

United Nations Human Rights Council, 59th Session
16 June to 9 July 2025
Item 6: Universal Periodic Review – Iran
Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Abid Mehmood¹

We are disappointed to learn that Iran does not support the recommendation put forward by Germany to 'end the execution of death sentences and abolish the death penalty entirely, especially for [...] religious offences [...].'²

We would like to remind Iran of the Human Rights Committee's *General Comment No 22* which makes clear that Article 18 'protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief'.³ This means that states have a duty to respect, protect, and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief of the non-religious, as well as of religious minorities. Yet the Penal Code punishes the expression of non-religious beliefs. This includes 'offenses that violate religious sensibilities', or 'pouring scorn on religious practices' which includes making light of religious tenets or teachings or publicly insulting a sacred symbol or person, punishable with a fine or a prison sentence.⁴

Like others, we have long called on Iran to repeal its blasphemy laws, and are horrified that, by the end of 2023, they were used to execute protesters in the Women Life Freedom protests that followed the death in custody of Mahsa Amini. Their alleged crimes included so-called 'enmity against God' and 'corruption on earth'.⁵ 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.⁶

We implore the Iranian government to repeal the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy, and protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, of non-religious and religious minorities, in line with the international standards set by the ICCPR, which Iran has ratified.

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

² See UNHRC, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Islamic Republic of Iran*, UN Doc A/HRC/59/12, recommendation 38.104, and UNHRC, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Islamic Republic of Iran, Addendum*, UN Doc A/HRC/59/12/Add.1, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ir-index>

³ Human Rights Committee, *CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion)*, 30 July 1993, UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, <https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4>

⁴ US Department of State, *2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran/>

⁵ US Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2024 Annual Report*, May 2024, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/2024%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

⁶ 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