



## ORAL STATEMENT

International Humanist and Ethical Union

**UN Human Rights Council, 35<sup>th</sup> Session (6<sup>th</sup> June – 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017)**

**General Debate on Item 3**

**Elizabeth O'Casey**

This statement is supported by Muslims for Progressive Values.

During the Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), one NGO questioned the validity of his mandate [as one that focuses solely on human rights issues relating to SOGI.]

We could respond to this by citing the countless cases of violence and discrimination against people *because* of their - actual or perceived - sexual orientation or gender identity. This includes the recent case in Chechnya where over 100 men were detained and tortured; men targeted not because they were a certain colour or religion but *because* they were gay or thought to be gay.

But perhaps a more pertinent response would be to point to the OIC boycott of the debate itself, due to the mandate's "introduction and imposition of controversial notions outside the internationally agreed legal framework." We are sure these "notions" won't be much of an "introduction" or "imposition" to those of the 1.5 billion Muslims, the OIC claims to speak for, who identify on the LGBTI spectrum.

The OIC representative called on the Council to "respect relevant matters associated with historical, cultural, social and religious sensitivities" and rejected the "divisive" nature of the mandate.

Mr President, there was a time when "notions" such as women having equal rights to men, or black people being equal to white, would have been divisive. It is no longer the case, thanks to universalist reason and argument, thanks to progress of thought and ideals.

This council is not just about agreement; the validity and universalism of human rights cannot be at the whim of democratic consensus. This Council is about protecting the rights of all people regardless of how they happen to identify or whom they happen to love; and *that* is why we need this mandate.

The IHEU wants to put on record its full support for Professor Muntarbhorn's work.