

IHEU calls for action on Bangladesh

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Following the [recent Islamist demands](#) to introduce the death penalty for insulting religion in Bangladesh, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) has made a [call to action](#) for all its member organisations.

Its call came in response to the recent demands made the Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam, to hang those who insult Islam. The group also called for Bangladesh's constitution to be amended so as to prevent "the infiltration of alien cultures" and to separate men and women in public (amongst other changes). Its supporters have protested against what they said were blasphemous writings by atheist bloggers - several of whom have now been arrested on grounds that they have hurt the [religious sentiments of the country's Muslim majority](#).

Whilst the Bangladeshi Prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, has [stated](#) that her government has no intention of enacting a law against blasphemy (and the likelihood of it [implementing Hefazat-e-Islam's agenda](#) as very slim), she somewhat ominously, within the context of these recent arrests, observed that under existing laws: "If anybody tried to hurt any sentiments of any religion or any religious leader, there is a law. We can take any action."

IHEU has highlighted the serious threat to freedom of thought, expression and political opinion in Bangladesh. It has called upon all its members to express solidarity with the Bangladeshi bloggers and to institute a "coordinated, global response to defend the right to express religious criticism and secularist principles, and also to defend political activism."

Noting the American Humanist Association's call to its members and supporters to [contact the US Ambassador to Bangladesh and express their concerns](#), IHEU has urged individuals to contact their ambassador, in order to object to the arrests, and the threat to freedom of speech those arrests represent. It points out that if a national ambassador were to receive even a small amount of correspondence on this issue, it might be sufficient to draw their attention to it as an issue to be raised as a priority with the Bangladeshi Government.

There are also online petitions that have been established, and which can be signed [here](#).

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