

WEA publishes two speeches given at the International Human Rights Conference in Prague, March 2019

Johnson on “Martin Luther King and Those Wonderful Old Names!”

Schirmmacher on “Why People of all Religions and Worldviews Should Back Human Rights Ethics”

The Department of Theological Concerns of the World Evangelical Alliance has published two speeches of its members at a Human Rights Conference of the Anglo-American University held at the Czech National Bank. Professor Thomas Schirmmacher’s speech is [available on the YouTube channel of the International Institute for Religious Freedom \(IIRF\)](#). Professor Thomas K. Johnson’s speech “Martin Luther King and Those Wonderful Old Names!” is [printed in the department’s Bulletin](#).



The printed speech is a revised version of the speech given at the first annual International Human Rights Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, March 7 & 8, 2019, hosted by [Anglo-American University](#), [Norwich University](#), and [Post Bellum](#). The theme of the conference was “Key Moments of the 20th Century and Their Legacy.” Many of the participants were professors and students from the two universities, along with researchers from Post Bellum. The participation by members of the anti-communist Charter 77 movement set the historical background for the event.

Other keynote speakers included:

- Alexandr Vondra – politician and diplomat, former dissident and signatory of Charter 77
- Daniel Kroupa – philosopher, former dissident and signatory of Charter 77, politician and university educator
- Kelly Adams-Smith – Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Prague

In his opening plenary “Why People of all Religions and Worldviews Should Back Human Rights Ethics,” now available on YouTube, the President of the International Society for Human Rights, Thomas Schirmmacher, interacted with two signatories of Charter 77, Dr. Daniel Kroupa and Dr. Alexandr Vondra.



Schirmmacher especially agreed with the speech of Dr. Vondra, who warned that the old concept of human rights, that made the [Charter 77](#) possible and great, was more and more put aside in favor of ideological views, adding all kinds of new so-called human rights.

Charter 77 (Charta 77 in Czech and in Slovak) was a civil rights movement in Czechoslovakia from 1977 to 1992 which was the center of opposition to the communist regime. It emerged from the Charter 77 petition, which had highlighted many grievances in the country. The charter was released on January 1, 1977, by 200 intellectuals and artists; by 1989 it had 2000 signatories. The communist government punished the dissemination of the document as a political crime with severe penalties.

After the Velvet revolution of 1989, many of the members of Charter 77 held important positions in Czech and Slovak politics. As just one example, Dr. Vondra has been Minister of Defense, Minister for European Affairs, Foreign Minister, and Vice-Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, as well as a Member of the European Parliament. The Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in Prague, Kelly Adam-Smith, explained the important role of the USA backing Czechoslovakian dissidents during communist times.

Anglo-American University (AAU), the oldest private college in the Czech Republic, and Norwich University, the oldest military college of the USA, hosted an Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Rights at the prestigious building of the Czech National Bank and the AAU buildings. The conference was co-sponsored by *Post Bellum*, a Czech human rights organization archiving the statements of older eye-witnesses as well as recording human rights violations for later reference.

The conference presented interdisciplinary papers and presentations from students, faculty, and experts. The theme of the conference commemorated important 20th-century dates in human rights history with anniversaries in 2019 linked to the Central European region. In addition to meetings with dissidents, historians and experts, students experienced a moot court mimicking real trial cases and a truth commission with eyewitnesses and victims of past regimes.

Anglo-American University offers 17 undergraduate and graduate programs to students from more than 70 countries across the world. With more than 80 percent international students, AAU is the most international academic institution in the Czech Republic and was recently recognized by the European Association for International Education as an innovative leader in internationalization on the global stage. AAU is one of few universities outside the United States to have received accreditation from the American accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Most of AAU's programs are also accredited by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports of the Czech Republic.

[Norwich University](#) was founded in 1819 for the U.S. Army and is the oldest private military college in the USA, established to assure that officers not only have a military education, but also a humanistic education. It is one of six senior military colleges in the USA. Norwich University is a diversified academic institution that educates traditional-age students and adults in a Corps of Cadets and as civilians. It offers a broad selection of baccalaureate and graduate degrees in natural sciences, mathematics, architecture, business administration, computer science, and public administration, with 2512 students, of whom 1570 are cadets.

Further Links:

- [Report on the conference](#)
- [Czech Dissidents Charted New Territory](#)
- [The Legacy of Czechoslovakia's Charter 77](#)
- [An Original Signatory on Czechoslovakia's Most Important Protest](#)
- English translations of many primary sources related to the Charter 77 movement: [Charter 77 After 30 Years](#)

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