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FREE SPEECH UNION

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Chief Constable Stephen Watson QPM
Greater Manchester Police
Openshaw Complex
Lawton Street
Openshaw
Manchester
M11 2NS

4th February 2025

By email.

Dear Chief Constable,

I am writing to you in my capacity as General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, a non-partisan, mass membership public interest body that stands up for the speech rights of its members and campaigns for free speech more widely.

This letter concerns the handling of the case of Mr Martin Frost by Greater Manchester Police (GMP), and the decision by GMP to publicly name him and provide details of his street address and date of birth which have now been widely circulated and reported in the media.

As you must know, demonstrations involving damage to or the destruction of a Koran have been responded to with violence of the most serious kind. Just last week, an Iraqi man named Salwan Momika was murdered in Sweden after he burnt a Koran. Indeed, we understand that it was in solidarity with Mr Momika that Mr Frost undertook his demonstration.

In this country, the preacher Hatun Tash – a former Muslim who has damaged the Koran in public demonstrations – has been targeted in multiple incidents, including a plot to shoot her¹ and a stabbing attack. In Wakefield in 2023, death threats were made against schoolboys who accidentally damaged their own copy of the Koran. This is to say nothing of other, similar cases of anti-blasphemy extremism like the March 2021 Batley Grammar School incident, or the murder of Ahmadi shopkeeper Asad Shah for showing “disrespect” to Islam.²

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67730535>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-37021385>

Unsurprisingly therefore, a report published last year by the UK Commission for Countering Extremism found that “Anti-blasphemy activism in the UK is gaining momentum and showing signs of becoming increasingly radicalised”.³

Clearly, dissidents who criticise Islam face serious threats in Britain. GMP must have known that to be the case when the decision was taken to broadcast Mr Frost’s identity, street address and date of birth.

Burning a Koran should not be a police matter at all. But given this context, I am writing to protest in the strongest terms about your decision to make Mr Frost so readily identifiable.

College of Policing Guidance is clear:

Those charged with an offence – including those who receive a summons to court – should be named, unless there is an exceptional and legitimate policing purpose for not doing so or reporting restrictions apply. This information can be given at the point of charge. A decision not to name an individual who has been charged should be taken in consultation with the CPS.⁴

It is right that those charged with an offence are ordinarily named to maintain public trust in policing, as we have seen with the handling of the Southport attack and its aftermath. But, palpably, given the context here, there is “an exceptional and legitimate policing purpose” for not naming Mr Frost in this case.

By releasing Mr Frost’s details, having charged him for something that should never have been a police matter, your police force may well have placed him in great jeopardy.

We are therefore seeking:

- (1) Your personal assurance that GMP will take whatever steps necessary to secure Mr Frost’s safety for as long as is required;
- (2) An explanation from you as to why Mr Frost was named in the first place.

I would be grateful for your prompt acknowledgement of this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Young of Acton
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³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-and-responding-to-blasphemy-extremism/understanding-and-responding-to-blasphemy-extremism-in-the-uk-accessible>

⁴ <https://www.college.police.uk/app/engagement-and-communication/media-relations>