



**United Nations Human Rights Council: 28<sup>th</sup> Session (2 -27 March 2015)**

**Item 3 General Debate**

**Friday 13 March 2015**

**Speaker: BHA Representative, Boris Van der Ham**

Thank you Mr President.

In 1670, my fellow-Dutchman, Benedict Spinoza asked himself: ‘What altar of refuge can a man find himself when he commits treason against the majesty of reason?’

I recalled Spinoza’s words when reading the excellent report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Unfortunately, the altar of religion is used to seek refuge for some of the world’s most horrifying crimes.

People who want to debate certain ideas, who use their fundamental rights to make up their own minds, are losing their jobs, are being prosecuted, tortured, or even facing the death penalty, because their views are so called ‘insulting’ and blasphemous. Religious minorities are brutally targeted; Humanists and non-believers are often in particular danger.<sup>1</sup>

Some governments- some of whose States are members of this Council – also use these blasphemy laws to uproot their political opponents, and thus expose the vanity that they believe themselves to be god.

Acting this way is not only inconsistent with the principles outlined in Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, these governments also give the worst thinkable example to terrorist groups like Islamic State, Boko Haram, and individual jihadists.

Accordingly, the European Humanist Federation and International Humanist and Ethical Union have together launched a campaign to end all those blasphemy laws still in existence in 55 states. We call upon their governments to make an honest and clear statement, by abolishing these anti-blasphemy laws. Removing religion as an altar of refuge for hatred, prosecution and violence is of utmost importance.

Those who downplay universal and fundamental rights with the argument that these should be seen in cultural perspective are wrong. Individual freedom and the freedom of speech are serving us all, and are indispensable for a peaceful, happy, wealthy, and stable international society.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> See Freedom of Thought Report 2015, <http://freethoughtreport.com/>