

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 56th Session**

**18 June to 12 July 2024**

**Item 3 – Interactive Dialogue with the independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity**

**Speaker: Humanists UK representative: William Mulroy<sup>1</sup>**

Thank you Independent Expert for your report, particularly your statement that so-called ‘moral disapproval’ even when widespread cannot be used to undermine fundamental human rights.<sup>2</sup>

We wish to align this with the findings of the former special rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion and belief Dr Ahmed Shaheed that ‘in all regions of the world, actors citing religious justifications for their actions have advocated to governments and to the broader public for the preservation or imposition of laws and policies that directly or indirectly discriminate against women, girls and LGBT+ persons’.<sup>3</sup>

We remain deeply concerned by the findings of openDemocracy in 2020, that Christian fundamentalists in the United States have been able to influence policymakers by spending over \$280 million on global advocacy against same-sex marriage, comprehensive sexuality education, and the human rights of LGBT people more broadly.<sup>4</sup>

Their total spending is understood to have increased considerably since then. In the UK, politicians have been funded by American groups pushing Christian conservatism in the name of ‘religious freedom’. This phrase falls short of the standard human rights wording of ‘freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief’ and is used to undermine the rights of children, of women – especially in relation to their reproductive freedom – and of LGBT people.<sup>5</sup>

Will the Independent Expert reiterate Dr Shaheed’s recommendations for states to affirm that religious attitudes must not be used to justify violations of human rights?

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<sup>1</sup> Humanists UK is the operating name of the British Humanist Association.

<sup>2</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to the human rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association*, A/HRC/56/49, 18 April 2024.

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/057/40/pdf/g2405740.pdf?token=BoF7cWR10r4XblppNQ&e=true>

<sup>3</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report on freedom of religion or belief and gender equality*, A/HRC/43/48, 27 February 2020.

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/217/76/pdf/g2021776.pdf?token=LqYy1qOQEA9pELRbw2&e=true>

<sup>4</sup> openDemocracy, ‘Revealed: \$280m “dark money” spent by US Christian Right groups globally’, October 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/trump-us-christian-spending-global-revealed/>

<sup>5</sup> *The Guardian*, ‘“Extreme” US anti-abortion group ramps up lobbying in Westminster’, 15 June 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/06/extreme-us-anti-abortion-group-ramps-up-lobbying-in-westminster>