

## Syria and its neighbors - Every country for itself or a joint effort for peace?

4th Initiative Symposium on  
March 20/21, 2009 in Münster

*Patron: Lord Mayor of Münster,  
Dr. Berthold Tillmann*



Ambassador Dr. Hussein Omran

According to Syria's Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Hussein Omran, growing acknowledgment for the key role that Syria is playing in the Middle East is a highly positive development that will ultimately help to resolve the Middle-East conflict. In this context, Omran emphasized how "delighted" he was that Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier was the first to establish direct contact with Syria. "Syria," Omran stated in a stimulus address at an event organized by Germany's Initiative for the Middle East (DINO) in Münster, "is very pleased that other countries are recognizing the importance of our role." "Contact," Omran continues, "spells security." He underlined the fact that Syria has all the prerequisites that will enable a course of reconciliation and dialog to effect a change in the present relationships.

At the same time, the ambassador expressed his optimism that the Middle East would "at last be given more attention" under the new US administration. Syria wants an end to the conflict, as well as prosperity and development for the entire region. In his welcoming address, Dr. Gernot Erler, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, underlined Germany's support for Syria in its economic reforms. He also expressed his conviction that Syria stood to gain as hugely from cooperation with Europe as Europe did itself. He emphasized that peace could only be reached in the Middle East if all countries were involved and participated actively in the process, and that Syria itself had a key role to play. For this reason Syria could and should make a constructive contribution to the peace process. In this context, he welcomed the Initiative's Symposium as providing "outstanding support".



Ambassador Omran  
Manfred Erdenberger



Prof. Rita Süßmuth

During the event, the former president of the German Bundestag and member of the DINO Initiative, Prof. Rita Süßmuth, warned listeners not to assume that the conflicts in the Middle East were solely of a religious nature. According to Süßmuth, another vital issue is to take up the fight against poverty in these societies. There was no hope of solving the problems by military means. Nor could they be resolved from outside, as the will for peace must come from within, from the heart of the region's population. Süßmuth called on the people not to resign. Each failure is, at the same time, a signal to carry on.

The Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregorios III reminded listeners in Münster that the border with Israel and half a million refugees who have fled into the country link Syria inextricably with the peace process.



Patriarch Gregorios III



Contract-signing in Ramallah:  
Dr. Mitri Raheb, Gerhard Schlaudraff  
(deputy head of the rep. office)

The German Initiative for the Middle East already has the backing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for two projects that support political culture and continuing education in Bethlehem. The aim of the "Youth vote – Jugend wählt" project is to get 1800 young people ready for democracy and elections. Elections are due to be held in the West Bank in 2010.

Besides this, a university of applied media and art is being set up in Bethlehem under the leadership of the two-time Nobel Peace prizewinner and Lutheran pastor Dr. Mitri Raheb in order to prepare the ground for free, democratic and professional media work. The Initiative has called on a group of North Rhine-Westphalian institutions – universities and broadcasting companies – as well as the state government to cooperate, and has networked the extremely positive responses.



Dr. Mitri Raheb

(from the press release dated March 23, 2009)  
(Photos: C. Königsdorf)

More information on the Symposium is available on our homepage:  
[www.dino-muenster.de](http://www.dino-muenster.de)

#### Members of the German Initiative for the Middle East (DINO):

Jürgen Bremer, Wolfgang Clement, Rudolf Dressler, Manfred Erdenberger, Patriarch Gregorios III, Martin Hülskamp, Klaus Kinkel, Manfred Kock, Muhammad Salim Abdullah, Avi Primor, Mitri Raheb, Rita Süßmuth, Johannes Rau †, Paul Spiegel †