



**United Nations Human Rights Council: 26<sup>th</sup> Session (10<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June 2014)**  
**Item 3: Clustered ID with the SR on the right to freedom of expression and SR on peaceful  
assembly and association**  
**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> June**  
**Speaker: BHA Representative, Amelia Cooper**

Thank you Mr President.

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur Frank la Rue and applaud him for his tireless work over the past six years. While we recognize the particular threat of assaults on freedom of expression during electoral processes, the *'structural, legal and practical barriers'*<sup>1</sup> noted by the Special Rapporteur in his fine report are simply manifestations of persistent State abuses of freedom of expression.

One such violation is the application of blasphemy laws which, despite widespread condemnation<sup>2</sup>, many States continue to propagate and arbitrarily implement with impunity.

The Rabat Plan of Action<sup>3</sup> provides guidance to ensure that incitement does not go unpunished, while preserving the inalienable right to freedom of expression: blasphemy laws stand starkly at variance with this approach.

During the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of this Council, the Saudi Arabian delegate reiterated the importance of the Rabat Plan of Action, and stated that the country *'exerts its supportive efforts domestically'*<sup>4</sup>. Why, therefore, does Raif Badawi remain in jail, convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to ten years and 1000 lashes for establishing a liberal website<sup>5</sup>? Should the Saudi Arabian government honour their words and employ the Plan's guidelines in a retrial, they would find Badawi an innocent man.

May we remind States that membership to this Council obliges them *'to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights'*<sup>6</sup>, not just in platitudes, but in practice.

Furthermore, Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai said that *'state obligations to achieve non-discrimination and equality are immediate, and not subject to progressive realization'*<sup>7</sup>. It is therefore incumbent upon the Human Rights Council to ensure:

- that States take immediate steps to align their domestic legislation with their international obligations;
- that there is an end to State impunity regarding human rights abuses, notably the arbitrary use of blasphemy laws;
- that existing human rights instruments, from the fundamental principles set forth in the ICCPR to more specialised conventions, are strictly adhered to.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 14, p.5, A/HRC/26/30

<sup>2</sup> By, inter alia, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2013/10/07/defamation-of-religions-is-haunting-egypt-s-writers/> and in UN Documentation A/HRC/25/58.

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/25/58 (The Rabat Plan of Action)

<sup>4</sup> 'My country exerts its supportive efforts domestically to combat the phenomenon', Meshal Alotibi, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2014, <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/human-rights-council/regular-sessions/25th-session/watch/clustered-id-contd-sr-on-religion-and-protection-of-human-rights-22nd-meeting-25th-regular-session-of-human-rights-council/3329494304001>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27318400>

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 9, A/RES/60/251 (Human Rights Council Founding Resolution) 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 19, p.7, A/HRC/26/29