



United Nations Human Rights Council, 32nd Session (13 June – 1 July 2016)

Item 3 General Debate

20 June 2016

Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O'Sullivan

Thank you Mr. President.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Arab Humanists and the British Humanist Association.

We welcome the report from the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, in particular his insistence that 'States cannot claim to uphold assembly and association rights when they criminalize freedom of religious (or irreligious) expression and thought.'¹

The human rights situation in Egypt is gravely concerning; the anti-atheist hate campaign of 2014 has continued, with prison sentences being handed down to two individuals in early 2015 for allegedly 'spreading immoral values and abnormal thoughts', 'defending homosexuality' and 'insulting the divine'.² Numerous human rights defenders have been subjected to harassment from Egyptian authorities and legal penalties, including the freezing of assets and travel bans.³ This infringes a myriad of rights which extend to all, including individuals who form 'associations with goals that may be perceived as "political"'.⁴

In Saudi Arabia, 'public non-Muslim places of worship are not allowed', and blasphemy and apostasy are criminalized, with the latter being punishable by death.⁵ It is a criminal act of terrorism for an individual *or* association to call for atheist thought in any form, borne from the 'intractable connection between state identity, the ruling royal family and the religious establishment'.⁶ This intolerance has resulted in several prolific imprisonments, including that of Raif Badawi and his lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair, who began a hunger strike earlier this month to protest the prison authorities' refusal to provide him with adequate medical care.⁷

The targeting of human rights defenders and severely restricting freedom of religion or belief has direct implications for the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and a plethora of other human rights. We call on those States whose legal codes mandate and condone the persecution of political dissenters, human rights defenders, and religious and belief minorities to repeal these oppressive laws, and ensure that their fundamental human rights are promoted and respected.

¹ A/HRC/32/36, p14

² See the International Humanist and Ethical Union's Freedom of Thought Report 2015, available for download here: <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

³ See: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/egypt#b6f24c>, <http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/egypt/2016/05/d23785/>, and the International Humanist and Ethical Union's (IHEU) Freedom of Thought Report 2015, available for download here: <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

⁴ A/HRC/32/36, p13

⁵ See the IHEU Freedom of Thought Report 2015, pp. 367-72

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Hence infringing his right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental healthcare (art 12 of the ICESR); <http://www.amnestyusa.org/get-involved/take-action-now/saudi-arabia-waleed-abu-al-khair-starts-hunger-strike-ua-9814>

Thank you.

British Humanist Association

for the one life we have



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