



# Economic and Social Council

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### High-level segment

## **Statement submitted by Atheist Alliance International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality for Non-Believers.

Atheist Alliance International is a global federation of atheist groups and individuals committed to educating its members and the public about atheism and critical thinking. We support atheists around the world who are discriminated against and criminalized. As such we appreciate the work the United Nations has done to protect the rights of everyone, including non-believers.

The international community has made great strides over the past 60 years in articulating and protecting universal human rights, including the individual's right to hold religious beliefs and to practice religion privately and publicly.

Unfortunately, none of the international human rights declarations or treaties promulgated to date explicitly provides equivalent rights for those who choose to follow no religion or have no religious beliefs. For example, some states require citizens to declare a religion when they register the birth of a child. Religious people are unlikely to have any difficulty with this requirement, but non-religious people may see it as overriding their freedom to register their child as non-religious or to keep this information as a private matter. You will look in vain for any international human rights statement that proscribes this practice.

Perhaps this example is a minor irritant but, in parts of the world, non-believers are a persecuted and outlawed minority. In some states, leaving your religion is a criminal offense carrying draconian penalties up to, and including, execution.

Atheist Alliance International seeks to clarify the human rights of people who hold no religious beliefs. We hold that non-believers' rights should be explicitly equal to believers' rights and should be recognized as such in international treaties. We wish to make this very clear: We do not seek to diminish in any way the existing rights of believers, rather we seek equality of rights.

Nor do we seek to create 'special' rights to benefit non-believers uniquely. We see belief as a spectrum from strong belief through indifference to strong non-belief. Humans may be at any point on that spectrum and may change their position at different times in their lives. We seek rights that apply to the entire spectrum rather than to those occupying particular parts of it. Human rights should attach to all of us on the basis of our humanity, not on the basis of our beliefs. Consequently, freedom of religion and freedom from religion must be non-derogable rights applicable to all people at all times.

The United Nations stands at the forefront of protecting freedom of religion and belief. We ask that it courageously and urgently defend dissenters irrespective of their religion, belief or non-belief.

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