

28. March 2024

**Integration Council**

## **Dialogue of cultures at the breaking of the fast in the Skylounge**

**Bocholt - Mayor Thomas Kerkhoff invited people to break their fast for the second time. A good 80 Bocholt residents from mosque associations, the Catholic and Protestant churches, the Integration Council and various organisations came to the Skylounge of the LWL Textilwerk Bocholt on 27 March**

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**Mayor** Thomas Kerkhoff welcomed the guests in the Skylounge of the LWL textile factory.

"I am delighted that you have accepted our invitation to break the fast together for the second time this year after 2023", said Kerkhoff. The saying goes that if an event takes place three times, then "it is a tradition", said the mayor, inviting the guests to the next event in 2025.

In view of the threats posed by right-wing extremism, but also by the rise of anti-Semitism, it is particularly important to engage in more conversation and dialogue in order to develop mutual understanding. "And that is why I wish you and us many good conversations today", said Kerkhoff.

Memet Cinar, Deputy Chairman of the Integration Council, thanked the Mayor for the invitation. "You have created a wonderful opportunity here for us to come together and strengthen our community." Cinar emphasised that it is important to promote encounters and build trust, especially in times of growing social tensions and fears. "We must not allow extremism and prejudice to divide our community", demanded Cinar.

## Adhere to the golden rule

He went on to say that everyone should focus on what unites them all: being human and the shared values of tolerance, respect and empathy. "We can all testify that peaceful coexistence is possible if we abide by the golden rule: Treat others as you would like them to treat you. This simple but powerful message is the foundation for a harmonious society."

Pastor Rafael van Straelen said that he still remembers the first edition well. "This year the fasting periods, the Easter penitential period and Ramadan, overlap. For us as Christians, Lent ends with Easter, for Muslims with Eid and for me it is a joy that touches my heart when I see how Muslims celebrate then."

The fasting period is a time to look at oneself, give alms and do good. "Breaking the fast today is a beautiful sign of peaceful coexistence in our city of Bocholt", emphasised van Stralen. At the same time, however, he also said that religious sites must not be places where violence is practised. "We must not allow our faith in our God to be robbed by people who want to appropriate it in order to achieve political goals."

Tugay Turgut, chairman of the DITIB Bocholt (Turkish-Islamic Community of Bocholt) thanked the mayor for the invitation. "I am glad that we can enjoy this together today."

## "Together for respectful coexistence"



*The guests chatted at the tables.*

"It is an honour and a privilege for me to stand here and speak for the second time", said Abdullah Zor from the Integrations- und Bildungsstätte e.V. (Blue Mosque) association afterwards. "Diversity is a gift from God and as human beings we are called to respect and honour one another."

Islam teaches respect and tolerance, especially towards other religions. "Mosques and associations of people with an international family history need support because they are not recognised as fully-fledged religious communities. It is time to gain this recognition", demands Zor.

Dr Abdul Waheed from the Ahmadiyya community emphasised mercy and generosity. "Ramadan is a time of devotion, fasting and spiritual reflection. We want to strengthen our relationship with God and be merciful and generous to our fellow human beings."

## Great acceptance

Muaiad Abd Alrahman then spoke on behalf of the German-Syrian Association. "We organised a Ramadan bazaar for a week for the first time this year and wanted to transfer the Ramadan mosque to German society. We were very happy about the great acceptance, that was great." He went on to say that when something bad happens in the world, it affects everyone, regardless of whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims. "Let's

continue to stand together and fight back against the misinformation, especially on social media", demanded Abd Alrahman.



## Specialities from the Hatay region

Gülhan Zorlu brought greetings from the Akdeniz Alevi Association, which organised the meal this year. "A good deed is one that brings a smile of joy to the face of another. I think we will succeed in doing that today", said Zorlu. She emphasised that she had prepared specialities from the Hatay region with many helpers in the association this year.

Mesut Gültepe, Imam of the DITIB, and Taha Cicekci started the breaking of the fast with the call to prayer just in time for sunset at 7.05 pm.

Organiser Bruno Wansing, integration officer for the city of Bocholt, drew a satisfied conclusion. "We sat the different people from Bocholt around the tables in a colourful mix to promote dialogue right from the start. We succeeded in doing that."

The reactions he received the day after ranged from "it was very enriching", "I used the evening to lay the foundations for a new network", "Thomas Kerkhoff showed the participants a very high level of appreciation, as if this "more than a gesture" had been awaited for a long time. There was an atmosphere that was infectious, I still have goose bumps" up to "I hope to see my table neighbours again soon."

On behalf of the city of Bocholt, he thanked the Akdeniz/Alevi cultural association, which provided the food, as well as all participants who made the exchange around the breaking of the fast a success. "We will continue the interreligious dialogue with further events", announced Wansing.

## Photos: Breaking the fast in the Skylounge



