

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 39th Session (10-28 September 2018)**

**Universal periodic review: Russia**

**Speaker: Humanists UK<sup>1</sup> representative, Dr David Harvey**

We wish to highlight the recommendations from several member states that the Russian Federation improve its protections for people who identify, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), and in relation to freedom of religion or belief.

With regard to LGBT rights, in June, Humanists UK patron Peter Tatchell was arrested in Russia whilst he was protesting against increasing violence against gay men across Russia.<sup>2</sup> We recommend that the Russian Federation enforces the right to freedom of expression and the right to peacefully protest as laid out in Article 19 of the UDHR. We urge the Russian Federation to ensure its national legislation on equality is in line with international standards on human rights; in particular, we urge that the recommendation that the law prohibiting the ‘propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations’ be urgently repealed.

We are particularly concerned by the persecution of gay men in Chechnya. Since 2017 there have been domestic and international reports of state-sanctioned violence being committed. Over a hundred men suspected of being gay have been abducted, tortured, and some murdered whilst the Government insists upon the non-existence of gay people. One man, Maxim Lapunov, reports that he was tortured by the Chechen authorities: held in a cell for 12 days, had a bag over his head by police, and repeatedly beaten, because of his sexual orientation.<sup>3</sup> We support the recommendations calling for a thorough investigation into the persecution taking place.

With regard to freedom of belief, we are concerned about the increase in the use of blasphemy laws to criminalise those who peacefully express non-religious views. In particular, we urge Russia to repeal the 2013 law which criminalises ‘insult to the religious feelings of believers’. Such blasphemy laws are incompatible with international standards of human rights and we urge Russia to recognise that human rights laws apply to all of its citizens, including humanists and other non-religious people.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Humanists UK recently changed its name from the British Humanist Association.

<sup>2</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/2018/06/14/humanists-uk-patron-peter-tatchell-detained-in-russia-for-lgbt-rights-protest/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/a-man-tortured-in-chechnya-for-being-gay-dares-to-go-public-with-his-story/2017/10/16/86ce1d7a-b277-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7a21b7ba64a6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/a-man-tortured-in-chechnya-for-being-gay-dares-to-go-public-with-his-story/2017/10/16/86ce1d7a-b277-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html?utm_term=.7a21b7ba64a6)