

Dr. Ralf Stegner meets Palestinian politicians

For years, the FES Jerusalem has supported Al-Mubadara (the Palestinian National Initiative) in its party-development process. This is the reason why, in the past, cooperation between the SPD and Al-Mubadara has been constantly expanded. The cooperation achieved its greatest success in July 2008 when Al-Mubadara was admitted to the Socialist International.

An important step in the party-level cooperation between the SPD and Al-Mubadara was the visit to the Palestinian Territories by a high-ranking SPD delegation, from November 30 to December 6, 2008. The delegation was headed by Dr. Ralf Stegner, State Parliament Member, State Chairman of the Schleswig-Holstein SPD, and a member of the SPD National Executive. He was accompanied by Christian Kröning, the SPD's Secretary General in Schleswig-Holstein, Sven Zylla, head of the Ministerial Bureau of the Schleswig-Holstein State Ministry for Education and Women, and Karsten Reimer, Chairman of the SPD-Caucus in the City Council of Schleswig.

In order to get a comprehensive picture of Al-Mubadara's structure in the various parts of the West Bank, the delegation visited various Al-Mubadara representatives in the northern parts of the West Bank. This gave them an impression of the problems confronting the young party. Thus party activists from the city of Qalqilya, which is almost completely surrounded by the Israeli separation fence, reported on the massive economic impact suffered by Qalqilya since the construction of the separation fence. In Tulkarem, the FES held a workshop on the significance of youth organizations to the party's development. This took place as part of training for up-and-coming Al-Mubadara activists.



Sven Zylla at the FES workshop in Tulkarem (FES photo of December 1, 2008)



Dr. Ralf Stegner holding discussions with Al-Mubadara representatives in Ramallah (FES photo, December 3, 2008)

In Ramallah, FES Jerusalem held a large-scale SPD-Al-Mubadara workshop. Dr. Stegner delivered the keynote address on the subject of "The future of the international party landscape. Challenges and opportunities for the social democratic idea in the 21st century." In his lecture, he underscored the importance of Al-Mubadara's political message to a solution to the conflict in the Middle East. Al-Mubadara, he said, stands for non-violent resistance and equal social rights, which are part of the continuum of social democratic ideals. He went on to make the point that only non-violent resistance offers the possibility of successfully achieving recognition of legitimate Palestinian interests

and establishing an independent Palestinian State side by side with Israel.

Just as in its history Germany's SPD had had to cope with all kinds of adversity, Al-Mubadara similarly had to keep battling regardless. Another similarity was that, like the SPD, Al-Mubadara was also pursuing lofty goals, whose attainment, Dr. Stegner said, might appear unlikely. However, the example of European Social Democracy had shown that even ideals which appeared to be remote could be achieved. Since Al-Mubadara was a party which represented social democratic ideals in Palestinian society, cooperation should continue to be maintained and strengthened in the future as well.

During his visit, Schleswig-Holstein's former minister of the interior and finance held meetings with high-ranking political individuals, including Dr. Salam Fayyad, prime minister of the Palestinian Authority. The talks focused in particular on the presidential elections, which are becoming ever more likely, and the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. President Mahmoud Abbas has announced that he wishes to hold these elections, but in the meanwhile this has become dangerous, insofar as a Hamas boycott of the elections would reinforce the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There is no prospect of national unification between the two parties taking place in the short term, according to Dr. Fayyad. Apart from Hamas' unwillingness to strive for unity, he said, another problematic issue was the fact that it was hard to reform Fatah.



Dr. Stegner and Prime Minister Dr. Salam Fayyad
(FES photo, December 3, 2008)



Dr. Khulood Daibes Abu Dayyeh and Dr. Ralf Stegner in conversation in Bethlehem
(FES photo, December 5, 2008)

In Bethlehem, Dr. Stegner met with the Minister for Tourism and Women's Affairs, Dr. Khulood Daibes Abu Dayyeh. The Minister expressed her concern about the increasing domestic violence in the Palestinian Territories, as the violent conflict extended to include families and society. The growing unemployment among men, who thus see themselves robbed of their identity as family providers, was, she said, leading to helplessness being transformed into aggression. Dr. Daibes drew a somewhat more positive picture with regard to tourism. Bethlehem's hotels, she said, were practically fully occupied, with largely East European visitors in the city. Tourism was of vital importance to the development of the economy, since the country had few natural resources. "Tourism is our oil!", as the minister put it. However, Israel did not pay sufficient attention to the Palestinian side in talks – although 60% of the holy sites were on the Palestinian side, these received only five per cent or so of receipts.