

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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

UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

*UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

Separation of Religion or Belief and State

INVITATION

FOCUS GROUP ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

INVITATION to join an Internet Focus Group on Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief in support of UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167, *a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief*, combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief.

QUESTION: How can Resolution 66/167 protect the right at a national and local level to manifest one's religion or belief, moral principles, values, cultural identity or ethnicity, in tandem with international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief?

[United Nations Resolution – a Culture of Tolerance & Peace Based on Religion or Belief](#)

Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief

UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167 may be the best hope since the 1984 UN Geneva Seminar to reconcile issues and divergent views on human rights and freedom of religion or belief, assimilation and multiculturalism. The Tandem Project will report on local efforts to implement 66/167.

To join the Focus Group please complete this questionnaire and hit Submit: [QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

1984 - Since 1984 The Tandem Project has participated in dialogue and discussions on how to implement International Human Rights Instruments at a local level. The Tandem Project was an NGO delegate to the UN *Seminar on the Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief (1984)* ST/HR/SER.A/16, Geneva: United Nations.

1986 - The Tandem Project organized the first International Conference, *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief*, on the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief: <http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>

2012 - *Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS*, a website will be launched in support of UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167, *a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief*, combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief at a local level www.sorobas.com

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief.

Protect the right at a national and local level to manifest one's religion or belief, moral principles, values, cultural identity, ethnicity, in tandem with international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief.

Support United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/167, a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief.

Promote Focus Groups on Freedom of Religion or Belief at local levels to support implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167, a Culture of Tolerance and Peace Based on Religion or Belief.

Build awareness, understanding and support for a UN Working Group Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, to bring all related matters on freedom of religion or belief under one umbrella, a core international human rights legally-binding treaty.

Consider whether a legally-binding Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, elevated and supported equally by the UN Human Rights Council and UN Security Council, would help offset the risk of future weapons of mass destruction.

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, New York Times Op Ed, 21 December 2006

A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE AND PEACE BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

On December 19, 2011 UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167 was adopted by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly. Adoption by consensus comes after **years of no consensus votes** on contentious issues between the European Union (EU), Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and other UN Member States.

[United Nations Resolution – a Culture of Tolerance & Peace Based on Religion or Belief](#)

Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief

Recognizes that the open public debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national and international levels can be among the best protections against religious intolerance, and can play a positive role in strengthening democracy and combating religious hatred, and convinced that a continuing dialogue on these issues can help overcome existing misperceptions.

Calls for strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs, and decides to convene a panel discussion on this issue at its seventeenth session within existing resources.

Introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) adopted by consensus without a vote. - Resolution A/HRC/16/18/L.38, Geneva, March 24 2011

Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC) Mr. Zamir Akram [\[English\]](#) 10 minutes **Saudi Arabia** Mr. Ahmed Suleiman Ibrahim Alaquil [\[English\]](#) [\[Arabic\]](#) 1 minute **Norway** Ms. Beate Stjør [\[English\]](#) 2 minutes **United States of America** Mr. Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe [\[English\]](#) 5 minutes **Hungary (on behalf of the European Union)** Mr. András Dékány [\[English\]](#) 3 minutes

The Human Rights Council held a panel discussion which focused on strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs.

[UN Human Rights Council Panel Statements, Resolution A-HRC-16-18, 2010 General Assembly Third Committee Actions](#)

Introduced by United Arab Emirates on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) adopted by consensus without a vote – Resolution A/C.3/66/L.47, New York, 15 November 2011

[UN Third Committee Press Release - Resolution L.47 Adopted by Consensus](#)

The Resolution identified as A/RES/66/167 by the General Assembly welcomes the establishment of the “King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural dialogue in Vienna, initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia on the basis of purposes and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and acknowledging the important role that this Centre is expected to play as a platform for the enhancement of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.” - King Abdulaziz Dialogue Center – Vienna <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/>

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.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Anders Behring Breivik is the ethnic Norwegian perpetrator of the most horrific acts of terrorism in Norway since WW II. In an opinion page article in the New York Times, 31 July 2011, by Thomas Hegghammer, Senior Research Fellow of the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, Breivik is quoted as saying he is “extremely proud of his Odinistic/Norse heritage and while he is Christian admits ‘I’m not a very religious person.’ “While Breivik’s violent acts are exceptional, his anti-Islamic views are not. His goal is to reverse what he views as the Islamization of Western Europe.”

[Assimilation’s Failure, Terrorism’s Rise](#)

[Discussion at Augsburg with Kjell-Magne Bondevik](#)

UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLE

International human rights law on freedom of religion or belief 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 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

[http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/9a30112c27d1167cc12563ed004d8f15?Opendocument)

SEPARATION OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND STATE - SOROBAS

www.sorobas.com

THE TERM

Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS is a term used by The Tandem Project to express the core principles of international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief. The term has a long history with diverse interpretations. [Separation of Church and State](#).

Modern technology, travel and communications have brought religions and other beliefs, and cultures closer than ever before in human history. The **balance between assimilation and multiculturalism** is a great challenge for our age. *Separation of Religion or Belief and State* – SOROBAS brings separation of church and state, separation of synagogue and state, separation of mosque and state, separation of temple and state, and separation of other sacred places and associations and state, together under an umbrella term of respect for each other and international human rights law on freedom of religion or belief.

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. The value of such dialogues is proportionate to the level of participation. *Separation of Religion or Belief and State* - SOROBAS will create opportunities for inclusive and genuine human rights education on freedom of religion or belief.

THE HISTORY

1962 “The General Assembly adopted a resolution requesting ECOSOC to ask the Commission to prepare a draft declaration and a draft convention on the elimination of racial discrimination. It also adopted a similarly worded resolution requesting ECOSOC to ask the Commission to prepare a draft declaration and a draft convention on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance. Both resolutions referred in their respective preambles to the desire to ‘put into effect the principle of equality of all men and all peoples without distinction as to race, color or religion.’” The General Assembly set deadlines for submission of the special instruments as the eighteenth session (1963) for the draft declaration and its twentieth session (1965) for the draft convention. A legally-binding human rights treaty on the elimination of racial discrimination was open for signature by the UN Member States in 1966 and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1969. The request for a legally-binding human rights treaty on the elimination of religious intolerance was deferred by the UN General Assembly, allegedly due to its complexity and sensitivity. <http://www.tandemproject.com/program/history.htm>

1986 First international conference on the 1981 UN Declaration was held on *Tolerance for Diversity of Religion or Belief* <http://www.tandemproject.com/tolerance.pdf>

1998 Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief was the catalyst for a change of title from UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In his report to the UN Human Rights Commission, E/CN.4/1999/58, the Special Rapporteur for Religious Intolerance, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, made the following recommendation in paragraph 122. It was approved by the UN Human Rights Commission and subsequently adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly in 2000: [1998 UN Conference Report](#)

Title and consistency of the Mandate

“The Special Rapporteur reiterates his recommendation that a more neutral and encouraging title, such as ‘Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief’ should be used. The present one with its reference to religious intolerance, antagonizes certain interlocutors and sometimes make dialogue difficult. A different title could embrace all aspects of freedom of religion or belief. It must also be consistent with the mandate, covering not only religion but also belief and intolerance, as well as discrimination, and reflect the balanced dialogue-oriented approach followed by the Special Rapporteur in his work, in accordance with the resolutions governing him mandate.” – Report to Human Rights Commission, E/CN.4/1999/58.

2006 Commemoration of the 1981 UN Declaration was celebrated in Prague, Czech Republic, sponsored by the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights with contributions from the Netherlands.

[1981 UN Declaration – 25 Year Commemoration](#)

2012 The Tandem Project website, *Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS* will be launched in 2012. www.sorobas.com [SOROBAS – Site Map](#)

The Tandem Project believes until a legally binding human rights treaty a Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief is adopted international human rights law will be incomplete.

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.