# UK legal charge over Qur'an burning sparks free speech and blasphemy law debate



A recent incident outside the Turkish consulate in London has sparked intense debate over free speech and religious sensitivity. Hamit Coskun, a 50-year-old protestor, ignited a copy of the Koran as a form of protest against what he perceives as the transformation of Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from a secular state into an “Islamist regime.” In an exclusive interview, Coskun expressed deep frustration, stating, “I would never have come here if I knew this country does not have free speech,” highlighting his disillusionment regarding his expectations of democratic values in the UK.

Coskun, who fled Turkey nearly three years ago, identified as both Turkish and Armenian and sought asylum in Britain to escape oppression. His protest was not just an isolated act; it was a statement of solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was tragically assassinated in Sweden following a similar act of burning Qurans. Coskun's actions stirred widespread anger within the Muslim community, leading to violent confrontations, including a knife attack against him during the protest. To ensure his safety, police have relocated him to a secure, undisclosed location under the protection of bodyguards.

The legal repercussions of Coskun's actions have been significant. He faces charges of disorderly behaviour after a series of incidents that his defence team argues raises questions about the implications of blasphemy laws in the UK. Legal experts, including human rights lawyer Akua Reindorf, contend that the original charge, which described him as harassing the “religious institution of Islam,” is flawed. Such terminology risks criminalising the act of desecrating a religious text in public, thus imposing an indirect form of blasphemy law. The Crown Prosecution Service later amended the charge to better reflect the nature of the alleged behaviour, acknowledging that its initial wording was misapplied.

The National Secular Society and the Free Speech Union have come to Coskun’s aid, funding his legal fees and security measures. Their leadership has expressed concern that a successful prosecution would represent an alarming precedent, effectively criminalising the act of damaging a Koran in public and thereby curtailing the fundamental right to free expression. Stephen Evans, Chief Executive of the National Secular Society, warned that this legal approach threatens to undermine the very foundation of free speech in Britain by prioritising the right not to be offended over the right to express dissenting views.

Coskun himself has voiced strong opposition to the charges, asserting that convicting him would signify a victory for extremism. He emphasised that the act of burning the Koran was directed solely at President Erdoğan's policies rather than an attack on the Muslim community as a whole. His case illustrates the growing tension in modern society regarding the intersection of free speech and religious sensitivity, particularly in a multicultural environment like the UK.

As debates continue to unfold, the legal outcomes may have far-reaching implications not only for freedom of expression but also for how societies manage the delicate balance between respecting religious beliefs and upholding individual rights.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770461/Man-50-set-fire-Koran-outside-Turkish-consulate-London-says-never-come-Britain-knew-country-does-not-free-speech.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770461/Man-50-set-fire-Koran-outside-Turkish-consulate-London-says-never-come-Britain-knew-country-does-not-free-speech.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.newenglishreview.org/man-who-burned-koran-faces-charges-for-harassing-islam/), [[4]](https://publiclawlibrary.org/controversial-quran-burning-sparks-debate-on-free-speech-vs-religious-sensitivity-in-europe/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2025/04/quran-burning-charge-evokes-blasphemy-offence-legal-expert-says), [[6]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770461/Man-50-set-fire-Koran-outside-Turkish-consulate-London-says-never-come-Britain-knew-country-does-not-free-speech.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-man-charged-burning-quran-amid-blasphemy-law-criticism)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2025/04/quran-burning-charge-evokes-blasphemy-offence-legal-expert-says), [[4]](https://publiclawlibrary.org/controversial-quran-burning-sparks-debate-on-free-speech-vs-religious-sensitivity-in-europe/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-man-charged-burning-quran-amid-blasphemy-law-criticism), [[6]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770461/Man-50-set-fire-Koran-outside-Turkish-consulate-London-says-never-come-Britain-knew-country-does-not-free-speech.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2025/04/quran-burning-charge-evokes-blasphemy-offence-legal-expert-says> - Human rights lawyer Akua Reindorf KC has stated that the charge against Hamit Coskun for burning a Quran outside the Turkish Consulate in London 'evokes the notion of blasphemy'. Coskun's act was a protest against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was assassinated in Sweden after burning Qurans in public protests. The National Secular Society has called for the charges to be dropped, arguing that the prosecution represents a reintroduction of blasphemy laws by the back door. ([secularism.org.uk](https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2025/04/quran-burning-charge-evokes-blasphemy-offence-legal-expert-says?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.newenglishreview.org/man-who-burned-koran-faces-charges-for-harassing-islam/> - Hamit Coskun, 50, has been charged with 'harassing the religious institution of Islam' after burning a Quran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. Coskun stated that his protest was against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was assassinated in Sweden after burning Qurans in public protests. Legal experts argue that the charge is legally flawed, as 'Islam' is not a person under the Public Order Act, and convicting Coskun would amount to criminalising the desecration of a religious text in a public place. ([newenglishreview.org](https://www.newenglishreview.org/man-who-burned-koran-faces-charges-for-harassing-islam/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://publiclawlibrary.org/controversial-quran-burning-sparks-debate-on-free-speech-vs-religious-sensitivity-in-europe/> - The burning of a Quran by Hamit Coskun outside the Turkish Consulate in London has ignited debates over freedom of expression and religious sensitivity in Europe. Coskun's act was a protest against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was assassinated in Sweden after burning Qurans in public protests. Legal analysts argue that the charges against Coskun might be inherently flawed, and critics view this as a concealed effort to reintroduce blasphemy laws. ([publiclawlibrary.org](https://publiclawlibrary.org/controversial-quran-burning-sparks-debate-on-free-speech-vs-religious-sensitivity-in-europe/?utm_source=openai))
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 Quran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. They warn that this could lead to the imposition of 'de facto blasphemy laws' in the UK. Coskun was charged with 'intent to cause against religious institution of Islam, harassment, alarm or distress'. A video appeared to show Coskun being attacked with a knife after the incident. ([thejc.com](https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/quran-burner-blasphemy-laws-cnhlk1n7?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate> - The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has amended the charge against Hamit Coskun, who burned a Quran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. Initially charged with harassing the 'religious institution of Islam', the CPS admitted it had 'incorrectly applied' the term and substituted a new charge to more accurately reflect the alleged offence. Coskun's act was a protest against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was assassinated in Sweden after burning Qurans in public protests. ([gbnews.com](https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-man-charged-burning-quran-amid-blasphemy-law-criticism> - Hamit Coskun, 50, has been charged with disorderly behaviour after burning a Quran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. Coskun stated that his act was in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee who was assassinated in Sweden after burning Qurans in public protests, and as a protest against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The charges have been altered amid criticism that they resemble 'blasphemy laws'. ([newarab.com](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk-man-charged-burning-quran-amid-blasphemy-law-criticism?utm_source=openai))