

## THE TANDEM PROJECT

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### UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

#### MINNEAPOLIS – SUICIDE BOMBER IS LINKED LOCALLY

**Issue:** Somali Violence in the Context of International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

**For:** United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media, Civil Society

**Review:** *Suicide Bomber is Linked Locally*, The New York Times and Star Tribune staff writers, Emily Johns and Richard Meryhew, contributed to this report, Tuesday 24 February 2009.

This article is on extremist beliefs and the Minneapolis Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center accused of encouraging recruitment of young men to go to Somali as suicide bombers. The leaders of the Islamic Center vigorously dispute this accusation. Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center held a Community Dinner and open house to get to know them as a neighborhood mosque on Wednesday 25 February 2009.

This article follows The Tandem Project Issue Statement from Newsweek, 2 February 2009, *Recruited for Jihad?-About 20 Somali-American men in Minneapolis have recently vanished*.

There are five document attachments with this review. They need to be read for the international dynamic of the issues. The Tandem Project respects Islam as a religion that explains the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly. But we point out the tension all religions or beliefs have to hold their truth claims in tandem with International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

This tension is expressed politically at the UN Human Rights Council in debates on issues such as: right of a person to leave a religion or belief; meaning of blasphemy against a religion or belief; protection of minority religions or beliefs; right to conversion; registration of religions and beliefs; protection of sacred sites; protection against discrimination based on religion or belief; how should these issues be monitored, etc. This review is on the context of these issues in The Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression & the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Religion or belief is always set in a local ethnic and cultural context within a religion or belief itself and the broader community at-large. An editorial in the Minneapolis Star Tribune says this: “this is true of the 25,000 or so people of Somali background in Minnesota that reflect clan loyalties that divided Somalis in Africa and live on in Minnesota.” However, Somali Muslims are all members of the *ummah* the global family of Islam. It is within this local-global context that The Tandem Project proposes inclusive and genuine dialogue and early childhood education as *essential* for long-term solutions to conflicts based on religion or belief.

As we are all painfully aware, religious conflict continues to escalate worldwide whether in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, South Asia, East Asia or the Americas. Acceptance of the rights of others to their own beliefs continues to be a value denied for millions of people. Much suffering is inflicted in the name of religion or belief on minorities, women and children and “the other” for the most part by perpetrators in total disregard for the tenets of their own faiths.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at the Alliance of Civilizations Madrid Forum said; “never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed

dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations.” Another writer in different setting said; “the warning signs are clear, unless we establish genuine dialogue within and among all kinds of belief, ranging from religious fundamentalism to secular dogmatism, the conflicts of the future will probably be even more deadly.”

International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief monitor governments, religions or beliefs, non-governmental organizations, civil society and individuals living under constitutional systems such as separation of church and state, state church, theocratic, and non-constitutional legal frameworks. The concept *Separation of Religion or Belief and State* means equal, fair and practical support for all *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*, as stated by International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The Tandem Project is in its twenty-fifth year in support of international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief. We focus on two proposals: (1) inclusive and genuine dialogue, (2) early childhood education. Implementing them is *essential* for long-term solutions to conflicts based on religion or belief.

- **Proposal:** Use International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as a platform for inclusive and genuine dialogue on the core values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.
- **Proposal:** Adapt these human rights standards to early childhood education in schools and places of worship, teaching children, from the very beginning, *that their own religion is one out of many and that it is a personal choice for everyone to adhere to the religion or belief by which he or she feels most inspired, or to adhere to no religion or belief at all.*

**STANDARDS:** [http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81\\_dec.htm](http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm)

Inclusive and genuine dialogue is essential as a first step in recognition of the inherent dignity, equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, and a foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world. Leaders of religious and non-religious beliefs sanction the truth claims of their own traditions. They are a key to raising awareness and acceptance of the value of holding truth claims in tandem with human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief.

Did God create us or did we create God? This question calls for inclusive and genuine dialogue, respectful and thoughtful responses, discussion of taboos and clarity by persons of diverse beliefs. Inclusive and genuine is dialogue between people of *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*. These UN categories are embedded in international law to promote tolerance and prevent discrimination based on religion or belief.

The challenge is to reconcile international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief with the truth claims of religious and non-religious beliefs.

Surely one of the best hopes for the future of humankind is to embrace a culture in which religions and other beliefs accept one another, in which wars and violence are not tolerated in the name of an exclusive right to truth, in which children are raised to solve conflicts with mediation, compassion and understanding.

Links: *Minneapolis-Suicide Bomber Linked Locally; Letter to Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center; In Death's Shadow-Islam and Apostasy; Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression; How Close are We to Inclusive & Genuine Dialogue on Freedom of Religion or Belief;*

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**Excerpts:** Excerpts are presented under the Eight Articles of the 1981 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

**PREAMBLE: 1981 UN Declaration:**

*Considering* that one of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion,

*Considering* that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights proclaim the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief,

**1. 1** *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practices and teaching.*

**1. 2.** *No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.*

**1. 3** *Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.*

**2. 1** *No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on the grounds of religion or other beliefs.*

***SUICIDE BOMBER LINKED LOCALLY***

Minneapolis Star Tribune, Staff and Wire Reports, Tuesday 24 February, 2009

Excerpts:

**FBI Director Robert Mueller said Monday in Washington D.C. that a Somali-American man from Minnesota who was one of several suicide bombers in a terrorist attack in Somalia had apparently been indoctrinated into his extremist beliefs while living in Minneapolis.**

**Shirwa Ahmed, the first known suicide bomber with U.S. citizenship, immigrated with his family to the Minneapolis area in the mid-1990's, but returned to Somalia after he was recruited by a militant group, Mueller said. The FBI director, who spoke at a meeting of the Council of Foreign Relations, declined to be more specific, and did not mention the Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center, a Minneapolis Mosque that some of the young men, including Ahmed, attended, and which some local Somali families have suggested is linked to their disappearance.**

**Late Monday, an Abubakar spokesman said again that the mosque had nothing to do with the men's disappearances.**

**Ahmed was driving a vehicle laden with explosives that blew up in northern Somalia in an attack that killed as many as 30 people in October, according to news reports. His body was**

returned to Minnesota with the help of the FBI. “It appears that this individual was radicalized in his hometown in Minnesota,” Mueller said.

Federal authorities have said that Ahmed was one of as many as two dozen young men of Somali descent who disappeared in the past two year from their homes in Minneapolis area after being recruited by the Shabab, a militia suspected of having ties to Al-Qaida that has waged war against the Somali government.

Some in Minneapolis’ Somali Community have said the young men disappeared after being radicalized at Abubakar. Representatives of the mosque have vigorously repeatedly denied that the mosque has any connection to the men’s disappearance or to any violent ideology.

Attorney Mahir Sherif, a consultant to the mosque, said in a telephone interview late Monday that Mueller “doesn’t really know what’s happened” and that he’s “surprised that he would make such a comment.”

The mosque is the largest in Minneapolis, Sherif said, drawing 10,000 to 15,000 people for the last fall’s celebration marking the end of Ramadan... This past weekend, the mosque held a seminar about how suicide is prohibited by Islam attended by hundreds of Somali youth, Sahir said.

“It’s just frustrating to see people at high levels make such statements,” he said. “It angers me they can just say this. This is affecting a lot of people. The mosque and Somalis have received a lot of hate messages because of this.”

Two weeks ago, the mosque’s director also rebuffed rumors. “We have nothing to do with these kids who left,” said Director Farhan Hurre, “Mean, we don’t know the time they left, we don’t know why they left, we don’t know who convinced them to go there.”

This past weekend, the mosque held a seminar about how suicide is prohibited by Islam attended by hundreds of Somali youth, Sahir said.

“What more can this mosque do?” he said. “They’ve gone out publicly, and they’ve put it on paper, that there’s nothing secret going on, there are not two separate messages going out...The Koran says you can’t kill yourself. If you do, you’re going straight to hell.”

On Monday in Washington, Mueller suggested that Somali recruiting posed a serious issue for the FBI, which has sought the cooperation of the Somali community to try to understand whether the recruiting represents a threat.

**ISSUE STATEMENT:** International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief are international law and universal codes of conduct for peaceful cooperation, respectful competition and resolution of conflicts. The standards are a platform for inclusive and genuine dialogue on core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.

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**STANDARDS:** [http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81\\_dec.htm](http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm)

**The Tandem Project:** a non-governmental organization founded in 1986 to build understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity, and to prevent discrimination in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief. The Tandem Project, a non-profit NGO, has sponsored multiple conferences, curricula, reference materials and programs on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - and 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The Tandem Project initiative is the result of a co-founder representing the World Federation of United Nations Associations at the United Nations Geneva Seminar, *Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, called by the UN Secretariat in 1984 on ways to implement the 1981 UN Declaration. In 1986, The Tandem Project organized the first NGO International Conference on the 1981 UN Declaration.

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*The Tandem Project is a UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

**Goal:** To eliminate all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at the Alliance of Civilizations Madrid Forum said; “never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations.” Another writer in different setting said; “the warning signs are clear, unless we establish genuine dialogue within and among all kinds of belief, ranging from religious fundamentalism to secular dogmatism, the conflicts of the future will probably be even more deadly.”

**Challenge:** to reconcile international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief with the truth claims of religious and non-religious beliefs.

Did God create us or did we create God? This question calls for inclusive and genuine dialogue, respectful and thoughtful responses, discussion of taboos and clarity by persons of diverse beliefs. Inclusive and genuine is dialogue between people of *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*. These UN categories embodied in international law promote tolerance and prevent discrimination based on religion or belief.

Inclusive and genuine dialogue is essential as a first step in recognition of the inherent dignity, equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, and a foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world. Leaders of religious and non-religious beliefs sanction the truth claims of their own traditions. They are the key to raising awareness and acceptance of the value of holding truth claims in tandem with human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief.

To build understanding and support for Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Encourage the United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media and Civil Society to use International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as essential for *long-term solutions* to conflicts in all matters relating to religion or belief.

**Objectives:**

1. Use International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as a platform for genuine dialogue on the core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.
2. Adapt these human rights standards to early childhood education, teaching children, from the very beginning, that their own religion is one out of many and that it is a personal choice for everyone to adhere to the religion or belief by which he or she feels most inspired, or to adhere to no religion or belief at all.<sup>1</sup>

**History:** In 1968 the United Nations deferred work on an International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Religious Intolerance, because of its apparent complexity and sensitivity. In the twenty-first century, a dramatic increase of intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief is motivating a worldwide search to find solutions to these problems. This is a challenge calling for enhanced dialogue by States and others; including consideration of an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief for protection of and accountability by all religions or beliefs. The tensions in today’s world inspire a question such as:

Should the United Nations adopt an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief?

**Response:** Is it the appropriate moment to reinitiate the drafting of a legally binding international convention on freedom of religion or belief? Law making of this nature requires a minimum consensus and an environment that appeals to reason rather than emotions. At the same time we are on a learning curve as the various dimensions of the Declaration are being explored. Many academics have produced voluminous books on these questions but more ground has to be prepared before setting up of a UN working group on drafting a convention. In my opinion, we should not try to rush the elaboration of a Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, especially not in times of high tensions and unpreparedness. - *UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 UN Declaration, 25 November 2006.*

**Option:** After forty years this may be the time, however complex and sensitive, for the United Nations Human Rights Council to appoint an Open-ended Working Group to draft a United Nations Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The mandate for an Open-ended Working Group ought to assure nothing in a draft Convention will be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

#### *Separation of Religion or Belief and State*

**Concept:** *Separation of Religion or Belief and State - SOROBAS.* The First Preamble to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads; “*Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.* This concept suggests States recalling their history, culture and constitution adopt fair and equal human rights protection for all religions or beliefs as described in General Comment 22 on Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, 20 July 1993 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4):

**Article 18:** protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.* The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with international characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reasons, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community.

**Article 18:** permits restrictions to manifest a religion or belief only if such limitations are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

**Dialogue:** International Human Rights Standards on Freedom or Religion or Belief are international law and universal codes of conduct for peaceful cooperation, respectful competition and resolution of conflicts. The standards are a platform for genuine dialogue on core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.

**Education:** Ambassador Piet de Klerk addressing the Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 U.N. Declaration said; “Our educational systems need to provide children with a broad orientation: from the very beginning, children should be taught that their own religion is one out of many and that it is a personal choice for everyone to adhere to the religion or belief by which he or she feels most inspired, or to adhere to no religion or belief at all.”<sup>1</sup>

#### *1981 U.N. Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief*

5.2: Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.” With International Human Rights safeguards, early

childhood education is the best time to begin to build tolerance, understanding and respect for freedom of religion or belief.

5.3: The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, and friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for the freedom of religion or belief of others and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.