

June 24, 2015

Rep. Ralph Abraham  
417 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-1805

Dear Representative Abraham,

**The undersigned secularist, humanist, nontheist, atheist, and religious freedom advocacy organizations write in support of H. Res. 290, a bi-partisan international religious freedom resolution recently introduced by Reps. Joseph Pitts (R-PA) and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX).**

This resolution calls upon the President and the U.S. State Department to make the repeal of blasphemy laws a priority in their relationships with countries that have such laws. In addition, this resolution encourages the President and the State Department to oppose any efforts at the United Nations or other international forum to create an international anti-blasphemy norm, or attempts to expand the international norm on incitement to include blasphemy or defamation of religions.

Blasphemy laws are the most explicit laws banning the expression of doubts or criticism regarding religion, and various countries employ them to ban criticism of religious beliefs, symbols, and figures. In several countries, the penalty for violating these laws is as severe as death. These laws harm not just the non-religious, but dissidents in all religious sects.

Alexander Aan, a former Indonesian civil servant who in January 2012 posted messages to Facebook expressing his lack of belief in a god, was attacked at his workplace by an angry mob. When police arrived, they arrested Aan and charged him with blasphemy, promoting atheism, and disseminating information aimed at inciting religious hatred or hostility. On June 15, 2012, a district court found Aan guilty of the charges and sentenced him to 30 months in prison, and fined him an amount equivalent to \$10,600.

Raif Badawi, an advocate for freedom of religion, belief, and expression, was arrested and charged on June 17, 2012 with insulting Islam and blasphemy. On July 29, 2013, a criminal court sentenced Badawi to seven years in jail and 600 lashes. On May 7, 2014, a Saudi court issued a new sentence for Raif: 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes, and a fine equivalent to \$267,000. On January 9, 2015, Saudi authorities gave Badawi the first 50 of his 1,000 lashes, and in June 2015 Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court upheld the sentence of 1,000 lashes and ten years in prison.

These are just some of the many cases of individuals who have been affected by blasphemy laws. Thankfully, Congress has the unique ability to promote international religious freedom on the global stage and to encourage governments of countries where religious and non-religious rights are not respected to remedy the situation. **As such, the undersigned groups urge you to co-sponsor this important resolution, and support its passage should it come to the House floor or a committee on which you serve.**

Sincerely,

American Atheists  
American Humanist Association  
Atheist Alliance International  
Atheist Alliance of America  
Camp Quest  
Center for Freethought Equality  
Center for Inquiry  
Ex-Muslims of North America  
Freethought Society  
Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers  
Secular Coalition for America  
Secular Student Alliance  
Secular Woman  
Society for Humanistic Judaism  
Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association  
United Coalition of Reason