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

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

Separation of Religion or Belief and State

STOP PREACHING OR GET OUT

Article in The Economist July 31st 2010

Fez: The king is unamused by Christians who proselytize.

Evangelical Christians in the poor world are rarely accused of undermining public order. All the more surprising, then, that in recent months around a hundred have been deported from Morocco for just that. The Christians, mostly from the United States and Europe, have been accused of trying to convert Muslims to Christianity, a crime punishable by imprisonment under Moroccan law, which protects the freedom to practice one's faith but forbids any attempt to convert others.

Rules against proselytizing are quite common in Muslim countries but Morocco has long enjoyed a reputation as a bastion of religious tolerance in the region. Almost all the country's 32 million citizens are Sunni Muslims but churches and synagogues exist, alongside mosques, to cater for the 1% of the people who are Christian or Jewish.

Such open-mindedness presumably appealed to the Christian missionaries who ran the "Village of Hope" home for children 80km (50 miles) south of Fez, a former capital known for religion and scholarship. The 16 aid-workers had cared for abandoned children for over a decade when, in March, the Moroccan authorities sent inspectors to the orphanage, then gave the workers a few days notice to leave the country. Witnesses reports distraught farewells between the Moroccan children and the foreigners who had acted as foster parents.

Morocco's communications minister, Khaled Naciri, said the missionaries "took advantage of the poverty of some families and targeted their young children." The aid-workers deny pumping the children with Christianity. But sympathizers say that even if they did, a few hours of preaching was a small price to pay for education and pastoral care. There have been further expulsions since then, most recently of an evangelical Spanish teacher.

Local residents are quick to point out that it is not only Christians who have been targets; last year a similar campaign was waged against Morocco's even smaller population of Shia Muslims. But the motivation for the crackdown is probably political more than religious. Morocco's constitution is based on the hereditary position of the king as "commander of the faithful". Any drift of Muhammad VI's subjects away from the dominant stream of moderate Sunni Islam might, his advisers fear, diminish his authority.

The American branch of evangelical organization, Open Doors, which speaks up for persecuted Christians across the world, is backing a campaign by a Republican congressman, Frank Wolf, to press the Moroccans to be kinder to the evangelicals. Seeing that Morocco is one of America's closest Arab allies the American administration has been notably silent.

The Tandem Project a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1986 to build understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity of religion or belief, and to prevent discrimination in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief. The Tandem Project has sponsored multiple conferences, curricula, reference material 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 the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.