

United Nations Human Rights Council, 41st Session (24 February to 20 March 2020)

Item 6: Universal Periodic Review: Iraq

Speaker: British Humanist Association Representative, Tallulah Gordon¹

We call upon the Iraqi Government to implement the recommendation made by a number of member states to guarantee freedom of religion or belief for all religious and non-religious groups, enact legislation to outlaw religious discrimination, and ensure instances are fully investigated.²

Humanists International's *Freedom of Thought Report* reports that non-Muslims in Iraq face systemic discrimination for their beliefs, including legal restrictions, harassment, and severe social stigma.³ The Iraqi constitution only recognises the right to freedom of religion or belief of a select few religious groups, failing to recognise the non-religious. For some minorities, such as those of the Baha'i faith, religious practice is forbidden by law.⁴ This is clearly in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which declares that states must protect the right of their religious or non-religious minorities to freely practise their religion or belief.

In Iraq, blasphemy is a criminal offence prohibited by the penal code. Like all blasphemy laws, this is used to discriminate against religious dissenters.⁵ We highlight the case of Yousef Muhammad Ali, who in 2014, filed a case against those who had threatened him with death for his atheism. Rather than receiving protection, he was instead arrested for blasphemy by the police.⁶

We call on Iraq to fulfil its obligations under the UDHR and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to protect the right of religious and non-religious minorities to freedom of religion or belief, including by repealing its blasphemy law.

Thank you.

¹ Humanists UK is the operating name of the British Humanist Association.

² United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Iraq*, 20 December 2019. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/43/14>

³ Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report 2019: Iraq'. <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/iraq/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report 2019: Iraq'. <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/iraq/>

⁶ Richard Dawkins Foundation, 'Yousef Muhammad Ali Faces Trial Tomorrow For Criticising Islam', 13 July 2015. <https://www.richarddawkins.net/2015/07/yousef-muhammad-ali-faces-trial-tomorrow-for-criticising-islam/>