

24. March 2026

Integration Council

## **"See you in Syria": Lecture evening at the comprehensive school**

### **Lutz Jäkel talks about hope, suffering - and new beginnings // Almost 100 guests in the assembly hall of the comprehensive school**

Around 100 interested guests accepted the invitation from the Bocholt-Rhede-Isselburg adult education centre, the volunteer agency and the integration office of the city of Bocholt to attend an impressive evening lecture by Middle East expert and journalist Lutz Jäkel. Entitled "The New Syria - Journey to a Country in Upheaval", he took his audience on a personal and harrowing journey through a country in upheaval.

Isabel Testroet, Director of the Bocholt-Rhede-Isselburg Adult Education Centre, and Fatma Boland, full-time educational assistant at the VHS, welcomed the guests. "I want Syria to be a country for everyone", said Jäkel right at the beginning. After more than 50 years of dictatorship, characterised by the Assad regime, the country is today marked by deep wounds - and yet full of hope.

His presentation centred on personal encounters and experiences. Particularly moving: the story of his Syrian friend Amer, with whom he lost contact in 2011. Years later, he received unexpected news: "Come to Syria." For Jäkel, this was the start of a journey back to Damascus - for the first time in 14 years. There he meets Amer again, who had been imprisoned in the meantime. A reunion that symbolises the new Syria for both of them: characterised by pain, but also by new freedom.

Jäkel impressively described the changes in everyday life: full markets, people returning, open criticism of the former regime - things that would have been unthinkable in the past. At the same time, he reported on places of horror, such as the notorious Sednaya torture prison, which he described as "the worst place I have ever seen". Thousands of people were tortured and killed there and hundreds of thousands are still missing today.

### **Clear message: hope**

In addition to the horrors, Jäkel also showed the resilience of the population. Stories such as that of the legendary Café Nofara in Damascus, which never closed despite the war, or encounters with people who have not lost their courage to face life despite poverty and loss, left a lasting impression.

The complex political situation was also discussed: different power structures, insecurities for minorities and the fragile future of the country. The challenges remain enormous, particularly in northern Syria and in areas formerly controlled by the so-called "Islamic State".

But despite all the ambivalence, one message of the evening remained clear: hope. In Aleppo, for example, once badly destroyed, life is slowly beginning to return. Markets are being rebuilt, people are gaining new courage. "The country is alive again", Jäkel quoted one of his dialogue partners.

### **Appeal: Listen to the people in Syria**

He concluded with an urgent appeal to the audience: listen to the people in Syria, pass on their stories and meet them with openness. "If we see them as human beings, racism has no chance", said Jäkel.

The evening ended with a sentence that resonated - as an invitation, as hope and as a promise: "See you in Syria."