi from the Muslim brotherhood was elected president. Abdelfatah As-Sisi, the army chief, who ironically was appointed to

this top position by Mursi, then led an alliance to depose President Mursi, which led to the present turmoils. Supported not just by the army, but by the police, by a compliant media and a partisan justice (the four powers) As-Sisi succeeded in installing a new government. It is unclear how the situation of Egypt will develop from here on. The split between supporters and opponents of these measures runs right through the entire society of Egypt.

In their final words the four speakers sounded cautious hopes for the future. Prof. Frenschkowski stated that despite all adversities the overall development takes inevitably the direction of more democracy and a better realisation of human rights in all parts of the world. Hamid Faruqi saw the greatest hope for Afghanistan in its youth and Dr. Ali conceded that any future government in Egypt must take better care of religious and social minorities in order to make everybody feel that he/she is part of the nation first.

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