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**CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE**

Report submitted by Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur, in  
accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/18

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## II. INITIATIVES BY STATES AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

14. The Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief was held from 12 to 15 August 1998 in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The goal of the Conference - an initiative of Norwegian NGOs and institutes (Cooperation Council for Faith and Life Stance Societies; Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Church of Norway; Diakonjemmet College Research Center; Institute for Human Rights, University of Oslo) and the Tandem Project NGO, and financed by the Norwegian Government - was to build an international coalition and to develop a plan of action to strengthen the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance and, therefore, the implementation of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

15. The Conference, which was attended by representatives of Governments, religious communities (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) academic institutions and NGOs, adopted the Oslo Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the main principles of which are as follows:

(a) Change in the Special Rapporteur's title, to "Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief"; study and application of articles 18 of the Covenant and the 1981 Declaration as a way of solving problems of intolerance and discrimination; creation of educational programmes using the 1981 Declaration as a universal standard to build a culture of tolerance, understanding and respect; use by United Nations Member States of the 1981 Declaration and other instruments to promote mediation and negotiation and resolve intolerance, discrimination, injustice and violence in conflicts where religion or belief plays a role; research and development of other informational resources and methodologies for collecting information, initiating comparative studies, etc.;

(b) The last paragraph of the Oslo Declaration reads as follows: "[The participants] urge the organizers and sponsors of the Oslo Conference, in consultation with Conference participants:

[i] to review the discussions and recommendations of the Conference, with the purpose of creating an 'Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief', inviting support and participation by Governments, religious or belief communities, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, and

[ii] to develop a strategic plan of action and seek funding to carry out programmes and projects based on its recommendations, in cooperation with the United Nations."

In his closing statement, the Minister for International Development and Human Rights said that "The Special Rapporteur should be given the necessary means and resources to actively promote the cause of victims of intolerance based on religion or belief all over the world. The Norwegian Government has this year contributed an additional US\$ 1.5 million to the High Commissioner for Human Rights to this end." The Special Rapporteur thanks the Norwegian Government and the organizers of the Oslo Conference for their commitment to strengthening his mandate.

16. The Special Rapporteur also welcomes the initiatives of Spain, which organized a seminar on dialogue among the major monotheistic religions at Toledo on 9 and 10 November 1998, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which sponsored a seminar on "enriching the universality of human rights: Islamic perspectives on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Geneva, 9-10 November 1998).

## III. IN SITU VISITS AND FOLLOW-UP

17. In accordance with Commission on Human Rights and General Assembly resolutions, the Special Rapporteur generally makes two in situ visits a year to States with different political, economic, social and religious systems. Ten visits have taken place since 1994: China (November 1994;

120. By and large, it would be desirable for these financial contributions to be used for the development of other informational resources and methodologies for inter alia collecting information, monitoring compliance, making available in simplified form for analysis all religious, philosophical and scientific research on freedom of religion or belief. To that end, the creation of an Internet site on the 1981 Declaration would be an extremely promising project meeting all the requirements implicit in the mandate (communications, in situ visits, studies and an international compendium of enactments; see paras. 2 to 5 above). As regards sources of information, the Special Rapporteur, while constantly mindful of his sources' authenticity and reliability, is of the view that those in the developing countries should be strengthened in order to assure human rights victims and advocates access to the special procedures; they must not be left behind in matters of accessing information, particularly in the context of modern communication technologies (fax, Internet, etc.).

## 2. A new methodology

121. These additional resources could also facilitate the adoption of a new approach to the preparation of reports. The Special Rapporteur is of the view that the general report should systematically cover all States and all religions and beliefs; it should contain analyses of each State so that its economic, social, cultural, civil and political context can be taken into account when cases and situations of intolerance and discrimination are being examined. It would also make for reflection on and a better understanding of developments in the field of freedom of religion or belief, as well as the stakes involved in freedom of religion or belief. For example, the record number of communications concerning Iran this year will not have gone unnoticed. Although aware of what still remains to be done, we must acknowledge the strides made by President Khatami's policy, such as progress in women's representation (posts of Vice-President of the State, diplomats, magistrates, police officers, a woman mayor of a district in Tehran, etc.), his statement calling for the non-application of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, his address to the last session of the General Assembly and support for General Assembly resolution 53/22 "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations". The Special Rapporteur's communications should therefore be viewed not only from the standpoint of their intrinsic importance, but also in the Iranian context and the stakes involved. The communications concerning Iran may be interpreted either as reflecting its maintenance of a policy of intolerance and discrimination, particularly against the Baha'is, or as revealing a strategy on the part of conservatives to thwart President Khatami's progressive advances, or as both at once. It is therefore of vital importance that a report should be prepared from that angle, using the approach described above.

## 3. Title and consistency of the mandate

122. The Special Rapporteur reiterates his recommendation that a more neutral and encouraging title, such as "Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief", should be used. The present one, with its reference to religious intolerance, antagonizes certain interlocutors and sometimes makes dialogue difficult. A different title could embrace all aspects of freedom of religion or belief. It must also be consistent with the mandate, covering not only religion but also belief and intolerance, as well as discrimination, and reflect the balanced dialogue-oriented approach followed by the Special Rapporteur in his work, in accordance with the resolutions governing his mandate.

## B. External factors