

Bonner Querschnitte

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ICCJ Annual Conference in Hanover: Visit to Bergen-Belsen and workshop on Christian-Jewish dialogue

(Bonn, 17.08.2026) As part of the annual conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), Prof. Dr Thomas Schirmacher, President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), visited the Bergen-Belsen Memorial together with Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious representatives. There, he paid tribute to the victims of the Holocaust and reaffirmed the enduring responsibility to resolutely fight against all forms of anti-Semitism, religious hatred and hostility towards humanity.

The Bergen-Belsen Memorial commemorates one of the first Nazi labour camps, which only later became a concentration camp. More than 70,000 people lost their lives there, most of them in the final months of the war, when Bergen-Belsen received concentration camp prisoners from the Eastern Front who had been transported to the heart of the German Reich on evacuation trains and forced marches, and who died there of starvation, disease and exhaustion. The British Army completely destroyed the camp after its liberation to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Among the best-known victims are Anne Frank and her sister Margot. Schirmacher paused for a silent prayer both at the memorial stone for the Frank sisters and at the Jewish memorial.

The ICCJ is the world's leading umbrella organisation for Christian-Jewish dialogue. For decades, its member organisations from numerous countries have been promoting the reappraisal of history, the fight against anti-Semitism and mutual understanding between Jews and Christians. This year's annual conference was hosted by the German Coordinating Council of Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation (DKR), which, as the Ger-



Kniend vor dem Denkmal zum Gedenken an die in Bergen-Belsen ermordeten Juden © BQ/Schirmacher

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Text & Technology:

Titus Vogt (ViSdP)
Vorderer Kamp 52a, D-25479 Ellerau
Phone: +49 4106 804806
Fax: +49 4106 804807
Email: info@bonn-profiles.net



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man member of the ICCJ, organised the conference in Hanover together with regional partners. The DKR represents more than 80 societies for Christian-Jewish cooperation in Germany and has been committed to Christian-Jewish dialogue and the fight against anti-Semitism for decades. The ICCJ was founded after the Second World War as an international response to Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi anti-Semitism.



Jews, Christians and Muslims of ICCJ commemorating the victimism of KZ Bergen-Belsen together © BQ/Schirmmacher

As part of the conference, Schirmmacher co-led a workshop with the ICCJ President, Rabbi Dr David Fox Sandmel, on the history of Jewish and Christian Zionism. Sandmel had previously served as President of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), the international representative body of organised Judaism in dialogue with the churches.

The workshop examined the origins and the historical, theological and political developments of Jewish and Christian Zionism, highlighting the surprising diversity of their respective forms. Both traditions were presented in a comparative manner, emphasising their similarities and differences.

Schirmmacher has been working with the IJCIC and its presidents for many years. During Sandmel's tenure at the IJCIC, joint international dialogue events were a regular feature of their activities. Highlights included a historic joint conference between the IJCIC and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in Jerusalem, as well as a joint reception hosted by the President of the State of Israel. Against this backdrop,



Workshop of Rabbi Dr Sandmel – in picture – and Thomas Schirmmacher at ICCJ © BQ/Schirmmacher

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the ICCJ workshop formed part of a long-standing collaboration in Christian-Jewish dialogue.

The conference combined academic and theological exchange with a joint commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust, thereby highlighting that Christian-Jewish dialogue is inextricably linked to the historical responsibility regarding anti-Semitism.

Participation in the ICCJ Annual Conference also highlighted Schirmacher's long-standing commitment to Christian-Jewish dialogue, as well as the ISHR's work against anti-Semitism and in support of religious freedom worldwide.



The Grave of Margot and Anne Frank © BQ/Schirmacher

Downloads and Links

- Photo 1: **Kneeling at the monument remembering the Jews murdered in Bergen-Belsen** © BQ/Schirmacher
- Photo 2: **Jews, Christians and Muslims of ICCJ commemorating the victimism of KZ Bergen-Belsen together** © BQ/Schirmacher
- Photo 3: **Workshop of Rabbi Dr Sandmel – in picture – and Thomas Schirmacher at ICCJ** © BQ/Schirmacher
- Photo 4: **The monument in Bergen-Belsen** © BQ/Schirmacher
- Photo 5: **Commemorating the murdered Sinti and Roma at Bergen-Belsen** © BQ/Schirmacher
- Photo 6: **The Grave of Margot and Anne Frank** © BQ/Schirmacher

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