

# Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and/or Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief - 1981

---

## Issue

Freedom of religion and belief is essential to Jewish existence, as it is to all human beings. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and/or Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief states, "Disregard and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, have brought... great suffering" to humankind. "Religion,... one of the fundamental elements in a conception of life... should be fully respected and guaranteed... It is essential to promote understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion and belief... Manifestations of intolerance and discrimination (are) still in evidence... All necessary measures for the speedy elimination of such intolerance... should be undertaken."

## Background

After some 20 years of continuous efforts and complicated political maneuvers to reach agreement, there is now a Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and/or Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

## Chronology

1948 - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations and Article 18 proclaims the right of freedom of religion and the practice of religion.

1959 - The Sub-Commission and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) expressed appreciation to the Special Rapporteur for their study. The Sub-Commission prepared, on the basis of the report, a series of draft principles.

1960 - The Sub-Commission discussed the epidemic of swastika-painting occurring in 1959-60 and decided to study these events and their causes, an initiative later endorsed by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the 15th General Assembly (G.A.) of the UN in Resolution 1510 (XV).

1962 - The 17th G.A. in Resolution 1781 (XVII) requested the Economic and Social Council to ask the HRC to prepare:

- 1) A Draft Declaration on the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance and
- 2) Draft International Convention on the same topic. (In Resolution 1780 (XVII) it requested a Declaration and Convention on Racial Discrimination and gave this priority).

1963 - HRC asked its Sub-Commission to prepare a Draft Declaration.

1965 - The 20th G.A. in Resolution 2020 (XX) requested the Economic and Social Council to ask the HRC to complete the Draft Declaration for consideration by the 21st G.A.

1966 - HRC did not give further consideration to completing the Draft Declaration, during this time, and theistic and atheistic nations were polarized. In the 70's Third World nations moved the Declaration, bringing in non-Christian religions. When "atheistic" was interpreted as a form of belief, the Soviet Union participated in the drafting of the Declaration.

1972 - NGOs (Non-Governmental Organization Representatives) at UN Headquarters met in an effort to give new impetus to the Declaration.

1972 - The 27th G.A. in Resolution 3027 (XXVII) decided to give priority to completing a Declaration and asked member states to submit comments to the Secretary-General on previous drafts by the Sub-Commission and a working group of the Commission.

1978 - The working group of the 34th HRC began to draft the operative paragraphs.

1981 - The working group of the 37th HRC reported that it had completed the Declaration, consisting of the preamble and 7 articles. This draft text was approved by the HRC for transmission to the Economic and Social Council of the 36th General Assembly. The Economic and Social Council adopted the Draft Declaration by a vote of 45 to 0, with 5 abstentions.

1981 - November 25, the 36th General Assembly adopted the Declaration. Adoption of the Declaration into the UN system is a necessary step toward lessening religious intolerance around the world. Article I states that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion"... and "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

Within Article II, the Declaration states that "No one shall be subject to discrimination by any state, institution, group of persons or person on grounds of religion or other beliefs." It goes on to say that discrimination between people will be condemned as a violation of human rights. It supports all states' actions that will prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief.

The Declaration is a compromise among differing beliefs. While not a binding legal document, it is a major advance in securing human rights, an ideal set forth in the Charter of the United Nations. With the Declaration as a model for religious freedom, nations will have a standard against which to judge intolerance and/or discrimination based on religion or belief.

### **Resolution**

We realize that adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and/or Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief into the UN system is a necessary step toward lessening religious intolerance around the world. We therefore resolve to:

- 1) Urge our Sisterhoods to provide information and education among Jewish and non-Jewish groups about the Declaration;
- 2) Urge our respective governments to promote the preparation and adoption of a convention; and
- 3) Urge our members to understand the implications of religious freedom for all peoples when consonant with the human rights of others.