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

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

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[22 August 1984]

As a contribution to the Sub-Commission's deliberations under agenda item 14
concerning the forthcoming seminar on the encouragement of understanding, tolerance
and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief, the Bahá'í
International Community is pleased to submit the following points which might be
considered by the seminar:

The current dimensions, manifestations and root causes of the problems of religious
intolerance and discrimination

1. Religious intolerance and discrimination are serious problems in the world
today, in terms both of the severity of the violations of the right to freedom of
religion and belief and the world-wide extent of these problems. In many parts of the
world, the fundamental right to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice,
the right freely to practise and manifest one's religion or belief and the right to
non-discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief are consistently violated.
It should be recognized, however, that religious intolerance is a universal problem
requiring action and attention by the international community as a whole as well as
action by individual States and by all members of society.
2. Intolerance and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief may have a
number of serious manifestations, ranging, for example, from discrimination in such
areas as education, housing and employment, to proscription of specific religious
activities such as teaching and the publication of religious literature and outright
genocide committed against members of particular religions.

3. One of the fundamental root causes of all manifestations of religious intolerance and discrimination is the existence of religious prejudice and prejudicial attitudes among individuals and groups. It is accordingly necessary, in combating religious intolerance, to address these fundamental prejudices.

Implementation of international standards

4. The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief represents a common standard defining the elements of the right to freedom of religion or belief and elaborating the guarantees contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. States should take all necessary steps to implement the provisions of the Declaration through the adoption of appropriate and effective constitutional, legislative, judicial, administrative, educational and cultural measures.

Action in the field of legislation

5. It is essential that appropriate constitutional, legislative, judicial and administrative measures be adopted in order to ensure that all the rights set forth in the Declaration are adequately and fully protected by law, and to create a social atmosphere conducive to the development of religious understanding, tolerance and respect.

6. In particular, States should ensure that the rights set forth in the Declaration are realized in practice and are guaranteed through the existence and application of effective grievance and recourse procedures.

7. In this connection, the United Nations might consider means by which it can offer assistance to States in the drafting of appropriate legislation. It might also consider ways of disseminating information on the standards set forth in the Declaration to judges, legislators, magistrates, lawyers, public officials, civil servants and other officials whose duties involve the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Action in the fields of teaching, education, culture, media and information

8. Recognizing that religious intolerance has its roots in religious prejudice and prejudicial attitudes, States should also take appropriate measures in the fields of teaching, education, culture, the media and information to combat the prejudices giving rise to religious intolerance and to encourage understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to religion or belief.

9. The education of children from their earliest, pre-school years with the goal of fostering a consciousness of, respect for and a growing appreciation of the different forms of religious expression as well as the development of attitudes of religious tolerance is particularly important.

10. In this connection, States might:

- (a) Encourage the development of school curricula at primary, secondary and university levels aimed at eliminating religious prejudice and fostering religious tolerance;
- (b) Provide for the development of appropriate educational materials for use in curricula on religious tolerance;

- (c) Encourage the development of appropriate teacher-training programmes;
- (d) Share with other States their experience in the field of education aimed at promoting religious tolerance.

11. The appropriate intergovernmental agencies, for example, UNESCO, might:

- (a) Solicit information from Governments, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions on educational programmes and methods currently in use aimed at developing religious tolerance and understanding, and make this information available to all interested Governments, institutions and organizations;
- (b) Compile a bibliography of educational materials which might be incorporated in curricula on religious tolerance, and possibly establish a library of such materials available to all governments;
- (c) Consider the possibility of developing appropriate curriculum guides for teaching about religious tolerance; and appropriate curriculum materials on religious tolerance which might be used in school programmes.

12. States might consider measures to encourage the incorporation in school curricula of the following topics or elements:

- (a) The commonality of spiritual concepts in all human societies;
- (b) The variety of forms of religious expression;
- (c) The history of religious prejudice and conflict, with a view to understanding the nature of religious prejudice;
- (d) The principles of religious liberty and tolerance contained in the Declaration.

13. Educational agencies and institutions responsible for developing curricula and educational programmes designed to foster religious tolerance should be encouraged to take note of the background papers prepared for the seminar, particularly those offering practical suggestions relating to curricula content and materials.

14. States, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions should take appropriate measures in the field of culture to encourage religious understanding. Some of these activities might be undertaken in co-operation with UNESCO. These might include the development of multi-religious cultural programmes, through the use of exhibitions, religious libraries and museums, with a view to encouraging greater understanding of the variety of forms of religious expression and fostering understanding among religions and religious groups.

15. The media should be encouraged to disseminate materials conducive to fostering understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to religion or belief.

16. The United Nations General Assembly might consider the possibility of proclaiming 25 November "Universal Religious Tolerance Day", in commemoration of the anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration.

Other future activities which might be considered

17. The appropriate United Nations human rights bodies might consider the possibility of elaborating additional standards as a means of implementing the Declaration. In particular, they might investigate the possibility of beginning discussions on the elaboration of a draft convention on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.

18. The appropriate United Nations human rights bodies might consider further measures to study the current dimensions of the problem of religious intolerance and discrimination and to monitor the situation in the world relating to religious intolerance. They might consider establishing a formal or informal body which could study the current state of religious tolerance in various parts of the world and could report to one of the United Nations human rights organs.