

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 58th Session**  
**24 February to 4 April 2025**  
**Item 6: Universal Periodic Review – Brunei Darussalam**  
**Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Alys Evans<sup>1</sup>**

We support Ireland's recommendation to abolish the use of the death penalty in cases of blasphemy and apostasy, and to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief is upheld.<sup>2</sup>

We are aware of the continuing de facto moratorium on the death penalty,<sup>3</sup> but remain deeply concerned that blasphemy and apostasy are capital crimes. This contradicts this Council's resolution 36/17, which urges all states that have not yet abolished the death penalty to ensure it is not imposed for specific forms of conduct, including blasphemy or apostasy.<sup>4</sup>

'Blasphemy' is criminalised by articles 220 and 221 of the Syariah Penal Code Order 2013. Non-Muslims found guilty of insulting or defaming the Prophet Muhammad may receive a death sentence, while Muslims thought to bring Islam into contempt may face a maximum three-year prison sentence. However, in 2014, the State Mufti said that Muslims who made blasphemous statements or performed sacrilegious actions and had not repented could face the death penalty as well.<sup>5</sup> Those disassociating themselves from Islam also face a criminal conviction of 'apostasy', an offence punishable by death.<sup>6</sup>

While Brunei's Constitution states that 'all... religions may be practised in peace and harmony,' the Government continues to prohibit religious groups perceived as 'deviant', such as the Ahmadiyya Community, the Baha'i Faith and Jehovah's Witnesses among others.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, non-Muslims feel pressured to convert to Islam, in the workplace or within social groups, and fear social retribution if they do not.<sup>8</sup>

We implore the Brunei Darussalam government to repeal the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy, and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief for all.

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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, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Brunei Darussalam*. (A/HRC/58/12) 23 December, 2024 paras 124.71.  
<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/12>.

<sup>3</sup> Humanists International, *Freedom of Thought Report: Brunei Darussalam*, 24 October 2023,  
<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-south-eastern-asia/brunei-darussalam/>

<sup>4</sup> Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 29 September 2017 36/17, 'The question of the death penalty.' [https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/36/L.6](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/36/L.6)

<sup>5</sup> Humanists International, *Freedom of Thought Report: Brunei Darussalam*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> US Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report: Brunei, 2023*,  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/brunei/>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*