

THE TANDEM PROJECT
<http://www.tandemproject.com>.

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

*UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

Separation of Religion or Belief & State

Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam?

PERSPECTIVES: The Tandem Project offers perspectives from distinguished authors, writers, religious and diplomatic leaders on freedom of religion or belief. They are offered with the greatest respect for the dignity of all people of all religions or beliefs and in no way is meant to insult or defame anyone or any belief.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR DISCUSSION: THE TANDEM PROJECT & THE UNITED NATIONS

Positive steps have been taken by the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly to achieve consensus on the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Dialogue is **needed to resolve differences between United Nations Member States in respect to national laws and religious norms on the right to change or abandon one's religion.**

Articles 2 & 22 Constitution, Federal Republic of Somalia, adopted 1 August 2012

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42603>

The Tandem Project has followed this debate within the United Nations since 2007. In 2011 the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167 by consensus may be the best hope in fifty years: **Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief**

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

The Economist, 26 July-1 August 2008.

Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam? When Egypt's grand mufti, Ali Gomaa, pondered that dilemma in an article published last year, many of his co-religionists were shocked that the question could even be asked.

And they were even more scandalized by his conclusion. The answer, he wrote, was yes, they can, in the light of three verses in the Koran: first, "unto you your religion, and unto me my religion" second,

whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve;” and, most famously,” “There is no compulsion in religion.”

The sheikh’s pronouncement was certainly not that of a wet liberal; he agrees that anyone who deserts Islam is committing a sin and will pay a price in the hereafter, and also that in some historical circumstances (presumably war between Muslims and non-Muslims) an individual’s sin may also amount to “sedition against one’s society.” But his opinion caused a sensation because it went against the political and judicial trends in many parts of the Muslim world, and also against the mood in places where Muslims feel defensive.

In the West, many prominent Muslims would agree with the mufti’s scripturally-based view that leaving Islam is a matter between the believer and God, not for the state. But awkwardly, the main traditions of scholarship and jurisprudence in Islam – both the Shia school and the four main Sunni ones – draw on Hadiths (words and deeds ascribed with varying credibility to Muhammad) to argue in support of death for apostates. And in recent years sentiment in the Muslim world has been hardening. In every big “apostasy” case, the authorities have faced pressure from sections of public opinion, and from Islamist factions, to take the toughest possible stance. In Malaysia, people who try to desert Islam can face compulsory “re-education.”

Under the far harsher regime of Afghanistan, death for apostasy is still on the statute book, despite the country’s American-backed “liberation” from the tyranny of the Taliban. The Western world realized this when Abdul Rahman, an Afgan who had lived in Germany, was sentenced to die after police found him with a Bible. After pressure from Western governments, he was allowed to go to Italy. What especially startled Westerners was the fact that Afghanistan’s parliament, a product of the democracy for which NATO soldiers are dying, tried to bar Mr. Rahman’s exit, and that street protests call for his execution.

The fact that he fled to Italy is one of the factors that have made the issue of Muslim-Christian conversion a hot topic in that country. There are several others. During this year’s Easter celebrations, Magdi Allam, an Egyptian-born journalist who is now a columnist in Italy, was publicly baptized as a Catholic by Pope Benedict; the convert hailed his “liberation” from Islam, and used his column to celebrate other cases of Muslims becoming Christian. To the delight of some Catholics and the dismay of others, he has defended the right of Christians to proselytize among Muslims, and denounced liberal churchmen who are “soft” on Islam. Muslims in Italy and elsewhere have called Mr. Allam a provocateur and chided Pope Benedict for abetting him. But given that many of Italy’s Muslims are converts (and beneficiaries of Europe’s tolerance); Mr. Allam says his critics are hypocrites, denying him a liberty which they themselves have enjoyed.

If there is any issue on which Islam’s diaspora – experiencing the relative calmness of inter-faith relations in the West – might be able to give a clearer moral lead, it is surely this one. But even in the West, speaking out for the legal and civil right to “apostasise” can carry a cost. Usama Hasan, an influential, young British imam, recently made the case for the right to change religions – only to find himself furiously denounced and threatened on Islamist websites, many of them produced in the West.”

<http://www.aligomaa.net/>

TARIQ RAMADAN

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tariq_Ramadan

<http://www.tariqramadan.com/spip.php>

Tariq Ramadan is professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies on the faculty of Oriental Studies at Oxford University. He spoke about his book *What I Believe* in St. Paul, Minnesota on 23 December 2010 at a conference on *Coexistence: Contributing to the Common Good while Maintaining Islamic Identity and Values*, hosted by the Islamic Civic Society of America. Tariq Ramadan is the grandson of Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.

What I Believe

Our societies are awaiting the emergence of a new ‘We.’ A ‘We’ that would bring together men and women, citizens of all religions – and those without religion- who would undertake together to resolve the contradictions of their society: the right to work, to housing, to respect, against racism and all forms of discrimination, all offenses against human dignity. Such a ‘We’ would henceforth represent this coming together of citizens confident in their values, defenders of pluralism in their common society, and respectful of the identities of others; citizens who seek to take up the challenge in the name of their shared values at the very heart of societies. As loyal and critical citizens, as men and women of integrity, they join forces in a revolution of trust and confidence to stem the onrush of fear. Against shallow, emotional, even hysterical reactions they stand firm for rationality, for dialogue, for attentiveness, for a reasonable approach to complex social questions.

The future of Western societies is now being played out at the local level. It is a matter of greatest urgency to set in motion national movements of local initiatives, in which women and men of different religions, cultures, and sensitivities can open new horizons of mutual understanding and shared commitment: horizons of trust. This shared project must henceforth bring us together and give birth to a new ‘We’ anchored in citizenship. Of course, ‘intercultural’ and ‘interfaith’ dialogues are both vital and necessary, but they cannot have the impact of the shared commitment of citizens in the priority fields: education, social divides, insecurity, racisms, discriminations, and more.

DRAFT CONSTITUTION FOR THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA

The Draft Constitution for the Federal Republic of Somalia by the Independent Federal Constitution Commission has 179 Articles and was passed on July 30, 2010. The Consultation by the Commission is a draft for approval by the Somali people of a citizen-based democracy under Shari’ah Law. Article 2, State and Religion, Article 22, Freedom of Religion or Belief, is not in compliance with International Human Rights Law under Article 18 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

[FINAL CDC 30 July ENG](#); [FINAL ISSUES QUESTIONS 30 JULY ENG](#); [Final Main Consultation 30 July - ENG](#)

ARTICLE 2

Islam is the religion of the Somali Republic.

No religion other than Islam can be propagated in the Republic

No law which is not compliant with the general principles and with Shari’ah can be enacted.

ARTICLE 22: FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

A person is free to practice his or her religion

**No Muslim can renounce Islam.
No religion other than Islam can be propagated in Somalia.**

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42603>

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

Shari'ah - the "path to Allah" includes the Quran (recitation), Hadith (sayings), Qiyas (analogical reasoning), Ijma (consensus of the community) and Ijtihad (free and independent thinking). "So which is the real history of the world? The task lies in the never-ending task of compiling them in the quest to build a universal human community situated within a single shared history."

– *Destiny Disrupted – A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*, Tamim Ansary.

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

RESOLUTION ADOPTED, 14 December 2007

http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_37.pdf

In 2007 the U.N. Human Rights Council voted 29 in favor, 0 against and 18 abstentions on 14 December 2007 in the sixth session for a three year extension of the mandate on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/HRC/6/L.15/Rev.1). Those abstaining included: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Mali, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa and Sri Lanka.

The abstentions were based on the objections from Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the 57 country Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) that norms in Muslim countries prohibit leaving Islam as a religion, and were not being honored in the draft resolution.

Portugal, speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) said over 40 paragraphs in the draft resolution was eliminated in an attempt at consensus with the abstaining states, but consensus over the right to leave one's religion or belief was inviolable and could not be compromised.

The Resolution (A/HRC/RES/6/37) with recorded votes:

http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_37.pdf

9. *Urges States:*

(a) To ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief to all without distinction, inter alia, by provision of effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, or the right to practice freely one's religion, including the right to change one's religion or belief is violated:

- The OIC wanted a clearer denouncement of recent stereotyping of religions, their adherents and prophets in the media and by political parties in some societies.
- It wanted to see the respect for all religions or belief enshrined in the resolution. They disagreed with the approach taken by the EU, which calls for the promotion of diversity and tolerance instead.
- It called for the “respect for norms about the right to change one's religion”. The EU draft explicitly urges States to guarantee the right to change one's religion or belief, a requirement the OIC could not subscribe to.
- The resolution urges all Governments to respond favorably to requests by the Special Rapporteur. The OIC was of the view that States should only “consider responding favorably” to such requests.

The Human Rights Council resolution extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief by three years (A/HRC/6/L.15/Rev/1) was the only resolution not passed by consensus. An attempt was made for consensus by leaving out 24 out of the original 40 paragraphs. According to the International Service for Human Rights report, “Portugal (on behalf of the EU) introduced the draft, regretted that despite intensive consultations since the end of the September part of the 6th session, consensus could not be reached. It said that the negotiations efforts were exhausted and it had no other option than bringing the draft to a vote. However, it pledged that it would take up the negotiations again; hoping that consensus on the issue could be re-established soon.” Before the vote, a total of 71 Member States and Observer States endorsed the Special Procedures resolution.

Based on these disagreements, the OIC called for a vote, and said it would abstain. A large number of OIC members of the Council then took the floor to align with the statement by Pakistan, and, while regretting the failure to achieve consensus, announced their abstention as well.” Eighteen Human Rights Council members abstained on the resolution.”

- International Services for Human Rights (ISHR) Report after the Vote

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

2010

In 2010 in the 65th session of the UN General Assembly Morocco spoke on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and made a positive statement on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, and work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

“In a general statement, the representative of Morocco, on behalf of the OIC, said all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion and belief were opposed by that Organization, which condemned all acts of violence carried out in the name of religion. It was the belief of the Organization that all religions shared the same message of peace and respect for others. Terrorism could not and should not be associated with any religion, nationality or ethnic group. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the

issue had been consistently supported by the Organization, which had no problem with the general thrust of the resolution. Many of the Organization's considerations had been taken into account by the co-sponsors in the final stages of consultations; it was understood that they had to work very hard with their constituents."

However, the representative of Morocco, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference said **it had not been possible to resolve differences on respect for national laws and religious norms regarding changing one's religion**. Despite such divergences, it had been decided by the Organization not to oppose the draft; such resolutions ought to be adopted by consensus.

The representative of Belgium, the main sponsor, on behalf of the European Union, recalled that similar resolutions had been adopted by consensus in previous years. This year's draft had been the subject of many rounds of open and transparent informal consultations. It was regretted that, once again, it had not been possible to explicitly state in the resolution that the freedom of religion and belief included **the right not only not to have, but also to change or abandon one's religion or belief**; such language had been let go for the sake of a highly valued consensus. On 16 November 2010 the General Assembly Third Committee adopted without a vote a comprehensive draft resolution (A/C.3/65/L.32.Rev.1) on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

http://www.tandemproject.com/pdf/65_gen_assembly.pdf

Urges States to step up their efforts to protect and promote freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, and to this end:

(a) To ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief to all without distinction, inter alia, by the provision of access to justice and effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, or the right to freely practice one's religion, including the right to change one's religion or belief, is violated;

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

RESOLUTION ADOPTED, March 24, 2011

A-HRC-16-L.14 - Resolution on Freedom of Religion or Belief;

Introduced by Hungary on behalf of the European Union (EU) adopted by consensus without a vote.

Excerpt:

7. Urges States to step up their efforts to protect and promote freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, and to this end:

(a) To ensure that their constitutional and legislative systems provide adequate and effective guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief to all without distinction by, inter alia, the provision of access to justice and effective remedies in cases where the right to freedom of thought, conscience and

religion or belief, or the right to freely practice one's religion, including the right to change one's religion or belief, is violated;

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION

ADOPTED, March 24, 2011

A-HRC-16-L.38 - Resolution Combating Intolerance, Stereotyping, Discrimination & Incitement to Violence against Persons Based on Religion or Belief

Introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) adopted by consensus without a vote.

Excerpt:

(g) Understanding the need to combat denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons, as well as incitement to religious hatred, by strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through, inter alia, education and awareness-building;

(h) Recognizing that the open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels, can play a positive role in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence;

9. *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.

The warning signs are clear: unless we establish a genuine dialogue within and among all kinds of belief, ranging from religious fundamentalism to secular dogmatism, the conflicts of the future will probably be even more deadly. – Mark C. Taylor, New York Times Op Ed, 21 December 2006

HIGHLIGHTS FOR DISCUSSION: THE TANDEM PROJECT & THE UNITED NATIONS

The Tandem Project Internet Course

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

1961: UN General Assembly adopted a resolution asking the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the UN Human Rights Commission to prepare legally-binding international human rights convention on religious intolerance. It was deferred by religious and diplomatic leaders because of its complexity and political sensitivity. History: <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>

1968: UN deferred work on a Convention on Religious Intolerance as too complicated and politically sensitive and instead began work on what was to become the non-binding 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The Tandem

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

1984: The Tandem Project since 1984 has participated in dialogue and discussions on how to implement International Human Rights Instruments at a local level. A Tandem Project co-founder was the delegate of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) to the *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: United Nations.

2011: UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 66/167 by consensus to combat such intolerance. It is the best hope in **fifty** years to reconcile issues and divergent views on human rights and freedom of religion or belief, assimilation and multiculturalism. The Resolution calls for an open public debate of ideas and strengthened global dialogue at all levels to implement the Resolution – *a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief*

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

Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief

UNITED NATIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL & GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

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.

Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC) Mr. Zamir Akram [\[English\]](#) 10 minutes **Saudi Arabia** Mr. Ahmed Suleiman Ibrahim Alaquil [\[English\]](#) [\[Arabic\]](#) 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

[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](#)

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.3/66/L.47/Rev.1

The Resolution identified as A/RES/66/167 by the General Assembly welcomes the establishment of the “King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural dialogue in Vienna, initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia on the basis of purposes and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and acknowledging the important role that this Centre is expected to play as a platform for the enhancement of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.” - King Abdulaziz Dialogue Center – Vienna <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/>

REPORTS & DAILY NEWS

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

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

- 1948: UN General Assembly as of: <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>
- 1986: First International NGO Conference: <http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>
- 2000: UN General Assembly adopts term for the mandate: [1998 UN Conference Report](#)

US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report -2011
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

Religion and Law Consortium - Daily news
<http://www.religlaw.org/headline.php?pageId=20>

UPR-info is an NGO with information and statistics on Universal Periodic Reviews, www.UPR-info.org. Statistics: www.upr-info.org/database/statistics/ Statistics first UPR cycle: 198 countries 12 UPR sessions 21,354 Recommendations. 30 Ranked Issues, Freedom of Religion and Belief ranked 29. There were 425 Recommendations or 1.99% of 21,354. Freedom of Religion and Belief is an issue that is not often raised within the context of the Universal Periodic Review. Early returns from the UPR second Cycle are the same, a low return on the issue of freedom of religion or belief.

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.”

Anders Behring Breivik was declared sane and convicted on Friday August 25, 2012 by a Norwegian court of killing 77 people, and sentenced to the maximum sentence of 21 years in prison under Norwegian law which no longer has the death penalty and considers prison more a means for rehabilitation than retribution. According to the New York Times, “Breivik was given ample time to speak of his rambling anti-Muslim, anti-multicultural political views, including a rant about the ‘deconstruction of Norway at the hands of cultural Marxists.’ Bjorn Magnus Ihler, who survived the Utoya shootings, was quoted as saying that “Norway’s treatment of Mr. Breivik was a sign of a fundamentally civilized nation.”

Norway may set an example now for rehabilitation rather than retribution, turning grief and loss into action, a civilized country where balancing assimilation with multiculturalism works.

The Tandem Project was a catalyst for the 1998 Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief that led to the formation of the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The conference celebrated the fifty year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Honorable Kjell-Magne Bondevik, then Prime Minister of Norway, gave the keynote address. [1998 UN Conference Report](#)

[Assimilation’s Failure, Terrorism’s Rise](#)
[Discussion at Augsburg with Kjell-Magne Bondevik](#)

BEST PRACTICE MODELS

Best Practice Models in Minnesota combine the 1986 NGO International Conference on *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*, ways to implement the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Tolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief: <http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>; And the *Islamic Law and Human Rights* program at the University of Minnesota Law School and Human Rights Center. http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/center/IHRP-Press_Release_Feb%204.pdf.

Minnesota Fifth District Congressman Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to the United States Congress, and University of Minnesota officials attended the opening of the *Islamic Law and Human Rights* program at the University of Minnesota Law (above) on February 4, 2011. The program in *Islamic Law and Human Rights* has been delayed but is appropriate as a best practice model in higher education on religious law and human rights if launched as a platform for an open public debate of ideas, local interfaith, multicultural dialogue: [United Nations & Islamic Human Rights Declarations](#)

The Tandem Project **encourages universities and colleges worldwide** to consider a UN Human Rights Education World Programme on Freedom of Religion or Belief, to raise awareness and understanding of international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief.

World Programme for Human Rights Education Phase 2 (2010-2014)
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/education/training/secondphase.htm>

The Best Practice Models may apply to GA Resolution 66/167 adopted in 2011 by consensus in the UN General Assembly 66th session - **Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief**. The UN General Assembly 67th session requests reports by the UN Secretary-General and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the UN Member States response to Resolution 66/167:

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

Encourages all States to consider providing updates on efforts made in this regard as part of ongoing reporting to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and requests in this respect the High Commissioner for Human Rights to include those updates in her reports to the Human Rights Council; Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session a report on steps taken by States to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief, as set forth in the present resolution.

SEPARATION OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND STATE

SOROBAS

www.sorobas.com

Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS is a term used by The Tandem Project to express the core principles of international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief. It encourages UN Member States to consider how their constitutional and legal systems implement the following objective at national and local levels.

The term has a long history with diverse interpretations: [Separation of Church and State](#).

Modern technology, communications and travel bring us closer together providing new learning opportunities to build respect and tolerance for diversity of religion or belief and for each other. The balance between assimilation and multiculturalism is a great challenge for our age. *Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS* brings separation of church and state, separation of synagogue and state, separation of mosque and state, separation of temple and state, and separation of other sacred places and associations and state, together under an umbrella term of respect for each other and international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief.

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. The value of such dialogues is proportionate to the level of participation. *Separation of Religion or Belief and State - SOROBAS* will create opportunities for inclusive and genuine human rights education on freedom of religion or belief.

[SOROBAS – Site Map](#)

REFLECTIONS

The Tandem Project

Reason only visits those who welcome it.

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 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.