

Interview with Sonja Dinner on philanthropy, education projects and social support

Help for the

INTERVIEW BY YVES KUGELMANN

In these countries, where the government simply does not provide anything, help is necessary, even if such help is normally a task of the government. Of course it is frustrating that the relief we provide means that these governments are not motivated to do something themselves. But now, in addition, there is also the flow of migration from Africa. Currently, it is assumed that between 500 and 800 million Africans want to come to Europe. There are currently 750 million Europeans. So I understand the demand of the donor nations that these countries must cooperate in all areas of migration. The migration of young, healthy people who could build up their countries in Africa, but find it significantly easier to come to Europe and try to integrate in the existing structures, is an enormous problem, as the people left behind are largely old, infirm and disabled. This is an extremely asocial movement, which is often fueled by a lack of understanding and expertise as well as short-sighted solidarity when we speak of countries that are not in a state of war! We cannot judge Africa, Asia and Latin America from a European standpoint; otherwise we'd have to accept those continents in their entirety. Thus, there is only one sustainable and ethical path: we must help the people in their respective countries to attain a decent standard of living with dignity, and to demand an appropriate effort from the people concerned.

Foundations can choose their projects as they wish, and in the past you have written about the transfer of funds that a lot of money goes to Africa that is then possibly lacking for the basic support of poor children in Switzerland, for example.

Obviously, the purpose of a foundation defines the tasks of a foundation, and the founder chooses where he wants to do something.

Today, databases provide increased transparency and create synergies, but the foundation sector, like any other industry, is extremely competitive and working with associations can be tricky.

But we

“Every child must have access to good education and equal opportunities.”

The material about the Palestinians is either missing entirely or is very negative. The same is true of the other side. That's why we actively support, among other things, yeshivas that also study the history of Christians and Muslims and, for example, the six Hand in Hand schools, which are rapidly expanding. In these schools, every class from kindergarten to graduation is half and half. In kindergarten, the Jewish children learn Arabic and the Arab children Hebrew, and together they learn English. And they never have any problems with each other.

Are the schools connected to the state?

They are accredited by the government without the involvement we would like to see. Despite this, the plan is to expand the concept as far as possible, and we are seeking further donors who wish to contribute funding, because this segregation must be eliminated!

A core project is the breast cancer center at the Clalit Emek Hospital in Afula. Why is this project so important? Wouldn't such a center normally be the task of the government?

We are responsible for a substantial part of the construction of the Comprehensive Breast Care Center. Breast cancer affects all women and men, and in Israel the breast cancer rate is very high among both Arabs and Jews. This is because the women concerned have not been well-educated on the issue and it is taboo to do self-examinations, so that one of the most important methods of early detection is eliminated. For a film project, we brought together 42 women with cancer for 2.5 days at the Dead Sea: Jews of all denominations, Muslims, Christians and Ethiopians, and we found once more that when children or illness is involved, all people are the same, and overcome all the usual boundaries. The women's group formed there is still extremely cohesive today. The women provide mutual support to each other and many support groups have been established, founded primarily via the networks in the Arab and Orthodox Jewish world, in which they now discuss cancer with each other. We have thus been able to prevent or at least alleviate many more severe cases of the disease.

You are already working on innumerable projects. But if you could wish for a new one, what would it be?

It wouldn't really be an actual project, but I would wish that all the funds from private and government donors would be better channeled and more effectively utilized. If just one percent were used more efficiently, this would have a huge impact, whether in health care or in education. However, with regard to Israel, my dream would be to have 90 Hand in Hand schools by my 90th birthday. Then this concept would start becoming the standard. That means 84 more schools must be established, but I still have a few years left! We're working on it!

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