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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*

**THE KING OF NORWAY CANNOT CHOOSE HIS RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik addressed an Augsburg College discussion on 6 May 2011 that Article 2 of the Norwegian Constitution has been amended by Parliament and there is no longer a State Church of Norway. Article 12 has been amended accordingly for the Prime Minister's cabinet with the exception that the **King will still be head of the Lutheran Church of Norway** which implies he must be Lutheran." [Discussion at Augsburg with Kjell-Magne Bondevik](#)

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**Review:** King Harald V and Queen Sonja of Norway visited Augsburg College on Sunday 16 October and a worship service in Hoversten chapel attended by 300 Norwegian students from Augsburg and sister colleges and universities by invitation only. Later that day a gala banquet was held in Minneapolis: [http://augnet.augsburg.edu/news-archives/2011/10\\_10\\_11/kingqueennorway.html](http://augnet.augsburg.edu/news-archives/2011/10_10_11/kingqueennorway.html).

The New York Times article below, *Again in Norway, Events Provide Test for King's Mettle*, recalls the tragedy of July 22, 2011 when Anders Behring Breivik set off a bomb in downtown Oslo and then murdered scores of children on Utoya island. The article is a testimony to the love the Norwegians have for their monarch and his moving address to the Norwegian people after the tragedy.

In 2014 Norway will celebrate the two hundred year anniversary of their 1814 Constitution, the second oldest constitution in the world.

Norway with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United States and Hungary have taken the lead in promoting UN Resolution A/HRC/16/18/L.38 being discussed in the sixty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly.

Norway has an opportunity to be a **model for Separation of Religion or Belief** by, among other issues, allowing the King the right to choose his own religion or belief in compliance with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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## **Again in Norway, Events Provide Test for a King's Mettle**

By **STEVEN ERLANGER**

New York Times, Sunday 16 October 2011

OSLO — The government buildings where [Anders Behring Breivik](#) set off a bomb are still cordoned off, under repair, and bullet holes still mar the primitive buildings on the island of Utoya, where he then proceeded to murder scores of children.

[Seventy-seven people were killed on July 22](#), and Norwegians are not through grieving. They want to return to business as normal, said their monarch, King Harald V, but that is not yet possible.

“I think it still lies in the future how we will cope with this in the long run,” the king said in a rare interview last week. “We haven’t got to the stage where people have gotten mad yet. I think we’ll go through that as well. That has to come and go before we are finished with this. And we have to let that happen.”

[King Harald](#), 74, was crowned in 1991 and has reigned during an oil-and-gas-driven economic boom. He is the country’s first native-born king since the 14th century, the grandson of [Norway’s](#) first king after the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905. That king, who took the title Haakon VII, was imported from Denmark but made his reputation forever by his refusal in 1940 to surrender to Nazi Germany.

July 22 was King Harald’s test, and he is considered to have passed it — making a moving speech to the nation that night, meeting with anguished families, weeping at a national memorial service, and serving as a visible symbol of Norwegian patriotism and solidarity.

“Now it’s important that we stand together and support each other, and that we don’t let fear take over,” he said that night to a shaken country.

A jovial man with a ready laugh, the king plays down his contribution, saying that “many people did the right things.” As for his own role, he said: “I’ve always had the feeling that in times of crisis, that’s what we’re here for, really. That showed in 1940, and we’ll see if this will come out the same way. You do what comes natural to you, and if that’s correct, all the better for that. Everything was going very quickly, and you have to work on intuition.”

But for a man who has never quite had the common touch of his father, King Olav V, King Harald still moved the nation after July 22, reaching out as best he could to those in grief and shock. Asked in an interview in his office at the palace what he took away from those meetings, he paused for a moment, then spoke with a puzzled honesty.

“I don’t know what I came away with,” he said. “I hope they came away with something.”

It was “a very strange experience,” he said. “I felt very helpless, really. All these families who had either just got someone back from this or had just got the message that they weren’t coming back; it was a very strange atmosphere. Wherever you turned there were people in grief.”

He stopped again, then laughed, to break the mood. “When I came out I said to my wife I’d never hugged so many people I didn’t know!”

King Harald caused considerable controversy in 1969 by marrying a commoner, [Sonja Haraldsen](#), but that helped cement the “Norwegianness” of the family, which was Danish and British. His son, [Crown Prince Haakon](#), has done the same, causing another controversy by marrying a single mother, a divorced woman who admits to having had a rebellious youth. But the future king and queen were also prominent after July 22, as they appeared at a huge rally and he gave his own moving speech.

The couple were on their honeymoon on Long Island on Sept. 11, 2001, and visited ground zero a year ago; King Harald and Queen Sonja first went in October 2002 and will go again this month. Unusually, they will visit in the company of four other Nordic heads of state or royal representatives: the king and queen of Sweden, the presidents of Iceland and Finland, and the crown prince and princess of Denmark.

“It’s very rare,” King Harald said, laughing again. “It happens at weddings and that sort of thing, but not so often.” A Norwegian architectural firm, [Snohetta](#), designed the museum pavilion for the ground zero memorial, a source of pride here.

After July 22, which many Norwegians feel marked their country like the Sept. 11 attacks did the United States, there is a new resonance to the royal visit to ground zero. But asked if he would feel different this time, the king said, “I would think so, I don’t know, let’s see.” But in Norwegian history, he said, “people will say before and after 22 July 2011, it will be a milestone like 9/11 in America.”

The king and his wife will also commemorate the centennial of the [American-Scandinavian Foundation](#) after a visit to the Norwegian-American heartland of the Midwest, in Minnesota and Iowa. There are more than 5 million people who identify as Norwegian-American and keep strong ties to Norway, he said, whose own population is only about 4.8 million.

The king arrived in the United States at the age of 3 when his family fled the Nazis. He spent his first two years of school in Washington and remembers meeting President Franklin D. Roosevelt at his 1945 inauguration. His father and grandfather spent most of the war in London, with the government-in-exile.

His grandfather was only 36 when he was chosen to come from Denmark to be king. “He didn’t know anybody, he didn’t know who he could trust and who he couldn’t, and had to find out for himself what Norway was all about,” King Harald said.

He came to know his grandfather very well, he said. “He did a very wise thing,” demanding a plebiscite on whether Norwegians wanted him as king. “So many times when he was in trouble with our politicians, he said, ‘Ah, remember, I’m elected, too!’ ”

Asked whether July 22 would define his reign, as 1940 did for his grandfather’s, King Harald said simply: “I don’t know. History will tell.” But he said he remembered seeing a photograph of his grandfather driving himself off in his car to meet with the Germans in April 1940, when he said his famous “no.”

“He drove alone in his car,” the king said, with admiration. “But he never drove alone in his car. He always had his A.D.C.,” his aide-de-camp, “with him. But this time there was nobody. I’m sure he didn’t think he was coming back.”

Norway is in good hands, he said. Learning to be king is a “lifelong learning period,” he said, but his son, the crown prince, passed his own test on July 22. “He came up with some very good ideas, and he made a strong speech,” his father said. “He did very well. We’re a very good team, I think.”

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## REFLECTIONS

By The Tandem Project

*The First Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: 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.*

*Surely one of the best hopes for 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.*

*There is an increase in dialogue today between religions and other beliefs to embrace diversity, but few persons, less than one percent of any population, ever participate. This is a challenge. The value of such dialogues is proportionate to the level of participation. For civil society increased participation would create opportunities for education on inclusive and genuine approaches to human rights and freedom of religion or belief.*

*In 1968 the United Nations deferred passage of a legally-binding convention on religious intolerance saying it was too complicated and sensitive. Instead, they adopted a non-binding declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief. While very*

*worthwhile, the declaration does not carry the force and commitment of a legally-binding international human rights convention on freedom of religion or belief.*

*Religions and other beliefs historically have been used to justify wars and settle disputes. This is more dangerous today as the possible use of nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction increases. Governments need to consider whether religions and other beliefs trump human rights or human rights trump religions and other beliefs or neither trumps the other. Can international human rights law help to stop the advance and use of such weapons in the face of this historic truth?*

- **QUESTION:** Weapons of mass destruction as history teaches are often legitimized for national security and justified by cultural, ethnic, religious or political ideology. The U.N. Review Conference on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and studies on biological and cyber weapons demonstrate advances in science and technology is being used to increase their potential for mass destruction. The question is whether an International Convention on Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief, elevated and supported equally by the U.N. Human Rights Council and U.N. Security Council, would help offset the risk of weapons of mass destruction. Recognition of the need for synergy to balance rights and security is a foundation for solving this issue.

*“I am become death, the destroyer of worlds”*

- Robert Oppenheimer, quote from the Bhagavad Gita after exploding the first atomic bomb, Trinity 1945.

*The Tandem Project believes until a core legally-binding human rights Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief is adopted international human rights law will be incomplete. It may be time to begin to consider reinstating the 1968 Working Group to bring all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief under one banner, a core international human rights legally-binding treaty.*

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**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.