

Interfaith Initiative of the Young-Muslim-Active-Project - JUMA

In summer 2010 there have been numerous discussions about the integration of Muslims in Germany. Whether Islam is part of this country, and whether there is a contradiction in being German and Muslim at the same time. Most of the public discussions focused on Muslim youth. So called experts on Islam dominated the debates who claimed to know exactly what young Muslims feel, what their attitude towards engagement and integration is, and what aims they follow in Germany. The JUMA-project was created to give Muslim youth a voice, to empower them to speak for themselves, and to find out more about their desires, their motivations and their thoughts. In JUMA young, mainly practicing, Muslims get a platform to discuss openly and frankly about what they expect from decision makers of different spheres of life and where they see the lack of political participation, but also where they see potential for their own contribution in a decision making process. In order to change the image of Islam and reach out to the German public JUMA tries to attract journalists to cover all its activities. The overall objective of this approach is to give Muslim youth the opportunity to engage in all social spheres.

The project started with five different sub groups chosen by the JUMA participants themselves. These subgroups were: Media, Equality, Politics and Islam, Muslim Diversity, and Identity.

In May 2011 the inter-religious sub group, the so called the JUGA group, was established. JUGA was created behind the background of first, the perception of religion as being backward and old fashioned. It has to be noted that this perception does not only refer to Islam but is valid for all monotheistic religions. The second reason for bringing JUGA into life is the misuse of religion for violent action which is often the reason why religion, especially Islam, in the Western world, is portrayed as the root cause of violence. What makes JUGA special and unique is that it was young Muslims of the JUMA-projects who urged on enlarging JUMA, which was purely Muslim in the beginning, and who wished to get other religions involved. They wanted to know what challenges young people with different religious backgrounds than Islam face in Germany; they wanted to see if they maybe face similar challenges as Muslims who are religious practitioners, and above all, they wished to promote a better understanding and peaceful coexistence of people with different religious backgrounds and between people without any religion.

JUGA now represents young leaders from the Jewish, Christian, and Bahai Community. The JUGA members are politically, ethnically, and economically diverse. Their common ground is religious tradition and faith. They are the youth leaders who are in faith-based organisations, including church/mosque/synagogue youth groups and religion-based community organisations. The young religious leaders play an important role in motivating their peers who experience challenges in their day-to-day lives and in their attempts to realise their personal goals. Being young and ethnically diverse, they are credible and authentic. They provide a sense of belonging, pride, respect, and positive social recognition.

From the beginning JUGA's main focus was on organising public campaigns and using media to spread its message. Since its creation it has launched several campaigns. Different media sources and channels such as radio, television, public screens, and social media have been used to transport its message of peace and coexistence in order to reach out to the German public. Its first campaign was an answer to the 9/11 terror attacks.

Everybody has its own experience with the attacks. Some had family in the US and the only thing they thought of that day was to make sure that their family was safe. Some lost their friends and relatives. After 9/11 Muslims in the Western world were confronted with deep mistrust. Western media portrayed Islam as a violent religion which urges its followers to attack non Muslims all over the world. In general, media played and still plays a harmful role by manifesting a negative image of Islam.

As we were remembering the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terror attack in the year 2011, JUGA started a large scale media campaign in Berlin called NEIN!Eleven. 'Nein' is the German word for 'no'. Basically Nein!Eleven means 'no' to 9/11. The campaign consisted of different elements. Together with a professional singer the young members of JUGA composed a song called Sweet coexistence. It was featured by Robert Lee Fardoe. A music clip was produced which told the story of JUGA's vision for the future. The lyrics of the song were as followed:

*We all have the right to be free
We're different, but that's the balance we need*

*And if we don't agree
It doesn't mean we should be fighting*

*Come sit with us
We are the same family
Just with different blood
Maybe we like the same food
And our children play the same games too*

*Sweet, sweet coco
Sweet, sweet, coco, co-existence*

*I heard about you on the news
I thought your name was another number
There's so many things we did not discover*

*Sweet, sweet coco
Sweet, sweet, coco, co-existence*

*'Cause we all, we all, we all have a name
We all, we all have name*

*Sweet, sweet coco
Sweet, sweet coco
Sweet, sweet coco
We all, we all have a name
(Shout names)
Let the last name be PEACE:)*



On September 11 the song was performed in the main 9/11 ceremony organised by the major of Berlin and the American ambassador in the Berlin town hall. The video clip was shown on German TV, on screens in public transportation, on YouTube and many other social media sources. The song itself was on different radio channels.

Another important element of the campaign was a self made 4 meter high symbolic tower called Common Future Tower. The message was: While some people in the name of religion destroy towers, we build towers. What was special about the JUGA-tower was that it was made out of paper boxes which had paintings with dreams and wishes of young people in Germany. This tower was presented in the public, in different malls, in schools, and in the Jewish Museum in Berlin.



The NEIN!Eleven campaign was a huge success. It was covered in different countries. There were many interfaith initiatives initiated after 9/11 by young people but all were mainly acting behind doors. Through the media JUGA was able to reach out to many people and gain lots of attention.

In January 2012 JUGA launched another campaign, the so called Code of Ethics. One major goal of the Code of Ethics campaign was to promote dialogue between people of different religions and ethnic backgrounds. The JUGA members agreed on seven codes which according to them are the basic fundament for peaceful coexistence. The seven codes are respect, recognition, empathy, forgiveness, responsibility, knowledge, and open-mindedness. In order to reach out to the public the JUGA members developed different elements, such as a code of ethics catalogue with a preamble, a life size-panorama portraying 40 young members of JUGA and silhouette in the middle, seven different posters showing seven different JUGA faces asking a provocative question, postcards, a trailer, and an interactive website were all the pictures of the panorama were downloaded and could be voted for.



The campaign attracted great attention. Especially the life size panorama with which the JUGA members travelled from one place to other in Berlin was a great sensation. All German media covered the campaign. JUGA members did interviews on TV, in daily newspapers, and on radio and spoke about the goals of the Code of Ethics campaign.

In March JUGA started its so called JUGA peers campaign. JUGA members are trained by professional experts to go to schools in Berlin and do interfaith focused workshops with students. These workshops aim at fighting antisemitism, islamophobia and sorts of discrimination and racism.