



Ribal Al-Assad is the Founder and Director of the Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria (ODFS) and the 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 extensively 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 on how the current conflict is shaped by regional and geopolitical dynamics. He is also a staunch advocate of consistency and integrity in foreign policy, believing that liberal and democratic countries must uphold these values in all circumstances. Since

entering public life, he has interacted with politicians, civil servants, academics, journalists, think tanks and pro-democracy and human-rights organisations across the world, from the United States 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 played an active role in addressing intra-religious conflict and violence in Lebanon, and one of his notable achievements was helping to facilitate a rapprochement between Alawite and Sunni Muslims in North Lebanon.

In 2006, Ribal founded the Al-Fursan Charity in Lebanon, which distributed food, presents and school items during religious festivals to people of all religions, sects and ethnic groups, until its director was arrested and handed over to the Syrian regime in 2009. He also established a small school providing free foreign-language education for children, until its director and the school were shot at and the director's car burned down by agents of the Syrian regime in 2007. Ribal additionally served as Chairman of the Arab News Network, one of the first Arabic TV channels to promote freedom and democracy across the Middle East.

The satellite TV channel was blocked by the Syrian regime in 2009, prompting Ribal to leave his position and found the Organisation for Democracy and Freedom in Syria (ODFS) to demonstrate that neither he nor others who shared his convictions would be silenced. ODFS speaks out against the Syrian regime and its failure to provide a democratic future for the Syrian people.

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, the organisation has gained momentum. In the years since, Ribal has addressed numerous institutions internationally, including the UK Parliament, the European Parliament, and many leading conferences, universities and think tanks. These include, among others, the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia; the World Policy

Conference in Seoul and Montreux; the World Affairs Councils of America annual conference in Washington, DC, and several of its regional councils across the United States; the National Security Conference in Berlin; the St Gallen Symposium in Switzerland; the Yalta European Strategy (YES) annual meeting in Kyiv; the FAES Foundation and the Instituto Atlántico de Gobierno in Madrid; Avenir Suisse in Zürich; EIN in Split; the Business Executives for National Security (BENS); Seoul National University; the China Foreign Affairs University; the Center for National Security at Fordham Law School; the United Service Institution of India; the Observer Research Foundation, the Vivekananda Foundation and the India International Centre in Delhi; as well as the Oxford United Nations Association, the Oxford International Relations Society, Queen Mary University, the Durham Union at Durham University, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the University of Chernivtsi.

He has been interviewed by Arabic, British, American, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Swiss, Indian and Chinese media.

Personal Life

Ribal was born in Damascus in 1975. He is first cousin to former President Bashar Al-Assad, but has been a life-long political opponent of his regime. Like many Syrians, Ribal's parents supported democratic change, reduced dependence on the Soviet Union and better relations with the West. As political tensions escalated in the 1970s and 1980s, the family was forced to move to Paris in 1984, when Ribal was nine.

At 16, he moved to the United States, attending high school in New York and Houston before beginning his university studies 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 helped shape his career in public life.

Ribal holds a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) 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. A keen sportsman, he practices Thai boxing, Shaolin Kung-Fu, swimming and tennis. He now lives in London with his wife and two sons.