



Deutscher Bundestag

**The Committee on Human
Rights and Humanitarian Aid**





“The concept of human rights is one of the greatest achievements of civilisation in human history. Human rights are inalienable and apply to everyone – irrespective of gender, faith, race or political beliefs. This is what underpins the work of the German Bundestag’s Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid. We will continue to work towards ensuring a high level of respect for human rights around the world: that is our task and our obligation.”



Gyde Jensen, 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 the Affairs of the European Union and the Petitions Committee. The Budget Committee and the Committee for 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 Bundestag committees

The German Bundestag sets political priorities of its own by establishing additional committees for specific subjects, such as sport, cultural affairs 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 nine 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, a majority of its members adopt a recommendation for a decision and a report, which serve as the basis for the plenary's decision.

Germany is fully committed to universal human rights and has wide-ranging obligations in this context. 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 are also binding in the context of 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 on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid. In doing so, the Bundestag accepted the role of a permanent advocate for people facing persecution and people in need around the world. Even today, fundamental human rights are severely restricted or under threat in many countries, or are not even upheld in the first place. Human rights violations remain widespread, including discrimination, persecution, expulsion or oppres-

The Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid

sion of groups in society and entire peoples, and on grounds of gender. Torture and the death penalty also still remain in use in many countries. For Germany, 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, the need for assistance is growing. Humanitarian aid can alleviate the hardship experienced by those affected. However, it is essential for it to be supplemented by preventive measures which help to avoid crises emerging in the first place.

The Committee's work to support human rights and humanitarian aid

As in previous electoral terms, the Committee is currently dealing with a wide spectrum of human rights and humanitarian problems, most of

which are connected to the consequences of state repression and of crises and conflicts worldwide. Key issues include the situation of ethnic, religious and other minorities, refugee flows, the shrinking space for civil society, the protection of human rights defenders, action to combat torture, and the abolition of the death penalty. However, the Committee also focuses on more general topics in its work, such as the development of democracy in individual countries and regions, or the impact of global economic activity on human rights. Freedom of religion is another priority. Around the world, people face repression due to their religious affiliation, and this can stretch from marginalisation, discrimination and persecution to torture and execution.

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

Number of members: 17
Chairwoman: Gyde Jensen, FDP
Deputy Chairman: Jürgen Braun, AfD

In order to obtain information and contribute to solving problems, the Committee engages in dialogue with governments and parliaments, national and international organisations such as the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individual human rights defenders. The Committee organises hearings, consultations with experts and confidential discussions in order to obtain relevant information first-hand. Nor is it unusual for the Committee members to travel to political and social flashpoints in order to form their own impressions of the situation on the ground and make direct contact with political decision-makers and the people affected.

The Committee, chaired by Gyde Jensen (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. While other committees deal with issues which fall primarily within the remit of a single government department, the issues for which the Committee is responsible 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, Building and Community. Other key sources of information for the Committee are discussions with representatives of international institutions and organisations, in particular the United Nations, and representatives of German and international civil society.



The work carried out by the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid makes an effective contribution to alleviating humanitarian emergencies and strengthening human rights worldwide. 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. Human rights defenders and dedicated journalists often face severe threats and persecution, usually

from their own governments, 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 in Berlin or abroad, 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. Existing institutions can count on 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 plays a particularly important role in drawing public attention to

these issues. For example, the UN 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 for the global human rights situation to be improved. 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.



“Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians”: an initiative to protect Members and human rights defenders

On the initiative of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, the German Bundestag has set up the “Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians” programme. It supports selected Members of Parliament and human rights defenders throughout the world who are unable to speak out freely due to their advocacy of human rights, and who are persecuted, detained or threatened with death.

As part of the programme, Members of the Bundestag can “adopt” a human rights defender or parliamentarian. They make use of their contacts in Germany and abroad, and often succeed in helping to protect the individual facing persecution. Establishing links between various stakeholders, including governments, parliaments, embassies, NGOs, other institutions and individual activists has often led, in the past, to

threatened parliamentarians and human rights defenders receiving concrete help. 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. For example, the prominent human rights activist Leyla Yunus from Azerbaijan was released from prison, together with her husband, Arif. Without international pressure, including from Germany, it is unlikely that she would have been released.



Gyde Jensen,
FDP
*Chairwoman,
FDP spokeswoman on
human rights and
humanitarian aid*
Political scientist,
b. 14 Aug. 1989
in Rendsburg;
unmarried.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Jürgen Braun,
AfD
*Deputy Chairman,
AfD spokesman
on the Committee,
AfD spokesman
on human rights
and humanitarian aid*
Self-employed
communications
consultant,
b. 25 Aug. 1961
in Bergneustadt;
married; two children.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Committee members

The 17 members of the Committee on
Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid

Norbert Altenkamp,
CDU/CSU
Economist,
b. 27 July 1972
in Marl, Westphalia;
married; two children.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Michael Brand,
CDU/CSU
*CDU/CSU spokesman
on human rights
and humanitarian aid*
Employee,
b. 19 Nov. 1973
in Fulda;
married; three children.
Bundestag Member
since 2005



Sebastian Brehm,
CDU/CSU
Business administrator,
tax adviser,
b. 18 Oct. 1971
in Nuremberg;
two children.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



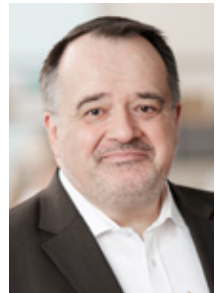
Frank Heinrich,
CDU/CSU
*CDU/CSU spokesman
on the Committee*
Theologian,
social worker,
b. 25 Jan. 1964
in Siegen;
married;
four children.
Bundestag Member
since 2009



Martin Patzelt,
CDU/CSU
Youth and
community worker,
b. 23 July 1947
in Frankfurt (Oder);
married;
five children.
Bundestag Member
since 2013



Professor
Matthias Zimmer,
CDU/CSU
University lecturer,
b. 3 May 1961
in Marburg;
married;
two children.
Bundestag Member
since 2009



Gabriela Heinrich,
SPD
Editor,
b. 18 Apr. 1963
in Berlin;
married; one child.
Bundestag Member
since 2013



Aydan Özoğuz,
SPD
Philologist,
b. 31 May 1967
in Hamburg;
one child.
Bundestag Member
since 2009



Frank Schwabe,
SPD
*SPD spokesman
on human rights
and humanitarian aid*
Tour guide,
b. 12 Nov. 1970
in Waltrop;
married;
three children.
Bundestag Member
since 2005



Waldemar Herdt,
AfD
Agricultural engineer,
b. 28 Nov. 1962
in Zabelovka,
Kazakhstan;
married;
four children.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Dr Lukas Köhler,
FDP
*FDP spokesman
on the Committee*
Philosopher,
b. 20 Aug. 1986
in Munich;
married; one child.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Michel Brandt,
The Left Party
*The Left Party spokes-
man on the Committee*
Actor,
b. 14 July 1990
in Achim.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Žaklin Nastic,
The Left Party
The Left Party spokeswoman on human rights and humanitarian aid
Carer,
b. 29 Jan. 1980
in Gdynia, Poland;
two children.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Margarete Bause,
Alliance 90/The Greens
Alliance 90/The Greens spokeswoman on the Committee, Alliance 90/The Greens spokeswoman on human rights and humanitarian aid
Sociologist,
b. 19 Jan. 1959
in Wertheim;
married; one child.
Bundestag Member
since 2017



Kai Gehring,
Alliance 90/The Greens
Social scientist,
b. 26 Dec. 1977
in Mülheim
an der Ruhr;
unmarried.
Bundestag Member
since 2005



Information online

The Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid
www.bundestag.de/en/committees/a17

The Federal Foreign Office
www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en

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

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

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

*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/en

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

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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.

www.bundestag.de/en/committees