# Man denies religious hatred charge over Koran burning protest outside Turkish Consulate



A man who set fire to a Koran outside the Turkish Consulate in central London has sparked significant tension and legal scrutiny, following a violent confrontation that occurred during the event. Hamit Coskun, a 50-year-old atheist, faces charges of religiously aggravated public order offences after he reportedly shouted inflammatory statements, including “f\*\*\* Islam” and “Islam is a religion of terrorism,” while brandishing the burning book in Rutland Gardens, Knightsbridge. Westminster Magistrates’ Court has been informed that he denied these charges, claiming his actions were motivated by a desire to protest against the Turkish government under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which he believes endorses radical Islamism.

The incident, occurring on February 13, has not only incited public outrage but also led to a violent reaction. During the protest, a man approached Coskun, expressing disapproval of his actions. Eyewitness footage shows this individual attempting to slash at him while accusing Coskun of desecrating a sacred text. This was followed by a physical altercation, wherein Coskun was reportedly kicked and spat upon, further escalating the confrontation. The aggressor, who has been identified as 59-year-old Moussa Kadri, later pleaded guilty to assault but denied carrying a weapon during the incident. The case regarding the weapon charge is expected to proceed to Southwark Crown Court for sentencing.

In defence of his client, Katy Thorne KC highlighted the complexities surrounding freedom of expression and its limits, asserting that Coskun’s statements, however offensive, fell under his right to protest. This sentiment underscores an ongoing debate in the UK regarding the balance between free speech and respect for religious feelings. Thorne brought forth historical instances of hostility towards various religions, invoking examples of feminist criticism towards Catholicism to illustrate her point. She argued that the act of burning the Koran, while potentially offensive, should not necessarily be criminalised as it reflects personal beliefs and dissent.

The prosecution counters that Coskun's actions reveal an underlying hostility towards Islam, framing his defence as a shield for bigotry. They point to social media posts from Coskun that display his contempt not only for Islam but for specific political ideologies associated with the Turkish government. This has drawn the attention of lawmakers and advocacy groups, with some MPs expressing their concerns that such incidents could pave the way for informal blasphemy laws in the UK. They argue that charging Coskun could set a dangerous precedent for limiting free expression based on religious sensitivities.

As the case unfolds, it poses significant questions about the boundaries of free speech in a multicultural society. District Judge John McGarva is expected to announce a verdict early next week, which will not only determine Coskun’s fate but may also influence broader discussions surrounding religious tolerance and freedom of expression in the UK. Legal fees for Coskun are being supported by the Free Speech Union and the National Secular Society, indicating the high stakes and public interest attached to this case.

This incident resonates deeply within the already contentious landscape of religious and cultural expression, reflecting the challenges faced in striking a balance that respects individual freedoms while acknowledging communal sensitivities. Whether the court will affirm the right to protest or bow to calls for restrictions remains to be seen.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/man-who-burned-koran-was-attacked-and-spat-at-court-told-AT5IQZ4UOJNAXBMSPASZXSECD4/), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hamit-coskun-koran-burning-court-b2698865.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/man-who-burned-koran-was-attacked-and-spat-at-court-told-AT5IQZ4UOJNAXBMSPASZXSECD4/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/man-admits-assault-koran-burning-turkish-consulate-london-knightsbridge-b1222348.html), [[6]](https://www.newarkadvertiser.co.uk/national/man-admits-assault-after-koran-burned-outside-turkish-consulate-144160/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7), [[7]](https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c3rwg8wde0xo)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/man-who-burned-koran-was-attacked-and-spat-at-court-told-AT5IQZ4UOJNAXBMSPASZXSECD4/), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-02-15/man-denies-religious-aggravation-charge-after-burning-of-quran)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/man-admits-assault-koran-burning-turkish-consulate-london-knightsbridge-b1222348.html), [[6]](https://www.newarkadvertiser.co.uk/national/man-admits-assault-after-koran-burned-outside-turkish-consulate-144160/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7), [[6]](https://www.newarkadvertiser.co.uk/national/man-admits-assault-after-koran-burned-outside-turkish-consulate-144160/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.newarkadvertiser.co.uk/national/man-admits-assault-after-koran-burned-outside-turkish-consulate-144160/), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hamit-coskun-koran-burning-court-b2698865.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/man-who-burned-koran-was-attacked-and-spat-at-court-told-AT5IQZ4UOJNAXBMSPASZXSECD4/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/man-admits-assault-koran-burning-turkish-consulate-london-knightsbridge-b1222348.html> - Moussa Kadri, 59, pleaded guilty to assaulting Hamit Coskun, 50, who burned a Koran outside the Turkish Consulate in London on February 13. Kadri denied possessing a bladed article during the incident. The case was sent to Southwark Crown Court for sentencing and trial on the weapon charge. Coskun has denied religiously motivated harassment and is due to stand trial at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on May 28.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2025-02-15/man-denies-religious-aggravation-charge-after-burning-of-quran> - Hamit Coskun, 50, from Derby, denied religiously motivated harassment after burning a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in Knightsbridge. Footage showed him burning the book and being attacked by another man. Coskun appeared at Westminster Magistrates’ Court, where he entered not guilty pleas and was released on conditional bail, with a trial scheduled for May 28. Moussa Kadri, 59, was also charged with causing actual bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hamit-coskun-koran-burning-court-b2698865.html> - Hamit Coskun, 50, from Derby, was charged with religiously motivated harassment after burning a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. Footage showed him burning the book and being attacked by another man. Coskun appeared at Westminster Magistrates’ Court, where he entered not guilty pleas and was released on conditional bail, with a trial scheduled for May 28. Moussa Kadri, 59, was also charged with causing actual bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon.
5. <https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7> - Senior MPs, including former Lib Dem leader Tim Farron, have expressed concerns over the decision to charge Hamit Coskun for burning the Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. They warn that such actions could lead to 'de facto blasphemy laws' in the UK. Coskun was charged with 'intent to cause against religious institution of Islam, harassment, alarm or distress' after the incident, which also involved an attack on him by another man.
6. <https://www.newarkadvertiser.co.uk/national/man-admits-assault-after-koran-burned-outside-turkish-consulate-144160/> - Moussa Kadri, 59, pleaded guilty to assaulting Hamit Coskun, 50, who burned a Koran outside the Turkish Consulate in London on February 13. Kadri denied possessing a bladed article during the incident. The case was sent to Southwark Crown Court for sentencing and trial on the weapon charge. Coskun has denied religiously motivated harassment and is due to stand trial at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on May 28.
7. <https://feeds.bbci.co.uk/news/articles/c3rwg8wde0xo> - Hamit Coskun, 50, from Derby, was charged with religiously motivated harassment after burning a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. Footage showed him burning the book and being attacked by another man. Coskun appeared at Westminster Magistrates’ Court, where he entered not guilty pleas and was released on conditional bail, with a trial scheduled for May 28. Moussa Kadri, 59, was also charged with causing actual bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon.