

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 40th Session (25 February-22 March 2019)
Universal Periodic Review: Saudi Arabia
Speaker Humanists UK representative, Rachel Taggart-Ryan**

We welcome the recommendations from several member states that Saudi Arabia should amend legislation to guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, and belief, and to accede to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In 2018, Humanists International's¹ *Freedom of Thought Report*, which surveys discrimination and persecution against the non-religious worldwide, ranked Saudi Arabia as the most repressive country in the world, receiving a rating of 'grave violation' in all categories measured.²

There is no freedom of religion or belief in Saudi Arabia. The Government prohibits the public practice of any religion or belief other than Islam. Blasphemy and apostasy remain crimes, with the latter carrying the death penalty.³ In 2014, the Government brought into law new anti-terrorism legislation, which defines atheism as terrorism.⁴

Improvements in freedom of religion or belief have been minimal, with individuals who have expressed humanist beliefs or defended human rights facing imprisonment, lashes, and capital punishment.

We call upon the Saudi Government to overturn the death sentences of Ahmad Al Shamri,⁵ and the poet Ashraf Fayadh,⁶ both convicted of apostasy, and to release the blogger Raif Badawi, who has been imprisoned since 2013.

Thank you.

¹ Humanists International recently rebranded from its former name the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

² Humanists International's *Freedom of Thought Report 2018* is available to download here: <https://fot.humanists.international/>

³ End Blasphemy Laws Campaign. *Saudi Arabia* <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/saudi-arabia/>

⁴ Humanists International, *Freedom of Thought Report 2018. Saudi Arabia.* <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/saudi-arabia/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.