



**United Nations Human Rights Council, 32<sup>nd</sup> Session (13 June – 1 July 2016)**  
**Item 4 General Debate; Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**  
**22 June 2016**  
**Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O'Sullivan**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Secular activists and religious minorities in Bangladesh are being subjected to grave human rights violations, both state sanctioned, and as the result of fundamentalist vigilantism.

This year alone, a humanist activist and student,<sup>1</sup> a Hindu priest,<sup>2</sup> a Sufi leader,<sup>3</sup> two LGBT activists,<sup>4</sup> and a Christian convert,<sup>5</sup> were all murdered, and a Professor of English<sup>6</sup> and a Buddhist monk<sup>7</sup> were killed in ways which bore all the hallmarks of these recent killings.

In 2015, four humanist activists were hacked to death,<sup>8</sup> as well as a publisher of secular authors.<sup>9</sup> In the same year, a Shia mosque was attacked by gunmen, killing one and injuring three,<sup>10</sup> and in a bomb attack targeting the Muslim minority, one was killed while an estimated 80 were wounded.<sup>11</sup>

This followed a protest against freethinkers and religious minorities, where 100,000 protestors called for the prosecution and death of bloggers who insult Islam,<sup>12</sup> providing a list of 84 humanist activists. In response, the government criminalised 'defamation of religion', creating a de facto 'blasphemy' law.<sup>13</sup> Section 295A of the penal code states that anyone with 'deliberate' or 'malicious' intentions of 'outraging...religious feelings' will be liable to imprisonment, which in practice has been used to prosecute and imprison humanists and secularists.<sup>14</sup> As one humanist activist put it, 'minorities of all sorts in Bangladesh don't just have to fear Islamic militants – we must also fear our own government, which shows no regard for its secular beginnings and choose instead to appease the fundamentalists'.<sup>15</sup>

It is the duty of the State to protect the rights of all of its citizens, including religious and belief minorities. We therefore urge the government of Bangladesh to reform its legal code in order to conform with its human rights obligations, and take effective steps to combat escalating violent fundamentalist vigilantism.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/2016/04/07/sixth-humanist-activist-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/21/isis-claim-responsibility-killing-hindu-priest-bangladesh>

<sup>3</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/07/asia/bangladesh-hacking/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/2016/04/25/more-individuals-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh-as-islamists-broaden-their-hit-list/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Christian-convert-in-Bangladesh-killed-during-morning-walk>

<sup>6</sup> <http://iheu.org/academic-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/14/elderly-buddhist-monk-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh-temple/>

<sup>8</sup> These being Niloy Neel, Washiqur Rahman, Ananta Bijoy Das, and Avijit Roy. <https://humanism.org.uk/2015/08/07/fourth-bangladeshi-humanist-blogger-niloy-neel-hacked-to-death-by-islamist-extremists/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/2015/11/01/one-killed-and-three-injured-as-publishing-houses-targeted-in-coordinated-attacks-on-bangladeshi-humanist-bloggers-network/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34930668>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/24/bomb-attack-on-bangladesh-shia-community>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rt.com/news/bangladesh-protest-muslim-blogger-431/>

<sup>13</sup> See the p 293 of the International Humanist and Ethical Union Freedom of Thought Report 2015, available for download here

<http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

<sup>14</sup> Several humanist bloggers were arrested following the protests, see: <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/04/bangladesh-rejects-call-for-blasphemy-law-but-atheist-bloggers-still-detained/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/11/opinions/bangladeshi-blogger-ahmed/>