

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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Panel on Cyber-Religion by the International Institute for Religious Freedom at the Global Media Forum

IIRF Reports no. 8 just published [\[here\]](#)

(Bonn, 10.09.2013) The three-day Global Media Forum in Bonn, Germany, hosted 2.000 top journalists from 110 countries. The congress sought to examine the role the media play as they broadcast images and disseminate messages to a rapidly



The workshop: Schirmmacher, Yakubu, Rothfuß, Schirmmacher

changing world. The congress is organised yearly by Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster.

Every year the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), an official partner of the Global Media Forum, hosts a panel, this year under the topic: *The spread of extremism and of peace through internet and social media*.

Internet and social media play a central role in spreading religious and non-religious

extremism globally. Both tools can also be used to cool down tensions and to develop peace among different religious, ethnic or national groups. Individual people can make a difference here and launch large social media campaigns.

The example of a former Christian pastor who had announced his plan to burn a copy of the Quran in May 2011, and the global media attention following this event, was evaluated and contrasted with a discussion of how Christians and Muslims worldwide did better at the same time to calm down tensions between religious, ethnic or national groups and prevented any killing as a result.

Hundreds of examples from the internet and social media were shown on the screen by the experts, e.g. a campaign where people in Nigeria post on a mass scale banners like "I like Christians" and "I like Muslims". Most impressive was a campaign by Israelis "I love Iranians". Hundred thousands of Iranians posted back "I like Israelis".

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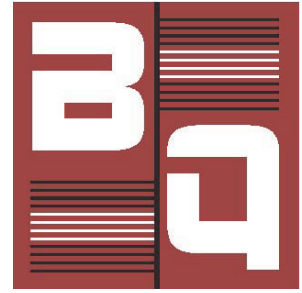
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Prof. Dr. Christine Schirmmacher, teaching at the State University of Bonn and leading the International Institute for Islamic Studies of the World Evangelical Alliance, focused her contribution on the spreading of worldviews, religious and political opinions through the medium of the internet. She explained the impact of this tool on the Muslim community since the internet for the first time in history creates a real worldwide “umma” (Muslim community) and connects its members all the way from the island of Java/Indonesia to the mosques in Canada or the Sufi groups in Mali. She showed how Muslim extremists manipulate their followers by the internet and how they use the current technology of new media on a global scale in order to radicalize their audience. Major theologians like Qaradawi often work out of nowhere and influence immigrants all over the globe. Schirmmacher contrasted the influence of Qaradawi with the influence of Quran scholar Abdullah Saeed, who spoke at the workshop 2011, propagating religious freedom and tolerance in the name of Islam.

Joseph Yakubu, the research coordinator of the IIRF from Nigeria, introduced the participants into the world of Nigeria, the most religious country in the world, and its internet use with calls to extremism as well as large campaigns towards peacefully living together. Boko Haram was portrayed as an extremist group which recruits young people through the web and launches campaigns against the government. The internet, social media and SMS are used to further “othering and stereotyping of enemies”. ‘IT’ is used to spread rumours on planned supposed attacks or secret goals of the enemy. At the same time the internet and social media are the greatest hope to overcome conflicts, as millions of Nigerians fight for peacefully living together, e.g. the website MuslimsAgainstTerror.com.

In his presentation Professor Rainer Rothfuß, professor of geography at the State University of Tübingen and member of the academic board of IIRF, argued that the world has entered the age of mass communication and modern media. Today, the world has 5,600,000,000 cell phone users, 2,267,233,742 internet users and almost 1,000,000,000 face book users. He showed how powerful social media and internet are in religious and other conflicts. At the University of Vienna over 6,000 Islamist hate instigating web videos have been collected and analyzed within the “Jihadism online” project. Professor Rothfuß stressed that the present and future challenge to secure peaceful intercultural and interreligious coexistence on a local and global level calls for a strict containment of cyber-extremism but also for a transformation of intercultural communication to promote peace across “borders in minds”. Among the hard



Yakubu left and Schirmmacher after an interview with Nigerian State Radio

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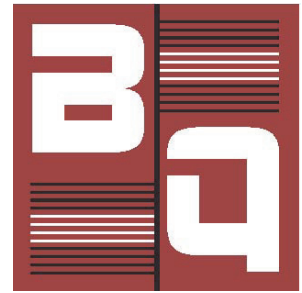
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IIRF as partner left forth from below

measures should be a more effective monitoring to detect critical organizations and initiatives early enough to prevent later real terrorist attacks.

At the end, the moderator Prof. Thomas Schirmmacher, director of IIRF, used the “Global Charter of Conscience” (charterofconscience.org), that had been launched in the European Parliament some days before, and that gathered major signers from all over the world through the internet, as a good example for religious and non-religious leaders to propagate peaceful engagement in the global civil public square.

Downloads and Links:

- [Photo 1](#): The workshop: Schirmmacher, Yakubu, Rothfuß, Schirmmacher
- [Photo 2](#): The workshop: Schirmmacher, Yakubu, Rothfuß, Schirmmacher
- [Photo 3](#): The workshop: Schirmmacher, Yakubu, Rothfuß, Schirmmacher
- [Photo 4](#): Yakubu left and Schirmmacher after an interview with Nigerian State Radio
- [Photo 5](#): IIRF as partner left forth from below
- [Photo 6](#): The Schirmmachers in discussion with the director of GMF Bettermann
- Full report in IIRF Reports vol. 8 ([pdf](#))
- Extract from the 300 pp. report of GMF ([pdf](#))
- IIRF Reports (English): www.iirf.eu; IIRF Bulletins (German): www.iirf.eu

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