

THE TANDEM PROJECT

<http://tandemproject.com>.

UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

There may be an effort in the seventh session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to add religion to the Convention on race as part of the post-Durban process. This would be a mistake. Freedom of Religion or Belief should stand alone as a treaty-based Convention. Religious conflict is at least equal in importance and transcendent from conflict based on race.

“Religion raises the stakes of human conflict much higher than tribalism, racism, or politics ever can, as it is the only form of in-group/out-group thinking that casts the differences between people in terms of eternal rewards and punishments.” – *Sam Harris, Letter to a Christian Nation*

Drafting a treaty-based Convention on religious intolerance was one of the most important early foundational concerns of the United Nations. Decisions were made in 1962 and 1963 that led the UN General Assembly in 1968 to defer work on a draft Convention on Religious Intolerance:

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.”

1963: “The decision to separate the instruments on religious intolerance from those on racial discrimination constituted a compromise solution designed to satisfy a number of conflicting viewpoints. Western states insisted on addressing both matters in a joint instrument. Communist states were not anxious to deal with religious matters. African and Asian states considered the question of religious intolerance a minor matter compared with racial discrimination. In contrast to the religious intolerance matter, international instruments on the elimination of racial discrimination were adopted fairly swiftly, in 1963 and 1965 respectively.” – *Freedom of Religion or Belief; Ensuring Effective International Legal Protection, Bahyyih G. Tahzib, Kluwer Law International, The Hague, September, 1995*

Open this link for a year-by-year history of Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief:

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

It is unfortunate if the mandate on Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief is placed in a subordinate position to racial discrimination. Religion has important issues that transcend race; one being a debate on whether there is a conflict between faith and science. Philip Meyer has said; “Religion is about the mystery, science is about figuring out what works in the material world. No one needs to frame the argument as a choice between religion and science. We can have both as long as we don’t use either one to test the other.” For *long term* solutions to conflicts based on religion or belief a question needs to be addressed; how best to promote tolerance and provide protection against all forms of intolerance and discrimination equally, for *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*.

Reply: The Tandem Project Country & Community Database collects information worldwide on United Nations Human Rights Bodies. The information is used for UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR); UN Treaty-based Reports; UN Special Procedures, Special Rapporteur Reports. Click the link below to open the Database. Read the Instructions & Table of Contents: scroll to an Article of your

choice and click to reply.

<http://www.tandemproject.com/databases/forms/card.htm>

The Tandem Project: a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1986 to build understanding and respect for diversity of religion or belief, and 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 the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The Tandem Project initiative was launched in 1986 as the result of a co-founder representing the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) at a 1984 United Nations Geneva Seminar, *Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, called by the UN Secretariat on ways to implement the 1981 UN Declaration. In 1986, The Tandem Project organized the first NGO International Conference on the 1981 UN Declaration.

The Tandem Project Executive Director: Michael M. Roan, mroan@tandemproject.com.

*The Tandem Project is a UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

