

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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

info@tandemproject.com

UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Separation of Religion or Belief & State

NORWAY

Sixth Session U.N. Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (30 Nov. – 11 Dec. 2009)

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process launched by the UN Human Rights Council in 2008 to review the human rights obligations and responsibilities of all UN Member States by 2011. Click for an Introduction to the Universal Periodic Review, Process and News:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/BasicFacts.aspx>

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

The *Norway Universal Periodic Review* was held by the UN Human Rights Council on Wednesday 2 December 2009 from 9.00-12.00. Open this link to access reports for the *Norway Universal Periodic Review: National Report; Compilation prepared by OHCHR; Summary prepared by OHCHR; Interactive Dialogue; Comments & Answers; Final Remarks*.

HRC Web Cast: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/PAGES/NOsession6.aspx>
<http://www.un.org/webcast/unhrc/archive.asp?go=091202>

The primary international human rights instruments on freedom of religion or belief are:

Article 18 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

General Comment 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:
[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument)

The 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief: http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm.

The 1981 UN Declaration is unique; it may be a one of a kind Human Rights Concordat *between nations and all religions or beliefs*.

THE TANDEM PROJECT FOLLOW-UP

The Tandem Project Follow-up builds on twenty-seven *Community Strategies*, action proposals by organizations in 1986 to implement Article 18 of the CCPR and the 1981 UN Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief: <http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf> .

These *Community Strategies* are consolidated for *The Tandem Project Follow-up* into three generic proposals on integration, dialogue and education for *Universal Periodic Reviews* and exchange of information worldwide with organizations on international, national and local levels.

1. Develop model integrated approaches to International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief at national and local levels to test the reality of implementation as appropriate to the constitutions, legal systems and cultures of each country.

2. Use International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as appropriate to each culture and venue for inclusive and genuine dialogue on freedom of religion or belief.

3. Apply International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief in education curricula as appropriate in all grade levels, teaching children, from the very beginning, that their own religion is one out of many and 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Tandem Project will not make follow-up recommendations until after the final adoption of the Norway UPR in March 2010. However, we will call for an exchange of information with Norwegian organizations. This call will focus on implementation of the following sections of the National Report and the recommendation of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR).

Excerpt from National Report: 3.15 Freedom of thought, religion and belief. “Norway has a constitutional state church system that has been the subject of criticism as a matter of principle from several quarters, including the UN Human Rights Committee. Article 2 of the Constitution protects certain aspects of freedom of religion or belief, but does not go as far as the protection provided by international human rights principles.” “A White Paper has been discussed in Parliament, and formal proposals to amend all seven articles in the Constitution establishing the state church system has been submitted. The proposals will be voted on in the next parliamentary session.” “In connection with continuous focus on dialogue, cooperation between religious and life stance communities, the authorities and the general population, grants are provided for three councils for religion and belief: the Council of Religious and Life Stance Communities, the Islamic Council of Norway and the Christian Council of Norway.” “Religious and belief communities outside the Church of Norway have a statutory right to claim an annual financial grant from the State and municipal authorities. This grant scheme is unique internationally.”

National Centre for Human Rights:

5. Freedom of religion and belief, expression, association and peaceful assembly

20. Inclusive approach to religion and belief - The Government has purposed a new formulation of the Constitution § 2 articulating basic values. It mentions humanity and Christianity specifically, with no reference to other religions or beliefs. This may not be in conflict with any human rights conventions; it might however exclude groups of the population. The same problem arises in the statements of objectives in the law on both schools and kindergartens. NCHR finds the principle of inclusion to be highly relevant in this debate. NCHR recommends that Norwegian authorities reconsider whether there is a need for explicitly highlighting the Christian belief in the constitutional values and in the statement of objectives in the laws on schools and kindergartens.

EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

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The Tandem Project Follow-up is seeking an exchange of information for the Norway Universal Periodic Review on approaches to freedom of religion or belief, to bridge human rights proclaimed in treaties at the international level with the reality of implementation at a national and local level. This Survey in PDF is an example for an exchange of information:

[Survey on Human Rights & Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

These are government and non-governmental organizations with expertise in Norway that will be asked for advice on issues of concern relating to international human rights and freedom of religion or belief after the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Stakeholder Letters: Submitted for the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRNOSTakeholdersInfoS6.aspx>

Norwegian Centre for Human Rights:

http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session6/NO/NCHR_NOR_UPR_S06_2009_NorwegianCentreForHumanRights.pdf

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) is Norway's national institution for human rights, accredited with A-status according to standards of the International Coordinating Committee of the global network of national institutions of human rights (ICC).

Government of Norway

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en.html?id=4>

The Constitution and constitutional practice determine which matters must be formally decided in the Council of State presided over by the King, and which may be decided by the competent minister. In both cases the government conference is the main forum for discussing important policy matters before formal decisions are taken. As of February 2007, there are 17 ministries, plus the office of the Prime Minister, while the Government consists of the prime minister and 18 ministers. The Tandem Project for purposes of an exchange of information on *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review will seek advice from the Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs.

Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/selected-topics/human-rights.html?id=1160>

The Minister of Foreign Affairs for Norway is Jonas Gahr Store. The Norwegian Foreign Ministry is responsible for: Development cooperation; High North; Human Rights; Humanitarian Efforts; International Law; Peace and Reconciliation efforts; Public Diplomacy and Cultural Cooperation; Security Policy; Trade Policy; United Nations. Bente Angell-Hansen, Norway's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva delivered Norway's opening statement at a member of the UN Human Rights Council on 15 September 2009. The Tandem Project will request an exchange of information with the Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Norway Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs:

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kkd.html?id=545>

The Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs is responsible for cultural policy, church affairs, regulations and other matters regarding the media and sports. The Tandem Project will contact them for advice on *follow-up* efforts for education on human rights and freedom of religion or belief after the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

University of Oslo: CULCOM research program;

<http://www.culcom.uio.no/english/news/2009/borsum.html>

The University of Oslo is Norway's largest and oldest institution of higher education. It was founded in 1811 when Norway was still under Danish rule. Today the University of Oslo has approximately 27,700 students and 5,900 employees. CULCOM, Cultural Complexity in the new

Norway is a strategic university program, University of Oslo 2004-spring 2010. This website article is on a Master's thesis "Cooperation rather than religious dialogue" by Kjersti Borsum, pointing out "there is a great distance between the elite participating in dialogue and the grassroots level. The Tandem Project will approach a variety of departments in the University of Oslo including CULCOM, the School of Theology, School of Law and department of Sociology for an exchange of information as a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Church of Norway: <http://www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5730>

The State Church of Norway has represented the main, almost the only, expression of religious belief in Norway for a thousand years. Around 86 percent of the population or 3, 868,943 Norwegians are members of the Church of Norway. The Constitution of 1814 states that the Evangelical-Lutheran faith shall be the religion of the Kingdom of Norway and embodied the principle democratic ideals and a process of church reform still continuing to this day. The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has a long history of dialogue with other faiths including on the formation of the Declaration on Religious Freedom signed with the Islamic Council of Norway in 2007. Separation of Church and State issues remain such as the requirement that the King be a Lutheran and an issue of Christian education in the Norwegian public school system in which the European Court of Human Rights found them in violation of Council of Europe human rights principles. The Tandem Project worked with the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations in organization of the 1998 Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and will ask for an exchange of information with them as a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities

<http://www.trooglivssyn.no>

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway was established in May 1996. Membership includes thirteen religious and non-religious Norwegian communities. The goals of the Council are to promote mutual understanding and respect between different religious and life stance communities through dialogue; to work towards equality between various religious and life stance communities in Norway based on United Nations covenants on Human Rights and on the European Convention on Human Rights; to work internally and externally with social and ethical issues from the perspective of religions and life stances. The Tandem Project will seek out all community members of the Council for an exchange of information on how they promote Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1981 UN Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief in integration, dialogue and education, as a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief

www.oslocoalition.org

The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief was established by participants of the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief which was held in August 1998 in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The activities of the Oslo Coalition are based on the Oslo Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief which was adopted by the Conference of over 200 participants and was signed by leaders of all major Norwegian faith communities in 2001. Projects of the Oslo Coalition include New Directions in Islamic Thought and Practice; Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief; Missionary Activities and Human Rights; Teaching for Tolerance and Freedom of Religion or Belief; China Project; Indonesia Project; Caucasus Project and Central Asia Project. The Tandem Project as the founder idea and then co-sponsor of the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief will seek an

exchange of information with the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief as a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights

<http://www.oslocenter.no/>

The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights was established as an independent foundation in August 2006. The Oslo Center's work is structured around three main programs: Dialogue for Peace, Promoting Democracy and Human Rights. The Oslo Center works through contact and dialogue with policy makers, organizations and key actors in Norway and internationally. Several members of the staff of nine are former diplomats and experts from the Government of Norway. The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights president and founder is Kjell Magne Bondevik, Prime Minister of Norway from 1997-2000 and 2001-2005. Mr. Bondevik was ordained as a priest in the Lutheran Church of Norway in 1979. He is a member of several key international associations the United Nations endorsed Alliance of Civilizations and the Club de Madrid made up of former presidents and foreign ministers from countries throughout the world. Mr. Bondevik is in a unique position having been a Norwegian Foreign Minister and an active priest in the State Church of Norway. The Tandem Project will call on the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights to exchange information on ways they intend to *follow-up* on the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Islamic Council of Norway:

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/norway.christians.and.muslims.sign.declaration.on.religious.freedom/12636.htm>

The Islamic Council of Norway is an umbrella group of Islamic organizations and mosques in Norway and a Member Community of the Norway Religious and Life Stance Communities. In 26 August 2007 they signed a Declaration on Religious Freedom with the Church of Norway that was a previous to tension in the UN Human Rights Council in 14 December 2007 that led to members of the Council who are also members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) abstaining on a resolution to extend the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief by three years (A/HRC/6/L.15/Rev.1). Muslims in the Islamic Council of Norway as all Muslims worldwide are in the *Ummah* the 1.4 billion family of Islam. But they live outside the Diaspora of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (IOC) a 57 member organization of countries either with Sharia law or where Islam is the majority religion. The Tandem Project will request an exchange of information with the Islamic Council of Norway on ways they plan to promote human rights and freedom of religion or belief in Norway, as a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Lutheran World Federation; <http://www.lutheranworld.org>

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition with international headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF now has 140 member churches in 79 countries all over the world representing 68.5 million Christians. Their mission includes humanitarian assistance, mission and development, theology, international affairs & human rights and ecumenical relations. Lutheran churches see the protection of human rights as a basic Christian concern and LWF monitors human rights abuses around the world and, in consultation with its member churches, makes representations in relation to crucial issues. The Church of Norway is a member of the Lutheran World Federation. LWF and the Church of Norway will be approached by The Tandem Project for an exchange of information on ways they approach integration, dialogue and education at

international, national and local levels in Norway and abroad at a *follow-up* to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Norwegian Humanist Association; <http://www.human.no>

The Norwegian Humanist Association is an organization for people who base their ethics on human values. Humanism is a life stance in which the understanding of reality and ethics is based on reason and experience, rational and critical thinking, feelings and human compassion. The by-laws are non-theistic and reject supernatural views of reality. They have more than 75,000 members in Norway and are a partner association with the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). They are one of the thirteen member communities in the Norwegian Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities. The Tandem Project was a founding co-sponsor of the Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in 1998 with the Religious and Life Stance Communities and will call on the Norwegian Humanist Association for an exchange of information on their programs in Norway for equal protection of *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*, at a follow-up to the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

Forum 18: <http://www.forum18.org/Forum18.php>

Forum 18 is a Norwegian-Danish non-profit charitable initiative. The Forum 18 believes that religious freedom is a fundamental right, which is essential for the dignity of humanity and for true freedom. Forum 18 is committed to religious freedom for all on the basis of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Forum 18 News Service (F18News) is a Christian initiative which is independent of any one church or religious group. Its independence is safeguarded by a board whose members are Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and who are responsible for matters of policy and fundraising. F18News is committed to Jesus Christ's command to do to others what you would have them do to you, and so reports on threats and actions against the religious freedom of all people, regardless of their religious affiliation. The Tandem Project believes Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights equally protects against discrimination all *theist, non-theist and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*. The Tandem Project will request an exchange of information with Forum 18 on freedom of religion or belief as a *follow-up* after the Norway Universal Periodic Review.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

1. Norway - Overview

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, the state church, enjoys some benefits not available to other religious groups.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were few reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

2. Norway - Religious Demography

The country has an area of 150,000 square miles and a population of 4.75 million. Citizens are considered to be members of the state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, unless they explicitly state otherwise.

For example, citizens may elect to associate themselves with another denomination, nonreligious organization (e.g., the Norwegian Humanist Association), or to have no religious affiliation at all. An estimated 82 percent of the population (3.9 million persons) nominally belongs to the state church. However, actual church attendance is quite low.

Other religious groups operate freely and include various Protestant Christian denominations (166,000 registered members), Muslims (84,000), Roman Catholics (54,000), and Jews (850). Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus are also present in small numbers, together constituting less than 1 percent of the population. The Norwegian Humanist Association--the largest national organization for those who do not formally practice any religion, including atheists--has 79,870 registered members. An unknown number of persons belong to religious institutions but do not formally register with the Government, so they are not reflected in the statistics.

The majority of European and American immigrants, who make up approximately 45 percent of the foreign-born population, are either Christian or nonreligious, with the exception of Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Most non-Western immigrants practice Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, or Hinduism. Of religious minority members, 55 percent are concentrated in the Oslo metropolitan area, including 57 percent of Muslims and most of the Buddhist community.

3. Norway - Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway is the state church. The state supports it financially, and there is a constitutional requirement that the King and at least one-half of the cabinet belong to this church.

In 2008 there was a public debate about introducing greater separation in the state-church relationship. In April 2008 the Minister of Culture presented the results of a parliament-commissioned report on the state and church relationship that had been five years in the making and had included significant public input. The report called for maintaining the state church but for further democratization of the Church and for the Government to consider changes to the Constitution that would further separate church and state functions. One of the immediate effects was the signing of a church agreement that gives the state church the ability to select, but not appoint, its own bishops, a role that had previously been fulfilled by the Government. The legal power to officially appoint bishops will not be transferred to the Church until Parliament amends the Constitution on this point, which it was expected to do during the 2009-11 session.

The Government observes the following religious holidays, all of which are Christian, as national holidays: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Whit-Monday, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day.

A religious community must register with the Government only if it desires state financial support, which is provided to all registered denominations in proportion to their formally registered membership. Some faith groups argued that this registration requirement disadvantages their efforts to get funding, since the faiths most popular among immigrants generally, including Islam and Roman Catholicism, are also most popular among individuals who are in the country either illegally or as political refugees, and who may be leery of contact with state officials.

In February 2009 the Police Directorate, responding to a petition by a Muslim woman, proposed that the hijab be permitted to be worn with the police uniform in order to recruit a broader field of candidates for police work. This proposal caused an intense nationwide political and media debate, and the police union came out firmly against the change. Some commentators argued that all policewomen should dress the same, and citizens might be afraid that they would not receive equal treatment from a policewoman wearing a hijab. Two weeks after it initially expressed its support for the Police Directorate's proposal, the Justice Ministry withdrew its support and ruled against allowing the hijab to be worn. Many in the Muslim community were disappointed by the Government's reversal.

In February 2006 the city of Oslo submitted a plan to ban the wearing of burqas and nikabs to the Education Directorate for evaluation. The Education Directorate subsequently submitted the plan to the Ministry of Education, concerned that the ban might contravene the Norwegian Constitution. In August 2006, while still awaiting an advisory opinion, the city of Oslo implemented the ban. The Ministry of Education submitted the issue to the Ministry of Justice, which in September 2007 determined that a ban on burqas and nikabs was not inconsistent with Norwegian law and international conventions. However, there were no reports of the ban being enforced by the end of the reporting period.

Norway is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and assumed the rotating chairmanship of the organization in 2009. In 2003 the Government instituted annual observance of Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27 in schools nationwide, as part of a National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination. In addition, high school curriculums include the deportation and extermination of Jewish citizens from 1942 to 1945. The Government also continued to support the foundation "The White Buses," which takes Norwegian secondary school students to Auschwitz, Poland, to educate them about the Holocaust. In August 2007, following a multiyear, \$10 million (NOK 60 million) construction project, Norway opened the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in the wartime residence of Nazi collaborator Vikdun Quisling. The associated museum features a history of the Holocaust in the country. During the reporting period, the Center supported Holocaust-related research and sponsored seminars related to the Jewish experience during the Nazi occupation period.

A 1997 law introduced the Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) course for grades 1 through 10 (generally ages six to 16). The CKREE reviews world religions and philosophy while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs. Citing the country's Christian history (and the stated importance of Christianity to society), the CKREE devotes an extensive amount of time to studying Christianity. This class is mandatory, without any exceptions for children of other religious groups. On special grounds, students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts, such as church services or prayer.

Organizations for atheists, as well as Muslim communities, contested the legality of mandatory

religious education, claiming that it was a breach of freedom of religion and parents' right to provide religious instruction to their children. After the case was heard before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2002 and again in 2006, the Government modified the curriculum and expanded the education to more thoroughly discuss other religions while continuing an emphasis on Christianity as the religion of the majority of citizens.

There is no special licensing or registration requirements for foreign religious workers. Such workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers.

4. Norway - Restrictions on Freedom of Religion or Belief

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

After an intense political and media debate in January 2009, and particularly due to widespread criticism that it would infringe on free speech, the Government withdrew from consideration a proposed modification of the penal law that would have criminalized "proven attacks on religion or philosophy." Although proposed by a centrist Christian party, the public debate on the law made reference to the Danish and Norwegian "cartoon controversies" of the past few years, and the proposed law was cited by one political party as evidence of caving in to "stealth Islamification."

In December 2008 Muslim inmates in a Trondheim prison complained that the prison served food that contained pork. Prison authorities said the incident was the result of a mistake. More than one-third of prison inmates are Muslims, but none of the facilities offer halal food. One Muslim politician suggested that prisons serve halal food as a default, with prisoners able to request nonhalal food on the side; however, the Government did not act upon the suggestion.

In May 2008 two Christian pastors, one American and one Norwegian, were arrested for sharing their faith with signs and public preaching near a parade route during the country's independence celebration. In November 2008 and January 2009, the American pastor lost appeals, which he based on a free speech defense, of his trial court sentence before the appellate and supreme courts, respectively. The trial court had ruled that the pastors' right to free speech could not exceed the police's power to ensure order. A suit by the Norwegian pastor based on similar events that occurred in 2007 was on file at the ECHR, which was scheduled to decide in October 2009 whether to hear the case. The American pastor also intended to file a case with the ECHR, based on the May 2008 events, by July 2009.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits employers to ask job applicants who are applying for positions in religious or other private schools, or day care centers, whether they agree to teach and behave in accordance with the institution's or religion's beliefs and principles.

The Government did not enforce a ban on the wearing of burqas and nikabs in schools, permitting every school to independently determine whether to implement such a ban; during the reporting period, there were no reports that any school enforced a ban.

A ban remained in place on policewomen wearing the hijab with police uniforms, despite the Government having earlier briefly supported a proposal to allow wearing of it.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had

been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

5. Norway - Societal Abuse and Discrimination

During the reporting period, Islam and so-called Islamification in the country were subjects of increasing debate among politicians, the media, and civic and religious groups. In February 2009 the second-largest political party, the Progress Party, published a list of events over the last decade that it purported showed that the country was being "Islamified by stealth." Measured by opinion polls, the Progress Party's popularity increased after it published its list. The list was heavily criticized by other political parties and prominent commentators, but the notion that Islam was insidiously threatening the country's society and culture provided a background to several substantive issues. Covered in Section II, these included debates over the use of the hijab by policewomen, halal food in prisons, and the proposed law that would have banned "attacks on religion."

Anecdotal press reports during the reporting period indicated that job seekers with first or last names that appear to be Muslim were much less likely to receive responses to their applications for employment.

During the reporting period, and especially during Israel's operations in Gaza in late December 2008, anti-Semitism, and a corresponding debate about it, significantly increased in intensity. During the Gaza events, violent anti-Israel riots broke out on several occasions in Oslo. A pro-Israel march in Bergen was cancelled when the police stated that it could not guarantee participants' safety. The location of the line between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitism was frequently discussed. The general atmosphere for Jews in the country, however, worsened to the point where Foreign Minister Stoere visited a synagogue on January 18, 2009 to show solidarity with Jewish citizens who "feel alienated" and are "experiencing growing anti-Semitism."

During January 2009 both a former prime minister and a high-profile commentator on U.S. policy were accused of making anti-Semitic comments. Their statements were criticized as blurring the line between Jewishness and Israeli government policy.

In mid-January 2009 a first secretary at the Norwegian embassy in Saudi Arabia used a government e-mail system to send out a chain e-mail with images comparing Israeli soldiers to Nazi soldiers. Some politicians urged the Government to fire the employee; there was no further information on the case by the end of the reporting period.

The small Jewish community in the country was frightened by the rise in anti-Semitism during the Gaza war. A leading newspaper reported that it had difficulty finding Jews who were willing to be publicly interviewed, as they felt they might be targeted. The chief rabbi of the Oslo Synagogue received daily piles of hate mail full of anti-Semitic vitriol.

On May 29, 2009, a fire destroyed a 204-year-old Lutheran church in Vaaler, Hedmark Province; police concluded that the fire was an act of arson.

On May 17, 2009, 10 graves were vandalized at a Lutheran church in the town of As, Akershus Province.

On May 14, 2009, the cemetery of the Mosaic Religious Community in Oslo (the Jewish

community), established in 1869, was vandalized. Several gravestones were defaced with Nazi symbols; on one, "the war is not over" was written.

On May 1, 2009, vandals knocked over 35 gravestones near the Lutheran Nordstrand church in Oslo. Additionally, the vandals destroyed flowers, broke windows, and wrote "Satan Lives" on the door of the church.

The press heavily criticized a controversial television comedian for telling a joke that trivialized the killing of Jews during the Holocaust. A nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported the incident to the police, but the comedian was not charged with any wrongdoing.

There were no other reported societal abuses or cases of discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice during the reporting period.

The Council for Religious and Philosophical Communities includes the state church and other religious communities, among them the Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities, as well as secular humanist groups. The Council, acting as an umbrella organization, organized many events that furthered interreligious dialogue and debate, including a 2008 "dialogue conference" that was expected to be repeated in 2009, and a debate about religion in educational institutions.

The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated closer coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom issues both domestically and outside of the country. The Coalition was conducting research projects on New Directions in Islamic Thought and Practice, Facilitating Freedom of Religion, Missionary Activities and Human Rights, and Teaching for Tolerance and Religious Freedom.

6. Norway – US Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly sponsored speakers and other events to highlight religious freedom. During the reporting period, the Ambassador hosted both an interreligious Thanksgiving dinner and, in January, a human rights NGO reception during which the importance of religious freedom, both in the country and around the world, was discussed. In May 2009 the Embassy also invited Imam Yahya Hendi, a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, to speak to the Islamic Council, Muslim youth groups, and the Theological Faculty of the University of Oslo about religious freedom in the United States.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127329.htm>

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The Tandem Project is a non-governmental organization (NGO) 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 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 is a UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the

Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at the first Alliance of Civilizations Madrid Forum; “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.”

In 1968 the UN deferred work on an International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance because of the sensitivity and complexity of reconciling a human rights treaty with dissonant worldviews and voices on religion or belief. Instead, in 1981 the United Nations adopted a non-binding Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief in support of Article 18: http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm.

Separation of Religion or Belief and State reflects the far-reaching scope of UN General Comment 22 on Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1993, UN Human Rights Committee. [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument)

Inclusive and genuine dialogue on human rights and freedom of religion or belief are between people of theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. It calls for open dialogue on: awareness, understanding, acceptance; cooperation, competition, conflict; respectful discourse, discussion of taboos and clarity by persons of diverse beliefs.

Human rights protect freedom of religion or belief; religion or belief does not always protect human rights. In this respect human rights trump religion to protect individuals against all forms of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief by the State, institutions, groups of persons and persons. After forty years suffering, violence and conflict based on belief has increased in many parts of the world. UN options may be to gradually reduce such intolerance and discrimination or call for a new paradigm deferred since 1968.

Is it time for the UN to draft a legally binding International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief: [United Nations History – Freedom of Religion or Belief](#).