

International groups highlight global persecution of non-religious and religious minorities

Posted: Thu, 25th Jun 2015

Secular human rights organisations have called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to promote "genuine respect for freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression".

At the 29th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, Roy Brown, representing the Centre for Inquiry, called for action to combat persecution, oppression and discrimination against non-believers.

Mr Brown drew specific attention to murder of bloggers in Bangladesh, the arrest and lashing of Raif Badawi and others in Saudi Arabia and the imprisonment of freethinkers in Egypt.

Mr Brown challenged Saudi Arabia, which has a seat on the Human Rights Council, over its "fear of atheism and freethought".

"Saudi Arabia has equated atheism with terrorism, but it isn't atheist jihadis who are terrorising the world", he said.

Mr Brown told the Council: "atheists and freethinkers do not advocate state atheism but government that is neutral towards religion and belief, favouring none and discriminating against none."

In a separate intervention, Kacem El Ghazzali of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), [accused](#) the Egyptian state of being party to "a war on atheism".

He called on the UNHRC to "condemn the use of hate speech and incitement against any religious or belief minority" and urged Egypt to implement the Rabat Plan of Action – which seeks to prevent incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence whilst protecting free speech.

In another IHEU intervention, Elizabeth O'Casey [called on the UN](#) to do more to protect the rights of LGBT people and challenge laws restricting their free expression.

Meanwhile, a new report into the imprisonment of people for their religion or belief was launched in the House of Lords this week at meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Freedom of Religion and Belief, attended by the National Secular Society.

The report – "*In Prison for their religion or beliefs*" – was published by Human Rights Without Frontiers International (HRWF) and details country by country a list prisoners who have been incarcerated for manifesting their beliefs or falling foul of so-called anti-blasphemy laws.

The report is available [here](#).

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)

- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Free speech](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[Protect freedom of expression](#)

We promote free speech as a positive value.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[Response unit needed to tackle blasphemy flashpoints, report says](#)

Recommendations echo NSS calls for more support for schools facing religious intimidation and threats. [Read More »](#)

[NSS address urges UN to call for government action on human rights](#)

Religious privilege is undermining rights of UK citizens, NSS tells UN committee. [Read More »](#)

[Anti-blasphemy extremism “gaining momentum” in UK, report warns](#)

Counter-extremism report recommends review of religious charities linked to anti-blasphemy activism. [Read More »](#)

[New extremism definition may put free speech at risk, NSS warns](#)

Proposed definition could 'label secularists as extremists'. [Read More »](#)

A state Church is no bulwark against extremism – but secularism is

With its commitment to the separation of religion and state and safeguarding the rights of all individuals, secularism can provide an effective defence against the spread of extremism, says Stephen Evans. [Read More »](#)