

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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*

HIGHLIGHTS FOR DISCUSSION

In Eight Sections

RESPONSE: 1st Blue bar *Highlights for Discussion*

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

Since 1986 The Tandem Project has supported the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief. In 2012 we launched *Highlights for Discussion: the Tandem Project and the United Nations* to enable us to exchange views with others. We welcome new opportunities to explore collaboration, foster justice, build tolerance, and resolve conflicts, divisiveness and discrimination based on religion or belief at local, national and global levels.

I. HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

1962: The General Assembly adopted a resolution requesting ECOSOC to ask the Commission to prepare a draft declaration and a draft convention on the elimination of racial discrimination. It also adopted a similarly worded resolution requesting ECOSOC to ask the Commission to prepare a draft declaration and a draft convention on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance. Both resolutions referred in their respective preambles to the desire to 'put into effect the principle of equality of all men and all peoples without distinction as to race, color or religion. The General Assembly set deadlines for submission. The draft convention on racial discrimination was adopted in 1966. The draft convention on religious intolerance was deferred by the UN General Assembly because of its complexity and sensitivity.

History: <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>

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

II. THE 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 Styrø [\[English\]](#) 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/>

III. REPORTS & DAILY NEWS

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](#)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx>

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>

IV. UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

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.

The question is why such a low return as freedom of religion or belief is a central concern and core issue in the Constitutions, legal systems and cultures in most UN Member States. The answer may be found in the reluctance of the UN from 1961-2012 to proceed with a draft convention on religious intolerance due to its complexity and sensitivity. Issues such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, indigenous, children, minorities, women, are all rights-based issues where religion or belief plays a role and is not even mentioned in UN Member States national reports for the Universal Periodic Review.

V. 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 Odinic/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.”

The 1998 Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief 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](#)

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

VI. BEST PRACTICE MODEL

The Best Practice Minnesota Model combines 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.

[Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam](#)

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](#)

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

Modern technology, communications and travel provide 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](#)

VIII. 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 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.