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World Union of  
Catholic Women's  
Organisations

## Human Rights Council

### Sixty-one session

23 february – 31 march 2026

Agenda item 3

## How freedom of religion or belief relates to death and honouring the deceased - Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (A/HRC/61/50)

Joint Oral Statement delivered by New Humanity of the Focolare Movement

**Mr. President,**

New Humanity and the co-signed NGO's express their appreciation for the report presented by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Over 80 per cent of the world's population is affiliated with a religion. In this context, we commend the rigor and sensitivity with which the Special Rapporteur has examined a largely unexplored topic, reflecting a shared understanding across religious traditions as noted in paragraph 2: "life and death are irreversibly linked."

In the words of Pope Francis "death is a 'new' beginning, because we will experience something we have never fully experienced before: eternity."

The report highlights fundamental considerations, including that "the question of stillborn children and deceased foetuses also relates to freedom of religion or belief" (paragraph 40), as well as the obligation to treat deceased human bodies with dignity and respect (paragraph 42), the right of families to bury their deceased in accordance with their beliefs (paragraph 61), and the importance of religious communities for the exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

Finally, we would like to briefly recall one aspect highlighted in our written statement and respectfully invite its consideration in the report to the General Assembly: the right to access

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to spiritual assistance before death, including in emergency situations, as a core manifestation of religious practice and an essential component of human dignity.

Thank you, Mr. President