

IHEU Paris Declaration

The 16th World Congress of IHEU was held in Paris 5 to 7 July, 2005 to commemorate the Centenary of the French Law of Separation of Church and State of 9 December 1905. Inspired by the heritage of the North American Revolution, by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America (1791) and by the Mexican Revolution, this French law was an achievement of the process of secularization initiated by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution so as to put Human Beings at the core of their own destiny.

Everywhere, on every continent, and for centuries, Humanists have been, and are working for the triumph of the freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience is the fundamental basis of Human emancipation and cannot be dissociated from the struggle for democratic liberties. "*Man is the measure of all things*" Protagoras said, thousands of years ago in ancient Greece, the founding fatherland of the notion of citizenship. In ancient India, 600 years before the common era, this humanist principle was already asserted by the ancient Carvakas (in summary): "*Ethics is a phenomenon of nature. This is a social convention, a convenience not a divine command. It is not necessary at all to control instincts and feelings. They are orders of nature. The aim of life is to live and happiness remains the only wisdom*".

Above all, the essence of being human is his or her consciousness and the liberty to use it. No economic, religious, cultural constraints have any legitimate basis to prohibit or limit human freedom of conscience.

There can be no freedom of conscience when religions rule societies. Secularism is the demand for equal rights for those who belong to a religion as well as for those who belong to none. Humanists have always supported actions aimed at building secularism in society and its institutions by demanding this principle of equality for believers and non-believers alike.

For IHEU and its member organizations, the State must be secular, that is neither religious nor atheist. But demanding genuine democratic equality, recognized by the Law between, believers and humanists does not mean that the member associations of IHEU treat all philosophical points of view. We have no duty to respect irrationality, however ancient its origins. True Humanism is the flourishing of freedom of conscience and the methods of free inquiry.

The achievement of the same rights for all is a step toward secularization and the separation of religions and the state is a prerequisite. Secular safeguards must be not merely legal but constitutional - without constitutional safeguards how can we guarantee equal freedom of conscience for all ? A law lacking constitutional safeguards could easily be overturned by a simple majority in the legislature. That is why , everywhere in the world, IHEU demands constitutional separation of religion and state. It lights the way of peoples and countries everywhere. The history of every people, of every nation is different by nature. There are countries, like the USA, where the State is secular but society is not. In France, with the 1905 Law, the State and the school system are secular, and citizens have a real freedom of conscience. There are as many histories as there are countries.

For IHEU every path, for all people and nations, must lead to the achievement of the separation of religion and State. Every secular gain must be preserved, defended and widened for this purpose. For this reason the 16th World Congress of IHEU held in Paris decided to make the separation of religion and State one of its main international focus. The 16th IHEU Congress, held in the UNESCO headquarters and at the Sorbonne University of Paris - two venues which witnessed historical events of the struggle for the achievement of enlightened humanism – resolves that the IHEU will fight for genuine separation of religion and state everywhere in the world.