



Abrahamic Forum in Germany

Frankfurt/Main, 15th of September 2009

Courage to mingle with one another

Statement on the speech made by US President Obama in June 2009 in Cairo

US President Barack Obama delivered a remarkable speech at Cairo University on 4 June 2009. The Abrahamic Forum in Germany welcomes, in particular, the President's promise "to forge joint service projects by Christians, Muslims and Jews in America". This is also one of the most important concerns of the Abrahamic Forum in Germany.

President Obama's speech contains numerous suggestions that are also relevant for Germany. We thus underline the following points:

(1) Courage to share common principles

"So long as our relationship is defined by our differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace ..." (page 1 of President Obama's speech).

The Abrahamic Forum has always endeavored to promote debate on common principles and on differences. For centuries, the emphasis has lain on the differences between Jews, Christians and Muslims. These differences have led to wars and terrible acts of violence. We live together in multicultural societies and it is now time to emphasize what we have in common. That includes working for peace, caring for creation, recognizing cultural diversity, and respecting the family.

Jews, Christians and Muslims have been shaped by their painful history: the persecution of the Jews, the Crusades, wars with the Ottoman Empire, colonialism and the unimaginable Shoah. If we continue to work on what we have in common we can learn how to cope with the burden of this history, and overcome fear and mistrust. Examples of Abrahamic cooperation and partnership indicate the way to go.

(2) Combating violent extremism

"Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism – it is an important part of promoting peace." (page 5)

Violent extremism has caused the cruel deaths of thousands of innocent women, children and men. Jews, Christians and Muslims are joined in the struggle against violent extremism, for which there is absolutely no justification.



(3) Promoting Abrahamic projects

“Faith should bring us together. And that’s why we’re forging service projects in America to bring together Christians, Muslims and Jews.” (page 10)

Fundamentalist Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups are combating joint projects by Jews, Christians and Muslims. That is hindering or preventing joint solutions to tensions and conflicts. Promoting Abrahamic cooperation is an urgent responsibility for society and the state. This can reduce mistrust and hatred. It would be good to share experience on such cooperation between the United States and Germany. It strengthens the best of Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition.

(4) Peace in the Middle East

“Violence is a dead end.” (page 7)

The conflict in the Middle East is a threat to world peace. It is thus in all our interest to contribute to understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. The hatred is inexpressibly great between young Israelis and Palestinians, in particular. Political peace endeavors can only be successful if the population supports them. Every religion calls on people to make peace. That must lead to practical action. Abrahamic cooperation in Israel and Palestine can contribute to overcoming this hatred. One example is the Noah Festival held at the Sea of Galilee in Israel on 20 January 2008, with about 200 Jewish, Christian and Muslim participants. The Abrahamic Forum in Germany supported this remarkable event.

(5) The headscarf is an expression of religious freedom

“It is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit – for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear.” (page 10)

From the American viewpoint, banning woman teachers or civil servants from wearing headscarves is incompatible with religious freedom. We have to talk about that in Germany. Human Rights Watch in Germany issued a statement in February 2009 showing that banning the wearing of headscarves at work violates fundamental and human rights.

(6) Jerusalem as a place of peace

“All of us have a responsibility to work for the day when ... the Holy Land of the three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims, and a place for all the children of Abraham to mingle peacefully together as in the story of Isra, when Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, peace be upon them, joined in prayer.” (page 8)

Jerusalem is to become a place of peace for Jews, Christians and Muslims. We must all work towards that day. This is one of the great desires and expectations of the Abrahamic religions. It can only succeed when the relationship between these three



faiths has improved worldwide. An important step forward was the "World Conference for Interreligious Dialogue" in July 2008 in Madrid.

We have already had many good experiences in Germany, which the Abrahamic Forum has documented and publicized. That includes the numerous events with Abrahamic Teams, Abrahamic Youth Forums, Abrahamic celebrations at Frankfurt airport, the Festival of Sacrifice, Noah Festival, Harvest Thanksgiving, the project "Do you know who I am?", triological school projects - to name but a few. It would be mutually encouraging to hold exchanges between Abrahamic projects in Jewish, Christian and Muslim countries, particularly involving young people. Abrahamic foundations can foster such efforts. Such an international exchange could well be organized from Jerusalem.

(7) Universal values

"There is one truth that lies at the heart of every religion – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This truth transcends nations and peoples." (page 13)

Human action is rooted in an ethic of humanity. Its essence is the Golden Rule, which is known all over the world, both in religions and in philosophy – often as a proverb. It is our common ethical world cultural heritage. An ethic of humanity includes standing up for human rights, for justice and the dignity of all people. These values bind people of Abrahamic faiths with people of other faiths, or of no faith. These universal values run through the holy scriptures of the Torah, the Gospel and the Koran.

The undersigned members of the Abrahamic Forum in Germany thank US President Barack Obama for his encouraging speech and want to play their part so that Jews, Christians and Muslims can live together in peace.

For the Abrahamic Forum in Germany:

(signed)

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The Abrahamic Forum in Germany was founded on 6 February 2001 at the Martin Buber House in Heppenheim, Germany. It promotes the trustful living together of people of different religions, positive common experiences and recognition of differences, and seeks to overcome prejudice, xenophobia and racism. Its activities include Abrahamic teams, festivals and conferences, the Young Abrahamic Forum or the Abrahamic Trio.

In the Abrahamic Forum, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í leaders cooperate with foundations, academics and experts. The Abrahamic Forum is a project of the Karl Konrad und Ria Groeben Foundation within the Intercultural Council in Germany. More information may be found at www.interkultureller-rat.de