

## General Meeting of the Abraham Forum in MENA-Countries

Zoom-Conference on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1021

11am – 1 pm/ 2 pm - 4pm CET

1pm-3 pm/4-6 pm (Abu Dhabi)

### Participants:

Diana **Adel**, Anette **Adelmann**, Michael Adel **Agaiby**, Muhammed **Ali**, Dr. Gohar **Azmy**, Rabbi Ehud **Bandel**, Dr. Mohamed **Bechari**, Dr. Volker **Berresheim**, Karl-Herrmann und Lisbeth **Blickle**, Susanne **Breuer**, **Hasan Dadelen**, Dr. Ahmed **Darweesh**, Dr. Hoda **Darweesh**, Dr. Radwan **El Sayyed**, Abdassamad **El Yazidi**, Rev. Refaat **Fathy**, Dr. Youssef **Hamitou**, Rabbi Nava **Hefetz**, Dr. Tharwat **Kades**, Rev. Ayman Samy **Khaleel**, Dr. Nouredine **Kirrat**, Stephanie **Krauch**, Prof. Dr. Karl-Josef **Kuschel**, Dr. Ekram **Lamie**, Imam Mohamed **Majid**, Dr. Jürgen **Micksch**, Rabbi Elhanan **Miller**, Diana Adel **Ramses**, Prof. Dr. Ralph **Rothenbusch**, Dr. Kameel **Samaan**, Dr. Mongia Nefzi **Souahi**, Nurhan **Soykan**

### Minutes

Dr. Jürgen Micksch from the Abraham Forum in Germany welcomes Ambassador Dr. Volker Berresheim and Dr. Mohamed Bechari on behalf of “The world Muslim Communities”. He thanks Dr. Berresheim from the division “Religion and Foreign Policy” of the Federal Republic of Germany for his encouragement to continue the financial support of the program in MENA – Countries. He also thanks Dr. Bechari for providing the facilities for a zoom platform with translation in English and Arabic language.

Due to economic interests in times of polarization and disrupt the efforts of religious players are amended and people become more and more victims of the clash, as Dr. Berresheim remarks. The interreligious approach on an individual or a diplomatic level therefore is so important to ease tensions. For the future he wishes everyone a lot of success.

Dr. Bechari remarks that in times of pandemics and the climate change a good and lasting relationship between Germany and the MENA countries including the UAE has become more important than ever. The aim of interreligious dialogue is to prevent wars and conflicts and to weaken extreme positions like antisemitism, islamophobia and salafism. He congratulates the Abraham Forum and ensures support in future times.

**2.** In his contribution **The Spirit of Abraham– effects on ourdays societies and politics** Prof. Dr. Karl-Josef Kuschel emphasizes that Abraham is a common father to whom we are all committed. Therefor Abraham is not a label but an obligation to show respect for each other in spite of all obstacles that exist. In this context he cited the symbolical pilgrimage of Pope Francis in March 2021 to the city Ur in Iraq, where the birthplace of Abraham is located in the vicinity.

**3.** After accepting the agenda a short introductory round of the 33 participants is held. Then different representatives inform about interreligious collaborations of their home countries during the Corona Pandemic.

## Egypt

Dr. Gohar Azmy presents the Abrahamic Teams in **Egypt**. In 2021 there will be about 20 events with Abrahamic teams all over Egypt. Until May 2021 about 200 participants (school staff, parents and pupils) were benefitting from the interreligious approach. An important question that kept the teams busy is the role of religious concepts by helping societies to overcome the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic as interreligious meetings can give psychological support. The vaccination in Egypt brought people from different social and religious backgrounds together and showed that collaboration is the first step to handle the pandemic. However the dialogues in Muslim and Christian schools in Egypt showed that teachers eager for communicative events and want to get more instructions to handle with critical situations.



## Israel

Rabbi Nava Hefetz talked about NGO rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) in Israel. Besides doing spiritual work with talks and readings there is also a lot of practical pedagogical work going on, e.g. harvesting olives with about 600 volunteers from all different backgrounds.

Her new project, "Incubators for Peace", brings together in three sessions within a year 40 young Jewish Israeli, Muslim Palestinian and Christian leaders. One encounter is located close to Gaza and his refugee camps to get a better understanding for the difficult situation of the people. A donation of 8 million euro was collected for the region of Gaza. 300 rabbis of RHR signed a declaration to ensure that Israel's vaccine is distributed fair in Gaza and the West Bank.

## Morocco

Dr. Noureddine Kirrat informs about his activities in Morocco. Various meetings have taken place e.g. international conferences at the Mohammed V University. Recently a new curricula for interreligious studies within the Bachelor and Master programs has been proposed.

## Tunisia

Dr. Mongia Nefzi gives a presentation on interreligious projects in Tunisia. For the most part young people affiliated with the three Abrahamic religions have been targeted. The activities include a visit of a holy place for Jewish pilgrims in Djerba as well as a field trip to a church and a mosque in Tunisia. Unfortunately some of the activities had to be postponed due to the lockdown. A meeting between young Muslims, Christians and Jews to carry out environmental activities like cleaning beaches, mosques, churches and synagogues is still on the agenda.

## United Arab Emirates

**Dr. Yussef Hamitou** explains the role of „**The Forum of Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies**“ and the exchange program which exists in the United Arab Emirates. He refers to the declaration of Abu Dhabi which emphasizes that peace of religions is a base for peaceful dialogue in general. He remarks that the Abraham Forum in MENA-Countries should not only be a platform for emotional speech but for actions.

## Lebanon

**Dr. Radwan El Sayyed** informs about interreligious academic activities in Lebanon. The debate about interreligious communication and movements towards conflict resolution are inevitable in times of the increasing refuge numbers in Lebanon and existing objections concerning the state of Israel among the population.

## Palestine

Dr. Ralf Rothenbusch is the managing director of the Paulus House in East- Jerusalem and informs about its difficult situation. The catholic guest house used to be an interreligious encounter place for individual visitors from abroad and also for travel groups, but due to the pandemic has ceased to have this role. He expresses his hope that members of the Abraham Forum will be able to meet each other in the Paulus House once again in the near future.

## 4. Collaborations with international perspectives

After the lunch break there follow short reports from various institutions.

**Jürgen Micksch** gives a short overview over the history of the **Abrahamic Forum in Germany** with its twenty years jubilee. With its more than 35 members from different religious communities the interreligious club can look back on some hundred events and many fruitful connections in the last years. For the time being there are negotiations to give also the Alevis with there about 500.000 members in Germany via a membership a voice in the Abrahamic Forum. Since 2015 the project “Religions for biological diversity” was developed. In 2016 the idea of Abrahamic Teams was exported to Egypt and has been supported by the Abrahamic Forum and its sponsors ever since. In this year the project “Religionen laden ein/ Religions invite” started a cooperation with the Foundation against Racism. To overcome racism there

will be various digital talks about different interreligious subjects starting in September of this year.

**Karl-Herrmann Blickle**, co-founder and president of the **Foundation Stuttgarter Lehrhaus** presents his institution of interfaith learning and teaching.

For the last ten years various talks and interreligious sessions have taken place in and around Stuttgart. As the Corona Pandemic broke out digital events came into focus. The Jewish - Muslim dialogue was expanded. With the event series "Isaak and Ismael" different aspects of the Abrahamic dialogue could be worked out in various lectures throughout this year. He invited everyone to his next digital lecture about the concept "Tikun Olam" in Jewish and Muslim faith which will be presented by Johanan Flusser from Israel on 4. and 11. 07. The lecture will be held in German. Registrations are welcome via email: [info@stuttgarter-lehrhaus.de](mailto:info@stuttgarter-lehrhaus.de)

In 2020 the **Blickle Institute for Interfaith Dialogue** in Jerusalem was launched with the mission to develop new paradigms for Judaism's relationship towards non-Jews. Under the title „Ohr Torah Stone“ the institution will teach Judaism's approach toward other religions and toward people who practice other faiths.

In Nigeria the Stuttgarter Lehrhaus supports a refugee village for victims of the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram. Not only Christian victims but also victims of Muslim faith get help and shelter. Since this year the project Abrahamic Teams in Egypt is also fully supported by the Stuttgarter Lehrhaus.

**Anette Adelman** paints a vivid picture of her work with the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) and the **International Abrahamic Forum (IAF)** which is an umbrella organisation of 40 organisations worldwide. The IAF was established 15 years ago and is a network with the mission to bring people together. She announced a digital conference under the title "When this is all over – how do we want the world to be different?" from 20- 27th of June.

**Imam Mohamed Majid** apologizes not to be available due to other obligations to give his presentation of the work of the **International Interfaith Peace Corps** in the US (IIPC) within the planned schedule.

**5. Function and Tasks of the Executive Board of Abraham Forum in MENA - Countries** are discussed. Tharwat Kades, Ehud Bandel and Mongia Nefzi Souahi give their speeches for the unpaid position as president, secretary general and treasurer.

**Tharwat Kades** is Chairman of The International Academy of Dialogue in Egypt. For 55 years he is also living in Germany and considers himself to be Abrahamic.

**Ehud Bandel** is a conservative Israeli rabbi and was co chairman of the IAF of the ICCJ. Learning Arabic helped him to develop his ability to communicate in interfaith dialogue. Due to his former work in Melbourne he has also the Australian citizenship.

Since 2004 **Mongia Nefzi Souahi** works within interfaith projects. She visited many international gatherings and is a publisher in the field of interreligious dialogue. She speaks Hebrew and considers herself to be a servant of humanity.

**6.** The members of the Abraham Forum in MENA-Countries are taking part in the **Election of the Executive Board**. There are no rejections or abstentions and the election is approved in the presence of the conference guests. The members of the Abraham Forum congratulate the newly elected board.

Abdassamad El Yazidi is happy to announce that he will continue his work as an interim managing director. The Abraham Forum strives to become independent from the Abrahamic Forum in Germany as soon as possible.

**7.** The next **Appointment for the first digital meeting of the Executive Board** will be on 7<sup>th</sup> July at 1 pm. The next meeting of the Abraham Forum is planned in June 2022. The Executive Board will announce a date shortly.

## 8. Miscellaneous

A press release in German, English and Arabic language concerning the election has already been prepared and will be published directly after the meeting.

<https://abrahamisches-forum.de/tharwat-kades-is-elected-chairman/>

With a big applause by all participants the conference ended in mutual consent.



Stephanie Krauch, Darmstadt 28.06.2021