

Blogger Maikel Nabil's Hunger Strike

While Egypt's transitional government allows hatred towards Israel to run rampant in order to distract from its own failures, Maikel Nabil is among the blogger rebels advocating for friendship with Israel.

By Matthias Küntzel

Maikel Nabil Sanad is one of the prominent intellectuals that gave birth to the Arab Spring. The name of the 25-year old blogger is currently circling the globe – not because he is a star player on the stages of the Arab capitals, but because he is sitting in solitary confinement in Egypt and his life is hanging by a thread.

Last year, Maikel became the first Egyptian to refuse to complete his military service. His justification: he refused to fire upon Israeli soldiers. He warned of the new power structures within Egypt's armed forces and was proved right as the military has continued its practice of indiscriminate detainment and humiliation – transgressions that Maikel meticulously documented on his blog.

In March of this year, armed forces seized Maikel. He was brought before a secret military court and sentenced to three years imprisonment based on charges of spreading false information. It was a sentence that shocked the blogosphere in Egypt and outraged the international community.

In order to force his release, Maikel started a hunger strike on 23 August. Since 12 September, he has even refused to accept liquids. His life is hanging in the balance.

Even as a boy, Maikel read widely on the Middle Eastern conflict, taught himself Hebrew and recognized that the Mubarak regime kept certain aspects about Israel secret.

“Why aren’t we striving for peace with Israel?” is the title of one of his articles. According to his thesis, the Arab Spring would change this and set the stage for a friendly relationship with Israel.

A beautiful hope; a beautiful illusion. The Arab Spring has already shown that irrational ideologies are harder to drive away than illegitimate rulers.

This is particularly true for Egypt where an anti-Semitic way of speaking has established itself over the past sixty years regarding the Holocaust, the Jews and Israel. In the face of this, anyone advocating for normalised relations with Israel needs a great deal of courage.

In Germany, there are legal consequences for voicing the anti-Semitic diatribe “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”. In Egypt, however, dissemination of this anti-Jewish classic is supported by the state and beamed into living rooms across Egypt in the form of an excitingly assembled TV series.

While denying or endorsing the Holocaust is forbidden in Germany, both actions are part of the acceptable public discourse in Egypt.

A leading politician from the long-established Wafd Party recently explained that the Shoah is a lie and the Diary of Anne Frank “a fake”. There was no evidence of protests in Egypt. In the West, however, no one raised an objection either.

“With every word I write about Israel, I lose more friends and gain thousands of enemies here in Egypt,” Maikel complained on his homepage. Should this absurd situation continue?

Today the focus is on saving Maikel’s life. He must immediately be released – independently of what he says. Maikel was active for some time in the Democratic Front Party, a sister party to the FDP. When will Germany’s Foreign Minister finally offer him public support?

But in order to approach a solution to the Middle Eastern conflict, Germany’s diplomats must make efforts towards ensuring that Maikel’s message – the call for friendship with Israel – is discussed in the arenas of the Arab capitals.

The “Politische Feuilleton” of Deutschlandradio Kultur broadcast this article on 20 September 2011.

- Maikel’s blog can be found here:
<http://www.maikelnabil.com/2007/12/welcome.html>
- Information about his health and his legal proceedings can be found here:.
<http://www.wri-irg.org/>