

**Interdisciplinary Conference ‘Creating Public Space -
International Christian-Muslim Consultation on the Role of Faith in the Public Sphere’**

Experts from a total number of 15 different countries met up from 9 to 12 January 2014 in Muenster, Germany, under the motto ‘creating public space’ to discuss the topic ‘religion in public life’. The interdisciplinary and English-language conference which was jointly organised by the Centre for Islamic Theology Muenster and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) mainly concentrated on the question to what extent religion still plays a role in the public sphere and in public life, how visible it is as well as the respective theological, sociological and political background.

Prominent speakers from the US, Great Britain, Scandinavia, Asia and Africa attended the conference. The main objective of the inter-religious event was to compare Christian and Muslim points of view and to seek inter-religious dialogue on this level. Amongst the highlights were the keynote speeches by Prof. Dr. Mona Siddiqui from the University of Edinburgh as well as Bishop Dr. Antje Jackelén, who was elected archbishop of Sweden last October. In addition, the conference presented interesting insights into the situation of religious communities all over the world, including testimonies from Nigeria, Tanzania and Brazil. From a Muslim perspective, the contributions of Prof. Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina, Professor at the University of Virginia, and Prof. Dr. Adnane Mokrani of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome were of immense value. In addition to the academic contributions, the conference also included a political discussion with the German politicians Ruprecht Polenz (Christian Democratic Union), Christoph Strässer (Social Democratic Party) and Dr. Mitri Raheb from Palestine.

Dr. Simone Sinn, study secretary for interreligious relations in the Lutheran World Federation, expressed her content at the outcome of the conference: “We have seen an important concern for equal citizenship from Christian and Muslim theologians across different contexts. We explored principles in both religious traditions that provide a solid theological basis for that. The LWF is committed to continue such joint academic reflections together with the ZIT.” Dina El Omari, research fellow and postdoctoral student at the Centre for Islamic Theology was equally pleased about the “extremely successful and fruitful dialogue which raised important issues and at the same time developed answers. It was very apparent that religion in public life remains an important issue and that we need to establish corresponding theological, sociological and political foundations in order for religion to manifest itself in freedom and not at the expense of others.” Prof. Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide, head of the Centre for Islamic Theology, added: “The collaboration between the Centre for Islamic Theology and the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva demonstrates that we don’t engage in dialogue about each other but with each other. This constructive cooperation is evidence of our important contribution to religions’ active participation in pluralistic societies.” The Centre plans to continue its cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation in future and organise similar events together.