

Exemplary organisation: Parents Circle

Eulogy by Luise Scherf

One of the guiding principles of Parents' Circle Forum is "we can speak about reconciliation". This principle is something very special and precious in several aspects and I would like to make this clear to you with the help of a simple trick. The trick is that I am going to stress four times on different words that are included in this principle and while doing so, I would like to consider four contextual aspects of this sentence.

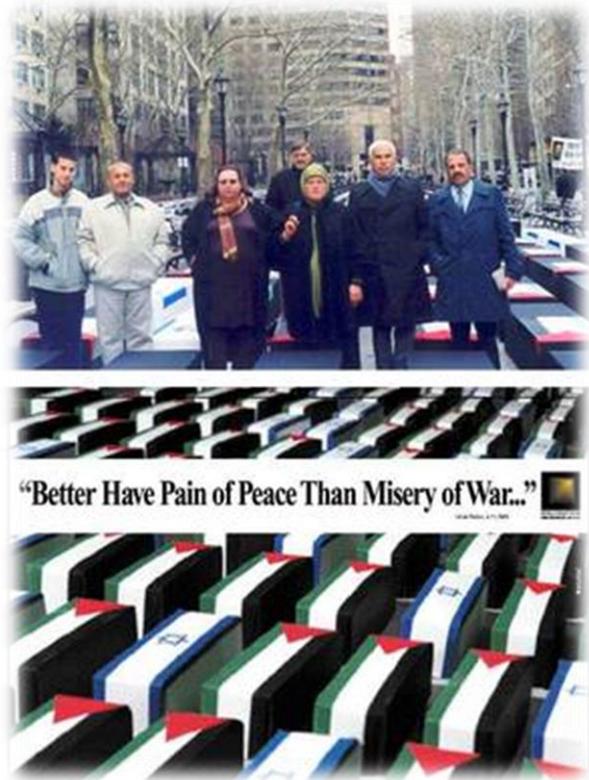
1. WE can speak about reconciliation

Stressing the word "WE" is – unfortunately – justifiable, because it evidently implies that not everybody is capable of doing what the

members of "Parents' Circle" do. There are many organisations and persons on both sides that, in different ways, make an effort towards reconciliation. Out of these, two courageous women – Sumayah Farhat Naser and Gila Svirsky – received the Solidarity Award 2003 of the Bremen Senate for their work.

Unfortunately, Peace-Initiatives, however, constitute only a diminishing minority of their respective populations. These organisations are unpopular, threatened and are accused of treason and of collaboration with the "enemy" on both sides, the Jewish as well as the Arabian sides.

In this context, the word "WE" encloses a group of very courageous people. These people decided to leave the path of violence due to their own sorrowful experience. They continue to do so, bearing up with the lack of understanding of their society and also by putting forward their "WE", which is a minority compared to the number of dissenters. I admire this!



2. We CAN speak about reconciliation –

means: it is not impossible to do so, although it is not only individuals and groups, but especially the media that claims to do so.

In the Israeli media – besides one exception that I am familiar with, the daily newspaper "Haaretz" – it is predominantly the collision course of the Sharon government that is widely spread, justified and supported. On the Palestinian side, where a free press is almost non-existent, it is almost exclusively written and spoken about revenge on the Jews which increasing hatred. Even here in Germany, it is very often the unwritten law of the media "Only bad news is real news" that is widely followed and just in the near past, a special edition of the SPIEGEL magazine on the Middle East Conflict was published under the title "Im Hass vereint" ("United in Hatred").

We hear very little, far too little about people who, in spite of everything, say "We CAN speak with one another, we CAN try to overcome hatred". The people whom we honour today belong to this group and I wish that they receive a massive press coverage – but perhaps this is just "wishful thinking".

I picture how members of Parents' Circle and Families Forum, with every new suicide-bombing, are in danger, withdraw themselves in despair and disappointment, support one another and carry on appealing to the public to get out of the dead-end of violence and I am amazed about the almost unbelievable strength that lies in "We CAN".

3. We can speak about "RECONCILIATION"

The main goal of those working with Parents' Circle and Family Forum is to achieve reconciliation and finally peace between the hostile groups. Thus, through their activities, it becomes clear that the path is part of the goal.

The first step on this path is surely grasping the telephone: for more than a year, a free telephone hotline has been provided, through which Palestinian or Jewish-Israeli people, who have lost family members to violent conflicts, can communicate with one another. Meanwhile, thousands of such telephone conversations have taken place – really thousands! These people talked about their worries and grief – and listened to their respective conversation-partners, who suffer from the same burden. They, however, did not dial the number to increase hatred, fear and revenge, but because they want to leave behind the old paths and to achieve reconciliation. They are aware of the fact that reconciliation will not appear from nowhere, but that it has its own price and that both sides have to make painful compromises.

Nevertheless, and after all the suffering that individuals have gone through, the message is

"Better have pain of peace than misery of war". The path to reconciliation is a difficult one: this is experienced everyday by all people involved. And the honour that is conferred on you today, is a clear symbol of recognition for this important and hard work!

4. We can SPEAK about reconciliation

The members of Parents' Circle and Family Forum are in mourning. Each of them has lost a family member – son or daughter mother or father, brother or sister, wife or husband. In each case, there is dismay and grief due to the irretrievable loss of a loved one. One of the figures of speech in German states "stumm vor Schmerz" ("in silent agony") and I can understand such a reaction.

But here are people who do not freeze with their grief, who do not turn their back on the rest of the world, who do not allow themselves to be governed by feelings of revenge. Here are people who rather think of others in their grief, especially of those who might have to suffer in the same way as they themselves have suffered. They are filled with the desire to prevent others from the same fate as theirs. Through this, they obtain strength to talk about their grief, speak it out and to listen to their companions in distress on the other side.

The people working with Parents' Circle Family Forum may mostly come from the Jewish and Islamic tradition. I think one can find a similar story which I would like to recall at the end, both, in the Thora as well as in the Koran.

In view of the human greatness involved in the work of Parents' Circle Families Forum, I remember a story from my own (Christian) tradition: Jesus says, if anyone strikes you on one cheek, do not strike back, turn to him the other cheek also. I often think about this story – like many others from the bible, which do not talk about "the reality" but about the aims of our actions.

It is definitely the most difficult experience: to neglect one's own grievance or sorrow and to devote oneself peaceably to the others. The members of Parents' Circle have already made this approach their own.

We would like to thank them cordially and congratulate them on their award.