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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Written statement submitted by the International League
for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in
consultative status, (category II).

Nearly two years have passed since the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The Declaration represents a major achievement by establishing international standards for religious freedoms beyond those already set by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Human Rights Covenants. In view of the gravity of abuses of religious freedom throughout the world, however, the International League for Human Rights believes that these current undertakings do not go far enough. Therefore, we wish to take this opportunity to propose additional means for advancing the important principles set forth in the Declaration.

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At the outset, we should recognize that religious intolerance is not just a thing of the past, no longer pressing. Intolerance, often of the most virulent kind, appears regularly throughout the globe today. Innumerable examples of religious persecution have been cited in recent years, many in statements before this Sub-Commission.

The adoption of the Declaration, in itself, will not cause such persecution to cease. Implementation measures are needed. As indicated in the note by the Secretary-General before the Sub-Commission (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1983/29) the human rights bodies of the United Nations have already made a number of recommendations for follow-up.

In that connection, the General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution which invited "all Governments to take necessary measures to ensure wide publicity for the Declaration" and the Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1983/40 requested the Secretary-General to "hold within the framework of the advisory services programme in the period 1984-1985 a seminar on the encouragement of understanding, tolerance, and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief".

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Though the League welcomes these decisions, we believe that the Sub-Commission should consider proposing additional programmes to be undertaken by the United Nations for example, regional conferences and seminars, encouragement of universities, legal associations, and other groups to engage in relevant activities, and (as proposed by a group of NGOs in a communication to the General Assembly's President at its 1982 session) that the Assembly declare 25 November, the date the Declaration was adopted, as World Religious Freedom Day, to be observed each year with appropriate events.

The documents of the United Nations Decades relating to Women and Racism and programmes in other areas of United Nations concern, point to other techniques that could be applied by analogy to the religious rights area. For example, the Secretary-General could be requested to submit annually to the Economic and Social Council a report containing information received from NGOs and other sources. The Commission on Human Rights could be requested to make relevant studies, for example of the kinds of situations that lead to denials of religious freedom; the propagation, international or otherwise, of religious intolerance by the press, cinema, or television; or the role of private groups in combating it. Associations of jurists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other professionals could be encouraged to study these and other aspects of religious intolerance and discrimination. And so forth.

As the members are aware, at its last session, in resolution 1982/28, the Sub-Commission requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Sub-Commission at its thirty-sixth session "all relevant and available information regarding the current dimensions of the problems of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief" and decided to consider, on this basis, whether to update its 1960 seminal study on "Discrimination in the Matter of Religious Rights and Practices". However the Secretary-General's note prepared pursuant to this resolution mainly catalogues the actions of the United Nations and intergovernmental groups. A study describing the "current dimensions" of actual situations and problems prevailing in various countries remains to be done.

The League urges that the Sub-Commission find some means by which the more than 20-year old report of Special Rapporteur Arcot Krishna Swami could be updated as done in the fields of Racial Discrimination, Slavery, Women's Rights and other fields of concern to the Sub-Commission. This could be accomplished by appointing a Special Rapporteur, or by creating a Working Group modelled on those on Disappearance or Slavery. Such an individual or Working Group could be empowered to receive orally or in writing information on cases of government-sponsored or sanctioned religious discrimination or intolerance, and authorized to use their good offices with offending Governments and to make recommendations.