ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Review of work | ARAP | Humanitarian aid | Campaigns

Finances | Board changes | The future
Atheist Alliance International turned 30 years old in 2021. That in itself is a significant accomplishment for a non-profit organization run by volunteers. We speak up for atheists everywhere, support atheists in danger, and educate people about atheism.

Review of Activity

This past year has been undeniably productive.

We accepted 18 new affiliates bringing us to a total of 65, the largest number in our history.

It has not been such a good year for membership. Many members lapsed over the Covid-19 years and we only added 32 new members in the past 12 months. We have also experienced problems with our membership system, which has not helped. Now we have 522 members, but only 224 are fully paid up. These members brought in nearly $15,000 in fees. Growing membership and fixing our system problems will be a priority for the next 12 months.

Our podcast channel has 620 subscribers. We produced 23 podcast videos, viewed 13,841 times. This added up to 1,199 viewing hours.

Our website has been revamped, making it more engaging and easier for viewers to access stories and obtain the information we provide.

We have created an Advisory Council, a voluntary group of important atheist voices to give support and advice to AAI’s Board of Directors. You can see who the members of the Advisory Council are here: [https://www.atheistalliance.org/our-advisory-council/](https://www.atheistalliance.org/our-advisory-council/)

We have earned a GuideStar Platinum rating for transparency.

We faced some criticisms for actions taken by the board more than four years ago. We reviewed those criticisms carefully and worked diligently to correct any inappropriate actions. We have clarified some issues by revising our bylaws.
A team of affiliates and AAI board directors have put a great deal of effort into drafting new bylaws that we believe are workable, fair and democratic. A draft will be presented to the Annual General Meeting for discussion and the meeting will vote on them.

Atheists at Risk

Most importantly, we have been extremely active in helping atheists at risk. We have been doing this for some years, but recently, we have seen demand grow as more people elect to leave their religion and find themselves at risk. Our response was to set up a formal program that we call The Atheist Support Network (ASN).

ASN has achieved a great deal but, sadly, demand continues to outstrip our resources so there are many atheists in danger that we are unable to support in the way we would wish.

The major areas of support: Emergency relocation, resettlement to a safe country, asylum support, legal support for the victims of blasphemy cases, and advocacy. Below are some examples of our work in this area.

Emergency relocation to safety

Fatma Smida is a young Tunisian woman and an activist. Her ideas clashed with the old values of Tunisian society. She started expressing her thoughts on social media as she grew up about freedom, chastity, and women’s rights. People with Islamic values called her a woman with questionable character and reported to her brother that she was seen speaking with men. The danger was imminent.

The atheist Support Network team immediately intervened and moved her to a different city with a monthly stipend. She is now safe and continues to study.

Adam Rabe Kafinta is an ex-Muslim from the Katsina State of Nigeria. His activism and social media commentaries made him a target of local Muslims. He was threatened and wrote to us from hiding. AAI immediately relocated him to a safe part of the country.
Resettlement in a safe country

**Mahdi Solaili** is a Saudi Arabian activist and was at risk of severe punishment for criticizing the Saudi regime and the religion of Islam. He is now resettled in Europe.

**Nusratullah** is an Afghan academic. He taught law at several universities in Afghanistan and presented his views on secularism on TV. When the Taliban came to power, he had no option but to flee. He is currently resettled in a relatively safe country and continues his advocacy and academic work.

**Hani** is a Somali woman. She was tortured and threatened because of her outspoken criticism of Islamic tradition, and was at risk of forced marriage. With AAI's support, she is now residing in a safe country.

**Ms. Izzat** is an Egyptian LGBTQ woman, artist, and activist. She used her art for activism and was very active with several atheist groups, such as the Atheist Republic. She suffered from all kinds of torture when some people found out about her activism. She was often beaten severely, blackmailed, raped, and threatened with death. AAI supported her with funds to continue her artwork and she was later resettled in a safe country in Europe.

*AN EXAMPLE OF MS IZZAT'S ARTWORK*
**Battling to Save Blasphemy Law Victims**

Atheist Alliance International is a specialist in blasphemy cases. Our legal teams are fighting blasphemy cases actively in several countries including Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Nigar.

**Omar Farouq**, a teenager from Nigeria, captured the attention of world media. He was 15 when charged with blasphemy and sentenced to a 10-years jail term with menial labor. Because of AAI’s intervention last year his sentence was quashed. He was released from prison and safe accommodation was found for him and family members. Our legal battles in Nigeria continued this year too.

**Yahaya Sharif-Aminu**, a 22-year-old singer from Nigeria was charged with blasphemy and sentenced to death. Our legal team was able to quash the death sentence. However, the court remitted him back to the Shariah court for a retrial. Our lawyers immediately appealed that decision. He is currently in jail and the legal battle to get him released continues.

**Mubarak Bala**, the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was arrested on April 28, 2020, for making a critical Facebook post about Prophet Muhammed. Because of the pressure from Islamic zealots, he was denied basic human rights such as the right to counsel and fair treatment in accordance with the law. We organized and participated in several campaigns to build public awareness of his case and apply pressure on the Nigerian Government and Kano State Government.

Mubarak was recently sentenced to an unjust jail term of 24 years. Along with other human rights groups, AAI is fighting for his safe release. AAI has provided financial support for his wife and baby son every month since May 2020.

**Bangladesh** has adopted a secular constitution that guarantees free speech and religious freedom, but, in practice, the threat of violence from the Islamic lobby sees a continuation of the oppression of secular bloggers in the name of defending religious feelings. Atheist Alliance International has become the organization Bangladeshi atheist bloggers and activists contact when they become victims of Bangladesh’s draconian Digital Security Act 2018 - Bangladesh’s version of blasphemy law.

**Joy Dev** was also in jail for over twenty months without a trial and now facing a prison sentencing. AAI lawyers are working for him in court.

**Mahbubul Alam and Sagar Borua** were in jail for nearly a year for criticizing religion and are now facing a trial. AAI lawyers are supporting them.
Limon Fakir went to the police for safety when he was threatened by the radical Islamist party Islami Movement, Bangladesh. Instead of helping him, the police collaborated with the Islamists and filed a lawsuit against him. He was later arrested and brutally tortured in police custody. He was in jail for over twenty months without a trial. He was eventually granted bail but the trial continues. He is facing a prison sentence of up to 14 years. AAI appointed lawyers to fight for him in court, and we are actively seeking resettlement for him in a safe country.

Other legal battles

Asad Noor is the most prominent Bangladeshi secular activist of the time. Each of his videos generates 1K-5K shares on social media. Asad was booked for blasphemy and was in prison twice without a trial. To save his life, Asad fled to neighboring India where he resides currently. He lives without basic human rights such as health care or freedom of movement. During the pandemic AAI lawyers filed a petition in the district court of Kolkata, West Bengal province of India, so he can get vaccinated. The petition was successful. AAI lawyers are now preparing for a petition to ensure basic human rights for him in the high court of India.
Ahmed Al Khair is an atheist activist from Gao, Mali who operates a Facebook page known as Atheism. Mali is a stronghold of Islamic terrorist outfits such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Criticizing Islam there can mean death. Ahmed’s activism made him a prime target of the Islamic extremist outfits. He had to flee. He entered the neighboring Republic of Niger in search of safety. Instead of safety, the Niger officials arrested him without any evidence of wrongdoing. He is in Jail in inhuman condition. AAI lawyers battling for his release.

Support for Afghan atheists

After the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, AAI received a surge of applications for support from Afghan atheist activists. Recipients of AAI assistance included women rights activists, atheist bloggers, social media activists, academics, and authors. AAI supported them with financial aid and advocacy to governments for safe relocation. Several of them have been relocated to safe countries such as Sweden.

Atheist Alliance International continues supporting Afghan atheist refugees with its Atheist Refugee Assistance program in Turkey as well.

Support for Atheist asylum seekers

Asylum support is one of the main services ASN provides. We currently have asylum cases in several countries including Turkey, Greece, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the UK. Our successes include:

Islam is an Egyptian LGBTQ man and activist. He was arrested and tortured because of his lifestyle and his views. With our help, he found safety in Europe.

Arash Jabordast is an Iranian activist and an AAI member. He was granted asylum in Canada.

Nurullah Koyuchu is a Turkish national. Several lawsuits were filed against him because of his criticism of Islam and the Turkish regime. He had to flee. With AAI’s support, he now has found safety in Europe.
ARAP (Atheist Refugee Assistance Program)

Turkey is home to over 7 million refugees. The Atheist Refugee Assistance Program is aimed to help the refugees in Turkey, who escaped from religious persecution in their own countries, to build a new life. Atheist Alliance International runs this program in partnership with Ateizm Dernegi, Turkey, and the Center for Inquiry, USA. Atheists from middle eastern countries are the direct beneficiary of this program. The program also serves atheists from other countries such as Afghanistan and Iran. The program supports atheists with accommodation, jobs, legal help, and guidance.

The program provided assistance in the following fields:

1. ACCOMODATION
   Help finding a place to live or a roommate to stay with for atheist asylum seekers/refugees in Turkey. A total of 13 refugees received accommodation support.

2. JOB
   Help finding jobs for the atheist asylum seekers/refugees in Turkey. 9 refugees found jobs through the program.

3. LEGAL HELP
   Accepting applications from atheist asylum seekers/refugees for legal aid. The program provided legal help to 25 atheist refugees.

4. LETTERS etc.
   Issuing letter of recommendation, letter of support, or letter of verification to the Turkish immigration division or UNHCR on behalf of the asylum seekers/refugees about their claim. A total of 22 refugees received support letters.

5. GUIDANCE
   Assisting applicants to prepare documents regarding allowances, grants, and scholarships to be sent to national and international organizations, and charities. A total of 20 refugees received guidance in the past year.
Humanitarian work in Africa

Humanist schools

**Kasese Humanist School in Uganda** was founded in 2011 by the Kasese United Humanist Association. It is located in the western region of Uganda. The school is founded on humanist principles and science. It is open to boys and girls from ages 3 – 14. Atheist Alliance International continued its support for the school this year. Money raised by AAI helped the school with buying textbooks and school materials, renovating school buildings, paying for teacher salaries.

**Eagles View Humanist School** is located in Buwenge-Kayiira, Uganda. The school proudly identifies itself as secular and embraces humanist values.

Due to heavy rain and strong winds, the school building and teaching materials were severely damaged in 2021. It needed major repairs. Atheist Alliance International funded the repair work which included the installation of a new roof and plastering the walls to increase the structural integrity. Atheist Alliance International also connected the school with other humanist donors.

Other support

**Kasitu Humanist Association** is based in Kasitu, Uganda. AAI partnered with KHA to build an internet café in this rural sub county of Uganda. The café has been able to give hundreds of young Ugandans and residents of Kasitu access to the internet as well as providing a useful income for KHA and a forum for promoting humanism and rationalist ideas.

Major campaigns and advocacy

Greek court recognises atheism as a ground for asylum

In coordination with our affiliates, the Atheist and Agnostic Alliance of Pakistan and the Atheist Union of Greece, AAI facilitated a legal petition in favor of a Pakistani citizen seeking asylum on the ground that if he returned to his home country, he would be in danger of being arrested and being sentenced to death because of his atheistic views.

The First Instance Administrative Court of Thessaloniki issued an irrevocable decision, recognizing atheism as a vulnerability sufficient to allow asylum for refugees.
This is the first final judgment of the Greek judiciary, and we believe, likely the first in the world, that recognizes atheism as a ground for the vulnerability of a citizen of a fundamentalist religious state.

This is an important case. It can now be argued, in Europe at least, that atheists are at special risk in some Islamic countries and, consequently, need to be protected. This is the first decision of the Greek judiciary that recognizes atheism as a ground for vulnerability of a fundamentalist state citizen.

Humanist International also contributed to the campaign.

United Nations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was a particularly tough year for UN advocacy. We, like other NGOs, were not able to attend any UN meeting in person.

AAI engaged at the UN this year with the tagline "Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality for Non-believers."

We submitted a paper arguing that the international community has made great strides over the past 60 years in articulating and protecting universal human rights, including the individual’s right to hold religious beliefs and to practice religion privately and publicly. Unfortunately, none of the international human rights declarations or treaties promulgated to date explicitly provide equivalent rights for those who choose to follow no religion or have no religious beliefs.

Atheist Alliance International seeks to clarify the human rights of people who hold no religious beliefs. We hold that non-believers’ rights should be explicitly equal to believers’ rights and should be recognized as such in international treaties.

We seek rights that apply to the entire spectrum rather than to those who occupy particular parts of it. Human rights should attach to all of us on the basis of our humanity, not on the basis of our beliefs. Consequently, freedom of religion and freedom from religion must be non-derogable rights applicable to all people at all times.
## Statement of Activities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2020</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donations (gross)</td>
<td>14,9</td>
<td>55,8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memberships (gross)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affiliate membership</td>
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<td>Individual Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Outlays</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Various other projects</td>
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<td>28,3</td>
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<tr>
<td>To Affiliates</td>
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<td>13,9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Project Outlays</td>
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<td>Professional Fees (incl Insurance)</td>
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<td>Other Admin Expenses</td>
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<td>Total Administration</td>
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<td>Total Expenses</td>
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<td>61,8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excess / (Deficit) for the year</td>
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<td>13,0</td>
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</table>

Net Assets at Beginning of Year: 35,4
Net Assets at End of Year: 30,8
Revenue has significantly decreased, especially donations. Whilst one or two large donations can make a big difference in any one year, fundraising remains a challenge for the organisation. Fundraising is a specialized skill and one that has been lacking on the board. Nominees for this year’s elections include two people with good experience in this area so we are hopeful this problem will soon be resolved.

Membership revenue has also decreased, for both affiliate and individual memberships. It is disappointing that income from affiliates has fallen by 18% whilst the number of affiliates has grown by 38%. This is partly explained by an increase in the number of smaller informal affiliate organizations who are unable to raise funds for affiliate fees and partly by an increase in the number of existing affiliates who have asked us to waive their fees.

We have seen new individual memberships slowing during the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in existing members failing to renew the memberships. The board will soon launch a motivational campaign to grow the number of supporters.

However, AAI maintained fund balances over $30,000 at the end of 2021. Expenses were significantly lower than 2020, mainly due to not having to pay salaries after the Executive Director’s (ED) departure in January ’21. There is a flip side to that: the last ED was in great part responsible for the significant increase in revenue in 2020.

One of AAI’s strategic advantages is that we have no paid employees (now we no longer have an ED). All our work is accomplished by our unpaid board directors and volunteers. Board directors often devote a great deal of time each week for the reward of saving atheists at risk and moving the world towards secularism. This keeps our administration expenses low so we can direct more than two thirds of revenues to campaigns and helping atheists at risk.

Project outlays also reduced in 2021 due to the lack of significant campaign proposals from affiliates. This may also be related to Covid-19.

Board Members

Howard Burman stepped down from the board on May 19, 2022. Howard joined the board in November 2017 and took the role of Secretary. In February 2020, the board elected him as President, a role he has held since then. Board directors wish to express their sincere thanks to Howard for his dedication and service to AAI. He helped us through much of the work of rebuilding AAI from a low point in 2017 to where we are now. He leaves AAI with our gratitude and affection.

Other board directors to leave during the year were: Tina Hamilton and Rosi Guastella. Our huge thanks to both of them. Unfortunately, one board member was asked to step down after we received allegations about his conduct and a disciplinary investigation found substance in the allegations.
Prior to the upcoming Annual General Meeting, elections will be held for six board positions, including the role vacated by Howard. Affiliates will cast their votes on May 20th and results will be announced at the AGM. We anticipate a full board of 13 members to be in place for the coming year.

The Future

The board normally presents its plans for the following three - five years at AGMs but this year we will do things differently. As Howard is stepping down we need to elect a new President. With a new person may come fresh ideas and new approaches to our work. So, this year, we will allocate part of the meeting to affiliates and other friends of AAI so they can articulate their ideas and aspirations for the future.

We will take note of the ideas presented and the new President will take the lead in drafting a new document setting out our future. This document will be circulated to affiliates for their feedback. We need to move forward in a way that takes all AAI members on the journey.

We are certainly not prophets, but the future looks bright and we see an exciting time ahead for AAI!

May 2022

To support our work, please go to: https://www.atheistalliance.org/donate/