



Ribal Al-Assad is the Founder and Director of the Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria and Founder and Chairman of the Iman Foundation, which promotes interfaith, intra-faith and intercultural dialogue, and challenges extremism. He campaigns internationally for democracy, freedom and human rights, and is a regular speaker at international conferences, universities think tanks and other institutes, as well as writing regularly on these issues.

Ribal has lived in the West since being exiled from his native Syria as a child. He is a leading authority on Syrian politics and how the current conflict is shaped by regional and geopolitical dynamics. He is also a staunch advocate of consistency and integrity in foreign policy, and believes liberal and democratic countries should uphold these values in all circumstances. Since entering public life, he has interacted with politicians, civil servants, academics, journalists, think tanks, pro-democracy, and human rights groups all around the world, from the US to the Far East.

He is particularly involved in promoting interfaith and intrafaith dialogue and relations between Muslims, Jews and Christians around the globe. Ribal has successfully helped tackle intra-religious conflict and violence in Lebanon. One of his notable achievements was to help facilitate a rapprochement between the Alawite and the Sunni Muslims in North Lebanon.

In 2006, Ribal founded the Al-Fursan Charity in Lebanon, which during religious festivals distributed food, presents and school items to people from across religions, sects and ethnic groups until its director was arrested and handed over to the Syrian regime in 2009. He also opened a small school to teach children foreign languages free of charge until its director was shot at and the school burned down by agents of the Syrian regime in 2007. Ribal was also chairman of the Arab News Network, one of the first Arabic TV channels, which promotes freedom and democracy across the Middle East.

Though it still broadcasts elsewhere, the Arab News Network was blocked by the Syrian regime in 2009, leading Ribal to leave his position and found the Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria (ODFS) to show the regime he and others like him would not be stopped. The ODFS speaks out against the Syrian regime and its failure to provide a democratic future for the Syrian people.

The organisation began to gain momentum after the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, and in the years since, Ribal has addressed numerous institutions internationally, including the UK and EU Parliaments, and influential think tanks and universities not only in the UK and Europe but as far afield as India, China and South Korea. These include Seoul National University, the China Foreign Affairs University and the Center for National Security at Fordham Law school in the US. He has also spoken at international conferences like the Bled Conference in Slovenia, the World Policy Conference in Seoul and Montreux Switzerland, the World Affairs Councils of America's annual Conference in Washington DC, the St Gallen Symposium in Switzerland, the Yalta European Strategy (YES) annual Meeting, the Boston Committee on Foreign Affairs, the FAES Foundation in Madrid, the Instituto Atlántico de Gobierno, the Avenir Suisse Foundation in Zürich, the United Service Institution of India, the Observer Research Foundation and the Vivekananda Foundation in Delhi, as well as at the Oxford United Nations Association, the Oxford International Relations Society, Queen Mary University, the Durham Union at Durham University, Taras Shevchenko National

University of Kyiv, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the University of Chernivtsi. He has been interviewed by the Arabic, British, American, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Swiss, Indian, Chinese media.

Personal life

Ribal was born in Damascus in 1975. He is first cousin to current President Bashar Al-Assad, but has been a life-long political opponent of the regime. Like many Syrians, Ribal's parents were in favour of democratic change, less dependence on the Soviet Union and better relations with the West, and as political tensions heightened in the 1970s and 1980s, they were forced to move to Paris in 1984, when Ribal was nine. At 16, he moved on to the US and attended high school in New York and Houston before going to university in Boston. He later returned intermittently to Syria to continue charitable work begun by his father, and faced numerous assassination attempts. These experiences convinced him of the need for peaceful change, and inspired his career in public life.

Ribal holds a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree from the InterAmerican University in New York and an MA in International Relations from the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. He is fluent in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Ribal is a keen sportsman with a special interest in Thai boxing, Shaolin Kung-Fu, swimming and tennis. He now lives in London with his wife and two sons.