



## ORAL STATEMENT

International Humanist and Ethical Union

**UN Human Rights Council, 34<sup>th</sup> Session (27<sup>th</sup> February – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017)**  
**Universal Periodic Review: Iceland**  
**Elizabeth O'Casey**

This statement is joined by our member organisation, Sidmennt (the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association) and partner, the European Humanist Federation.

Since it was not mentioned during the Universal Periodic Review process or in the outcome document, we wanted to take this opportunity to warmly welcome, since its last review, Iceland's introduction of a bill removing the anti-blasphemy provision of its Criminal Code, as agreed by the Icelandic parliament on 2 August 2015.<sup>1</sup>

We also note the extensive support for the bill amongst the various organizations consulted by the parliament, including our campaign partners Sidmennt, and the bishop of Iceland, the Icelandic priesthood, the Association of Publishers, and PEN Iceland.

In accordance with recommendations by UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief<sup>2</sup> and on Freedom of Expression,<sup>3</sup> as well as General Comment 22 of the Human Rights Committee and the Council of Europe ( Venice Commission)<sup>4</sup>, Iceland has taken an important step in guaranteeing the human right to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression for its citizens and in providing an example of good practice we urge other states (which make up a quarter of UN members) to replicate.

Blasphemy laws protect ideas, not people and in so doing threaten the very underpinnings of the human rights framework.

We would also like to encourage, in line with France, Mongolia and Sudan's recommendations,<sup>5</sup> the establishing of an independent national human rights institution, in full compliance with the Paris principles relating to the status of national institutions. We highlight the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR issued on 6 February on the creation of such an institution and we invite Iceland to use the expertise, experience and network of the Icelandic Human Rights Center in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://end-blasphemy-laws.org/2015/07/blasphemy-law-abolished-in-iceland/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://end-blasphemy-laws.org/about/the-international-human-rights-consensus-against-blasphemy-laws/>, A/HRC/34/50

<sup>3</sup> E.g. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21074&LangID=E>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-STD\(2010\)047-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-STD(2010)047-e)

<sup>5</sup> A/HRC/3/4/7, §115.34, §115.40