

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

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

This is your opportunity 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.

The question is from an article in *The Economist* asked of 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>.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reads: “ 1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice and freedom either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. 2. *No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.* 3. 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, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

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

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

Resolution A/HRC/6/L.15/Rev.1 sponsored by Portugal in 2007 on behalf of the European Union (EU) was **not adopted by consensus** in the sixth session of the UN Human Rights Council. Abstentions were based on objections from Pakistan speaking on behalf of the 57 country Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) that **norms in Muslim countries prohibit leaving Islam as a religion** and were not being honored in the draft resolution.

http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_37.pdf

Resolution A/HRC/16/L.38 sponsored by Pakistan in 2011 was **adopted by consensus** in the sixteenth session of the UN Human Rights Council with help from ambassadors in the Organization of Islamic Conference, United Kingdom, United States of America, Norway and regional groups. The resolution calls for rights-based Interfaith-Intercultural dialogue with open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas and a global strategy of awareness building and education to combat intolerance, stereotyping,

discrimination and violence against persons based on religion or belief at local, national and international levels:

[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](#)

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 draft Constitution for the Federal Republic of Somalia has 179 articles under Shari'ah Law one of which Article 22, Freedom of Religion and Belief, states **no Muslim can renounce Islam**. Each constitution under Shari'ah Law has different wording but as of 2007 the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) countries agree, constitutions and **norms in Muslim countries prohibit leaving Islam** as a religion.

Can a person who is Muslim choose a religion other than Islam? In *The Economist* article many Muslims found it an affront to Islamic traditions and cultural norms to even ask the question. For others, Muslims and non-Muslims, not to have the right to change one's religion or belief is seen as coercion and a challenge to the universality of human rights.

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.