Humanists
INTERNATIONAL

Our Strategy to 2030

Vision, mission, values and aims for the global humanist movement

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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ABOUT HUMANISTS INTERNATIONAL

Humanists International is the global representative body of the humanist movement. Founded in Amsterdam in 1952, we unite humanist, atheist, rationalist, secularist, skeptic and freethought organizations in every region of the world, and represent them at the United Nations and other international institutions.

ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

This strategy was shaped through consultation with our Board, staff and members during 2026, and agreed by the Board of Directors at its annual strategy meeting in Berlin, 15 to 18 October 2026. It sets our direction to 2030, and the Board reviews our progress against it every October.

PREFACE

A message from our President



"Humanists International in 2030 is bigger, braver, and built to last."

Maggie Ardiente
President, Humanists International

Next August, Humanists International turns 75. In 1952, about 200 people came together in Amsterdam, a few years after a world war, and founded this organization because they believed humanists everywhere were stronger together. It took them fourteen hours just to agree on a name! But eventually they agreed, and they built something that has lasted three quarters of a century.

For most of our history, Humanists International was led by volunteers. Ten years ago we had four staff and a six-person executive committee drawn only from Europe and North America. Today we have a professional team working across more than five countries, a full Board drawn from every region of the world, and around 120 Members and Associates in some 60 countries.

We are recognized and respected at the United Nations. Governments take action based on our Freedom of Thought Report. When a humanist or atheist is in danger, people know to call us. Humanists International is known around the world, thanks to every person who championed our mission and helped us grow.

But growth by itself isn't enough. When our Board met in Berlin in October 2026, the question in front of us was not "how do we keep going?" It was "what do we want to become?"

This strategy is our answer. By 2030, we want to be a global movement that is growing and thriving, with new humanist organizations and members connected through strong regional networks. A voice that is recognized and respected at the highest levels of international decision-making. A movement whose leadership reflects the people it serves: more leaders from Latin America, Africa and Asia, more women, more LGBTQ+ humanists, more young humanists. And an organization that can sustain itself, supported by thousands of individual donors.

We have also been realistic. Some of what we envision will not be possible without more money and more people. That is not a reason to stop dreaming, but it means being clear about what we can do here and now.

The Board that agreed on this strategy is a relatively new Board, coming from every part of the world. We debated hard, bringing in different experiences and unique perspectives, and we left Berlin united behind it. My thanks go to my fellow Board members, to our Chief Executive and staff, and to our hosts at the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands.

My vision is an egalitarian and peaceful world where every humanist and nonbeliever can live freely and thrive. We will not reach it by 2030, but every step in this strategy moves us closer. We take those steps with courage, with compassion, and with belief: not in a god, but in each other.

Maggie Ardiente
President

INTRODUCTION

A message from our Chief Executive



"The best chapters of our story are still to be written."

Gary McLelland
Chief Executive, Humanists International

Humanism has always been a hopeful idea: that people, guided by reason and compassion, can work together to make the world a better place. Seventy-five years after our founders met in Amsterdam, that idea is needed as much as ever.

In too many countries, people are still harassed, imprisoned or worse for questioning or leaving religion. Elsewhere, hard-won rights to equality, free expression and secular government are under pressure. But I am optimistic, because every day I see what humanists are doing about it.

Across our movement, humanists are providing care and education, offering ceremonies that mark the biggest moments in people's lives, supporting people accused of witchcraft, campaigning for equality, and speaking up at the United Nations. In 2026, more than 500 delegates from 41 countries filled the World Humanist Congress in Ottawa, and the energy in that room told me where our movement is heading.

When I joined in 2017, our whole staff team could fit in one photograph. Today we are a professional team working across more than five countries, alongside members in every region of the world. We have grown because humanists everywhere want a strong, shared voice, and they are finding it together.

This strategy is about what we can build by 2030: a growing movement, with new humanist organizations taking root, especially in Latin America; a voice that is heard wherever decisions about human rights are made, from Geneva to the African Commission; the rights of humanists and the non-religious documented, defended and recognized worldwide; and an organization built to last.

As we celebrate our 75th anniversary in Lima in 2027, I invite you to be part of what comes next, as a member, a supporter, a partner or a friend.

Thank you to our members, supporters and partners, to our Board, and to a remarkable staff team. The best chapters of our story are still to be written.

Gary McLelland
Chief Executive



WHO WE ARE

Our vision, mission and values

VISION

Inspired by humanist values, we envision a world where humanists can live an ethical, dignified and fulfilling life.

MISSION

We build, support and represent the global humanist movement, and work to champion human rights, science and secularism.

VALUES

We cherish empathy, cooperation, free inquiry, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Our vision, mission and values guide everything in this strategy. Under them sit four aims, each with change pathways: the routes by which we expect change to happen, and the programs through which we pursue it.



Our strategy at a glance

Four aims set out the change we want to see by 2030. Each is delivered through four change pathways.

AIM 1 · MEMBERS

Successful and sustainable humanist organizations exist in every part of the world and are networked together

- **1.1** Leadership teams are supported and developed
- **1.2** Organizations are supported to develop their activities
- **1.3** Organizations connect and collaborate
- **1.4** New organizations are established where none exist

AIM 2 · ADVOCACY

Human rights priorities based on humanist values are influential at international institutions

- **2.1** International and regional bodies act on our priorities
- **2.2** Our advocacy focuses on three priorities
- **2.3** Other NGOs take action on our priorities
- **2.4** Our members advocate at international institutions

AIM 3 · RIGHTS

The right to freedom of religion or belief, and the rights of humanists and the non-religious, are documented, defended and recognized worldwide

- **3.1** The Freedom of Thought Report
- **3.2** Support for humanists at risk
- **3.3** Research and publications
- **3.4** Recognition as human rights defenders

AIM 4 · RESOURCES

We have sufficient reputation, resources and effectiveness to achieve our objectives

- **4.1** A globally diverse and sustainable Board
- **4.2** A sustainable, reliable and ethical core team
- **4.3** Funding from multiple sources
- **4.4** Flexible and safe working conditions



AIM 1 · MEMBERS

Successful and sustainable humanist organizations exist in every part of the world and are networked together

1

DESCRIPTION

Our members are the heart of Humanists International, and the experts in their own countries. Humanist organizations grow through different stages: fighting for acceptance where being non-religious is dangerous, campaigning for secularism where humanists are tolerated, and offering ceremonies, care and education where humanism is established. Each stage needs something different from us.

To 2030 we will support every member while focusing our growth and development work where it can make the greatest difference. Latin America is our priority region, with a dedicated Latin American Development Officer, and a Latin American members network to be launched at the 75th anniversary World Humanist Congress in Lima in 2027. We will meet African humanist leaders in 2027, with training for them, and we will keep bringing members together, in person and online, to learn from each other.

OUR FOCUS TO 2030

Latin America
Our priority region for growth and new organizations

One grant stream
A single Development and Sustainability Grant from 2027

A Congress every other year
with a General Assembly every year

Training led by members' needs
building on what has worked before





Change pathways

What needs to change, and what we do to make it happen

1.1 Leadership teams are supported and developed to create and sustain humanist organizations

- Training led by members' needs, such as grant writing, the Universal Periodic Review and security
- Membership training at every World Humanist Congress
- Members with expertise sharing it with others: free online resources, trainers and hosting, in kind
- Our approach to leadership training scoped and reviewed in 2027

1.2 Humanist organizations are supported to develop their activities

- A single Development and Sustainability Grant from 2027, in place of six separate streams, aligned with our organizational and advocacy priorities
- Orientation, staged funding and reviews for every grantee, with grantees presenting their work at a Members Meeting
- Support for the Asian Humanist Conference every year

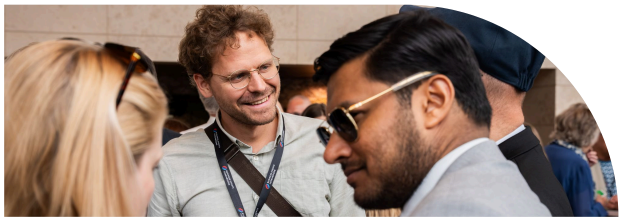
1.3 Humanist organizations have ongoing opportunities to connect and collaborate with each other

- A General Assembly every year, free to take part in, with travel grants: in person in Congress years and fully online in between
- A World Humanist Congress every other year, informed by what we learn about cost and value in Lima
- Members Meetings twice a year, and regional networks in Europe and, from 2027, Latin America
- A young humanists meetup at every Congress

1.4 Humanists in countries with no humanist organization are supported to establish one

- Latin America as our target region to 2030, with a dedicated Latin American Development Officer
- Outreach to the 26 Latin American countries that do not yet have a humanist organization in membership
- A clear application process for new organizations







AIM 2 · ADVOCACY

Human rights priorities based on humanist values are influential at international institutions

DESCRIPTION

Humanists International speaks for the global humanist movement where international human rights decisions are made. The United Nations remains at the center of our work, in Geneva and New York, alongside Europe through the European Policy Forum.

To 2030 we will concentrate around 80 percent of our advocacy on three priorities, keeping room for our members' requests and new issues. Africa, where we hold observer status at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, is our next regional focus, to be developed together with our African members. And we will bring more members into international advocacy, so that their voices are heard directly and carry that credibility home.

OUR FOCUS TO 2030

The UN at the center
Geneva, New York, and other relevant offices

Europe
through the European Policy Forum

Africa
at the African Union and African Commission

Bridging the international and the national
training and support for our members

1

The right to freedom of religion or belief for all, and the rights of the non-religious

The shield: protecting the right to hold and live by non-religious beliefs

2

Defending equality where the misuse of religion, or of the right to freedom of religion or belief, threatens it

Confronting the use of that right to limit the freedoms of others

3

Civic space and democracy

Protecting the conditions in which humanists and civil society can organize and speak, working to strengthen democracy amidst multifaceted challenges to it

Change pathways

What needs to change, and what we do to make it happen

2.1 International bodies, agencies and senior officials, including at the United Nations and at regional institutions, make decisions that implement our human rights priorities

- The UN at the center: the Human Rights Council, the Treaty Bodies and the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, working with OHCHR, governments and other UN agencies
- The UN in New York, including the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women; UNESCO in Paris; and the OSCE
- Europe through the European Policy Forum: the EU institutions and the Article 17 dialogue, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights
- Amicus briefs at regional courts in relevant cases
- Advocacy in Africa next, at the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, where we hold observer status

2.2 Our advocacy focuses on three priorities: the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all and the rights of the non-religious; defending equality where the misuse of religion or of the right to FoRB threatens it; and civic space and democracy

- About 80 percent of our advocacy effort on the three priorities, with a margin for members' requests and new issues, assessed through a five-part decision filter
- Statements, briefings, lobbying on resolutions, and monitoring anti-rights actors
- The Freedom of Thought Report as the evidence for our first priority, and a new report on the misuse of the right to FoRB for our second
- Advocacy planned to feed our communications, including our podcast and takeover weeks

2.3 Other NGOs understand our priorities and take action on them

- Formal coalitions and networks where they advance our priorities
- Partnerships with other NGOs, and a bridge between human rights groups and religion or belief actors
- Working with pro-rights faith actors who share our commitment to human rights

2.4 Our members are capable of advocating in relation to our priorities at international institutions

- UPR training, which has reached more than 80 member leaders since 2021, and trainings about other multilateral institutions and how our members can work at regional institutions, with support to turn UPR recommendations into change at home
- Members in Geneva, delivering statements and meeting governments with a staff member alongside
- Webinars, "Ask the advocacy team" sessions, roundtables with interested members before UN meetings, and alerts, with our members' wins celebrated every year
- A global moment of action for the right to FoRB for all, led by our members



AIM 3 · RIGHTS · NEW FOR 2030

The right to freedom of religion or belief, and the rights of humanists and the non-religious, are documented, defended and recognized worldwide

3

DESCRIPTION

In too many countries, people are discriminated against, imprisoned or killed for being non-religious, or for leaving a religion. This new aim brings together the work that documents those violations and defends the people who face them.

The Freedom of Thought Report is its foundation: an authoritative, evidence-led global source on the right to freedom of religion or belief and the situation of humanists and the non-religious. To 2030 we will put quality before quantity and keep improving the report, presenting ratings beside the evidence for every country. Alongside it, our Humanists at Risk casework, research and partnerships will help humanists stay safe, and help those who defend this right to be recognized as the human rights defenders they are.

OUR FOCUS TO 2030

Quality before quantity
28 country updates of the report every year, increasing as capacity permits

Evidence first
Ratings beside the evidence, not summary scores

Prevention
Safety and security resources and training for members' leaders

Recognition
Humanists who defend FoRB recognized as human rights defenders





Change pathways

What needs to change, and what we do to make it happen

3.1 The Freedom of Thought Report is an authoritative, evidence-led global source on the right to FoRB and the situation of humanists and the non-religious, and is continually improved

- 28 country updates a year: quality before quantity, with the intention to increase the number of updates when capacity permits
- Ratings tables beside the evidence on every country page, with no public summary scores
- Launched each year with our members, and used as an advocacy tool to create action nationally, regionally and globally

3.2 Humanists at risk and their organizations have access to preventive support, training, practical resources and referral to protection partners

- Humanists at Risk casework, focused on the leaders of our member organizations
- Reports, briefings and toolkits for humanists at risk around the world, created, improved and made available
- An updated safety and security toolkit, building on our experience and expanding on the dedicated session held at the 2025 Congress
- Referral to protection partners

3.3 Research and publications document the right to FoRB in practice, including the lived experiences of humanists and the non-religious, and inform our advocacy and that of our members

- Research and publications beyond the report
- Short thematic summaries alongside the report, ready for members to use with their own governments
- Research partnerships, including with members, that add capacity and outside challenge

3.4 Humanists who promote or defend the right to FoRB have a greater understanding that they are human rights defenders, and receive greater recognition from the wider human rights community

- Evidence from our casework, which shows that defenders of the right to FoRB are often seen as non-religious first and as human rights defenders second
- Advocacy for improved recognition at the UN and regional bodies, with civil society partners, for example through a joint report
- Helping our members recognize that, in defending the right to FoRB and other human rights, they are human rights defenders



AIM 4 · RESOURCES

We have sufficient reputation, resources and effectiveness to achieve our objectives

4

DESCRIPTION

Everything in this strategy depends on an organization that is well governed, well run and sustainably funded. Over the past decade we have grown from a volunteer-led body into a professional international NGO, with a Board drawn from every region of the world and a remote team working across more than five countries.

To 2030 we will make that organization built to last. Our Board will become more diverse and better supported, with a review of our Bylaws and governance. We will strengthen our finances and systems across our two legal entities, broaden our income, especially from individual supporters, and use our endowment by deliberate decision of the Board. Holding the World Humanist Congress every other year will give our team the time to follow up, improve our systems and learn.

OUR FOCUS TO 2030

Good governance
A Bylaws review and a Board handbook in use

Individual supporters
A clear offer, and the Amsterdam Circle of patrons

Money by decision
An Investment and Risk Committee

A stable team
with room for the unexpected





Change pathways

What needs to change, and what we do to make it happen

4.1 A globally diverse and sustainable Board

- A governance working group to review the Board Handbook and the Board expenses policy, with a Board member and skills review every year
- The review of our Bylaws mandated by the 2026 General Assembly
- Induction and training after every election, and a Board development session every year
- Diversity data for the Board, staff, events, grantees and member leaders

4.2 A sustainable, reliable and ethical core operations team

- Finance and operations across two legal entities: our US parent organization and our Scottish charity
- A live risk register reviewed by the Investment and Risk Committee, a compliance calendar, a single policy register, and an AI and information security policy
- Cost centers with named budget holders, and a review of our accounting software
- A stable core team, with a small margin for the unexpected

4.3 Funding from multiple financial sources

- Member fees and contributions in kind, with an annual account to members of what their fees fund
- Fundraising from individuals: regular appeals, direct mail, the Amsterdam Circle, legacies, and a clear offer for individual supporters
- Communications that grow our audience and turn followers into supporters
- At least one externally funded program every year, recovering a share of core costs
- Our endowment, drawn on by decision of the Board, on the advice of the Investment and Risk Committee

4.4 Flexible and safe working conditions

- A remote team across more than five countries, meeting in person every quarter
- Time for learning and reflection after each major piece of work



Holding ourselves to account

This is our first strategy with a fixed horizon. Rather than updating the same aims each year, we have set a direction to 2030 and agreed the steps that will take us there.

Behind each aim sit strategic markers: concrete, dated commitments for each year of the strategy. The Board reviews our progress against them at its strategy meeting every October, and we report to our members at the General Assembly every year.

We have been deliberate about capacity. This strategy sets out what we can achieve with the resources we have. Where new funding allows, we will go further, but our core commitments come first.

In 2030, the Board will evaluate what this strategy achieved, and our members will help shape what comes next.



Maggie Ardiente, President, and Gary McLelland, Chief Executive

1952

Humanists International is founded in Amsterdam, as the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

2026

The Board adopts our strategy to 2030 in Berlin.

2027

Our 75th anniversary, celebrated at the World Humanist Congress in Lima, Peru.

2030

The strategy is evaluated, and the next one begins.



Humanists
INTERNATIONAL

Building, supporting and representing the global humanist movement since 1952.

humanists.international

Our Strategy to 2030 · Adopted by the Board of Directors of Humanists International, Berlin, October 2026.