

United Nations Human Rights Council, 46th Session (22 February - 23 March 2021)

Item 3 – ID with SR on Iran.

Speaker: Humanists UK representative: Karen Wright¹

We welcome the Special Rapporteur's recommendations that Iran must 'protect the rights of all persons belonging to ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, eliminate all forms of discrimination against them and release all those imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief'.²

By imposing the death penalty for the crimes of blasphemy and apostasy, Iran is arguably in violation of Article 23 of its own constitution, which states that 'no one must be molested or taken to task for simply holding a religious belief'.³ It is also in breach of resolution 36/17 of this Council⁴ and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which it is a party.⁵ It remains one of only 13 countries still to retain such draconian punishments for these crimes.

Iran continues to use these laws to persecute minority belief groups, as demonstrated by the arrest and imprisonment of Liza Tebyanian in 2020 on the charges of teaching the Baha'i faith. After an earlier acquittal, the Supreme Court reinstated her conviction without notifying her of the proceedings.⁶ Similarly, Professor Ahmadreza Djalali was arrested in 2016 for 'collaborating with scientists from hostile nations' and 'enmity against God'⁷ after he travelled to Iran to take part in a series of workshops about disaster medicine. He has been held for over three years and was placed on death row in November 2020, after repeatedly being denied access to his lawyer.⁸

¹ Humanists UK is the trading name of the British Humanist Association.

² UN Human Rights Council, forty-sixth session. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. January 2021.

<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/50>

³ Humanists International. 'Freedom of Thought Report 2019: Iran.'

<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/iran/>

⁴ UN Human Rights Council, thirty-sixth session. 'The question of the death penalty' September 2017. https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_36_L_6.docx

⁵ Universal Declaration on Human Rights

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

⁶ UN Human Rights Council, forty-sixth session. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. January 2021.

<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/50>

⁷ Humanists International. 'Freedom of Thought Report 2019: Iran.'

<https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-southern-asia/iran/>

⁸ Humanists International. 'Iran to execute Ahmadreza Djalali imminently.'

<https://humanists.international/2020/11/iran-to-execute-ahmadreza-djalali-imminently/>

We ask the Special Rapporteur what progress he has made within this mandate towards establishing compliance with the right to freedom of religion or belief and we call upon Iran to immediately release Liza Tebyanian and Professor Ahmadreza Djalali.

Thank you.