

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

Item 4 ID – Special Rapporteur on Islamic Republic of Iran

Speaker: British Humanist Association Representative, Tallulah Gordon¹

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's concerns about Iran's use of the death penalty, and wish to highlight the recommendation that Iran 'release all those imprisoned for having exercised their right to freedom of religion or belief'.²

Iran is one of 14 countries worldwide that continues to apply the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy.³ The Iranian Government periodically uses the charge of 'enmity against God' to jail and execute non-religious people and other religious and political dissenters.⁴ This is despite the UN Human Rights Council putting forward Resolution 36/17 in 2017, which demands an end to the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy.⁵ Exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief, as enshrined by the UDHR, should not be regarded as a crime at all, let alone one that is punishable by death.

In 2017, 21-year-old Sina Dehghan was sentenced to death for blasphemy for sharing private messages sent over an instant messaging app. According to reports, Dehghan was promised release if he confessed to breaching Islamic law, but was subsequently issued a death sentence for doing so. It remains unknown whether the Supreme Court has given its final ruling.⁶

We ask the Special Rapporteur what steps he is taken to ensure Iran's compliance with Resolution 36/17 and ask him to continue to call for the release those like Dehghan who have been convicted under these laws and, in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, abolish the use of the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy.

Thank you.

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

² United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 28 January 2020. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/43/61>

³ Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report 2019: Iran'. <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/iran/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Humanists International, 'UN Human Rights Council condemns punishing apostasy, blasphemy and same-sex relations with death penalty', 30 September 2017. <https://humanists.international/2017/09/un-human-rights-council-condemns-punishing-apostasy-blasphemy-sex-relations-death-penalty/>

⁶ Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report 2019: Iran'. <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/iran/>