

**United Nations Human Rights Council  
52nd Session (27 February – 31 March 2023)  
Item 6 – United Kingdom UPR  
Speaker: Humanists UK Representative Karen Wright<sup>1</sup>**

We welcome the recommendations in the UK's UPR, such as the incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law.<sup>2</sup>

We are deeply concerned by the Government's abandoning legislation to shut unregistered schools.<sup>3</sup> In England the law defines what it means to be a school, and there are associated minimum standards. That includes that a school must teach English, maths, and science. But, paradoxically, some full-time settings have evaded these minimum standards by avoiding meeting the definition – for example by only teaching religious texts. The pupils in these settings then find themselves trapped in places where they receive no secular education at all. They can find themselves the victims of physical and sexual abuse. When they leave, they are unable to function in modern Britain. A new law is urgently needed to fix the problem.

We also remain concerned over the UK continuing to delay the legal recognition of humanist marriages despite the High Court ruling in 2020 that this amounts to discrimination.<sup>4</sup> Since 2013, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act has given the Government power to enact legal recognition of humanist marriages by order but it has refused to do so ever since. This is a denial of humanists' freedom of religion or belief.

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

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' A/HRC/52/10, 9 January 2023

<sup>3</sup> Humanists UK, 'Government fails most vulnerable children by dropping Schools Bill', 7 December 2022. <https://humanists.uk/2022/12/07/government-fails-most-vulnerable-children-by-dropping-schools-bill/>

<sup>4</sup> *R (Harrison and others) v Secretary of State for Justice* [2020] EWHC 2096 (Admin): <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2020/2096.pdf>