

United Nations Human Rights Council, 22nd Session (25th February – 22nd March 2013)
Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Wednesday 6th March 2013
Speaker: IHEU, BHA, and CFI representative Roy Brown
The Right to Apostasy

Mr President,

We welcome the report by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and for his focus on the rights of religious minorities.

Mr President, religious belief is not genetic, it is cultural. No baby is born with religious beliefs. To deny the right to change or leave one's religion is to deny one of the few rights that is absolute in international law, the right to freedom of thought and of conscience. To condemn someone because they finally learned to think for themselves runs counter to the very concept of human rights.

No one can change by force what is in people's hearts, nor should States seek to do so. To punish what a person believes is to demand hypocrisy. No internationally acceptable norms can be based on the beliefs of a single religion. But even on its own terms the religious justification for punishing apostasy is flawed, a denial of the very beliefs that many States claim to be defending.

And as the Special Rapporteur has noted: "...freedom of religion or belief has the status of a human right, prior to and independent from any acts of State approval".

Apostasy is not a crime, Mr President, it is a human right. To deny the right of anyone to change their beliefs is not only a denial of both freedom of thought and of logic, it is purely political, and clearly aimed at imposing social conformity.

Mr President, we urge all States to take immediate steps to decriminalise apostasy in the name of freedom of thought and freedom of belief. Failure to do so is an admission of the weakness of the very beliefs that these States are seeking to defend.

Thank you, Sir.