

**Bishop Dr Dr h.c. Markus Dröge,**

***Human Fraternity: Challenges and Opportunities***

**Global Conference for Human Fraternity, Abu Dhabi, 3-4 February 2019**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to convey to you the greetings of my church, the Evangelical Church in Germany, uniting 21.5 millions of Evangelical Christians. It is a great honour for me to address the subject “Human Fraternity: Challenges and Opportunities”. For it is an amazing occasion that people of different religions come together from all over the world in order to reflect on this subject in highly eventful times.

The world is growing together and financial flows as well as information know no borders, however, mankind has not yet arrived at a common ethical conviction in order to live together peacefully in the one house of the earth. It appears that mankind has become nervous. Each country and each people seem to worry fearfully about getting a place in the world of tomorrow. Old scars burst open again and old wounds peoples have caused each other become new accusations. Some groups become impatient, they lose hope first and then philanthropy, talk about their fellow human beings badly and dismissively, and some finally resort to violence and terror. The founder of my Christian religion, Jesus Christ, revealed this spiral of violence in the Sermon of the Mount: If we give free reign to anger and insult, this will end with violence and murder (Matthew 5:21-25a). Therefore, He called His audience: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Can religious values contribute to strengthening the fraternity of all people? As Christians, we are convinced that all who believe in God are called upon to find joint paths of peace and to attempt acts of reconciliation in this eventful and threatening time. For God has created all men as His children and wants them to live together in peace.

I come from a city that was a symbol of hostility for almost 30 years. From 1961 until 1989, a wall was separating the people of Berlin, because two ideologies were facing each other irreconcilably.

Martin Luther King, the great preacher, visited Berlin shortly after the Wall had been built and spoke in West Berlin as well as in East Berlin. He said:

“... No barrier made by man can make us forget that children of God live on both sides of the Wall. Regardless of the barriers of race, faith, ideology or nationality, there is an inescapable determination. There is a common humanity making us sensitive for each other and among each other for sufferings.”

By delivering this speech, he then gave courage to the people in Berlin to maintain their hope that the Wall would fall someday.

We are grateful today that there was a peaceful revolution, that people stood up for freedom and equal dignity of all mankind and that the Wall fell 30 years ago. Nowadays, people from around the world live in Berlin: Jews, Christians and Muslims, atheists and humanists as well as people of every philosophy. And we Christians say: All of them are children of God. There is a common human brotherhood.

In my view, there are three major global challenges today:

1. The abuse of the name of God for political purposes and the legitimization of power and violence. People elevate their religion in order to intimidate and despise other people and to insult them as non-believers in order to provoke distrust and hatred.
2. The gap between rich and poor that violates the dignity of poor people and jeopardizes global peace.
3. The threat to the environment that affects the foundations of global life and increases injustice in the distribution of the people's opportunities.

Each of these challenges is intensified by digitalization accelerating all processes. It happens at such a speed that our ethics lags behind this development in many areas. As people who believe in God, we bear great responsibility and have to take the opportunity to recognize this responsibility together and to act together.

1. Together, we have to counter the abuse of religion: There are hidden treasures in all religions and they are waiting to be discovered. These treasures are deep below the surface at the moment, since religions are abused to legitimize power and violence. We have to remember, that religions are treasure chambers of spirituality: If I know that I am taken seriously, esteemed and loved by my Creator, I will be able to treat my fellow beings mercifully. All of us should raise the treasures in our own religion and clearly and unequivocally turn against the abuse of God – in our own and in each other religion.
2. We have to take action against injustice together: Each religion stresses the dignity of every single person, since every human being is a child of God, regardless of his culture, nationality or religion. We must therefore not allow that people live at the expense of others. We have to advocate for just structures in politics, economy and finance. Economy has to serve mankind.
3. Together, we have to protect the environment, as it is the creation of God: All religions guarantee dignity not only to humans but also to nature. We have to feel jointly obliged to an ethics of nature respectively drawing strength from the own religious traditions.

In Berlin, we as Evangelical Christians commit ourselves to the dialogue of religions very specifically:

- A “House of One“ is being erected: This house provides individual prayer rooms to the three major monotheistic religions and a centre for meeting.

- We established a nursery school for Jewish, Christian and Muslim children. All children are taught their own religion, but they also get to know the other two religions.
- We are training clergy that support congregations to maintain interreligious dialogue.
- Our religious education at school always aims at promoting dialogue.

All these measures have been developed in order to counter the defamation of interreligious dialogue as a naïve idea. We are aware of the fact that dialogue is not an easy matter. However, as Christians we are convinced that God wants this dialogue to be entered into.

My conclusion is that at a time when economy, information and finance flows are infinitely globalized, we need a globalization of mercy that can be based on various religious und philosophical sources.

It is a great opportunity that we as believers belonging to different religions are gathered here in Abu Dhabi: We have to mutually commit ourselves to use the valuable spiritual truths for the common good of the whole of humanity. Each human being shall experience the dignity given to him by God. Thus, the common bond of human fraternity is strengthened.