

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 436 – No. 41/2016

## “Stumbling Block” presented as a Gift – Pakistani Lawyer and Schirmmacher meet Pope Francis

(Bonn, 22.08.2016) After the last general audience with Pope Francis prior to the summer break, the Pakistani human rights lawyer Aneeqa Anthony has presented a painted brick as a symbol for the numerous Christians enslaved in brick factories in Pakistan. The President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), Thomas Schirmmacher, and the leader of the ISHR's Department for Religious Freedom, Michaela Koller, arranged the meeting and accompanied the lawyer.

The “stumbling block” was designed by three Christian children whose mother, Shama Bibi (26), and father, Shahzad Masih (28), were beaten by a mob at the beginning of November 2014 and thrown alive into a brick kiln and burned. Anthony is representing the children in court.

The Christian married couple had been accused of burning pages from a copy of the Koran. They had also worked like slaves in a brick factory. According to information police have obtained, the owner had incited an Islamic preacher to publicly accuse the married couple of blasphemy. A fanatic mob dragged them around the grounds of the brick factory, beat them half-dead, and finally threw them in a brick kiln where they met their death. At that time, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Papal Council for Interreligious Dialogue, labeled what had happened a “barbarous act” and called upon Islamic authorities to denounce the act. Schirmmacher had met with Cardinal Tauran on the prior day.

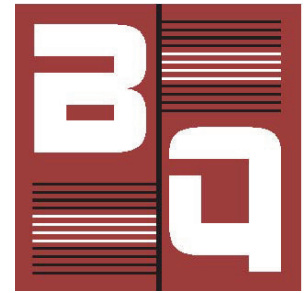
Aneeqa Anthony asked Pope Francis in a personal encounter as an aside to the audience: “Holy Father, this modest token from my home country was designed by the children of slaves who, by the way, toiled in a brick factory, as do many Christians. They had to witness how their parents, Shama and Shahzad, were thrown alive into a brick kiln by a fanatic mob and burned on account of alleged blasphemy in November 2014. My lawyer colleagues and myself are seeing to it that the suspected culprits end



Presentation of the brick (from left): Michaela Koller, Aneeqa Anthony, Thomas Schirmmacher, Pope Francis

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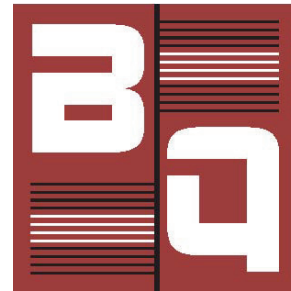
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up behind bars. We are all no longer safe in our homeland. Pakistan is not a safe home country – not only for us as Christians but above all not for Shama and Shahzad's children. May the European states not seal themselves off from afflicted Christians. Help us to persuade their governments."

The leading suspect in the lynching was released on bail on April 16. The children, in the meantime three, five, and seven years old, were almost burned as well. Observers fear that a form of revenge might be conducted by those associated with the suspects: At the beginning of December, a significant imam in Pakistan published a fatwa against Anthony, the attorney, condemning her to death. Together with an opinion by the Islamic studies specialist Christine Schirmacher from Bonn, the ISHR appealed in vain to the German federal government, state governments, and to others to offer Anthony asylum as an endangered human rights advocate or to offer her temporary protection in Germany.

Italy had just issued a visa to Ms. Anthony on the day before but has initially denied the same to her children and later to her husband: The death fatwa appears to have impressed Italy less than the worry that the parents might not return. "Does Italy seriously mean that a lawyer who under the threat of death defends others' children and abused wives would abandon her own children to the regime or to revenge on the streets at home."

According to the World Slavery Index, Pakistan counts among the top five states which in absolute numbers employ the most slaves. Many among them belong to the Christian minority of 2.7% of the population. The ISHR now hopes that Pope Francis will direct attention to this problem during a possible visit to Pakistan.

### **Excerpt from a Letter and Opinion by Christine Schirmacher regarding the case of Aneeqa Maria Anthony directed towards Human Rights Representatives in the German Federal Government**

"... in my view, the threats against the lawyer are to be taken extremely seriously, and they have recently found expression in the form of an Islamic legal opinion (fatwa). On the one hand, they are to be taken seriously owing to the increasing interreligious tensions and what in the meantime has become a very heated atmosphere, used in particular by fundamentalist Islamist groups to accuse and smear members of minorities. Suspicion of blasphemy is quickly raised against unwanted individuals who think differently (reformed Muslims, Ahmadiyya adherents, or Christians), and those involved can hardly dispel the charges. These charges very frequently end with the long-term incarceration of those involved and with threats to their lawyers. If the accused go free, they are often threatened and persecuted or lose their life to lynch law (it is not seldom that this occurs prior to or after court proceedings or in prison) carried out by a heated mob.

The choice of words of the fatwa show that with regard to Aneeqa Maria Anthony the drafters of the fatwa are addressing criminalization under the allegation of blasphemy. It not only speaks about blasphemy (which in Pakistani society counts as worthy of

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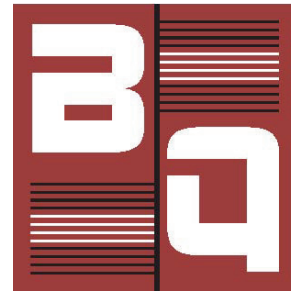
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capital punishment). It also speaks of an attack on Pakistan's "blasphemy laws" by Aneeqa Maria Anthony, which in § 295-298 call for the death penalty for each individual who, for instance, maligns Mohammad. In my opinion, these words have



Pope Francis receiving Spanish language books by Christine Schirmmacher as expositions on Islam

also been chosen because in recent years high ranking individuals, a minister and a governor, have attempted to defuse the blasphemy laws – both were killed in broad daylight. Since that time, further attempts to change these laws have stopped. The fatwa threatens Aneeqa Maria Anthony in the same way with death when it charges her with an "attack on and criticism of" the blasphemy laws. At the same time, it is completely inconsequential whether the

fatwa comes from the named group or not – its effect is the same. It is for that reason that in my opinion human rights lawyer Anthony finds herself in mortal danger.

In my professorial dissertation I occupied myself in detail with topic of the effects of blasphemy laws (Christine Schirmmacher. *"Let there be no Compulsion in Religion" (Sura 2:256): Apostasy from Islam as judged by contemporary Islamic Theologians: Discourses on Apostasy, Religious Freedom, and Human Rights*, pp. 620, Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2016). I have attached an excerpt from the text illustrating, by the use of examples, the danger in which Aneeqa Maria Anthony finds herself."

### Downloads:

- Christine Schirmmacher. *"Let there be no Compulsion in Religion" (Sura 2:256): Apostasy from Islam ...*: full book as [pdf](#)
- [Photo 1](#): Presentation of the brick (from left): Michaela Koller, Aneeqa Anthony, Thomas Schirmmacher, Pope Francis
- [Photo 2](#): Pope Francis receiving Spanish language books by Christine Schirmmacher as expositions on Islam
- [Photo 3](#): Pope Francis and Thomas Schirmmacher meet again
- [Photo 4](#): Pope Francis and Thomas Schirmmacher in a flurry of camera flashes
- *All photos: © Osservatore Romano*  
Whoever wishes to replicate pictures has to go to [pubblicazioni@ossrom.va](mailto:pubblicazioni@ossrom.va) to inquire regarding the following pictures, which are also accessible at <http://www.photovat.com>: 224537\_22062016.jpg, 224544\_22062016.jpg, 224577\_22062016.jpg, 224657\_22062016.jpg

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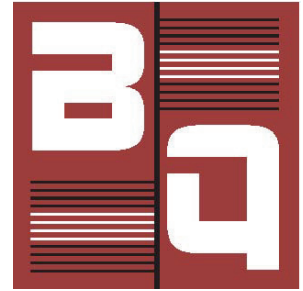
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