



**International Humanist and Ethical Union**

## *About the organization*

The International Humanist and Ethical Union is the world union of more than 100 Humanist, rationalist, secular, ethical culture, atheist and freethought organizations from more than 40 countries. Its mission is to represent and support the global Humanist movement, with the ultimate goal of building a Humanist world in which human rights are respected and all can live a life of dignity.

As a federation of national and regional Humanist groups, IHEU co-ordinates activities of its Member Organizations, stimulates their policies and guides their strategies, fosters the growth of new Humanist groups, and represents the interests of Humanists at the United Nations and other international forums. IHEU's Member Organizations range from large membership groups to specialist bodies such as publishers, universities and development agencies.

IHEU is a clearing-house for information and inspiration, and a forum where Humanist organizations and individuals can exchange thoughts and expertise for improving the impact of national and international activities. By representing Humanism to the world media, IHEU ensures that an ever-greater number of people learn of the Humanist alternative.

IHEU is democratically organized and is funded by donations and membership dues from its Member Organizations and Individual Supporters. IHEU Member Organizations are Full Members, Specialist Members or Associate Members. Individuals can associate themselves with IHEU by becoming Individual Supporters.

Founded in the Netherlands in 1952, the IHEU is incorporated in New York and headquartered in London, UK. IHEU is an international NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) with Special Consultative Status with the United Nations (New York, Geneva, Vienna), General Consultative Status at UNICEF (New York) and the Council of Europe (Strasbourg), and Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. IHEU also maintains operational relations with UNESCO (Paris).

IHEU promotes campaigns on various matters of interest to humanists and sponsors conferences, including the triennial World Humanist Congress. It publishes a quarterly magazine, *International Humanist News*, and a French language magazine, *Informations Humanistes Internationales*.

The primary campaign themes of IHEU are:

- For freedom of religion and belief and freedom of conscience
- The abolition of blasphemy and apostasy laws
- For constitutional secularism and separation of religion and state
- Against child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Against persecution based on religion and belief
- For recognition of and respect for human rights, particularly the human rights of women and children
- For the human rights of untouchables and against untouchability
- For a humanist approach to social issues
- For increased understanding of science and critical thinking.



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## *Organization Fast Facts*

- Name:** International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)
- Founded:** 1952
- Organization Structure:** Democratic membership non-profit bringing together more than 100 organizations in 40 countries. Headquartered in London, UK, IHEU also has staff in India, Nigeria, Uganda and the USA.
- Purpose:** The purpose of the IHEU is to promote Humanism throughout the world, to develop Humanism as a life stance, to represent organized Humanism in international bodies, to defend human rights and the rights of humanists, to develop organized Humanism in every part of the world, and to build a strong and effective global organization.
- Activities:** IHEU campaigns for human rights and separation of religion and government. It sponsors conferences, including the triannual World Humanist Congress. IHEU publishes a quarterly magazine, *International Humanist News*, plus an annual magazine in French, *Informations Humanistes Internationales*. It represents humanist opinion at the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and other international forums. In the past 15 years it has distributed more than a million Euros to humanist projects in the developing world.
- Membership:** IHEU has more than 100 Member Organizations from 40 countries on six continents. They range from national membership groups to specialist bodies such as publishers, universities and development agencies. Common activities include:
- Humanist ceremonies for members and other non-religious people
  - Humanist education for children and adults
  - Critiques of religion and promotion of secular ethics
  - Social work and activism for a more humane society
  - Advocacy and lobbying for separation of religion and government
  - Support for local communities, youth networks, and membership conferences.



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## *About IHEU Spokespersons*

### **President**

The President, **Sonja Eggerickx**, is based in Ghent, Belgium and is also President of the federation of Flemish Humanist organizations in Belgium. Professionally, Sonja is a Senior Schools Inspector in Moral Education. She speaks widely on Humanism, IHEU, moral education, and on how Humanism empowers women.

### **Staff and Representatives**

**Roy Brown** leads the IHEU delegation to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council in Geneva, where he has led IHEU campaigns for freedom of expression and other fundamental rights. A former president of IHEU, he received the Danish Free Press Society's Free Press Prize in 2006 and the IHEU Distinguished Service to Humanism award in 2008. With his wife Diana, he founded the World Population Foundation.

**Matt Cherry** is IHEU International Representative and leads the IHEU delegation to the UN headquarters in New York. He also handles IHEU's public relations. Cherry has played a leading role in humanist groups in Britain, the Netherlands, and the USA. He also served two terms as president of the UN NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief, where he is now vice president. He has co-authored books on secular parenting and humanism in business.

**Babu Gogineni** is International Director for IHEU. Gogineni successfully led IHEU's worldwide campaign to liberate Dr. Younis Shaikh, victim of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, from death row. Currently based in India, Gogineni is leading an international campaign against untouchability and is working on programs to help the victims of belief in witchcraft. Babu also runs Humanist leadership training workshops and youth training programmes to expose supposed miracles, and to combat superstition.

**Leo Igwe** is IHEU's Representative for West Africa, working out of Nigeria. He is coordinating the development of Humanism in francophone Africa as well as a network of Humanist groups in Southern Africa. As part of IHEU's campaign against untouchability, he has focused attention on untouchables in Nigeria. Igwe represents IHEU at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

**Deo Ssekitooleko** is IHEU's Representative for East Africa, working out of Uganda. He has founded humanist groups and humanist schools in Uganda, and is working to develop more humanist groups and projects in East and Central Africa. He has organized national, regional, and global humanist conferences in Uganda.



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## *The Humanist Philosophy and Movement*

### **Philosophy**

Humanism is a philosophy of life inspired by humanity and guided by reason. It provides the basis for a fulfilling and ethical life without religion. Humanists make sense of the world using reason, experience and shared human values.

### **Adherents**

Humanist philosophies have arisen separately in many different cultures over thousands of years. Non-theistic and non-religious people who accept humanist principles are now the world's fastest growing belief group. According to the *World Encyclopedia of Christianity*, "the number of nonreligionists .... throughout the 20th century has skyrocketed from 3.2 million in 1900, to 697 million in 1970, and on to 918 million in AD 2000"

### **Definitions**

"Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance that affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality." *IHEU 'Minimum Statement of Humanism'*

"...seeking, without religion, the best in, and for, human beings." *Chambers Pocket Dictionary*

"...a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason." *Merriam Webster Dictionary*

"...an appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality... Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God." *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

"The rejection of religion in favor of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts." *Collins Concise Dictionary*

"That which is characteristically human, not supernatural, that which belongs to man and not to external nature, that which raises man to his greatest height or gives him, as man, his greatest satisfaction." *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*



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## *Story ideas*

**Good without God.** Many people think (wrongly) that people who don't believe in a god are without values or morals. But the Humanist movement is dedicated to working for a more humane society without reference to God or the supernatural. Find out more from the global union of humanist and non-theistic groups, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU).

**Untouchability.** Imagine being born into a group that is not allowed to mix with the rest of society. Imagine that because of your birth you are only allowed to do one job: cleaning up human excrement. In India, they used to be called "Untouchables" and are now known as "Dalits". They are, in the most literal sense, outcasts. They have been historically excluded from human society, and deprived of the most basic opportunities. Groups of "untouchables" also exist in other South Asian countries -- Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka -- but also as far afield as Yemen and Nigeria. Find out how and why IHEU is working to end untouchability.

**The fastest growing minority.** Which was the fastest growing "belief group" over the past century? People who reject religion and belief in God. Several surveys have shown the non-religious growing from a few million in 1900 to more than a billion around the world today. Find out from the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), the global union for humanist and non-theistic groups, why so many people are leaving religion.

**Child Marriage.** Many societies encourage parents to marry their young daughters to significantly older men. In fact, child marriage is likely to affect over 100 million girls within the next ten years. And some of them are in Europe and the US. The IHEU argues that child marriages must be viewed within a context of force and coercion. Contact IHEU to find out more about child marriage: its causes, consequences and how to end it.

**Free Speech vs. "Defamation of Religion."** The IHEU has led the campaign to stop the UN from categorizing "Defamation of Religion" as a human rights violation. Learn why outlawing "defamation of religion" may lead to more human rights violations, not less.

### **Other ideas:**

- **What do Humanists do for weddings, funerals and other rites of passage?** Learn why Humanist ceremonies – personalized celebrations without reference to God – are exploding in popularity.
- **How can you raise kids to be good without God?** Learn what humanists are doing – in families, local communities and schools – to raise caring, ethical children without religion.
- **Why do atheists fight for freedom of religion?** Talk to non-religious leaders of United Nations efforts to protect freedom of religion or belief for everyone, no matter what their beliefs.
- **When superstitions kill.** Talk to humanist leaders who save women from being murdered for alleged "witchcraft."