

THE TANDEM PROJECT

<http://www.tandemproject.com>.

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

By Invitation Only

FOCUS GROUP ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief

Saturday 10 March 2012

Augsburg College
Oren Gateway Center, Room 103
610 22nd Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55454

3:00 pm -5:00 pm.

INTRODUCTION

The Tandem Project will give a brief explanation of the history of the United Nations and human rights law on freedom of religion or belief that up to Resolution A/RES/66/167 – *a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief*, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2011.

Focus Groups on Freedom of Religion or Belief will be proposed for international exchange of ideas and best practice models on local ways to support a UN General Assembly Human Rights Resolution **adopted by consensus** on 19 December 2011, A/RES/66/167 *a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief*.

Focus Question: Will UN General Assembly A/RES/66/167 matter to promote and protect your freedom of religion or belief, cultural identity, principles and values at a local level?

[United Nations Resolution – a Culture of Tolerance & Peace Based on Religion or Belief](#)

In 1984, the UN Secretariat sponsored a two week Geneva Seminar on ways to implement the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, *Seminar on the Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief* (1984) ST/HR/SER. A/16 Geneva. In 1986, The Tandem Project hosted the first International Conference, *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*, on how to implement the 1981 UN Declaration.

Discussion included ways to promote tolerance for diversity of religion or belief at a local level. A theist introduced the speaker on Atheism and the 1981 UN Declaration and an atheist introduced the speaker on Theism and the 1981 UN Declaration. 27 *Community Strategies* were presented on how to implement the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief at a local level. They are offered as examples for an exchange of ideas and best practices to implement a *Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief* at a local level.

Professor Francis Sejersted, then Chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, gave an address on how the Nobel Peace Prize is selected to the conference on *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*.

<http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>

A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE AND PEACE BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

ADOPTED BY CONSENSUS WITHOUT A VOTE

[United Nations Resolution – a Culture of Tolerance & Peace Based on Religion or Belief](#)

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.

One best hope is Resolution A/RES/66/167 **adopted by consensus** by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2011.

Recognizes that the open public debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels can be among the best protections against religious intolerance, and can play a positive role in strengthening democracy and combating religious hatred, and convinced that a continuing dialogue on these issues can help overcome existing misperceptions.

Calls for strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs, and decides to convene a panel discussion on this issue at its seventeenth session within existing resources.

Introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) adopted by consensus without a vote. - Resolution A/HRC/16/18/L.38, Geneva, March 24 2011

Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC) Mr. Zamir Akram [\[English\]](#) 10 minutes **Saudi Arabia** Mr. Ahmed Suleiman Ibrahim Alaqil [\[English\]](#) [\[Arabic\]](#) 1 minute **Norway** Ms. Beate Stirø [\[English\]](#) 2 minutes **United States of America** Mr. Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe [\[English\]](#) 5 minutes **Hungary (on behalf of the European Union)** Mr. András Dékány [\[English\]](#) 3 minutes

The Human Rights Council held a panel discussion which focused on strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs.

[UN Human Rights Council Panel Statements, Resolution A-HRC-16-18, 2010 General Assembly Third Committee Actions](#)

Introduced by United Arab Emirates on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) adopted by consensus without a vote – Resolution A/C.3/66/L.47, New York, 15 November 2011

[UN Third Committee Press Release - Resolution L.47 Adopted by Consensus](#)

ISSUES & CHALLENGES

Anders Behring Breivik is the ethnic Norwegian perpetrator of the most horrific acts of terrorism in Norway since WW II. In an opinion page article in the New York Times, 31 July 2011, by Thomas Hegghammer, Senior Research Fellow of the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, Breivik is quoted as saying he is “extremely proud of his Odinistic/Norse heritage and while he is Christian admits ‘I’m not a very religious person.’ “While Breivik’s violent acts are exceptional, his anti-Islamic views are not. His goal is to reverse what he views as the Islamization of Western Europe.”

Religion and non-religious 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. Weapons of mass destruction 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 in tandem 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 the foundation to resolve this issue.

[Assimilation’s Failure, Terrorism’s Rise](#)

[Discussion at Augsburg with Kjell-Magne Bondevik](#)

FOCUS GROUPS ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Focus Groups on Freedom of Religion or Belief will be proposed to exchange international best practice models on ways to implement United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/66/147.

In 1984, the United Nations Secretariat sponsored a two week Geneva Seminar on ways to implement the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, *Seminar on the Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief* (1984) ST/HR/SER. A/16 Geneva. In 1986, The Tandem Project hosted the first International Conference, *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*, on how to implement the 1981 UN Declaration.

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1986 International Conference: *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*

<http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>

SEPARATION OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND STATE

Separation of Religion or Belief and State is a term used by The Tandem Project to express core principles of international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief. UN Member States are mandated with or without separation of religion or belief to ensure their constitutional and legal systems provide effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief to all without distinction at international, national and local levels.

UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE

International human rights law on freedom of religion or belief protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*, - General Comment 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not favor one religion or belief over another. Human Rights Law protects all individuals from discrimination based on religion or belief. It values the equal rights of majority and minority religions or beliefs, indigenous, traditional and new religious movements. It is a universal moral principle.

GOAL

The right of persons to manifest their own values, cultural identity and core principles based on religion or belief, together with human rights law, principles and values on freedom of religion or belief.

Build awareness, understanding and support at international, national and local levels for a UN Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief as a legally-binding international human rights treaty.

HISTORY

In 1968, the United Nations deferred passage of a legally-binding convention on religious intolerance saying it was too complicated and sensitive. <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>

In 1981, 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. http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm.

In 1998, the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief was the catalyst for a change of title from Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

[1998 UN Conference Report](#)

In 2012, The Tandem Project plans to launch a new website, *Separation of Religion or Belief and State*, by subscription, to track the progress of Resolution A/RES/66/147 *a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief*.

This Questionnaire measures inclusive and genuine awareness, understanding and use of international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief. <http://www.tandemproject.com/survey/>

The Tandem Project believes until a core legally-binding human rights treaty, a Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief is adopted international human rights law will be incomplete.

REFLECTIONS

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.

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.