

United Nations Human Rights Council, 53rd Session
11 September to 13 October 2023
Item 3 – Interactive dialogue with the Working Group on arbitrary detention
Speaker: Humanists UK Representative: Laura Newlyn¹

This statement is jointly delivered by Humanists UK and the UK Bahá'í Community. We thank the working group for their report identifying discriminatory trends relating to arbitrary detention during the Covid-19 pandemic.²

Neither non-religious beliefs nor the Bahá'í faith are recognised by the Iranian authorities³ and we remain alarmed by the increase in the already longstanding persecution of the non-religious and the Bahá'ís since the pandemic.⁴ Blogger and photojournalist Soheil Arabi was reportedly detained in January as part of a crackdown on protests. He'd previously had a death sentence commuted to seven and a half years' imprisonment for alleged 'blasphemy'.⁵ Mahvash Sabet,⁶ Fariba Kamalabadi,⁷ and Afif Naeimi,⁸ who each sat on a Bahá'í leadership committee, and have already served ten years in harsh prison conditions, have all been re-imprisoned between August 2022 and February this year. Bahá'í offices report that Ms Sabet and Mr Naeimi are both gravely ill and doctors have provided evidence that they are unfit to be detained.

On 25 May, Houthi gunmen staged a violent raid on a peaceful Bahá'í gathering in Sana'a, detaining and forcibly disappearing 17 members of the Yemeni Bahá'í community, gathered in a private home to elect their national governing body. Only six have been released, and 11 Bahá'ís remain under arbitrary detention.⁹

In what way will the Working Group address such flagrant violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief as related to its mandate?

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

² Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention A/HRC/54/51*, 31 July 2023, paras 48–49, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5451-arbitrary-detention-report-working-group-arbitrary-detention>

³ Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report: Iran', updated 11 May 2023, <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/iran/>

⁴ All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, *Commentary on the Current State of International Freedom of Religion or Belief (2020)*, <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/2020-APPG-commentary-final.pdf>

⁵ Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report: Iran'.

⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), 'Mahvash Sabet', <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/mahvash-sabet>

⁷ USCIRF, Faribra Kamalabadi, <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/fariba-kamalabadi>

⁸ USCIRF, 'Afif Naeimi',

<https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/afif-naeimi>

⁹ Baha'i International Community, UN Security Council members "deplore" detention of 11 Yemeni Baha'is and call for their release', 22 August 2023 <https://www.bic.org/news/un-security-council-members-deplore-detention-11-yemeni-bahais-and-call-their-release>