

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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## BQ 787 – Nr. 10/2024

### Norbert Altenkamp MP on the hearing on religious freedom in the German Bundestag

(Bonn, 03.05.2024) The following is a summary by Norbert Altenkamp MP of the hearing on the 'Third Report of the Federal Government on the Global Situation of Freedom of Religion or Belief'.

#### Religious freedom: endangered worldwide – an important indicator of human rights, democracy, sustainability and peace!

Of particular interest to me as a Catholic: our expert hearing in the Human Rights Committee on the Federal Government's report on the global situation of freedom of religion or belief, which is unique in its breadth.

The questions that particularly moved us:

- What role does religion play for democracy and in our development and foreign policy?
- How can we strengthen the dialogue between religions worldwide?
- To what extent does the loss of religion in Germany also limit our room for manoeuvre with regard to dialogue between religions and peacekeeping?



Press photo Norbert Altenkamp © Klaas Fahr

#### Religion determines the identity of most people worldwide

A brief overview of the problem shows: At a time when more and more people in Germany are leaving the church, for almost 90 per cent of people worldwide, religion is an important part of their identity and morality and is also highly significant politically.

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Religion determines everyday life and politics not only in Iran or in many Arab countries, but in the entire global South, including the indigenous peoples in South America.

### Religious freedom is a human right and not a right of religions

No human right is felt as directly as religious freedom. And to clear up any misunderstandings: religious freedom is an individual human right to the free exercise of belief or non-belief – and not a right of religions. The strict enforcement of religious norms or dogmas – such as the circumcision of women's rights in Iran or the blasphemy laws in Pakistan – has nothing to do with religious freedom and violates human rights.

### Religious freedom is endangered worldwide and is an important indicator of democracy

At the same time, we are alarmed to realise that this religious freedom is increasingly under threat worldwide. And where religious freedom is violated, other human rights are usually also at stake. Religious freedom is therefore also an important indicator of democracy and peace.

We are seeing

- an alarming rise in anti-Semitism,
- the negative consequences of Hindu nationalism in India,
- the persecution of the Muslim Uyghurs in China and the Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar,
- the persecution of Christians and believers from other religions
- the destruction of indigenous peoples, who are often also prevented from living their own spirituality through land theft, as this is closely linked to the land on which they live – not to mention the destruction of the environment associated with land theft, e.g. in the Amazon region.

Often a rift also runs through the religions themselves. There are also fundamentalist forces in Christianity that hinder peace – as can be seen, for example, in the Russian Orthodox Church's support for Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine.



Members of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on human rights together with the invited experts Dr. Richard Ottinger and Archbishop Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher © BQ/Martin Warnecke

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### Strengthening religious freedom – social dialogue often only works as religious dialogue

The most important demands of the experts from our point of view – including our invited experts Dr. Richard Ottinger, expert for international religious dialogue at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Archbishop Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, President of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Co-President of Religions for Peace and until recently General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance.



(from left): Richard Ottinger, Thomas Schirrmacher, Heiner Bielefeldt, Frank Schwabe in conversation © BQ/Martin Warnecke

- Social dialogue in many countries and dialogue with other countries often only works as religious dialogue. You have to understand your counterpart in order to enter into dialogue with them and to be able to act competently. In this respect, religion and politics cannot be separated. Interreligious dialogue could also help in the conflict between Israel, Hamas and the mastermind Iran, even if this conflict is of course more than a battle of religions.
- Religious dialogue is all the more successful the more we work towards common goals that benefit everyone, e.g. the 17 sustainable development goals of the UN Agenda 2030, including the right to education and the fight against hunger. It is important to enter into dialogue with moderate and peace-loving members of religious groups in particular.
- The secular state in particular can and should play an important role as a moderator in the dialogue between the regions.
- Despite all the criticism, the UN is also needed in the dialogue of religions, as an important building block in the infrastructure for human rights, as a platform for discussions, group formation and as a space for experimentation.
- The office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Religious Affairs should therefore be permanently secured as a politically independent institution.
- The globally unique international partnership for religion and development PaRD, which was initiated by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2016, must be strengthened.
- Germany should once again play a leading role in the fight for human rights in the area of religious freedom.

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- Loss of religion and a lack of knowledge about religions must not restrict the scope for foreign policy action, development cooperation and peace efforts, as currently appears to be the case.
- Defending religious freedom at home and around the world is an important obligation for Germany.
- Successful dialogue with religions, well-founded criticism of religion and the fight against anti-Semitism require religious knowledge – religious education must therefore be strengthened again in Germany.
- Important contributions to dialogue and religious education are made, for example, by the Religions for Peace initiative, which is also active in Germany.

### Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** Press photo Norbert Altenkamp © Klaas Fahr
- **Photo 2:** Members of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on human rights together with the invited experts Dr. Richard Ottinger and Archbishop Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher © BQ/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 3** (from left): Richard Ottinger, Thomas Schirmmacher, Heiner Bielefeldt, Frank Schwabe in conversation © BQ/Martin Warnecke
- Briefing: Third Report of the Federal Government on the Global Situation of Freedom of Religion or Belief (reporting period 2020 to 2022):  
<https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/095/2009580.pdf>
- Further information on the hearing: <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2024/kw17-pa-menschenrechte-religion-996264>
- Video of the entire hearing: <https://dbtg.tv/cvid/7610222>
- Website of Norbert Altenkamp: <https://www.norbert-altenkamp.de>

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