# Concerns arise over potential blasphemy laws in UK following Qur’an burning case



The National Secular Society has expressed significant concerns regarding a criminal case involving the alleged burning of the Qur’an, warning that it may signal a clandestine resurgence of blasphemy laws in the UK. Legal opinion from prominent human rights barrister Akua Reindorf KC, representing the Society, indicates that the charges brought against Hamit Coskun could be fundamentally flawed.

Hamit Coskun, a 50-year-old Turkish national, faced legal proceedings earlier this year following an incident that occurred outside the Turkish Consulate in London. In February, he appeared at Westminster Magistrates' Court, where he denied charges of intending to cause harassment, alarm, or distress related to his actions, which were captured in a video circulating on social media purportedly showing him burning a book outside the consulate’s premises.

In her legal assessment, Reindorf articulated concerns about the legality and implications of the charges against Coskun. She noted that the wording of the charge—specifically, referencing “the religious institution of Islam” as a victim—raises significant legal issues, as such an entity does not constitute a “person” under section 4A of the Public Order Act 1986. Consequently, this leads to the conclusion that a charge based on the premise that Coskun caused harassment, alarm, or distress to Islam is intrinsically problematic.

Reindorf further elaborated that even should the charges be revised, the prosecution may face challenges in establishing that a conviction would be a proportionate response to the potential disruption posed by Coskun’s actions. In this context, she referenced the robust protections for political expression provided by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which upholds the presumption in favour of freedom of speech.

She cautioned that the existing charges, alongside any potential conviction, could inadvertently imply a reintroduction of blasphemy laws in England. The offence of blasphemy was formally abolished in 2008 and had only historically applied to Christianity. Reindorf's insights raise questions about the future of legal precedents surrounding freedom of expression in relation to religious sentiments.

In light of these developments, the National Secular Society has taken a proactive stance by appealing to the Crown Prosecution Service, requesting the discontinuation of the prosecution against Coskun. The case continues to unfold, reflecting complexities around religious rights and freedom of speech in contemporary society.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://freespeechunion.org/cps-bringing-back-blasphemy-by-prosecuting-man-for-burning-qaran/> - This article discusses the case of Hamit Coskun, who is charged with religiously motivated harassment for burning a Quran outside the Turkish consulate in London. It highlights the concerns about the charges being 'defective' and likened to a back-door reinstatement of blasphemy laws.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hamit-coskun-koran-burning-court-b2698865.html> - This article details the incident involving Hamit Coskun burning a Quran and his appearance in court to deny charges related to harassment and distress towards the Islamic institution. It also covers the social media footage of the event.
* <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/quran-burning-case-threatens-back-door-blasphemy-law/5122978.article> - The article explains the legal concerns from human rights barrister Akua Reindorf KC regarding the charges against Coskun. It outlines how the charges might be seen as reimplementing blasphemy laws indirectly.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/> - While the BBC itself does not have a specific article on this topic, their news platform could generally support broader discussions about religious freedom and legal controversies surrounding such cases in the UK.
* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cps-accused-of-back-door-blasphemy-like-prosecution-after-man-charged-for-burning-quran-5p8jh7vsg> - This article further details the prosecution of Hamit Coskun and the accusations that it resembles a revival of blasphemy laws through charging him for actions seen as disrespectful to Islam.