

Repeal Blasphemy Laws



Faith . Freedom . For All.

Laws penalizing blasphemy stifle religious expression and undermine human rights. Most societies have had religious dissenters and other nonconformists, and history teaches us that state-enforced theological conformity simply doesn't work. While legal definitions vary, "blasphemy" refers to words or actions that disrespect religion. Blasphemy laws are often used to silence religious minorities or political opponents and to foster religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence within society.

Support religious freedom by calling for the global repeal of blasphemy and apostasy laws.

What are blasphemy and apostasy laws?

- A blasphemy law seeks to punish those who insult, offend, demean, or denigrate religion (including religious doctrines, leaders, symbols, and texts) with fines, imprisonment, or even the death penalty. An apostasy law criminalizes changing from one religion to another.
- Blasphemy laws harm all of us — religious and nonreligious alike. They are used to justify vigilante violence against both religious and nontheistic dissenters. They harm practitioners of the protected religion by preventing them from asking hard questions to better connect their faith to their daily lives. Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and others have been imprisoned, tortured, and executed for blasphemy offenses.
- In its report titled "Respecting Rights? Measuring the World's Blasphemy Laws," the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom compiled blasphemy laws from all regions of the world, finding them in at least 1/3 of the world's countries.

H.Res. 512 and S.Res. 458

- Call on the President and the Secretary of State to: (1) make the repeal of blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy laws a priority in the bilateral relationships of the United States with all countries that have such laws and (2) designate countries that enforce such laws as "countries of particular concern for religious freedom" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.
- Urge the governments of countries which enforce their blasphemy laws to: (1) amend or repeal such laws and (2) release unconditionally and ensure the safety of those who have been prosecuted, imprisoned, and persecuted on charges of blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy.
- Encourage the President and the Secretary of State: (1) to oppose any efforts by the United Nations to create a model for blasphemy laws and (2) to support efforts by the United Nations to combat religious intolerance, discrimination, or violence and avoid restricting religious expression.

Support bipartisan resolutions
H.Res. 512 and S.Res. 458

Who supports the resolution?

The **original sponsors** of H.Res. 512 are Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Maryland, and Rep. Mark Meadows, R-North Carolina. Sen. James Lankford, R-Oklahoma, and Sen. Chris Coons, D-Delaware, are the original sponsors of S.Res. 458.

A **growing coalition** of more than four dozen religious and nontheistic advocacy organizations have signed an advocacy letter supporting H.Res. 512 and S.Res. 458, including Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC), American Humanist Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Hindu American Foundation, Union for Reform Judaism, The United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society, and World Muslim Conference.

Impact of blasphemy laws around the world

“Blasphemy” refers to words or actions that disrespect religion. Blasphemy laws are often used to silence religious minorities or political opponents and to foster religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence within society.

In 2014, **Mariam Ibraheem**, a pregnant 27-year-old woman, was convicted and sentenced to death on apostasy charges in Sudan. Meriam was detained with her young son and gave birth to her daughter in her cell while shackled. After receiving international attention, Meriam was found innocent of all charges and finally freed.

In 2017, Russian blogger **Ruslan Sokolovsky** received a 27-month suspended sentence and was banned from public events after posting a video of himself playing Pokémon Go inside a Russian cathedral.

In 2017, **Basuki Tjahaja Purnama** was seeking to become the first elected non-Muslim leader in Jakarta, Indonesia. He had a comfortable lead in the race until an edited video of one of his campaign speeches sparked outrage against him for appearing to criticize the Quran. Even though someone was eventually convicted for tampering with the video, his blasphemy conviction stood. Purnama was released from prison in January 2019 after serving his two-year sentence.

In 2016, **Albert Voss**, a retired physics teacher and professed atheist, was convicted of blasphemy in Germany for painting anti-Christian slogans on his car. He was fined €500.

In 2012, **Bishoy Kameel Kamel Garas**, a Coptic Christian in Egypt, was convicted of blasphemy for posts shared on a fake Facebook page impersonating him. Despite alerting the authorities of the fake account, posting a disclaimer on his own account, and obtaining a recorded confession from the creator of the fake account, he was convicted of blasphemy, and his family regularly received death threats. He served more than three years in prison before finally being acquitted of this crime he didn't commit.

In 2015, **Abdul Shakoor** received a three-year sentence for blasphemy in Pakistan. He was put on trial for the offense of selling books related to Ahmadiyya, a group who considers themselves Muslim but are not legally permitted to describe themselves as Muslims. According to research statistics collected by the Center for Social Justice in Pakistan, 84% of the people charged under the Pakistani blasphemy laws between 1987-2016 have been Muslim or Ahmadiyya.

In 2014, **Kerolos Shouky Attallah** was convicted of blasphemy in Egypt for “liking” a Facebook page for Arabic-speaking Christian converts. He was sentenced to six years in prison, even though he “unliked” the page and never shared any of the page's posts nor posted any content himself.

In 2018, **Aasiya Noreen**, also known as Asia Bibi, was cleared of her blasphemy conviction in Pakistan and released from death row. Noreen is a Christian mother of five who was convicted in 2010 and sentenced to death by hanging. A mob nearly beat her to death in front of her 9-year-old daughter just before her arrest. Two of the Pakistani officials who came to her defense for the unjust conviction were assassinated for supporting her cause. She spent eight years on death row.

Laws are starting to be repealed — let's keep this list growing!

More than 10% of countries with blasphemy laws in 2015 have repealed them: Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, and Norway.



Support
bipartisan
resolutions
H.Res. 512
S.Res. 458