

## PRESS RELEASE

### *International Prize of the Peace of Westphalia awarded*

#### **Commitment to peace to the limits of capacity**

**Münster/Westphalia, October 8, 2016** - German President Joachim Gauck has awarded the International Prize of Westphalian Peace to Jordan's King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein in Münster for his peacemaking mediation in various conflicts in the Middle East. The Jordanian head of state shared the prize with young volunteers from Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, who were honored by the chairman of the SPD parliamentary group in the Bundestag, Thomas Oppermann, for their outstanding commitment against racism and intolerance. The Economic Society for Westphalia and Lippe (WWL) awarded the prize, which is endowed with 100,000 euros, for the tenth time this year.

In his laudatory speech, Gauck paid tribute to the fact that Jordan has "reached the limits of its capacity" in previous crises and currently in its aid for Syrian refugees. 656,000 Syrian refugees are currently living in Jordan. The country has committed itself to ensuring that every Syrian refugee child can go to school. This means more than 230,000 additional pupils in just two years.

The current threat posed by radical Islamism is a conflict that is being fought within Islamic states. In this context, Gauck recalled the words of Abdullah II (54) that Islamic states must not only defend their statehood, but also the faith of their majority populations. In Jordan, Muslims and Christians live peacefully side by side.

However, the Jordanian king's peace-building commitment is also recognized and respected in an international context. Addressing the award winner, the Federal President said: "Your word carries weight, not only in Europe and the United States. It is heard by Muslims all over the world." The award winner could hardly be more worthy. Gauck: "We are honoring a statesman who has maintained peace for his country with great skill, even under the most adverse conditions."

In his words of thanks, Abdullah II emphasized Germany's role in coping with the influx of refugees. With regard to international terrorism, the King warned: "Extremists on all sides are using gaps in knowledge to polarize and divide us." In view of the 1.4 million Syrian refugees in his country, he called for a regional stability fund to overcome the socio-economic challenges. Jordan's answer to overcoming the refugee crisis would be lasting, structural improvements in infrastructure, employment and trade. He also called for sustainable investment in his country.

This year's second prize winner is Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste. Thomas Oppermann, who himself volunteered with the organization for projects in the USA almost 40 years ago, paid tribute to the twelve to 15-month commitment of the

participants from his own experience. On his way into politics, nothing had shaped him as much as his 18-month period as a volunteer with Aktion Sühnezeichen. "The prize to Aktion Sühnezeichen reminds us how relevant its mission is today," said Oppermann, describing the mission of the organization, which was founded in 1958. This applies both nationally and internationally, said the SPD politician: "We are stunned to see the bombing war in Syria, children dying in Aleppo, millions of people fleeing. We see democracies in Europe and North America that must once again step up their fight against right-wing populism, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism." However, Aktion Sühnezeichen has actively worked against this. Oppermann: "Our civil society is strong today, people are standing up to hatred and hate speech. We also have Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste to thank for that." The organization is a role model for many other voluntary services.

State Parliament President Carina Gödecke recalled the King's relationship with North Rhine-Westphalia: he had completed his military training here and now, once again in North Rhine-Westphalia, had the opportunity to visit the site of the Peace of Westphalia together with his wife, Queen Rania Al Abdullah.

In his speech, Dr. Reinhard Zinkann, Chairman of the Economic Society for Westphalia and Lippe, drew parallels between the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and current developments in the Middle East. "Instead of Catholics and Protestants, Sunnis and Shiites are fighting each other," the Chairman analyzed. There were also similarities "in the cruelty of the fighting, which resulted in terrible suffering, especially for the civilian population", said Zinkann. The attacks in Paris and Brussels had shown how the violence in the Middle East was now spreading to Central Europe.

In his welcoming address, Münster's Lord Mayor Markus Lewe emphasized that the negotiation methods that led to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 "also created new instruments of peace that put the order of Europe on a new footing". This form of diplomatic peace-building, with all its facets, should be understood as an encouragement "that peace and order can be restored in the affected regions, especially in the Arab world, and to send signals of peace".

The International Prize of Peace of Westphalia has been awarded every two years since 1998. Past winners have included former Czech President Vaclav Havel, former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, conductor Daniel Barenboim, former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and the crews of the International Space Station.

*Note for editors: Printable images and lots of background information can be found at [www.friedenspreis-presse.de](http://www.friedenspreis-presse.de).*