

United Nations Human Rights Council, 22nd Session (25th February – 22nd March 2013)
Item 2/3 Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner of Human Rights
Thursday 1st March 2013
Speaker: IHEU, BHA, and CFI representative, Roy Brown
The Rabat Plan of Action

Mme High Commissioner, Mr President

We welcome the report by the High Commissioner and applaud her deep commitment to the protection of human right worldwide. We were particularly encouraged by her comments on the Expert Workshops on combating incitement to hatred and violence while protecting the right to freedom of expression, and by the outcome document: The Rabat Plan of Action.¹

May we bring to the Council's attention a paragraph from the Plan of Action which quotes the Human Rights Committee General Comment no34 (2011).

“Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the Convention [the ICCPR], except in specific circumstances... Thus, for instance, it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favour of or against one or certain religious or belief systems... or religious believers over non-believers. Nor would it be permissible for such prohibitions to be used to prevent or punish criticism of religious leaders, or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith” (para.48).

If only, Madam High Commissioner, if only!

In our written statement² we referred to the IHEU report *Freedom of Thought 2012*, which documents worldwide discrimination against non-believers,³ a phenomenon that has until now been largely ignored – including by this Council. We shall be referring to this issue again during this Council session under agenda item 4 when a victim of abuse will be recounting his personal experiences.

We urge all States, and in particular those pushing for further restrictions on freedom of expression, to accept and implement the Rabat Plan of Action. It would go a very long way to diffusing tensions between those who feel obliged to protect religions and those of us who are more concerned with the protection of human rights.

Thank you.

¹ A/HRC/22/17/Add.4

² A/HRC/22/NGO/24

³ <http://iheu.org/files/IHEU%20Freedom%20of%20Thought%202012.pdf>