

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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1. Introduction:

The Tandem Project is dedicated to support for International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief. We focus on fundamental values shared virtually universally by public, private, religious and non-religious organizations to change how our cultures view differences, how we often behave toward one another and to forestall the reflexive hostility we see so vividly around the world.

As we are all painfully aware, religious conflict continues to escalate worldwide whether in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, South Asia, East Asia or the Americas. Acceptance of the rights of others to their own beliefs continues to be a value denied for millions of people. Much suffering is inflicted in the name of religion or belief on minorities, women and children and “the other” for the most part by perpetrators in total disregard for the tenets of their own faiths.

Surely one of the best hopes for the future of 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.

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2. Statistics

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3. Picture

4. The Tandem Project

The Tandem Project is 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.

The Tandem Project initiative is the result of a co-founder representing the World Federation of United Nations Associations at the United Nations Geneva Seminar, *Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, called by the UN Secretariat in 1984 on ways to implement the 1981 UN Declaration. In 1986, The Tandem Project organized the first NGO International Conference on the 1981 UN Declaration.

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

4. Picture

5. Purpose

To build understanding and support for Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights –Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Encourage the United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media and Civil Society to consider the rule of law and International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as essential for *long-term solutions* to conflicts in matters relating to religion or belief.

6. Picture

7. Challenge

In 1968 the United Nations deferred work on an International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Religious Intolerance, because of its apparent complexity and sensitivity. In the twenty-first century, a dramatic increase of intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief is motivating a worldwide search to find solutions to these problems. This is a challenge calling for enhanced dialogue by States and others; including consideration of an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief for protection of and accountability by all religions or beliefs. The tensions in today's world inspire a question such as:

Should the United Nations adopt an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief?

8. Picture.

9. Response

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 a 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. - *UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 UN Declaration, 25 November 2006.*

10. Picture.

11. Option

After forty years this may be the time, however complex and sensitive, for the United Nations Human Rights Council to appoint an Open-ended Working Group for a re-draft of a United Nations Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The mandate for an Open-ended Working Group ought to assure nothing in a draft Convention will be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

12. Picture.

13. Concept

Separation of Religion or Belief and State: SOROBAS. The First Preamble to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads; “*Whereas 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.* This concept suggests States recalling their history, culture and constitution adopt fair and equal human rights protection for all religions or beliefs as described in General Comment 22 on Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, 20 July 1993 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4):

Article 18: protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.* The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with international characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reasons, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community. **Article 18:** permits restrictions to manifest a religion or belief only if such limitations are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief are used to review the actions of governments, religions or beliefs, non-governmental organizations and civil society under constitutional systems such as Separation of Church and State, State Church, Theocratic, and other legal frameworks. The concept *Separation of Religion or Belief and State* means equal, fair and practical support for all *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief,* in tandem with international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief.

14. Picture.

15. Objectives

- Use International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief as a platform for genuine dialogue on the core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.
- Adapt these human rights standards to early childhood education, teaching children, from the very beginning, 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.¹

16. Picture.

17. **Dialogue**

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at the Alliance of Civilizations Madrid Forum said; “Never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations.” A writer in another setting has said, “The warning signs are clear: unless we establish 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.”

International Human Rights Standards on Freedom or Religion or Belief are international law and universal codes of conduct for peaceful cooperation, respectful competition and resolution of conflicts. The standards are a platform for genuine dialogue on core principles and values within and among nations, all religions and other beliefs.

18. Picture.

19. **Education**

Ambassador Piet de Klerk addressing the Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 U.N. Declaration said; “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.”

The 1981 U.N. Declaration states; “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, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.” With International Human Rights safeguards, early childhood education is the best time to begin to build tolerance, understanding and respect for freedom of religion or belief.

20. Picture.

21. **Appeal**

The Tandem Project is a 501 c-3 non-profit tax deductible organization, registered in the State of Minnesota with the US Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service on 9 April 1986.

Here are five good reasons to consider support for The Tandem Project:

- Reason
- Reason
- Reason
- Reason
- Reason

22. **Appreciation**

Sincerely,

Michael M. Roan

Michael M. Roan
Executive Director,
The Tandem Project

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