

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 57th Session**  
**9 September to 11 October 2024**  
**Panel discussion on quality education for peace and tolerance for every child**  
**Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Lewis Young<sup>1</sup>**

We welcome the Council's focus on how to develop accessible, inclusive, equitable, and quality education for peace and tolerance for every child as an effective strategy to promote sustainable peace. We support its aim to empower children with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to contribute to an equitable society, and note that Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals lists among this knowledge and skills set the need to promote human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and an appreciation of cultural diversity.<sup>2</sup>

Outside of the family, schools and other educational settings are the major influence on our attitudes, beliefs, and values. They can do a lot of damage to freedom of religion or belief but can also play a role in advancing this human right. School structures, the school curriculum, and other aspects of schools' ethos can all play a part in supporting freedom of religion or belief for all.

We believe that high quality education on religions and humanism, that is conveyed in a pluralistic manner – and accords equal respect to different religious convictions and to non-religious beliefs – plays a role in contributing to social cohesion and mutual understanding in a well-informed, respectful, open society. Sometimes called 'religious education', we believe a more comprehensive and inclusive name for this school subject is 'Religions and Worldviews'.

This approach is encompassed by the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*,<sup>3</sup> prepared by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

We urge states to look to the *Toledo Guiding Principles* in the development of their school curriculums, and recommend these principles are endorsed in the thematic report to be presented to the Council at the 59th session as an outcome of this panel discussion.

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

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Panel discussion on quality education for peace and tolerance of every child: Concept note (as of 4 September 2024)' [https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/57/DL\\_HRC\\_Panels/CN\\_Educ4Peace.docx](https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/57/DL_HRC_Panels/CN_Educ4Peace.docx)

<sup>3</sup> OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Advisory Council, *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, 2007, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/e/29154.pdf>