



Humanism in times of crisis.



Humanists
INTERNATIONAL

Foreword

The dominating theme of 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic. It affected every aspect of our lives, and touched us all.

I am proud of the way that Humanists International has been able to assist our Members and Associates, as well as the individual activists within our global community at such a time. It's thanks to the broad shoulders of our international movement that we are able to distribute tens of thousands in development grants every year. In addition to this, we moved quickly last year to approve a new program to provide small grants directly to individual humanists in developing countries with the minimal possible bureaucracy. We distributed 23 of these grants in 2020.

Last year, in this annual report, I passed on the good news that our friend and colleague Gualai Ismail had made her way safely to asylum in the United States. Sadly, this year I must report that yet another of the global leaders of the humanist movement is being persecuted because of his beliefs.

On 28 April 2020, Mubarak Bala, the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was detained in his home, and has been held continuously, without charge, since then. Humanists in Nigeria, along with our staff team and supported by the entire global humanist family, continue to campaign for his release. You can read more about his situation, and the efforts to secure his release, later in this annual report.

The pandemic meant that we had to cancel the World Humanist Congress, which was due to have taken place in Miami, USA, in August 2020. Despite the challenges, over 100 delegates from around the world were able to join an interactive online General Assembly in October to ensure that our important business

was managed. Such a format is not ideal for those of us who thrive on human contact and communication – but better days lie ahead!

As we discussed at that General Assembly, the Board has been undertaking a thorough review of the governance structures of the organization. You can read more about this in the report below.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your dedication, hard work, and contributions to domestic and international efforts to combat the pandemic. I know just how hard many of you have been hit by the pandemic, and it is inspiring to see how humanist communities around the world have rallied together to help.

Thank you.



Andrew Copson
President



ANNUAL REPORT

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2020

Introduction

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to take forward our plan for expanding the support provided to Humanists at Risk.



In April 2020, Emma Wadsworth-Jones joined the staff team as our new full-time Humanists at Risk coordinator. Emma brings a wealth of experience having more than seven years' experience in casework and campaigning across Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East at PEN International. Since joining the team Emma has developed a range of new policies to focus and guide the work we do, and also developed a framework for distributing emergency grants to humanists at risk.

We also welcomed Lillie Ashworth to the team as our new Advocacy Officer, working alongside Dr. Elizabeth O'Casey, our Director of Advocacy. Before joining the team Lillie was practising as a solicitor advising in international judicial proceedings. Lillie will focus on the UN Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the OSCE, and especially finding new ways to engage our Members and Associates in the work that we do.

The whole team of staff and volunteers has worked harder than ever this year. Despite the significant challenges of the pandemic, we've managed to deliver most of our operational objectives, and keep the management of the organization on course.

A significant strategic objective of Humanists International is to successfully apply for large institutional funding. In 2020 we had planned to recruit a Grants and Development Officer to be dedicated to this job. However, given the uncertainty in the global economy, we have postponed that plan. In 2020 we have been fortunate to secure almost £10,000 in funding from the United Kingdom Foreign Office to produce the 2020 Humanists at Risk report.

Thank you for your support, and a special thank you to my staff colleagues and volunteers who work harder than you can imagine.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Gary McLelland'.

Gary McLelland
Chief Executive



The Objectives of Humanists International

Since 1952, Humanists International has been the global representative body of the humanist movement, uniting a diversity of non-religious organizations and individuals.

We want everyone to live a life of dignity in a world where universal human rights are respected and protected, and where states uphold secularism.

We work to build, support and represent the global humanist movement, defending human rights, particularly those of non-religious people, and promoting humanist values worldwide.



Our People

Our Board



President:
Andrew Copson
United Kingdom



Vice-president:
Anne-France
Ketelaer Belgium



Treasurer:
Boris Van Der Ham
Netherlands

From 16 October 2020



Board Member:
Anya Overman
United States of
America

Until 16 October 2020



Board Member:
Becky Hale
United States of
America



Board Member:
David Pineda
Guatemala

From 16 October 2020



Board Member:
Debbie Goddard
United States of
America

Until 16 October 2020



Board Member:
Gulalai Ismail
Pakistan



Board Member:
Kristin Mile
Norway

From 16 October 2020



Board Member:
Leo Igwe
Nigeria



Board Member:
Uttam Niraula
Nepal



Board Member:
Roslyn Mould
Ghana

Our staff, consultants and volunteers



Chief Executive:
Gary McLelland



Director of Advocacy:
Elizabeth O'Casey



Humanists at Risk Coordinator:
Emma Wadsworth-Jones



Membership Engagement Manager:
Giovanni Gaetani



Finance and Administration Manager:
Jean Zong



MENA Advocacy & Casework Consultant:
Kacem El Ghazzali



Social Media Consultant:
Kristine Chan



Advocacy Officer:
Lillie Ashworth



Intern:
Mahalet Tadesse



2020 Freedom of Thought Report Consultant:
Tommaso Virgili

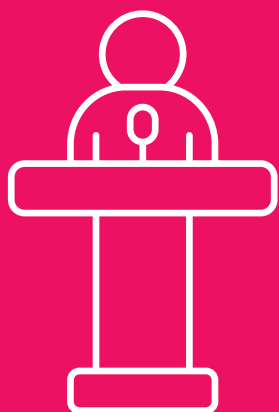


Volunteer representative:
John Wagner



Volunteer representative:
Margaretha Jones

Key figures



111 delegates

at GA (compared to 75 in the previous year)



45

was the average age of GA delegates compared to 42 in 2019



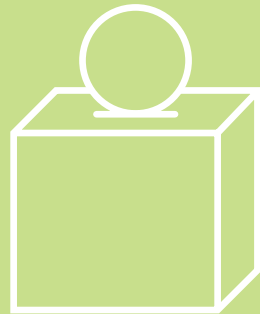
72 Humanists at Risk

supported including 21 emergency grants



Income is up 7.3%

compared to last year



**£87,849
given out**

in growth and
development grants



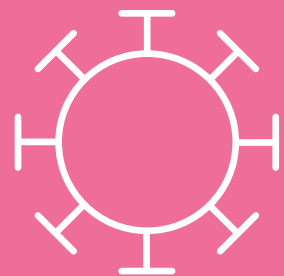
**Over 400
people**

took part in 19 Café
Humaniste events



We made 14

statements at the UN, 2
at the OSCE and 2 at the
African Commission



**24 COVID-19
Small Relief**

grants distributed
urgently to our network

Update on Mubarak Bala



On 28 April 2020, Mubarak Bala, President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was arrested at his home in Kaduna state.

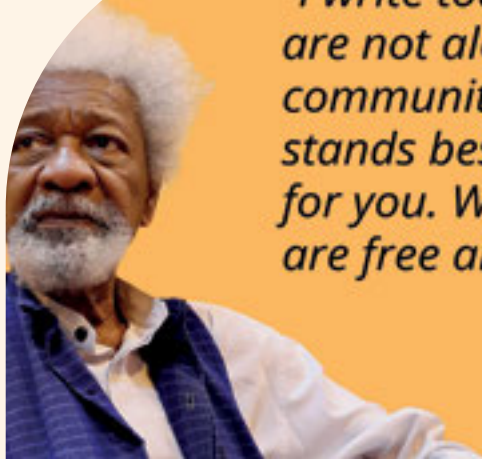
Accused of having insulted the Prophet Muhammad in a Facebook post, he has been held without formal charge ever since, in stark contravention of his rights enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution and international instruments to which Nigeria is a State Party. Humanists International – together with the wider membership – has been working closely with colleagues in Nigeria to coordinate the campaign to ensure his safety and release. Humanists International has secured a legal team, held urgent talks with the United Nations, European Union and US State Dept. officials, in coordination with our Members and Supporters, and garnered vital international attention on his case. Marking 100 days since his arrest, world renowned Nigerian poet and playwright, Wole Soyinka, sent a message of solidarity to Bala:

"Despite the dangers, you have stood firm in your convictions and true to your values. You have lived. You have stood against the tide of religious imperialism. You have fought for all Humanity, to ensure a better, fairer, world for all. You have not sought to appease those that treasure scrolls. You have not bowed to pressure to revere their unseen deities.

[...]

I imagine you pacing your cell, just as I have done. Feeling with each passing day, the added strain. But I know too, that with each passing day you will reach further into your reserves – reserves that you have always thought finite – and discover strength of which you had never dreamed.

"I write today to tell you that you are not alone, there is a whole community across the globe that stands beside you and will fight for you. We will not rest until you are free and safe."



Wole Soyinka

Letter to Mubarak Bala
on his 100th day in detention



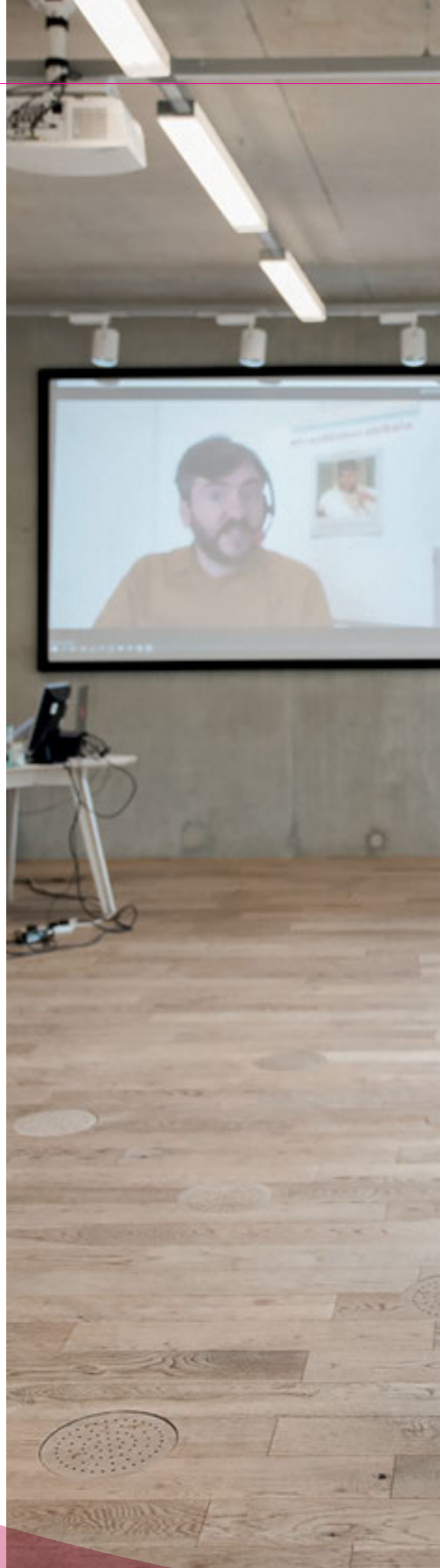
Report on the General Assembly

More than 100 representatives of humanist organizations around the world participated in Humanists International's first ever online General Assembly on Friday 16 October 2020.

The online meeting came after the cancellation of the 2020 World Humanist Congress, which was due to have taken place in Miami in August.

At the General Assembly **Anne-France Ketelaer** was re-elected as the Vice-President of Humanists International, and **Anya Overmann** was elected as the President of Young Humanists International. They will be joined on the Board by **Dr Leo Igwe** and **Debbie Goddard** who join the Board for the first time as general members.

Marieke Prien, the outgoing President of Young Humanists International received a commendation for her work leading the international humanist youth section since her election in 2016. In particular the President noted her work to lead "the process of integrating Young Humanists International as a part of Humanists International, radically reducing the bureaucracy, and finding and engaging new volunteers all over the world" and also noted that she would leave a lasting legacy in the organization, saying: "It will be a lasting tribute to Marieke's diligence and hard work, that the President of Young Humanists International is to be made into a permanent Board position. Marieke has convinced us that the need for a dedicated youth perspective is invaluable for the organization as we move forward."



The following three people were awarded the **2020 Distinguished Service to Humanism Award**:

- **Dr. Sudesh Ghoderao** for his hard work and dedication as both the National General Secretary of the Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations, and the Secretary of the Maharashtra Committee for Eradication of Blind Faith. Last year Sudesh helped MANS celebrate its 30 year anniversary by organising a conference on the theme of “Rationalism for Humanity” with hundreds of national and international delegates. The General Assembly noted that “On top of his leadership duties in the Indian humanist movement, Sudesh is also an Associate Professor of Chemistry with an impressive career in teaching and research, and has also been a delegate to many Humanists International events in the past.”
- **Bert Gasenbeek** the outgoing director of the Humanist History Centre, which for many years contained the archives of Humanists International. Bert was recognised for his work to record, study, and preserve the rich humanist tradition - in both its corporate and its social manifestations. Remarking on Bert’s achievements, the President Andrew Copson commented: “I would like to thank him for his many years of dedicated service to humanism. He has surely earned his own place in the history books of our global movement!”
- **Becky Hale**, a retiring member of the Board, was noted for her particular contribution to the work of the organization since 2017. Becky is a committed humanist, and a former president of the American Humanist Association. Commenting on Becky’s hard work and determination, Andrew Copson said “Becky has also earned her reputation as a hard worker. Being part of an international organization brings its challenges, the 5am zoom calls, the long layovers, and trying to maintain your focus during an 8 hour board meeting with jetlag! Becky has well and truly earned her stripes, and along with it the respect and admiration of her colleagues. “



The online General Assembly was well reviewed by participants, and seemed to go off without any significant technical difficulties.

Andrew Copson, President of Humanists International, said in his opening address:

"It has been heartening to see how the global humanist community has responded to these unprecedented challenges. The response has been awe inspiring, from the Uganda Humanist Association raising public awareness of the worrying rise in domestic violence during the lockdown, to the Humanist Society of Peru's campaign to promote proper scientific information in the face of harmful falsehoods, to the Humanist Society of Singapore which quickly moved to develop a range of 'Humanism at home' resources for its members. These responses should give us heart, in these difficult times."

Commenting after his election to the Board, **Dr Leo Igwe** commented:

"Humanists International exists to promote humanism worldwide and has continued to further this goal since it was founded in 1952. Becoming a board member is an opportunity to serve and contribute to this mission. In the coming years, I look forward to working with other board members to ensure that the humanist umbrella extends to include humanists in some forgotten corners of the world, to protect humanists at risk and highlight those human rights abuses that are too often committed or too often ignored in the name of religion and superstition. I will work to ensure that Humanists International continues to grow in strength, numbers and influence".



Commenting on her election to as **President of Young Humanists International, Anya Overmann** said:

"Thanks to all the members who supported my election. I am honoured to take on the legacy of former Young Humanists International President Marieke Prien and look forward to bringing a strong voice representing youth interests to the Board!"

In her closing remarks to the General Assembly, newly re-elected **Vice-President Anne-France Ketelaer** said:

"I want to express my sincere gratitude for renewing my mandate to serve as your Vice-President. It's an honour and a privilege to work alongside such a great team of dedicated people."

"Challenging times lay ahead of us. But we know that humanist values, and human solidarity, are the bedrock of our vision for a renewed world. We will build back, and we will build back better."

Debbie Goddard was elected as Board Member of Humanists International. She said on her election:

"It is truly an honour to have the opportunity to serve on the Board of Humanists International. In a time when humanity faces new existential threats – including climate change, a global pandemic, growing authoritarianism, and profound attacks on free expression – the work of Humanists International has never been more important."

"As an organizer, I believe that people have more power to effect change, whether locally or on a global scale, when they work with others. It has been encouraging to see the growing number of humanists worldwide who are engaging in courageous activism, fostering supportive communities, and educating the public about humanism. It's also exciting to see the successes of recent campaigns and programs by Humanists International that translate humanist values into effective actions."

"I appreciate the opportunity to further turn some of my own values into action by serving on the Board. I look forward to working with the board, staff, and members to continue to strengthen the humanist community, promote humanist values, and contribute to a better world together."



Advocacy

Some of the many negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic extended to advocacy activities too.



In terms of international relations more broadly, we saw a decline in international cooperation and the sabotaging of multilateralist efforts, an increasing scepticism of and derision for international human rights law and systems, and a rejection of fact-based reasoning and scientific evidence.

On a more day-to-day work level, it meant that the usual international fora in which we do much of our advocacy work were no longer open in the same way. First of all, many events were cancelled, because no one was used to doing everything online – the whole session of the UN's annual Commission on the Status of Women was cancelled, for example. Indeed, it was with regret that we decided to postpone our planned advocacy training session for Africa-based members on the sidelines of the African Commission. And whilst gradually many of the previous conferences, meetings, and events we had been engaging with pre-pandemic went online, the absence of meaningful interaction, dialogue and exchange at these events has been striking.

It was not possible for the most part to lobby successfully on UN resolutions of concern; drafting meetings were either entirely closed from civil society or subject to invitation from a relevant diplomat. There was no longer an easy way to network or make new contacts, and the corridor information exchange so essential for the political nature of high-level advocacy was gone.

Despite the practical difficulties for advocacy that 2020 brought, it has never been more important for us to advocate for human rights, democracy, and other humanist values such as critical thinking, scientific enquiry, and artistic freedom. Indeed, 2020 marked the first time since 2001 in which a majority of the world's political regimes are autocracies (92 countries, hosting over half of the world's population). We have witnessed responses to the pandemic which penalise the already marginalised and disadvantaged, and seen that the fear that a pandemic like this inspires (and is sometimes encouraged to inspire) and the extreme measures it sometimes requires provide fertile ground for power-hungry states to further undermine human rights and scapegoat marginal groups. We made sure we highlighted these aspects of the pandemic through statements, blogs, news pieces and interventions in meetings throughout the year.

It should be said though, despite the difficulties, a benefit of all meetings going online is the potential it has given for people from all over the world to attend. It means that costs of travel and accommodation, visa worries or hostile governments have not impeded people from participating as they did previously. Of course the digital divide has become even more stark, but at least the digital nature of advocacy has meant it is more likely to have grassroots voices involved.

Advocacy at the United Nations

In 2020, Humanists International engaged with all three sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council, two of these by making online statements. In total the team delivered 14 statements.

The subjects of statements included: cultural rights and artistic expression, blasphemy and freedom of expression, gender and freedom of religion or belief, anti-LGBTI+ “conversion therapy”, rights of the child, harmful traditional practices, abortion and reproductive rights, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights. Countries covered included China, El Salvador, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. We also delivered a statement on behalf of Cheick Mkhaitir who couldn’t attend the March session in person due to his still not having been granted his travel permit in France.

We also highlighted some individual cases of concern: academic Ahmadreza Djalali, Nigerian humanist Mubarak Bala, Sri Lankan writer Shakthika Sathkumara, Somali Humanist professor Mahmoud Jama Ahmed, four Mauritanian human rights defenders – Abd al-Rahman Haddad, Ahmad Muhammad al-Mukhtar, Othman Muhammad Al Habib and Amin Houd - as well as a Nepalese filmmaker and artists from Chile and Cuba.

The Advocacy Officer worked directly with one Associate – Atheists in Kenya Society – and one Member – the Turkish Association of Atheism - to deliver a statement on human rights in Kenya and Turkey respectively.

These UN advocacy statements (and others made at other institutions such as the OSCE and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights) can now be easily searched for in a newly made dedicated database on our website.

We have continued to work closely with the UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Director of Advocacy contributed to a

UN report by the UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights on how COVID 19-related restrictions have negatively impacted cultural rights, and participated in two online consultations ahead of the report. She gave feedback on the General Assembly report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief on religious intolerance, and Humanists International Member Organizations and Associates were encouraged to submit information to the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues ahead of his annual report to the UN General Assembly, which a number of members did.

Following his seminal report on gender, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief came under attack from anti-rights groups and many conservative states. There was concerted action from Catholic and other Christian groups to undermine his mandate and to get him removed from the post. This sits within a wider context of many parties seeking to undermine the independence of Special Rapporteurs (who are unpaid and are independent of UN Staff and States). We have continued to work with a network of allies to counter the anti-rights lobby, whose constituents come from a variety of sources, including conservative religious groups, the Vatican, along with countries such as China, Russia, Egypt, and in 2020, the Trump administration.

The Director of Advocacy continued in her role as Vice Chair of the UN NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion of Belief (Geneva).

We continued to engage in the work of UNESCO. The Director of Advocacy participated in the UNESCO NGO Forum, as well as webinars and consultations on human rights of girls and non-discrimination in the context of COVID-19.

Advocacy at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

We attended the two sessions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights online. We made an oral statement on the persecution of human rights activists in Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Nigeria. It was delivered by Mauritanian human rights defender and writer Cheick Mkhaitir. We also submitted a statement on witchcraft-related abuse to the Commission. The Director of Advocacy attended the NGO Forum preceding the second session of the Commission.



Advocacy in Europe

Humanists International has continued to engage in advocacy activities at European institutions, including the Council of Europe, the European Union, and its Fundamental Rights Agency.

At the Winter session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which took place in January 2020, we worked with our NGO partners on a resolution on freedom of religion or belief in the workplace. Together we drafted amendments and were successful in getting the resolution changed. Due to the pandemic, the Spring and Summer part-sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe were cancelled, while the Autumn part-session was subsumed into a meeting of the Standing Committee. The Advocacy Officer compiled a submission to a report under preparation in the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination on the harassment of pro-choice activists. She also sent a survey to European Members and Associates on the treatment of abortion rights defenders in their countries, and received a wide range of feedback, including personal testimonies, from Members in Croatia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United Kingdom which was incorporated into the submission. In December, the Advocacy Officer attended the plenary meeting of the Conference of INGOs and met with some members of the Standing Committee in order to discuss proposed changes to the Conference of INGOs Rules of Procedure.

At the EU level in Brussels, we continued to engage with the work of the Parliament, Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The Director of Advocacy attended meetings between NGOs and the EEAS designed to set the human rights priorities and strategies for the coming period. She also kept in contact with staff on situations of concern

outside of Europe in liaison with Humanists International's Casework Coordinator.

We have also been lobbying the EU on its promised appointment of a new EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Along with working behind the scenes to lobby and collaborate with other interested NGOs, the Director of Advocacy sent a letter to the EU Commission, calling for it to guarantee transparency in its appointment procedure and to ensure the candidate chosen has an excellent human rights record.

In June, following approval by EU Commissioner Josep Borrell Fontelles, the Director of Advocacy was invited to become a member of the newly formed Advisory Board for the EU Global Exchange on Religion in Society. The Exchange is an international platform open to individuals – of all beliefs – working on the promotion of coexistence and social inclusion in religiously diverse contexts, and have since encouraged members to apply for a position on the platform.

The Advocacy Officer attended a European Parliament Article 17 virtual dialogue session on 15 July 2020 on the theme of COVID-19 implications for the future.

We also continued engaging with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights through, for example, participating in its first Fundamental Rights Dialogue – which looked at equitable access to education, jobs and healthcare, reducing societal divisions, and tackling hate speech, racism and disinformation – and by engaging in its work on the shrinking of civic space in the EU and the impact of COVID-19 measures on civil society.

Advocacy at the Organization for Security and Co-operation

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization.

Its 57 participating states range from Central Asia to North America. It holds a yearly meeting on human rights (the 'Human Dimension Implementation Meeting'), which was cancelled in 2020. The Advocacy Officer attended two of the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings and gave two statements, one on the misuse of fake news laws to crack down on freedom of expression in the wake of COVID-19, and the other on the instrumentalization of religion by populist, anti – gender movements.

The Director of Advocacy continued in her role on the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief for the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The Panel was charged with assessing and contributing to draft government legislation on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Uzbekistan.

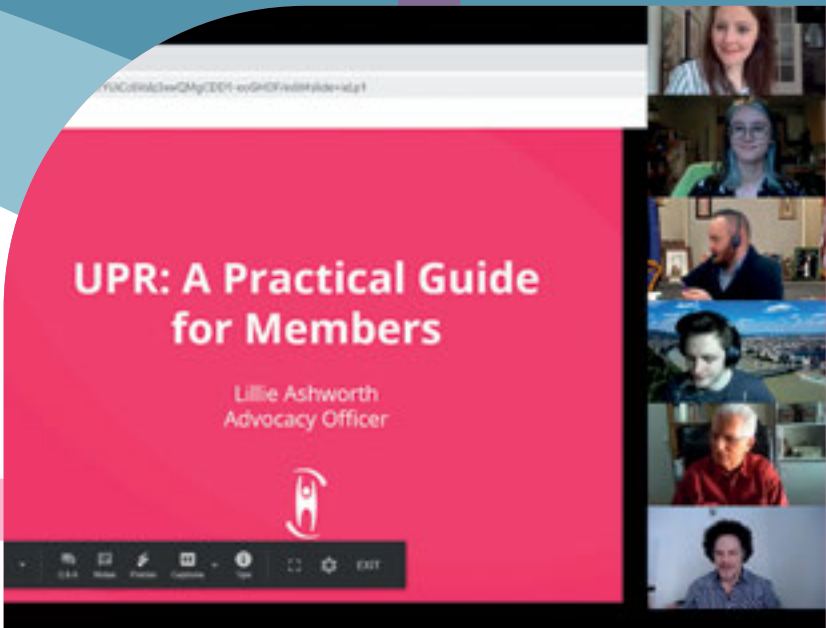
Advocacy in the Americas

In November, the Advocacy Officer attended the third Ministerial Conference to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief hosted by Poland (online). She reported on the event in a blog post, which critiqued the poor choice of host and a number of anti-human rights views expressed by State participants.

In relation to the Ministerial Conference, the Director of Advocacy was invited to become a member of the Informal Council of Experts for the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, an alliance that grew out of the second Ministerial Conference in Washington D.C.

The Director of Advocacy continued to track the work of the Organization of American States, by following relevant virtual meetings of the Permanent Council, as well as online seminars held by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights which looked at the role of regional human rights commissions in the context of the pandemic.





UPR: A Practical Guide for Members

Lillie Ashworth
Advocacy Officer



Working with members

The addition of the position of Advocacy Officer to the team in 2020 allowed us to better build on our mission both to assist member organizations to engage in international advocacy opportunities relevant to their work, and to help with capacity building in terms of member advocacy skills and knowledge.

At the UN, the Advocacy Officer worked with member organizations to make written submissions to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. The UPR examines the human rights performance of all 193 UN Member States once every five years. In April, the Advocacy Officer updated the Humanists International UPR briefing and got in touch with member organizations based in countries that were due to be reviewed in 2020. She worked closely with three Members - SOCH Nepal, deMens.nu and Danish Humanist Society - and one Associate - Freethought Lebanon - on their written reports. The reports touched upon a range of relevant human rights issues that member organizations have been actively campaigning on, such as the discrimination and harassment faced by the non-religious in Lebanon, harmful kuriti practices in Nepal, and the special privileges afforded to the *Folkekirke* in Denmark.

The Advocacy Officer also involved members in advocacy work at the Council of Europe and the OSCE. She emailed advocacy contacts at member organizations in relation to a report at the Council of Europe on reproductive rights, and encouraged member organizations in the OSCE to participate in a supplementary human dimension meeting on the right of freedom of religion or belief.



Speaking engagements

Throughout the year our advocacy team had a number of speaking events, engaging with various stakeholders including the press, academics, policy makers, UN experts and the general public, and focused on a range of issues.

One broad issue was freedom of expression and blasphemy. The Director of Advocacy spoke at a press conference in Paris organised by Reporters without Borders to mark the fifth anniversary of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, and was a speaker on a panel during a conference organised in Indonesia on blasphemy. She also gave witness testimony to a congressional hearing on blasphemy, held by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Our MENA Advocacy & Casework Consultant, Kacem El Ghazalli, was featured on the BBC World Service speaking on the issue of blasphemy and freedom of expression.

Our speaking engagements also covered the issues of equality, non-discrimination, and Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Advocacy Officer spoke at an event hosted by the Danish Institute of Human Rights on reaffirming Freedom of Religion or Belief in the context of all human rights. To mark UNESCO's international day of tolerance, the Director of Advocacy spoke on a panel organised by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief at Essex University. She was also a panelist in an online event hosted by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the UN Istanbul Process.

The final issue covered was the issue of human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director of Advocacy spoke about the need to strengthen multilateralism and the human rights system in response to the health crisis, on a panel at an event by the Universal Rights Group, with the UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Environment. She also participated in workshops held by the UN looking at how faith-based organizations and humanists are responding to human rights concerns arising out of the pandemic.





Freedom of Thought Report

The 2020 edition of the *Freedom of Thought Report* was launched simultaneously online on Facebook and YouTube on 10 December 2020. Now in its ninth annual edition, the report examines the legal and human rights situation for “humanists, atheists and the non-religious” around the world.

The Report highlights that humanists are discriminated against in 106 countries across the globe through a combination of the following: the existence of ‘blasphemy’ laws in at least 68 countries, exploited by state and non-state actors to curtail legitimate discussion and expression; discriminatory funding of religious groups in 79 countries; the derivation of state legislation in whole or in part from religious law in 35 countries; the use of religious courts on family or moral matters in 48 countries; the barring of the non-religious from holding at least some offices in 26 countries; provision of mandatory religious instruction in state-funded schools without a secular or humanist alternative in 34 countries. Government figures or state agencies openly marginalize, harass, or incite hatred or violence against the non-religious in 12 countries.

In addition, this year’s edition sought to expose the challenges faced by humanists, atheists and the non-religious as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Report warns of how the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and served as an opportunity to crack down on dissenting voices.

The above issues, together with travel restrictions rightly imposed to stop the spread of the pandemic, have compounded the problems that the non-religious face in their daily lives, exposing them to greater peril, while at the same time preventing them from taking steps to ensure their own safety.

Our Members

At the end of 2020,
Humanists International's
ratified membership was:

Members: **46**

Associates: **73**

Total: **119**

 Members
 Associates

New members in 2020:

LiberOs

Faithless Hijabi

Hungarian Atheist Association

Social Development Foundation

Atheists United

Humanists Brazil

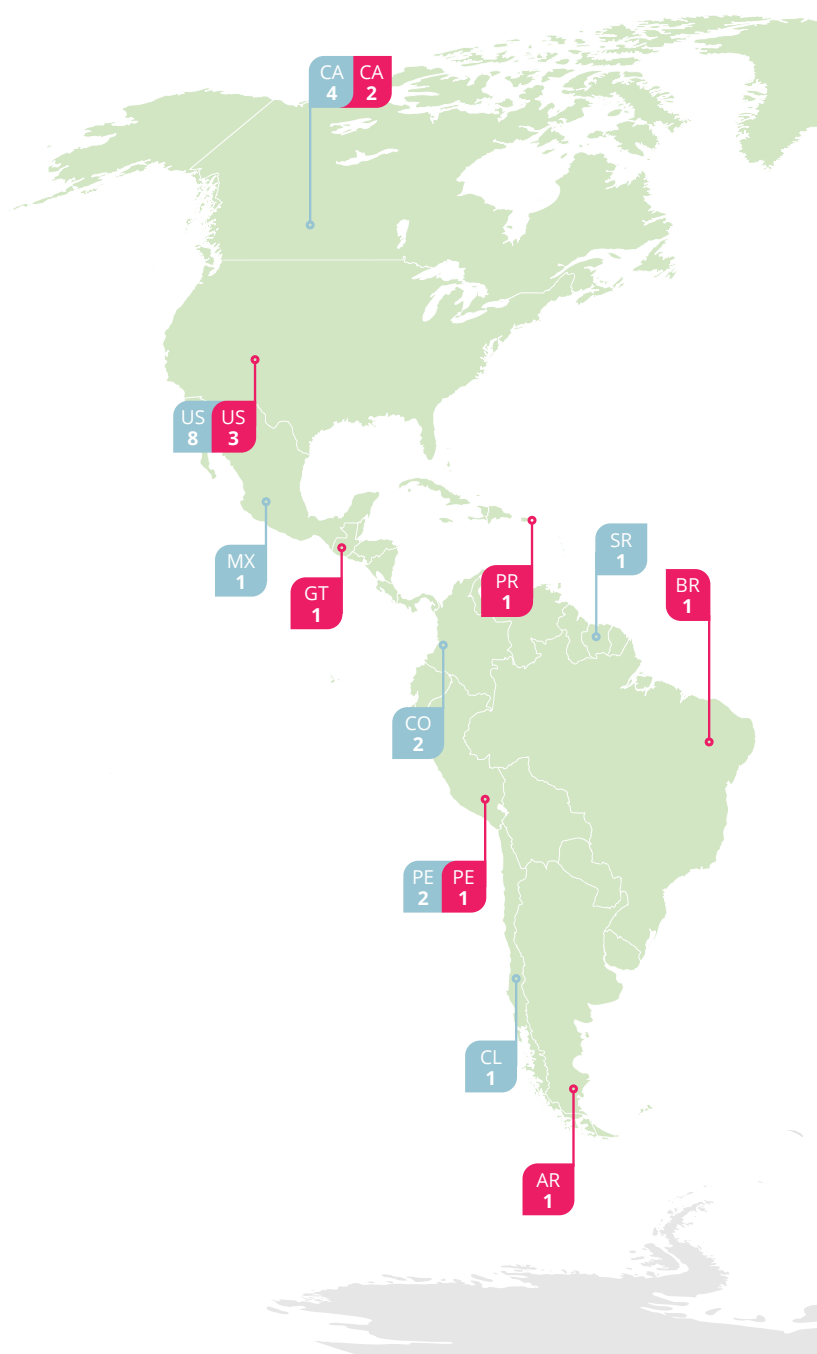
(to be ratified in 2021)

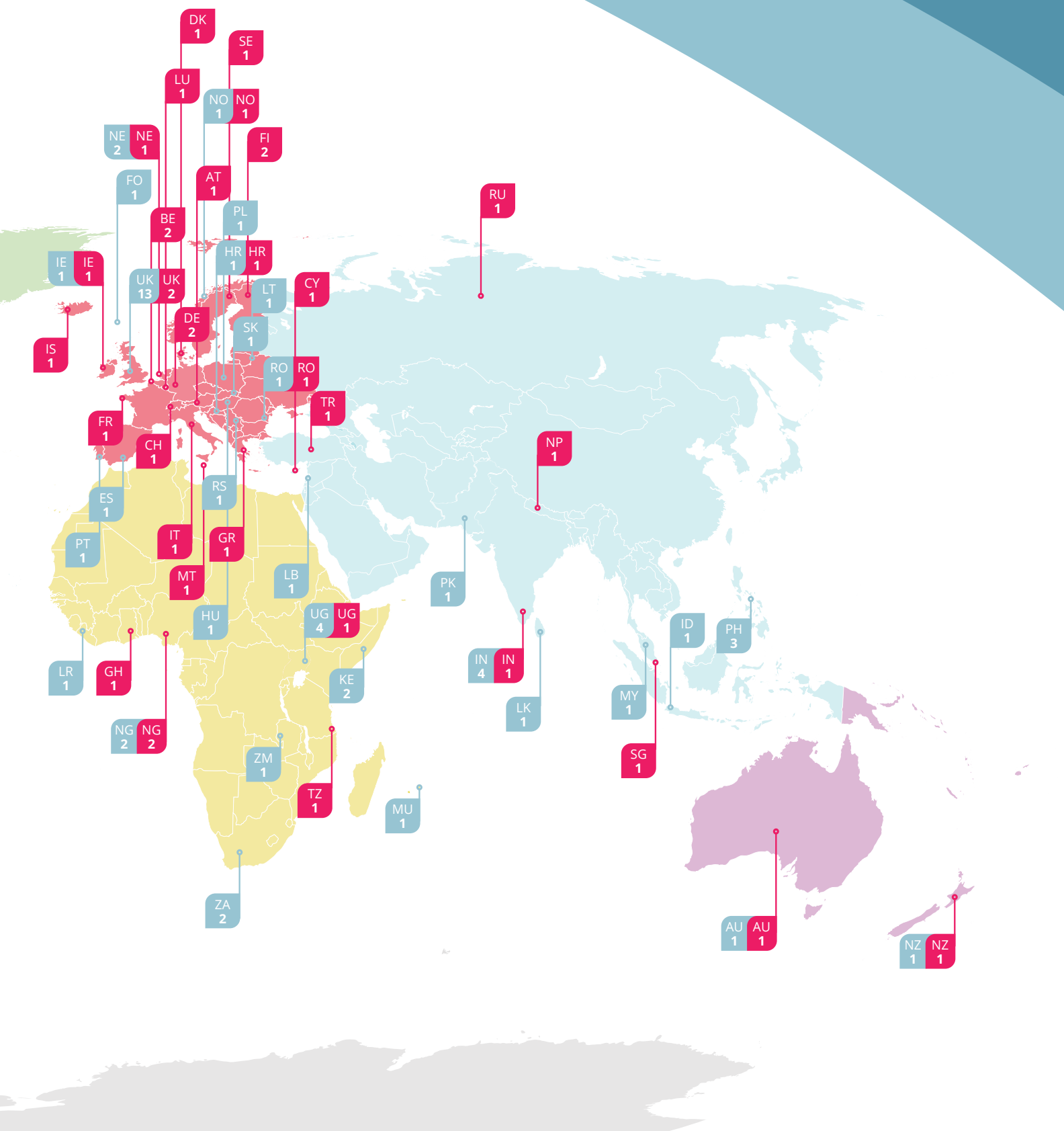
Humanists Australia

(to be ratified in 2021)

The following organizations did not
renew their membership in 2021:

- Atheist Ireland
- Secular Policy Institute (USA)
- Belfast Humanist Group
- Secular Action (Chile)
- Indian Renaissance Institute
- Secular Humanist League of Brazil
- Urban House Suriname





Growth and Development

Humanist Development Grants

In February 2020 we awarded a total of £22,000 from the Humanist Development Fund to support the projects of nine humanist organizations around the world. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March upset the plans of many humanist organizations around the world and, following a risk assessment in April, four organizations awarded with a grant were forced to cancel their projects.

Despite the emergency circumstances, we managed to support five humanist projects in 2020:



£4,000 was awarded to Think to support the creation of humanist videos and educational resources in Bangla. In 2020 only, Think published 19 videos, which correspond to roughly 2.5 videos per month. Think Bangla has now 23,000 subscribers on YouTube and 20,000 followers on Facebook - an impressive growth for an organization launched in 2020. Even more impressive is the number of views: more than 500,000 on YouTube and even 1,800,000 on Facebook. Think Bangla is now more than just a content producer but rather a community for Bangladeshi humanist and activists, as testified by the feedback received on the Facebook group "ThinkBangla adda", which now counts more than 5,000 members.

£2,000 was awarded to Advocacy for Alleged Witches (AfAW), an organization based in Nigeria but operating all over Africa (including Ghana, Malawi, Liberia, etc.) to fight witchcraft persecution and to provide assistance to alleged witches. In 2020, ten alleged witches received legal and financial assistance, including help to relocate, medicine and education (for children). Police in Zambia, Malawi and Nigeria acknowledged AfAW's work and took action in some cases. There has been significant media coverage and Leo Igwe, AfAW's founder, has been invited to write an article on anti-witchcraft activism for Scientific American.



£3,500 was awarded to Secular Humanist Society of Peru to support their vodcast on critical thinking in Spanish called “Para normales de la noche”. In 2020 alone Secular Humanist Society of Peru broadcast 41 episodes for a total of 50 hours live, including an episode dedicated to the protection of humanists at risk around the world with the presence of a panel of different Latin American humanist activists. The program had 184,500 views in total via Facebook and YouTube, with an increase of 1,500 followers on the Facebook page of the show and 900 new followers on the page of Secular Humanist Society of Peru.



LYDĖTUVIŲ CEREMONIJA

£2,200 was awarded to our Lithuanian Associate Laimingas Žmogus (formerly known as “Taip” kitaip) to support the introduction of humanist funerals in the country. Despite the difficulties associated with the lockdown restrictions, Laimingas Žmogus managed to celebrate three funerals in 2020, to launch a new website dedicated to humanist funerals in Lithuania (lydetuves.lt) and to recruit three new humanist celebrants. On top of that, three families have been assisted by professional psychologists during the grieving process, and positive feedback has been collected from relatives and participants to the funerals.

£3,500 was awarded to Humanists Guatemala to support their community building activities. Seven “Ideas & Chelas” meetings have been organised online - originally the plan was to hold them in person, but the pandemic made it impossible. Three 20-hour online workshops on critical thinking have been delivered, with 99 sign-ups and a very positive feedback from participants. A humanist online community has been created on WhatsApp, with more than 50 activists in the group. In between March and December 2020, the page of Humanists Guatemala had a 10% increase with 3,200 new followers.



Young Humanist Grants

In February 2020 we awarded a total of £14,770 from the Young Humanist Grant Fund to support the projects of four humanist organizations around the world. Because of the pandemic, Filipino Freethinkers had to cancel the organization of the 2020 Asian Humanism Conference, planned to be held in November 2020 in Manila (Philippines). However, we managed to support the following three projects:

£4,000 was awarded to the South African Secular Society (SASS) for the publication of the school book "Roadmap to Reason", a guide on critical thinking for teachers and educators to be included in the curriculum of public schools in South Africa. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the meeting with the Department of Basic Education was postponed to March 2021, but in the meantime the book is available for free download online at roadmaptoreason.org.za.



CRITICAL THINKING

Critical Thinking Curriculum
for Life Orientation Grades 7-12



£4,000 was awarded to Humanist Society Scotland for their "Discover Humanism" project, aimed at spreading humanism amongst young people. Since its publication, the video "What is a Humanist?" reached more than 13,000 people just on Facebook, with 3,400 click-through conversions to Young Humanists Scotland's website: humanism.scot/get-involved/younghumanists. As a result of the campaign, dozens of new young members joined Humanist Society Scotland at a £1 discounted rate. The launch online conference was watched by over 700 people, and after the launch 8,000 households in Scotland received a magazine publicising the work of the organization. One of the first initiatives of the Young Humanists Scotland was to collect more than 1,200 signatures for a petition in support of LGBT inclusive sex education in Scottish schools.

£2,770 was awarded to our Colombian Associate Children's Space for the creation of Tik Tok, Instagram and YouTube channels to share humanist videos in Spanish for kids. The videos have been viewed by 7,400 people on YouTube and 17,000 on Facebook. Children's Space also helped in the production of 11 episodes of the #CrispetaAtea series, a series of talks with Colombian and Latin American humanist activists.



Café Humaniste Grants

Before March 2020 we organized two live events from the Café Humaniste series in India and Liberia. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, given that many countries were implementing social distancing and lockdown measures, we cancelled all scheduled live events and decided to bring our Café Humaniste series online. This shift proved to be successful, since in 2020 we managed to organize a record number of 19 events - against the 18 events in 2019, eight in 2018 and six in 2017:



A Café Humaniste organized by the Secular Humanist Society of Peru



A Café Humaniste organized by Filipino Freethinkers

20 February: Secularism in India
Ambedkar Social Institute

7 March: Religion and superstition in Africa
Humanists Liberia

30 May: Origen y evolución del SARS-CoV-2' con Antonio Lazcano
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

6 June: Posmodernismo
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

20 June: La Ilustración y el Estado Laico
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

4 July: Blasphemy Laws in West Africa
Atheists in Kenya Society

4 July: El origen de todas las cosas
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

25 July: COVID-19 & Critical Thinking
Kenyan Humanist Association

2 August: African Secularism
Humanists & Atheists Of Zambia

15 August: La captura corporativa del Estado: teoría y aplicación al caso peruano
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

29 August: Happiness for humanists
Filipino Freethinkers

29 August: ¿Existió Jesús? ¿Tiene sentido debatirlo?
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

5 September: Desmitificando la inteligencia artificial ¿Oportunidad o riesgo para el desarrollo social?
Secular Humanist Society of Peru

15 November: Hallmarks of Humanism
Kenyan Humanist Association

27 November: Ελευθερία του Λόγου και Κοσμικό Κράτος
Cyprus Humanist Association

28 November: Humanist parenting
Humanists & Atheists Of Zambia

5 December: E-numan - Secular Parenting & Coming Out
Humanist Alliance Philippines, International

12 December: Raising Freethinkers
Filipino Freethinkers

27 December: Being Visible
Filipino Freethinkers

COVID-19 Small Relief Fund

In April 2020 we decided to open the COVID-19 Small Relief Fund to assist individuals in need in developing countries while facing the consequences of the pandemic. We allocated a total £4,500 to be released in grants of £150 each. In the period April-December we managed to assist 20 individuals in developing countries, while helping four humanist organizations involved in humanitarian work in India, Lebanon and the Philippines.



Humanist initiatives in time of crisis

Starting from April 2020, we launched a series of initiatives meant to support humanist organizations and individuals around the world in their fight against the virus and the consequences of lockdown restrictions such as sense of loneliness, disorientation, and powerlessness.

On 26 March, the first immediate initiative was to open a Facebook group for all our Members, Associates and Individual Supporters. The three main goals of the group are summarized in the acronym CCC: Community, Communication, Coordination. During the pandemic many humanists spent their days locked in their houses: for many of them, the group provided a safe space to meet like-minded activists and share their experiences, feeling in this way less alone and part of a global community.

Another initiative on the same line was the #GlobalHumanismNow series. We asked our Members and Associates how the global COVID-19 crisis was affecting their lives, and how they responded to the emergency. We interviewed 17 activists from 17 different countries and we found out that, despite the many geographical and political differences, humanists around the globe all stood true to our values: reason, science, empathy, critical thinking, secularism and democracy. "We are all one and we shall fight this battle as one", to quote the words of Narendra Nayak, President of the Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations.

On 23 April our President Andrew Copson stressed the same concept in his video-message to the global humanist community: "Staying true to our humanist values is never as important as it is in times of crisis [...] Our resilience can not only be a strength for us as individuals, but rise up to carry us through this situation together as one."



#GlobalHumanismNow



On 11 May the global humanist community joined forces to publish a series of informative memes in 17 languages, including Bangla, Urdu, Persian, Tagalog, Tamil, Spanish, Sinhala, Portuguese, Ki-Swahili, Hindi and French. The goal was to debunk misinformation, conspiracy theories, superstition and fake news which were contributing to the spreading of the contagion on a global scale.

On 25 July, while we were roughly six months into the start of the pandemic, Humanists International organized an online event with speakers from six different world regions in order to share their experiences and highlight how humanist organizations faced the emergency.

Humanism and COVID-19

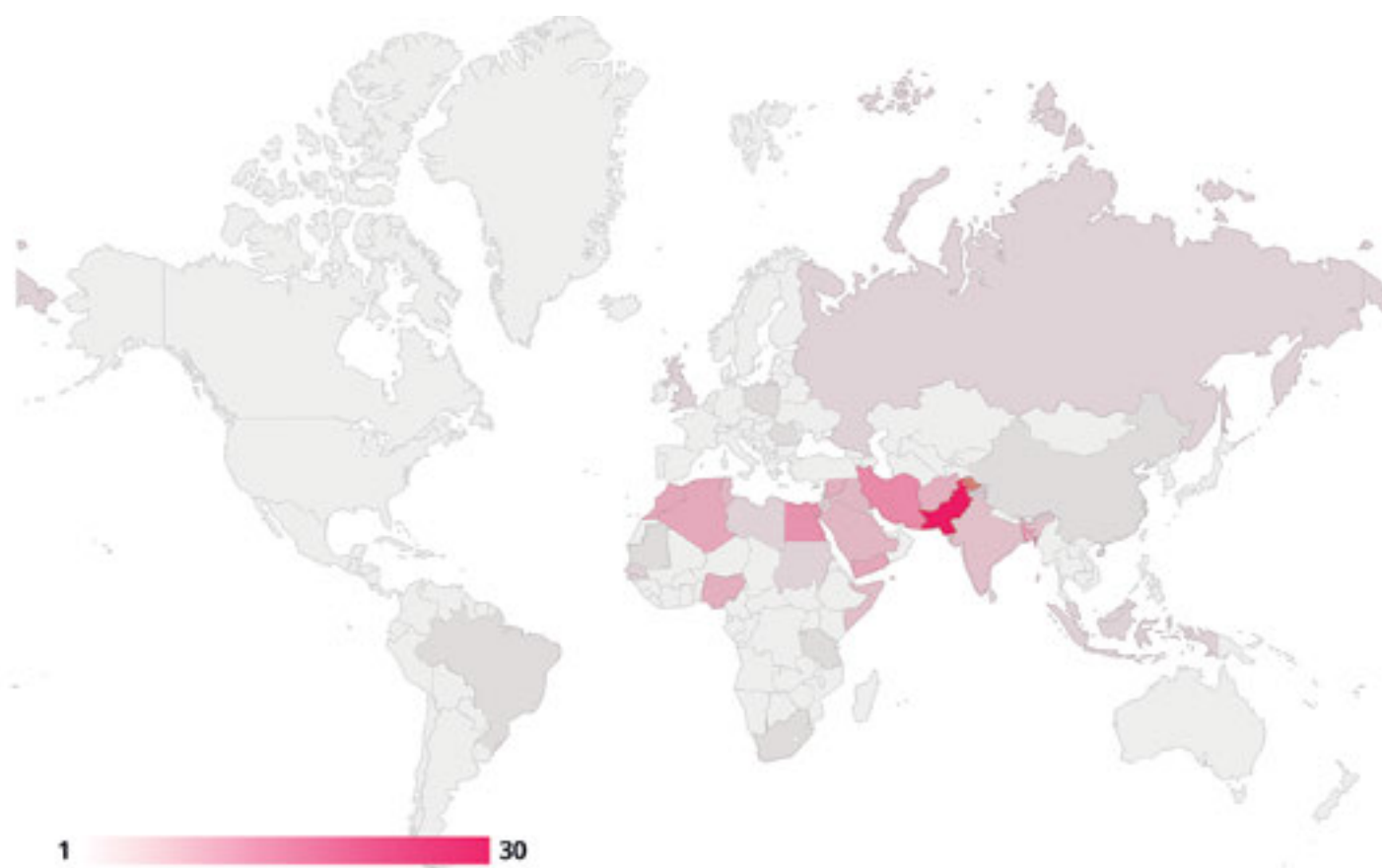
six months on



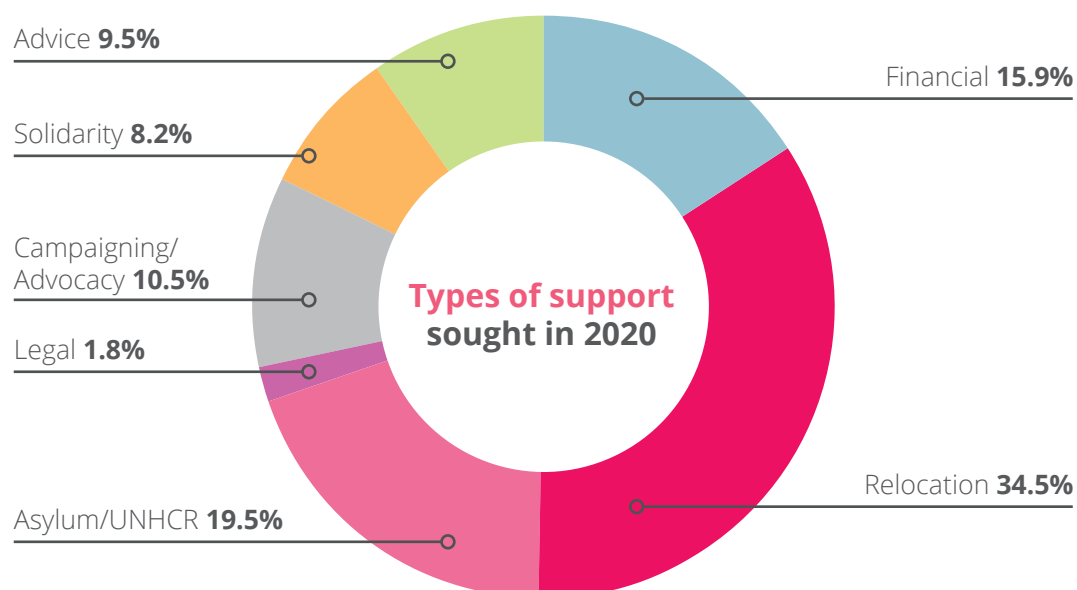
Humanists At Risk

Between January – December 2020, we received 175 requests for help from individuals seeking assistance.

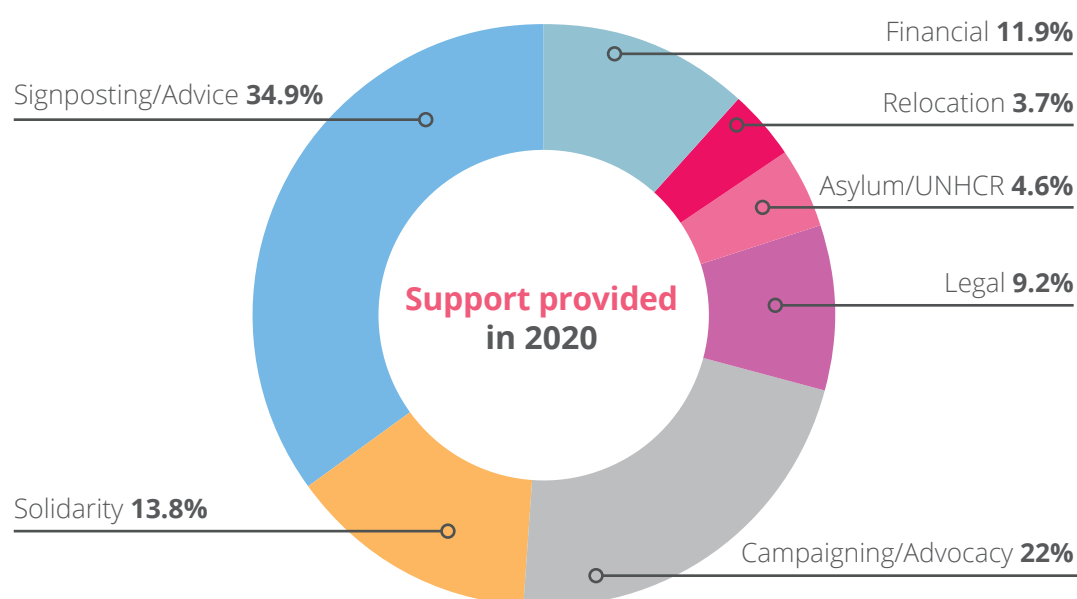
Most of the individuals identified themselves as living a “closeted” life, unable to live true to their values, and fearing the consequences of their true views being exposed. Such fears were exacerbated by the pandemic, as individuals reported being forced to observe religious festivals and being unable to escape their current circumstances due to local travel restrictions.



The majority of those reaching out to us, sought assistance and/or advice regarding relocation and asylum. The provision of support for relocation was made more difficult by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting closure of borders. Additionally, traditional routes to relocation, such as through UNHCR resettlement schemes, were suspended, leaving individuals in perilous limbo with no clear indication of when such programmes might resume.



The appointment of the world's first Humanists at Risk Coordinator in April 2020 dramatically increased our capacity to assess, prioritize and respond to such requests despite the challenges of the pandemic. From April 2020 - December 2020, we provided assistance to 72 individuals, most of whom we supported over a period of months. In total we made at least 175 different interventions on behalf of individuals, ranging from advice, emergency grants, asylum and visa support letters, international advocacy and campaigning actions and helping individuals attain legal support. Crucial to this work was our ability to connect individuals at risk with groups on the ground (our Members and Associates) who were able to provide practical support and advice.



Governance

Throughout 2020, the Board of Humanists International has been undertaking a thorough audit of its governance arrangements. As reported to the 2020 General Assembly, the previous structure of being a 'foreign company' in the United Kingdom is no longer appropriate for our needs.

Members and Associates

Board elected at the General Assembly

Humanists
International
Board
(formerly
IHEU,
US-based)

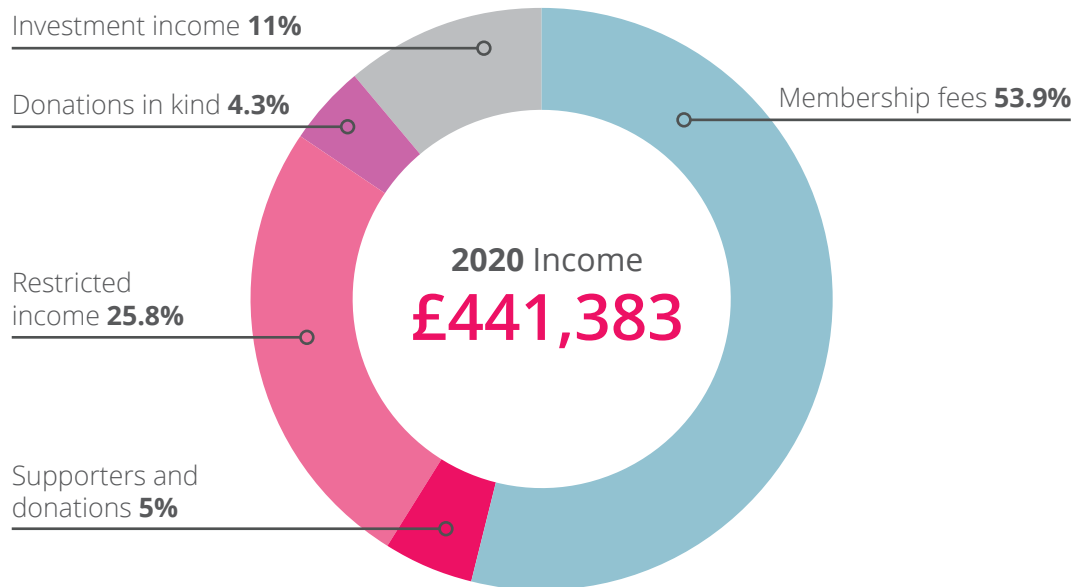
Board members *ex officio*

Humanists
International
2020 (UK-
based charity)

As agreed at the 2020 General Assembly, the Humanists International Board plans to establish a UK-based charity which will function alongside the US-based legal entity, to provide a platform for the employment of staff and delivery of services. This will not affect the rights and privileges of Members and Associates, and in keeping with the US Internal Revenue Service's policies and ruling, the UK-based charity (to be called Humanists International 2020) will effectively be a subsidiary of the existing organization.

Finances

Income

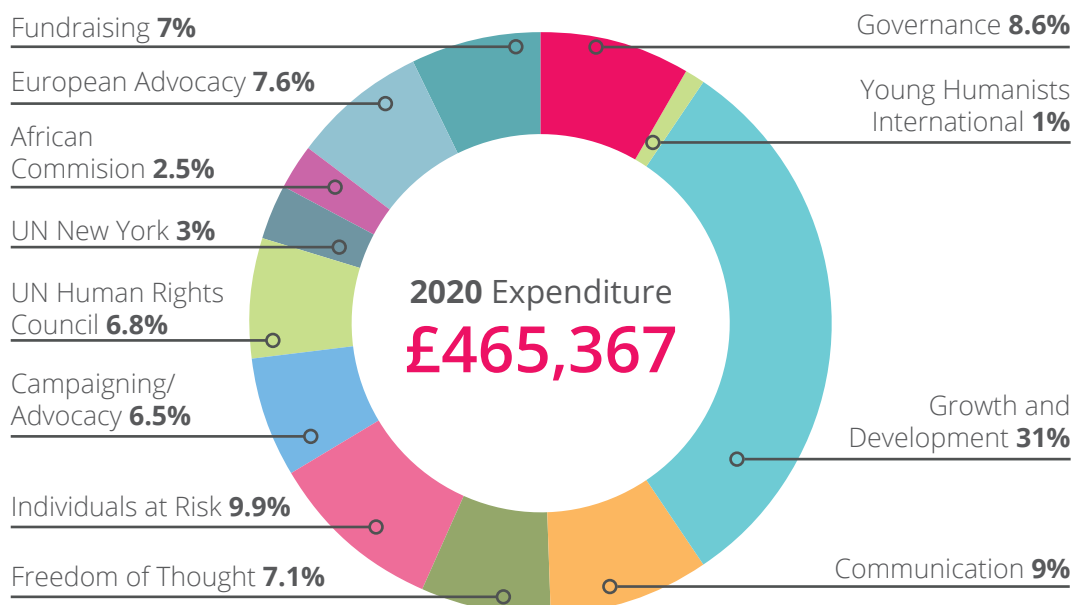
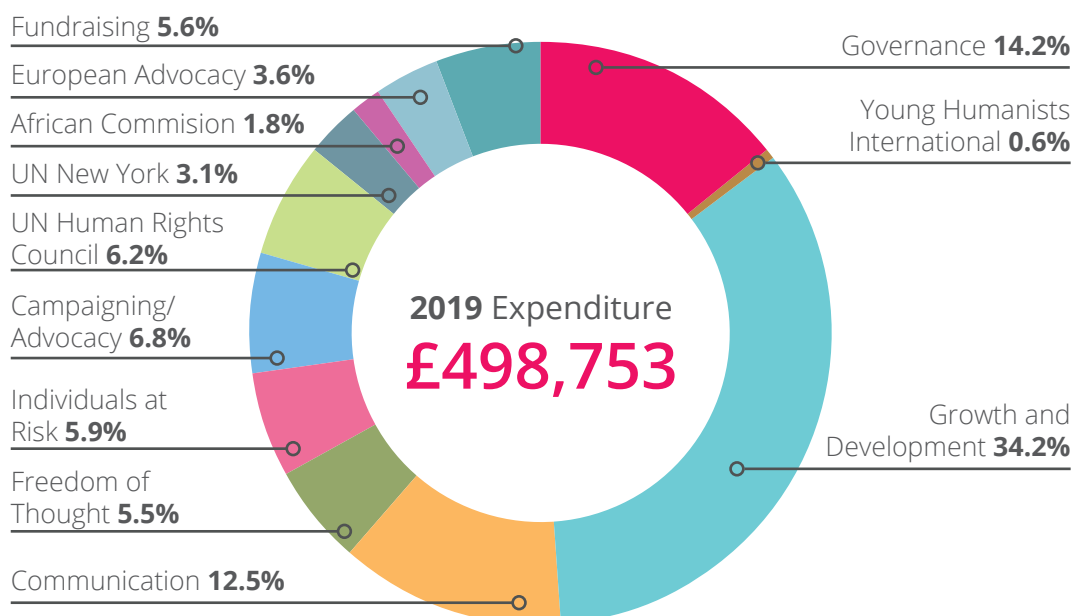


Despite the Covid-19 impact on the global economy, in 2020 we saw a 7.3% increase in total Humanists International funds compared to 2019.

There had been three noticeable increases in income: 1) Total Membership Fees income increased from £161K to £238K, 2) Mubarak Bala fundraising income £23,442, and 3) The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) government funding income £9,400.

The remaining £180,000 from an agreed total donation of £300,000 was received in December 2020 as a lump sum in advance. This amount will be spent as three annual tranches of £60,000 starting from January 2021.

Expenditure



Summary of Expenditure

	2020	2019
	£	£
Governance	40,132	70,893
Young Humanists International	4,750	3,014
Growth and development	144,112	170,680
Communication	41,660	62,450
Freedom of Thought report	33,023	27,214
Individuals at Risk	46,139	29,385
Campaign Coordination	30,338	33,922
UN Human Rights Council	31,634	30,929
UN New York	13,910	15,545
African Commission	11,819	9,116
European Advocacy	35,178	17,744
Human Wisdom	-	-
Dalit	-	-
Fundraising	32,672	27,861
	465,367	498,753

Income and Expenditure

	Funds 2020				Funds 2019
	£ Unrestricted	£ Restricted	£ Endowment	£ Total	£ Total
Income					
Membership fees	238,023	-	-	238,023	160,993
Supporters and donations	40,837	113,812	-	154,649	198,793
Investment income	742	-	47,969	48,711	51,565
Total income	279,602	113,812	47,969	441,383	411,351
Expenditure					
Wages and social security	205,615	-	-	205,615	176,248
General assembly expenses	2,060	-	-	2,060	6,401
Travel aid board members	-	-	-	-	22,125
Office expenses	43,268	-	-	43,268	31,498
Finance charges	4,743	-	8,339	13,082	12,938
Website costs	4,980	-	-	4,980	22,311
Consultancy costs	65,871	-	-	65,871	45,093
Growth and development	33,193	54,656	-	87,849	107,169
Travel and representation	12,670	-	-	12,670	48,423
Governance costs	8,515	-	-	8,515	18,189
Audit fees	4,680	-	-	4,680	4,620
Campaign promotions	2,220	-	-	2,220	3,154
Fundraising	-	-	-	-	1,584
Reports	14,557	-	-	14,557	1,584
Total expenditure	402,372	54,656	8,339	465,367	499,753
Net (deficit)/income before transfers, exchange and investment gains or losses	-122,770	59,156	39,630	-23,984	-88,402
Exchange (losses)/gains	-19,595	-	-73,305	-92,900	-107,847
Gains/(losses) on investments	-	-	405,538	405,538	391,733
Transfers between funds	75,000	-	-75,000	-	-
Net Movement in Funds	-67,365	59,156	296,863	288,654	195,484
Balance at 1 January 2019	169,915	305,892	2,262,733	2,738,540	2,543,056
Balance at 31 December 2019	102,550	365,048	2,559,596	3,027,194	2,738,540

*This financial summary has been extracted from the company's audited statutory accounts.
Full details are available on our website.*

Humanists International is the 'doing business as' name of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), a not-for-profit organization registered in New York, USA (501(c)3).

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Plans for the future

Fundraising

Fundraising continues to be a strategic priority for the organization. In 2021, we will prioritize the task of applying for large institutional funding, and also seek out opportunities to increase the skills and experience in the staff team through training and consultancy support.

European investment

In May 2020, the European Humanist Federation's members passed a motion seeking for that organization to merge with Humanists International. Following initial discussions between the two organizations, and some Members and Associates in Europe, it seems there is a desire from them to invest additional funds into Humanists International which would be restricted to activities in Europe. The Humanists International Board will engage with the European Humanist Federation to see if there is a workable solution which can be achieved, without disadvantaging other global regions.

Greater focus on growth and development

Thanks to the generous support of our Members and Associates, every year we are increasing the financial support we can give out in grants to organizations in developing countries. As these funds continue to grow, it is important that we can properly evaluate the success of these programs. Over the coming year we will invest much more time into developing a robust Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which we hope will help us track the progress of our Growth and Development Program, as well as give us greater tools for applying for funds ourselves.

2022 Amsterdam Commission

In 2022 Humanists International will be 70 years old. To mark that important milestone, the Board has established a Commission made up of prominent humanist thinkers and campaigners from around the world to consider making amendments to the Amsterdam Declaration. The Declaration was adopted at the inaugural Congress in 1952, and was updated last in 2002. The Board will be consulting with all Members and Associates in the coming months, and will update the General Assembly in 2021



Humanists International is a trading name of The International Humanist and Ethical Union, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization incorporated in New York, USA, and registered in England, number FC020642.

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Humanists
INTERNATIONAL