

United Nations Human Rights Council, 53rd Session

19 June to 14 July 2023

Item 3 – Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls

Speaker: Humanists UK Representative: Blend Ademi¹

We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for her report, particularly her reference to the prevalence of religious dogma in family law,² and wish to emphasise this perspective in light of the draft resolution on child, early, and forced marriage.

Forced marriage is a global issue that has multiple social drivers, such as poverty and lack of education, but the most prominent of these are religious and cultural practices ‘that discriminate against and harm women and girls’.³ In Afghanistan, economic factors ultimately facilitating forced marriage are aggravated through the crackdown by the Taliban on women’s access to education and their positioning as second-class citizens in general, justified by instrumentalising ‘fallacious interpretations of religion’.⁴

‘Where cultural or religious norms oppose it, forced marriage is unlikely to occur.’⁵ In the UK, an independent review into faith engagement demonstrated how the UK Government falls short in tackling forced marriage and recommends preventative measures including the provision of training for faith leaders to spot signs of coercion.⁶ The same review highlighted the underreported and often overlooked use of forced marriage as a means of ‘conversion’ against lesbians and bisexual women as part of the wider LGBTQ+ community.⁷

How will the Special Rapporteur encourage states to support a resolution on child, early, and forced marriage that addresses the harms of religious dogma on women and girls, including those in the LGBTQ+ community?

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

² Human Rights Council, *Custody, violence against women and violence against children*, A/HRC/53/36, 13 April 2023.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session53/list-reports>

³ Human Rights Council, *Adverse impact of forced marriage on the full and effective enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls*, A/HRC/52/50, 02 February 2023, paras 23-26.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5250-adverse-impact-forced-marriage-full-and-effective-enjoyment-all>

⁴ Human Rights Council, *Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan*, A/HRC/53/21, 15 June 2023, paras 18, 66-73. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session53/A_HRC_53_21-AEV.docx

⁵ Human Rights Council, A/HRC/52/50, paras 23-26.

⁶ Colin Bloom, *Does government “do God?” An independent review into how government engages with faith (Bloom Review)*, April 2023, recommendations 20-22.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf

⁷ Ibid p149. See also Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office *Forced Marriage Unit statistics 2019*, 25 June 2020, p13. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/894428/Forced_Marriage_Unit_statistics_2019.pdf