

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 40th Session (25 February-22 March 2019)**  
**Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with SR Cultural Rights**  
**Speaker Humanists UK representative, Rachel Taggart-Ryan**

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's recommendation to all member states to 'review laws that discriminate against anyone on the basis of cultural or religious arguments and bring them into line with universal human rights standards'.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, there has been an increase in blasphemy accusations, both by state and non-state actors, which are employed to shut down and undermine freedom of artistic expression. In 2018, Shahzahan Bachchu, a well-known humanist poet, was shot dead in his home village in Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> This murder was the latest in a long string of vigilante attacks in a campaign of murder against humanist writers, poets, and authors across Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup>

We endorse the Special Rapporteur's call for the immediate release of Cheikh Ould Mohamed M'kheitir, a blogger who challenged the religious justifications for caste discrimination in Mauritania, and Palestinian poet Ashfar Fayadh, who is facing a death sentence because of the content of his poems.

We ask the Special Rapporteur what more can be done within her mandate to encourage member states to remove apostasy and blasphemy restrictions from their statute books so that everyone can enjoy their cultural rights, regardless of their religion or belief?

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Human Rights Council, fortieth session. *Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights: Cultural rights: tenth anniversary report.*

[http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/40/53](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/40/53)

<sup>2</sup> Humanists UK, June 2018. *Humanist writer murdered in Bangladesh.*

<https://humanism.org.uk/2018/06/12/humanist-writer-murdered-in-bangladesh/>

<sup>3</sup> Humanists UK, April 2016, *More individuals hacked to death in Bangladesh as Islamists broaden their hit list.*

<https://humanism.org.uk/2016/04/25/more-individuals-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh-as-islamists-broaden-their-hit-list/>