

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

Phone: +49 4106 804806 • Fax: +49 4106 804807
Email: info@bonn-profiles.net • <https://bonn-profiles.net>

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A word to the critics of the World Watch List

Schirmmacher responds to media criticism of Open Doors' World Watch List

(Bonn, 11.03.2026) In a recently published report, sociologist of religion and president of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher, has responded to worldwide criticism of the World Watch List (WWL) persecution index. The WWL is published annually by Open Doors and reviewed by IIRF researchers.

In the report entitled “A word to the critics of the World Watch List – and a way forward,” Schirmmacher writes in his introduction: “I have been following comments by critics of the World Watch List (WWL) in the global media for many years. I am interested in the global media reaction because the yearly WWL is the most quoted tool regarding freedom of religion or belief (FoRB—the official term used by the United Nations), even though it only re-searches the situation of Christians. I am sympathetic towards any serious effort to record restrictions on religious freedom worldwide and advocate on behalf of churches. However, I do not consider the issues discussed below as being in any way part of WWL or its partners, but as an outsider professor of the sociology of religions. I also would like to state from the outset that I would like to see this expanded to include a global study and ranking of all religions and worldviews.”

Schirmmacher then addresses the critics' arguments in six points and calls for much more investment in recording and researching restrictions on religious freedom. In addition, the International Director of the IIRF, Prof. Dr. Dennis P. Petri, discusses in an

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Text & Technology:

Titus Vogt (ViSdP)
Vorderer Kamp 52a, 25479 Ellerau
Tel.: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 06
Fax: +49 / 4106 / 80 48 07
E-Mail: Titus.Vogt@bucer.de



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Business Coalition of the World Evangelical Alliance (Bonn, Hamburg) business.worlddea.org

Evangelical Missiology, Journal of missiotop – Evangelical Forum for Missions, Cultures and Religions (Evangelical Alliance in Germany) missiotop.org

Evangelical Review of Theology (New York, Bonn) theology.worlddea.org/evangelical-review-of-theology

Giving Hands – International Charity (Bonn) gebende-haende.de

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International Institute for Islamic Studies (IIS) (Bonn) islaminstiute.net

International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) (Bonn, Vancouver, San José – Costa Rica) iirf.global

International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF) (Bonn/Toronto) ijrf.org

International Secretariat of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) ishr.org

Islam and Christianity journal.islaminstiute.net

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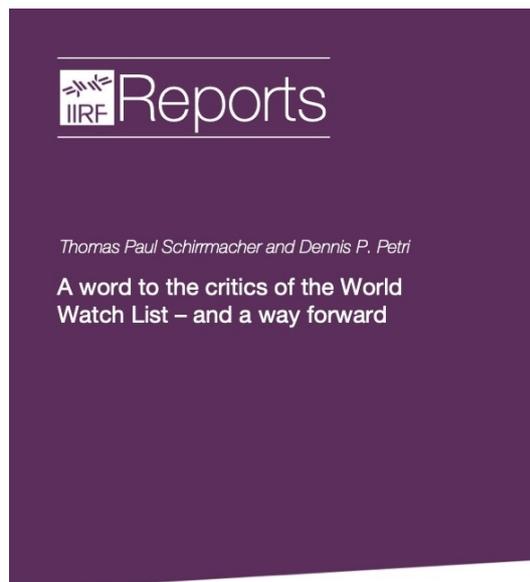
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Yearbook Persecution and Discrimination of Christians and Yearbook Religious Freedom iirf.global/jahrbuch

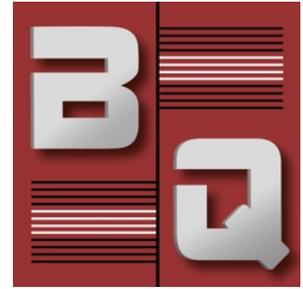


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appendix the question of whether Christians are indeed the most persecuted religious group worldwide.

Downloads and Links:

- IIRF Reports Vol. 15 – 2026/3: “A word to the critics of the World Watch List – and a way forward”: <https://iirf.global/?p=6890>
- BQ 896 – 1/2026: “IIRF has published audit statement on the Open Doors World Watch List 2026”: <https://bonn-profiles.net/?p=10841>

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