

Introduction of Professor Heiner Bielefeldt
United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief
and Presentation of
The International Center for Law and Religion Studies'
2016 Distinguished Service Award

October 2, 2016

It is a great privilege for me to introduce Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt, a long-time friend and this year's recipient of the 2016 Distinguished Service Award presented by the International Center for Law and Religion Studies.

Professor Heiner Bielefeldt was appointed to serve as the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2010, and his mandate was renewed by the UN Human Rights Council for an additional three years in 2013. His term in office has been further extended through the end of this month to enable his successor to complete service as the Special Rapporteur for Iran. His position is one of what are now over fifty thematic and country-specific Special Procedures mandates (including Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, and certain Working Groups) that address special areas of concern of the United Nations.

In addition to serving as Special Rapporteur for over six years, Professor Bielefeldt has had a full time position as Professor of Human Rights and Human Rights Politics at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany. He took his first degree in Catholic theology at the University of Tübingen, followed by a doctorate in philosophy, also from Tübingen, and did his *Habilitation* (second doctorate) at the University of Bremen. He has taught at universities in Mannheim, Heidelberg, Toronto, Bremen, Bielefeld, and also Oslo, Norway, and has also participated widely in conferences around the world. Reaching beyond Christian theology and western philosophy, he has also done significant work on Islam.

I first met Professor Bielefeldt near the end of his six-year service as Director of the German Institute for Human Rights in Berlin, a position which he held from 2003-2009. I was introduced to him by a long-term friend and delegate to this conference, Professor Tore Lindholm.

What I can attest is that Professor Bielefeldt has brought extraordinary energy, intellectual depth, profound human concern, and extraordinarily valuable and balanced judgment, at a time when world events have called for such judgment in the field of freedom of religion or belief as never before. Despite carrying what sounds to me like an extraordinarily heavy teaching load at his university, and despite insufficient staffing of support for his position at the United Nations, he has kept of a schedule of responding to hundreds of individual letters from individuals, regular site visits to countries around the world, and the preparation of two major reports each year. His recognition of key issues in his reports, and his focused studies of key issues, such as the right to conversion, recognition and registration of religious entities, violence in the name of religion, religion and gender issues, accommodating religion in the workplace, and many other such issues, has contributed in major ways to improving implementation of the ideal of freedom of religion or belief world-wide.

It is a great honor for me personally, and for our Center, and for the institutions in which our Center is housed, to present Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt with this year's Distinguished Service Award.