

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 & State

1981 U.N. DECLARATION -25 YEAR COMMEMORATION

25 November 2006

Prague Speakers on the 25 Year Commemoration of the 1981 U.N. Declaration.

Three hundred people representing Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Human Rights Organizations and Civil Society participated in the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 UN Declaration on 25 November 2006 in Prague, Czech Republic. The Netherlands was a prime donor and sponsor of the 25 year commemoration. These excerpts are from plenary speakers including then Netherlands Ambassador-at-large for Human Rights, Mr. Piet de Klerk, and the keynote address by Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Excerpts of their addresses are printed below.

All documents are available at: www.1981declaration.org.

Excerpts from Prague Plenary Speakers in 2006 are placed under the Eight Articles of the 1981 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The distinguished speakers are active in the promotion of International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The 25 Year Commemoration in 2006 was held prior to the Netherlands Universal Periodic Review.

The Netherlands Universal Periodic Review was held by the UN Human Rights Council on Tuesday 15 April 2008 from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/nlsession1.aspx>

Excerpts presented under the Eight Articles of the 1981 U.N. Declaration.

1. 2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

Religions have a tendency of trying to keep their adherents from changing their religion: sometimes, converts are even punished for their behavior, either legally or socially. I have never understood these concerns: isn't it possible for a religion to base its power on the very message it contains? Is it really necessary for religions to surround themselves with a range of protective measures, which keep the door open for adherents of other religions or beliefs

to convert, but punish those who opt to leave their traditional religious beliefs behind them?

- Address – Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

5. 5 Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account Article 1, paragraph 3, of the present Declaration.

According to my experience as the UN Special Rapporteur, particular attention needs to be given to the vulnerable situation of certain groups, such as women, children, religious minorities, migrant workers, refugees and persons deprived of their liberty.

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

7. 1 The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.

Concerning the nexus hypothesis mentioned earlier on, we may take into account the increasing attention to article 20 ICCPR and its interpretation. This article states that ‘any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.’ However, Ms. Asma Jahangir cautions against confusion between a racist statement and an act of defamation of religion. She argues that the criminal measures adopted by national legal systems to fight racism may not necessarily be applicable to defamation of religion as the elements that constitute a racist statement are not the same as those that constitute a statement defaming religion. –

Address: Bacre Waly Ndiaye, Director of the Division of Human Rights Procedures, Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

1. 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, practices and teaching.

We appreciate the right to freedom of religion or belief for those who profess either and reaffirm the precious value of the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or whatever belief of one’s choice and to manifest it in public and in private, alone or in community with others, in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

- Prague Declaration

We note that freedom of religion or belief includes theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.” - Prague Declaration

1. 2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

Religions have a tendency of trying to keep their adherents from changing their religion: sometimes, converts are even punished for their behavior, either legally or socially. I have never understood these concerns: isn’t it possible for a religion to base its power on the very message it contains? Is it really necessary for religions to surround themselves with a range of protective measures, which keep the door open for adherents of other religions or beliefs

to convert, but punish those who opt to leave their traditional religious beliefs behind them?

- Address – Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

... the Human Rights Committee states in its general comment no. 22 that ‘the freedom to ‘have or to adopt’ a religion or belief necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one’s current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views, as well as the right to retain one’s religion or belief.’”

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

2. 1 No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on the grounds of religion or other beliefs.

We condemn any incitement to hatred or violence against religions or beliefs – whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental actors – and in the name of religions or beliefs, and deeply regret that violations of the freedom of religion or belief unfortunately still occur in many parts of the world.”

- Prague Declaration

In my opinion, the right to freedom of religion or belief *per se* benefit from protection protects primarily the individual and, to some extent, the collective rights of the community concerned. However, it does not protect religions or beliefs *per se*. Criminalizing ‘defamation of religion’ can be counterproductive as the rigorous protection of religions as such may create an atmosphere of intolerance and might give rise to fear. Restricting the freedom of expression and information may also limit scholarship on religious issues and may asphyxiate honest debate or research. That is why we have argued that expressions should only be prohibited under article 20 ICCPR if they constitute incitement to imminent acts of violence or discrimination against a specific individual or group. A useful endeavor would be a new general comment on article 20, as the existing one is relatively brief and dates back to the year 1983. –

Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

I would like to take this opportunity to announce that an online digest of the Special Rapporteur’s framework for communications is going to be presented on the OHCHR website in 2007. In my current annual report I have published this framework with various categories of relevant provisions which I use as the legal yardstick, taking the 1981 declaration as a starting point but also expanding and updating it with further human rights instruments. -

Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

I do believe that legal protection of the various freedoms contained in the freedom of religion or belief is an important and necessary first step. If the legal system endorses some type of discrimination, directly or indirectly, you can safely assume that the society at large will not be tolerant. It becomes particularly complicated if the State itself voices opinions on the status of certain religions or beliefs. Are Ahmaddhiyas Muslims? Are Jehovah’s Witnesses a dangerous sect? Is my country embedded in the Christian-Judeo tradition? These are tricky questions for a State to address. –

Address – Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

2. 2 For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression ‘intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief’ means any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

If tolerance is primarily an attitude, it is indeed very difficult or even undesirable to make intolerance punishable by law. It is better to stick to terms, such as ‘discriminatory practices’ in that respect. However, since intolerance is the attitude behind such acts, as well as behind tensions, hostilities and violence, it does need to be combated. Governments have a responsibility to promote tolerance and to combat intolerance. They have to set the right example by voicing respect for all religions or belief. By doing so, they will certainly have some influence, but it is impossible for governments to enforce tolerance; you can enforce non-discrimination, but you cannot enforce tolerance. –

Address – Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

3. 1 Discrimination between human beings on grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants on Human Rights, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.

We recognize the fact that this right has been further clarified by the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that the UN has made significant accomplishments in promoting the standards around this right, particularly through the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to examine incidents and governmental actions in all parts of the world which are inconsistent with the provisions of the 1981 Declaration and to recommend remedial measures for such situations. -

Prague Declaration

Even if we completely disagree, I still can and must respect you. –

Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

Freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are interdependent and interrelated. Balancing the various aspects of human rights is an extremely delicate exercise which requires impartial implementation by independent and non-arbitrary bodies. –

Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

4. 1 All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

We are committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion or belief and call for tolerance in matters relating to religion or belief; we are grateful for the attempts by civil society actors – including faith based organizations – to promote respect, tolerance and understanding; and acknowledge with appreciation initiatives aimed at the promotion of

understanding among all, such as the UN Dialogue among Civilizations and the UN Alliance of Civilizations. -

Prague Declaration

We invite all States, the international community and civil society actors to promote the principles, objectives and recommendations of the present document, and to join us in reaffirming our full support for the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which was adopted by consensus on 25 November 1981, and commit to upholding it and to working to ensure respect of its principles and objectives. –

Prague Declaration

For a successful strategy against intolerance based on religion or belief, governments and civil society have to work closely together. I was very pleased with the recent report by the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations. It contains a wide range of proposals to promote tolerance and understanding in the present-day world. Thus, the report entirely reflects the spirit of the 1981 Declaration. –

Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

“The spirit of the 1981 Declaration requires us to join forces: the promotion of tolerance ought to be a priority for the international community. Initiatives like the Alliance of Civilizations can show us a way to make the general ideas behind the Declaration operational in our present, modern times.

Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

“In my own country, we are facing a lot of challenges in this respect: some people feel threatened by the idea that especially for those who came to the Netherlands in the past decades, religion is essential in daily life. Just when society got used to the idea that religion had become a matter for a small minority, and that it would disappear from public life, we witness the opposite. For my government, it is a constant struggle to meet these conflicting demands.” –

Ambassador-at-Large of the Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk Netherlands on Human Rights.

“The central message is that we have to get to know each other. By learning about each other’s cultural and religious backgrounds; we also learn how important these elements are for one’s outlook on life. The more we know, the less we shall be inclined to be afraid of new or unfamiliar cultures and religions.” –

Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

“In the Native American worldview, all beings are related both physically and emotionally, and there is no sharp distinction between natural and supernatural entities. I think that this thinking reflects great wisdom and could be the basis of a better, tolerant world. After all, who would want to be intolerant against supernatural entities embodied in our fellow man?” - Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

4. 2 All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the

grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

“Is it the appropriate moment to reinitiate 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 the 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.”

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

“Although I would at this moment not rule out the idea of a convention, I think it is preferable to concentrate on the maintenance and strengthening of existing supervisory mechanisms, treaty based and charter based. I also suggested that, if at all a new binding instrument would be elaborated; this may preferably be done in the form of an additional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights rather than in a new separate convention.

- Address: Theo van Boven, Emeritus Professor of International Law at the International and European Law Department, Faculty of Law, Maastricht University, The Netherlands.

“Many academics have argued that the adoption of the 1981 Declaration needs to be followed by negotiations of a Convention. Governments have generally been reluctant to go down this path. It was argued that it took 35 years to get agreement on the text of the Declaration; it would probably take even longer to agree on the text of a Convention in this area. Moreover, earlier attempts to reach agreement on legally binding provisions had also been futile.”

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

5. 1 The parents or, as the case may be, the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.

In my 2005 report to the General Assembly I have taken the position that the choice of religion is restricted by the parents’ rights to determine their child’s religion up to an age where the child is capable of doing so on his/her own. Thus I would advocate a flexible case-by-case approach in line with the provision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

5. 2 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 or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians; the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

Of course, parents have the right to raise their children in accordance with their own religion or belief, but, as clearly stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the evolving capacities of the child to form his/her own opinion have to be taken into account as

well.

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

5. 3 The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for the freedom of religion or belief of others and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

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.

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

Another important step was taken exactly five years ago, when the Final Document on School Education in relation with Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination was adopted in Madrid. There have been promising follow-up activities by governments and NGOs during global meetings of experts and exchanges of minds on regional levels. However, these implementation efforts need a fresh impetus in order to further develop strategies on how religious intolerance and discrimination can be prevented and how freedom of religion or belief can be promoted through education.

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

5. 5 Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account Article 1, paragraph 3, of the present Declaration.

According to my experience as the UN Special Rapporteur, particular attention needs to be given to the vulnerable situation of certain groups, such as women, children, religious minorities, migrant workers, refugees and persons deprived of their liberty.

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

6. 1 To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;

Subsequently, there has been a NGO project of a draft International Convention on the International Protection of Places of Worship, collecting more than 10,000 signatures from individuals and organizations.

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

6. 3 To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites and customs of a religion or belief;

Furthermore, national legislation on religious symbols may have adverse effects on individuals, either because they are prevented from identifying themselves through the display of religious symbols or because they are required to wear religious dress in public. In this regard I have formulated a set of general criteria on religious symbols in order to

provide some guidance on this applicable human rights standards and their scope.

- Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

6. 4 *To write issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;*

...they can spread the word.

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

6. 5 *To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;*

“...they can set up institutions.”

Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

6. 7 *To train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;*

“...train religious leaders.”

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

6. 9 *To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion or belief at the national and international levels.*

...and establish and maintain communications.

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

7. 1 *The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.*

Registration appears often to be used as a means to limit the right of freedom of religion or belief of members of certain religious communities. The 2004 OSCE guidelines contain an excellent chapter on laws governing registration of religious/belief organizations and I have also referred to the international legal standards in my communications and reports.

-Address: Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Furthermore, national legislation on religious symbols may have adverse effects on individuals, either because they are prevented from identifying themselves through the display of religious symbols or because they are required to wear religious dress in public. In this regard I have formulated a set of general criteria on religious symbols in order to provide some guidance on this applicable human rights standards and their scope.

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“Concerning the nexus hypothesis mentioned earlier on, we may take into account the increasing attention to article 20 ICCPR and its interpretation. This article states that ‘any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination,

hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.’ However, Ms. Asma Jahangir cautions against confusion between a racist statement and an act of defamation of religion. She argues that the criminal measures adopted by national legal systems to fight racism may not necessarily be applicable to defamation of religion as the elements that constitute a racist statement are not the same as those that constitute a statement defaming religion.

-Address: Bacre Waly Ndiaye, Director of the Division of Human Rights Procedures, Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We note that freedom of religion or belief includes theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.” - “in light of the unanimous use of the phrase “Freedom of Religion or Belief, by participants in the Prague Commemoration, might you request a change of the title of your bipartisan, independent U.S. federal agency to; United States Commission on International Freedom of Religion or Belief?

- Workshop Question addressed to Felice D. Gaer, Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom;

8. 1 Nothing in the present Declaration shall be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

The Netherlands has always taken a keen interest in the codification process relating to what eventually became the 1981 Declaration. One of my colleagues, the late Jaap Walkate, belonged to the group of diplomats who persisted during the final phase of the negotiations and succeeded in the end in accommodating the various, often conflicting interests of the participating states. It was not easy and eventually the negotiations were rescued by the introduction of the ‘Dutch clause,’ i.e. art. 8, in order to make sure that no provisions of the Declaration could be interpreted in a manner that would restrict or derogate from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

- Address: Mr. Piet de Klerk, Ambassador-at-Large of the Netherlands on Human Rights.

PRAGUE DECLARATION ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

On the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth anniversary of the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, we, representatives of governments, international organizations, and civil society – including organizations based on religion or belief – and academics have come together in Prague, on 25 November 2006.

We recall the protection of adherents of religion or belief in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which explicitly recognize the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

We recognize the fact that this right has been further clarified by the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment 22 on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that the UN has made significant accomplishments in promoting the standards around this right, particularly through the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to examine incidents and governmental actions in all parts of the world which are

inconsistent with the provisions of the 1981 Declaration and to recommend remedial measures for such situations.

We appreciate the right to freedom of religion or belief for those who profess either and reaffirm the precious value of the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or whatever belief of one's choice and to manifest it in public and in private, alone or in community with others, in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

We note that freedom of religion or belief includes theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.

We condemn any incitement to hatred or violence against religions or beliefs – whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental actors – and in the name of religions or beliefs, and deeply regret that violations of the freedom of religion or belief unfortunately still occur in many parts of the world.

We are committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion or belief and call for tolerance in matters relating to religion or belief; we are grateful for the attempts by civil society actors – including faith based organizations – to promote respect, tolerance and understanding; and acknowledge with appreciation initiatives aimed at the promotion of understanding among all, such as the UN Dialogue among Civilizations and the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

We consider it essential for governments and international organizations, such as the UN and various regional organizations, to give priority to the protection of the freedom of religion or belief and to the eradication of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.

We draw particular attention to questions which the Prague commemorative events have focused on: (a) Protection of Religion or Belief vis-à-vis Freedom of Expression, (b) Change of Religion or Belief, Enabling the Environment, (c) Protection of Religion or Belief and (d) Propagation of Religion or Belief, and encourage efforts at further clarifying the scope of the various rights and freedoms contained in the 1981 Declaration.

We invite all States, the international community and civil society actors to promote the principles, objectives and recommendations of the present document, and to join us in reaffirming our full support for the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which was adopted by consensus on 25 November 1981, and commit to upholding it and to working to ensure respect of its principles and objectives.

REFLECTIONS

The Tandem Project

The First Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: 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.

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.

There is an increase in dialogue today between religions and other beliefs to embrace diversity, but few persons, less than one percent of any population, ever participate. This is a challenge. The value of such dialogues is proportionate to the level of participation. For civil society increased participation would create opportunities for education on inclusive and genuine approaches to human rights and freedom of religion or belief.

In 1968 the United Nations deferred passage of a legally-binding convention on religious intolerance saying it was too complicated and sensitive. Instead, they adopted a non-binding declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief. While very worthwhile, the declaration does not carry the force and commitment of a legally-binding international human rights convention on freedom of religion or belief.

Religions and other beliefs historically have been used to justify wars and settle disputes. This is more dangerous today as the possible use of nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction increases. Governments need to consider whether religions and other beliefs trump human rights or human rights trump religions and other beliefs or neither trumps the other. Can international human rights law help to stop the advance and use of such weapons in the face of this historic truth?

- **QUESTION:** Weapons of mass destruction as history teaches are often legitimized for national security and justified by cultural, ethnic, religious or political ideology. The U.N. Review Conference on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and studies on biological and cyber weapons demonstrate advances in science and technology is being used to increase their potential for mass destruction. The question is whether an International Convention on Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief, elevated and supported equally by the U.N. Human Rights Council and U.N. Security Council, would help offset the risk of weapons of mass destruction. Recognition of the need for synergy to balance rights and security is a foundation for solving this issue.

“I am become death, the destroyer of worlds”

- Robert Oppenheimer, quote from the Bhagavad Gita after exploding the first atomic bomb, Trinity 1945.

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.

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 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.