

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 50th Session
(13 June - 8 July 2022)**

**Item 2: Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights: Oral
update on Afghanistan**

Speaker: Humanists UK Representative: Andrew Copson¹

Although we welcomed the recommendations made in your update at the last Council, especially focusing on the human rights situation for women and girls, we were disappointed that it did not make specific recommendations calling on the Taliban to cease attacks on religious and belief minorities, including the non-religious,² and to enact measures to protect minority belief groups from other terrorist organisations.

Violent intolerance of any dissenting belief was a hallmark of the Taliban regime in the 1990s, and there is no evidence of any recent change in policy. Even before its return to power last year, it was not possible to be openly non-religious in Afghanistan. Both blasphemy and apostasy were already crimes that carry the death penalty.³

Terrorist attacks upon religious minorities – such as last month’s bombing of a Kabul mosque which killed members of the Hazara Shia community, including at least 16 children – rightlyfully receive international condemnation. But the plight of the non-religious remains entirely hidden.⁴

Non-religious Afghan refugees are not safe. They cannot make themselves known to the UNHCR in neighbouring countries, most notably Pakistan and Iran, for fear of mob violence and arrest under the blasphemy laws there. Unlike other minority groups, who may enjoy a degree of toleration in the region, the non-religious have no safe route of passage out of Afghanistan.

Will the High Commissioner comment on what is being done to ensure that Afghan resettlement programmes are inclusive of the non-religious? What mechanisms are in place so they can be safely identified by the UNHCR in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran?

Thank you.

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

² *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Situation of human rights in Afghanistan*, 4 March 2022.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session49/list-reports>

³ Humanists International, *Freedom of Thought Report: Afghanistan*.

<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/afghanistan/>

⁴ Business Standard, ‘UN Secretary-General Guterres condemns recent terror attacks in Afghanistan’ 27 May 2022. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2361315/taliban-kill-iskp-commanders-responsible-for-mosque-attacks>