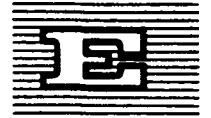


UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/NGO/7
29 July 1985

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities

Thirty-eighth session

Item 15 of the provisional agenda

ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION
BASED ON RELIGION AND BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the Bahá'í International
Community a non-governmental organization in consultative
status (category II)

The Bahá'í International Community welcomes the attention that has been devoted in recent years to implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. We wholeheartedly commend the progress report presented by the Special Rapporteur, Mrs. Odio Benito. We furthermore express our sincere conviction that the recommendations adopted by the seminar on the encouragement of understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief, held in December of last year, would if faithfully considered and enacted by the international community, advance greatly the practical protection of religious rights.

In the Bahá'í view, religious intolerance springs from prejudices rooted in religious fanaticism and dogmatism - the result of man's turning away from the spiritual message of unity and universal love which is the very essence of every major religion in the world. Any fair-minded observer who listened to the discussions at the seminar would have concluded, from the views presented, that every religion is inspired by the ideals of peace and of the unity and equality of all human beings, and that every religion has taught, as one of its fundamental tenets, the principle of religious tolerance and understanding. Moreover, it would have been apparent to him - and this view, too, was repeatedly expressed at the seminar - that the differences between religions are minor and often artificial. Bahá'ís are convinced that religious prejudice can be eradicated only through the development within each individual of a profound, heartfelt recognition of the essential unity of religions, and of the principle of the organic oneness of the human race. Moreover, it is through the healing power of religion itself, as the first teacher of these principles, that religious intolerance can best be combated.

For all these reasons, Bahá'ís believe that education aimed at fostering the development of an awareness of the agreement between religions and the wholeness of human relationships represents the primary remedy to the destructive disease of religious intolerance. In light of these views, we welcome paragraph 6 of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1985/51, which invites the United Nations University and other academic and research institutions to undertake programmes and studies on the encouragement of religious understanding, tolerance and respect. We would like to suggest that the studies called for by the Commission might include, in particular:

(a) A scholarly study on the commonality of spiritual concepts in all human societies - for example, the concept of the existence of some Being superior to man; the twofold physical/spiritual nature of man; and the principle, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

(b) The compilation of a bibliography on religious tolerance that would include works on the nature of religious intolerance, its roots, the nature of prejudice and educational methods to combat prejudice and foster tolerance. Selected works could be included in a recommended list of materials suitable for use in curricula at various educational levels.

(c) A paper summarizing and analysing current educational programmes and efforts aimed at combating religious intolerance. We have suggested previously that UNESCO might be well suited to undertake the collection and analysis of information from various countries about existing educational efforts in this field.

(d) A study recommending the various forms that education to combat religious prejudice could take, and the various actions that Governments might take in the fields of educational curricula, culture and the media. A paper on this topic might draw inspiration, for example, from the recommendations considered at the 1978 International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights.

All these studies, if successfully completed, ought to be publicized and made available to educational institutions, community organizations and religious organizations at all levels.

In the area of legislation, constitutional guarantees and administrative measures - which we believe to be an important complement to educational activities - we have previously proposed that a study might be undertaken of the Human Rights Committee's consideration of the measures that States have adopted to give effect to their obligations under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Such a study might have as its goal the identification of a core of basic legal guarantees and recourse procedures that should be in force in every country in order to protect religious freedom.

Because we feel that legal measures are essential, we welcome the decision of the Commission, in resolution 1985/51, to request the Secretary-General to prepare a compendium of the national legislation and regulations of States on the question of freedom of religion or belief. We feel that such a compendium, once produced, should be made available to States as part of an expanded effort to provide legal assistance to them, when requested, under the aegis of the Advisory Services Programme.

While we have made a number of suggestions in this statement concerning studies that might be undertaken and legal assistance that might be provided to States, we would like to underline, in conclusion, that the value of these initiatives lies in the degree to which they inspire action on the part of Governments, religious institutions, community organizations, families and individuals to recognize the truth of religious unity and of the fundamental oneness of mankind, and to act upon this truth by casting aside religious divisions, fostering religious understanding and unhesitatingly implementing, in practice, the protection of freedom of religion or belief. Nothing less than a radical change in human attitudes can sweep away, once and for all, artificial religious barriers and prejudices, and establish that society founded upon religious harmony that we all long for. We take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of Bahá'i communities around the world to achieve this essential change, and to assist the United Nations as it strives towards this important goal.