

The NSS: Protection of Equality and Human Rights

The NSS and the protection of equality and human rights

Religious individuals, funded by wealthy religious organisations, are waging a continuing legal battle in UK and European courts seeking to create a hierarchy of rights, with religion at the top.

We believe any further accommodation of religious conscience in UK equality law would seriously threaten the equality and human rights of all.

The objective of these religious activists is to ensure certain belief systems are preferenced over others, privileging those people who happen to subscribe to such beliefs. Such actions serve only to divide our society, stressing and institutionalising difference, rather than championing the equality of all, regardless of belief.

The National Secular Society has been seeking to change UK society and policy for the better. Premised on the idea that the law and the administration of justice should be based on equality, respect for human rights, and objective evidence, we have been using UK, European, and International law to protect the equality and human rights of UK citizens and beyond. We seek to ensure that human rights do not lose out to religious demands, and challenge the exemptions religious groups demand, and are often granted. We have been doing this by intervening in UK and EU courts, and at the United Nations.

Recently:

- The NSS [intervened at the European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECtHR) to argue that Britain's equality laws should be upheld and not compromised by religious exemptions. In the intervention we argued that the four cases of Eweida, Chaplin, Ladele and McFarlane, all relating to alleged religious discrimination in the workplace, were correctly dismissed by the UK courts.
- The NSS [co-sponsored a parliamentary Bill](#) in the House of Lords that would stop sharia courts in this country claiming that they have legal jurisdiction over criminal or family law.
- The NSS launched a successful legal challenge to prayers during the official business of local council meetings. On 10 February 2012, The High Court ruled that conducting prayers as part of the formal meeting of a Council was unlawful. The court decided that holding prayers is not within the Council's legal powers.
- The NSS [launched a legal challenge](#) against Woking Borough Council, for its policy of offering free parking to worshippers whilst charging everyone else. We argued that Woking's policy constituted unequal treatment; one that arbitrarily favoured those wishing to attend a service of worship, whilst costing all taxpayers money, regardless of whether they attend religious services or not. Woking subsequently amended their policy.

- The NSS lodged a number of formal complaints with the European Commission. The complaints, which are under investigation relate to employment discrimination, predominantly in schools with a religious character ('faith schools').
- The NSS, as part of the international umbrella organisation, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), has spoken at the UN on issues concerning the [Holy See and child abuse](#) and the role of [culture in discrimination against women](#).

These are just a few examples of our recent work. Our campaign is far from over and not an easy one. As well-funded religious groups continue to support, monetarily and politically, the push for religious privilege, religious exemption, and religious influence within all spheres of public life, the work of the NSS is as urgent as ever.

The NSS campaigns to ensure the upholding and respect for human rights and equality. You can help with this. We need the support of people like you to ensure the success of this sort of work and our overall campaign, in its various forms, to bring about a just, equal and cohesive society.

The NSS receives no funding from government or outside bodies - our campaigning is wholly supported by our members, people like you who share our belief in the urgent need to separate religion from education, politics and public life in general. We are grateful for any support you feel able to give us.

[Donate to the NSS and help to support our vital work](#)

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