

# “Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Conscience, and Freedom of Speech as the Heart of our Democracy”

## Yet another ISHR lecture by Thomas Schirmmacher at the University of Freiburg

In a lecture in the Horst Weizmann lecture hall in the main building of the University of Freiburg, the President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights stated that “freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and freedom of speech are not marginal. Rather, they are central elements in the concert of human rights, without which there can be no democracy.”

Using numerous examples from his worldwide travel in over 130 countries, Schirmmacher documented that no country could be free without freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and freedom of speech.



Schirmmacher specifically addressed the question “Can we in Germany simultaneously protect everyone’s religious freedom and fight enemies of religious freedom?” In his opinion, one is “not only able” to do this but “must” do it. Every human right requires protection against those who want to do away with it. A well-fortified democracy also has to ensure that everyone can enjoy a human right and that they are protected against those who infringe upon it or demand or promote the human right’s removal. Therefore, Germany must also manage to offer all people of all religions and world views a home with freedom and at the same time manage to contain the enemies of freedom of religion. This is due to the fact that freedom of religion exists only where it is also protected by the state’s monopoly on the use of force. This also means that Muslims who love freedom must be protected from Muslims who are prepared to use violence.

The Freiburg working group of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) had invited Schirmmacher to the same location at the University of Freiburg a prior time, in 2013. The head of the working group, Heinz Ernst, was highly satisfied with the number of participants and their active participation in the long subsequent round of discussion.

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