

“Lead 22” refers to 22 highly promising graduates of a leadership training course held in the summer of 2007 by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in conjunction with Birzeit University. Its participants came from the most diverse areas of Palestinian society, ranging from the PR department head of a Palestinian cell phone company through a preschool principal. “We are trying to strengthen women’s leadership role in Palestinian society, in all areas and without reservations,” says Dr. Sabri Saidam, organizer of the Lead 22 training course.

The best six participants then went on to take part in an FES program involving a visit to Berlin. There they met with women jurists, female managers, politicians of both sexes, equal rights representatives, and scientists, both male and female, discussing aspects of equal opportunities, gender mainstreaming, and women’s political participation.

*Women in the economy and politics*

“Think big” was the message that was conveyed to the visitors by Claudia Neusuess, founding member of the women’s cooperative business center WeiberWirtschaft. Women, she said, must believe in themselves so that they can get something moving. Irrespective of whether in the economy, politics or elsewhere, women could



pursue their own paths and be successful. However, the goal is not to create an oasis for women, but to make them strong so that they can tackle the competition outside.

From talking to Herta Däubler-Gmelin, a member of Germany’s parliament, the Bundestag, the participants heard that in Germany also, equal rights for women and men have certainly not been implemented in all areas. Compared with earlier times, she said, a great deal has been done, but there is still room for improvement, particularly when it comes to women occupying leadership positions.

*Berlin as a historical museum*

The women visitors were impressed by how the city of Berlin had grown together again following the fall of the Wall. The experience of a dividing wall which runs right through the middle of a people was common to Germans and Palestinians, said one of the

participants. This could only be overcome by holding peaceful, joint protests and resolutely championing democracy, according to the explanations given by Christine Bergmann, a former mayor of Berlin who was active in the citizens' 1989 movement in the German Democratic Republic. about her experiences during the "Wende" or the beginning of the reunification of both parts of Germany.

Since their return to Palestine, the participants of the Lead 22 delegation have started adapting the impressions and knowledge from their visit to Berlin to Palestinian realities and turning them into concrete initiatives. They are considering a radio program where critical discussions will take place about topics of relevance to women, as well as an academic women's institute in conjunction with the German state of Brandenburg.