

Reasons to keep BPW International Congress 2017 in Cairo

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An International Congress in Cairo should not be a major problem as at the International Congress in Helsinki in 2011 a majority of the delegates has chosen Cairo as the Congress venue in 2017. But obviously there are BPW who are afraid to attend a Congress in Cairo.

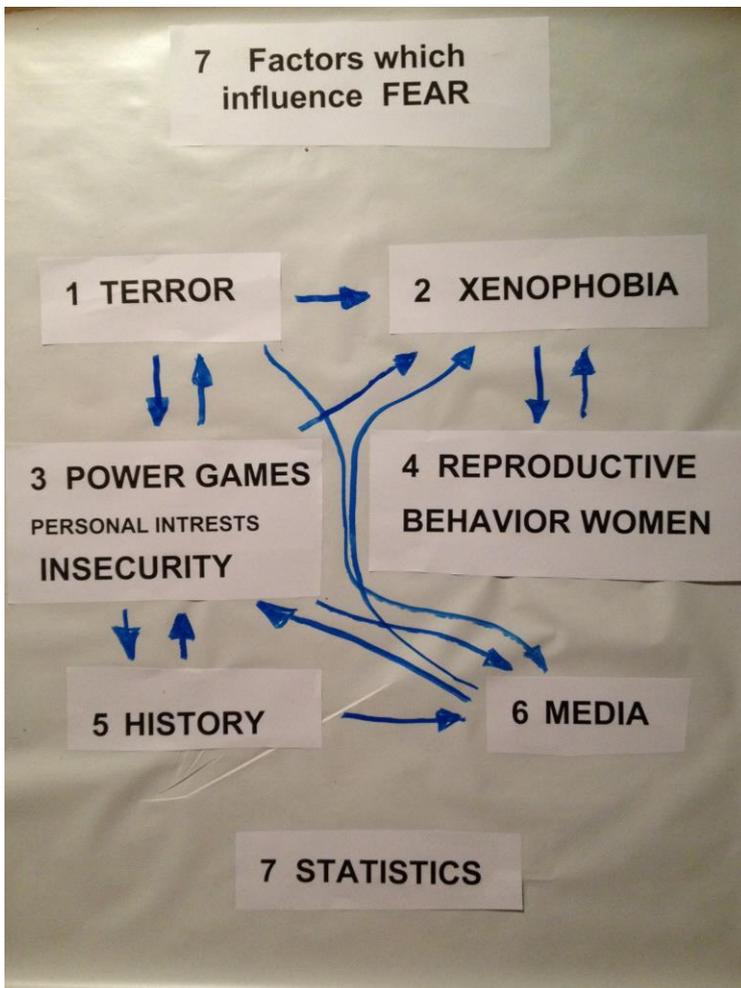
I got very surprised about the fact that there are members who are afraid to go to Cairo already in 2012. In January seven participants from Switzerland registered for the Cross-Cultural Understanding Conference in Cairo and cancelled end of February because they were afraid of the insecurity in Egypt. I tried to explain them that since 10 years I annually attended the Cairo Conference and that there is no special danger. But even they never visited Cairo before they knew that the country was not safe and didn't hesitate to bring all kind of not very smart arguments. They taught me that if fear is involved a person cannot think clearly anymore and will find any argument to defend her fear. And that's exactly what the terrorist wants and how they succeed.

That tendency also get confirmed when I started to read the travel recommendations on the websites of the Departments for foreign affairs of the different countries. I was very impressed how the officials of the different countries perceived danger in Egypt during the last years. Remarkable was that especially Commonwealth countries warned strongly against visiting Egypt or Cairo. Switzerland and many other countries suggested not to go to certain places and not to go to places which are used by political manifestations. Visiting Cairo annually since 16 years I have to say that the propositions of the more moderate countries fit reality. At least together with many participants I'm still alive and never witnessed any violent incident.

If BPW would be a Leisure Club, we would not discuss the issue any longer and change Congress to a calm destination even today there are no such places anymore. But as BPW advocate for **gender equality and a democratic culture** we have to look closer. Even our founder, **Dr. Lena Madesin Phillips, initiated a fund to empower Arab women**. For her it was clear that BPW has to support women from all cultures and that requires courage and leadership.

I wish that a majority of our members have either the courage to meet Arab women in an Arab country or at list to not hold back those who feel okay to go to Cairo.

Fear is a real and very tricky feeling and I looked at the factors which can provoke or reinforce it and found 7 factors which you see in the following picture



7 Factors which influence FEAR

1 TERROR

Terrorist weapon = FEAR

Terrorism is a terrible war which uses cruelties and hence the psychological weapon **FEAR**. In a traditional war soldiers fight against each other but terrorists fight against unprotected civilians. Even to be a victim of a terror attack is a tragic fact, but probability to die by a terrorist attack is very low. The probability to lose life by a car accident – a danger we are used to - is much higher.

2 XENOPHOBIA (*Fear of what is not familiar or different of one's own environment*)

A certain level of xenophobic behavior has biological roots and keep human groups in a secure environment. Very naturally we are looking for familiar traits and reject foreign behaviors. To feel attraction by familiarity and rejection by foreignness made sense in stone-age, antiquity and in medieval times. But in our today's globalized world it's better not to run away or to fight differences, but to build bridges. A person who has xenophobic tendencies cannot drop xenophobia or xenophobic behaviors so easily. I have e.g. a close relative who never would leave Europe. She doesn't know why but she just has a very bad feeling when she imagines to leave Europe. Psychologists offer the stepwise desensitization and propose to risk more and more in very small steps. Most people do that without thinking, very automatically. Not

challenging one's own courage means keeping the status quo and perhaps becoming more and more rigid and fearful. But people who have fear are not accessible to objective arguments. If one tries to discuss the issue they use all kind of arguments in endless "yes but" loops to justify their fear. For example fear of flying or aviaphobia is a well-known fear which we cannot calm down with arguments. Luckily those who are afraid of flying do not block the ones who take the risk to fly.

Therefore the BPW strategy regarding the Congress place should be:

We respect the members who do not feel comfortable to travel to Cairo but do not accept that they retain pioneers or motivated members who's fear is not so prominent.

3 POWER GAMES AND INSECURITY

Power games and insecurity are twins. People who have a true self-security and rest in themselves have not to play power games.

Demagogues and terrorists want to gain power over humans to compensate their own inner insecurity. They use religions, ideologies or believes to justify their doing. They rely on an outside security which means they depend on believers and need persons or force persons to confirm them again and again. They behave like addicts and need higher and higher doses of power and violence. That is one of the sources which nourishes terrorism.

4 REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR WOMEN

"Crabs basked effect" and "dramatizing".

"Crabs basked effect" means that women on one hand suck down individuals who are above average, like the few strong and courageous ones, and on the other hand support the weak ones or those who are afraid. For women, in contrast to men, not considering or ignoring weak or anxious persons is like a sacrilege. Letting persons behind is unacceptable.

EXAMPLE: Introduction of internet and e-mails communication in BPW in the 90ies triggered big protests among some members. "We cannot use digital tools because African women will not be able to follow". But African women asked for digital communication because it was much quicker and more reliable than snail mail and they simply used internet cafes to get their e-mails. Some members couldn't listen or respect the African women, they knew better out of a programming that African women are helpless and therefore have to be supported in the way they imagined.

Compared to women most men react differently towards fearful or helpless persons. For most men courageous persons are respected whereas a fearful man is even not a "true man".

Most women know another very efficient tool to influence or manipulate others, they **dramatize**. Being very touched by a feeling or even be drown in a feeling and e.g. communicate panic doesn't get realized by

many people. They just pick up strong feelings automatically and increase the drama. Leaders of women's organizations have to be aware of the "drama tool" women can use and it needs a clear mind not join the choir.

5 HISTORY AND ECONOMY

Strong interest in **natural resources like the oil** in the Middle East or **strategic areas** like the Suez channel trigger conflicts and interests. After World War I, when the Ottomans collapsed, England and France defined the borders of the Middle East. A fact which triggers conflicts until today.

6 MEDIA

Sensations and exaggerations means circulation increase and that means benefits.

If widespread media produce sensations and exaggeration, what a majority of consumers are eager to get, manipulation flourishes.

Since we live in the digital world, manipulation reaches new dimension. Xenophobic people are happy to find arguments for their fear. Their attitude that foreigners or countries which do not conform are dangerous get confirmed nonstop.

I read carefully articles in Swiss newspapers about Egypt. All titles had a negative touch. Often a minor issue like merchants who run behind clients were used to cover positive news like new oil discoveries. 10 years ago migrant workers from Turkey were Turkish people, today Islam got in the focus and they have to prove that they are no Islamists. Such changes get very much supported by all kind of media.

7 STATISTICS

Statistics can also get manipulated, but if one knows how which facts got measured, the size of the random test and the significance level, statistics deliver reliable hints. E.g. dying by a car accident, also in Egypt, is a much higher risk than getting killed by a terror attack. But today people feel a much higher risk to die by a terror attack than by a car accident or a criminal act. A lady told me that her children do not want her to attend the Congress in Cairo. I suppressed my answer: "If your children are so much afraid to lose you they should immediately forbid you to hop in any car".

How to promote the International Congress 2017 in BPW?

Looking at the different factors which influences fear, BPW leaders have to keep calm and find a wise solution.

BPW should support the pioneers and e.g. offer a live streaming of the Congress Business Sessions on YouTube for all members who are interested in congress issues. Why not starting to use the tools of the digital age? Presidents who are too afraid to travel to Cairo can send delegates with whom they can stay in

Skype contact and who they can advise how to vote. Only delegates who are in the Business Sessions can vote, proxy votes should not be allowed.

Organizing the International Congress in Cairo not only means to truly support the Arab women on their tack to gender equality but the members not coming from Arab states can replace their prejudices by true experiences and insights.