

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 860 – No. 40/2025

## IIRF and ISHR leadership involved in Faith & Freedom Summit IV in the Latin American Parliament

(Bonn, 25.07.2025) The fourth Faith & Freedom Summit focusing on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) took place under the title “Practicing What We Preach” in the Latin American Parliament in Panama City. Thomas Schirmacher has been a speaker at all four events Faith & Freedom Summit I–III (2018, 2019, 2024), both in his ecclesiastical role and as President of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) and as President of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF). This time he was accompanied by a larger team including the CEO of both organizations, that is Prof. Dr. Dennis Petri, International Director of the IIRF, and Matthias Böhning, Secretary General of the ISHR. A fourth speaker from the team was Prof. Dr. Christine Schirmacher, Professor of Islamic Studies, member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Federal Center for Analysis and Research in Berlin and board member of the Center for Advanced Security, Strategic and Integration Studies (CASSIS) in Bonn.

The summit provided ample opportunities for the ISHR and the IIRF leadership to engage with the whole international FoRB community present, meet old friends, strengthen existing networks and build new connections globally.



Matthias Böhning from the ISHR and Dennis Petri from the IIRF are participating in the Faith and Freedom Summit IV at the Pan-American Parliament in Panama, together with Thomas Schirmacher, president of both organizations © BQ/Esther Schirmacher



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### Dennis Petri on the Role of Academia in Defending Freedom of Belief

Dennis Petri spoke on the panel “The Role of Academia in Defending Freedom of Belief”, where he presented five key points on how academia can contribute to the promotion and protection of religious freedom. Here are the five key points:

- **Training Future Professionals:** Dr. Petri emphasized the importance of incorporating religious freedom (RF) into university curricula, both as a cross-cutting theme and as an independent field of study. He referenced the work of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), traditionally collaborating with theological seminaries but now extending to secular programs. Petri highlighted the importance of religious literacy within public administration and sensitivity towards religious issues.
- **Contributing to Knowledge:** He explained that religious freedom is a multidimensional concept that requires academic exploration to uncover invisible violations, such as those connected to organized crime and indigenous communities in Latin America. Petri stressed the need to document best practices and conduct assessments, such as Colombia’s public policy on religious freedom.
- **Supporting Political Advocacy:** Dr. Petri emphasized the social relevance of research, showcasing the pyramid of successful advocacy, which relies on objective data, strong arguments, and empathy. He cited projects like the Violent Incidents Database (VID) and the Global Religious Freedom Index (GRFI) as tools that aid this advocacy.
- **Combating Polarization and Politicization:** He noted that religious tolerance has historically been used to advance political interests and underscored the importance of generating unbiased, non-politicized data. Petri positioned OLIRE as an organization representing “the voice of reason”, unaffiliated with either right or left-wing political ideologies.
- **Quality of Democracy:** Petri concluded that religious freedom is crucial to the quality of democracy, allowing for the peaceful coexistence of diverse beliefs and fostering a more inclusive society.



IIRF Director Dennis Petri and IIRF President Thomas Schirmacher in conversation with Minister Ricarda A. Landera M. at the Faith and Freedom Summit IV in the Panamanian National Assembly © BQ/IIRF

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The panel was moderated by Professor Alonso Illueca from Universidad Santa María La Antigua, one of the co-organizers of the conference.

### Partnership Agreements between ISHR and IIRF and FPST

On the sidelines of the Faith & Freedom Summit in Panama, the ISHR Secretary General Matthias Böhning signed two partnership agreements, one with the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) and one with the Foundation Platform for Social Transformation (FPST). Both partners were represented by Dr. Dennis Petri (Costa Rica) who signed the agreements on their behalf. The partnership agreement with the IIRF strengthens ISHR's links in the global FoRB (Freedom of Religion and Belief) community and opens up new possibilities for collaboration, sharing of knowledge, learnings and resources between the IIRF and the ISHR. Among other stipulations of the partnership agreement, both parties commit to convene on a regular basis in order to discuss potential fields of collaboration, joint projects and potential as well as ongoing activities. The partnership agreement with FPST is mainly regulating a more structured collaboration between ISHR and two of FPST's projects in the Religious Freedom space: The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE) and The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA).

Both partnership agreements expand the ISHR's scope of action in the field of religious freedom and make the access that the ISHR has through its various international accreditations (including ECOSOC and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights/ACHPR) available and



ISHR chairmen Thomas Schirmacher and Matthias Böhning with ministers and representatives of the Panamanian government in the Pan-American Parliament in Panama © BQ/Esther Schirmacher



Thomas Schirmacher spricht vor dem Allamerikanischen Parlament in Panama auf dem Faith and Freedom Summit IV © BQ/Esther Schirmacher

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useful to important partners. Specifically, the SG and Dr Dennis Petri agreed in Panama City that the ISHR would submit the report 'Countering the myth of religious indifference in Nigerian terror (10/2019–9/2023)' on violations of the human right to religious freedom in Nigeria, which was produced over four years by ORFA, as a civil society contribution at the next high-level ACHPR meeting in Gambia. The report can thus rise to the level of attention of political decisionmakers across the African continent as a direct and reliable source of information on religious freedom issues.

### Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** Matthias Böhning from the ISHR and Dennis Petri from the IIRF are participating in the Faith and Freedom Summit IV at the Pan-American Parliament in Panama, together with Thomas Schirmacher, president of both organizations © BQ/Esther Schirmacher
- **Photo 2:** IIRF Director Dennis Petri and IIRF President Thomas Schirmacher in conversation with Minister Ricarda A. Landera M. at the Faith and Freedom Summit IV in the Panamanian National Assembly © BQ/IIRF
- **Photo 3:** ISHR chairmen Thomas Schirmacher and Matthias Böhning with ministers and representatives of the Panamanian government in the Pan-American Parliament in Panama © BQ/Esther Schirmacher
- **Photo 4:** Thomas Schirmacher speaks before the Pan-American Parliament in Panama at the Faith and Freedom Summit IV © BQ/Esther Schirmacher
- Picture gallery of the event: <https://thomasschirmacher.net/?p=23610>

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