

The Oslo Conference

**on Freedom
of Religion
or Belief**

Accepting the Challenge:
Building a Coalition to
Protect Universal Freedom
of Religion or Belief

**August 12-15, 1998
Oslo, Norway**

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or Belief

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE - WELCOME TO NORWAY

We are proud to welcome you all to the "Oslo Conference on the Freedom of Religion and Belief." We are proud to invite you to a country where we have come a long way in creating a climate and a culture for humane and peaceful coexistence between the religions. We welcome you to a country where the religious and humanist communities stand together in the struggle to strengthen the freedom of religion and belief.

Although religiously speaking Norway is very homogenous country. 88% of the population are members of the Church of Norway, a Lutheran church, it is the Council of Cooperation of Religious and Humanist communities that invites you to four days of hard work in order to build an alliance to promote the re-enforcement of the implementation for every human being of their freedom of religion and belief. The Council is a unique host, consisting of Council of Free Churches in Norway, Norwegian Humanist Association, The Jewish Communities in Norway, Islamic Council Norway, The Buddhist Community of Norway, The Bahai Community of Norway, Alternativt Nettverk, and Council on Ecumenical and International Relations of the Church of Norway. In addition the Roman Catholic Church Norway, Institute of Human Rights, and Diaconia College Center are co-invitors.

The initiative and vision for this conference arise from this co-operation. But the international networks of our organisations have also encouraged us. This is, in our opinion, how it always should be when change are needed. The urgency for change has to come from both within and outside ourselves. That is why we are proud to say: We accept the challenge!

But we also feel humble and vulnerable when we invite you to Norway: Norway is a country where our constitutional Fathers when creating Europe's most advanced constitution 184 years ago, omitted a proposed paragraph securing the the freedom of religion for the citizens of the newly independent kingdom of Norway. At the same time they included in the constitution a section saying that «Jews and Jesuits may not enter the Kingdom».

In the multi-religious Norway of today, there is real disagreement amongst the religious and humanist communities on some crucial issues. One of them is whether the new curriculum for religious education in public schools is a threat to the freedom of religion. We still do not know whether our present unified system of religious education will survive our new religious pluralism. Therefore it is with humility we acknowledge: We accept the challenge!

A broader community of Norwegian human rights NGOs is also part of the background and national setting of this conference. In December we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights with a broad and grassroots-based Human Rights Festival, which will focus specifically on human rights education. Between these "peoples organisations" and more academic human rights institutions on the one hand and Norwegian authorities on the other, there is a close but critical co-operation. This is why we are very happy to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Norwegian government for the role it has taken as the sole sponsor of the Oslo Conference. We therefore nurture a confident hope that they too, during the days of the Conference, will say: We accept the challenge!

PURPOSE

Toleration, understanding and respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief is not growing as rapidly as globalization of science, technology and economics. The result is unacceptable levels of confrontation throughout the world where religion or belief plays a role and is a threat to national and international stability. A solid foundation for stability in world affairs is slowly developing, built on human rights and global

fundamental to the development of this foundation. Yet in the panoply of human rights, it may be the most difficult to achieve. The complexity of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief cannot be overestimated. It is a problem underlying all of human history.

The Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, in celebration of the 50 year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognizes

GOAL

International Coalition and Strategic Plan of Action

Create an international coalition and develop a strategic plan of action to fund programs and projects that support Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1981 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

OBJECTIVES

1. Research, Information Collection, Databases

Develop a strategy for cooperation between the U.N., governments, religions or beliefs, nongovernmental organizations and academic institutions to provide research, information collection and database assistance, as part of the strategic plan of action.

2. Mediation, Negotiation, Conflict Resolution

Develop a strategy for cooperation between the U.N., governments, religions or beliefs and nongovernmental organizations engaged in mediation, negotiation or conflict resolution, where religion or belief plays a role, as part of the strategic plan of action.

3. Toleration, Understanding, Respect

Develop a strategy for cooperation between the U.N., governments, religions or beliefs and nongovernmental organizations and academics institutions to promote tolerance, understanding and respect for freedom of religion or belief, as part of the strategic plan of action.

accepts the challenge of building an international coalition to protect universal freedom of religion or belief by achieving real progress and practical support for Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1981 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The 1981 Declaration is a universal standard around which all beliefs and states can rally, in a common interest to build freedom of religion or belief.



PROGRAM

Wednesday, 12 August

8:30-9:45 a.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Hilde Frafjord Johnson
Royal Norwegian Minister for International
Development and Human Rights
Oslo, Norway

Gunnar Stalsett, Conference President
Bishop of Oslo, Church of Norway
Member, Norwegian Nobel Committee
Oslo, Norway

Chung-Ok Lee, Conference President
Representative, Won Buddhism International
to the United Nations
Abbot, Won Buddhism of America
New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

9:45-10:45 a.m.

Plenary Session I

Abdellefatah Amor, U.N. Special Rapporteur
1981 U.N. Declaration on Freedom of Religion
or Belief, Conference President
Professor, University of Tunis Law School
Tunis, Tunisia

Bahiyih G. Tahzib, Author
Freedom of Religion or Belief: Ensuring
Effective International Legal Protection
The Hague, The Netherlands

10:45-11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00-12:30 p.m.

Plenary Session II

Asia-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities

Kinhide Mushakoji, Professor,
Meiji Gakuin University and Former
Vice Chancellor, United Nations University
Tokyo, Japan



SPONSORS

Royal Norwegian Foreign Ministry, Oslo, Norway
Royal Norwegian Ministry for Development and Human Rights, Oslo, Norway
Royal Norwegian Ministry for Regional Development and Local Government

CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS

Dr. Gunnar Stålsett, Bishop of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
Ven. Dr. Chung-Ok Lee, New York, New York, U.S.A.
Professor Abdellefatah Amor, Tunis, Tunisia

CONFERENCE STEERING COMMITTEE

Stig Utnem, Chair; Secretary General, Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Church of Norway, Oslo, Norway
Anne Sender, Program and Norwegian Coordinator, The Jewish Communities of Norway, Oslo, Norway
Michael M. Roan, Program and International Coordinator; Executive Director, The Tandem Project, Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A.
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Dr. Gunnar Stålsett, Bishop of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
Lars Gunnar Lingaas, Advisor, Norwegian Humanist Association
Abdellefatah Amor, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Chung-Ok Lee, Ven. Dr., Won Buddhism International

COOPERATION COUNCIL OF FAITH AND LIFE STANCE SOCIETIES

Council of Free Churches of Norway
Norwegian Humanist Association
The Jewish Communities of Norway
Islamic Council of Norway
The Buddhist Community of Norway
The Bahai Community of Norway
Alternativt Nettverk of Norway
Roman Catholic Church of Norway
Church of Norway

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