

United Nations Human Rights Council, 62nd Session (15 June to 7 July 2026)

Item 6: Universal Periodic Review – Mauritania

Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Laura Newlyn¹

We welcome Mauritania's acceptance of recommendations from Estonia, Mexico and the Netherlands to reform the Criminal Code and other legislation in order to uphold the right to freedom of expression in accordance with article 19 of the ICCPR.²

We would therefore like to remind Mauritania of the Human Rights Committee's General Comment 34 on article 19. It states that blasphemy laws are incompatible with the Covenant, and highlights that it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favour of or against the adherents of one religion or belief system, or the religious over the non-religious.³

We would also like to remind Mauritania that all rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and a reservation against article 18 does not justify the criminalisation of expression that is critical of religion. Nor can it be used to prevent the sharing of humanist or atheist beliefs, ideas, and opinions. The forum internum of the right to freedom of religion or belief is absolute, and cannot be subject to state interference. We are therefore disappointed that Mauritania has not accepted Australia's recommendation to decriminalise apostasy.⁴

We are also disappointed that Mauritania has not accepted the many recommendations aimed at forming a de jure moratorium on the death penalty, or abolishing it altogether – in particular, Spain's recommendation to repeal the mandatory nature of the death penalty in article 306 of the Criminal Code for the crimes of blasphemy and apostasy.⁵ Mauritania remains bound by ICCPR Article 6, which limits the death penalty to the 'most serious crimes'. The Committee's General Comment 36 states that under no circumstances can the death penalty be applied as a sanction against conduct which if criminalised at all is itself a violation of the Covenant. This includes apostasy.⁶

We therefore urge Mauritania to repeal its blasphemy and apostasy laws in line with its commitment to reform the Criminal Code in order to uphold article 19.

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: Mauritania*, UN Doc A/HRC/62/6, 15 April 2026; and UNHRC, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Maldives, Addendum*, A/HRC/62/6/Add.1, 15 April 2026, recommendations and 130.84, 130.85, and 130.86.

³ Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No 34*, UN Doc CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September 2011, para 48 <https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/GC/34>

⁴ A/HRC/62/6 and, A/HRC/62/6/Add.1, recommendation 130.94.

⁵ A/HRC/62/6 and, A/HRC/62/6/Add.1, recommendation 130.65..

⁶ Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 36* UN Doc CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019 para 36, <https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/GC/36>.