

International campaign calls for wave of pluralism to break down barriers, on anniversary of fall of Berlin Wall

For immediate release

On the twenty first anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the respected Institute for Cultural Diplomacy invited the Chairman of Iman, the global counter-extremism foundation, to deliver a keynote speech on pluralism and the Middle East.

Ribal al Assad addressed a distinguished audience of diplomats, scholars and political figures, at the World Without Walls conference in Berlin, on Monday 8 November.

The conference made the case for cultural diplomacy and soft power in building peace and supporting reconciliation.

In his keynote address, Ribal al Assad said:

Whether it is through excellent institutions, such as the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, or through the vital work of organisations like the British Council in the UK, we must double our efforts to embed the enduring ideas of pluralism, tolerance, education and democracy for they are amongst the noblest, and most beneficial concepts ever to have taken hold in our societies.

He continued:

We must speak up when we see nations holding back the potential and the hopes of their people. We must encourage free-market economies and inclusive, modern schools. It is from these foundations that pluralism grows.

Pluralism tackles extremism. It opens minds. It opens economies. It provides information. It encourages tolerance. It frees us from the past and yes, it can free people from the present.

Following the speech Ribal Al-Assad joined a panel discussion on A World without Walls: Barriers to Equality and Coexistence.

The distinguished panel comprised of Ribal Al-Assad, Janez Janaa (former Prime Minister of Slovenia), Dr. Miomir Zuzul (Former Minister of Foreign Affairs for Croatia), George Galloway (former British MP), Dr Jan Oborg (Director & Co-Founder of the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research) and Mark Donfried (Founder and Director of the Institute of Cultural Diplomacy) who moderated the discussion. The discussion focused on the barriers to equality and co-existence for minority ethnic communities including Muslims in European countries.

Ribal al Assad, who is also Chairman of the campaign group The Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria, raised the case of press and personal freedoms in his native country:

At the Iman Foundation, we hear stories on a daily basis of bloggers being arrested, poets being silenced and human rights activists locked away so as to no longer be an inconvenience to the state. It pains me to say it, but such violations are increasingly common in my beloved Syria.

The Syrian government decides who is and who isn't a journalist; censoring or even imprisoning those who criticise the regime. Human rights campaigners are treated as enemies of the State, with principled men such as Muhannad Al Hassani jailed for spreading false information likely to weaken the morale of the nation. In other words, calling for democracy.

The same fate awaits young campaigners and bloggers who fight their way through State censorship of the internet with the simple ambition of sharing ideas."

Commenting on the conference, Ribal al Assad said:

There has never been a more vital time for the advocacy of pluralism and tolerance. It was an honour for me to expand on these ideas in such distinguished company, and I sincerely hope that the coming years will usher in a new wave of pluralism and peace.

ENDS

For media enquires, interview requests or to see a copy of the full speech, contact Christian May of Media Intelligence Partners on 07876708262 or email Christian@mippr.co

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

IMAN is a non-partisan and not for profit organisation, which aims to promote dialogue to strengthen international understanding and co-existence through the exchange of ideas, people, culture and religion.

Aims:

To promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue

To promote intra-religious dialogue

To challenge extremism and promote mainstream voices

www.iman-worldwide.org

About Iman's Chairman:

Ribal Al-Assad is the Founder and Chairman of IMAN. He is extensively involved in promoting dialogue, understanding and relations between the Arab world and the West. Ribal, 35, was born in Syria and has lived in the West since being exiled from his country as a child. He brings fresh ideas and perspectives to promoting dialogue between civilisations and strengthening international understanding. Ribal is a regular speaker on inter-religious and inter-cultural platforms and regularly interacts with religious and cultural leaders, politicians, civil servants, academics, journalists, think tanks, cultural and religious groups all around the world.

Ribal has a track record of promoting dialogue and relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews around the globe. Over the last few years he has successfully been involved in helping to tackle inter-religious and intra-religious conflict and violence in Lebanon. One of his notable achievements was to help facilitate a rapprochement between the Alawite and the Sunni Muslims in North Lebanon.

Ribal is also Founder and Director of the Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria and the Chairman of the Arab News Network (ANN) satellite television channel, which broadcasts throughout Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa and promotes democracy, freedom and peace in the Middle East.