



## **ORAL STATEMENT**

International Humanist and Ethical Union

**UN Human Rights Council, 37<sup>th</sup> Session (27<sup>th</sup> February – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018)**

**General Debate on the Vienna Declaration**

**Elizabeth O’Casey**

Twenty-five years ago, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action articulated that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

International law is clear that the universality of rights cannot be undermined by limitations based on reference to culture or religion. And yet today anti-rights actors are promoting anti-universalist initiatives at the national, regional and international levels to undermine equality for all.

Earlier this year in Puerto Rico, the Senate approved a so-called “Law for the Protection of Religious Freedom” which allows individuals and religious groups to discriminate against LGBTI people.<sup>1</sup>

At least eight US states have enacted similar laws that allow people to infringe on the rights of LGBTI individuals and their families on the claim of upholding their own religious beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

In this Council states have cited “cultural particularities” and “religious specificities” as a pretence for why human rights are not universal in that they do not extend to equality and the right to non-discrimination for LGBTI people.<sup>3</sup>

Mr President, we cannot allow those instrumentalizing religion and culture in this way to continue to claim that an insistence on equal treatment for LGBTI people amounts to some sort of state persecution against these instrumentalists.

The real victims are not those who seek to dress up their anti-gay prejudices as religious conscience, but those LGBTI people living in the 76 countries in which they are branded criminals under anti-gay legislation<sup>4</sup>. Simply put, a selective interpretation of certain religious texts does not give anyone the right to deny LGBTI people legal equality or undermine the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights determined in Vienna 25 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://iheu.org/religious-can-discriminate-lgbt-people-says-puerto-rico-senate/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/02/19/all-we-want-equality/religious-exemptions-and-discrimination-against-lgbt-people>

<sup>3</sup> <http://iheu.org/cultural-practices-and-religious-specificities-and-the-shame-of-some-states-at-the-human-rights-council/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://76crimes.com/76-countries-where-homosexuality-is-illegal/>