

United Nations Human Rights Council, 45th Session (14 September to 6 October 2020)

**Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Sudan
Speaker: Humanists UK representative, Rachel Taggart-Ryan¹**

We welcome the report of the Independent Expert² and commend the transitional Government of Sudan for the significant advances it has made to protect the freedom of religion or belief of all of its citizens.

Humanists International's 2019 *Freedom of Thought Report* ranked Sudan as the ninth-worst country in the world with regards to the right to freedom of religion or belief³ and it was one of only 14 countries to impose capital punishment for apostasy or blasphemy, which has subsequently been repealed.

The transitional Government's commitment to creating a secular constitution has been a significant step in realising this right.⁴ Further reforms, including ending the use of public flogging as a form of punishment, and allowing non-Muslims to consume alcohol, have mitigated some of the most extreme aspects of the Shari'a Law-influenced criminal justice system.⁵

Sudan has shown that even in a conservative religious country, and in the face of opposition from Islamist extremists, the protection of religion or belief is possible. We hope that the repeal of the death penalty for apostasy will inspire the Governments of Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the UAE, and Yemen to do likewise.

We ask the Independent Expert what more can be done under his mandate to ensure that apostasy and 'religious insult' are both fully decriminalised and that Sudan signs up to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women?

Thank you.

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

² Human Rights Council, Forty-fifth session. *Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan*.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session45/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

³ Humanists International, 'Human rights victory as Sudan abolishes death sentence for apostasy', 14 July 2020. <https://humanists.international/2020/07/human-rights-victory-as-sudan-abolishes-death-sentence-for-apostasy/>

⁴ Humanists International, 'Sudanese state embraces secularism', 7 September 2020. <https://humanists.international/2020/09/sudanese-state-embraces-secularism/>

⁵ Humanists International, 'Human rights victory as Sudan abolishes death sentence for apostasy', 14 July 2020. <https://humanists.international/2020/07/human-rights-victory-as-sudan-abolishes-death-sentence-for-apostasy/>