

United Nations Human Rights Council, 55th Session
26 February to 5 April 2024
Item 4 - General Debate
Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Andrew Copson¹

Humanists UK are deeply concerned by the ongoing rise of Hindu nationalism in India, and how this facilitates intercommunal violence and increased persecution of non-religious and religious minorities.² In particular, we are alarmed by the removal of the police protection of prominent rationalist, Narendra Nayak, while the threat to his life remains.³

Between 2013 and 2015, three prominent humanist rationalists were assassinated, reportedly for peacefully challenging Hindu nationalism and harmful religious practices.⁴ In 2016, it was discovered that Narendra Nayak was also a target for assassination, as a result of his advocacy upholding secularism in India. He was subsequently placed under police protection. In 2021, Mr Nayak became the victim of a viral smear campaign in which violence was incited against him.⁵ Yet on 30 March last year, the Karnataka State authorities removed his security detail despite there being no decrease in the threat to his life.

We call for the immediate reinstatement of Narendra Nayak's security detail in order to guarantee his safety. He has been targeted for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of religion or belief. Further, we urge member States to address the increasing persecution of non-religious and religious minorities who are victims of the rise of Hindu nationalism in India.

¹ Humanists UK is the trading name of the British Humanist Association

² Humanists International, 'Freedom of Thought Report - India', updated 6 October 2022, <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/india/>

³ Humanists International General Assembly, 'Emergency Resolution Calling for the Restoration of Protection for Narendra Nayak', 2023, <https://humanists.international/policy/emergency-resolution-calling-for-the-restoration-of-protection-for-narendra-nayak/>

⁴ Humanists International, 'Cases of concern - Narendra Nayak', updated 30 March 2023, <https://humanists.international/case-of-concern/narendra-nayak/>

⁵ *Ibid.*