

Danish blasphemy law questioned by church minister

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A Danish church minister has argued for the abolition of the country's blasphemy law saying it undermines democracy by limiting free speech, abuses human rights and no longer serves any purpose.

The last prosecution under the law was in 1946 when a couple received a small fine for "baptising" a doll at a carnival.

Writing in *Politiken* magazine, Manu Sareen says the law, which can lead to a fine or 4 years in prison for "publicly mocking or deriding the teachings or worship of a legally existing religious community in the country", privileges religious beliefs over other beliefs. He wrote: "Free speech and human rights are far more important than the danger that someone might feel offended if their religion is subject to mockery and derision.

"No one would dream of, for example, making it punishable to call the Danish constitution a 'pathetic little pamphlet', even though it would be considered a mockery of all the people who believe in Danish democracy."

He wrote that it makes it more difficult to criticise countries like Russia or Pakistan that misuse blasphemy law when Denmark had its own version on its law books.

Jacob Mchangama, the director of legal affairs at the liberal think-tank Cepos, supported Sareen's proposal, telling *Politiken*: "Free speech is a cornerstone of Danish democracy, and religious feelings should not be afforded any special protection but rather should be subject to precisely the same criticism, satire and mockery that are levelled at political and philosophical ideologies,".

But the bishop of Aarhus told the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper that abolishing the law would "suggest that everything under the sun is equal and that we can say whatever we like without there being any consequences".

A poll last year showed that 66% of Danes supported the retention of the blasphemy law.

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