

**IARF EUROPEAN AND MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL CONFERENCE MANNHEIM
22-25 OCTOBER 2009**

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: A CALL TO ACTION

Peter Sampson and Jeff Teagle attended the IARF's European and Middle East Regional (EME) Conference in Mannheim, Germany from 22-25 October. This was held in response to the high level of enthusiasm generated by the IARF EME Belfast conference of July 2008. Wolfgang Jantz and Gudrun Hahn volunteered to organise it and were soon joined by EME President, Wytse Dijtske. IARF member Freireligieuse Gemeinde, Mannheim provided their community centre for the meetings and were wonderfully welcoming hosts. The Freireligieuse Gemeinde had just celebrated its 150th anniversary and the conference room contained an exhibition of its history. A short distance away in neighbouring Ludwigshaven, the Freireligieuse Gemeinde also provided the location for a parallel Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN) conference, organised by IARF Council member Morse Flores.

The conference was well attended by a mixture of long-term IARF members and newcomers. The new Transylvanian Unitarian Bishop, Baunt-Benczedi Ferenc, led a significant delegation, including seven for the RFYN conference. IARF President Thomas Matthew (India) and Council members Shlomo Alon (Israel) and Esther Kopmels (Netherlands) also participated.

Three workshops addressed the IARF's role and future potentials:

- 1) Wies Houveling's workshop considered the IARF's relative position to other interfaith bodies.
- 2) Chris Hudson facilitated a very active public relations workshop.
- 3) Wytse Dijtske's workshop considered the organisation and governance of the EME Region.

An important outcome of the workshops was the creation of an EME Steering Committee comprising of Wytse Dijtske (Chair), Lucie Meijer (Treasurer), Shlomo Alon, Glenn Bauer and Jeff Teagle.

Other features of the conference were a promotion of the IARF World Congress 2010 by Thomas Matthew, an explanation of IARF's role within the United Nations by our representative John Taylor, and a guided tour Heidelberg. We completed the programme on Sunday morning by joining the RFYN and the Freireligieuse Gemeinde congregation of Ludwigshaven, where its minister, Renate Bauer, graciously facilitated participation by conference members.

The conference achieved everything it set out to do. By bringing its members together at this time, it has generated a renewed feeling of purpose and community and laid the foundations for participation in Congress and further EME activities in 2011 and beyond.

Jeff Teagle
04/11/09