No Penalty for Apostasy

A United Nations Human Rights Council parallel event

Speakers

- Ann Buwalda, Introduction (Executive Director, Jubilee Campaign)
- Ambassador Jos Douma, Moderator (Special Envoy for Religion and Belief of the Netherlands)
- Hon. Ahmed Shaheed, Keynote Speaker (United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief)
- Hon. Gayle Manchin (Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom)
- Mariam Ibraheem (Sudanese religious freedom activist)
- Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkhaitir (Mauritanian blogger & journalist)
- Tehmina Arora (Senior Legal Counsel, Alliance Defending Freedom International, New Delhi)
- Ladan (Iranian convert to Christianity)

Objectives

This event was convened to highlight that several countries across the world continue to adopt and strictly enforce laws that criminalize apostasy (leaving the state religion and/or religious conversion) and restrict the rights of individuals to freely adopt the religion of one’s choice.

We also wish to highlight best practices to encourage states to take steps to uphold their obligations in Article 18 of the ICCPR as reaffirmed in Resolution 16/18 and 66/167, which includes the freedom to “have or to adopt a religion or belief of one’s choice.”

Key Messages

- Freedom of conscience is protected absolutely and includes the right of every individual to change his or her religion or belief, or to abstain from any religion or belief.
- All states, regardless of traditions, must uphold their obligations under international law. Religious freedom includes the right to express a wide range of thoughts and beliefs, including renouncing or changing one’s religion.
- There is a need to couple the repeal of apostasy laws with legal reform of family laws and the abolition of blasphemy laws; among others, these laws prevent individuals from manifesting their beliefs peacefully.

Recommendations

- Countries must repeal laws that criminalize apostasy, as they are totally inconsistent with international human rights standards.
- Membership to the United Nations Human Rights Council, and membership to the Human Rights Council Consultative Group, should not be granted to countries who have imposed the death penalty for apostasy or enforce legislations that restrict freedom of religion or belief.
- Develop country-specific strategies which look at multiple entry points and multiple levels of work to target countries who penalize apostasy:
  - (1) Engage with the Universal Periodic Review
  - (2) Exert pressure on these countries to improve their human rights and religious freedom record via bilateral or multilateral actions (i.e., in the European Union, in the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance)
  - (3) Review Magnitsky Acts being implemented in numerous countries; use these acts to sanction judges, legislators, and government officials that use the apostasy laws to criminalize religious conversion
- Educate relevant actors on how the allowance of people to freely manifest their religious and non-religious beliefs coincides with a greater respect for human rights, and other forms of positive developments in the economic, social, and political sectors.
- Place pressure on countries applying new manifestations of restrictions to ensure there will be no anti-conversion or apostasy legislations.