

Freigabe Freitag, 22. September 2017, 18:00 Uhr
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

**Verleihung „Rebellinnen gegen den Krieg – Anita Augspurg - Preis der Internationalen Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit“
Rathaus in Verden**

Laudation Barbara Lochbihler

Ladies and gentlemen,

dear friends,

dear Zaina Erhaim,

Today we are celebrating for the first time the Anita Augspurg Award "Women rebels against war". Today, exactly 160 years ago, the women's rights activist Anita Augspurg was born here in Verden.

With this award we want to honour and encourage women who are committed to combating militarism and war.

On behalf of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom, I want to thank all those who made this award ceremony possible. My special thanks go to:

- Mayor Lutz Brockmann,
- Annika Meinecke, the city representative for equal opportunities
- members of the City Council of Verden,
- all employees of the Town Hall,
- all supporters, especially the donors.

I am particularly pleased that the Syrian journalist and filmmaker, Zaina Erhaim is here with us today to receive this award in person.

"Ahlan wa Sahlan fi Verden" (Welcome to Verden!). Wa-yas' eduni an arahab Zaina huna al-yaum (And I am very happy to welcome Zaina here today)

Before I talk about Zaina Erhaim, please allow me to start by recalling Anita Augspurg's life and specific commitments:

- She was an independent woman who could not be forced into the corset of 19th century's social conventions. This was already evident in her choice of career: She first became an actress and later opened a famous photo studio in Munich. She politicized herself because of the massive restrictions that women were confronted

with in terms of education and career opportunities. This motivated her to work consequently for women's rights.

- She finally decided to study law at the end of the 19th century. At that time, women were not allowed to complete her studies in Germany, so she moved to Zurich. Together with Rosa Luxemburg she became one of the co-founders of the "International Students' Association".
- Anita Augspurg received her doctorate in law and went to Berlin when a reform of the German Civil Code was due. She was committed to reforming marriage and family law and to the introduction of women's right to vote.
- After the breakout of the First World War, she took part in the 1915 International Women's Congress in The Hague, where 1136 women crossed the War's frontlines to demand an end to the war and called for peace negotiations. These women created later the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Anita Augspurg is one of the co-founders.
- Already in 1923, Anita Augspurg and her partner Lida Gustava Heymann had tried to counter the aggressions of the National Socialists. They organized a visit to the Bavarian Minister of Interior and demanded (without success) the expulsion of the Austrian citizen Adolf Hitler due to seduction of the people.
- When the Nazis finally came to power in Germany 10 years later, both women were forced to leave the country and found exile in Switzerland. All their property was confiscated and their important feminist archive got lost.

Of course, it is not possible to sum up the life of this remarkable woman in a few words. Therefore, I would like to highlight only three aspects of her biography, which illustrate that Anita Augspurg was a "woman rebel against war":

- First, her willingness to disregard social conventions;
- Second, her consciousness that women are key actors against repression, violence and war;
- Third, her courage and independence in her political thinking and acting.

And I think there are numerous similarities between Zaina Erhaim and Anita Augspurg.

Now let me come to our laureate Zaina Erhaim.

Why did we decide to award Zaina Erhaim?

The short and simple answer is:

- Zaina Erhaim, a dedicated Syrian journalist, is not only a "woman rebel against war" herself, but she has also helped with her work many other "women rebels" in Syria to strengthen their voices.

Zaina was born in the province of Idlib, in northern Syria, a bit more than 30 years ago. After her high school degree, she moved to Damascus, where she graduated in journalism in 2007.

In an interview, you Zaina, told that conservative people in your hometown met you with suspicion for having chosen this profession. As a teenager, you were repeatedly blamed for "swimming against the current" and you refused to wear a headscarf.

When the so-called "Arabic Spring" began in 2011, you, Zaina, were about to complete your studies of international journalism in London. Later, you worked for the Arab service of the BBC.

In 2013, in the midst of the civil war, you decided to return to Syria in the besieged city of Aleppo. From there, you reported regularly to international media, including The Economist, The Guardian, Newsweek and al-Hayat.

Back to Syria, you were able to pass on your journalistic knowledge to others. As Syria coordinator of the "Institute for War and Peace Reporting", you have trained more than 100 women and men as "citizen reporters", i. e. people who report without formal journalistic training as media activists.

It is more than evident how dangerous your work as a journalist and trainer was in Syria. The organization "Reporters without Borders" has documented that a majority of journalists have lost their life in the Syrian conflict in recent years. More than 650 media workers have died since the beginning of the civil war more than six years ago.

Also you, Zaina, have also lost friends and colleagues in the war. Some were abducted or killed by the Islamic state and others by Assad's henchmen.

With the arrival of the Islamic state in Aleppo towards the end of 2013, the threat to journalists has intensified massively. Kidnapping took place and numerous media workers were forced to flee. Zaina was only able to continue her journalistic training programs under the strictest security measures.

Despite the immediate threat, you, Zaina, continued your work. In March 2015, for example, the Mazaya Center in Kafranbel, in Idlib province, where you too taught women, was attacked and set alight by armed men - and yet the training continued the next day.

Zaina Erhaim has already received important awards for her journalistic work: in 2015 she was awarded with the Peter Mackler Prize. This prize is given in collaboration with "Reporters without Borders" and "Agence France Press" for courageous and ethical journalism. The following year she received the award from "Index on Censorship".

Although Zaina Erhaim is often perceived as a war reporter, she does not see herself as such. She says: "I would not have reported on war if this war was not engulfing my home"

You, Zaina, have regretted repeatedly that in the western media, reporting on the Syrian war is disproportionately focused on massacres and atrocities. Instead, you have always tried to keep an eye on people who have to survive the war.

That's why many of your reports from the war region have a very personal touch. In your blog from Aleppo you, Zaina, often described the everyday life of your friends and neighbors

during the civil war. You told us about the organization of a wedding party or a puppet show for children around the turn of the year 2014/2015. You described how a New Year's Eve party had to be canceled due to an attack. Some of your friends went to the front as fighters or medical assistants while you and others went down to the basement.

Approximately one third of the "citizen reporters" trained by you Zaina are women. You once said that you are particularly proud of the women who came to you with a basic knowledge of writing and reading and were later able to publish in various media. In recent years, you have been able to document Syrian women's own stories with a lot of dedication and courage.

On the situation of women in the Syrian civil war, you wrote: "Women here have to combat many battles at the same time: against death, against the regime with its barrel bombs and missiles, against the new dictators (...) and above all (...) against the patriarchal closed society (...)"

In your film documentary entitled "Syria's Rebellious Women", you, Zaina, paid tribute to the commitment of Syrian women activists in the civil war. You interviewed women who volunteer to provide medical care, organise food or work as journalists. (We will have the opportunity to watch a selection of Zaina's films later on.)

Let me come back to Anita Augspurg – or better what makes both “women rebels against war”:

Their willingness to disregard social conventions;

Their awareness that women are key actors against repression, violence and war;

Their courage and independence in their political action.

I think it is obvious that these three basic attitudes of a "woman rebel against war" have shaped the life of Zaina Erhaim.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the situation in Syria: hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in the Syrian conflict: by barrel bombs; by gas attacks; by torture and by executions. Millions of people - about half of the population - had to leave their homes And dearests and flee to other parts of the country or were forced to emigrate.

It is obvious that a peaceful and democratic Syria, which respects the rights of all people, is currently a long way off. Although the extent of violence has in some cases decreased in recent months, there is no peace perspective on the way. The Assad regime is using the deathly silence to regain power. So also in Aleppo, where you, Zaina, lived and survived in the civil war until you also had to go to exile.

In addition, in your home region - Idlib – we can fear that the worst battles are yet to come.

However, it is precisely in view of this desperate situation that it remains important for us to continue to appeal to the international community of states to strengthen their peace building capacities and their political will to resolve conflicts.

This responsibility includes:

- support for a negotiated solution through UN mediation, in particular with the appropriate participation of Syrian civil society;
- Humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons and Syrian refugees in the region; and the reception of refugees in Europe;
- finally, advocacy for political change and - for those responsible for crimes committed during the civil war - to be held accountable.

I very much regret that Syrian civil society - and women activists in particular - have so far been insufficiently involved in international peace efforts. In my opinion, Syrian civil society - also in exile - should be the key actor for a new and free Syria.

It is more important than ever today to support the actors of Syrian civil society. Our award to you, Zaina, is a modest contribution to this.

Barbara Lochbihler ©

Übersetzung: Philipp Heilberger / Heidi Meinzolt ©