

Opening Remarks: Imam Tarafa Baghajati

Muslim Jewish Leadership Council (MJLC)

Welcome and Reception

A very warm good morning to you all! I am truly delighted to see so many of you here today. It is wonderful to see so many familiar faces and dear friends. I would very much like to welcome each of you personally, but time is short, and I have been given a maximum of five minutes. To all those whom I am meeting for the first time today, I extend a particularly warm welcome. I very much look forward to getting to know you, to exchanging ideas and perspectives, and to building new connections.

The Role and Relevance of the MJLC

Why does the MJLC, the Muslim Jewish Leadership Council, exist in the first place? What makes this initiative so important for Europe, for Austria, and, above all, for our cities - particularly today for our beautiful Vienna and for the other European communities represented here and at the heart of today's gathering? And what does our work mean in concrete terms at the local level - for communities, districts, public authorities, and for all municipal and state institutions?

Shared Responsibility for Ten Years

If there is one place where the well-known maxim *"Think globally, act locally"* truly applies, it is here. I reveal no secret in this distinguished gathering when I say that Muslim-Jewish relations have suffered profoundly over the past century and have endured many setbacks. It was precisely for this reason that we founded the MJLC ten years ago. Not to engage in theoretical interfaith dialogue or simply to foster mutual acquaintance, but to confront the real challenges of our time together: as Jews and Muslims, and as citizens of Europe.

Addressing Global Tensions Locally

None of us denies the profound tensions that exist, particularly in the Middle East, or the deep emotional ties that our communities have to that region. Our aim, however, is to prevent these conflicts from being carried into our cities, our streets, our districts and our schools. Quite simply: differences, yes; importing conflicts, no.

Religious Communities as a Resource for Local Communities

Unfortunately, religious communities are still too often perceived as a burden. We frequently hear statements such as, *"I want nothing to do with religion."* What is overlooked, however, is that none of us is interested in engaging in theological debates. What matters is how we can

develop models through which religious communities can become constructive partners and a valuable resource for our local communities. Social cohesion, rather than the endlessly fraught debate about integration. That is precisely at the heart of today's workshop: to explore together how municipalities and religious communities can work hand in hand to actively shape life and foster a sense of belonging at the local level.

A New Model of Cooperation

In the past, it was often others - whether the state or Christian institutions - who brought Muslims and Jews together around the same table. Today, we are turning that model on its head: we, Muslims and Jews, are the hosts. We are inviting representatives from politics, public administration and civil society to join us and to see for themselves that what is taking shape here is not merely a peaceful coexistence, but a genuine commitment to living and working together, and for one another, despite our differences.

A Pioneering Role in Austria and Europe

I would venture to say that such a constellation, in which Muslims and Jews jointly serve as hosts and organizers for their local communities, is unique in this form in Austria, and perhaps even across Europe.

I would particularly like to emphasize the outstanding cooperation between rabbis and imams in Austria and Vienna. Our friends on the Jewish side have consistently demonstrated a clear commitment to standing against every form of discrimination, and we have always stood together with determination against antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred.

Thank you very much!