

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 48th Regular Session
13 September 2021 to 8 October 2021
Item 6 Universal Periodic Review: Somalia
Speaker: Humanists UK Representative,¹ Rachel Taggart-Ryan**

We congratulate Somalia on its recent ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the development of a bill to criminalize all types of female genital mutilation, and the creation of a national action plan on ending sexual violence in conflict.²

However, we urge the Somali Government to use the opportunity presented by the upcoming redrafting of its Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code to guarantee the right to and strengthen protections for freedom of religion or belief of all citizens.

We call upon Somalia to remove Articles 313 and 559 relating to blasphemy from its Penal Code.³ This would strengthen protection for religious and non-religious minority groups for whom such laws are used to harass, marginalise, and justify vigilante attacks. I wish to highlight the case of Mahmoud Jama Ahmed, an academic who was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison in 2019 for a Facebook post in which he questioned the power of prayer.⁴ Although an appeal to increase his sentence to death was dismissed and he eventually received a pardon, he has been forced to flee the country due to continued death threats.⁵

We implore the Somali Government to heed the example of Sudan last year in repealing the death penalty for apostasy.⁶ Somalia is one of 13 countries to still impose the death penalty for the offence of blasphemy or apostasy. This runs counter to resolution 36/17 of this Council which urged all States that have not yet abolished the death penalty to ensure it is not imposed for specific forms of conduct, including apostasy.⁷ Sudan has shown that it is possible to do this in spite of pressure from Islamic extremists. In doing so, Somalia would not only make progress towards its obligations to realise the human rights of its citizens, but would also bring about a greater prosperity and peace.

Thank you.

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

² Human Rights Council, 'Forty-eighth session 13 September–1 October 2021: Agenda item 6 Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Somalia' 7 July 2021. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/11>

³ Humanists International, Freedom of Thought Report: Somalia. 28 August 2020. <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/africa-eastern-africa/somalia/#Apostasy>

⁴ Humanists International, Cases of Concern: Mahmoud Jama Ahmed. <https://humanists.international/case-of-concern/mahmoud-jama-ahmed/>

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Humanists UK, 'Success! Sudan abolishes death penalty for apostasy', 14 July 2020. <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/07/14/success-sudan-abolishes-death-penalty-for-apostasy/>

⁷ Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 29 September 2017 36/17, 'The question of the death penalty.' https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/36/L.6