

Copenhagen Declaration on Religion in Public Life

We, at the World Atheist Conference: “Gods and Politics”, held in Copenhagen from 18 to 20 June 2010, hereby declare as follows:

- We recognize the unlimited right to freedom of conscience, religion and belief [1], and that freedom to practice one’s religion should be limited only by the need to respect the rights of others.
- We submit that public policy should be informed by evidence and reason, not by dogma.[2]
- We assert the need for a society based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.[3] History has shown that the most successful societies are the most secular. [4]
- We assert that the only equitable system of government in a democratic society is based on secularism: state neutrality in matters of religion or belief, favoring none and discriminating against none.[4]
- We assert that private conduct, which respects the rights of others should not be the subject of legal sanction or government concern.[5]
- We affirm the right of believers and non-believers alike to participate in public life and their right to equality of treatment in the democratic process.
- We affirm the right to freedom of expression for all, subject to limitations only as prescribed in international law – laws which all governments should respect and enforce [6]. We reject all blasphemy laws and restrictions on the right to criticize religion or nonreligious life stances.[7]
- We assert the principle of one law for all, with no special treatment for minority communities, and no jurisdiction for religious courts for the settlement of civil matters or family disputes.
- We reject all discrimination in employment (other than for religious leaders) and the provision of social services on the grounds of race, religion or belief, gender, class, caste or sexual orientation [8].
- We reject any special consideration for religion in politics and public life, and oppose charitable, tax-free status and state grants for the promotion of any religion as inimical to the interests of non-believers and those of other faiths. We oppose state funding for faith schools.
- We support the right to secular education, and assert the need for education in critical thinking and the distinction between faith and reason as a guide to knowledge, and in the diversity of religious beliefs [9]. We support the spirit of inquiry and the teaching of science free from religious interference, and are opposed to indoctrination, religious or otherwise.

Adopted by the conference
Copenhagen, 20 June 2010.

[1] Article 18 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

[2] Societies in the 21st century must be built on a culture of objective knowledge and rational thinking based on evidence provided by the sciences within the legal framework of international human rights. Religions are inherently based on faith and guided by myths and hearsay interpreted by a self-established clergy. Religions should therefore be relegated to the private sphere and have no role in public affairs

[3] The Brussels Declaration 2007.

[4] Research in social science show that strongly religious modern nations have been unsuccessful in terms of basic social and economic indicators such as levels of crime and incarceration, life expectancy, the adverse consequences of sexuality and in securing prosperity. The most secular advanced democracies are consistently the most successful.

[5] The State should neither punish nor favor any group for any reason

[6] Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

[7] Recommendation 1805 (2007) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

[8] Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

[9] Article 14 of Recommendation 1720 (2005) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.