



December 10th is Human Rights Day, when [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, is celebrated worldwide. Last year, the International Humanist and Ethical Union released its latest Freedom of Thought Report, while in Ipswich we contributed to a local celebration. [The IHEU introduced its report](#) as follows:

The 2015 edition of the report documents how persecution of the non-religious has escalated in the past year. There has been a rise in extrajudicial violence, and in several states harsher judicial sentences have been handed down for crimes such as “blasphemy” and “apostasy” (leaving religion). The Freedom of Thought Report 2015, produced by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), records discrimination and persecution against humanists, atheists, and the non-religious, with a country-by-country assessment. ([Read more about the Report.](#)) The 2015 study draws attention to a string of murders in Bangladesh: four humanist bloggers and one secular publisher were hacked to death in machete assassinations. The victims were Avijit Roy, Washqiur Rahman Babu, Ananta Bijoy Das, Niladri Chatterjee, and most recently the publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon.

Since the report's publication, the persecution of atheists, secularists, dissidents, and anyone brave enough to challenge theocratic orthodoxy, has continued. One of the latest victims is the Palestinian artist, curator, and poet [Ashraf Fayadh](#), 35, who's been sentenced to death by beheading in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi authorities have declared his crime as “apostasy,” or abandoning one’s religion—in this case, renouncing Islam. Among other things, he's also accused of promulgating “atheism and destructive thoughts” in his 2008 book of poems, *Instructions Within*. The Saudis have recently beheaded a record number of people, prompting many to comment that ISIS isn't the only organisation to relish this grisly form of execution. The annual Celebration of Human Rights in Ipswich, organised by [the local UN Association](#), includes contributions from local faith groups and others. The theme was from Article 25 Part 1 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Our chairperson, Denis Johnston, spoke on our behalf.

I must confess that before this event I had never really noticed Article 25 and when I first read it it seemed to be unlikely - a rather Utopian view. Some might even argue that with a looming epidemic of obesity some of these rights may well have gone too far or at least run their course. But that would be a misunderstanding. For the essence of Article 25 is that it prohibits any deliberate act that deprives others of the necessities of life. It is primarily focused on governments but applies to any national, religious or indeed other organized group that deliberately or by omission prevents others from attaining an adequate standard of living. To give some context: when it was written the world had just emerged from the second world war. More had died from starvation and exposure than from direct military action. Many of the major cities especially in Europe and Asia were in ruins. Decent housing and medical care were a distant dream for millions. Harrowing images of former concentration and forced labour camp victims and the destitution of refugee civilians was being revealed to a mass audience for the first time through cinema news reels. What was also abundantly clear was that none of this was an accident and none of it was due to natural disaster. As so often before the history of humankind really isn't just about kings and queens, battles and sieges: it's about food. Most human activity boils down to this procuring, storing, and eating enough food. Hunger is, and was, a powerful weapon. It would be wonderful to say that we had learnt our lesson but as we all know since then deprivation, especially of food has remained a means for political control. The only difference is it has become subtler than before and it tends to be the means for food production - by water restriction or diversion, eco destruction, by appropriation of land by certain groups, selective taxation and even the partisan allocation of seed, fertiliser etc., along or partisan lines. The challenges ahead are even more formidable not least because the population of the world is destined to grow to 8 billion by 2030. It has been estimated (by the UK Chief scientific adviser) that to fulfil the 'adequate standard of living for all similar to that' understood by article 25 in 15 years' time we will need 40% cent more food, 30% more fresh water and 50% more energy.' There may be some who think and hope that such a challenge can only be met by divine intervention - but as humanists we think that the only way will be by human endeavour and human co-operation. All the Rights laid down in in the UN Charter represent shared values rooted in our common humanity and our shared human needs. They all transcend cultural and religious traditions and we both celebrate them and give them our full support.

The UK is the only democratic country to have religious representation in its legislature as of right, which is absurd. Now that [the Church of England has sanctioned its US branch](#) because it supports equal marriage, there's even more reason to boot the bishops out of the Lords. Sign this petition and write to your MP. The petition states:

Remove Church of England Bishops from the House of Lords. With the publication of the Church of England's intention to sanction the US Episcopal Church over the latter's sympathetic stance towards equal marriage, the C of E is quite out of step with UK Law and indeed common humanity. Thus we feel strongly these bishops have no place in our government.

[Click here to sign](#). [Click here to read the National Secular Society's briefing on the bishops](#), with ammunition to use when writing to your MP - just as important as signing the petition.

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Feb 2016
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A video from an interview with primatologist [Jane Goodall](#) made for [Yann Arthus-Bertrand's](#) film '[Human](#)'.

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May 2016
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[caption id="attachment_8167" align="alignleft" width="150"] Taken on the set of 'In Cold Blood' in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas.[/caption] Today is Sir David Attenborough's 90th birthday. This is a quote from 'Life on Earth', included in a 'Humanist Anthology', [available from the BHA](#).

"Man's passion to communicate and to receive communications seems as central to his success as a species as the fin was to the fish or the feather to the birds. We do not limit ourselves to our own acquaintances or even our own generation. Archaeologists labour to decipher clay tablets rescued with painstaking care from Uruk and other ancient cities in the hope that the same citizen long ago may have recorded a message of more significance than a boastful genealogy of a chief or a laundry list. In our own cities, dignitaries arrange for messages to be sent to future generations by burying writings in steel cylinders strong enough to survive even a nuclear catastrophe. And scientists, convinced that man's most refined language of all is that of mathematics, select a universal truth that they believe will be recognised through all eternity — a formula for the wavelength of light — and beam it towards other galaxies in the Milky Way to proclaim that here on earth, after three thousand million years of evolution, a creature has emerged that has for the first time devised its own way of accumulating and transferring experience across generations. This last chapter has been devoted to only one species, ourselves. This may have given the impression that somehow man is the ultimate triumph of evolution, that all these millions of years of development have had no purpose other than to put him on earth. There is no scientific evidence whatever to support such a view and no reason to suppose that our stay here will be any more permanent than that of the dinosaur. The processes of evolution are still going on among plants and birds, insects and mammals. So it is more than likely that if men were to disappear from the face of the earth, for whatever reason, there is a modest, unobtrusive creature somewhere that would develop into a new form and take our place. But although denying that we have a special position in the natural world might seem becomingly modest in the eye of eternity, it might also be used as an excuse for evading our responsibilities. The fact is that no species has ever had such control over everything on earth, living or dead, as we now have. That lays upon us, whether we like it or not, an awesome responsibility. In our hands now lies not only our own future, but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the earth."

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Jun 2016
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Whatever your views about the outcome of the British EU referendum, you may like to know that English, Irish and Scottish Humanists are members of the European Humanist Federation, and this won't change. [Click here to find out more about it.](#) The British Humanist Association has been neutral about EU membership but has published some Leave and Remain views on its website. [Click here to read them.](#)

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Aug 2016



All the news about what we've been doing and what we will be doing over the next few months. [Click here to download our latest newsletter](#) (PDF) and share it with anyone who's interested.

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Nov 2016



Our latest newsletter is out now. Sorry it's rather brief. Will have more to offer next time. There's a meeting on Tuesday 8th November - **Gospel Truth?** Richard Layton plans to explore the origins of Biblical myths, in particular the earliest writings on Jesus (before the Four Gospels) which some scholars claim reveal that the Resurrection was celebrated as a spiritual event—not the physical event that later gospel writers claimed. For the venue and time, see the newsletter. [Click here to download it.](#)