

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 40th Session (25 February-22 March 2019)
Item 4 ID - Special Rapporteur on Islamic Republic of Iran
Speaker Humanists UK representative, Rachel Taggart-Ryan**

As we mark 30 years since Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Humanists UK's patron and writer Salman Rushdie, we welcome the Special Rapporteur on Iran's recommendation that Iran 'protect the rights of all persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, and address all forms of discrimination against them, and release all those imprisoned for having exercised their right to freedom of religion or belief.'

In 2017, the UN Human Rights Council put forward a resolution that demanded an end to the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy.¹ The resolution reaffirmed that Article 18 of the UDHR² includes the right to freely change one's religious beliefs and the right to leave a religion entirely.

However, the Iranian Government has made no notable progress towards compliance with it.³ It remains one of 13 countries where judges can impose the death penalty for apostasy or blasphemy in accordance with their own interpretation of Sharia law.⁴ Iran also frequently jails and executes individuals on charges of 'enmity against God,' a charge that is frequently used to silence religious and political dissent.⁵

We call upon Iran to fulfil its obligation under the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to abolish the use of the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy, and to remove these crimes from their statute books.

Thank you.

¹ Humanists International, September 2017, *UN Human Rights Council condemns punishing apostasy, blasphemy and same-sex relations with death penalty*, <https://humanists.international/2017/09/un-human-rights-council-condemns-punishing-apostasy-blasphemy-sex-relations-death-penalty/>

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

³ UN General Assembly September 2017. *On the Question of the Death Penalty*.
https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_36_L_6.docx

⁴ Humanists International, *Freedom of Thought Report 2018: Iran*.
<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/iran/#Apostasy>

⁵ Ibid.