



ISHR NEWSLETTER

June 2018

IMPORTANT DATES

1-30 June

LGBT Pride month (US)

12 June

World Day Against Child
Labor (UN)

17 June

Day of Remembrance for
the Uprising of 1953 in East
Germany (Germany)

20 June

World Refugee Day (UN)

26 June

UN Int. Day in Support of
Victims of Torture (UN)



Photo taken in camp Qadian in northern Iraq, during the most recent humanitarian aid trip of ISHR Germany

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ISHR SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES & IDPS

Last year on June 19, the day before World Refugee Day, the UNHCR reported that the number of forcibly displaced people has reached 65.5 million people worldwide – the highest number ever recorded. Refugees and displaced people need our support now more than ever. Read more about the efforts of the ISHR to support refugees and IDPs in northern Iraq under ‘From the Sections’.

"I have heard it said we are the uninvited, the unwelcome - that we should take our misfortune elsewhere; but then I hear your mother's voice over the tide whispering 'Oh, but if they saw, even half of what you have, if only they saw, they would say kinder things, surely...' "
– Excerpt from *Sea Prayer*, by Khaled Hosseini

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Excerpt from the Laudation in Honor of Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, S.D.B., Recipient of the Stephanus Prize 2018



Bishop Thomas Schirrmacher congratulates Cardinal Zen, emeritus Bishop of Hong-Kong at the Stephanus Prize award ceremony

Most Reverend Eminence,

Last year I visited the directors of the Religious Affairs Bureau of the Communist Party in Cuba, which is in the process of loosening its control over religious entities. The new archbishop of Havana, who also chairs Cuba's Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been outspoken on human rights. Among other things, he spoke up publicly in defense of our partners in the International Society of Human Rights (ISHR), the brave "Ladies in White" who are mothers and relatives of political prisoners in Cuba.

Just a few weeks ago, I spoke to the National Political Academy of the Communist Party of Vietnam, addressing party leaders

and doctoral students at the Human Rights Institute on religious freedom issues. The director who hosted me there had visited the ISHR in Frankfurt in 2017. Vietnam is clearly moving towards greater respect for religious believers and their faith. Surely there is a long way to go, but the direction is clear.

We wish that we could report similar developments in China. Granted, China today is not what it was under Mao, when millions of Christians were killed as the government extinguished all forms of official, visible Christianity. But some troubling things have happened recently...

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, S.D.B., Bishop emeritus of Hong Kong (China), born 1932 in Yang King-pang, Shanghai, is receiving the Stephanus Prize in honor of his courage and endurance in defending religious freedom and in stepping forward on behalf of human rights defenders. Cardinal Zen has been first a clear voice against the discrimination of Christians, second a defender of religious freedom for all faiths, and third a symbol of human rights in general far beyond religious issues alone.

Let me give you an example of the second topic. At the ISHR, we are especially involved in advocacy for adherents of Falun Gong and against the evil of organ harvesting, including killing prisoners in order to take their organs. This practice has been documented by researchers and experts independent of the Falun Gong religious community, such as by the former UN Rapporteur on torture, Manfred Nowak, professor of public international law in Vienna. We welcome the representatives of Falun Gong who are among us today. You will not be surprised to hear that Cardinal Zen has raised his voice against the Chinese policy of outlawing and persecuting Falun Gong. We thank him for this bold step.

Let's move on to human rights in general. Every year on July 1, you can see the Cardinal marching in the first row of the Hong Kong march of the Civil Human Rights Front, an alliance of virtually all human rights organizations in Hong Kong. In 2014, he said to the gathered protesters, "It is high time we really show that we want to be free and not slaves. ... We must unite together." During his speech, protesters were fired on with tear gas and he asked them to disperse.

Cardinal Zen not only helped to unite human rights activists, but stood up on their behalf in China—not only for Christians but for all people of good will, young and old, unknown and prominent.

Your Eminence, you show no hatred, but only the deepest wish for a just and peaceful future for your people and their leadership. Your entirely peaceful and respectful, but bold and risky action in standing up for those who are oppressed and persecuted makes you more than worthy to receive the Stephanus Prize, named for the first Christian martyr. You teach all of us that the Christian faith is not a search for power and money, but a peaceful dissemination and standing up for nothing other than the truth.

*Thomas Schirrmacher
President of the International Council of ISHR*

FROM THE SECTIONS

ISHR Belarus

Presentation of a book published in honor Prof. Ivan Kotlyar, lifelong human rights scholar & educator



Prof. Kotlyar speaks at the presentation.

Photo: Pavel Pernikau, ISHR Belarus

On April 21, 2018, the presentation of the book “Personality: Kotlyar I.I.”, honoring Professor Ivan Kotlyar, President of ISHR Belarus, was held in the Brest central municipal library named after A.S. Pushkin .

The authors of the book are Svetlana Ptichkina, senior lecturer at Brest State Technical University, and Arsentii Golovchenko, board member of ISHR Belarus. The presentation was conducted by the Scientific and Expert Council of ISHR Belarus and the Directorate of the Brest Central Municipal Library named after A.S. Pushkin.

Many academics and public figures from Brest and Minsk gathered for the event, including prominent featured speakers, all of whom shared their appreciation for the

book and the contributions of Professor Kotlyar. The materials of the presentation were also widely covered by the media; the reportage on the presentation was broadcasted on the “Bug-TV” channel, and articles were published in the newspapers “Brestskii Vestnik” (Brest) and “Nastavniskaya Gazeta” (Minsk).

Prof. Kotlyar (born 1941) can rightly be called a pioneer in the field of human rights in modern Belarus. The problems of the theory, protection, and realization of human rights become the basis of his activities and the meaning of the entirety of his life since 1973. In 1996, he published the very first scientific and methodical publications on the problem of human rights in the country, which were the teaching aids “Human Rights” and “Human Rights: Modern views and mechanisms of protection”.

During parliamentary hearings in 1998, he introduced the need for human rights courses in the education system, and subsequently developed the curriculum for “Human Rights” for higher educational institutions in the country on assignment from the Ministry of Education. Over the years, he conducted six domestic and international theoretical and practical conferences on human rights at Brest State University named after A.S. Pushkin, and organized nine seminars for human rights lectures for higher education from 2009-2017. All of their materials were published. He has been passing his experience and knowledge to students for over 30 years.



Prof. Kotlyar standing in front of a selection of his primary & most recent publications.

Photo: Pavel Pernikau, ISHR Belarus

22 years ago, he created the Republican Public Association for the Protection of Human Rights – the Belarusian section of the International Society for Human Rights, which he continues to successfully manage. Prof. Kotlyar has also received international and domestic recognition for his activities and contributions to academia, teaching, and human rights. This included receiving the Honorary Diploma of the International Biographical Centre in Cambridge (UK) in 2001, among many others.

He is a respected leader in human rights in Belarus, and he is the creator of the national education system in this field. According to the general opinion of the participants in the presentation, his experience and work in the field of human rights education and his scientific understanding of this area should be more fully applied and disseminated by international organizations*.

*Text has been summarized from its original version by the editor; to see the original text with additional photos, please visit: <https://humanrights-online.org/en/presentation-of-the-book-personality-kotlyar-i-i/>

Sergey Simanovsky
Executive Secretary of the Board of ISHR Belarus

ISHR Germany

Update on support for refugees/IDPs and victims of IS in northern Iraq (Kurdistan)



Muho Boga (left) & Katrin Bornmüller (center) visiting women who experienced horrific abuse by IS

Over April and May of this year, the German section of the ISHR has undertaken two separate trips to northern Iraq to provide humanitarian aid and various forms of support for refugees and IDPs, including women and children who were previously victims of enslavement by the so-called Islamic State (IS). At the beginning of April, Katrin Bornmüller, the President of the ISHR working group in Wittlich and board member of the German section, traveled for the 8th time to northern Iraq in April with Muho Boga, who is originally from Iraq. Together, they visited and provided support to

many families, especially women and children, who have been liberated from enslavement, trafficking, and horrendous sexual and physical abuse at the hands of IS through ransom payments. Ms. Bornmüller has been consistently providing financial assistance to many liberated families and women, many of whose lives had been destroyed by IS; many have family members who are still held captive.

From the end of April through the end of May, Khalil Al-Rasho, the Director of Humanitarian Aid to Iraq of ISHR Germany, was also working on the ground in northern Iraq to support and supervise the transportation and distribution of a semi-truck load of aid sent from Germany for refugees, including 2 tons of medical supplies and equipment. These were distributed to several health centers which serve refugees and the local population in Kurdistan. Mr. Al-Rasho also coordinated the visit of Ms. Frauke Havenkost, who is a consultant of Ms. Marie Luise von Halem (MdL, Member of State Parliament in Brandenburg for the Green Party), as well as a board member of the Heinrich Böll Foundation Brandenburg. Together, they met with the local UNHCR office to discuss the situation of refugees and to generate suggestions for the role of the state of Brandenburg in providing support in the future. Meetings were also held with other organizations and authorities, including with Dr. Nazaar, Director of the Health Directorate Dohuk, as well as visits to several of the refugee/IDP camps in the area.



Fltr: A. Nandy (UNHCR), F. Havenkost, & K. Al-Rasho (ISHR)



Shaha Al-Rasho (center) helped distribute aid from ISHR Germany to the families of children who were liberated from IS, now living in camp Shekhan

After Ms. Havenkost's return to Germany, Mr. Al-Rasho coordinated the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Klopff, who visited patients and distributed medication to health centers, including a children's clinic, in the camps Essian, Shekhan and Sharia. Following the visit of these two doctors, (who have made multiple trips to the region to provide medical assistance to refugees in conjunction with ISHR Germany), Mr. Al-Rasho initiated a number of new projects. One of these was cosmetology workshops for women in the camps Essian and Qadian, led by his daughter Shaha, who is a certified hairdresser in Germany. Mr. Al-Rasho also set up a computer lab with 10 computers donated by the German section in camp Essian, to be used for an upcoming program to teach computer skills for refugees beginning in June.



A wall in Bahshika reads: *We have returned, we are building, we will remain.*

He and Shaha also visited so-called ‘wild-camps’ and distributed aid items, such as clothing and blankets, to needy families. Furthermore, they traveled to the liberated areas of Bahzani and Bahshika. Though liberated, these areas are still dangerous at night for the inhabitants, who are at risk of kidnapping or violence from IS fighters, who still live in hiding in the area. They also delivered



Conclusion of the sewing course project in camp Essian

an organ (the instrument) to a Syrian Orthodox church in Bahzani, to replace one destroyed by an IS attack. Near the end of the trip, the three month long sewing course project initiated by ISHR Germany in camp Essian was concluded on May 19, and the participants received their certificates (see photo right). See one last extra special impression of our work in Iraq at the end of page 6.

Katrin Bornmüller, Member of the Board of ISHR Germany & Khalil Al-Rasho, Director of Humanitarian Aid to Iraq of ISHR Germany

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

Latin America

Polarized presidential elections in Colombia

Colombians are faced with two candidates that reflect the polarization of the country during the second round of presidential elections on June 17. The political scientist María González stated that "there are two visions of the country and the world that candidates have, and it is explained by who they are and where they come from".



Iván Duque, candidate for the right-wing Centro-Democratico party. Photo: Fontecha19 & Tokota via Wikimedia Commons

Iván Duque, 41 years old, appears to be the emergent leader of the most recent political cycle in Colombia. Duque is a lawyer and an economist; he is conservative and religious man. He is in favor of fiscal reform and is a firm opponent of the legalization of drugs. He belongs to the right-wing Democratic Center (Centro Democrático) party, whose primary leader is former president Álvaro Uribe. The party presents a clear preference towards economic programs and national security, as well as strong opposition to the peace agreement signed by the government in 2016 with the former guerrilla group, FARC.

The peace agreement has received widespread criticism; many regard its application as allowing impunity for those who have committed crimes against humanity. Duque has promised that if he becomes president, he will make changes in these areas.

Gustavo Petro, age 58, is currently considered to be the most influential leader of the Colombian left. He is the leader of Colombia Humana. Petro is an economist with a specialization in public administration, who gained experience in politics as the mayor of Bogotá from 2012 to 2015. In his youth, he joined the guerrilla group M-19, which is sadly remembered for the assault on the Palace of Justice in Bogotá in 1985, in which approximately 99 people died. Should he win the election, Petro proposes to convene a Constituent Assembly to promote changes in the areas of health, education, social justice, and the economy.



Gustavo Petro (left) and the logo of the left-wing Colombia Humana coalition
Photos via Wikimedia Commons

Petro was close to Hugo Chavez and has maintained a friendship with current Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro. Petro's detractors claim that he launched the ‘21st Century socialism’ model in Venezuela.

Many Colombians fear that if Petro reaches the presidency, he will turn the country into another Venezuela, which has recently spiraled into economic disaster under Maduro.

June 17, 2018 will be a historic day for Colombia, because it will decide whether the country will follow the democratic path or the model of 21st Century socialism.

Update: Iván Duque won the election on June 17 with 54% of the vote; Gustavo Petro received 41%. 4.2% submitted abstentions (i.e. votes for 'none of the above').

Government of Daniel Ortega massacres the civilian population in Nicaragua



A woman stands near a burning barricade holding the Nicaraguan flag. Photo: Voice of America, Via Wikimedia Commons

In Nicaragua there is chaos due to the rebellion against Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo, who are clinging to power by using force against their defenseless people.

Nicaraguans are tired of corruption and illicit enrichment by the Ortega-Murillo family and government officials. They protested with peaceful demonstrations that were met with bullets, tear gas, and beatings by the national police.

University students awakened the national consciousness of a people who were overwhelmed by poverty and social injustice. Ortega's opposition are primarily students and the defenseless civil society, who are struggling with unprecedented repression.

The students' weapons are trenches made of cobblestones. Those of the police are heavy weapons of war and tear gas. Ortega has ordered the police to shoot to kill, and there are already nearly 170 dead, mostly students, according to independent sources. Furthermore, Ortega has recruited Cuban and Venezuelan mercenaries to attack the civilian population. A pattern has been identified among the bodies of young people shot by firearms of bullet wounds specifically to the head, neck, and chest, confirming that the police and snipers shoot to kill the young unarmed protestors.

Representatives of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights visited Nicaragua and noted the serious violations of the human rights of the civilian population. In their statement, they established "that the government repression during a month of protests in Nicaragua was characterized by the excessive use of force by state security and "armed third parties", which resulted in hundreds of dead and wounded, and hundreds more detained. It also caused illegal and arbitrary detentions, practices of torture, cruel and inhumane treatment, as well as censorship and attacks on the press.

The city most affected by the aggression of the police is the city of Masaya, which has suffered weeks of attacks perpetrated by the police accompanied by paramilitaries. They have plundered the city and caused fires. Masaya is located 25 km from the capital. It has around 200 barricades blocking the streets; neighbors have organized to ensure safety and to collect food for the young people who care for the trenches. The churches of the city have opened their doors to the victims of police aggression.



With an improvised memorial on the road to Masaya, thousands of people remember the victims of the protests. Photo: Voice of America, Via Wikimedia Commons

In the main cities of the country, barricades have been erected to defend against attacks by the national police.

Roadblocks have prevented more than 6,000 trucks and cargo vehicles from delivering goods to destination ports, which have already caused a loss of 70 million dollars. **If there is no intervention by international organizations in Nicaragua, it will suffer a bloodbath incurred by the police, paramilitaries and foreign mercenaries.**

Haydee Marin

Vice President of the International Council

Coordinator of the ISHR Latin American Regional Committee

ISHR EVENTS

President of ISHR, Thomas Schirrmacher, lectures on religious freedom at Vietnam's Academy of Politics



The lecture hall during the seminar. Photo: Martin Warnecke

Press Release published by the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (partial):

The Institute of Human Rights along with the Institute of Religion and Beliefs co-organized a scientific seminar titled “Limits of Religious Freedom Rights” on March 6th, 2018 with the participation of lecturers and researchers from these two institutes, a large number of master’s students majoring in Laws of Human Rights and Religious studies.

Co-chairmen of the seminar were Assoc. Prof, Dr. Tuong Duy Kien, General Director of the Institute of Human Rights, Assoc. Prof, Dr. Do Lan Hien, General Director of the Institute of Religion and Belief and Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, President of the International Society for Human Rights (Frankfurt), Associate Secretary General of the Theological Concerns Department, The World Evangelical Alliance (New York, Bonn), President of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn, Cape Town, Colombo, Brasilia), Chair of the Board of Advisors of the Central Council of Oriental Christians in Germany (Munich), extraordinary professor of the sociology of religion at the State University of the West (Timisoara).

In his opening speech, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuong Duy Kien briefly presented some outstanding international cooperation activities in research and teaching of the Institute of Human Rights recently. He also welcomed the visit of Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher to Vietnam, considering this as a good opportunity for the two sides to exchange and share issues relating to human rights and religious freedom in the current global context.

At the seminar, Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher overviewed issues about religious freedom in the world in general and in Germany in particular. He specifically emphasized Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Accordingly, he shared the views on the existing limits of religious freedom rights and the conflicts between religious freedom and other social issues. He also pointed out the necessary limits for religious freedom rights, and condemned extreme nationalism and its negative consequences for the safety and development of countries in the world.

To read the full press release, please visit: <http://english.hcma.vn/home/news/scientific-seminar-limits-of-religious-freedom-rights-249>

Contributing source: Le Dat (The Institute of Human Rights)

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A SWEET SMILE TO PASS ON

To close this issue, we would like to share one of the extra special moments captured by our colleague, Khalil Al-Rasho, in Khanke refugee camp during his month-long trip in Iraq. We hope it brings a smile as big as his to your faces, and we wish you all the best for your work.

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