

Message of solidarity from DFG-VK Hesse to the *Iranian Secular Democrats* on the occasion of their congress in Frankfurt, 4th/5th July 2015

I am speaking on behalf of the German Peace Society – United War Resisters‘ – Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft – Vereinigte Kriegsdienstgegner und Kriegsdienstgegnerinnen. We are a section of War Resisters‘ International. War Resisters' International works for a world without war. We are a global pacifist and antimilitarist network with over 80 affiliated groups in 40 countries. There are affiliates on the one hand in Egypt, Israel, Turkey and Georgia and on the other hand in India, unfortunately not yet in the countries in between.

We remain committed to the War Resisters‘ International founding declaration from 1921 that *“War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war”*.

One important cause of war is religion. During the history of mankind millions of human beings have been slaughtered in the name of some god. Several religious ideologies themselves call for war and conquest and for the submission of human beings to repressive religious rules. Religion frequently functions as an accelerant of conflicts that are primarily non-religious. Religion is used to justify war and to mobilise people for war. Since centuries soldiers are told that they are fighting for god and fatherland and that „God is on our side“. Even today in the armies of more or less secular states military chaplains give blessing to war and mass murder and thereby ensure that soldiers continue to function.

However, we must not forget that religion can be interpreted as well in a non-violent and peaceful way and that it is possible for believers to place human rights and the values of enlightenment above violent and repressive religious dogmas. This is shown by the important role of believers within the movements for peace, non-violence and conscientious objection.

Furthermore we must be aware that secular ideologies as well can produce brutal dictatorships and wars. Their mechanisms are often not very different from religious ideologies. It is no coincidence that for instance nationalism has been called “secular religion“ and “political religion“.

Before 1979 the world seemed to be on the path of modernisation and secularisation. This changed with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Since then political Islam has become a global force, creating atrocious political regimes and an excessive worldwide terrorism. Most people in the peace movement are not aware of it: This terrorism is targeting pacifists as well, like the pacifist activists murdered in January 2015 in the massacre at Charlie Hebdo. While Islamism is the most conspicuous religious political ideology on a global scale politicised and fundamentalist religion has been on the rise elsewhere during the past decades, e.g. Hindu nationalism in India, reactionary Christian nationalism in Eastern Europe, Jewish religious nationalism in Israel, creationists in the Americas and elsewhere, the Lord’s Resistance Army in Eastern Africa and influential Christian fundamentalists in the United States preparing for the final apocalyptic battle of Armageddon. Western Europe is most secular major region in the world. But even in Norway a self-appointed crusader knight committed a mass murder, and the separation of state and church is far from complete. While in Germany society is becoming more secular the churches and religious associations cling to their institutional power, to the huge financial subsidies received from the state, to the pro-Christian discrimination in the job market and to the blasphemy law.

We fully support your struggle for secular democracy which is at the same time a struggle for human rights and peace. We hope that it will become possible to hold such a conference in Iran. The rise of the present wave of Islamism started in Iran. Perhaps Iran will be the first country to get rid of this religious tyranny.

Dr. Gernot Lennert, secretary DFG-VK Hesse