

Ladies and gentlemen, Salam Aleikum, that means 'peace be upon you', it's my honor to be invited by the parliament of the German-speaking community and I thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of you.

My name is Ahmed, I'm a Palestinian refugee coming from Gaza strip. I came after surviving three consecutive wars in Gaza. During these wars I witnessed all kinds of destruction and deaths of innocent civilians. Fortunately enough I survived and now I live in Elsenborn camp.

As you know I come from the land where Jesus was born and which was supposed to be a land of peace and love – but war and destruction has totally covered it in our times. However, you know that it is not easy for somebody to leave his family and home behind and take the risks of such a trip – crossing the sea and coming over all these countries seeking for only one purpose – to find what is lost in our land: that is peace.

And now we are at the other side of the world, in Belgium. And we as refugees know how difficult it is for Belgium to receive the enormous number of foreigners at the same time.

I remember Mr. Shimon Perez, the former president of Israel, when he said *es gibt ein Licht am Ende des Tunnels* / there is a light at the end of the tunnel – and to me Belgium represents this light of hope. So, as a refugee I couldn't forget how Belgian people welcomed us with good hospitality and care.

Seven months living in the camp I think this period of time should be enough to get the necessary knowledge of the kind of life system here.

But unfortunately, we found ourselves surrounded by forests and what we know about life in this country is just the daily condition of the weather – whereas all of us would prefer to get integrated into your cultural background and social community. As guests in your country we should respect every cultural aspect of our hosts. Therefore we kindly ask for your active support as a sort of volunteer guides through the Belgian society. And we will appreciate the confidence that you put on us.

Once we learn more about your culture we will be able to understand each other better and this will change and enrich the concept of multicultural society. An example that happened to me during my stay in the camp: In one room we are 8 people, different from language, nationality, religion and culture. At the beginning it wasn't easy to live or to communicate or to understand one another. By the time conditions changed and we tried to find a way to communicate and we succeeded. And now we live in harmony, peace and friendship as if we knew one another for years!

How did we do it? Actually, we need to be more courageous and initiative to get along with one another. Couldn't we do this with our Belgian neighbors also?

In conclusion: As a refugee I would like to be a good guest who respects the laws and customs and one day becomes a member of value to the Belgian society.

Shukran W Aslam Aleikum – 'Thank you again, and peace be upon you'.