

# The Worldwide Abolition of Laws Against Blasphemy

*Proposed by the Board of Humanists International*

Humanists International,

*Guided* by the principles of international human rights law and the Amsterdam Declaration,

*Recalling* the Oxford Declaration on Freedom of Thought and Expression, ratified at the 2014 World Humanist Congress,

*Recognizing* that laws against blasphemy shield religious beliefs and practices, symbols, institutions and authorities, from legitimate and necessary criticism,

*Noting* that apostasy is considered a form of blasphemy in many parts of the world,

*Noting* that, while laws against blasphemy are not confined to a particular religion or region, wherever they exist, they serve to legitimize religious persecution that disproportionately targets minorities, including humanists, non-believers and political dissidents,

*Reaffirming* that the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and to freedom of opinion and expression, are human rights that are guaranteed to all, in accordance with articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that these rights are essential to intellectual and cultural development,

*Reiterating* that there is no justification under international human rights law for the continued existence and implementation of laws against blasphemy, as there is no fundamental right not to be offended in one's religious feelings, and religions per se do not hold rights,

*Reiterating* further that the right to freedom of religion or belief is not about respecting religion, but about respecting an individual's (absolute) freedom to hold particular beliefs and (qualified) freedom to outwardly manifest the religion or belief of their choice,

*Stressing* that laws against blasphemy are discriminatory by nature, in that they afford different levels of protection to some religions over others and that, in many instances, the genuine expression of humanist or non-religious views, in itself, is capable of being interpreted as blasphemy,

*Emphasizing* that laws against blasphemy are an impediment to progress, because the imprecise, inherently political and subjective nature in which blasphemy laws are applied encourages self-censorship and represses the human impulse towards free and rational debate, artistic creativity, academic freedom, scholarship and scientific discovery,

*Emphasizing* further that laws against blasphemy impede the essential work of human rights defenders by deterring the criticism of harmful practices that are associated with religion, such as slavery or forced marriage, and the advocacy of secularism and humanist values,

*Remembering* that, throughout history and up to the present day, countless humanist and secular thinkers, writers, and activists have been killed, attacked, harassed and silenced by the extrajudicial enforcement of laws against blasphemy culminating in acts of violence and mob vigilantism,

*In light of this, underlining* that the global humanist movement has a responsibility towards those within our community who are at risk of persecution as a result of legislation criminalizing blasphemy,

*Recognizing* that hate speech and hate crime are a serious problem in practically all societies, leading to discrimination and the stigmatization of communities and individuals based on their ethnicity, religion or belief, amongst other characteristics,

*Recognizing*, nonetheless, that laws against blasphemy are an inappropriate mechanism to combat hate speech and intolerance, and that there is a need to firmly distinguish between hate speech – which targets living human beings – and blasphemy – which targets symbols, concepts and ideas,

*Acknowledging* that, even in places where they are not actively enforced, laws against blasphemy that remain on the statute books are deeply problematic, as they may lend legitimacy to arguments in favour of sustaining the use of blasphemy laws in other countries,

Calls for governments, humanists organizations and civil society to support:

1. The worldwide repeal of laws against blasphemy, in those jurisdictions where laws against blasphemy are actively enforced, in those where they are infrequently or never enforced but remain on statute, and in those where there is a moratorium against their use;
2. An end to impunity for acts of mob violence perpetrated against those that 'blaspheme' by questioning or criticizing religious beliefs and practices, symbols, institutions and authorities;
3. In place of laws against blasphemy, in accordance with Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Rabat Plan of Action, the implementation of effective anti-hate crime laws that prevent incitement to hate, including on the basis of an individual's religion or belief, and comprehensive policies that tackle the causes of inequality and discrimination in all its forms
4. The creation of literacy programmes on freedom of religion or belief and on human

rights, so as to prevent the right to freedom of religion or belief from being intentionally misconstrued or instrumentalized.

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