

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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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

NAME TO BE PLACED HERE

Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam?

This is a lesson on your tolerance for diversity of religion or belief. The question is from an article in *The Economist* on Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt. The lesson is from The Tandem Project 1986 international conference on *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*:

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

It is an opportunity for you to build awareness and understanding of the right to choose a religion or belief by taking a *Human Rights Lesson – Coercion and Freedom to Choose* on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Lesson: http://www.tandemproject.com/part2/article1/art1_2.htm

Reply: http://www.tandemproject.com/databases/forms/card_int.htm#1_2

UN Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/16/L.14 on Freedom of Religion or Belief was adopted on March 24, 2011 by consensus without a vote. Steps still need to be taken to resolve differences between UN Member States in respect to national laws and religious norms on the right to change or abandon one's religion.

Resolution A/HRC/16/L.38 adopted on the same day calls for **open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas**, as well as **interfaith and intercultural dialogue** at local, national and international levels, and a positive role through **education** and **awareness building** to combat religious hatred, incitement and violence. Actions to implement these resolutions will be a significant step forward to promote and protect *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*.

[A-HRC-16-L.14 - Resolution on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#);

[A-HRC-16-L.38 - Resolution Combating Intolerance, Stereotyping, Discrimination & Incitement to Violence Against Persons Based on Religion or Belief](#)

Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam? The attached document has a reply to this question by Ali Gomaa, Grand Mufti of Egypt, another's experience of conversion from Islam, Constitutional articles on state and religion, freedom of religion or belief, international human rights law

and UN Human Rights Council resolutions from 2007-2011 on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Somalia – Universal Periodic Review & Dialogue on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The attached document has a draft Constitution for the Federal Republic of Somalia and demonstrates the difficulty Shari’ah Law as a religion of the state has in compliance with Human Rights law in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The document was prepared for the Somalia Universal Periodic Review to be held by the UN Human Rights Council on May 3, 2011.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process launched by the UN Human Rights Council in 2008 to review the human rights obligations and responsibilities of UN Member States by 2011. The UN second UPR cycle starts in 2012: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx>

Human rights are universal and individual. What applies to one person applies to all persons and all religions or beliefs: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx>

Surely one of the best hopes for humankind is to embrace a culture in which religions and other beliefs accept one another, in which wars and violence are not tolerated in the name of an exclusive right to truth, in which children are raised to solve conflicts with mediation, compassion and understanding.

The question – Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam? is for the Muslim community and Muslims to decide. To some Muslims it is an affront to Islamic traditions and cultural norms to even ask the question. For others, Muslims and non-Muslims, not ensuring the right to change one’s religion is a challenge to the universality of human rights and freedom of religion or belief. It makes the UN Human Rights Council consensus on this question problematic for now. The answer must be one or the other. It can’t be both.

Comments are welcome.

Thank you,

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The Tandem Project a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1986 to build understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity of religion or belief, and to prevent discrimination in all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief. The Tandem Project has sponsored multiple conferences, curricula, reference material 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.

** 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 bring all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief under one banner, a core international human rights legally-binding treaty.*