

Effort to repeal New Zealand blasphemy law delayed

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An attempt by Labour MP Chris Hipkins to remove anti-blasphemy laws from New Zealand's statute book has failed after National Party and Maori Party MPs voted it down.

New Zealand media [reported](#) that Hipkins introduced an amendment to get rid of the country's blasphemy laws, which only came to light when Stephen Fry became the subject of a blasphemy investigation in Ireland.

Prime Minister Bill English said the country could "get rid of" the laws and that he did not know they remained in statute until the furore around the Stephen Fry case.

But his party rejected Hipkins' approach, and on Wednesday the Prime Minister said he wanted to "go through the proper process rather than just spontaneous amendments on the floor of the House."

He did add that when a bill was properly presented to the House of Representatives he expected the blasphemy law to be repealed.

Anglican Archbishop Philip Richardson has expressed his support for repealing the law.

Mr Hipkins described the delay as a "sad day for freedom of speech, tolerance and leadership".

"What moral authority does New Zealand have condemning other countries for draconian blasphemy laws when we have one of our own that we refuse to repeal?"

The president of the Humanist Society of New Zealand, Sara Passmore said the delay was a "vote against human rights" and that it showed New Zealand to have only the "illusion of a secular government".

"By refusing to remove the blasphemy law from our Crimes Act, the Government is saying we are not free to criticise and challenge all ideas. This decision was backwards, and not in line with international trends. We think people, not ideas, should be protected."

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said: "Any country that retains these laws is undercut when it tries to defend human rights abroad. Blasphemy laws are inimical to free speech and these laws should be removed as soon as possible. Even if they are never used they undermine the values of the countries that have them. We hope the Prime Minister is correct and that this law can be repealed very soon."

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