

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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Stephanus-Prize for Persecuted Christians awarded to Cardinal Zen

Thomas Schirmmacher publishes his Laudatio

(Bonn, 15.06.2018) On April 7th, the “Stephanus-Prize for Persecuted Christians” was awarded in Bonn to Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, the former bishop of Hongkong, for his courage and his persistence in decades of strong engagement for the rights of freedom, notably of religious freedom. The Associate Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher, said in his laudation: “Your totally peaceful and respectful, but bold and risky action in standing up for those who are oppressed and persecuted makes you more than worthy to receive the Stephanus-Prize, named after the first Christian martyr.” Bishop Schirmmacher especially highlighted the Catholic dignitary’s role in the merge of the defenders of human rights in Hongkong, who assemble each year on July 1st, the anniversary of the handover of Hongkong to China in the year 1997, to demonstrate against the influence of the Communist Party on the system of the Special Administration District. The 86-year-old Cardinal is planning also for this year to spearhead the protest march of the Civil Rights Front. When he urged the protestors in 2014 to really show, that they were no slaves, but free, the gathered people were attacked with tear gas.



Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun listening to the laudation for him © BQ/Warnecke

Bishop Schirmmacher, who is also President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM), declared, that Cardinal Zen is not only a clear voice against discrimination of Christians, but also a defender of religious freedom for all people, regardless of their religious affiliation. And he is “third a symbol of human rights in general far beyond religious problems alone”.

The Cardinal’s hunger strike action of 2011 at the age of 79 was very stirring, as the foundation’s president Michaela Koller pointed out. At that time the Communist Party

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of China put pressure on the Legislative Council of Hongkong and imposed a legislative amendment, as a result of which the influence of the Catholic church on about 300 schools under Catholic trusteeship was pushed back. The Cardinal, who belongs to the Order of the Salesians di Don Bosco, is, according to her words, aware of the fact, that humans, who suffer oppression in education or politics, cannot develop and unfold in a way that corresponds with their dignity.

In his acceptance speech given to 100 listeners Cardinal Zen said: “I’ve never asked for the grace of martyrdom. The colour red I wear reminds me of the blood of numerous brothers and sisters in China, who are living martyrs without necessarily shedding their blood in the literal sense of the term.”

All totalitarian regimes, he said, have only one goal: control over everything and everybody. Nowadays these rulers avoid making martyrs of people. “They rather employ threats and bribery. They threaten you and your family, they bribe you with money and honours”, he warned. They are not content to enslave the people, they also keep their consciences shackled.



Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun with the price certificate, left Michaela Koller and Dr. Emmanuel Franklyne Ogbunwezeh of the board of the Stephanus-Foundation © BQ/Warnecke

In the past few weeks the Cardinal made worldwide frontpage news with his warning against the

Chinese Communist Party’s religious policy and against a “sellout” between the Vatican and China. A new Act on Religious Affairs, which is in force since February, schedules much more control than that, which was executed anyway.

The foundation is named after the deacon of the early Christian church, who was the first one to be stoned for his confessions to Jesus Christ. The Stephanus-Foundation, according to its statutes, supports persecuted Christians in need, presently Iraqi refugees in Lebanon and Christians in Pakistan, e.g. by contributions to living costs or to attorney fees, and it uncovers violations of the right of religious freedom, and also the backgrounds thereof. Among the previous awardees are the Syrian Orthodox nun, Sister Hatune Dogan, who is also called “modern Mother Theresa”, the Patriarch of Babylon, Louis Raphael I. Sako, head of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Pastor Gottfried Martens of the Trinity Church in Berlin-Steglitz, which belongs to the SELK (Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church), and the Jesuit Father Frans van der Lugt, who was murdered on April 7th, 2014 in the Syrian city of Homs. Last year the Pakistani human rights lawyer Aneeqa Anthony received the prize, who in the past defended prominent cases in court, in which Christians were wrongly accused of blasphemy. Founder of the “Stephanus-Foundation for Persecuted Christians” in Frankfurt is the now retired senior teacher Wolfgang Link from Gegenbach in the Black Forest. Board president Michela Koller is advisor of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM) in Frankfurt.

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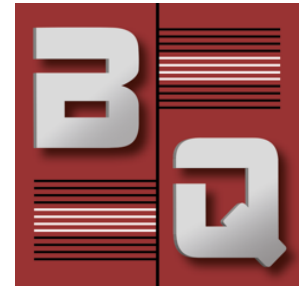
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- The full text of the Laudatio of Thomas Schirmmacher ([pdf](#))
- [Photo 1](#): Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun listening to the laudation for him © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 2](#): Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun with the price certificate, left Michaela Koller and Dr. Emmanuel Franklyne Ogbunwezeh of the board of the Stephanus-Foundation © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 3](#): Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher during the laudation for Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 4](#): Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun during his acceptance speech, Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher as translator © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 5](#): David Schirmmacher greets the Cardinal in his mother tongue at opening of the laudation © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 6](#): Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher congratulates Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, left Michaela Koller, Chair of the Stephanus-Foundation © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 7](#): Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher during the laudation, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun listening © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 8](#): Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun in discussion with Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher © BQ/Warnecke
- [Photo 9](#) and [photo 10](#): Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun during his speech at the general assembly of the International Society for Human Rights, Bishop Thomas Schirmmacher as translator © BQ/Warnecke

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