

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 842 – No. 22/2025

## How Freedom of Religion or Belief Can Help Prevent the Misuse of Religion and Build Social Cohesion and Resilience

### Thomas Paul Schirmmacher and Janet Epp-Buckingham represent the IIRF at the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in Berlin

(Bonn, 21.03.2025) The Civil Society Conference of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable (IRF) took place in Berlin a day before the 2024 International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) the next day, bringing together three dozen of governments from all continents in Berlin. The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) was represented at conference by Archbishop Prof. Dr. Thomas Paul Schirmmacher, President of the IIRF, and Prof. Dr. Janet Epp-Buckingham, Executive Editor of the International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF).

“How Freedom of Religion or Belief Can Help Prevent the Misuse of Religion and Build Social Cohesion and Resilience” was a powerful civil society program in connection with the 2024

International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Convened by IRF Secretariat, Templeton Religion Trust (TRT), and Love Your Neighbor Community (LYNC), the two-day event took place at the prestigious Hotel Adlon Kempinski in Berlin. This gathering brought together key leaders from civil society, faith communities, governments, and other stakeholders to discuss how Freedom of Religion



The IRF Roundtable in session in Berlin © IIRF/Martin Warnecke

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or Belief (FoRB) for all is a vital element in the process of building social cohesion, peace, and prosperity.

The purpose and focus of the event were three-fold:

- Bring majority world voices into the global conversation about FoRB, understanding them as they understand themselves—from their viewpoints.
  - Explore together what the majority world is interested in most: the nexus of FoRB & extremism (especially fighting terrorism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia).
  - Highlight inclusive new approaches that can help to prevent extremism and develop more strategic synergies through common partners.
- The event succeeded in building greater thought leadership, a stronger community of collaborative practice, and an emerging culture of philanthropy around this key issue.

The event included the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable “Live from Berlin,” co-chaired by Greg Mitchell and Nadine Maenza of IRF Secretariat. The Roundtable has been meeting regularly for 14 years now and has heard from more than 1,200 leaders of civil society, faith communities, and governments from over 60 countries.

The Opening Session: Opening remarks were delivered by leaders of the three co-conveners: Christopher Stewart, Chief Grants Officer of TRT; Nadine Maenza, President of IRF Secretariat; and Wade Kusack, Founder and CEO of LYNC. VIP Keynote Remarks were delivered by Czech Ambassador Robert Rehak, Chair of the Article 18 Alliance, a coalition of 43 countries committed to advancing FoRB for all; Fernanda San Martín Carrasco, Director of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB), a global network of more than 300 parliamentarians from 90 different countries; and key voices from the majority world, including Jose Ramos MP (Panama), Godfred Seidu Jasaw MP (Ghana), John Azumha, Ph.D (Ghana), Dr. Uriel Simonsohn (Israel) and Sheikh Al Mahfoudh bin Bayyah of the Alliance of Virtue and Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace.



Dr. Robert Rehak and Thomas Schirmacher  
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The Eurasia Panel Discussions on FoRB, Security, and Building Social Cohesion & Resilience: Moderated by Wade Kusack of LYNC with contributions from government officials, national faith leaders, and local religious leaders from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Moldova. These discussions were followed by a presentation on Eurasian Women of Faith Engagement by Halina Kusack of LYNC.

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Eurasian government officials included:

- Mr. Azamat Danakhmentov, Chief Expert of the Law Implementation Practice, Department of the Committee on Religious Affairs, Kazakhstan
- Mr. Dilshod Mamatkulov, Deputy Chair of the Committee on Religious Affairs, Uzbekistan
- Mr. Zaza Vashakmadze, Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Georgia
- Mr. Ion Groza, Member of Parliament, Vice President of the Foreign Affairs and European Integration Committee, Moldova

National Faith Leaders included:

- Imam Bijigit Qoshiev, Grand Mufti Advisor, Muslim Spiritual Board, Kazakhstan
- Imam Shovkat Khamdamov, Spiritual Muslim Administration, Uzbekistan
- Guram Imerishvili, Christian Youth Movement, Georgia
- Valeriu Gilechi, President of the European Christian Political Movement, Moldova
- Imam Nazirkhan Tashkhodjaev, Kazakhstan

Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** The IRF Roundtable in session in Berlin © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 2:** Dr. Robert Řehák and Thomas Schirmmacher © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 3:** Nadine Maenza receiving IIRF book on Iraq from Thomas Schirmmacher © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 4:** Prof. Janet Epp-Buckingham, Bishop Efraim Tendero and Archbishop Thomas Schirmmacher © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
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- **Photo 7:** A workshop of IRF Berlin with Civil Officials from the Caucasus © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 8:** A workshop of IRF Berlin with Faith Leaders from the Caucasus © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 9:** The welcome Logo © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 10:** The programme © IIRF/Martin Warnecke

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