Submission in response to call for input for “Report on International Solidarity and Faith-Based and Humanist Organizations”

October 2026

This submission is made by **Humanists International** (NGO with Consultative Status at UN ECOSOC)

Humanists International is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) and the global representative body of the humanist movement, uniting a diverse community of non-religious organizations and individuals. Inspired by humanist values, we are optimistic for a world where everyone can have a dignified and fulfilling life. We build, support and represent the global humanist movement and work to champion human rights, equality, and secularism. We campaign on humanist issues and defend humanists at risk of persecution and violence. We work to promote human rights priorities based on humanist values at international institutions, including the United Nations. Our Members and Associates include humanist, rationalist, secular, ethical culture, atheist, and freethought organizations from all over the world. Our community also includes many individual supporters who share our vision and values.

1. This submission by Humanists International is in response to the call for input issued in August 2026 by the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity for her report on international solidarity and faith-based and humanist organizations, to be presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council at its 65th session in June 2027.

2. At the outset, we would like to thank the Independent Expert for her explicit inclusion of humanists in the title of the report, and the nuanced questions posed to all faith-based and belief organizations.

3. The submission first explains whom Humanists International represents and how the humanist movement conceptualizes international solidarity. It then describes solidarity actions taken by Humanists International and by its Members and Associates, before turning to the barriers that humanists face while acting in solidarity with others. It closes with recommendations for this report.

Understanding Humanists International

4. Humanists International is the global representative body for non-religious organizations, self-describing primarily as humanist, atheist, ethical, skeptic, secular, freethinking, or rationalist, who do not hold a belief in god but do share a positive world view founded on values of empathy, dignity, and personal liberty, as well as striving for the fulfillment of human rights and the flourishing of all. There is no belief in an afterlife; rather, a commonly heard mantra is that we only have one life and a duty to live it to the best of our ability. Humanists International is therefore not affiliated with any religious community or denomination.

5. Humanists International has over 110 Member and Associate Organizations in over 60 countries, whom we represent. They range from national organizations with large memberships and public recognition to small volunteer groups in countries where declaring non-belief carries grave legal or physical risk. We wish to underscore that we do not purport to represent all humanists. As a non-doctrinal worldview, we have no hierarchy or authority to speak on behalf of those we do not know or those who have not joined us as members. We hope that our work is of benefit to all, particularly all non-religious individuals, but it is vital that we are clear about who we do, and do not, represent.

6. Finally, we have circulated the call for input to our members around the world, and hope that they have been able to submit as much information as possible to aid the mandate in drafting its report. This submission therefore focuses mainly on solidarity actions taken by or facilitated through Humanists International, and spotlights only a few examples from the work of our Members. We endorse the submissions made directly by our members as well.

Conceptualizing International Solidarity

7. International solidarity was at the heart of the founding of Humanists International, previously the International Humanist and Ethical Union, in 1952. After the Second World War, national humanist organizations from across the world came together to create an organization to foster international

solidarity and represent the humanist movement at the newly founded United Nations, receiving consultative status from UNESCO in 1958.[1]

8. The founding declaration of Humanists International was the Amsterdam Declaration, updated in 2002 and again in 2022, which all Members and Associates adopt as their guiding principles. The Amsterdam Declaration 2022 holds that morality is grounded in "the ability of living things to suffer and flourish, motivated by the benefits of helping and not harming, enabled by reason and compassion." It affirms "the worth and dignity of the individual and the right of every human to the greatest possible freedom and fullest possible development compatible with the rights of others," and to these ends supports "peace, democracy, the rule of law, and universal legal human rights."[2] For humanists, solidarity follows from this shared humanity rather than from shared belief, and extends to all, regardless of their religion or belief, or any other characteristic.

9. This understanding of solidarity is expressed through other declarations and resolutions of the General Assembly of Humanists International (the sovereign body of voting member organizations) and of the World Humanist Congress:

    9.1. The Ottawa Declaration on Humanism as Resistance (2026) commits the movement "to compassionate solidarity", observing that "authoritarianism thrives on isolation; humanism thrives on connection". It extends that solidarity to those who must remain silent out of fear of reprisal, and pledges to build communities that provide safe havens for vulnerable voices "so no one has to resist alone."[3]

    9.2. The Luxembourg Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Human Values (2025) calls on "governments, corporations, civil society, and individuals" to adopt its principles, aligning technology with "human values rooted in reason, evidence, and our shared humanity."[4]

    9.3. The Oslo Declaration on Peace (2011) holds that peace "requires respect for the worth and dignity of our fellow human beings," observes that communities are "often better at promoting peace among their own members than between themselves and other groups," and urges humanists to work for a more peaceful culture in their own nations.[5]

10. Position statements of the Board and General Assembly of Humanists International have also expressed solidarity with others; indeed, they are most commonly pronouncements of concern of, and calls to action for, the global humanist community with regard to threats to rights. In recent years, resolutions have been passed on country situations including expressing "solidarity with the women of Afghanistan",[6] as well as Venezuela, Palestine, Iran, among others.

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[1] Humanists International, 'History of Humanists International' (Humanists International) <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/history-of-humanists-international/> accessed 15 October 2026.
[2] Humanists International, 'Declaration of Modern Humanism' (Amsterdam Declaration 2022, General Assembly, Glasgow 2022).
[3] Humanists International, 'The Ottawa Declaration on Humanism as Resistance' (World Humanist Congress, Ottawa 2026) para 6.
[4] Humanists International, 'Luxembourg Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Human Values' (General Assembly, Luxembourg 2025).
[5] Humanists International, 'The Oslo Declaration on Peace' (World Humanist Congress, Oslo 2011).
[6] Humanists International, 'Resolution on the Erosion of Women's Rights in Afghanistan' (General Assembly, Singapore 2024).

11. Although lacking a definitive definition of its own, the humanist community has been engaging in solidarity for centuries, under whatever name and in whatever form, and the iterative democratic process of the members of Humanists International manifests that consistently, leading with the values of empathy and dignity, and in pursuit of the fulfillment and promotion of human rights for all, regardless of religion or belief, or any other characteristic.

Solidarity Actions by Humanists International

12. Humanists International acts on these values in numerous ways. First, it connects its Members to one another. The General Assembly meets every year, and as of 2025, online members' meetings allow for those less able to travel to come together. Regional networking is increasingly becoming part of the humanist community, both through and by Humanists International. We have hired a Latin American Development Officer who holds regional meetings, as well as a European Advocacy and Research Officer to coordinate the work of members at European institutions. These fora allow organizations to share experience, materials and contacts across borders, including between organizations that operate freely and those that cannot.

13. The World Humanist Congress, recently moved to an annual event, is the movement's largest gathering. The 2026 Congress in Ottawa, on the theme "Humanism as Resistance", brought together close to 500 participants from over 50 countries,[7] and the next will be held in Peru. The Congress moves between regions, which spreads the burden of hosting among Members and makes attendance easier for delegates from each region in turn. Crucially, Humanists International funds participants from the Global South to travel and be a part of these conversations, reaffirming that solidarity is a substantive material commitment and not just words.

14. Humanists International also funds its members directly, as a corollary of this material notion of solidarity. Each year it awards grants through six streams (Development, Humanist Ceremonies, Digital Humanism, Young Humanist, Regional Networking Meetings and Café Humaniste grants), generally between £200 and £10,000. Recent grants have supported projects in countries including Brazil, Colombia, Ghana, Guatemala, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, on themes ranging from countering harmful traditional practices and caste-based discrimination, to sexual and reproductive health and rights, the rights of the child, and non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. One recent grant funds a mental health program run by Faithless Hijabi for women from Muslim backgrounds who have questioned or left their faith.[8] Historically, until 2025, we also had a "Humanists at Risk" program, recognizing that many humanists are persecuted for their beliefs and actions. This program was unfortunately limited due to operational and capacity constraints, but it remains central to our work, including working through coalitions like the EU Temporary Relocation Platform.[9]

[7] Humanists International, 'Registration Opens for the 2026 World Humanist Congress: "Humanism as Resistance"' (Humanists International, 1 December 2025).
[8] Humanists International, 'Supported Projects' (Humanists International) <https://humanists.international/what-we-do/growth-and-development/supported-projects/> accessed 22 October 2026.
[9] EU Temporary Relocation Platform, 'Humanists International' (EUTRP) <https://eutrp.eu/entities/entities-5/> accessed 22 October 2026.

15. At the United Nations, Humanists International speaks for people well beyond the humanist community, amplifying marginalized voices. This is what international solidarity means to the organization in practice. At the 63rd session of the Human Rights Council, it called on Syria to guarantee freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief for all in its permanent Constitution, drawing attention to violence and discrimination against Alawites, Druze, and Bedouins as well as Christians, and to threats to minority religious sites.[10] Earlier in 2026, it condemned Iran's persecution of religious and belief minorities while warning that regional military escalation would only further endanger the Iranian people.[11]

16. It also acts in coalition with other civil society organizations, for example by joining letters urging the Council to maintain its scrutiny of Burundi through the Special Rapporteur's mandate,[12] and joint statements on the human rights situations in Ethiopia, and leading a call on the codification of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.[13]

17. Further, Humanists International takes part in inter-faith and inter-belief initiatives where non-religious participants are included as equals. One such example is the UN OHCHR Faith for Rights CommUNity of Practice. That framework is notable because its founding document, the Beirut Declaration, addresses believers in the broadest sense as "theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other," and Humanists International's representatives were involved in the drafting of this significant text.[14] In this regard, we have also been a part of interfaith events coordinated by the Coptic Archbishop of London in the past few years[15] among others.

18. Humanists International also holds that freedom of religion or belief protects individuals, not belief systems, and cannot be invoked to deny the rights of others. Solidarity from the faith and belief sphere must therefore extend to those whose rights are most often restricted in the name of religion. At the 63rd session of the Council, Humanists International marked International Safe Abortion Day by warning of threats to sexual and reproductive health and rights from anti-rights actors,[16] highlighted how religious freedom and "traditional values" are used to undermine gender equality, bodily autonomy, comprehensive sexuality education and the rights of LGBTI+ persons.[17] This is a cornerstone of Humanists International's work on the right to freedom of religion or belief:

[10] Humanists International, 'Humanists International Calls on Syria to Protect Non-Religious Citizens in its Permanent Constitution' (Humanists International, 20 September 2026), statement at HRC63 under Item 3.
[11] Humanists International, 'Humanists International Warns against Regional Escalation at the UN, Foregrounding Human Rights Concerns' (Humanists International, April 2026), statement in the Item 9 general debate.
[12] Amnesty International, 'Burundi: At a Critical Juncture for Burundi, the Special Rapporteur's Mandate Remains Vital' (AFR 16/8468/2024, 29 August 2024) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr16/8468/2024/en/> accessed 21 October 2026.
[13] Humanists International, 'Humanists International Calls for Codifying Gender Apartheid as a Crime against Humanity' (Humanists International, 9 September 2026) <https://humanists.international/2026/09/humanists-international-calls-for-codifying-gender-apartheid-as-a-crime-against-humanity/> accessed 22 October 2026.
[14] Beirut Declaration on "Faith for Rights" (2017), annexed to UNHRC, UN Doc A/HRC/40/58 (2019) annex I.
[15] Refcemi, 'Contemporary Martyrs Day Commemoration 2026' (Refcemi, 23 February 2026) <https://refcemi.org/f/contemporary-martyrs-day-commemoration-2026> accessed 22 October 2026.
[16] Humanists International, 'International Safe Abortion Day and Threats from Anti-Rights Actors' (Oral statement, HRC63, Item 8 general debate, September 2026).
[17] Humanists International, 'Humanists International Highlights Civil Society Repression and Human Rights Backsliding at the UN' (Humanists International, September 2026).

recognizing, calling out, and working against instances where the right to freedom of religion or belief is instrumentalized, systemic or otherwise.

Solidarity Actions by Members and Associates of Humanists International

19. Humanists International also supports its Members and Associates in the solidarity actions they undertake, which is contextual to their countries, regions, and priorities. Some examples of such solidarity actions are discussed in this section.

20. In Taiwan, for example, the Taiwanese Humanist Institute is authorized by the government to promote disaster preparedness training, with a focus on community resilience and local knowledge, and reports having trained more than 500 volunteers. It also supports the revitalization of Taiwanese and Indigenous languages, has campaigned for marriage equality, and has worked with the Humanist Mutual Aid Network to share knowledge and practice across borders.[18]

21. In the United States, the American Humanist Association launched the American Empathy Project in 2026 in response to what it describes as a crisis of cruelty. It committed $100,000 in grants to fund at least 100 community service projects and mobilized a national day of service on 2 May 2026 at more than 100 locations.[19]

22. Burmese Atheists, with the help of a grant from Humanists International, purchased and delivered water and other essential commodities for a shelter hosting around a hundred children as well as 50 older persons, when this became inaccessible to them because of natural disasters.

23. In Europe, 20 Member Organizations of Humanists International established the European Humanist Services Network in 2024 to make humanist ceremonies, humanist existential care in hospitals, prisons, the armed forces and universities, and humanist youth education available to everyone who wants them. Partners contribute staff time or funding to shared projects.[20]

24. In Nigeria, Advocacy for Alleged Witches works to end violence against people accused of witchcraft, most of them women, children, and older people. With a Humanists International Development Grant of £7,000 in 2024, it provided temporary housing, supported survivors' reintegration into their communities, and gave start-up capital for small businesses. It has worked with customary authorities to secure apologies and commitments from accusers, strengthened its partnership with the National Human Rights Commission, and reports no new "witch hunts" in the Gwer area of Benue State since its intervention and community dialogue.[21]

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[18] Taiwanese Humanist Institute, 'Taiwanese Humanist Institute: Building a Rational, Compassionate, and Inclusive Society' (THI) <https://humanist.tw/> accessed 9 October 2026.
[19] American Humanist Association, 'American Humanist Association to Host Nationwide Day of Service on May 2' (American Humanist Association, 27 April 2026).
[20] European Humanist Services Network, 'About EHSN' (EHSN) <https://humanistservices.eu/about-ehsn/> accessed 21 October 2026.
[21] Humanists International, 'Empowering Alleged Witches: Fighting Human Rights Violations in Nigeria' (Humanists International) <https://humanists.international/grantee/empowering-alleged-witches-fighting-human-rights-violations-in-nigeria/> accessed 19 October 2026.

25. Freedom Centre Uganda, with the support of Humanists International, has led critical thinking workshops for hundreds of students.[22] Additionally, they have created resources open to all humanists and non-religious individuals around the world.[23]

Barriers to Solidarity Actions

26. For many humanists, the first barrier is that their existence is not recognized. Where identity documents require a religious affiliation from a closed list, such as in Egypt and Malaysia, non-religious people are forced to misstate their beliefs. Where humanist organizations are refused registration, they cannot open bank accounts, receive grants or enter partnerships, and thus cannot receive the crucial international support described above. The Atheists in Kenya Society spent years in litigation before the High Court upheld its registration in December 2024.[24]

27. In some States, non-belief itself is treated as a security threat. Saudi Arabia's 2014 counter-terrorism regulations, for example, define calling for atheist thought in any form as terrorism.[25] Those who act in solidarity with others can also face judicial harassment. Panayote Dimitras, a Greek humanist and co-founder of the Greek Helsinki Monitor, has faced investigation and prosecution since 2022, alongside Norwegian humanitarian worker Tommy Olsen, on charges including forming a criminal organization and facilitating irregular entry. The charges followed his alerts to the Greek authorities and UNHCR in July 2021 about the arrival on Kos and Farmakonisi of people wishing to apply for asylum. He has been barred from carrying out Greek Helsinki Monitor's activities pending trial, and Amnesty International has described the charges as unsupported by evidence and a misuse of anti-smuggling legislation. Their trial was due to open in Rhodes on 6 October 2026.[26] Panayote has also faced harassment for his work combating antisemitism,[27] and was convicted of filing "false

[22] Humanists International, 'Critical Thinking Project Reaches over 300 People in Five Ugandan Schools' (Humanists International, 10 June 2026) <https://humanists.international/2026/06/critical-thinking-project-reaches-over-300-people-in-five-ugandan-schools/> accessed 16 October 2026.
[23] Freedom Centre-Uganda, photo post (Facebook, 3 July 2026) <https://www.facebook.com/fcmbarara/photos/1531090345729447/> accessed 14 October 2026.
[24] Humanists International, 'Kenya: Court Ruling a Boost for Secularism in the Country' (Humanists International, 6 December 2024).
[25] Human Rights Watch, 'Saudi Arabia: New Terrorism Regulations Assault Rights' (Human Rights Watch, 20 March 2014).
[26] Amnesty International, 'Greece: Human Rights Defenders Tommy Olsen and Panayote Dimitras on Trial for Their Work Supporting Refugees and Migrants' (Amnesty International, October 2026); Humanists International, 'Greece: Humanist Barred from Human Rights Work' (Humanists International, February 2023).
[27] Minority Rights Group International, 'Greek Human Rights Activist Target of Hate Campaign Following Conviction of Holocaust Denial Author' (Minority Rights Group International) <https://minorityrights.org/greek-human-rights-activist-target-of-hate-campaign-following-conviction-of-holocaust-denial-author/> accessed 19 October 2026.

accusations" against a bishop for hate speech.[28] OMCT has considered this pattern of judicial harassment to constitute SLAPP.[29]

28. Even where humanists are formally free, religious privilege can exclude them from the structures through which solidarity is organized. In Denmark, the law on faith organizations would need amending before non-religious life stance organizations such as the Danish Humanist Society could be recognized on equal terms with religious ones.[30]

29. The most extreme risks include humanists being killed, arrested and imprisoned for expressing their beliefs. In 2015, extremists in Bangladesh hacked to death the humanist writers and bloggers Avijit Roy, Washiqur Rahman, Ananta Bijoy Das, and Niloy Neel, and later that year murdered Faisal Arefin Dipan, a publisher of secularist books.[31] Two years earlier, four bloggers had been arrested for "hurting religious sentiments."[32] Many survivors and fellow bloggers fled the country in fear for their lives. Humanists International raised the killings at the UN, monitored and lobbied on the authorities' response, and organized an open letter with Bangladeshi bloggers and activists to express the "collective solidarity" of the humanist and human rights community worldwide. In February 2016, exiled bloggers and survivors of the attacks joined human rights organizations at a Bangladesh Solidarity Book Fair in The Hague. Our 2025 Freedom of Thought Report identifies 65 countries where blasphemy or criticism of religion can be punished by a term of imprisonment and 12 where apostasy or blasphemy can carry the death penalty.[33]

30. Restrictions on foreign funding, often framed as "foreign agent" or international cooperation laws, cut small belief minority organizations off from the international support on which many depend. At different points in time, individuals within our members have expressed fears about surveillance, especially when speaking out against authoritarian governments. Along these lines, renowned humanist and disaster medicine researcher, Ahmadreza Djalali,[34] has been sentenced to death in Iran

[28] Helena Smith, 'Activists Convicted of "Falsely Accusing" Greek Bishop of Hate Speech' *The Guardian* (London, 15 February 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/15/activists-convicted-of-falsely-accusing-greek-bishop-of-hate-speech> accessed 13 October 2026.
[29] OMCT, 'Greece: Continued Judicial Harassment against Migrants' Rights Defender Panayote Dimitras' (OMCT) <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-against-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras-2> accessed 19 October 2026.
[30] Humanists International, 'At the UN, Humanists Calls on Denmark to Recognize Non-Religious Organizations on Equal Terms' (Humanists International, 26 September 2026) <https://humanists.international/2026/09/at-the-un-humanists-calls-on-denmark-to-recognize-non-religious-organizations-on-equal-terms/> accessed 16 October 2026.
[31] 'Bangladeshi Secular Publisher Hacked to Death' (BBC News, 31 October 2015) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34688245> accessed 19 October 2026.
[32] Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Attacks on the Press in 2013: Bangladesh' (CPJ, 12 February 2014) <https://cpj.org/2014/02/attacks-on-the-press-in-2013-bangladesh/> accessed 20 October 2026.
[33] Humanists International, *Freedom of Thought Report 2025* (Humanists International 2025).
[34] Humanists International, 'Ahmadreza Djalali' (Humanists International, last updated 30 November 2023) <https://humanists.international/case-of-concern/ahmadreza-djalali/> accessed 9 October 2026.

on false charges of espionage and "spreading corruption on earth", and has been subjected to enforced disappearance since June 2025.[35]

Recommendations

31. Humanists International asks the Independent Expert to recommend that States:

31.1. Explicitly recognize and support the role of non-religious, humanist, and atheist groups in efforts towards international solidarity

31.2. Identify and ameliorate the risks faced by those acting in solidarity with others, due to actions by States or non-State actors, including non-religious activists who, in acting on their beliefs, are persecuted by States

[35] Amnesty International, 'Iran: Further Information: Forcibly Disappeared Swedish-Iranian at Risk of Execution' (MDE 13/0334/2025, 24 September 2025) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0334/2025/en/> accessed 21 October 2026.