

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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The Persecution of Christians makes its Debut as a Topic of Discussion in the Swedish Parliament

(Bonn, 14.12.2012) For the first time in history, the topic of the persecution of Christians and religious freedom were made a topic within the Swedish Parliament in a seminar for members of parliament and staff. The seminar occurred upon the initiative of the two Christian-Democrat representatives in the Swedish Parliament, Annelie Enochson and Andreas Carlson, and was organized by the Swedish Evangelical Alliance and their public relations head Jacob Rudolfsson. At the center of the seminar was the Report of the Special UN Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, which was handed out to participants.

The round of experts consisted of: Katherine Cash, religious freedom expert with the Swedish Mission Council and Swedish representative on the panel for freedom of religions and belief for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, Thomas Schirrmacher, Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Soheila Fors, university lecturer on honor-related violence, Nasrin Sjögren, a convert (for Open Doors), Katarina Tracz, a project leader of the Stockholm Free World Forum, and Gabriel Donner, an attorney specializing in work for individuals seeking asylum for religiously motivated reasons.

In his remarks on the state of religious freedom around the world, Schirrmacher reminded hearers that the (Worldwide) Evangelical Alliance, which was founded in 1846, took a stand in 1858 for six women who had converted to Catholicism. On account of their conversion and according to the penal code, the highest Swedish court, the King's Supreme Court, had expelled them from the country. Protests and activities organized across Europe by the Alliance were – according to researchers – a significant factor for the Swedish Parliament's completely abolishing the punishment for leaving the Lutheran National Church of Sweden in 1860 – a large step in Europe towards complete religious freedom.



Preliminary discussion in the Church of Saint Clare: (from left) Minister Attefall, singer Ingemar Olsson, Thomas Schirrmacher (© Chancellery of Swedish Government)



A joint platform for the following Bonn organizations on the basis of the Evangelical Alliance:

Commission for Religious Freedom of the German and the Austrian Evangelical Alliance
www.ead.de/akref

Culture and Science Publ.
www.vkwoonline.de

Giving Hands – International Charity
www.gebende-haende.de

Help Worldwide – International Charity
www.hilfe-weltweit.org

Institute for Emergency Counselling, Terminal Care and Grief Counselling
www.bucer.de/ist

Institute for Pro-life and Family Studies
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International Institute for Islamic Studies of the World Evangelical Alliance
www.islaminstitute.net

International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance
www.iirf.eu

Martin Bucer Seminary
www.bucer.de

Pro Mundis e. V.
www.thomasschirrmacher.net

Theological Commission of "Hope for Europe" (European Evangelical Alliance)
www.hfe.org

Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance
www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/tc/

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Subsequent to the consultation, a light manifestation and march with torches and a rally took place on the forecourt of the Royal Palace, in which 300 converts who had fled to Sweden participated. They had been called together by Set My People Free, an agency supporting converts and led by Sudanese Kamal Fahmi, one of the main speakers. The gathering served to demonstrate for the right to change religions.

The torchlight procession ended at the Church of Saint Clare across from the main train station. What transpired there was the opening of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church with around 1,000 attendees at what was the largest activity in Sweden on the topic of the persecution of Christians and religious freedom. In addition to a list of personal reports – above all by converts from Islam to Christianity living in Sweden but still living under threats – the federal Minister Stefan Attefall spoke as the representative for the Swedish government, and Thomas Schirmacher spoke for the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the Worldwide



Panel in the Swedish Reichstag: Soheila Fors, Thomas Schirmacher, Katherine Cash (© Swedish Evangelical Alliance)

Evangelical Alliance. The evening was musically framed by one of the most well known Swedish singers, Ingemar Olsson. Attefall called upon all people of good will to stand up for religious freedom. Furthermore, they should take the situation of those seeking asylum in Sweden seriously on account of the fact that a change of religion is life-threatening in their home countries. Stefan Attefall is the Minister for Public Administration and responsible for the relationships the Swedish government has with religious communities. In the last legislative period, he was the Chairman of the Parliamentary Group of Christian Democrats in the Swedish Parliament.

In his address, Schirmacher reported on the seven pillars of the Worldwide Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in the struggle for religious freedom and for solidarity with persecuted Christians.

Prayer ranks first, and since the earliest days it has been a component of ecclesiastical liturgy and is expressed in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. In the second place is explicit solidarity with those affected by offering assistance and training. Thirdly, there is work with the media. Fourthly, there is the legal defense of those affected before courts as well as other forms of advocacy. At this point Advocacy International has its own network of thousands of lawyers to fall back on. And fifthly, there is political activity. Since Christians are against violent self-defense and advocate the separation of church and state through the state monopoly on the use of force, they cannot protect themselves. Rather, they have to call upon states to defend their human rights. Where one's own state does not

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intervene, Christians turn towards other states with their plea to apply pressure to other states. Prayer, legal defense, media activities, and political involvement are all only possible where there is sound information. For this reason the sixth pillar is the WEA's investment in global research. Seventhly, and finally, the WEA has a 'Peace Building Track' in order to actualize a space for local, political peace between adherents of different religions, for whom nothing is more important than to get to know each other.

The Church of Saint Clare is an Evangelically-oriented community within the Swedish National Church and one of the most attended churches in Sweden. It is known for its advocacy for asylum seekers, the homeless, and the socially deprived. It maintains the most important food assistance center in the center of Stockholm.

Report from the Swedish Government (Swedish):

<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/14888/a/203112>

Links:

- Wikipedia on Attefall: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stefan_Attefall
- Enochson webpage: www.annelie.kristdemokrat.se

Downloads:

- [Photo 1](#): Preliminary discussion in the Church of Saint Clare: (from left) Minister Attefall, singer Ingemar Olsson, Thomas Schirmmacher (© Chancellery of Swedish Government)
- [Photo 2](#): Panel in the Swedish Reichstag: Soheila Fors, Thomas Schirmmacher, Katherine Cash (© Swedish Evangelical Alliance)
- [Photo 3](#): The organizing members of parliament and Schirmmacher
- [Photo 4](#): Minister Attefall addressing the audience
- [Photo 5](#): Thomas Schirmmacher with translator and organizer Jacob Rudolffson
- [Photo 6](#): The light manifestation
- [Photo 7](#): The rally

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