



schwelle Foundation
Contributions to Peace

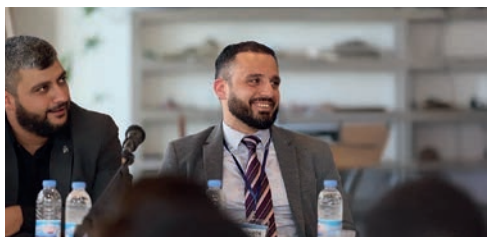
COMMITMENT TO DIGNITY AND JUSTICE ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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Cover picture:

*Mahdi Yahya and the organisation
Mate ni kani are the winners of the 2026
International Bremen Peace Award
of *schwelle* Foundation.*

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INTRODUCTION

BY ANETTE KLASING

Dear friends of *schwelle*, dear readers,

«Commitment to Dignity and Justice» is the title of our 2025 Annual Report, which we are publishing to coincide with the presentation of our 2026 Peace Award.

You can read the moving laudatory speech by our patron Karoline Linnert for Mahdi Yahya and his «Peace of Art» centre in Lebanon, as well as for the Bremen-Niger organisation «Mate ni kani», here. As we present this report, Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon continues, with many civilian deaths; our laureate and his team, like many people there, are deeply affected and greatly concerned. He powerfully recounts how, despite the war and the escalating violence, they remain committed to their reconciliation work for a peaceful Lebanon. The work of Mate ni kani in Niger, a country still scarred by colonialism, brings hope to children and women in a nation that is also grappling with crime and terrorism.

As in no year before, our partner projects have faced and continue to face reprisals: human rights and international law are increasingly being trampled underfoot, and civil societies are coming under pressure. Freedom of expression and critical debate are being defamed or punished. Peace work is being ridiculed or marginalised – and this is true here too. Read the article on this topic in the annual report.

The relentless war waged by Israel in Gaza, which has claimed over 70,000 lives, has, following the US and Israeli attack on Iran, escalated into a conflagration with devastating global consequences. The pro-democracy movement in Israel has collapsed, and in the spring the far-right government passed a law introducing the death penalty, intended to apply exclusively to Palestinians. Our new partner organisation, New Profile in Israel, works tirelessly for civil conflict resolution by advising people who refuse or wish to refuse military service. You can find a detailed report here.

Strengthening human rights and providing protection for refugees: Our new partner organisation, the Centre for Legal Aid in Bulgaria, supports refugees and migrants with free legal advice and political advocacy campaigns. You can read more about CLA's work in the report. Another article focuses on a conference attended by people from Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, France and Germany and describes how faith strengthens opportunities for non-violent resistance in South-Eastern Europe.



Anette Klasing

has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the schwelle Foundation since 2007 and has been Chairwoman of the Board since 2018.

She has been involved in Israel and Palestine for many years and supports the schwelle projects in Southeast Europe and in Israel/Palestine.

Another new partner is the Centre for Peace Church Theology, led by Prof. Dr. Fernando Enns. The centre combines research, teaching and practical peace work. You can find out more about reconciliation work and peacebuilding in the accompanying article.

The article about our partner organisation MHOLA describes how integrated legal advice and infrastructure projects, carried out with great dedication and a focus on empowerment, are making an impact on society in Tanzania and thus achieving sustainable results.

Last year, the *schwelle* Foundation once again organised a series of events in collaboration with various partners in Bremen, under the title «Transforming Conflicts – Avoiding Wars». You can read more about the contributions from academia and practice in the annual report.

Please also read further examples of the projects we support. The articles in this annual report provide an insight into the diversity of the organisations supported by our foundation worldwide, as well as our activities on the ground. Not all project partners and projects are featured here; the scope of *schwelle* is broader. This work is only possible thanks to our many supporters, through donations and endowments.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all friends and supporters of *schwelle* for their solidarity, also on behalf of our project partners.

Please continue to support us!

Yours



Anette Klasing
Chairwoman of the Foundation *die schwelle*

«Racism is a social construct that we can overcome if we stand up for justice.»

Michelle Obama, lawyer and author

HONOURED WITH THE PEACE AWARD MAHDI YAHYA AND MATE NI KANI

BY KAROLINE LINNERT

This year, the International Bremen Peace Award of *schwelle* Foundation goes to Mahdi Yahya, a cultural worker from Lebanon, and to the organisation Mate ni kani from Niger and Germany, in recognition of their efforts to combat colonial-era educational policies in the West African country. Bremen's former mayor, Karoline Linnert, will deliver the laudatory speech in her capacity as patron of the Peace Award.



Karoline Linnert

was Senator for Finance and

Mayor of Bremen from 2007 to 2019.

Since 2013, she has been the patron of the

Bremen International Peace Award

*of the *schwelle* Foundation.*

Dear Ms Klasing,

Dear Mr Mahdi Yahya,

Dear members of Mate ni kani,

Dear Mr Aladdin Haddad and the students of Gesamtschule Ost,

Ladies and gentlemen,

today is 8 May, Germany's official day of remembrance marking liberation from National Socialism and the end of the Second World War in Europe. Three generations now live in Germany without direct experience of war, yet it does not strike me as a particularly peaceful place. Peace is not merely the absence of armed conflict. Lasting peace means upholding the law, avoiding behaviour driven by hatred or the denigration of others, treating those with differing views as equals, and making the fair distribution of resources and life opportunities a guiding principle of politics; it also entails the readiness to defend oneself in the event of an attack.

Every day, the news and the newspapers remind us just how illusory my generation's hope was that the lessons of the Second World War, which claimed 60 million lives, would have a lasting impact on international politics. The hope that international law would not merely be a paper tiger, the hope that serious and responsible politicians would prevail in democracies, and the hope that fair trade relations would improve the standard of living for all people.

The play that members of Peace of Art are rehearsing here in Lebanon is called «Lost in the Sea».

Peace Award winner Mahdi Yahya is convinced that arts and cultural projects offer young people alternatives to extremism and violence.



Russia's attack on Ukraine now over four years ago, Israel's war against the terrorist organisation Hamas in the Gaza Strip and now in Lebanon, and the US attack on Iran are, in any case, signs that the balance of terror between the major powers has lost its effectiveness in preventing armed conflicts. And it shows just how helpless and in need of reform international law is. Great powers and veto powers do as they please; the US is setting up a competition club where one can buy one's way in personally through Donald Trump – what a mockery of the idea that, even among states, power should be subordinate to law.

The number of war dead has reached its highest level since 1945. And why on earth is a certain type of politician suddenly gaining ground worldwide with increasing frequency – lacking any sense of statesmanship, showing no respect for other people or their views, acting as a lackey to an increasingly brazen, ostentatious, modern variant of predatory capitalism? In Europe, children can end up in deportation detention, and the number of homeless people is rising. Fertilisers, microplastics and pesticides are endangering tomorrow's food supply, whilst hatred, hate speech and targeted disinformation are spreading almost unchecked online. Even in wealthy countries, elderly people are living on the breadline despite a lifetime of work. The hope of rising through one's own efforts and experiencing justice is dwindling. I see helplessness and resignation in many people. What on earth has gone wrong? How could we have thought differently ourselves, and how could we have acted differently? What have we overlooked? And how should we move forward?

Perhaps this is also age-related – but the thought that the realisation of the great goals of humanity and peace is further away than it has been for a long time, that little is improving and much is getting worse, gnaws at one – after all, it cannot really be viewed objectively anyway. Despite everything, we should not let ourselves be deprived of the joy of seeing a sharp decline in maternal mortality, protection against many childhood diseases through vaccination, the expansion of renewable energy, or the vast possibilities associated with the use of smartphones.

Of course, one could say that such expectations also stem from a vain overestimation of oneself, assuming that paradise on earth will break out just during my lifetime. And one might object that the struggle to curb violence was certainly not an invention of the 20th century. But it is undeniable: Never before have the technological possibilities been so great for inflicting injustice and violence upon so many people. Never before have the consequences of our unscrupulous exploitation of the Earth's riches been so visible, dramatic and far-reaching. And that is still not enough: Whether we will succeed in ensuring that artificial intelligence is used for the benefit of humanity, or in preventing misguided programmes from triggering a nuclear war – we cannot know, but we will have to strive to do so.

The *schwelle* Peace Award exists in spite of all this, and for this very reason.

I have the honour of presenting this Peace Award – to people who, through their lives, have found concrete answers to the world situation that are worthy of support. To that end, I would first like to thank the board and staff of the *schwelle* Foundation for their work on the Peace Award. They have selected initiatives that are exemplary. Undaunted and unwavering, the jury and donors find outstanding laureates. And you do this reliably, for the 12th time this year. It is often the small things, the initiatives and projects, that demonstrate a positive outlook on life and give us courage.



Reading in one's mother tongue is not a given in Niger.

«The fact that Mate ni kani is being honoured is no coincidence, but rather the reward for a colossal and invaluable effort spanning more than 15 years, and an encouragement for solid and lasting cooperation between our peoples,» says publisher Bako Malam Abdou from the Nigerien capital, Niamey.



Film workshop at Peace of Art.

*Peace Award winner Mahdi Yahya:
«This recognition means more to us
than words can express.*

*To have our work for peace and dignity va-
lued in this way is a profound honour – not
just for me personally, but for all
the artists, young people, children and
communities who are part of Peace of Art.*

*We see this award as a powerful
affirmation that our peace work can
bring about real and lasting change.»*



The award for «Pioneering Peace Work» goes to the founder and chairman of the Peace of Art association from Lebanon, Mr Mahdi Yahya. I hope you have arrived safely; there is open warfare in your country too, since Israel has been fighting Hezbollah on Lebanese soil.

Lebanon is a country with 5.5 million inhabitants and 18 recognised religious communities, and even the average news consumer can imagine how difficult peaceful coexistence must be. Your home region – the Bekaa Valley – has for many years shaped the image of Lebanon as a troubled region. Perhaps you could tell us a little about the personal experiences that led you to develop your philosophy of «Give a musical instrument instead of a weapon» and to act accordingly.

You founded Peace of Art in 2016. The idea behind «Peace of Art» is to promote peace, dialogue and acceptance through joint art projects. Discrimination, violent conflicts, sexual and gender-based violence, sectarianism and radicalisation are countered by supporting and guiding young people in one of the most neglected and conflict-affected areas to express themselves creatively, adopt new perspectives and forge connections.

Since its foundation, over 600 workshops, initiatives and discussions have been organised. In «safe spaces» and guided by the belief that art is the universal language of peace, professional facilitators guide young people in making music, performing theatre, dancing and painting. Joint sports, photography and digital projects are also offered. You believe that this helps to counter extremism, tackle hate speech and build bridges. This is a hopeful approach. In societies where divisions between people are heavily based on differing religious and ethnic affiliations, it is particularly important to foster respect for others' perspectives and experiences; and one's own creativity can provide the strength to engage with the world of others with greater confidence.

Dear Mr Yahya, you have achieved a great deal; you are distinguished by your personal courage, conviction and tenacity. Congratulations on winning the *schwelle* Foundation's Peace Award in the category «Pioneering Peace Work».

The donors to the *schwelle* Foundation have decided on the award for «Encouraging Initiatives»: The organisation *Mate ni kani* from Germany and Niger, with its German base in Bremen. Since 2010, the organisation has been promoting education beyond colonial language.

It is hard to believe, but in the Republic of Niger, even after liberation from the colonial power France in 1960, the language of instruction in schools remains French. During the colonial era, the use of the 10 different local mother tongues or the



*Art as a universal language of peace:
The workshop «Oriental Music», in which
young people make music together,
strengthens cultural identity and
helps combat discrimination.*

common official language Hausa was strictly forbidden. What a perfidious strategy of domination – to prevent education and communication. This continues to have an impact today: Niger is one of the least developed countries in the world, with 80% of the population considered illiterate. Infant mortality is high. There is water shortage, and the exploitation of Niger's sole natural resource – its vast uranium deposits – benefits foreign companies, leaving the population with radioactive waste heaps.

Consequently, there was no money available to reform the education system. To this day, lessons are routinely taught in French. However, many of the children do not speak any French at all and are thus forced to rote-learn a language that is alien to them. It is no wonder that many children leave school early – how devastating this is for the country's democratic and economic development.

Mate ni kani aims to change this. Close contact is maintained from Germany with schools, authors and civil society groups. Over 40 children's books in Niger's main languages – novels, fairy tales, comics and non-fiction – are written, illustrated, laid out and printed in Niger. They serve as reading material in schools, Qur'an schools and educational centres. This enables children and young people to learn to read in their own language!

Another key focus is encouraging girls to attend school through the illustrated series «Karambana», which is aimed specifically at them, and showing them prospects for a self-determined life in harmony with their own culture.

In addition to its educational work, Mate ni kani e.V. also supports the self-help organisation AFAS in Niamey. It was founded in 2007 and primarily supports single, HIV-positive mothers, combats stigma and helps them achieve financial independence through microloans.

Thank you very much for your work; I wish you continued success and, of course, my warmest congratulations on winning the *schwelle* award in the category «Encouraging Initiatives». It would be wonderful if the fact that you are becoming better known here were to result in a greater volume of donations.

Thank you for your attention; I hope you can take some encouraging momentum with you, and I wish you a few more fruitful conversations at the reception following the award ceremony.



«It's always touching to see children in primary school taking an active part in lessons with confidence, rather than just mechanically parroting something in a foreign language that they rarely understand,» says Manfred Weule, chairman of the Mate ni kani association.



The schwelle Foundation has been organising the International Bremen Peace Award since 2003. The aim is to honour people and organisations whose work is exemplary in their commitment to peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

Donation keyword: Peace Award

CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER PRESSURE THREATS TO HUMAN RIGHTS

BY ANETTE KLASING

For our partner organisations New Profile and Combatants for Peace, the past year in Israel and Palestine has been one of suffering and pain, marked by war and attacks on human rights. Our partner «No Name Kitchen», which provides support to refugees at the EU's external borders, has also faced violence and reprisals.



Anette Klasing

has been a member of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Board of *schwelle* Foundation since 2007. She has been Chairwoman of the Executive Board since 2018.

At the turn of the year, the US government under Donald Trump demonstrated, through its invasion of Venezuela (and the abduction of the Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro), that it no longer feels bound by international law: US President Donald Trump's statement that he has no need for international law and has his own moral code (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 10 January 2026) illustrates the state of global peace and security. We have had to witness over the past two years that international law is not a priority in Gaza, or for Israel and the US. The Deputy Chief of Staff to the US President, Stephen Miller, said in a CNN interview: «We live in the real world, which is governed by strength, violence and power. These have been the iron laws of the world since the dawn of time» (SZ, 7 January 2026).

The state of human rights, oppression and reprisals worldwide can be read in the 2025 CIVICUS Monitor: The organisation «Brot für die Welt – Bread for the World» has presented the CIVICUS surveys in detail in the «Atlas of Civil Society». According to this, almost 30% of the world's population live in 29 states where the scope for civil society action is completely closed off. 42.6% of the world's population live in 51 countries where the scope for action is severely restricted, and 12.9% in 36 countries where the free exercise of fundamental rights is restricted. 11.1% live in 42 countries where fundamental rights are impaired or violated (Germany falls into this category). And just 3.5% of the world's population live in the 40 countries classified as completely open. This means that a total of 96.5% of humanity live in countries where direct oppression prevails or where fundamental rights are restricted.

Peace Award winners under pressure: In 2019, the schwelle Foundation awarded the International Bremen Peace Prize to individuals and organisations from Israel, Belarus and Nicaragua. All the award winners are currently facing severe repression in their own countries.



What does this mean for our foundation's peace work? During our most recent Peace Award call for nominations and in light of the many impressive nominations received, we realised that a number of the nominated individuals and organisations are facing significant danger. This includes, for example, people in Latin America (Chile, Colombia, Mexico). Our 2019 Peace Award winners from Nicaragua and Belarus are still facing severe reprisals to this day.

As early as 2024, we became aware of severe reprisals by the Israeli government against human rights organisations, including personal threats against individual members of organisations it disapproves of. Under pressure from the Israeli government, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) discontinued funding for two Israeli organisations. «New Profile» was one of these two organisations. Since last year, *schwelle* has been supporting the work of «New Profile», which advises and supports conscientious objectors in Israel. We have written to various political bodies. We received a reply from Luise Amtsberg, then the Federal Government's Human Rights Commissioner at the Federal Foreign Office, stating that both organisations exhibited aspects «which indicate that the organisations' positions are not compatible with the fundamental values of German foreign policy, such as the commitment to Israel's existence as a «Jewish and democratic state».»

Our partners at «No Name Kitchen» in Bosnia, Bulgaria and elsewhere are also witnessing just how far unchecked violence and misanthropy can go. Violent attacks resulting from illegal pushbacks at borders have been a reality for years. Our former partner organisation, the «Colectivo de mujeres de Matagalpa», which campaigns for the rights of women and children in rural Nicaragua, had its legal status revoked by the state authorities in 2021 and its property expropriated.

We witnessed attacks on civil society organisations taking place here too, immediately after the federal election in February 2025. A year ago, the German Christian Democratic Party CDU announced that organisations receiving state funding would be subject to scrutiny. Interestingly, these were predominantly initiatives or organisations combating right-wing extremism (the «Omas gegen Rechts – Grannies Against the Far Right» were also targeted). In the meantime, even the programme «Demokratie leben – Living Democracy!» funded by the Federal Ministry for Youth has been or is currently being scrutinised. Accordingly, the programmes against right-wing extremism are to be scaled back and replaced by programmes against left-wing extremism.

Public spaces for critical discourse are becoming fewer and more restricted. For example, Iris Hefets, a Jewish psychologist critical of Israel, had the venue for an event at the University of Bremen withdrawn.

As people active within the Foundation, we are aware that standing up for human rights, peace and non-violence requires strength and, often, courage. Our partner organisations must summon even greater courage and moral courage; their lives are sometimes under threat. Supporting them is our task and our duty. To do this, we also need your support!



The «Colectivo de mujeres» in Nicaragua ran health education programmes aimed at empowering women until 2021. They are now unable to continue this work.

The *schwelle* Foundation is committed to human rights and non-violence and supports organisations that campaign for these causes.

Donation keyword: *schwelle* Foundation

NEW PROFILE AGAINST MILITARISM PROMOTING PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

BY BÄRBEL LUDEWIG

Since early 2025, we have had a new project partner: the Israeli organisation «New Profile». Founded in 1998 as a feminist movement, New Profile works to reduce the military's influence on Israeli civil society and is committed to peace, non-violence and a just and democratic society.



Bärbel Ludewig

*has been on the Board of Directors of the **schwelle** Foundation since 2021. The actuary and long-standing honorary treasurer of the Bremen Protestant Church takes care of the foundation's finances and is active in the Israel-Palestine group*

They write: «We believe that the militarism deeply rooted in Israeli society makes society more violent, sexist and racist, undermines civil and democratic values, blocks the path to peace and prevents an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, thereby perpetuating human rights violations against Palestinians and other marginalised groups.» The name New Profile alludes to the contrast with the «profile» drawn up by the army when young people aged 16 undergo conscription. This so-called profile is not only significant for military service, but remains an important social indicator thereafter.

In Israel, upon reaching the age of 18, men must serve in the army for three years and women for two years. In general, military service is viewed as a natural and uncontroversial step and is regarded as a period of self-discovery, representing a necessary phase for a successful civilian adult life. It is seen as a stepping stone into Israeli society. There is strong social pressure on Israelis to enlist for military service, including through the education system. For marginalised young people, compulsory military service is seen as a unique opportunity for social advancement, providing them with access to education and vocational qualifications.

There is no right to conscientious objection in Israel, but there are several grounds for exemption: exemption on health grounds («Profile 21W), exemption for religious women, exemption for married women, pregnant women and mothers, and exemption on grounds of 'incompatibility', which may be granted to individuals who have spent a prolonged period in a military prison (due to ideological refusal of military service or for other reasons), individuals who have convinced a military commission that they are pacifists, individuals whom the army has determined do not meet its 'conscription standards', and others.

As advertising or recommending withdrawal from military service is prohibited, New Profile officially offers only advice to those who have already made up their minds. The network advises around 1,000 people annually, working directly with psychological and legal experts and a group of trained volunteers. Thousands more benefit from the information available online via the website.

Even after October 7, 2023, the brutal attack by Hamas and the massive war in Gaza that followed, the situation feels «normal» to him, says one of the coordinators of



At an anti-fascist festival in Larissa, Greece, New Profile talks about its work, the challenges it faces and its vision for a new Israeli society.

New Profile. In Israel, after the war is before the war. The country has always been at war, or in pre- or post-war periods; since its founding, Israel has been on high alert. The whole system is built around war. At the moment, New Profile is receiving a great many requests for advice, as the army is mobilising reservists and people who had previously been exempted on a much larger scale.

Through educational and awareness-raising programmes, New Profile raises awareness among Israelis – particularly young people and professionals who work with young people – about militarism in Israel and its negative impact on society and individuals. New Profile demonstrates how Israeli society is indoctrinated through the education system, the media and advertising featuring soldiers. The movement is linked to a broad network of activists, specialists and researchers who examine militarism in a variety of contexts. Among other things, they provide data and information on the effects of military service, which show that many people return from war with traumas that are dangerous to themselves and others and which can become a threat to society.

Many schools take students on excursions to visit combatants, battle sites and memorials to war victims. Remembering the war and visiting parts of the country for which people have given their lives are educational tools through which war is presented as a necessary prerequisite for life in Israel – as a necessary evil in everyday life.

Anyone who speaks out and refuses to serve faces a great deal of hostility and is labelled a traitor. In recent months, there have been more conscientious objectors, including active-duty military personnel. This is also changing public perception somewhat. But they are not in the majority; a great deal of persuasion is still needed. New Profile advocates for different priorities: no place for the military in children's education, no propaganda promoting acceptance of the Conscription Act, prioritising peace over war, and promoting education on feminism, equality, and the importance of the value of life and freedom for all.

We are delighted to have found a new long-term partner organisation in New Profile, which we will accompany and support in its work and which enriches us with its expertise.

«New Profile» is a feminist movement that has been campaigning against deeply entrenched militarism in Israel since 1998. It supports young people who wish to refuse military service and promotes open debate on conscription. Its aim is a civil, peaceful society centred on equality, non-violence and human rights.

Donation keyword: New Profile, Israel

STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS AND PROTECTION PROVIDING LEGAL AID TO REFUGEES

BY SUSANNE KORHAMMER

Since 2009, the Centre for Legal Aid (CLA) has been supporting refugees and migrants in Bulgaria by providing free legal representation, monitoring and advocacy. As one of the few organisations in the country, CLA combines individual case work with strategic litigation and political advocacy – particularly in the context of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

As an EU Member State sharing an external border with Turkey, Bulgaria is at the heart of European migration policy and has been part of the Schengen Area since January 2025. In this sensitive context, CLA advocates for access to protection, fair procedures and the safeguarding of fundamental human rights.

Since 2025, CLA has been a new project partner of the *schwelle* Foundation. The organisation offers free legal aid and represents migrants, asylum seekers and refugees before authorities and courts in Bulgaria and at European level. In addition to providing legal assistance, CLA carries out campaign work. Its aim: to support refugees and to ensure that fundamental European values such as human rights, dignity and the rule of law are upheld. As an EU member state with an external border with Turkey and, since January 2025, a Schengen member, Bulgaria is heavily affected by the implementation of European border closure policies. This is a highly topical issue, as one of the main refugee routes runs via Turkey to Bulgaria.

CLA also conducts research, monitors and documents violence at the borders, initiates campaigns to raise public awareness, publishes analyses and is actively involved in national and European networks.

The current projects provide an insight into CLA's work:

Human rights risks arising from the implementation of the new Pact on Migration and Asylum

The new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is due to come into force in 2026, although its specific implementation in the Member States remains unclear in some respects and is likely to give rise to differing national interpretations. Against this backdrop, CLA is working alongside other NGOs to systematically record and document specific practices and procedures, particularly in EU border states such as Bulgaria and Greece. The aim is to highlight potential human rights risks at an early stage, ensure legal assistance for those seeking protection, and contribute to raising awareness and fostering an informed political debate through analyses, reports and public outreach.



Susanne Korhammer

has been involved with the schwelle Foundation since 2009. Since retiring, the qualified engineer has also been active on the Board and in the finance and Southeast Europe working groups.



The dedicated team at the Centre for Legal Aid works to defend the rights of refugees in Bulgaria.



Providing free counselling services to refugees and migrants is the core mission of CLA's dedicated staff in Bulgaria.

Women's Rights: Advocacy for women seeking asylum

Women seeking asylum are not only confronted with displacement and trauma, but also with deep-rooted structural barriers that marginalise their voices and hinder their access to justice. Discriminatory procedures, gaps in protection and stereotypical assumptions often shape their experiences within the asylum system. Survivors of gender-based violence, in particular, run the risk of having their statements questioned or of being re-traumatised during proceedings. Even in the face of serious shortcomings – such as inadequate protection from violence, unlawful deportations or restricted access to asylum – many of these cases remain invisible.

CLA brings these cases to light, highlights systemic problems and amplifies the voices of the women affected. By combining strategic litigation with responsible storytelling, the organisation helps to expose structural barriers and drive momentum towards a gender-sensitive asylum system and improved protection.

Support for children fleeing their homes

The project is specifically aimed at particularly vulnerable children who have fled their homes – in particular migrant children and children with refugee status, who are often unaccompanied or living in precarious family circumstances – as well as their carers and the relevant institutions. The objective is to prevent violence and protect their rights.

In conclusion, a statement from Desislava Todorova, a member of the CLA Executive Board:

«We are observing an increasing withdrawal of institutions, authorities and political actors from the field of human rights. What we are witnessing today is a tendency among state actors to adopt an «indifferent attitude» towards human rights. This «attitude of indifference» does not engage with arguments, findings or evidence, but simply renders human rights irrelevant. This lack of interest has a paralysing effect on human rights mechanisms and civil society. This is particularly evident in cases where state actors fail to ensure compliance with court rulings at national and international level. Serious human rights violations often occur when we normalise them.

Recent migration reforms at European level have even introduced the idea that, under certain circumstances, unaccompanied migrant children – who are among the most vulnerable groups – could be regarded as a security risk. If children can pose a security threat, then our future is a security threat. States must not be permitted to take arbitrary measures in the name of arbitrary security concepts. Security considerations must be based on evidence, legal safeguards, transparency, independent judicial review and oversight.»

CLA is committed to protecting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria. The organisation provides free, specialist legal assistance and supports particularly vulnerable people through complex asylum and court proceedings. Through campaigning and advocacy, it works towards a fair, transparent and humane asylum system in Bulgaria and Europe.

Donation keyword: CLA, Bulgaria

NON-VIOLENCE BELIEVING – LIVING – LEARNING THEOLOGY OF PEACE CHURCHES

BY HANNES MENKE



Hannes Menke

has been a member of the Board of Trustees and Executive Board of schwelle Foundation since 2012.

He is active in schwelle's Africa and Turkey working group.

Professor Dr Fernando Enns and the Centre for Peace Churches Theology combine research, teaching and practical peace work. The ATF is dedicated to the theology and history of the peace churches – particularly the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions – and promotes non-violence, reconciliation and peace-building. For the schwelle Foundation, the project partnership has, since 2025, opened up new historical, academic and globally networked perspectives for active peace work.

We first met Professor Dr Fernando Enns, holder of the Chair at the Centre for Peace Churches Theology – Arbeitsstelle Theologie der Friedenskirchen (ATF), in 2024 during his lecture as part of our series «Perspectives on Peace in Times of War». Based at the University of Hamburg, the Centre is an institution dedicated to the theology and history of the peace churches. Its aim is to promote peace theology, non-violence and reconciliation in teaching, research and practice. It is funded by the Foundation of the Association of Mennonite Churches (AMG) in Germany, which brings together several sponsors. It is supported by a board of trustees, on which representatives of the sponsors, the University of Hamburg and the churches meet once a year.

Four lecturers and student assistants work at this theological chair. In addition to academic work (seminars and lectures), a study trip to South Korea and doctoral colloquia in Lithuania were organised in 2025. The collaboration with other institutes gave rise to the «Peacebuilding initiative at the University of Hamburg», which offers a one-year curriculum for students.

The centre is not only active in academic circles but also maintains social and ecumenical networks. A key focus in 2025 was the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement, which was viewed both as a historical commemoration and a contemporary challenge. In the Mennonite congregation in Hamburg, for example, events were held as part of the MennoForum under the title «Is another world possible?! 500 Years of the Anabaptist Movement. Non-violent Revolution?» and recalled the centuries-old Mennonite tradition of non-violence.

In an initial historical lecture, it was emphasised that both the term «peace churches» and the term «pacifism» were only «invented» and defined around 1930. Following Jesus, loving one's enemies and the rejection of military service and warmongering were not new insights for the Anabaptists in the 20th century, as they had been following this way of life since their origins 400 years earlier.

Another event entitled «No Violence – The Peaceful Revolution in the GDR» served as a reminder of the recent past as a legacy for the present we are shaping today.



The history and theology of the peace churches are taught at the ATF – the programme also includes lecture series on current topics relating to non-violence and spirituality.



Active participation at the European meeting of Mennonite theology students in Lithuania in 2025.

The «Mennonite Academy» was founded in 2025 as an alliance of several educational institutions; I, Hannes Menke, am taking part in its founding process with great interest and benefit. I am impressed by how Mennonite congregations strive to bear a genuine witness to peace in almost every area. In the core area of theological teaching, it is not surprising that a New Testament advanced seminar on the Sermon on the Mount is offered as a guide to peace theology, with an ecumenical and intercultural interpretation.

During the summer term, a lecture series entitled «Is another world possible?! Movements that have changed / are changing societies non-violently» particularly caught my interest. In Zoom lectures, speakers from diverse backgrounds presented alternatives showing how reforms have been and are being initiated and new ideas introduced into society using approaches other than those based on violence. Topics that are close to the heart of the *schwelle* Foundation or which may be of new interest to it include:

- Combatants for Peace: A different reality is possible, lecture and discussion with an Israeli and a Palestinian peace activist
- Civil and church-based peace movements in Colombia
- Peace Movement in South Korea during the dictatorship and today
- The Gaza War vs international law: possibilities and limits of conflict resolution in Israel and Palestine
- Black Lives Matter and the fight against racism

This new partnership with the Centre for Peace Churches Theology is of particular significance to us, as it opens up new historical and academic horizons for us, as well as providing access to a global network.

The Mennonites emerged as a Protestant free church during the Reformation. They are part of the Anabaptist movement, in which Christian faith is expressed through baptism as an act of confession and in the way of life. Their commitment to peace is deeply rooted in the Bible, particularly in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. With their emphasis on non-violence, pacifism and social justice, Mennonites have always maintained a critical distance from the state. Their consistent refusal to perform military service and their rejection of oaths have meant that Mennonites have often fled or migrated to other parts of the world as a persecuted minority.

Today, Mennonites live on every continent in communities characterised by internal cohesion, solidarity and service to others. Their witness serves as a reminder that peace is possible – through dialogue, humility and persistent action.



The Centre for Peace Churches Theology at the University of Hamburg conducts research into the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions and promotes theology of peace and non-violence. It combines academic work with social engagement and international peace initiatives.

Donation keyword: ATF, Germany

WARS – IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE? FAITH AND NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

BY SUSANNE KORHAMMER

The organisation «Believers for Peace», which is supported by *schwelle* project partner RAND, hosted a conference in October 2025 in Omiš, Croatia, approximately 40 km from Split. «Believers for Peace» is an association of people from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia who are committed to promoting peace through non-violence. Sixty participants from Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, France and Germany attended a conference featuring numerous talks, workshops and opportunities for discussion.

In her welcome address, Ana Raffai, one of the organisers and a project partner of the *die schwelle* foundation, expressed the hope that the conference would help us all to find, both individually and collectively, the will and courage for peace, and to strengthen our spirituality for non-violent resistance. The conference was centred on discussion and joint reflection on the presentations given. The warmth and understanding with which every contribution was valued left a lasting impression. Facial expressions and comments revealed on many occasions that, even 30 years after the end of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the wounds remain. In this context, the embraces and heartfelt gestures between former warring parties were deeply moving.

The presentations covered a wide range of topics. Beginning with an analysis of the growing militarism linked to increasing social oppression, the session went on to examine current populist politics, which run counter to a pluralistic and just society. The conference placed great emphasis on interfaith dialogue. Theological foundations for strengthening spirituality, will and courage for non-violent resistance were presented from both Christian and Muslim perspectives. The conference focused on the central question of forgiveness and forgetting from theological, philosophical and psychological perspectives. The conference concluded with a theoretical presentation of concepts relating to non-violent resistance and the logic of peace, followed by positive examples from the region: on the one hand, the non-violent protests by Serbian students, and on the other, several examples from Bosnia.



Susanne Korhammer

has been involved with the schwelle Foundation since 2009. Since retiring, the qualified engineer has also been active on the Board and in the finance and Southeast Europe working groups.

60 participants from Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, France and Germany attended the conference: «Wars – is there anything else? Spirituality, faith and commitment to non-violent resistance».

The exchange with Serbian students from the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade was deeply moving. They gave a compelling account of their protest actions, which are always non-violent. They have had to learn to cope with reprisals ranging from threats of professional bans by the Patriarch and expulsion from student halls of residence to violent disrupters seeking to undermine the non-violent nature of their actions. In conclusion, the students made it clear how much strength they had gained from their joint actions and that they do not regret the lost academic year.

The joint proclamation resulting from the conference demonstrates the participants' commitment: «We call on one another, but also on our political and religious leaders, to take responsibility for the world we leave to future generations, to support young people as they stand up against violence and injustice, to protect the weak and vulnerable, to get to know others, and to live according to our conscience. We do this not only with words, but also by setting an example!»

STATEMENT by the participants of the Omiš conference (excerpt)

... In the face of growing militarism, which is being imposed by political elites as an indisputable and necessary response, and in the face of populist tendencies that are undermining the foundations of society on a global scale, we are convinced that it is our duty to raise our voices. None of us should remain passive observers: Every war, every injustice represents a defeat that compels us to ask ourselves – what is our responsibility, where are we going wrong, and what response can we offer as individuals and as communities?

We emphasise that peace must not remain merely the subject of abstract thought or be understood solely as the absence of war. Militarism and populism stand in contrast to the core messages of our faith traditions. ... We do not face a choice between peace and security – justice, respect for human rights and social development are the conditions for a life of fulfilment in peace. The false dilemma of «Peace or Security» is an excuse for future conflicts, for security exists only in peace. ...

We would remind you that churches and faith communities must not adopt the rhetoric of populism; on the contrary, they should protect the weak and vulnerable, include the marginalised, and promote dialogue and empathy. They should call on economic and political elites to take responsibility for society as a whole. Our faith teaches us to protect the displaced, to make strangers our neighbours, and to respond to evil with good...

For believers, forgiveness, justice and reconciliation are the primary prerequisites for peacemaking. We wish to emphasise: Forgiveness aids the healing of the entire community.

In the deep conviction that we praise God by building peace.
Conference participants, Omiš, 12 October 2025



In a lot of workshops and discussion sessions, the conference participants discussed spirituality and non-violence.



Encounters and in-depth discussions during the conference in Omiš.

RAND offers trainings in which participants learn to resolve conflicts non-violently and actively promote peace, and advocates for non-violent alternatives in politics and the church.

Donation keyword: RAND, Croatia

LEGAL ADVICE AND EMPOWERMENT PARTNER PROJECT MHOLA IN TANZANIA

BY AISSATOU BOUBA

MHOLA makes legal services accessible to women, children and marginalised groups, and empowers them in the economy, politics and society. Integrated advice, awareness-raising and infrastructure projects form the basis for sustainable change.

Tanzania is a country of diverse legal systems and cultures: alongside state law, Islamic law and local customary laws also exist. In rural regions, where around 80% of the population lives, this plurality of legal systems has a significant impact on daily life. As an NGO, MHOLA works closely with state institutions to improve access to justice, resolve conflicts out of court and offer practical support to women and children in asserting their rights.

A key focus is on providing legal advice and legal aid. MHOLA operates advice centres in various locations where clients have access to telephone advice, face-to-face legal advice, mediation and the drafting of legal documents. Particular attention is paid to cases of gender-based violence, land and inheritance matters, and safeguarding the rights of children and people with disabilities. Over 85% of conflicts are resolved out-of-court through mediation.

MHOLA works closely with the Ministry of Justice and the National Advisory Board for Legal Aid, which oversees the quality and coordination of state and non-state legal services. Through coordination meetings, policy dialogues and joint training sessions for legal advisers, social workers and police officers, procedures are optimised, standards are upheld and the provision of legal aid is continuously improved. The aim is to ensure that legal aid is accessible to all and to prevent abuse by unqualified providers.

In parallel, MHOLA strengthens women's economic and political autonomy. Over 200 women receive training in sustainable agriculture, including seeds, fertilisation and plant protection, supported by district authorities. The



Aissatou Bouba

has been a member of the Board of Trustees of schwelle Foundation since 2023.

The lecturer in the departments of Cultural Studies and Romance Studies at the University of Bremen, is actively involved in schwelle's Africa and Turkey Working Group.

Providing legal advice to people who face difficulties accessing the state legal system is one of MHOLA's core tasks.

It is predominantly women – particularly widows or divorcees who are vulnerable to gender-based violence – who make use of these services.





income generated boosts family earnings and enables children to attend school. 87 female leaders are being specifically prepared for senior roles. Results in local elections are having an impact: Women are increasingly taking on responsibility in institutions and local leadership positions.

Awareness-raising initiatives reach tens of thousands of people. Events such as football tournaments, public meetings, leaflets, brochures and radio programmes provide information on women's land rights, children's rights, the consequences of gender-based violence and the importance of legal aid. Over 1,200 pupils are taught directly in schools about their rights and the protection available to them.

Early childhood development is another key area. In day-care centres and prison facilities, children from marginalised families, including those with physical disabilities, are cared for and supported. Lessons in English and Kiswahili, educational support, meals and leisure activities help develop essential skills. The facilities are powered by a solar energy system, which was funded by the *schwelle* Foundation as part of its carbon footprint reduction efforts. This infrastructure ensures a reliable electricity supply, the operation of water pumps and agricultural projects, the proceeds of which go directly towards running the facilities. The physiotherapy centre, which is still under construction, will in future offer children with special needs additional access to rehabilitation services.

MHOLA is continuously strengthening its internal structures, financial management and public relations. Refurbished office buildings, new communication tools, policies on gender equality and child protection, and staff training ensure the quality of its services. The combination of legal advice, training, awareness-raising, infrastructure projects and income-generating activities enables sustainable improvements for women, children and marginalised groups.

Looking to the future, MHOLA plans to expand its digital legal aid services, complete the rehabilitation centre and mobilise additional resources. The aim remains to empower women, protect children and secure the provision of services in the long term. Through these comprehensive measures, MHOLA is a stable partner in the promotion of women's and children's rights in the Kagera region.

Through regular visits, including to remote villages, MHOLA raises awareness about women's and children's rights. Here, MHOLA's managing director, Saulo Malauri, meets residents of a fishing village on Lake Victoria.



Childcare at the day-care centre

MHOLA (Mama's Hope Organisation for Legal Assistance) in Tanzania provides legal advice to people in rural areas who find it difficult to access the state legal system. At its community centre, MHOLA cares for children with special needs and provides support and information to people from the surrounding villages.

Donation keyword: MHOLA, Tanzania

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY SUPPLY RESULTS OF SCHWELLE'S CLARBON FOOTPRINT ASSESSMENT

BY SUSANNE KORHAMMER

In 2020, the foundation commissioned a systematic assessment of the greenhouse gas emissions generated by its activities for the first time. The carbon footprint analysis identified the areas within the foundation where emissions arise and the scale of these emissions. As a measure to offset these emissions, MHOLA was supported through the funding of a solar power system.



Susanne Korhammer

has been involved with the Schwelle Foundation since 2009. The former managing director of an engineering firm specialising in energy efficiency and renewable energy is committed to improving the foundation's carbon footprint.

The solar power system supplies the entire MHOLA Community Centre in the small town of Muleba with solar power. The facility's electricity requirements are met via solar batteries which are continuously charged by the solar system. The largest consumer of electricity is the water pump, which operates several times a day and draws fresh water from a depth of 120 metres into three tanks with a total capacity of 15 cubic metres. From there, water is supplied to the centre and the agricultural land by gravity. Other consumers of electricity include the kitchen, with food processing and refrigeration, IT equipment and lighting.

Outside the rainy season, the photovoltaic system can cover the centre's entire electricity demand, whilst night-time electricity requirements can be met by the solar batteries. The entire system operates off-grid, meaning that the centre's power supply is secured even in the event of a power cut. During the rainy season or on rare days without sufficient sunlight, the batteries are recharged via the public grid as required. In the event of power cuts during the rainy season, the battery system can maintain the power supply for around twelve hours, and even up to 24 hours if consumption is reduced. Thanks to battery-backed operation, MHOLA now has a continuous power supply and power cuts no longer occur.

Thanks to the stable power supply, MHOLA has become significantly more attractive. The facility is increasingly being used as a conference venue, including by the local council. The slogan «safe space and safe energy» contributes to its positive image. Another success: MHOLA has been recognised by the relevant ministry for its approach to sustainability projects and the implementation of sustainability strategies. Looking ahead, MHOLA plans to expand its food processing activities by drying fruit and vegetables. It is currently assessing whether the existing solar power system is sufficient to meet the additional energy requirements. After more than three years of operation, it can be estimated that over 50% of the average CO₂ emissions generated by the centre's operations have been offset.



MHOLA's Managing Director, Saulo Malauri, receiving a certificate of recognition from the Ministry of Community Development for the implementation of sustainable projects.

TRANSFORMING CONFLICTS – PREVENTING WARS LECTURE SERIES 2025

BY BIRGIT VOLMERG

Through its series of events, *schwelle* provides a space where, beyond polarising debates and the formation of opinion, different perspectives on war and peace can be explored, whether of an academic, cultural-historical, political or practical nature. Our aim is to gain a broader understanding of the «big picture».

In collaboration with the Evangelical Educational Institute of Bremen, the Peace Commissioners of the Bremen Protestant Church, the Trade Union Confederation (DGB) Bremen and others, *schwelle* continued its 2024 lecture series in 2025 under the title: «Transforming Conflicts – Preventing Wars». The lectures were held at the Bremen Trade Union House. Some of the lectures were made available to listen to on YouTube via the foundation's website.

We are currently witnessing a disturbing rise in violent armed conflicts around the world, and it seems as though wars are inevitable. However, we also know from history that wars can be ended and conflicts transformed into peaceful coexistence. Conflicts are part of our lives. They can arise anywhere: in interpersonal relationships, between groups, within societies and between states. Whether conflicts have a productive effect or escalate into wars depends on how those involved act, and on the skills, options for action, values, interests and instruments (political, legal, institutional) available to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence.

Against this backdrop, we have invited the speakers to our lecture series. What are the transformative forces, and what are the interrelationships in peaceful conflict resolution from which we can learn?

Dr. Inga Luther, Executive Director of the OWEN Association – Mobile Academy for Gender Democracy and Peace Promotion, kicked off the series. She drew on her many years of experience in initiating regional dialogue meetings between women from Ukraine, Russia and other European countries, enabling them to support one another locally and show empathy towards one another. At the heart of this work are the weekly meetings of the team of coordinators who facilitate and organise these dialogues. Since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, this has become much more difficult, even dangerous, and has required a reorientation and restructuring of the joint international platform.



Birgit Volmerg

has been involved with the schwelle Foundation since 2020.

The professor emerita of occupational and engineering psychology is a member of schwelle's «Rethinking Security» working group.

In her talk, journalist Charlotte Wiedemann points out that traumas form a hierarchy within the world's collective memory.



Charlotte Wiedemann, a journalist and author from Berlin, shares her thoughts and experiences from her travels in crisis-hit regions. She describes the «world's memory» as a rugged landscape in which the perception and recollection of what has been and continues to be inflicted upon people in different parts of the world is distributed very unevenly. She states: «Traumas have a hierarchy» and «victims do not have to be innocent». In our German culture of remembrance, she argues, commemoration of the Holocaust is omnipresent, whereas the «Nakba» – the trauma of the expulsion of Palestinians following the founding of the State of Israel – is virtually non-existent in our official culture of remembrance, as is the perception and recognition of Palestinian refugees living in Germany.

Tahiro Sy, a staff member of the International Christian Peace Service EIRENE and programme manager for West Africa, takes a critical view of development aid to date. He provides a clear analysis of the complex crises in the Sahel – unemployment, a loss of trust in those in power, Islamist terrorism and climate change. He speaks of the crisis of «Western centrism», which merely prolongs colonial dependencies and is accompanied by growing hostility towards Europe. He analyses how both local and external actors cause and exacerbate insecurity and violence. What is needed, he argues, is a policy of self-reliance and personal responsibility in sustainable projects. He reports on how civil society operates in the Sahel and how it perceives the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.



Professor Dr. August Pradetto advocates a multi-perspective approach to the analysis of conflicts.

Professor Dr. August Pradetto, a political scientist at the German Army University in Hamburg specialising in Eastern Europe, draws our attention to the ethnic conflicts that have arisen during the «nation-building» processes in post-communist states following the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to this interpretation, Russia's war against Ukraine can be understood as an identity conflict in which various ethnic-nationalist factions, driven by linguistic, cultural and economic factors, are also active within Ukraine itself. This is not sufficiently recognised in Germany. From this perspective, familiar enemy stereotypes and patterns of thought are called into question: Rather than thinking in dichotomies, the speaker advocates a multi-perspective approach and a recognition of the simultaneous civil war within the international conflict.

Elisabeth Meyer works in the Partnership Team at the Berghof Foundation. She gives us an insight into the research-based work of the Berghof Foundation, which has been organising peace processes worldwide with partner organisations for over 50 years: The Foundation's 130 staff members help to resolve local conflicts; they initiate dialogues (e.g. historical-

biographical workshops) to foster empathy and a shared understanding of reality between conflicting parties; and they conduct peace education training. According to the speaker, all this is only possible if trustworthy social spaces are available for this purpose. As Elisabeth Meyer explains, the Berghof Foundation's long-term commitment is focused on creating such social spaces at all levels.

We invited **David Scheuing** to be the final speaker in our lecture series. David Scheuing is active in the DFG-VK (German Peace Society – United War Resisters) and on the international board of «War Resisters International». He currently works as the editor-in-chief of the journal «Wissenschaft und Frieden – Science and Peace». From him, we heard, on the one hand, a systematic definition of the various levels of conflict transformation, which requires not only a thorough understanding of the specific conditions of the situation at hand, but also skills and methods that need to be practised when dealing with conflicts. On the other hand, the discussion focused on practical peace-building actions in our daily lives and, in light of current events, on ways to counter the militarisation of our society, such as conscientious objection.

It can be said that the chosen format – consisting of half-hour presentations followed by discussions in small groups, before the contributions are discussed further with the speakers in a plenary session – has proved its worth. Besides providing an opportunity to get to know one another better, the discussions created a space in which participants could take note of others' perspectives and, ideally, acknowledge them.

Two further collaborative events took place, demonstrating just how important moderation is in maintaining a dialogue: On 1 September, the *schwelle* Foundation partnered with the Trade Union Confederation (DGB) for a very well-attended evening event to mark Anti-War Day. The moderator facilitated a discussion in which quite controversial views on arms production were exchanged.

On 27 October, a joint event was held with the organisation Connection and the Bremen Quakers, featuring two speakers from Russia. Connection is an international organisation for conscientious objection and was awarded the International Bremen Peace Award by the *schwelle* Foundation in 2024. During the event, it became clear that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine had triggered a deep mistrust among the Ukrainian people in the audience towards any speaker from Russia, even though they were speaking about their efforts to support conscientious objection. The event demonstrated the need to consider appropriate formats for dialogue in which the hostility between states does not also manifest itself here in Germany between civilians from both countries.



Elisabeth Meyer gives a vivid account of how the Berghof Foundation has been working with local partners to transform conflicts for the past 50 years.

Streitfall Frieden
FRIEDENSPRAXIS VOR ORT

VORTRAGSREIHE
MAI – JUNI – SEPTEMBER 2026

ORT: DGB-HAUS BREMEN
BAHNHOFSPLATZ 22-28 | BREMEN

ZEIT: JEWELS 19 UHR
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Stiftung die schwelle
Beiträge zum Frieden

DGB
Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
Land Bremen

BildungsWerk
vhs
Bremer Volkshochschule

In 2026, we will continue the series:
19 May: *Rethinking Peace Education*
2 June: *Climate Under Attack – Dilemmas Facing the Arms Industry*
and two further events in September.
DGB House, Bremen, at 7 pm

Experts from Russia:

Katya Dikovskaia has worked for organisations including Memorial, Nochlezhka and the Sphere Foundation. She has been Director of the Russian Conscientious Objection Movement since May 2025.

Artem Klyga is a lawyer specialising in military law and has been a specialist advisor on Eastern Europe at Connection since March 2025.

A COMMITTED PATH TO NON-VIOLENCE PROJECT COMPLETION AT INTERO

BY PETRA TITZE

For many years, the INTeRo Centar in Rijeka has supported people in Croatia in their commitment to non-violence, self-empowerment and social inclusion. The centre's work came to an end in 2025 – an occasion to look back with appreciation on an effective and courageous commitment under challenging conditions.

Since 2016, the *schwelle* Foundation has continuously accompanied, promoted and financially supported the INTeRo Centar in Rijeka. Founded in 2015, the project operated under precarious financial conditions throughout its entire duration. The long-term support provided by *schwelle* over the course of almost a decade was therefore a key factor in enabling the INTeRo Centar to reliably maintain and further develop its work, as well as to set new thematic priorities.

The INTeRo Centar was committed to non-violence, reconciliation and empowerment in post-war Croatian society. The focus was always on empowering individuals so that they could address conflicts, discrimination and social tensions non-violently and become agents of social change themselves. Through workshops, counselling and mediation, empathy, self-awareness and constructive conflict resolution were taught. This approach enabled many participants to reflect on their own experiences of exclusion, violence or trauma and to develop new approaches for action.

The work of INTeRo Centar in supporting LGBTQ+ people from religious backgrounds has been particularly influential. In Croatia, where religious affiliation plays a central role for many people, queer individuals often face exclusion from religious communities, rejection by their families and social discrimination after coming out. With the «Priceless» programme, INTeRo Centar created a safe space for religious LGBTQ+ people – something that



Petra Titze

is a political scientist and has been the managing director of the schwelle Foundation since 2008



A festively laid Easter table:

In Croatia, queer people are often excluded from their religious communities and families after coming out. The INTeRo Centre invited people to celebrate religious festivals together and provided safe spaces and a sense of belonging.

Neda Popović and Mihael Sečen, who spent many years building up and shaping the INTeRo Centar.





Local, national and international podcasts on LGBTQ+ issues and spirituality have given these topics a wide reach.

had previously been lacking in Croatia. Through group sessions, weekends, public discussions, film evenings and podcasts, the programme fostered exchange, self-acceptance and visibility, whilst building bridges between spirituality and sexual identity. The podcast work, which was stepped up from 2020 onwards – partly multilingual and with a Europe-wide focus – significantly expanded the reach of this approach and made it possible to share personal stories and non-violent perspectives beyond national borders.

From 2021, INTeRo Centar launched the «Superwoman» project, placing a further focus on empowering young girls and women in several Croatian cities. The project combined empowerment with violence prevention and provided knowledge about self-worth, personal boundaries and rights. Experience-based and creative methods created a framework in which young participants could develop self-confidence and build practical skills. In parallel, the work with volunteers grew into a project in its own right, which not only ensured the quality of the services provided but also focused on the personal development and empowerment of the volunteers themselves.

This diverse and ongoing work was carried out over the years by just two people: Neda Popović and Mihael Sečen. Both brought extensive professional qualifications, many years of experience in civil society work and a high level of personal commitment to the role. They managed, developed and were responsible for all the centre's activities, whilst also serving as key points of contact for participants, cooperation partners and sponsors. The continuity and quality of INTeRo Centar's work are inextricably linked to their dedication.

In 2025, the INTeRo Centar ceased its operations. This decision was driven by personal changes in the lives of Neda Popović and Mihael Sečen which made it no longer possible to continue the project in its previous form. This conclusion does not signify a failure, but rather the deliberate conclusion of an intensive, effective and, over many years, significant commitment undertaken under structurally challenging conditions.

schwelle Foundation looks back on its collaboration with the INTeRo Centar with gratitude and appreciation. The project offered concrete support to people in Croatia, addressed social taboos and created spaces for non-violence, dignity and self-empowerment. The impact of this work extends beyond the project's duration – into the experiences, relationships and strengthened attitudes of the people it reached.

HOPE FOR AFRICA NON-VIOLENCE, YOUTH AND CRISIS

BY HANNES MENKE

The «Project Espérance Afrique – PEA» (Project Hope for Africa, PEA) in Togo aims to encourage young people in particular to play an active role in shaping their society through non-violent means. The *schwelle* Foundation has been supporting PEA since 2020.

Like many African states, Togo has a long history of repressive rule: As a German and later French colony, under the dictatorship of Gnassingbé Eyadéma, and, to this day, under a «democrature» – a manipulated, authoritarian form of formal democracy – under his son, Faure Gnassingbé. In the 1990s, following a popular uprising, there was a democratic awakening and scope for social and societal development. PEA Director Franck Adubra was convinced that social change must be driven not only by political parties, but also by a grassroots renewal movement

The primary aim of the project was to promote non-violence and prevent inter-ethnic conflicts as well as political and religious radicalisation. At the same time, the project worked towards the social and professional integration of young people by supporting them in setting up self-help projects. The project has its own community centre, the «Mini-Village Espérance», near Kpalimé, approximately 120 km north of the capital, Lomé. Seminars, interfaith and intercultural meetings, work camps and open «tea rooms» were organised there.

Regular radio programmes and public events have been an important tool for promoting a spirit of peaceful coexistence, addressing not only personal and family conflicts but also social and political ones. Through these, young people themselves explained how non-violence helps to resolve conflicts in everyday life and in wider society.

Unfortunately, the project has been able to carry out fewer and fewer activities recently. The strained social situation and increasing poverty have meant that volunteers are no longer able to commit to the project. Like the young people, they are investing their time in small, informal second and third jobs to secure a livelihood for themselves and their families.

Due to family commitments and illness, the project leaders, Gisèle and Franck Adubra, are currently unable to continue the project. In their 2025 annual report, they announced that the PEA is suspending its activities until further notice and that the *schwelle* foundation is ending its funding.



Hannes Menke

has been a board member of *schwelle* Foundation since 2012. In addition to his involvement in the working group «Rethinking Security» he is active in die *schwelle*'s Africa and Turkey working group.



On 21 September 2023, International Day of Peace, PEA is organising a demonstration for non-violence in Kpalimé.



Gisèle and Franck Adubra have been working together at PEA since 1990.

FINANCES 2025

SCHWELLE FOUNDATION

In 2025, the foundation raised 442,500 euros. This income came from returns on financial investments, donations and project grants. With this money, the foundation supported thirteen long-term peace projects in Turkey, Bosnia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Tanzania, Togo, Israel, Palestine, Spain and Germany, provided funding for individual grants, facilitated events, project and partner visits, and maintained an office with 1.5 staff positions. Expenditure amounted to 375,385 euros.

Thanks to increased income from our assets, following on from «New Profile», CLA and the Peace Churches' Theology Office in 2025, we were able to include further new project partners in our long-term funding in 2026: «War Resisters' International» and the «International Fellowship of Reconciliation». We will provide further details on this in the 2026 Annual Report.

The foundation's assets, including free reserves, totalled 4.9 million euros.

Expenditure	2023 in T €	2024 in T €	2025 in T €	% 2025
Projects	238,64	248,84	292,21	77,8 %
Project Partners	140,34	134,28	173,65	46,3 %
Individual Grants	10,93	8,04	11,00	2,9 %
International Bremen Peace Award	3,03	23,40	5,82	1,6 %
Personnel Costs Projects	84,34	82,76	101,74	27,1 %
Operating Costs	60,82	62,82	83,17	22,2 %
Material Costs	32,71	27,59	49,26	13,1 %
Personnel Costs Administration	28,11	35,24	33,91	9 %
Total Expenditure	299,45	311,30	375,39	100%
Income	2023 in T €	2024 in T €	2025 in T €	% 2025
Income from Assets	112,41	240,23	216,75	49,0 %
Major Donations	125,0	125,00	125,00	28,2 %
General Donations	30,12	46,96	38,69	8,7 %
Project-Related Donations	63,38	43,26	54,64	12,3 %
Grants from Third Parties	5,33	9,09	7,47	1,7 %
Total Income	336,24	464,53	442,55	100%
Result	+ 36,79	+ 153,23	+ 67,16	

FINANCES 2025

FOUNDATION

SCHALOMDIAKONAT

THE DEPENDENT FOUNDATION «SCHALOMDIAKONAT»

The founding families of *schwelle* established the dependent foundation Schalomdiakonats in 2002. This foundation supports the work of *schwelle*'s cooperation partner «gewaltfrei handeln».

The Schalomdiakonats Foundation's assets amount to 650,030 euros. In addition, as of 31 December 2025, there are reserves of 53,136 euros, which may be distributed to the association «gewaltfrei handeln».

FINANCES OF THE FOUNDATION SCHALOMDIAKONAT 2025

Expenditure		2025
Donation to <i>gewaltfrei</i> handeln		26.000 €
Administrative Expenses		1.736 €
Losses from the Disposal of Securities		18.970 €
Total Expenses		46.706 €

Income		2025
Income from Assets		17.822 €
Income from the Disposal of Securities		21.677 €
Donations to the foundation Schalomdiakonats		0 €
Total Income		39.499 €

Result	-7.207 €
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BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND EXECUTIVE BOARD OF SCHWELLE FOUNDATION 2025

In 2025, Çetin Gürer joined the Board of Trustees.

As of December 31, 2025, the foundation had nine members of the Board of Trustees, one advisor and five members of the Executive Board.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Aissatou Bouba
Angelika Moriz
Beate Löwe-Navarro
Britta Ratsch-Menke
Çetin Gürer
Jenny Kauther
Johanna Zschornack
Rebekka Meyboden
Thomas Joppig

ADVISOR:

Birgit Volmerg

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD:

Anette Klasing (Chairwoman)
Hannes Menke (2. Chairman)
Bärbel Ludewig (Treasurer)
Susanne Korhammer
Heinrich Theilmann

EMPLOYEES OF THE OFFICE:

Petra Titze (Management)
Saida Halep (Administration)



Back Cover:

Every two years, the schwelle Foundation presents the International Bremen Peace Award at Bremen City Hall – as will be the case on 8 May 2026.

Bremen's former mayor, Karoline Linnert, is the patron of the Peace Award.

Stiftung **die schwelle**
Beiträge zum Frieden

schwelle Foundation
Contributions to Peace

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28209 Bremen
Telephone +49 (0)421 – 30 32 575
info@dieschwelle.de
www.dieschwelle.de/en

Donation Account:
GLS Bank
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BIC: GENODEM1GLS

