

## Petition to include atheists in refugee policy gains momentum

**OTTAWA, Ontario - Feb. 17, 2021 - [PRLog](#)** -- A petition launched to save the lives of atheists in countries where they are often labelled as terrorists, apostates or blasphemers has garnered sufficient signatures to be presented to parliament. "As of February 17 we have 1,133 signatories which is enough to move forward," explained Mike Miller, chair of the Humanist Canada petition committee, "But we want thousands of signatures to impress on our members of parliament that Canadians want to treat those who do not have a religious belief with equal protection." Miller said that the penalty for not having religious beliefs includes prison sentences, beatings and even execution.

A year ago the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada introduced a "Less Complex Claims System" for refugees from countries with poor human rights records in certain protected categories. For example, those suffering religious persecution from Pakistan or Saudi Arabia may be "fast tracked," but atheists were not included. Gus Lyn-Piluso, President of the Centre for Free Inquiry, Canada (CFIC) used a case example to explain how unfair this refugee policy is to non-believers:

After a heated debate about religion with a friend in 2011, "Omer" was abducted and beaten by five men. He was sexually assaulted, his finger was cut off, and the abductors used a burning cigarette to write Tauba ("repent") on his arm. Going to the authorities after his escape was not an option because blasphemy is punishable by death in Pakistan. In 2017, the Pakistani Law Enforcement agencies started a [targeted operation](#) to arrest freethinkers and a warrant was registered against Omer. He went into hiding and was eventually declared a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

CFIC is currently working to bring Omer to Canada. Another Pakistani atheist, [Ayaz Nizami](#), was sentenced to death for his beliefs on January 8 of this year. "We have atheist refugee claimants who desperately need asylum. Their claims have been outstanding for over a year even though these refugees face imminent threat of serious injury," explained Doug Thomas of Secular Connexion Séculière (SCS).

The petition to the Canadian House of Commons calling upon the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to include atheists in the Less Complex Claims policy is sponsored by the Centre For Inquiry, Canada; Humanist Canada, and Secular Connexion Séculière. It has been endorsed by well-known humanists Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker and Lawrence Krauss. Those who wish to sign the petition can click on the [e-petition link](#) and scroll down to bottom of the page.

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Source Humanist Canada

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Country Canada

Industry [Non-profit](#)

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