

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

RELIGION & SCIENCE IN TANDEM WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

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Issue: Religious and scientific core beliefs held in tandem with human rights

For: United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media, Civil Society

Review: *Religion & Science in Tandem with Human Rights*. Religious and scientific core beliefs held in tandem with human rights: I. United Nations History: II. Human Rights Education: III. Religion & Science: IV Method of Inquiry: V. Cooperation, Competition and Conflicts.

The Tandem Project International Conference in 1986; *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*, included 27 Community Strategies on International Human Rights Standards and Freedom of Religion or Belief for Local Applications (attached PDF word document).

The conference included speakers on Religion and the 1981 U.N. Declaration, and Atheism and the 1981 U.N. Declaration. The Presiding Bishop of the American Lutheran Church introduced the speaker on Atheism; a professor at the Polish Academy of Sciences and Minister of Church Affairs for the Peoples Republic of Poland, who later became Chair of the U.N. Working Group for the 1993 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Agenda with 27 Community Strategies were models on how to apply International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief to local programs in Education, Law, Development and Analysis. Afterwards, **implementing** the local strategies was a challenge. International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the United States remains relatively unknown. Use of International Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief should be an objective in preparing for the United States Universal Periodic Review in 2010.

The **success** of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review process will be determined by the National and Local follow-up over four years to U.N. Human Rights Council Working Group Reports. Implementing these measures on international human rights Conventions, Declarations and other instruments will **determine** the success of the Universal Periodic Review process.

Excerpts: Preamble to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 November, 1981 (Resolution: 36/55).

Reflections on the complexity, sensitivity, difficulty and challenge to achieve these excerpts from the preamble to the 1981 U.N. Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief:

Considering that religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements in his conception of life and that freedom of religion or belief should be fully respected and guaranteed,

Considering that it is essential to promote understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief and to ensure that the use of religion or belief for ends inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, other relevant instruments of the United Nations and the purposes and principles of the present Declaration is inadmissible,

I. United Nations History

The United Nations was founded in San Francisco in 1945 in response to the atrocities of World War II. This war was justified by a pagan German ethnic-religious ideology and a Japanese Emperor considered by the Japanese people to be a divine deity. Most religious expression openly opposed to these beliefs was violently suppressed.

In 1948, the UN appointed Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States, Rene Cassin of France, P.C. Chang of China and Charles H. Malik of Lebanon, to write a draft Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 18 of the Declaration says, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change his [her] religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his [her] religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

In 1961 the U.N. Sub-Commission to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights began to draft a Convention on Religious Intolerance. Deliberations on a legally-binding Convention were deferred in 1968 because of the apparent complexity and sensitivity of a legally-binding human rights Convention on religious intolerance. Instead, the Sub-Commission of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights was mandated to draft a U.N. Declaration on religion or belief.

In 1981 the U.N. General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. It is an adjunct to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Together, they are international law and Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

U.N. Member States of both religious and non-religious persuasions issued reservations after approval of the 1981 U.N. Declaration. Bulgaria, representing the Soviet Bloc countries made a reservation complaining that the U.N. Declaration favored religion over "atheistic" beliefs. Iraq issued a reservation on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, implying it did not favor "religion" enough. (2)

In March 1982 the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist party issued Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during our Country's Socialist Period. The policy declares the country is atheist, but calls for limited freedom of religion in the People's Republic of China. Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution: "no one may make use of religions to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the state educational system."

On 5 August 1990, a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the 55 country Organization of the Islamic Conference adopted *The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam*. Article 1 reads, "All human beings form one family whose members are united by submission to God and descent from Adam." The Cairo Declaration is a deeply-held religious human rights paradigm that may not agree with everyone's right to change religion or belief, a core principle of Article 18 of the ICCPR and the 1981 U.N. Declaration. (3)

II. Human Rights Education

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, "*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.*" This core principle is enshrined in international law by Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights –Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief - and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The United Nations on 10 December 2004, Human Rights Day, adopted a World Program for Human Rights Education. Article 18 and the 1981 U.N. Declaration are enshrined and recognized as international law and are a prerequisite for teaching International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Human rights education should be drafted and adopted as a treaty-based Convention.

Religions or beliefs explain the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly and often are a mixture of cooperating and competing principles. As competition, they have their own creeds, dogmas and values described as truth claims. The Roman Catholic Catechism, for example, has similarities and differences with the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran doctrine formulated by Martin Luther. Most Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, indigenous and new religions hold in common universal principles of peace and cooperation as well as claims in competition with each other.

There is a difference between monotheistic religions looking outward for a messiah, or the revealed word of God through His Prophet; and religions in search of the Universal Mind, commonly described as a non-theistic belief often belief in reincarnation. Charvaka, the ancient Indian philosophical system of materialism, traceable to the Rig Veda in 600 B.C., is different from T'ien, the impersonal secular standard of justice of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). Both are different from the 1848 Communist Manifesto rejecting supernatural beliefs.

Bahiyih G. Tahzib stressed the importance of definitions in her commentary, *Freedom of Religion or Belief: Ensuring Effective International Legal Protection*; "Sensitivity to labels is critically important for religious and nonreligious people when trying to reduce intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Passionate anger can quickly arise if people perceive their deeply-held beliefs being described unfairly. Giving a label to matters of religion and other beliefs has always been a challenge to the United Nations and its Member States, as it involves complex and sensitive definitional issues." (4)

Scholars and theologians debate terms like "religion." One Latin term *religare* means "to bind fast together" The agnostic Stephen Jay Gould, former professor of Zoology at Harvard, found this acceptable in his book *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, "if used to construe as fundamentally religious, literally, binding together, all moral discourse on principles that might activate the ideal of universal fellowship among people." (5). 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.

Sigmund Freud in his book, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, described the meaning of religion told to him by a religious friend as "an oceanic feeling, a sensation of eternity and one may, he thinks, rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion." Freud commented by saying, "I cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling in myself, but this gives me no right to deny that it does in fact occur in other people." (6)

Humanism has different definitions depending on the values of a person or the organization. According to one definition, Humanism with a capital H "is not theistic, and does not accept supernatural views of reality." (7) This is a non-theistic statement of humanism, as distinct from other terms persons like Richard Dawkins use when describing "New Atheists," or as "Christian humanism" coined during the Renaissance and used to describe Erasmus (1467-1536) the famous Dutch theologian.

III. Religion & Science

In the introduction to Sigmund Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud was quoted as saying, "science and religion are mortal enemies and that every attempt at bridging the gap between them is bound to be futile." (8) Contrary to this position Stephen Jay Gould said science and religion each have their own realms, separate from the other. Science does comment on the ultimate meaning of life and religion is not science by most definitions. Polls taken on the metaphysical beliefs of scientists divide roughly as follows; 40% define themselves as theists, 40% as atheists and 20% take no position. Non-scientific followers of religions or beliefs vary widely some accepting science as confirming their beliefs and others as a threat to their beliefs.

The view of science by members of a religion or belief varies from country to country and individual to individual. According to Niall Ferguson, a recent Gallup Millennium Survey of religious attitudes reports that in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, Sweden and Denmark, less than 10 percent of the population now attend church at least once a month. Only in Catholic Italy and Ireland does more than a third of the population go to church on a monthly basis. Meanwhile, 64 percent of Czechs regard God as not mattering at all, a higher rate than even in Sweden. In the United States, by comparison, 82 percent of respondents said God was 'very important' and almost 50 percent attend a religious service weekly. (9) "Europeans when asked if they believe in God will often say, 'well, it depends on what you mean by God.' Most Americans unequivocally answer 'yes' to the question." The cultures of countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, South America and other regions of the world, not included in this survey, have equally strong influence on how people view science and religion.

Science in the twenty-first century is making rapid discoveries such as mapping the human genome and stem cell research that seems to be challenging traditional beliefs. In 2003, The Harvard Divinity School Ingersoll Lectures, a series on immortality, held every year since 1896, debated "The Desire for Eternal Life: Scientific Versus Religious Visions." The debate was on the moral and ethical value of greatly extending life, something possible by science in the future, vs. the mortality argument that life is extended only by God in another realm after death. (10)

The U.N. debate continues on international treaty law for therapeutic and human cloning. A New York Times editorial, five years ago on November 5, 2003, reported a day before a preliminary vote that three positions were being proposed; a ban on all forms of human cloning, a ban on human cloning, with an exemption for therapeutic cloning for the use of embryonic stem cells in experiments to search for clues to a wide range of diseases, and a proposal to postpone the vote for two years. The United States and 60 other countries proposed banning all human cloning, Belgium and 20 other countries took the position of allowance for therapeutic cloning for stem cell research, and the Islamic countries proposed the postponement of a vote for two years. (11)

The United Nations put off the vote for a legal convention on human cloning. Led by a deferral motion introduced by Iran on behalf of the 55 Islamic States, the vote was 80 to 79 with 15 countries abstaining. This vote demonstrates the debate over stem cell research for therapeutic purposes is not only between followers of religious versus nonreligious beliefs. There is a continuing tension among, within and between people of all deeply-held beliefs and moral values over the use of science when it is at a crossroads with values on the ultimate meaning of life

IV. Method of Inquiry

Core scientific beliefs are not religion or belief; they are a method of inquiry. Human rights are not religion or belief either; they are metaphysically and philosophically neutral, protecting *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.*

T.H. Huxley (1825-1895) an English biologist, philosopher and educator, in 1869, in response to repeated questions from the London Metaphysical Society as a result of Darwin's publication *On the Origin of Species* asked if he believed in God or not originated the term 'agnostic.'(12) Lexicographers call agnosticism the third rail on the God-idea, distinct from theism and atheism.

T.H. Huxley explained it this way, "Agnostics have no creed but a method, the essence of which lies in the rigorous application of a single principle. That principle is of great antiquity; it is as old as Socrates, it is the axiom that every man and woman should be able to give a reason for the faith that is in them; it is the principle of Descartes; it is the fundamental axiom of modern science. The only obligation is to have the mind always open to conviction." (13) This became the definition of agnosticism; suspended belief open to conviction. T.H. Huxley, "Darwin's Bulldog," in a September 23, 1960 letter to Charles Kingsley wrote, "I neither deny nor affirm the immortality of man. I see no reason for believing in it, but on the other hand, I have no means of disproving it."

Faith, by one definition is holding a religion or belief without certifiable proof. Soren Kirkegaard (1823-1855) stated a Christian must take a "leap of faith"-either/or. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) said transcendentalism presumed a "special knowledge" derived from intuition. Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher (1623-1662) said intuition was the key to God, "the heart has reasons that reason knows nothing about." Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) agreeing with Islamic neo-platonic philosophy said "divine law revealed by God" complemented philosophy.

Atheism or "not-theism" does not believe in a supernatural reality. Richard Dawkins described by some as a "New Atheist" in his book "a devil's chaplain admits, "Science has no way to disprove the existence of a supreme being, this is strictly true." (15) Charles Darwin, describing himself as an agnostic after agreeing with the term coined by his colleague T.H. Huxley, was quoted as saying; "one might as well try to illuminate the midnight sky with a candle as throw the light of reason on metaphysics." Yet atheism, in support of reason and physics, cannot disprove theism. The mystery remains.

Consciousness is has been said, exists by a separation of opposites, by acquiring unilateral vision at birth. This may or may not be innate or inborn for individuals, groups, organizations, nations or religions as they both cooperate and compete against each other. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) describes the underlying condition of human existence as "a war of every man against every man and self-interest is the universal rule." For Hobbes, natural law is the law of the jungle that calls for a civil law compact with a benevolent monarch in order not to destroy each other. There are numerous examples of religious and non-religious altruism and self-sacrifice for others but unilateral vision, "splitting" into polar opposites seems to be a feature of human nature.

Ernest Becker (1924-1974) winner of the Pulitzer Prize in General Non-fiction for *The Denial of Death*, said: "culture itself is sacred, since it is the *religion* that assures in some way the perpetuation of its members. For a long time students of society liked to think in terms of 'sacred' and 'profane' aspects of social life. But there has been continued dissatisfaction with this kind of simple dichotomy, and the reason is that there is really no basic distinction between sacred and profane in the symbolic affairs of people. According to Becker, for individuals "life imagines its own significance and strains to justify its beliefs. 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.'" 16.

In Eastern philosophy the principle of Yin and Yang approaches the problem of opposites by embracing both simultaneously, in a paradoxical union that transcends and reconciles them; theist and atheist, black and white, good and evil, right and wrong, male and female, height and depth,

courage and cowardice, love and hate, destiny and free will, calm and turbulence, universal and particular, constructive and destructive, light and dark, war and peace. Yin and Yang in Jungian terms are used to understand and transcend our shadow – which is the opposite of what seems most different from us, what we fear the most.

Herman Melville, author of the great American novel, *Moby Dick*, speaks of opposites when contemplating the eyes of the Sperm Whale that sees out of both sides of its head, “how is it, then, with the whale? True, both of his eyes in themselves must simultaneously act; but is his brain so much more comprehensive, combing, and subtle than man’s, that he can at the same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side of him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction?” (17)

V. Cooperation, Competition and Conflicts

Norms and standards on human rights and freedom of religion or belief are international law and codes of conduct for peaceful cooperation, respectful competition and resolution of conflicts.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at an Alliance of Civilizations Madrid Forum said; “Never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations.” A writer in another setting said, “The warning signs are clear: unless we establish 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.”

The Tandem Project Objectives: (1) Use International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as a platform for genuine dialogue on core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs. (2) Adapt these human rights standards to early childhood education, teaching children, from the very beginning, that their own religion is one out of many and that it is a personal choice for everyone to adhere to the religion or belief by which he or she feels most inspired, or to adhere to no religion or belief at all.¹

Notes

The universality of human rights has been clearly established and recognized in international law. – *Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information DPI/1627/HR – March 1995.* Principle: A basic truth, law or assumption; a rule or standard of personal conduct; moral or ethical standard; rule.

1.) The U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment 22 on Article 18 defines the protection of religion or belief as follows: “Article 18 protects theistic non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.” The term, ‘not to profess any religion or belief,’ may be closest to the neutral position postulated by this paper. The General Comment goes on to say, “The terms religion or belief are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reasons, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community.”

2.) Bahiyyih G. Tahzib, “Freedom of Religion or Belief: Ensuring Effective International Legal Protection,” Kluwer Publishing, Amsterdam, 1996, p. 185. She refers to comments by Japp Walkate of the Netherlands on reservations to the 1981 Declaration; “According to Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R., the 1981 U.N. Declaration gave a one-sided version of freedom of thought, conscience and religion; it did not take sufficient account of atheistic beliefs. In their opinion, the 1981 Declaration disregarded the rights of persons who did not profess any religion or belief. They considered the 1981 Declaration unnecessarily incomplete. Iraq entered a collective reservation on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference as to the applicability of ‘ any provision or wording in the

Declaration which might be contrary to Islamic law (Shari'a) or to any legislation or act based on Islamic law. Syria and Iran endorsed Iraq's collective reservation."

3.) Tad Stahnke and Paul Martin, *Religion and Human Rights: Basic Documents*, "The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990), Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, p. 185

4.) The U.N. Commission on Human Rights focus is on eliminating discrimination based on religion or belief, which includes sensitivity to labels, definitions and the evolution of the phrase "religion or belief."

5) Gould, Stephen Jay, "Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life, Random House, Inc., 1999, p. 62.

6.) Freud Sigmund, "Civilization and its Discontents," 1929, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud in 24 Volumes, p. 12.

7.) The IHEU Minimum Statement on Humanism. For a more complete explanation of Humanism with a capital H read the Amsterdam Declaration for 2002 on their website: <http://www.iheu.org>.

8.) Freud Sigmund, "The Future of an Illusion," 1927: The Standard Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, p. xiii. Peter Gay.

9.) Niall Ferguson, N.Y. Times Editorial, June 8, 2003. Ferguson is a professor of financial history at New York University and senior research fellow, Jesus College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

10.) Daniel Callahan, "The Desire for Eternal Life: Scientific Versus Religious Visions," Harvard Divinity School Bulletin, Volume 31, Number 2, spring 2003.

11.) New York Times Editorial, "A Fight at the U.N. Over Cloning," November 5, 2003

12.) Adrian Desmond & James Moore, "Darwin", page 568, Time Warner Books, 1991. "The Metaphysical Society was a menagerie of faiths and heresies; bishops and archbishops mingled with Positivists, deists, and Unitarians, and for spice there was even the odd atheist. Before anyone could pin him down he came up with a new identifying label, 'agnostic.' An agnostic did not deny or affirm God's existence; he did not pretend to know whether the world was made up of matter, spirit, or whatever." Darwin in a letter from asking if he believed in God replied, "A man undoubtedly can be an ardent Theist and evolutionist, but if he had to wear a label, Huxley's agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind." Written by Darwin in 1879, in reply to whether he believed in God and if theism and evolution were compatible, cited by his friend, Rev. Charles Kingsley, as an example of a theist whom is also an ardent evolutionist, page 636.

13.) T.H. Huxley, Agnostic Annual, 1892

14.) Julian Huxley, "Religion without Revelation," New York: Harper, 1927.

15.) Richard Dawkins, "a devil's chaplain", Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, p. 149. This quote is from a chapter called "The Great Convergence." In the sentence prior to the quote Dawkins belittles agnostic conciliation by saying it is "the decent liberal bending over backwards to concede as much as possible to anybody who shouts loudly enough, reaches ludicrous lengths in the following common piece of sloppy thinking. It goes roughly like this. You can't prove a negative (so far so good). Science has no way to disprove the existence of a supreme being (this is strictly true). Therefore belief (or disbelief) in a supreme being is a matter of pure individual inclination, and they are therefore both equally deserving of respectful attention!" This was said as a matter of ridicule.

T.H. Huxley, who coined the term agnostic, would not agree with his description of agnosticism as "the decent liberal bending over backwards to concede as much as possible to anybody who shouts loudly enough." To Huxley agnosticism meant a rigorous scientific inquiry, always open to conviction. In a May 6, 1863 letter to Charles Kingsley T.H. Huxley said, "I have never had sympathy with the a priori reasons against orthodoxy, and I have by nature and disposition the greatest possible antipathy to the atheistic and infidel school – in matters of intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not

demonstrated or demonstrable.”

Dawkins implies Stephen Jay Gould was an atheist, “The ‘separate magisteria’ thesis was promoted by S.J. Gould, an atheist bending over backwards far beyond the call of duty or common sense.” S.J. Gould, in his own book, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, defines himself as an agnostic “I am not a believer. I am an agnostic in the wise sense of T.H. Huxley, who coined the word in identifying such open-minded skepticism as the only rational position because, truly, one cannot know.”

16.) Ernest Becker (1924-1974) won the Pulitzer Prize in General Nonfiction for “The Denial of Death.” He was a distinguished social theorist and a popular teacher of anthropology, sociology, and social psychology. Also, Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil: The Nature of Social Evil; Retrospect and Conclusion*, page 153; Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing, 1975:

“Persons have to keep from going mad by biting off small pieces of reality which they can get some command over and some satisfaction from. This means that their noblest passions are played out in the narrowest and most unreflective ways, and this is what undoes them. From this point of view the main problem for human beings has to be expressed in the following paradox; Men and women must have a *fetish* in order to survive and to have ‘normal mental health.’ But this shrinkage of vision that permits them to survive also at the same time prevents them from having the overall understanding they need to plan for and control the effects of their shrinkage of experience. A paradox this bitter sends a chill through all reflective people. “Self-knowledge is the hardest human task because it risks revealing to persons how their self-esteem was built; on the powers of others in order to deny their own death.” “Life imagines its own significance and strains to justify its beliefs. 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.”

17.) Edward F. Edinger, *Melville’s Moby-Dick, an American Nekyia*, Inner City Books, Toronto Canada (1995) p. 30. Many people consider Moby-Dick to be the greatest American novel. A major theme of Moby- Dick is the problem of opposites, white whale, black eyes, etc.

STANDARDS: http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81_dec.htm

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

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

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

Postscript: Closing the Gap – International Standards for National and Local Applications, considers the question of a Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief followed by a Response from the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and The Tandem Project Concept, an option that reflects the inclusive values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through human rights-based *Dialogue and Education*.

Closing the Gap - International Standards for National and Local Applications

Objective: Build understanding and support for Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights –Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Encourage the United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media and Civil Society to consider the rule of law and international human rights standards as essential for *long-term solutions* to conflicts based on religion or belief.

Challenge: In 1968 the United Nations deferred work on an International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Religious Intolerance, because of its apparent complexity and sensitivity. In the twenty-first century, a dramatic increase of intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief is motivating a worldwide search to find solutions to these problems. This is a challenge calling for enhanced dialogue by States and others; including consideration of an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief for protection of and accountability by all religions or beliefs. The tensions in today’s world inspire a question such as:

Should the United Nations adopt an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief?

Response: Is it the appropriate moment to reinstate the drafting of a legally binding international convention on freedom of religion or belief? Law making of this nature requires a minimum consensus and an environment that appeals to reason rather than emotions. At the same time we are on a learning curve as the various dimensions of the Declaration are being explored. Many academics have produced voluminous books on these questions but more ground has to be prepared before setting up of a UN working group on drafting a convention. In my opinion, we should not try to rush the elaboration of a Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, especially not in times of high tensions and unpreparedness. - *UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 UN Declaration, 25 November 2006.*

Option: After forty years this may be the time, however complex and sensitive, for the United Nations Human Rights Council to appoint an Open-ended Working Group to draft a United Nations Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The mandate for an Open-ended Working Group ought to assure nothing in a draft Convention will be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Concept: *Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS.* The First Preamble to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; “*Whereas 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.* This concept suggests States recalling their history, culture and constitution adopt fair and equal human rights protection for all religions or beliefs as described in General Comment 22 on Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, 20 July 1993 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4):

Article 18: protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.* The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with international characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reasons, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community. **Article 18:** permits restrictions to manifest a religion or belief only if such limitations are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Dialogue & Education

Dialogue: United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at the Alliance of Civilizations Madrid Forum said; “Never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue,

among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations.” A writer in another setting has said, “The warning signs are clear: unless we establish 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.”

Norms and standards on human rights and freedom of religion or belief are international law and codes of conduct for peaceful cooperation, respectful competition and resolution of conflicts. International Human Rights Standards on Religion or Belief is a platform for genuine dialogue on core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.

Education: Ambassador Piet de Klerk addressing the Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 U.N. Declaration said; “Our educational systems need to provide children with a broad orientation: from the very beginning, children should be taught that their own religion is one out of many and that it is a personal choice for everyone to adhere to the religion or belief by which he or she feels most inspired, or to adhere to no religion or belief at all.”¹

The 1981 U.N. Declaration states; “Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.” With International Human Rights safeguards, early childhood education is the best time to begin to teach tolerance, understanding and respect for freedom of religion or belief.