

## **THE TANDEM PROJECT**

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

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

#### **BENIN**

#### **FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND OTHER REPORTS IN THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

Second Session U.N. Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (5-19 May, 2008)

The Universal Periodic Review begins with a presentation of a National Report by a UN Member State and inter-active dialogue with the UN Human Rights Council. The Human Rights Council drafts a Working Group Report and later, follow-up recommendations after a second inter-active dialogue with the Council and other Stakeholders. A link to the UN Working Group Report and Archives of Other Reports and audio/visual UN web cast presentations with inter-active dialogues can be accessed below by opening the related web cast archives.

#### **A. Description of the methodology and the broad consultation process for the preparation of information provided under the Universal Periodic Review:**

The Tandem Project, a *UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*, submits information for the Universal Periodic Review on issues relevant to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and other matters related to freedom of religion or belief.

The U.S. State Department 2007 Religious Freedom Report is the source of this information. Excerpts comply with original five page limit for NGO Submissions under General Guidelines 5/1 for the Universal Periodic Review. There is a source link below to the complete report.\*

#### **B. Benin Religious Demography**

The country has an area of 43,483 square miles and a population of 8,078,300. According to the 2002 census, 27.1 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24.4 percent Muslim, 17.3 percent Vodun, 5 percent Celestial Christian, 3.2 percent Methodist, 7.5 percent other Christian, 6 percent other traditional local religious groups, 1.9 percent other religious groups, and 6.5 percent claim no religious affiliation.

Many individuals who nominally identify themselves as Christian or Muslim also practice traditional local religious beliefs. Among the most commonly practiced is the animist Vodun system of belief, also known as voodoo, which originated in this area of Africa. There are few atheists.

More than half of all Christians are Catholic. Other religious groups, both Christian and non-Christian, include Baptists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Celestial Christians, Rosicrucians, the Unification Church, Eckankar, and Baha'is. Nearly all Muslims adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. The few Shi'a Muslims are primarily Middle Eastern expatriates.

There are Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional local religious groups throughout the country. However, most adherents of the traditional Yoruba religious group are in the south, while other local religious beliefs are followed in the north. Muslims are represented most heavily in the north and southeast. Christians are prevalent in the south, particularly in Cotonou, the economic capital. It is not unusual for members of the same family to practice Christianity, Islam, traditional local religious beliefs, or a combination of all of these.

\* Direct Link to complete report: Overview; Religious Demography; Legal/Policy Framework; Restrictions on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Societal Abuse/Discrimination in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief. Click to open complete report:

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90082.htm>

Source: U.S. State Department 2007 International Religious Freedom Report; Benin

Links to State Department sites are welcomed. Unless a copyright is indicated, information on the State Department's main website is in the public domain and may be copied and distributed without permission. Citation of the U.S. State Department as source of the information is appreciated.

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**Report:** Report of the Working Group for the Universal Periodic Review. This report includes Conclusions and Recommendations.

[http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session2/BJ/A\\_HRC\\_8\\_39\\_Benin\\_E.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session2/BJ/A_HRC_8_39_Benin_E.pdf)

**Archives:** Archives of other reports and inter-active dialogues may be opened by clicking on the related web cast archives on the U.N. Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights website.

**[Related web cast archives](#)**

Click on footnotes below for sources to these reports.

**BENIN**

*Only contributions submitted in one of the United Nations official languages are admissible and posted on this webpage*

**Date of consideration: Wednesday 7 May 2008 - 9.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.**

**National report <sup>1</sup>: [A](#) | [C](#) | [E](#) | [E](#) | [R](#) | [S](#)**

**Compilation of UN information <sup>2</sup>: [A](#) | [C](#) | [E](#) | [E](#) | [R](#) | [S](#)**

**Summary of stakeholders' information <sup>3</sup>: [A](#) | [C](#) | [E](#) | [E](#) | [R](#) | [S](#)**



**Outcome of the review :**  
**Report of the Working group : [A](#) | [C](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [R](#) | [S](#)**

### THE TANDEM PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Tandem Project Objectives on Dialogue and Education: (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.<sup>1</sup>

International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief are international law and codes of conduct for peaceful cooperation, respectful competition and resolution of conflicts. The identification of achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints on the standards should be part of the follow-up to the Benin Universal Periodic Review.

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STANDARDS: [http://www.tandemproject.com/program/81\\_dec.htm](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*

*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 Freedom of Religion or Belief is a platform for genuine dialogue on the 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.”<sup>1</sup>.

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.