

Labour party equality statement excludes non-religious people

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Labour's policy making body – the National Policy Forum – has come under fire for adopting an equality statement that appears not to cover non-religious people.

The equality statement, adopted as a commitment to the way the party will implement policies and its manifesto states 'religion' but omits 'or belief'.

Both the Equality Act 2010 and human rights law use the term 'religion or belief' to cover both non-religious and religious people.

Labour Humanists, who campaign for a more secularist and rationalist approach to policy making within the party, say the statement needs "urgent amendment" and have written to representatives at Labour's policy making body asking for it to be changed to state 'religion or belief'.

A spokesperson for Labour Humanists said: "'Religion' clearly should not be used as shorthand or a catch-all for 'religion or belief' – few non-religious people would be happy to have their beliefs described under the banner of religion when they are atheistic, humanist or philosophical but distinctly not religious."

Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, said: "The omission runs the risk of leaving non-religious citizens feeling that they are less worthy of protection from discrimination than the religious. Equality means non-believers and those with other philosophical beliefs have the same rights and protection as those who identify with a religion. Clearly this should be reflected in the Labour Party's statement."

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