

Workshop 3

Terrorism and Non-violence

Moderator: Clemens Ronnefeldt

Clemens Ronnefeldt has been in charge of peace issues with the German branch of the International Fellowship for Reconciliation since 1992. He discussed the world-wide economic framework in front of which the terror attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon took place on 11 September 2001. The speaker stated that the removal of economic injustice was one of the most effective measures to prevent future terror attacks. One of the reasons that in the Arab world suicide bombers were prepared to blow themselves up was the fact that they saw no future for themselves and their families – but after their deaths the respective terrorist organizations took generous care of the surviving families.

In the second part of his talk the speaker named four groups of themes that needed discussion, but which at the moment were obstacles to a permanent peaceful solution as well as to the reduction of terrorism: the Islamic world's self-perception as having been suppressed by the west for decades, the Israel/Palestine question, the Iraqi embargo, and massive Anglo-American military presence in the Middle East for the sake of protecting western energy interests.

Ronnefeldt listed a voluminous catalogue of measures for ways out of the escalation of violence.

A state that obeys its laws should, before taking measures against those responsible for the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, first have proven their guilt beyond all reasonable doubt.

The example of the prosecution of the terrorists who caused the Lockerbie plane crash proves that such legal procedures using the methods of civilian life, the police and diplomacy, by no means only succeed in theory: given enough diplomatic pressure the Libyan leader was prepared to allow the accused to be tried by an international court.

The so-called Anti-Terror-Coalition could have proceeded in a similar matter concerning those responsible for 11 September 2001. It should have been the particular responsibility of the European states to convince their ally USA of such a way of operating – instead of promising "unconditional solidarity", as did the German Chancellor (said the speaker).

For the medium term Ronnefeldt suggested a regional treaty for peace and security, which should push for the reduction of ABC weapons and for a zone free of them. As far as Iraq is concerned, the embargo should be lifted for everything except military goods, in order to put an end to the "near genocidal conditions" which have already cost more than a million lives.

As far as Kurdistan and Kashmere are concerned, diplomatic solutions should be progressed by means of conferences.

In order to improve understanding and reduce the mutual prejudices between the Western and the Arab world, Ronnefeldt suggested the establishment of a European/Arab university in the Arab world and an Arab/European institution of tertiary education in the Western world.

It is largely up to the foreign policy of the USA whether the Palestine/Israel conflict escalates into a larger war or whether the negotiations on the basis of the so-called "Mitchell Plan" were revived yet again.

Even after the devastating Palestine suicide bombings and the liquidations and bombardments by the Israeli army, a two-state solution with a temporary buffer zone remains conceivable. However, in order to achieve this, European politics would have to try much harder than is the case so far.

As far as the West is concerned, the peace officer saw a decisive factor in favour of a reduction of tension if the massive extension of renewable energies reduced our dependency on the region.

If in the medium term the US withdrew from the Arab peninsula, stopped selling weapons and granted debt relief to the impoverished countries of the Arab League, terrorism would lose its foundations. Justice and peace would have a chance, and the Islamic world would at last be treated as an equal and with respect.

Clemens Ronnefeldt described the freedom from fear as a precondition for non-violent actions.

The most important task of every person is to become him- or herself. "If we know who we are, the question as to what we are supposed to do nearly answers itself".

If we lose our inner peace, then we can no longer contribute anything to "outside" peace. Therefore it is indispensable that we all work on our inner healing.

Clemens mentioned independence from having to achieve results as a further point to consider in a non-violent way of life: "Success is not among the names of God". This does not mean that we should forego influence and powerful actions, but particularly when involved in such work we must never abandon our consciences but follow their guidance, particularly if we find ourselves in a minority.

"Capacity for peace means capacity for conflict" – so the speaker. He described non-violent communication, following Marshall Rosenberg and his book of that title (Non-violent Communication) as an outstanding tool for those involved in non-violent action.