

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 46th Session (22 February - 23 March 2021)**  
**Item 3 – SR on Freedom of Religion or Belief**  
**Speaker: Humanists UK Representative<sup>1</sup> Rachel Taggart-Ryan**

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's report into the worrying rise in anti-Muslim hatred,<sup>2</sup> which has led to the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar's Rakhine province of Rohingya Muslims and the mass internment and human rights abuses of millions of Muslims in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

Last year, we asked this Council to take a view on whether the treatment of Uighur Muslims meets the legal definition of genocide and what further steps can be taken to inspect and report on the internments in Xinjiang in the face of China's continued refusal to engage with this Council.<sup>3</sup> We ask the Special Rapporteur what steps he can take within his mandate to visit and report on these facilities.

We are concerned about the link between the criminalisation of blasphemy and the rise in anti-Muslim hatred. In Pakistan, such laws have been used for decades to persecute and criminalise non-Muslims such as humanists and Christians, but also Ahmadi Muslims, who are subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, and charges of blasphemy because of their religious beliefs.

The penal code explicitly targets Ahmadis by prohibiting them from 'indirectly or directly posing as a Muslim.' Ahmadis are banned from declaring or propagating their faith publicly, building mosques, or making the Muslim call for prayer.<sup>4</sup> In 2020, there was a surge in targeted killings of members of the Ahmadi community, including Tahir Ahmad Naseem, who was fatally shot while appearing in court accused of blasphemy.<sup>5</sup>

We ask the Special Rapporteur what progress has been made towards repealing Pakistan's blasphemy laws, and what further research he plans to undertake on the link between blasphemy laws and the rise of anti-Muslim hatred?

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Humanists UK is the trading name of the British Humanist Association.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Ahmed Shaheed, 'Countering Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief: Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief' *United Nations Human Rights Council*, 25 February 2021  
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Humanists UK, 'Humanists UK and British Muslims for Secular Democracy speak out at UN against Chinese persecution of Uighurs', September 21st, 2020. <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/09/21/humanists-uk-and-british-muslims-for-secular-democracy-speak-out-at-un-against-chinese-persecution-of-uighurs/>

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Pakistan: Surge in Targeted Killings of Ahmadis' 26 November 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/26/pakistan-surge-targeted-killings-ahmadis>

<sup>5</sup> Salman Masood, 'American Accused of Blasphemy Is Killed in Pakistan Courtroom' *The New York Times*. July 30, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/world/asia/pakistan-blasphemy-killing-american.html>