

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 49th Session
(28 February-1 April 2022)**

**Item 2: Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Speaker: Humanists UK Representative: Andrew Copson¹**

It has been seven months since terrorists, according to the UN Security Council, took control of Afghanistan. This Council will remember their first regime, marked by extreme persecution of non-religious and religious minorities, including Shi'a Hazara Muslims. The height of this saw an edict, fortunately never enforced, requiring Hindus to wear identifying badges,² and the destruction of Buddhist statues, beautiful treasures of our human heritage.

There has been no change in the Taliban's approach to the human right to freedom of thought and belief. Recent years saw a resurgence in targeted violence against minority belief communities, including in 2018 in Jalalabad killing the only Sikh candidate for parliament³ and in 2020 at a Kabul gurdwara, killing 25 Sikhs.⁴ Now Amnesty International has reported the Taliban has murdered nine Hazara Muslims.⁵ Even before August this was one of 13 countries where blasphemy or apostasy is punishable by death, making it impossible legally and socially for the non-religious to live openly. Now, reports are received of murders and disappearances of atheists and humanist organisations are inundated with requests from Afghans for support and relocation.⁶ What progress has been made by the Council to send observers to monitor this persecution on the ground?

We are also concerned about non-religious Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This is not a safe country for the non-religious, who are targeted by blasphemy laws and subjected to mob violence. How does the UNHCR intend to identify such refugees who are entitled to resettlement through its schemes but unable to openly identify themselves?

Thank you.

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

² United States Department of State, *U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 2001 - Afghanistan*, 26 October 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3bdbdd7e1.html>

³ BBC News, 'Afghanistan blast: Sikhs among 19 dead in Jalalabad suicide attack,' 1 July 2018. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44677823>

⁴ United State Commission on International Religious Freedom, 'Factsheet Afghanistan', October 2021. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/2021%20Factsheet%20-%20Religious%20Minorities%20in%20Afghanistan.pdf>

⁵ Amnesty International, 'Afghanistan: Taliban responsible for brutal massacre of Hazara men - new investigation' 19 August 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/afghanistan-taliban-responsible-for-brutal-massacre-of-hazara-men-new-investigation/>

⁶ Humanists International, *Freedom of Through Report: Afghanistan*. https://fot.humanistsinternational.com/countries/asia-southern-asia/afghanistan/#Promotion_of_Virtue_and_Elimination_of_Vice