

IHEU report reveals extent of global discrimination against non-believers

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The International Humanist and Ethical Union has released its second annual [report](#) on the global state of human rights for non-believers, atheists and agnostics. The report found a "trend towards targeting 'atheists'" across the world, and concluded that "the overwhelming majority of countries fail to respect the rights of atheists and freethinkers."

The report draws attention to "hate campaigns against the non-religious" in 13 Muslim-majority countries, and examples of legislation and hate speech designed to curtail the rights of non-believers. These include a law in Saudi Arabia which equates atheism with terrorism and which prohibits "calling for atheist thought in any form, or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion."

The report also singles out Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, who branded secularism, humanism and liberalism as "deviant" and who dismissed human rights as a danger to Islam.

The Egyptian Ministry of Youth is also cited in the report, for their campaign to warn Egyptians about "the dangers of atheism".

Although the IHEU 'Freedom of Thought' study paints a grim picture of human rights across the globe, the authors do make a case for some positive trends. They write that, "if 2014 has seen something of a surge in hate directed at atheists, it is at least a backlash against a steadily globalising conception of non-religious identities."

"The non-religious are also recognising themselves more, stumbling upon new terms and new arguments through international media and the internet, coming together online, talking, in some countries meeting in secret. The non-religious are raising their heads above the parapet. There is a backlash, but it's a backlash that is a response to a surge of new ideas and new connections, and we can hold onto that."

The report gave every country in the world a "Freedom of Thought" status, with rankings ranging from "free and equal" to "grave violations."

Countries ranked as "free and equal" include Sierra Leone, Taiwan, Province of China, Estonia, Kosovo, Belgium, The Netherlands and Fiji.

Nations with "grave violations" against the human rights of the non-religious include Somalia, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, China, North Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The report notes that "19 countries punish their citizens for apostasy, and in 12 of those countries it is punishable by death. Pakistan doesn't have a death sentence for apostasy but it does for blasphemy, and the threshold for 'blasphemy' can very low; so in effect you can be put to death for expressing atheism in 13 countries."

The United Kingdom is rated as having "system discrimination." The IHEU report finds that "religion has little unwanted influence over most people in daily life, and the number identifying as

non-religious in the most recent census has increased dramatically; however some education reforms in the past few years including in 2014 have increased the influence of religion in schools and removed secular options from some courses."

The report cites a number of "systemic issues" in the UK, including "systematic religious privilege" like the control of "some public or social services" by religious groups and the existence of an established church. The research also notes that "religious schools have powers to discriminate in admissions or employment."

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