

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 61st Session
23 February to 31 March 2026**

**Item 3: Interactive Dialogue – Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Laura Newlyn¹**

We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for her inclusive report. We particularly welcome its recognition that tensions can arise when the convictions of the deceased differ from those of their family or community.²

We echo concerns that stigma or hostility can mean that a person's non-religious identity may not have been publicly known during their lifetime, and that in such cases, families may face particular challenges in honouring the wishes of the deceased.³

Further, apostasy is illegal in at least fifteen countries, and punishable by death in eleven of those,⁴ contrary to the right to leave or to change one's religion or belief, as identified in your report. It is therefore not only social stigma, community pressure, or interference from non-state actors that perpetuates this hostility, but the state itself.

We would like to ask the Special Rapporteur: where identifying as non-religious or as belonging to a minority belief community may expose families to social or legal repercussions, what measures can help make sure that funeral rights remain practically accessible? How might States best implement the Special Rapporteur's recommendations around meaningful consultation and the duty to accommodate diverse communities in ways that do not require people to come forward at personal cost?

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

² UN Human Rights Council, *How freedom of religion or belief relates to death and honouring the deceased - Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief A/HRC/61/50*, 7 January 2026 paras 19-21, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/50>.

³ *Ibid*, para 32.

⁴ Humanists International, Freedom of Thought Report Open Data <https://fot.humanists.international/data/> (accessed 23 February 2026).