

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

CONCEPT

Separation of Religion or Belief and State

Principle: 1948 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,*” – recognized as a “common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”

Concept: Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS. States recalling their history, culture and constitution, provide equal protection by law against all forms of intolerance and discrimination in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief for *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.*

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 or belief - 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 use these international human rights standards as essential for *long-term solutions* to conflicts based on religion or belief.

Beliefs: Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects “*theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.*” - General Comment 22 on Article 18, United Nations Human Rights Committee, 1993.

- **Theist:** a person who believes in a traditional description of God as a supernatural deity or deities; deism, animism, or belief in a theist spirituality without a defined dogma.
- **Non-theist:** a person who believes in striving in themselves for the inner Universal Mind, self actualization, non-theistic mysticism, meditation, pantheism, reincarnation; some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism are called godless or non-theist, some atheists describe themselves as non-theist.
- **Atheist:** a person who believes in materialism, naturalism, secular humanism; does not believe in a supernatural reality, traditional god or gods or theist spirituality.
- **Profess No Religion or Belief:** a person who says they have no belief; or persons who do not want to say what they are; who does not know; an agnostic that suspends belief in theism, non-theism and atheism, but remains open to conviction.

Standards: International human rights norms and standards on freedom of religion or belief include the following:

- **Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.** - *General Comment 22 on Article 18, United Nations Human Rights Committee, 1993.*
- **Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right**

includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. - Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966.

- **Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. - Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966.**
- **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 institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. Therefore the United Nations Human Rights Committee 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 hostilities by a predominant religious community - General Comment 22 on Article 18, United Nations Human Rights Committee, 1993.**
- **The concept of morals derives from many social, philosophical and religious traditions; consequently, limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals must be based on principles not deriving from a single tradition. - General Comment 22 on Article 18, United Nations Human Rights Committee.**

History: The United Nations has a long history in establishing international norms and standards on freedom of religion or belief.

- **Largely through the ongoing work of the United Nations, 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**
- **For the purpose of this convention: The expression “religion or belief” shall include theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs; Draft International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Religious Intolerance, 1967**

Dialogue: Dialogue between individuals, groups, institutions representing these categories are essential for *long-term solutions* to conflicts based on religion or belief:

- **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, Williams College; New York Times Op Ed article.**
- **It is important to articulate the definition of the expression “freedom of religion or belief” for the purposes of this study. In that respect, it is recognized that sensitivity to labels is critically important for both religious and non-religious 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 relating to religious and other beliefs has always been a challenge to the United Nations and its Member States and involves complex and sensitive definitional issues. - Bahiyyih G. Tahzib, Freedom of Religion or Belief: Ensuring Effective International Legal Protection.**

- **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.** - *Ambassador at-large of the Netherlands for Human Rights, Piet de Klerk, 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 U.N. Declaration, November 25, 2006, Prague, Czech Republic*

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 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.

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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