

THE TANDEM PROJECT
<http://www.tandemproject.com>.

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

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

Separation of Religion or Belief and State

NORWAY – TURNING SITES OF CONFLICT INTO BEACONS OF PEACE

*Places apart: a plan to turn sites of conflict into beacons of peace; The Economist, August 30, 2008. “ A plan was unveiled in Norway this summer to establish a **code of conduct** for holy sites on which all governments could agree.” This is a project of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights.*

Link: Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights: <http://www.oslocenter.no/>

“When an army wants to dishearten a defeated foe, few things are more effective than desecrating his holiest shrines. And when a demagogue or warlord wants to make peaceful folk take up arms, nothing works better than telling them that their faith’s holiest site needs reclaiming.

And in modern times, fighting over holy places- from India to Jerusalem to the Balkans – seems almost as common as it was in the Middle Ages. During the Bosnian War, over 3,000 religious buildings were destroyed or damaged, including Catholic and Orthodox churches, and above all mosques. In Kosovo, the minority Serbs say scores of Orthodox churches or monasteries have been wrecked by ethnic – Albanian nationalists.

But holy places, even those that are claimed by more than one religion, are not always a source of conflict; there are plenty of cases where a shared holy place has led to a bond between people of different faiths who have divergent beliefs about the site but still rub along.

Hence a plan that was unveiled in Norway this summer to establish a code of conduct for holy sites on which all governments could agree. The code would protect the right of one or more communities to worship at a sacred site; the right of tourists to visit such sites as long as worship is respected; and the right of individuals and groups to manifest their faith at holy places. “We want to turn these locations into places of prayer and reconciliation,” says Kjell Magne Bondevik, a former Norwegian Prime minister who is also a Lutheran minister and now heads the non-profit Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights.

Partners in the sacred sites project include Muslims, Jews and Christians from the “holy land” as well as people from all over the Balkans. It may take a year to hammer out the details of the code – a twinkling of an eye when set against centuries of war over places.”

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.

In 1968 the United Nations deferred work on a legally-binding treaty on religious intolerance as too complex and sensitive and passed a non-binding declaration in its place. 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 better organize and bring all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief under one banner, a core international human rights legally-binding treaty.

*Global Advocacy for the Universal Values and Principles of Human Rights
and Freedom of Religion or Belief through Education and Research*