

## Evangelical alliance launched in United Arab Emirates

On 13 December, WEA Secretary General Efraim Tendero visited the United Arab Emirates' Minister of State for Tolerance, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, and presented him with the bylaws of the newly launched National Evangelical Alliance of the UAE.

Tendero was in Abu Dhabi for the sixth annual Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, sponsored by the UAE and led by Abdallah bin Mahfudh bin Bayyah. One of the most prominent advocates for religious tolerance in the Muslim world, bin Bayyah was formerly vice president of his native Mauritania.

Tendero was a co-presenter at the forum along with Ahod 'Al Haj Murad' Ebrahim, formerly a commander of the Islamic revolutionary movement in Mindanao (in the southern Philippines). At the urging of Tendero (then head of the evangelical alliance in the Philippines) and other religious leaders, Ebrahim and his movement entered into negotiations with the government and eventually signed a peace agreement in 2014. Ebrahim is now chief minister of the Mindanao autonomous region.



From left to right: Thomas Schirmmacher, Ahod 'Al Haj Murad' Ebrahim, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan and Efraim Tendero. © Martin Warnecke

On the last day of the forum, organizers presented Tendero and Ebrahim with a special peace award for their efforts. After the forum ended, Tendero met personally with Al Nahyan to request official recognition of the new UAE evangelical alliance and to discuss other ways in which the UAE government could accommodate the estimated 250,000 evangelicals now living in that country.

'We are on the cusp of a new era in the UAE', Tendero commented. 'As religious freedom grows there, I hope that we can take a similar message to other Arabian Gulf states such as Bahrain, Qatar, and even Saudi Arabia.'

## Palestinian evangelical alliance gains official recognition

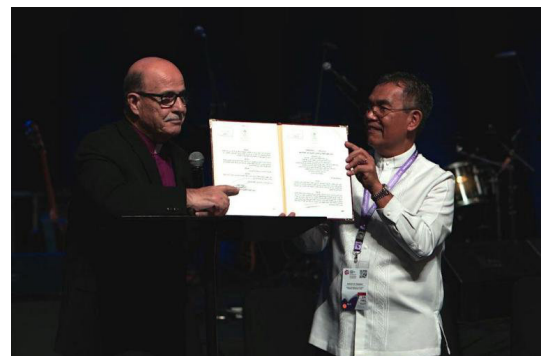
*(based on an article by Michael Gryboski for the Christian Post)*

The Palestinian Authority has officially granted legal recognition to Palestine's evangelical alliance, known as the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in the Holy Land.

Council President Munir Kakish announced the news during the WEA's General Assembly in Indonesia, stating that the Council had been seeking this recognition for twelve years.

'Our hearts are full of thankfulness to God for this new declaration', he added, thanking Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Dr Ramzi Khoury, general director of the Palestinian National Fund.

As a result of this official recognition, the Council can now grant marriage licenses, open bank accounts and legally purchase land registered in its name.



Munir Kakish, president of the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in the Holy Land, and Bishop Efraim Tendero, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, display a document from the Palestinian Authority granting the Council legal recognition in the Palestinian-occupied West Bank. © WEA

## Matenga assumes leadership of WEA Mission Commission



Thomas Schirmacher congratulates Jay Matenga on his appointment as the new director of the WEA's mission department. Jay is wearing his traditional symbols as a Maori chief. Schirmacher visited Matenga in New Zealand recently to discuss planning closer cooperation between the two departments. © Thomas Schirmacher

Jay Matenga has been named the new executive director of the WEA Mission Commission, but to those who do mission work within the WEA context, he is already a familiar name.

Raised in rural New Zealand, Matenga and his wife, Pauline, have been working in mission since 1991. Jay was the leader of Pioneers New Zealand's Mobilisation Base from 2000 to 2015. For the last five years he has been executive officer of Mission Interlink, fostering greater collaboration in New Zealand among mission organizations and within the church in general.

Matenga has been an associate of the WEA Mission Commission since 2007. In 2011 he was appointed to lead its Mobilisation Network and tasked with carrying out a global research project that culminated in the 2018 publication of *Mission in Motion: Speaking Frankly of Mobilization*.

Regarding his new position, Matenga said, 'As I have done for the missions community in Aotearoa New Zealand, so I seek to do in the global missions community—foster greater participation in God's mission and help God's people flourish in missions.' (Matenga treasures his Maori lineage, as reflected in his use of both the Maori and Dutch names for his home country.)

Despite what he calls an 'anti-education stance' within his family of origin, Matenga has become an incisive scholar and prolific writer. He holds a doctorate from the Fuller School of Graduate Studies. Many of his articles and messages are available at [jaymatenga.com](http://jaymatenga.com).

## Michael Ortiz becomes new ICETE director

On 25 November, Dr Michael Ortiz officially assumed leadership of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) as its International Director. He succeeds Dr Riad Kassis, who had served effectively in that role for six years and was part of the search team that selected Ortiz.

Of Cuban-American descent, Ortiz came to Christ in the early years of his law practice. He has been involved in Bible college and seminary teaching in Spain, Latin America and Cuba. In addition, he participated in a successful effort to unify and upgrade the quality of theological education in Cuba.

From 2016 until July 2019, Ortiz was responsible for Spanish-language online master's degree programmes at Dallas Theological Seminary. He is now chair of Dallas Seminary's World Missions and Intercultural Studies Department.

William Taylor, former executive director of the WEA's Mission Commission, praised Ortiz's appointment, stating, 'I have known Michael personally for years and thank God for the way the Spirit has guided him into this strategic, global servant-role in the worldwide arena of theological education.'



ICETE has four primary functions as it serves its eight regional accrediting agencies globally: (1) fostering global networking in theological education; (2) assisting quality assurance and development; (3) equipping theological educators; and (4) convening global leaders to dialogue and advance global theological education topics. ICETE's next triennial global consultation is scheduled for November 2021 in Turkey. More information is available at [www.icete.info](http://www.icete.info).



## “Re-Forma” aims to reach the world’s untrained pastors

About four years ago, Manfred Kohl of the World Evangelical Alliance’s Theological Commission saw a shocking statistic published by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. According to the centre, of the world’s approximately 2.5 million pastors, only 5 percent had a formal theological education.

Kohl, who says he has visited nearly 500 training institutions in his 40-year career in theological education, determined to find a way to fill that gap. The result is ‘Re-Forma,’ an inventive, efficient programme, launched by the WEA earlier this year, that helps pastors cover the basics in essential areas of Christian ministry.

The idea for Re-Forma emerged after Kohl called 20 global theological education leaders together to discuss what they could do to ensure that pastors have essential biblical knowledge and ministry skills. The group realized that it could not even begin to address the adequacy of the estimated 100,000 training programs—from full-fledged seminaries to online Bible courses—around the world.

As a result, they decided to evaluate not the training institutions but the pastors themselves. As Kohl put it, ‘It doesn’t matter where they got their education, training or insight. What matters is whether they have it.’ Kohl and his colleagues constructed 34 questions covering five areas: Knowing the Scriptures, Living by Faith, Outreach, Listening and Encouraging, and Trustworthy Faith. (To maximize user-friendliness, they avoided more intimidating titles like ‘Systematic Theology.’) The questions can be viewed at <https://www.re-forma.global/suggested-questions>; they are available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The questions are suitable for people from any branch of Christianity. They are not difficult, but some of them might challenge pastors to try to improve their performance quality before submitting their answers. For example, one asks, ‘What is the most effective technology/social media tool in your environment, and why? How much are you and your church investing in order to use it as professionally as possible?’

The Re-Forma team reviews submissions and awards a WEA-endorsed ‘certificate of biblical ministry’ to those who pass. Team members also recommend helpful readings in areas of weakness or, if there are large deficiencies, suggest that the applicant do additional study and resubmit. Kohl said that about 200 pastors, mostly in Africa, have already completed the programme, and requests to serve entire school populations or other groups are starting to come in. Ultimately, Kohl hopes that the program’s influence will encourage Bible schools to gear their teaching toward Re-Forma outcomes.

Contact information for Kohl and project director Reuben van Rensburg is available at <https://www.re-forma.global/contact-us>.



Manfred Kohl (left) of Re-Forma and Thomas Schirmacher of the WEA Theological Concerns Department completing the organization’s founding document. © Re-Forma/van Rensburg

### JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Evangelical Review of Theology (quarterly)  
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/>

Islam and Christianity (English and German) (semiannual)  
<https://www.islaminstitut.de/en/category/publikationen/journal/>

Jahrbuch für Verfolgung und Diskriminierung von Christen  
[Yearbook on Persecution and Discrimination of Christians]  
(German) <https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/german-yearbooks/>

International Journal of Religious Freedom (semiannual)  
<https://www.iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-journal/>

Jahrbuch für Religionsfreiheit [Yearbook on Religious Freedom]  
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#### DIGITAL ONLY:

Theological News (quarterly)  
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tc/publications/TN.htm>

Bonn Profiles (twice a week)  
<https://www.bucer.org/resources/bonner-querschnitte.html>

WEA RLC Religious Liberty Prayer News (monthly)  
<https://worlddea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

Business & Ministry News (Business Coalition) (monthly)  
order from [business@worlddea.org](mailto:business@worlddea.org)

Bonner Querschnitte (twice a week) (German)  
<https://www.bucer.de/ressourcen/bonner-querschnitte.html>

WEA RLC Research and Analysis Report (periodic)  
<https://worlddea.org/whoweare/newsletter-signup>

## Celebrating the Bible in 2020

*by Rosalee Velloso Ewell, Executive Director, WEA Theological Commission*

The year 2020 will be a big year for Bible initiatives around the globe. The Scriptures are foundational for everything we do as Christians, and therefore the WEA Theological Commission rejoices in the many events and initiatives happening this new year. Here are some examples.

The 'AD 2020 Global Year of the Bible' initiative has brought together multiple organizations such as the WEA, Youth with a Mission, Wycliffe, the Jesus Film Project and the United Bible Societies (UBS). The movement recognizes that for all people to have access to God's Word, Christians everywhere must encourage the translation, publication and distribution of the Bible and help to educate and motivate people so that everyone can engage with the life-giving words of the Scriptures. See <https://www.bibleyear2020.com>.

The UBS have a long-standing relationship with the WEA. Together they encourage collaboration between national Evangelical Alliances and national Bible Societies, as well as collaboration at regional and global levels. As an example, the Scottish Bible Society's <https://bible2020.org> app has already been well received as a global tool in the context of the Bible year. To read more about the WEA's collaboration with the UBS, see <https://www.weabibleengagement.org>.

To mark the 1600th anniversary of the death of Saint Jerome, patron of Bible translators, the Catholic Biblical Federation has inaugurated the Year of the Word of God from this Advent onwards. Congregations are encouraged to plan a full year of celebrations, mission awareness, community-based Bible study and sharing. For more information, visit the Catholic Biblical Federation website at <https://c-b-f.org/en/DeiVerbiAnnus>.

In addition, Pope Francis announced on the feast day of St Jerome (September 30) that the third Sunday in January is to be a special day devoted to the Word of God, with celebrations intended to promote a rediscovery of the centrality of Scripture in the life of the Church.

## Schirmmacher urges Papua New Guinea leader to fight corruption

Thomas Schirmmacher, the WEA's Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns, and his wife, Christine, visited Papua New Guinea in November, meeting with that nation's prime minister, James Marape.

Papua New Guinea is one of the world's poorest countries despite its ample natural resources, and corruption is one of the main reasons. Marape had been Minister of finance under his predecessor, Peter O'Neill, but resigned in April 2019 in protest against government corruption.

After weeks of power struggles, Marape gained overwhelming support from Parliament in May 2019 to become the new prime minister. An Adventist, Marape is the first prime minister to belong to a tribe from Papua New Guinea's rainforest areas, which make up three-quarters of the population but have had relatively weak political influence.

The country's parliament is among the most fragmented anywhere in the world, as twenty different parties hold seats and there are also fourteen independent deputies.

While in the country, the Schirmmachers also visited parishes, held theological seminars, and met with church leaders and the board of the Evangelical Alliance of Papua New Guinea.



Thomas Schirmmacher with the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, James Marape © BQ/Thomas Schirmmacher

## Interview: Catholic attends WEA General Assembly

Monsignor Juan Usma-Gómez, bureau chief for the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU)—the Vatican organization that relates to other Christian groups at the international level—attended the World Evangelical Alliance's General Assembly as an observer. He is believed to be the first Roman Catholic to have been an official observer at a WEA General Assembly since 1980. He answered these questions for *Theological News*.

### **Q: Why are you here with us?**

Usma-Gómez: The PCPCU received an invitation to send an observer to this General Assembly. It was very clear to us that it was important to come. Our presence is also a sign of reciprocity, because at the last two Synods of [Catholic] Bishops, the WEA has been invited as a fraternal delegate.

The PCPCU's Secretary, Brian Farrell, was invited but could not attend because of other commitments. I am the PCPCU bureau chief dealing with the Western churches and the main person who manages our relations with the WEA.

### **Q: How has your experience of attending the General Assembly been?**

Usma-Gómez: I am very grateful to be part of this moment. It is a key moment in the life of the WEA. To develop a clear vision for the next decade is very important. I have admired the dynamics of how that vision is being pursued. Everything is encompassed in prayer and reflection, but with defined points of development and a clear sense of direction. It is a very collegial way of working.

I feel welcome here. Some are surprised when I introduce myself as a Roman Catholic priest, but immediately the response is that I am welcome.

Although this is my first General Assembly, I have attended several previous evangelical conferences, including Amsterdam 2000 [the Billy Graham conference for evangelists] and Lausanne 2010. I must congratulate the worship team here. The music has been really beautiful.

### **Q: This General Assembly's emphasis is on holistic, intergenerational disciple making. How is that issue being addressed in the Catholic Church?**

Usma-Gómez: This same topic has been addressed by Pope Francis, who has said that disciples are missionaries. It was also developed at our youth synod. We believe it is necessary to ensure that the younger generation hears the gospel, has an experience of faith, is prepared to take leadership, and has a voice in the Catholic Church—guided by the Holy Spirit, who is the protagonist of the church's mission.

### **Q: The WEA and the PCPCU engaged in an important dialogue from 2011 to 2016. What are your hopes for the impact of the document that came from those conversations?**

Usma-Gómez: I would like to ask the WEA to honour the theologians who were part of that consultation, not by clapping their hands but by inviting evangelicals at the local and national level to read the document that has been produced, evaluate the result, and say whether it is representative of who we are. It was designed to serve not as the completion of a dialogue, but as a means to encourage conversation between Catholics and evangelicals at the local level.

The document has been written in such a way that local parishes and congregations can use it to enter into dialogue and evaluate directly what is said. The topics discussed are the normal topics, but the questions are structured to help people compare their perceptions of a Catholic or evangelical with what the two groups really think. The document was tested with local groups in Canada and they were very excited about it.

### **Q: What message would you like to share with our delegates?**

Usma-Gómez: I think that if we are going to take the gospel to the next generation, we need to work together, exchanging our skills and experiences. Our styles and methodologies are sometimes different, but not contradictory.

I yearn for the day when all Catholics will be evangelical and all evangelicals will be catholic (with a small c)—in obedience to Jesus' prayer, on the eve of his passion, 'that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe' (John 17:21).



## The Legacy of Phillip E. Johnson (1940–2019)

by Thomas K. Johnson

Phillip E. Johnson, who died on November 2, inaugurated a new paradigm in the relationship between theistic faith and natural science with the publication of *Darwin on Trial* in 1991. He was responsible for the birth of the intelligent design movement in natural science, philosophy and law.

Johnson went on to write several more seminal books, but his numerous books did not contain the man. In 2002, Terry Mattingly wrote about him, ‘Celebrities are hard to replace. That’s why a provocative thinker named Phillip E. Johnson—patriarch of the “Intelligent Design” movement—has taken a different path. It’s not that he is terribly modest. But Johnson wants to win and he is convinced that aiming the spotlight at others is good strategy. He wants his cause to thrive after he is gone.’

In his 2000 book *Wedge of Truth*, Johnson analysed the fact/value distinction that has dominated Western academic life since the Enlightenment, leading to the situation today in which, for secularists, evolutionary science tells us the facts about life while religion or ethics describes the disappearing realm of values. In a review of this book, Nancy Pearcey captured Johnson’s key arguments that will remain important for years to come. ‘Once this definition of knowledge is conceded’, she wrote, ‘then any position that appears to be backed by science will ultimately triumph in the public square over any position that appears based on ethics or religion. The details of the particular debate do not matter.’

Johnson argued masterfully that our intellectual capacities cannot be explained by either chance or physical law. As Pearcey wrote in her review, ‘Chance produces randomness, while physical law produces simple, repetitive order (like using a macro on your computer to print a phrase over and over). The only cause of complex, nonrepeating, specified order is an intelligent agent.’

Johnson relied heavily on John 1:1, from which he deduced that the Logos was the source of reason, intelligence and information. ‘These simple words’, he wrote, ‘make a fundamental statement that is directly contradictory to the corresponding starting point of scientific materialism.’

Mattingly’s article tells how Johnson summed up the evolutionary alternative to John 1:1: ‘In the beginning were the particles and the particles somehow became complex, living stuff. And the stuff imagined god.’

Johnson did not find that explanation credible. More importantly, he constructed a compelling intellectual movement that reinforced the connection between the nature of the universe and the gospel of Christ. We should treasure, reaffirm and promote this legacy.

## Theological Concerns Department meets at WEA General Assembly



Members of the WEA Theological Concerns Department enjoyed catching up on each other’s activities during the General Assembly in Indonesia. From left to right: Timo Plutschinski, Director, Business Coalition; Samuel Richmond Saxena, professor from India and Theological Commission (TC) member; Nik Nedelchev, WEA ambassador to the Orthodox Churches; Manfred Kohl, Chair, Re-Forma; Thomas K. Johnson, WEA Special Envoy to the Vatican, senior advisor to the TC and International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF); Michael Ortiz, International Director, International Council for Evangelical Theological Education; Thomas Schirmacher, department head; Christine Schirmacher, director of the International Institute on Islamic Studies (IIS); Lilian Kurz, WEA UN interreligious dialogue and WEA Sustainability Center; Kyle Wisdom, assistant to Thomas K. Johnson; Naomi Hinkelmann, media assistant; Christof Sauer, IIRF director; Esther Schirmacher, WEA delegate to the Global Christian Forum youth commission; Martin Warnecke, assistant to Thomas Schirmacher; Perscal Mutzner, WEA UN office, Geneva; Peirong Lin, research coordinator; Bruce Barron, editor of the *Evangelical Review of Theology and Theological News*; James Nkansah-Obrempong, Theological Commission vice chair; Doug Birdsall, senior advisor to the department; Jerry and Arulandu from Malaysia, advisors on Islam to the IIS.

## How God prepared Nik Nedelchev to be a WEA ambassador

One cannot overlook the unmistakable hand of God in the amazing life story of Nik Nedelchev, appointed earlier this year as the WEA's ambassador to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul and the Orthodox Churches.

Nedelchev was born to an Orthodox family in southern Bulgaria under communist rule. People crossing the border were checked for guns, drugs and Bibles, but the Orthodox Church was permitted to function. However, Nedelchev's family became isolated from the church after his sister began having epileptic seizures.

When Nedelchev was about three years old, a Greek migrant, whose wife had kicked him out of the house after he became an evangelical Christian, arrived in town. The man didn't know the local language, but he became a faithful worker. When people thanked him and wondered why he was so servantlike, he would show them a Bulgarian New Testament and say 'Read here.' Within six months, a revival broke out in town, with Nik's parents among the converts. After about three years, a local Orthodox priest was touched by their example and started Bible studies as well.

One day during the months of revival, both of Nik's parents heard a voice say the same strange word to them. When they shared their experience at a prayer meeting, others said they had heard the same word. Two months later, the Nedelchevs took their daughter to a doctor in Sofia. At the end of the visit, someone came in with a new experimental medicine from a Czech pharmacy. When he mentioned the name of the drug, the Nedelchevs were in shock—it was the word the voice had spoken to them! Nik's sister took the drug, her seizures ended, and she became a powerful witness to God's love.

In addition to seeing God's power displayed from an early age, Nedelchev said, 'I grew up learning that we were Baptists but that God had a bigger family of the redeemed. I was always told that unity is the only answer for the church to be effective.' That conviction led him to actively support collaboration among the evangelical churches in Bulgaria and later to serve as head of the Bulgarian and then the European Evangelical Alliance.

After a short career as a professional football player, Nedelchev earned a degree in civil engineering, but his file with the secret police (which contained information on his Christian activities, as he confirmed when the files were made public) kept him from getting a job. However, a friend from his church owned a roofing company and told Nedelchev, 'If you're not scared of heights, you'll never have to worry about work.' Nedelchev did that work for 22 years. He also joined his church's teaching and preaching team, but never took a salary because he didn't need the money and pastors were prime targets for the secret police.

During these years, Nedelchev and his wife directed more than half of their income to supporting Christian literature distribution. Staff from Open Doors and other organizations had a key to a locked tank on their property, to which they would come late at night to leave bags of literature and take money. Nedelchev also formed Biblical Education by Extension in 1979, holding training seminars secretly in private houses or at mountain retreats.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Nedelchev enlisted the help of Sam Ericsson of the Christian Legal Society to recover properties confiscated under Soviet domination, including a seminary, publishing house, and Bible society building.

Regarding his current work as a WEA ambassador, Nedelchev explained, 'This diplomatic recognition is important for a group that used to be seen as a sect. We now have a tool to communicate with the Orthodox Churches at a high level. For many years, the Orthodox, Catholics and many governments would tell us that we had so many branches, they didn't know who to talk to.

'If we want others to respect us, we have to learn how to respect others. We must not live in our comfortable, isolated, evangelical ghetto when we are supposed to be salt and light to the world.'

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

- (1) Do a **bank transfer** to: WEA Business Coalition • IBAN: DE65 2005 0550 1363 1437 42 • BIC: HASPDEHHXXX  
• Hamburger Sparkasse, Ecke Adolphsplatz/ Großer Burstah, 20457 Hamburg, Germany
- (2) Donate **online** or per **credit card** via <http://business.worlddea.org/contact>
- (3) Send a **cheque** to WEA Business Coalition, Achter de Weiden 47, 22869 Schenefeld, Germany

## WEA Sustainability Center director named to UN advisory board

The director of the World Evangelical Alliance Sustainability Center (WEASC), Matthias Böhning, has been appointed to the multi-religious advisory board of the United Nations inter-institutional working group on religion and development.

This advisory board, established in September 2018, includes representatives of each of the world's largest religious communities and is responsible for advising UN organizations on how to work with religious actors to implement the 2030 Agenda.

The UN Inter-institutional Working Group on Religion and Development was established in 2010. It is intended to develop political guidelines for cooperation with faith-based actors and to deepen the expertise of UN personnel with regard to interfaces between religious groups and UN activity in the areas of development, human rights, peace and security.



Representatives of various faith traditions at a side event in the context of the Faith for Earth Initiative at the UN Environment Assembly (2019) © WEASC

## New version of WEA's theology CD available

The tenth edition of the WEA Theological Concerns Department's resource CD has been released. It contains the entire WEA Global Issues Series, the entire WEA World of Theology Series, all editions of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, the *Journal for Islam and Christianity*, and the text of many other books on theology and world religions—mostly in English but with a small number in French and Spanish.

Copies of the CD can be requested at no charge from Martin Warnecke at [Martin.Warnecke.TS@iirf.eu](mailto:Martin.Warnecke.TS@iirf.eu) or [downloaded freely here](#).

### WEA THEOLOGICAL NEWS

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### WEA DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

**The WEA Department of Theological Concerns is responsible for Theology**

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- Religious Freedom • Persecution • Christian Scholars
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- UN Bonn liaison office for interreligious dialogue