



Deutscher Bundestag

The Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid

Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und
humanitäre Hilfe
Informationen in englischer Sprache



**New
2023
version**
20th electoral term



“Human rights are our civilisation’s greatest accomplishment, one which has come under growing pressure in recent years. It is our duty, as the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, to take resolute action against these worrying developments. We have an unconditional obligation to draw attention to human rights violations, to support human rights defenders, and to press for human rights to be respected worldwide.”



Renata Alt, FDP
Chairwoman of the Committee on
Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid

The German Bundestag's decisions are prepared by its committees, which are established at the start of each electoral term. Four of them are stipulated by the Basic Law, the German constitution: the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Defence Committee, the Committee on European Union Affairs and the Petitions Committee.

The Budget Committee and the Committee for the Scrutiny of Elections, Immunity and the Rules of Procedure are also required by law. The spheres of responsibility of the committees essentially reflect the Federal Government's distribution of ministerial portfolios. This enables Parliament to scrutinise the government's work effectively.

The committees of the German Bundestag

The German Bundestag sets political priorities of its own by establishing additional committees for specific subjects, such as sport, cultural affairs, human rights or tourism. In addition, special bodies such as parliamentary advisory councils, committees of inquiry or study commissions can also be established. The committees are composed of members of all the parliamentary groups, reflecting the balance of these groups in the German Bundestag. The distribution of the chairs and deputy chairs among the parliamentary groups also reflects their relative strengths in the plenary. In the current electoral term, the committees have between 19 and 49 members.

The committees discuss and deliberate on items referred to them by the plenary. They also have the right to take up issues on their own initiative, allowing them to set priorities in the parliamentary debate. When necessary, they draw on external expertise – usually by holding public hearings. At the end of a committee's deliberations – especially on bills and motions for which it is the lead committee – it adopts a recommendation for a decision and a report, which serve as the basis for the plenary's decision.

Germany is committed to universal human rights. The fundamental rights enshrined in the Basic Law are directly binding on the legislature. The European Convention on Human Rights, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights also establish standards for policy-making in Germany. The German Bundestag expressed its special commitment to human rights and humanitarian aid in 1998 by setting up a dedicated committee. In doing so, the Bundestag accepted the role of an advocate for people facing persecution and people dependent on assistance around the world.

The Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid

Even today, human rights are severely restricted or under threat in many countries. Human rights violations remain widespread, including discrimination, persecution, expulsion or oppression of groups in society and entire peoples. Torture and the death penalty also still remain in use in many countries. Human rights policy therefore means monitoring very closely whether countries are complying with their human rights obligations, and intervening where violations are found to be taking place.

In light of the large number of protracted violent conflicts and humanitarian crises, there is a growing need for humanitarian aid, which can alleviate the hardship experienced by those affected. However, it is essential for it to be supplemented by preventive measures that help to avoid crises emerging in the first place.

- 6 ■■■■■ SPD
- 5 ■■■■ CDU/CSU
- 3 ■■■ Alliance 90/The Greens
- 2 ■■ FDP
- 2 ■■ AfD
- 1 ■ The Left Party

Number of members: 19

Chairwoman: Renata Alt, FDP

Deputy Chairman: Norbert Maria Altenkamp, CDU/CSU

The Committee's work in support of minorities and people in emergency situations

As in previous electoral terms, the Committee is currently dealing with problems that are usually connected to the consequences of state repression or crises worldwide. The most important issues include the situation of ethnic and religious minorities and vulnerable groups such as the LGBTIQ community, who face repression which can stretch from marginalisation, discrimination and persecution to torture and execution. The Committee also focuses on the shrinking space for civil society, the global situation for refugees, action to combat torture, and the abolition of the death penalty. More general topics, such as the development of democracy and the rule of law in individual

countries and regions, or the impact of global economic activity on human rights, are also a priority in the Committee's work.

The Committee, chaired by Renata Alt (FDP), requests regular briefings from the Federal Government on the human rights situation and on humanitarian aid services and deficits in the various crisis regions. These issues do not fall primarily within the remit of a single government department; instead, they are split between several ministries, especially the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community. Other key sources of information for the Committee are



discussions with representatives of the governments and parliaments of other countries, and international institutions and organisations. The Committee therefore organises hearings, consultations with experts and confidential discussions in order to engage in dialogue with, for example, UNHCR, the World Food Programme, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, German and international civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), individual human rights defenders, and the German Institute for Human Rights. The Committee members also travel to other countries to form their own impressions of the situation on the ground and make contact with political decision-makers or the people affected.

In concrete terms, the Members of the German Bundestag help, through their parliamentary work and the priorities they set in the federal budget, to strengthen human rights in Germany and abroad and to mobilise assistance in emergencies. The Committee also provides targeted support for human rights defenders around the world, who, together with dedicated journalists, often face severe threats and persecution because of their work to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law. When members of the Committee or other parliamentarians meet these activists, this sends a signal to the governments of the countries where these human rights defenders are active, and offers them protection and support in their valuable work.



Human rights policy-making and humanitarian aid take place within the framework of international law. The Committee aims to develop this law into an internationally effective system to protect human rights. The existing institutions receive the Committee's long-term support. This applies in particular to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, which allows serious human rights violations to be punished, and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, which enables individuals to legally enforce their human rights. In the case of both of these bodies, human rights violations are prosecuted in a legally valid form and before the eyes of the global public. The UN Human Rights Council

also plays an important role in this context. For example, the special rapporteurs produce detailed reports on individual countries, and on subjects such as the fight against torture, the protection of the freedom of religion and faith, and the situation of indigenous peoples. The Human Rights Council uses the recommendations arising from these reports to create public pressure. It is also the highest body to which all those who seek to defend human rights in their countries – often risking their lives in the process – can appeal.



Assistance for parliamentarians facing persecution

On the initiative of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, the German Bundestag has set up the “Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians” programme. As part of this programme, Members of the Bundestag support fellow parliamentarians throughout the world who are persecuted, detained or threatened with death in connection with their work as parliamentarians or their political engagement.

All Members of the Bundestag can, as part of this programme, “adopt” someone and then use their contacts in Germany and abroad to

bring together various stakeholders, including governments, parliaments, embassies, NGOs, other institutions and individual activists, to help to protect the individual facing persecution. The decision on the right mix of “advocacy behind the scenes” and public pressure must be taken on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes, those affected are helped by a discussion with government representatives, while in other cases Members of the Bundestag write letters to people in detention, observe court proceedings or visit prisoners.

In past electoral terms, steps taken as part of the programme have resulted in individuals being released from prison or benefiting from enhanced protection.



Renata Alt,
FDP
Chairwoman
Chemical engineer,
b. 27 Aug. 1965
in Skalica (Slovakia).
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Norbert Maria
Altenkamp,
CDU/CSU
Deputy Chairman
Former mayor,
b. 27 July 1972 in Marl.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Committee members

The 19 members of the Committee on Human Rights
and Humanitarian Aid

Frank Schwabe,
SPD
Parliamentary-group
coordinator
Tour guide,
b. 12 Nov. 1970
in Waltrop.
Bundestag Member
since 2005



Knut Abraham,
CDU/CSU
Parliamentary-group
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Diplomat,
b. 4 June 1966
in Hamburg.
Bundestag Member
since 2021



Max Lucks,
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Parliamentary-group
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Employee,
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Bundestag Member
since 2021



Peter Heidt,
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Lawyer,
b. 28 Apr. 1965
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Parliamentary-group
coordinator and
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Self-employed commu-
nications consultant,
b. 25 Aug. 1961
in Bergneustadt.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Žaklin Nastić,
The Left Party
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since 2017



Falko Droßmann,
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Lieutenant Colonel in
the Air Force,
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in Wipperfürth.
Bundestag Member
since 2021



Heike Engelhardt,
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b. 5 June 1961
in Stuttgart.
Bundestag Member
since 2021



Fabian Funke,
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in Dresden.
Bundestag Member
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Nadja Sthamer,
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b. 13 Mar. 1990
in Reichenbach
im Vogtland.
Bundestag Member
since 2021



Derya Türk-Nachbaur,
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b. 10 Apr. 1973
in Paderborn.
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since 2021



Michael Brand,
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CDU/CSU policy
spokesman
Employee,
b. 19 Nov. 1973
in Fulda.
Bundestag Member
since 2005



Dr Jonas Geissler,
CDU/CSU
Civil servant,
b. 5 June 1984
in Isny im Allgäu.
Bundestag Member
since 2021



Sabine Weiss,
CDU/CSU
Lawyer, former mayor,
former Parliamentary
State Secretary,
b. 26 May 1958
in Duisburg-Hamborn.
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since 2009



Boris Mijatović,
Alliance 90/The Greens
Alliance 90/The Greens
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b. 4 Feb. 1974 in Kassel.
Bundestag Member
since 2021



Beate Walter-
Rosenheimer,
Alliance 90/The Greens
Psychologist,
b. 20 Nov. 1964 in
Weißenburg (Bavaria).
Bundestag Member
since 2012



Martin Sichert,
AfD
Business administrator,
b. 10 June 1980
in Nuremberg.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Information online

The Federal Foreign Office
www.auswaertiges-amt.de



The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and
Development
www.bmz.de



The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights
www.ohchr.org



The European Court of Human Rights
www.echr.coe.int



The EU Directorate-General for European Civil Protection
and Humanitarian Aid Operations
<http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>



The German Institute for Human Rights
www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de



The Association of German Development and Humanitarian
Aid Non-Governmental Organisations
www.venro.org



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The German Bundestag takes decisions on what are at times highly complex and controversial bills and parliamentary initiatives relating to the entire spectrum of policy fields. The committees play a central role in parliamentary deliberations. They are the forum where the Members thrash out compromises and draw on expert advice before submitting their reports and recommendations for decisions to be voted on by the Bundestag as a whole.

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