

How to Deal with Displaced and Threatened People Groups

Thomas Schirrmacher

This text contains translated excerpts from his invited testimony at a public hearing of the German Bundestag's Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid on 28 November 2018. Dr Schirrmacher's comments provide an insightful example of how an informed Christian can function effectively and even be in demand in the realm of secular public-policy discourse. The questions that appear as headings were developed by committee members and presented to Dr Schirrmacher in advance.

Question 1: Freedom of Religion

Displacement, discrimination, and threats against religious minorities constitute violations of the fundamental human right to religious freedom. Where around the world do you currently see this human right most threatened and what are the reasons and causes for this?

I will begin with a natural but necessary preliminary remark. What we briefly state to be freedom of religion is actually *freedom of religion and belief* and includes the freedom of non-religious worldviews. This applies at the level of the UN, the Council of Europe, and the EU as well as to Germany's Basic Law. The fact that leaving the church today has no social consequences is a consequence of the fact that the right to freedom of

religion includes the right to change one's religion, which means that I can leave any religion in the direction of another religion or non-religious worldview without being punished by the state, an employer, or others. ...

In answering the question, I would like to highlight three areas which seem to me to be the most serious and appear to cause the most serious violations of the right to freedom of religion and belief: (1) genocide of religiously determined ethnic groups, (2) fundamentalism or religious extremism, and (3) religious nationalism. The three are not delimited or unrelated but rather partly overlap.

A. Genocide against Religiously Determined Ethnic Groups

In international law, genocide is the most abhorrent human rights crime and can often lead to international prosecution even if the main perpetrators cannot be legally prosecuted in their own country or are in fact not prosecuted. Accordingly, the worst violations of freedom of belief and conscience are genocides directed against religiously or ideologically defined minorities and resulting in a high number of victims in the form of displaced and dispossessed persons in addition to those murdered. ...

The European Parliament, the Par-

liamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), about a dozen national parliaments, and Pope Francis saw and see in the war of the so-called Islamic State (IS or Daesh) a genocide against Christians and against Yazidis.

...

Of course, the victims of extremist movements in Islam are often Muslims themselves, and not only in the Near and Middle East. In Afghanistan, the ethnic group of five to seven million Hazaras is regarded as marginalized because they are Shiite Muslims and they speak a mother language related to Persian. They are poor and are fair game for the Taliban and IS. Hundreds have been killed by direct acts of terror, and tens of thousands have been driven out. They all live in great fear. It would be worth its own investigation to see where the mutual oppression by Sunnis and Shiites—depending on who has the power in the state—assumes the character of genocide.

Let us stick with genocides committed against Muslim peoples, this time by non-Muslims. They are motivated in very different ways. In Myanmar, which is actually a multi-ethnic state, the Rohingya were finally driven out by a mixture of Buddhist fundamentalism, racism, economic interests, and military control mania after decades of apartheid. The result is that today one million out of 1.3 million Rohingyas live in refugee dwellings in poor neighbouring Bangladesh. Shockingly, machete-armed thugs from Buddhist monasteries were organized against the Rohingya. Monks called for Myanmar's Buddhist culture to be protected from the growing Muslim minority. There were hundreds of deaths and several hundred thousand Muslims were dis-

placed.

Ninety percent of the approximately eleven million Muslim Uighurs live in the autonomous region of China named after them, and one million Muslim Kazakhs also live there. Human Rights Watch estimates that there are 800,000 inmates in re-education camps, while other experts estimate that there are one million inmates. However, research on the ground is impossible. That would be 7 to 10 percent of the Muslim population in the region. The main motive is quashing unrest and exercising of state control. The rejection of any religion that used to play a major role is less and less in the foreground. However, there is arguably a fundamental suspicion against Muslims as a fifth column of Islamic power. China thus also proves that people without religion are still capable of genocide, just as history has demonstrated in the cases of Mao or Stalin.

In Sri Lanka, Buddhists are the main threat to Hinduism, whereby the religious diversity is superimposed upon by the ethnic diversity of the Sinhalese and Tamils. The long civil war has had many victims, especially among the Tamils. Christians and Muslims have also been fought against. The President of the country has just dismissed the legitimately elected Prime Minister in favour of his predecessor, partly because he sees the Buddhist character of the country as endangered.

The various forms of genocide with a religious influence are still awaiting investigation. It should be noted that almost all genocides in recent history have included a religious line of conflict.

The genocide of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, including the mas-

sacre of Srebrenica, took place with the blessing of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (1993–2017) in the Hague and the International Court of Justice regarded the massacre of Srebrenica as genocide. It was not coincidental that a corresponding resolution of the UN Security Council was prevented by Russia in 2015, a decision seconded by the Russian Orthodox Church leadership.

Despite all the necessary discussion and differentiation in detail, this set also includes the wars in Kosovo and Chechnya. Ulrich Delius rightly includes the resettlement of more than 100,000 Muslims from the Central African Republic, supposedly to prevent genocide against them.¹

Let us return from Muslims as victims to Muslim states as perpetrators. The genocide of indigenous peoples in Indonesian Irian Jaya (West Papua) who are Christians or practice ethnic religions is discussed in detail below. (Editor's note: That section is not included here.) The ever-changing genocide in Darfur and South Sudan, which finally led to the independence of South Sudan—without really solving the problems—is not limited to religious characteristics but does indeed include them.²

The genocide of the Kurds in Iraq

under Saddam Hussein always had a religious-worldview component and was also directed against the comparatively loose toleration of ethnic religions and of Christians and Jews from among their midst. However, the current attitude of the Iraqi government towards the autonomous region of Kurdistan and the Kurds in general is not only racist but also religious. The 2005 constitution, for example, prescribes Arabic/Kurdish bilingualism. Thirteen years later, however, the central government has not yet published a line in Kurdish. It has also not implemented many other central requirements of the Constitution. Thus, a supreme court and a second chamber where regions have a say in central laws are missing. ... It is a particular thorn in Iraq's side that the Kurdish government recognizes many newer religious communities, for instance some Protestant and Evangelical churches, that are not recognized and are combatted in Iraq.

I remember that in the mid-1980s I sat in Bonn with Tilman Zülch, the long-time Secretary General of the Society for Threatened Peoples, as the only two Germans in a large assembly of Kurds of all languages, religions and countries who had travelled from all over Germany. I had just published a Kurdish grammar and the Turkish President had asked the federal President to close our publishing house. We were accused of working for the US Central Intelligence Agency and were banned from entering the country. Since then, I have experienced very closely for thirty years how all countries possessing parts of the Kurdish settlement areas try to control the Kurds, push them back into the mountains, extinguish their languages and religions, or

¹ Ulrich Delius. 'Genocide Averted by Ethnic Cleansing—No Effective Protection of the Civilian Population: Central African Republic: Exodus of More Than 100,000 Muslims', 5 March 2014, <https://www.gfbv.de/de/news/mit-ethnischen-saeuberungen-genozid-abgewendet-kein-wirksamer-schutz-der-zivilbevoelkerung-6298/>.

² Gérard Prunier. *Darfur. Der 'uneindeutige' Genozid* (Hamburg, 2007).

eliminate them completely. What an unnecessary tragedy! At times there were quite obvious genocides among them, but for me the overall strategy has genocidal traits, the attempt by several states to rob the Kurds of their basic needs and prevent them from participating in society.

It is also important to identify and address potential genocides at an early stage. If in India the governing party of several federal states and the Prime Minister, due to Hindu fundamentalism (Hindutva) behind it, set the goal of making the country free of non-Indians by 2025, one wonders what should then happen to the approximate 200 million Muslims and around 32 million Christians. Fore-runners have been violent forced re-conversions of helpless villagers and the elimination of their livelihood, for example by banning cattle breeding, from which many Muslims live. ...

It is gratifying that the EU, under the umbrella of Eurojust, maintains the European Network of contact points with respect to persons responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. It coordinates EU states' legal processing and prosecution of the above-mentioned serious crimes.³

B. Fundamentalism or Religious Extremism

Fundamentalism and religious extremism ... cause the most deaths among all religions. Religious extrem-

ism can connect itself directly with a state, but it can also form a movement directed against the state that follows the same religion. ...

However, the percentage of those who justify violence in the name of God has varied greatly in the history of each religion. In Christianity, the percentage has dropped sharply over the last 100 years and continues to decrease, even if we include special Christian groups in the statistics. This also applies to atheistic worldviews, which have largely abandoned violent models since the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, countries such as Vietnam or to some extent China show that a variant advocating violence is still possible. In Hinduism, the percentage of those factions legitimating violence against others has unfortunately increased sharply in recent times, as we have seen. But Islam is going through the most problematic development, so that Islamism, which is prepared to use violence and began only one hundred years ago (apart from the older Saudi Wahhabism), has in the meanwhile gained tremendous worldwide popularity and continues to grow, even if it is still in the minority within Islam. Whereas under Mao and Stalin communist rulers killed the most Christians, the large mass of Christian martyrs worldwide can currently be traced back to attacks by Islamists.

I prefer to use the term 'fundamentalism' instead of religious extremism since otherwise non-religious or quasi-religious worldviews are automatically excluded. Viewed historically, however, the largest numbers of victims are due to extremist, fundamentalist variants of communist and nationalist worldviews such as those embodied by Franco, Hitler,

³ Thomas Schirrmacher and Jonathan Chaplin, 'European Religious Freedom and the EU', in Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (eds.), *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, 2nd ed. (London and New York, 2017), 151-74.

Mussolini, Lenin, Stalin, Ceausescu or Pol Pot. In Vietnam, Christians are still threatened by representatives of an atheistic ideology up to the present day. The right to control all other worldviews and religions is derived from the view of the correctness of non-religious ideologies. This view also provides the right to employ state power to force people to think and live in a certain permissible corridor as desired; otherwise, people face the threat of punishment in prison camps or even death.⁴

Fundamentalism does not simply mean having a claim to truth. In such a case, the largest part of mankind would probably be considered fundamentalists. Rather, fundamentalism means that one is prepared to assert one's claim to truth against others by force. The term *fundamentalism*, which became famous in 1979, was applied to Ayatollah Khomeini, who imposed the claim to truth of a certain Islamic view on all people in Iran, which is still imposed today. A person who thinks that something is absolutely right or wrong is not thereby dangerous. He only becomes a problem for society if he deduces from this that one can force others to believe the same thing, to do the same thing, and that the whole society has to function in the way he thinks is right.⁵

Therefore, one must indeed differentiate between majority Islam and Islamism, between majority Hindu-

ism and fundamentalist Hinduism (Hindutva), and between majority Buddhism and fundamentalist Buddhism as in Myanmar and Sri Lanka. They all represent a new form of their respective religions that did not exist before the twentieth century.

Islamism says that an Islamic country can only be ruled by Sharia law and inhabited by Muslims. All others have no place there. By the way, the first to be affected in Pakistan were the Ahmadiyyas, who from our and their own point of view are Muslims. However, they are infidels from the point of view of the Sunni because they claim a new prophet after Muhammad.

Needless to say, Islamism developed historically from Islam just as the Crusades developed from Christianity. At the same time, it is wrong to say that Islam and Islamism are simply identical. The truth lies somewhere in between. Islamism is a strongly politicized form of Islam, which developed about a hundred years ago in the final phase of the European colonial period and makes some central demands that were not characteristic of what has historically represented the majority of Islam.

Islamism predominantly turns against the governments of Islamic countries and only secondarily against the West, which these countries supposedly follow too closely. Islamism brings about forms of violence that historical Islam has predominantly rejected or would have rejected. Today, for example, mothers have appeared as suicide bombers who only a few years ago thoroughly mourned their sons who blew themselves up. Thus today, we find the death of thousands of Muslims to be collateral damage as well as the de-

⁴ Stéphane Courtois, *Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus: Unterdrückung, Verbrechen und Terror* (Munich: Piper, 1998); Thomas Schirrmacher, *Hitlers Kriegerreligion*, 2 vols. (Bonn: VKW, 2005).

⁵ Thomas Schirrmacher, *Fundamentalism: When Religion Becomes Dangerous* (Bonn: VKW, 2011).

struction of graves and historical Islamic sites.⁶

If there were more comprehensive democracies in the Islamic world, there would also be more religious freedom and parliaments would push more and more for women's rights, as has happened wherever democracy has taken hold in the Islamic world. The main problem here is classical theology and, along with it, the theologians. Among Muslim politicians, lawyers, economists and others, democracy has many supporters. In Pakistan, the supreme judges, all of them Muslims, repeal blasphemy verdicts under mortal danger and would immediately abolish relevant laws. It is the 'little' imams, especially in the countryside, who prevent this.⁷

The tragedy is that countries with Islamic majorities repeatedly decide to leave the modern, 'Western' path and choose an Islamist path. Examples are Iran in 1979, Pakistan which has been creeping in this direction since 1984, and Turkey presently creeping in the same direction.

Admittedly, this dangerous development has the most serious consequences in the Islamic realm. However, it is by no means a unique feature of Islam; we see the same development in all world religions with different characteristics. In India, the influence of the political-funda-

mentalist Hinduism (Hindutva) has increased, which the Prime Minister is also promoting and practicing. In Myanmar and Sri Lanka, the undesirable development has been promoted and demanded by Buddhist fundamentalists, and in Russia Putin can rely on the country's ancestral Christian church. Also, even within the EU, governments are beginning to elevate religious nationalism—here of course of a Christian nature—to the status of state doctrine.

In my view, it is particularly frightening that such developments have not been halted even by reasonably free elections. In Turkey, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Russia and India there would have been the possibility of ending the nightmare with certain elections if not with all elections. Instead, one has seen that those primarily responsible have been able even to mobilize enormous masses.

Excursus: No One Would Have Expected Peaceful Christianity One Hundred Years Ago

In the First World War, the large Christian nations waged war against each other in the name of the Christian God, and their respective state churches demonized the peoples of their opponents. Even in the 1920s, it could not have simply been said that Christianity was broadly peaceful, that it refused to force people to believe, and that it was committed to freedom of religion.

On the contrary, fundamentalism in all denominations was on the advance, scheming with allegedly Christian dictators like Franco or even offering open support. Colonialism dressed up in Christian garb did not

6 Gilles Kepel, *Das Schwarzbuch des Dschihad*. (Munich: Piper, 2002); Christine Schirrmacher, *Islamismus: Wenn Religion zur Politik wird*, 2nd ed. (Holzgerlingen: SCM Hänssler, 2011).

7 Christine Schirrmacher, *Islam und Demokratie: Ein Gegensatz?* (Holzgerlingen: SCM Hänssler, 2013); Christine Schirrmacher, *Politischer Islam und Demokratie: Konfliktfelder* (Holzgerlingen: SCM Hänssler, 2015).

want to free the colonies, and the dream of a denominational, Christian state or at least the involvement of the state in the spreading of one's own denomination was still the order of the day.

Only after the Second World War did Christianity broadly begin to recognize democracy and above all the inclusion of human rights, including freedom of religion, in the basic teachings of the churches. This prevailed in theory (doctrines) in the mid-1960s and determined real life more and more in the following decades.

Christianity had come to the end of a long road. With the elaboration and signing of the document 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' (2005–2011) by almost all churches, it became clear that the Constantinian age was finally over and that it is against Christian doctrine and against the spirit of Jesus Christ to force other people to believe or to misuse the state for such purposes. At the same time, any kind of mission that does not respect the human rights of others is rejected.

With a time lag, atheism and non-religious worldviews have also undergone a similar development. Violent regimes, which wanted to exterminate all religions or used the state to force a non-religious worldview upon everyone, at times dominated large parts of the world. They largely disappeared with the end of the Soviet Union and gave way to a more peaceful intellectual discourse. Countries such as China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea, which still originate from this tradition, are only conditionally determined by atheism and are difficult to classify.

In contrast to the fact that the percentage of the supporters of Christi-

anity and secular worldviews who advocate violence is strongly declining, there is a painful development within the two other big world religions, Islam and Hinduism. In Islam this has been the case since the First World War; in Hinduism it is the case only in more recent times. The increase and geographical expansion of Islamist violence is taking place right before our eyes.

I am not concerned here with denigrating Muslims or Hindus or with sweeping statements about religions that have enormously many varieties. After all, peaceful Muslims and Hindus are also in large numbers victims of the violent wings of their religions. Rather, I am noting a worldwide trend and observing that the minority within a given world religion who are advocating violence sometimes grows larger and sometimes smaller. However, if it becomes too large, it takes the whole religion into its scourge.

Violent wings of Christianity and non-religious worldviews are on the retreat, while violent wings within Islam and Hinduism are growing and gaining more and more supporters worldwide. The vast majority of people belong to these four worldview groupings.

At the same time, this survey also shows that no world religion is *per se* automatically averse to the idea of spreading its faith by force. And every world religion has a large wing that gets along without convictions favouring violence. The situation has to do with concrete historical developments that work causally upon individuals, and not inevitabilities or biologically fixed factors.

C. Religious Nationalism

Where a country is no longer ethnically and culturally homogeneous, parties, governments, the majority religion or the media increasingly play the religious card to unite the population. This corresponds with the desire of many in the majority population to protect their own cultural identity against growing minorities of other faiths. This religious nationalism is marching ahead around the world, and it is globally becoming socially acceptable. A Turk has to be a Muslim, an Indian a Hindu, a Russian an Orthodox Christian, a Burmese a Buddhist, etc. More and more often, religion takes on the role which in former times the common language or culture often had.

This trend is also evident in the Christian and Jewish world. For the first time, a prime minister in Israel has demanded and has been able to pass in the Knesset a law that only a Jew can be a full citizen, even if human rights are guaranteed to all others. In Hungary and Poland, ruling parties have declared the country to be Christian, in a way we otherwise know from Orthodox countries. In Russia the old connection between state and church has been invoked anew, and Russia has been appointed as the Christian protective power. Religious writings must be approved by the state before they can go into print. Non-Orthodox communities are usually denied this permission. It is also very difficult for a Catholic or Muslim community to obtain permission to build a place of worship. This approval practice is handled more rigorously from year to year. At the same time, thousands of Orthodox churches are being built at state expense throughout the country.

The reasons for the persecution of religious groups, and for the persecution of Christians, are almost always multi-layered and mostly not only religiously determined. Thus political, cultural, racist, nationalist, economic and personal motives can play an important role. Long ago the Holy Scriptures of Christianity made this clear. In the Old Testament, for example, the infamous Queen Jezebel mixed her hatred of Yahweh and his prophets with her desire for power, but also with very personal attempts at enrichment because she wanted to seize the property of her Jewish neighbor (1 Kings 16–19). In the last book of the New Testament, the Revelation of John, political and economic reasons are added to the hatred of the church. The craftsmen and goldsmiths and silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:23–29) are a good example. They saw in Paul's proclamation and its success a 'danger' to their 'good income' and therefore instigated a revolt against the Christians with the battle cry 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians'. According to this Christian report, the furor was ended by the Roman army, which ensured law and order. Also, the imprisonment of Paul and Silas after expelling a spirit of divination from a slave was caused by the owners' anger with regard to their potential profit (Acts 16:16–24).

If the Bible itself makes it clear that persecution of Christians can be closely intertwined with political and economic interests, it is precisely Christians today who should soberly recognize and make this a subject of discussion. There is no unsullied restriction of religious freedom but always a mostly confusing entanglement of the problematic nature of religion with problems and human

rights violations within the respective cultures and societies involved.

The opposite can also be true: If a follower of a hated religion and at the same time the bearer of a hated skin colour is tortured, one may neither trivialize the racism by saying that in reality a religious component is at issue, nor vice versa. Racism and religious hatred are both despicable, and if they occur at the same time, they must be fought along both lines. It is not a question of playing off the violation of religious freedom against the oppression of women, against genocide, or against the lack of freedom of the press. In reality, human rights and their violation are always closely linked, such that states that violate religious freedom usually also violate many other human rights and vice versa.

Question 7: Racism and Displacement

How often are racism and ethnically related ideas the cause of displacement and discrimination such as, for example, Islamophobia worldwide?

Always. I would say that displacement of and discrimination against ethnic groups are always connected with some form of racist thinking. It doesn't matter what comes first. Sooner or later, racist ideas lead to their implementation in practice. The opposite is true as well: the repression of and discrimination against groups and ethnic groups sooner or later create a supposedly rational justification through racist explanations.

Man has a tendency to provide his negative feelings such as envy, jealousy, inferiority or hatred with an apparently rational and intelligent-sounding substructure and thus sud-

denly transform his immoral feelings into honourable decisions. An individual does not become master of this if one fights only against certain forms of racism, but rather if (1) one deals with this problem in principle, (2) one can convey a system of values in which respect for others and advocacy for others are the focus (e.g. brotherly love or Kant's categorical imperative) and (3) no one acts as if they are completely free of this problem and are therefore morally superior in such a way that others only have to learn from them.

In Belgium, a historical conglomeration of language problems, envy, election campaign issues, political party orientation and, since the 1960s, differences in economic development have made the country ungovernable. Meanwhile, the majority on both sides believe that these are ancient communities of descent that have always tried to live at the expense of each other. All this, however, was missing when Belgium was founded in 1830, when the educated Flemish still spoke French and almost all the inhabitants were Catholics. Step by step, a negative description of the character of each other's people was given as to why one had to fight the others. (Please forgive the necessarily shortened version of a complex historical process.) This shows how racism can emerge out of nowhere.

Racism can be found in everyday life as well as in politics and science. It ranges from prejudice and discrimination to slavery and racial segregation to pogroms, displacement, ethnic cleansing and genocide. The most extreme form to date was the industrial extermination of Jews in the Third Reich. ...

Racist movements always have a

national or cultural character and differ greatly, depending on which group uses racism to fight which other one. 'Wherever we find racism, we discover that it is historically specific, depending on the particular epoch, the particular culture, and the particular form of society in which it occurs. These specific differences must be analyzed. So when we talk about concrete social reality, we should not talk about racism, but about various forms of racism.'⁸

In my book on racism, I have argued that there are three groups of victims of racism that are the most widespread internationally, each of which can be traced over many centuries:

1. Blacks (or people who have a darker skin colour than yourself)—they are supposedly stupid, crude and uncivilized;
2. Jews—they are supposedly devious, greedy and domineering;
3. Gypsies—they are allegedly antisocial and thieving.

A study of the history of these three forms of racism is very instructive for less common forms of racism. For example, the prohibition or avoidance of derogatory designations of these groups—as meaningful as it may be—has not reduced racism anywhere. Also, the intensity of the dislike of these groups has little to do with how many of the vilified actually live within the reach of the racists but rather with who is creating a mood against them.

Question 8: Cohesion and Religious Communities

Increasing migration to Europe also poses new challenges for the cohesion of society. How can religious communities contribute to this cohesion?

Let us start with the negative side: religious communities or, more concretely, the official representatives of organized religious communities can—depending on their degree of influence on the population—cause massive damage to the cohesion of a society. The influence on the population is not measured above all by which part of the religious community actively practices the faith and which does not, but to what extent the religious community is accepted as an authority on relevant topics, especially for those for whom belonging to a religion is rather a cultural factor.

For example, in Russia only a very small percentage of the Christian population attends church services, even on the highest holidays, and the feeling that one has to adhere to the moral guidelines of the church in one's private life is hardly still present. But if the official Russian Orthodox Church describes a group as a 'sect' and as 'dangerous', this is unquestioningly taken at face value by almost all people who understand themselves as Russian Orthodox, and it is a standpoint even adopted to a large extent by many completely secularized people who do not perceive themselves to be Christians at all.

Extreme examples can be found in Pakistan, where the state still partly resists Iranian conditions, but where the local imam usually has more influence on the people than authorities or security bodies. Here the country can hardly rule against public statements

⁸ Stuart Hall, 'Racism as Ideological Discourse', in Nora Rätzsch (ed.), *Theories on Racism* (Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 2000), 11.

by religious leaders. That leads then still another step further towards Iran, the only example in the world of direct political rule by religious leaders and which is also historically an extremely rarely found hierocracy (meaning rule by priests). The religious leaders of the state religion have direct political control and thus also directly determine who is regarded as an outcast and who is not.

In Germany, if the official representatives of the two major institutions of the majority religion were to campaign massively against other religions, against certain ethnic groups such as the Roma and Sinti, or against 'social parasites' and accuse the state of pampering these groups too much, the damage would be devastating. ... One can be all the more grateful that all hereditary religious communities in Germany—even if only after long learning processes—have clearly supported democracy itself from the 1960s at the latest as well as in particular the secular character of the state, the freedom of religion and conscience of the followers of other religions, and the special importance of the protection of minorities.

The positive influence is felt through many channels. It begins where churches are still involved in the socialization of children and young people, be it through church programmes, through day-care centres and schools, or through hospitals or counselling centres. It also encompasses the entire media presence and finally leads to concrete implementation through visible, often symbolic appearances of religious dignitaries within the framework of dialogue and international understanding.

The fact that all churches in Germany basically welcome migrants

is certainly not welcomed by all political forces. However, I am of the opinion that it is devastating when people who in the end remain are immediately received with rejection instead of welcome. This happens, for example, in Australia, where potential immigrants are initially held for longer periods of time on foreign islands and get stirred up there against their future homeland or make their first criminal contacts. Even people who have to leave Germany in the end should get a positive impression that they have been treated with respect.

Question 11: International Understanding

What importance do you attach to means of international understanding as a preventive measure to reduce the threat level to threatened peoples?

International understanding, often also called cultural exchange or cultural diplomacy, is a deliberately induced direct acquaintance of two parties who otherwise have little or no opportunity to do so. The planned communication between different groups of a society, different cultures, religions, or social groups or even whole states has the goal of breaking down prejudices that were taken for granted against them by getting to know actual counterparts and by establishing relationships where they were not previously present or not considered possible.

International understanding can be carried out by citizens, by NGOs, by educational institutions, by states, or by international institutions such as UNESCO or the Alliance of Civilizations—or by a combination of these.

...

The importance of everyday, sta-

ble international understanding at all levels cannot be overestimated, nor can the importance of organized forms such as art, sport, science, the media, or dialogue between official representatives of religions. Where this is not enough, the state must organize additional possibilities, because this is one of the most effective peace-building measures.

The 1963 Franco-German Treaty of Friendship ('Élysée Treaty') can serve as a model. A comprehensive package of measures was put in place to ensure that 'enemies become friends'—that as many French people as possible could get to know Germany and Germans through their own experience and that as many Germans as possible could get to know France and the French. The extensive student exchanges organized by the Franco-German Youth Office, which in principle still exist (unfortunately on a smaller scale), are not only the best known but have probably also had the most far-reaching consequences. Young people got a positive picture of the other side at a very early stage before prejudices and dislikes could establish themselves at all. Even if up to the present day Germany remains active in international understanding on many levels, it is time to analyse the implementation of the Élysée Treaty in such a way that it can be transferred to other areas, especially those where the feeling of enmity hovers in the air or threatens to hover in the future. ...

With the financial support of the Federal Foreign Office, the International Society for Human Rights has, for example, run programmes in which young bloggers from the field of human rights in Eastern Europe (in a broad sense) are networked with

one another. In addition to seminars, which take place in the participating countries, and official virtual meetings, reports are jointly written and experiences exchanged. When I have gotten to know these young people at the end of the programmes, I have been delighted not only at how much momentum they have gotten for their commitment, but also that they have all reported how intensively these encounters have promoted their view of other countries, as well as how their general feeling for the diversity of people on this earth has been promoted. In this way, furthermore, many from non-democratic countries are given the benefits of democracy by their peers from other countries.

I am deeply convinced that there is no substitute for really and truly getting to know other people. And unfortunately, these people, whom I do not know but should get to know personally, may be living in the same high-rise as me! Our assessment of other people is formed by what we hear about them or what we concretely experience in our dealings with them.

As a teenager I got lost during my holidays in the Glasgow harbour area when our excursion ship left with my parents but without me. Left in a rundown area, an even younger black boy scooped me up. Thanks to great hospitality and care, I spent the night in the cramped space where his poor family, with their many children, lived and slept. Their willingness to help was greater than that of many of my acquaintances who have a guest room. ... At that time, I decided to treat people who looked and lived differently with the same normality and friendliness with which this family had welcomed me, although I was white and 'rich'.

As my parents had close contacts with churches all over the world, we received church leaders from Indonesia, Paraguay, Gambia and many other countries. As a small child I touched the unusual hair of Africans who afterwards held lectures. I grew up with the fact that people are very different but that they equally deserve respect.

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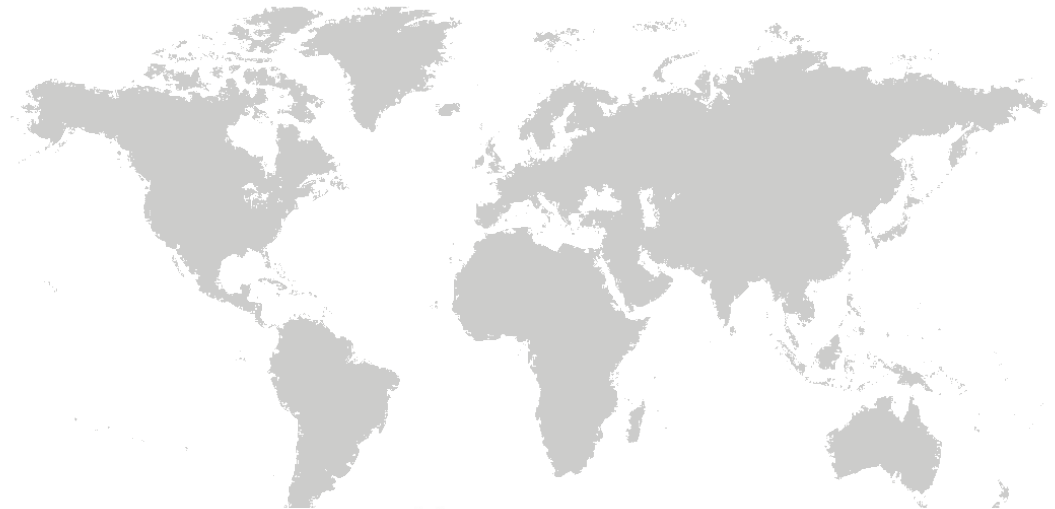
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