

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 46th Session (22 February - 23 March 2021)
Item – 6 Maldives UPR**

Speaker: Humanists UK representative Richy Thompson¹

Thank you, Mr President.

We welcome many of the recommendations put forward in the Maldives UPR, but remain deeply concerned by the lack of action on the part of the Maldivian Government to implement and protect freedom of religion or belief, including for apostates and the non-religious.

Resolution 36/17 explicitly condemns ‘the imposition of the death penalty as a sanction for specific forms of conduct, such as apostasy [and] blasphemy’.² This reaffirms the commitments outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that all have the freedom to leave a religion, or positively hold non-religious beliefs.³ Yet in the Maldives, apostasy remains punishable by death and blasphemy by imprisonment.⁴ Only 12 other countries similarly have the death penalty for blasphemy or apostasy.

The Government requires that all citizens identify as Muslim and are only guaranteed freedom of expression so long as their expressions comply with the tenets of Islam.⁵

Consequently, attitudes towards humanist values are extremely hostile. For example, in October 2019, the Maldivian Democracy Network – a leading human rights body – was forced to dissolve, on the grounds that a report it had released earlier in the year on radicalisation in the country was slanderous towards Islam.⁶ Members of the MDN were threatened with death over social media.

We believe that the Maldives needs to provide a stronger commitment to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, so that its citizens do not live in fear of persecution for their beliefs. We call upon the Maldivian Government to repeal criminal sanctions imposed for apostasy and blasphemy and release those detained for these crimes.

Thank you.

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

² UN Human Rights Council, thirty-sixth session ‘The question of the death penalty’ September 2017. https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_36_L_6.docx

³ Universal Declaration on Human rights https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

⁴ Humanists International. ‘Freedom of Thought Report 2020: Maldives’ https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/maldives/#Atheism_and_criticism_of_Islam

⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Maldives. Chapter 2, Article 27. <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/mv/mv001en.pdf>

⁶ Humanists International. ‘Freedom of Thought Report 2020: Maldives’ https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/maldives/#Atheism_and_criticism_of_Islam