



World Evangelical Alliance Secretary General

**Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher, friend of Humanitarian Islam,
appointed as WEA Secretary General**

**Heir to a tradition of religious liberty
and respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being**

**“It is only the prayer of millions, and the prayer of close friends...
that makes it possible to take over a task which is too big for just one human being”**

BONN, Germany, February 27, 2021: Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher — co-founder of an initiative that unites evangelical Christians and the Humanitarian Islam movement in promoting religious freedom across the globe — has been appointed Secretary General & CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). Founded in 1846, WEA is the largest international organization of evangelical churches, representing over 600 million Protestants and national evangelical alliances in 140 countries.

At a leadership handover [ceremony](#) broadcast live from Germany to evangelical Christians across the globe, Dr. Schirmmacher said:

“In 1846, the World Evangelical Alliance was the first ever large religious body speaking up for religious freedom. And that meant speaking up against state churches and against Christian nationalism — we know that this is even within our own ranks still a very ‘hot potato’ today — against Christian nationalism, against the state pressing its religion and its thoughts on the Church.

“After a long history meanwhile, the Catholic Church, at the Second Vatican Council, said exactly the same: that religious freedom is not just a political principle, but is [within] the DNA of Christianity... We did not stand for it as a confessional extra, but as the belief that this is pure Christianity: that God Himself wants to be loved, wants us to trust Him, wants our life. He does not want us to pray to Him because we are forced or because someone paid us or somebody cheated us. He wants our very trust, our very heart and our very love, and love is something that cannot be forced.”

Bishop Schirmmacher is descended from Huguenots who fled religious persecution in France, and was raised in a family with a strong commitment to global Christian witness and mission. He has spent much of his life defending oppressed Christians around the world — an experience that both shaped his spirituality and brought him into contact with the WEA. During the Cold War, Dr. Schirmmacher secretly trained pastors in Communist East Germany. A long-time friend of Pope Francis, he is an ordained Bishop of Communio Messianica, an Anglican network of approximately one million “Muslim Background Believers” in 75 nations.

Prior to his inauguration as WEA’s new Secretary General & CEO, Bishop Schirmmacher chaired the WEA’s Theological Commission. He was deeply involved in producing *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, a major statement jointly published by

the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which together represent more than 90 percent of global Christianity. As reported by the *Huffington Post*:

“Recognizing the long and troubled history of conversion efforts, the statement called upon Christian missionaries to ‘reject all forms of violence... including the violation or destruction of places of worship, sacred symbols or texts.’ In addition, Christians need to ‘acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good’ in other religions; any criticisms of another religion must be made ‘in a spirit of mutual respect.’”

WEA was founded by 19th-century Anglican, Salvation Army and Methodist leaders from the British Isles as well as by prominent German Lutherans. It emerged from a socio-cultural, religious and political context exemplified by Britain's abolition of the slave trade in 1808; the banning of slavery in British colonies in 1833; and a growing consensus among European Christians regarding the moral imperative to abolish slavery worldwide. As Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, told 4,500 Christian abolitionists gathered for the Great Anti-slavery Meeting held at London's Exeter Hall in 1840:

“I deeply regret that the benevolent and persevering exertions of England to abolish the atrocious traffic in human beings have not led to a satisfactory conclusion. I sincerely trust that this great county will not relax in its efforts until it has finally and forever put an end to that state of things so repugnant to the principles of Christianity and to the best feelings of our nature” (*The Liberator*, June 26, 1840).

Writing in *Evangelical Review of Theology: the World Evangelical Alliance's Journal of Theology and Contemporary Application*, the human rights theorist and ethicist Reverend Dr. Thomas K. Johnson — who serves the World Evangelical Alliance as senior advisor for theology and religious freedom, WEA Special Envoy to the Vatican and Special Envoy for Engaging Humanitarian Islam — noted the potential widespread benefits and theological legitimacy of evangelical Christians and the global Humanitarian Islam movement working together to realize freedom and dignity for all:

“A careful examination of the ethics of Humanitarian Islam finds that Muslims of this type, when following their own principles, support religious freedom and human rights for Christians and people of other faiths. But their ethic goes much farther. Though presented mostly as a Muslim alternative to extremist violence, Humanitarian Islam contains a serious assessment of universal moral norms, the relation between faith and reason, fundamental human goods, the laws (both civil and religious) needed to protect those human goods, and the role of religions in societies” (“[A Case for Ethical Cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam](#)”).

In April of 2020, Dr. Johnson, Bishop Schirrmacher and his wife, the noted scholar of Islam Dr. Christine Schirrmacher, co-founded the Humanitarian Islam/WEA [Joint Working Group](#) with spiritual leaders of Indonesia's 90-million-member Nahdlatul Ulama — whose 16th century ancestors' deft use of soft and hard power defeated Muslim extremists, and guaranteed freedom of religion for all Javanese, two centuries before the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom and the Bill of Rights led to the separation of state and religion in the U.S.