

Schirmmacher examines Korea tensions firsthand, on both sides

Thomas Schirmmacher, head of the WEA's Department of Theological Concerns, recently visited North and South Korea, interacting with citizens of both countries. He also met with Lieutenant General Michael A. Bills, commanding general of the US Army detachment stationed in Korea and of the Korean border troops, and Jeong Kyeong Doo, Joint Chief of Staff of the South Korean Army.

Schirmmacher has travelled to the line of demarcation between the two countries several times. In fact, he observed, 'By now I know the area so well that I could immediately tell that the shots recently fired at a fleeing North Korean officer were illegal, because the North Korean gunman could have achieved the appropriate angle only from South Korean ground.'

Schirmmacher noted that Koreans retain hope that reunification like the one that brought two Germans together in 1989 could still occur. From a geopolitical perspective, he observed, reunification happened quickly in Germany once the Soviet Union no longer undergirded East Germany, and the same thing could happen if China terminated its support of North Korea.

However, he also pointed out that the Koreas have already been divided much longer than the Germans were; that the separation began with a cruel war that has left abiding wounds; and that propaganda is more deeply rooted in North Korea than it was in East Germany.

'In North Korea, brainwashing has succeeded to a shocking extent', Schirmmacher commented. 'One meets very few people who, even behind closed doors when everything is quite safe, utter any critical statements. No country in all history has managed to isolate its population from external information to such an extent. The result is that anything like a civil society—even a very small percentage of the population among which something new could crystallize—does not exist.'

Consistent with this observation, Christians from South Korea who have had encounters with relatives in North Korea have told Schirmmacher that they 'were unable to find a common basis for discussion'. This is largely a result of their experience of isolation: the North Koreans have no idea what is happening in the rest of the world and don't even know that there are countries where everyone drives a car.

'In East Germany', Schirmmacher said, 'people watched West German television and therefore knew what life was like elsewhere. That effect is completely absent in North Korea.'

With regard to the situation of Christians in North Korea, he explained, 'Some worship services in the capital city of Pyongyang are tolerated, but only



Thomas Schirmmacher with UN vehicle at the border between North and South Korea © BQ/Warnecke



International guests and the Board of the National Prayer Breakfast in Korea © BQ/Warnecke

under government observation, with sermons approved in advance, so in effect there is no religious freedom. The Christians who are in penal camps or are somehow perceived as a threat are in bad condition. Moreover, all contacts between North Korea and the US have been cut, preventing any communication by Korean Christians living in the US.

‘On the other hand, in the very few projects in which South Koreans are involved, nothing has changed at this point. The North Koreans’ militant rhetoric refers exclusively to America and hardly at all to South Korea. The North Koreans are certainly not faring well, but so far the conflict of words with the US has had no aggravating effects on them.’

Schirmmacher said that South Korean churches vehemently oppose military intervention in the conflict. ‘There is intensive prayer for a peaceful solution in almost every worship service I experience’, he stated. ‘Furthermore, the South Koreans in general, and especially the churches, are desperately unhappy that the US and North Korea are engaging in heated rhetorical exchanges without even informing South Korea. The capital city of Seoul, with one third of South Korea’s population is situated less than 25 kilometres from the North Korean border, and a few residential areas are extending right up to the border, so the capital area would almost inevitably be severely damaged by any escalation of war. Thus, when Trump says he wants to wipe out North Korea, it is hard for South Koreans to understand what he means.’

Schirmmacher feels that the South Korean churches’ protests against any consideration of warlike measures are helping to sustain peace. ‘This is certainly one reason why things are very quiet at the moment between the two countries’, he said. ‘It makes a difference that church leaders like me can report in North Korea what they have experienced in South Korea. The churches, to be sure, are quite in favour of South Korea having a combat-ready army, but it’s a comforting factor that religious entities from the Catholic Church to the Yoido Full Gospel Church—the world’s largest Pentecostal congregation—speak in unison regarding this matter.’

Schirmmacher believes that the Vatican could play a crucial role in conflict resolution, taking advantage of its ‘double face’ as both church and state. In addition to assisting practical projects such as Catholic hospitals operating in Pyongyang, he said, the Vatican can use its diplomatic capacities to facilitate secret negotiations.

Schirmmacher urged churches in South Korea and elsewhere to prepare in advance for the possibility of regime change or reunification in North Korea: ‘Even if freedom should result, the number of people equipped to help build a new North Korea would be very few. The churches should consider beforehand how they would deal with the situation immediately should it ever occur, and how to create opportunities as soon as possible for the emergence of civil society in North Korea.’



Thomas Schirmmacher and Richard Howell, representing the WEA, recently presented Pope Francis with the April 2018 issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, which contained the final report of the WEA-Vatican dialogue meetings of 2009 to 2016 and several commentaries on the report.
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Business Coalition adopts investment principles; WEA's Plutschinski honoured

The annual Christian Economic Forum took place on 22–24 July in St. Moritz, Switzerland. At the forum's closing banquet, Timo Plutschinski of the WEA's Business Coalition received the "Hope and a Future Award" for his work in bridging business and the church and envisioning their shared impact in building God's kingdom.

Prior to the Christian Economic Forum, the WEA Business Coalition gathered a group of Christian financial leaders to strategize and discuss faith-based investment guidelines from an evangelical point of view. The group adopted the following statement of principles:

Investment is the means of redistributing capital to where it can be most productive for the flourishing of humankind and the earth. It is fundamentally a moral decision.

We as Christian investors believe:

- *Scriptural wisdom and God speaking to us influence the way in which we invest.*
- *We have been privileged with significant wealth and power compared to the majority of our brothers and sisters worldwide.*
- *We have a redemptive role in partnering with God to establish His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.*
- *Our assets are entrusted to us and we have a responsibility to act as God's steward for current and future generations.*



Core Team: Dave Hodgson (Australia), Matthias Böhning (Germany), Robert Delhaas (The Netherlands), Peter Mugendi (Kenya), Luke Roush (USA), Tim Macready (Australia), Reuben Coulter (Kenya), Tom Blaisdell (USA), Anita Delhaas-van Dijk (The Netherlands), Timo Plutschinski (Germany), Wesley Smith (South Africa), Robert Collins (USA), Rosen Ivanov (Germany) © private

Therefore we will:

- *Invest so as to promote human dignity, flourishing and reconciliation in Christ.*
- *Recognize the value of creation and our responsibility to care for and restore our natural environment.*
- *Acknowledge our duty of care and responsibility to prevent harm for the benefit of our families, communities and nations.*
- *Demonstrate Christian distinctiveness (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control) while operating in the world.*
- *Reject unjust accumulation of wealth and exacerbation of inequality.*
- *Pursue excellence and value creation in investment.*
- *Act to influence our areas of responsibility.*
- *Intentionally measure our spiritual, economic, social and environmental impact of our investments, both intended and unintended.*

Those interested in participating in this initiative or offering ideas or comments can do so by contacting the Business Coalition at business@worldea.org.

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT THE WEA DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS FINANCIALLY

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- (3) Send a **cheque** to WEA Business Coalition, Achter de Weiden 47, 22869 Schenefeld, Germany

Ahmadiyya Muslims provide firm support for religious freedom

The worldwide battle for religious freedom involves a wide range of allies, including Muslims who are persecuted by other Muslims. Thomas Schirmmacher, as president of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) and Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), thanked one such group for their strong support of religious freedom in September 2018.

Schirmmacher addressed the 40,000 participants at the annual meeting of Ahmadiyya Muslims in Germany, just before the speech by their spiritual leader, Mirza Masrur Ahmad.

The Ahmadiyya movement within Islam originated in 1889 after Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908) declared himself to be a recipient of revelation. He also later identified himself as an incarnation of Christ, Krishna, and Mahdi and as a reappearance of Mohammad.

These beliefs have exposed the Ahmadiyyas to severe persecution by Sunni Muslims, who believe that there are no further prophets after Mohammad. Adherents of special variations of Islam that claim additional prophets frequently face even more vigorous discrimination in Islamic countries than Jews and Christians and are not categorized as a 'religion of the book' but as pagans and idolaters.

In contrast to the large majority of Sunni and Shiite theologians, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community campaigns for religious freedom, strictly rejects violence as a means of spreading Islam, and seeks to solicit adherents through intensive but fully voluntary and peaceful missionary work. The motto "Love for all, hatred for no one" is displayed on large banners at major Ahmadiyya events:

Thousands of Ahmadiyyas now enjoy religious freedom in Germany after having fled death threats in Pakistan. They continue to publicly oppose any use of violence or compulsion in religion.

Schirmmacher called on Pakistan to change its constitution, which makes Islam the state religion, declares that only Muslims have full rights, and states explicitly that Ahmadiyyas are not Muslims. Leading Ahmadiyyas thanked the ISHR, the IIRF and the World Evangelical Alliance for their efforts to protect Ahmadiyyas around the world.

Germany's Minister of Justice, Katarina Barley, also spoke to the assembly. Schirmmacher thanked the minister for representing the federal government at this assembly even though the mainline Muslim networks exert pressure to ignore the Ahmadiyyas.

On behalf of the WEA, Schirmmacher recently met for the second time with Mirza Masrur Ahmad, the fifth Caliph of Ahmadiyya Muslims, at the Caliph's headquarters in London. The discussion revolved around the common struggle for religious freedom.

Schirmmacher has repeatedly expressed his view that in countries like Pakistan and Indonesia, Ahmadiyya Muslims are often the first victims of persecution and then Christians are the next ones.



Thomas Schirmmacher addresses 40,000 participants at the Ahmadiyya Jalsa Salana in Karlsruhe just before the lecture by their spiritual leader, Kalif Mirza Masrur Ahmad © BQ/Warnecke



Schirmmacher converses with Germany's federal minister of justice, Katarina Barley, during the Ahmadiyya Jalsa Salana in Karlsruhe © BQ/ Warnecke

Peirong Lin, WEA's new human resource director, is also a theologian

The WEA's Department of Theological Concerns has added Dr Peirong Lin, a native of Singapore, to its staff as Human Resource Director for the whole department and as Research Coordinator for its academic branches. Peirong joined our staff in September and is based in Bonn.

Peirong is both a theologian and a passionate human development professional. She has the special gift of helping others to develop and implement concrete action plans. She is also experienced in coordinating expert groups.

Based on her acute awareness that one's actions are subconsciously influenced by one's beliefs, Peirong deeply understands the relevance of theology in everyday life. This conviction motivated her work in theology and religious studies at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium. She had previously earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's degree in organizational leadership.

Peirong's first human resources position was with World Vision, the international faith-based relief organization, for which she travelled frequently to assist staff members in various countries. In 2012, she moved to Brussels to commence her PhD studies. Earlier this year, she successfully defended her dissertation, which examined the phenomenon of 'mission drift' within World Vision and recommended ways to counteract that tendency.

We expect to benefit greatly from Peirong's unusual combination of human resources expertise and theological insights. Her first major assignment in her new job was to attend the symposium of the Asia Theological Association (ATA) in Manila, the Philippines.

You can contact Dr Peirong Lin at peironglin@worldea.org.



Peirong Lin contributing to an Asia Theological Association discussion of women's roles in the church © Asia Theological Association

WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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