

## BHA BRIEFING:

### Article 18 and global persecution of the non-religious *For debate in the House of Lords on 16 July 2015*



#### Briefing from the British Humanist Association (BHA):

**Lord Alton of Liverpool** to move that this House takes note of worldwide violations of Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the case for greater priority to be given by the United Kingdom and the international community to upholding freedom of religion and belief. (Balloted debate, 2½ hours)

In 13 countries around the world apostasy is punishable by death, and in six the same is true for blasphemy. The most frequent targets of these laws include the non-religious.

Some of the most alarming recent developments are in **Bangladesh**, a nominally secular country, where laws against communications that 'may hurt religious belief' have been used increasingly since 2013 to persecute humanist bloggers. Islamists produced a 'hit-list' in 2013 of 84 such individuals they wanted arrested and retrospectively punished under a hypothetical new blasphemy law. Instead of repudiating this demand outright, the government quite arbitrarily arrested four bloggers for 'hurting religious belief'. Militant Islamists have since then been working through that list, murdering the bloggers one by one by hacking them to death on the streets with machetes and cleavers. Three have been killed this year alone – Avijit Roy in February, Washiqur Rahman in March and Ananta Bijoy Das in May. Their Government must do more to protect them and to arrest and sentence their attackers, and our Government must put pressure on the Bangladeshi Government to make this happen.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the secularist Raif Badawi, creator of the Free Saudi Liberals website, has been sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes for 'insulting Islam'. In **Indonesia**, the atheist Alexander Aan was attacked by a mob for stating on Facebook he had left Islam and for criticising the religion. He was arrested, charged with insulting religion, and spent two and a half years in jail. In **Egypt**, a mob formed outside the house of Alber Saber, who ran the Egyptian Atheists Facebook page, and demanded his arrest. He was subsequently sentenced to three years in jail, although he fled while on bail and is now in hiding in another country. Last summer the Government announced a campaign to 're-educate' atheists and hence eradicate them from the country. Several more atheists have since been accused or detained for blasphemy after discussing religion on TV or meeting in coffee shops.

The [End Blasphemy Laws campaign](#) was founded last year by the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the European Humanist Federation, the BHA and others, and seeks the end of blasphemy laws all around the globe. It is supported by research in the [IHEU Freedom of Thought Report](#). It has had some success, with Norway and Iceland abolishing their blasphemy laws, and Malta, where the law was used to put 99 individuals in prison in 2012, announcing that it intends to do likewise. Other European countries, such as **Greece**, **Russia** and **Poland**, continue to have anti-blasphemy laws which are in active use, whereas **Ireland**, **Denmark** and **Germany** have laws that have not been used in many years but continue to be a source of justification for countries like Saudi Arabia in their own harsh practises. All of these laws should be repealed.

#### About the BHA

The British Humanist Association is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethically and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. It promotes a secular state and equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief.

The BHA has accredited status at the UN Human Rights Council, and at the most recent session made interventions on [global discrimination against women](#) and on the [attacks on humanist bloggers in Bangladesh](#). The BHA's Chief Executive, Andrew Copson, is a member of the FCO's advisory group on international freedom of religion or belief. The BHA is a member of the International Coalition Against Blasphemy Laws.

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