

(UNGA resolution *Moratorium on the use of the death penalty*)
Protecting Life
Nobody should be killed for their choice of religion or belief

As individuals and organizations who represent diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, we stand united in our goal of promoting freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and expression for everyone.

We firmly oppose laws that restrict an individual's right to choose a faith, practice a faith, change their religion, not have a religion, tell others about their beliefs and practices, or openly debate and discuss aspects of faith or belief. Restricting the freedom to choose one's religion, to change it or to question religion or belief doctrines is an assault on the very core of human nature.

Today at least 70 countries criminalise blasphemy and at least 21 countries criminalize apostasy, including 12 countries which maintain the death penalty for apostasy or blasphemy in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Brunei Darussalam, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Maldives, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, several states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Federal Republic of Somalia, United Arab Emirates, and the Republic of Yemen.¹

Even where the death penalty is not applied it has a chilling effect on the legitimate exercise of fundamental human rights as noted by the UN Secretary General in his report on the death penalty.² It is used to justify the incommunicado detention, physical and psychological torture, denial of legal representation and medical care, and prolonged detention that often coincide with death sentences on the grounds of religion or belief.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has recommended a "triage-based approach" in the work to repeal apostasy and blasphemy laws; prioritizing the

¹ UN General Assembly, *Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*, Ahmed Shaheed *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance*, 10 December 2020, A/75/385, para. 16.

² Human Rights Council, *Capital punishment and the implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty*, 28 August 2019, A/HRC/42/28, para. 13; UN General Assembly, *Moratorium on the use of the death penalty - Report of the Secretary General*, 13 August 2020, A/75/309, para. 66.

repeal of those laws that “put lives at risk,” such as countries which mandate the death penalty or life sentences.³

We therefore call on civil society to:

- **Support** the embedding of language into the biennial UN General Assembly resolution on the *Moratorium on the use of the death penalty*, demanding the removal of the punishment of the death penalty, both in practice and in law, for apostasy or blasphemy.
- **Take note** of the UN Human Rights Council statement of 9 March 2021, signed by over 50 UN member states which emphasises that there are no circumstances in which the death penalty should ever be imposed or carried out as a sanction against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- **To speak** with one voice in the UN and other multilateral fora and condemn unequivocally the imposition of the death penalty for the exercise of fundamental freedoms including freedom of religion or belief.

We call on States to:

- **Embed** language into the biennial UN General Assembly resolution on the *Moratorium on the use of the death penalty*, demanding the removal of the punishment of the death penalty, both in practice and in law, for apostasy or blasphemy.
- **Take note** of the UN Human Rights Council statement of 9 March 2021, signed by over 50 UN member states which emphasises that there are no circumstances in which the death penalty should ever be imposed or carried out as a sanction against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- **Release** individuals currently on death row or otherwise imprisoned for these offences.

³ UN Human Rights Council, *Freedom of religion or belief*; ** **Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**, 5 March 2019, A/HRC/40/58, para. 59.

- **Speak** with one voice in the UN and other multilateral fora and condemn unequivocally the imposition of the death penalty for the exercise of fundamental freedoms including freedom of religion or belief.

Organization Signatories:

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Alliance of Former Muslims (Ireland)

Asian Children's Education Fellowship

Baptist World Alliance

CaoDai Today

Center for Pluralism

Christian Freedom International

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Coptic Solidarity

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Eleos Justice

European Office Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Human Rights

Ex-Muslims of North America

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Foundation for Religious Freedom

Fundacion para la Mejora de la Vida, la Cultura y la Sociedad

Genocide Watch

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust

International Human Rights Committee

International Institute for Religious Freedom

International Religious Liberty Association

Jubilee Campaign Netherlands

Jubilee Campaign USA

LEAH Foundation

Lumières Sans Frontières

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