

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 and State

QUESTION: What in your view are the benefits, drawbacks and obstacles to using UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167 to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons, based on religion or belief at a local level?

Reply to: Michael M. Roan, Director, The Tandem Project, mroan@tandemproject.com 612-825-2842

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. - *General Assembly Resolution 66/167*

Views on local efforts will not be available until after UN national reports in 2012.

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**

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 later deferred by religious and diplomatic leaders because of its complexity and political sensitivity: <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>

2011: UN General Assembly adopted A/RES/66/167 **by consensus** after several years of contentious issues between the European Union (EU), Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and other UN Member States. A/RES/66/167 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.

*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 Stjørø [\[English\]](#) 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/>

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.

ISSUES AND 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.”

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

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

<http://www.religlaw.org/headline.php?pageId=20>

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

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

UN History on Freedom of Religion or Belief: <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>

General Comment 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights:

[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument)

1981 Declaration on Religion or Belief: http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm.

1986 First International NGO Conference: <http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>

UN adoption of a term for the mandate: [1998 UN Conference Report](#)

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 UPR returns in the second cycle indicate this trend not to report on the issue of freedom of religion or belief is continuing.

SEPARATION OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND STATE

SOROBAS

www.sorobas.com

[SOROBAS – Site Map](#)

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 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.

The Tandem Project since 1984 has participated in dialogue and discussions on how to implement International Human Rights Instruments at a local level. The Tandem Project founder was the NGO 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.

Life imagines its own significance and strains to justify its beliefs.

People want to know that their life has somehow counted, if not for themselves, than at least in a larger scheme of things, that they have left a trace that has meaning. That they have fulfilled God's purpose, or done their duty to ancestors or family, or achieved something which has enriched humanity. What people really fear is not extinction, but extinction *with insignificance*. It is as though the life force itself needed illusion in order to further itself. Logically, then, the ideal creativity for humans would strain toward the grandest illusion. - Ernest Becker (1924-1974)

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.