

Moygashel Bonfire Mosque Effigy — July 2026

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Overview

A replica mosque was placed atop a loyalist Eleventh Night bonfire in **Moygashel, Co Tyrone**, featuring an effigy brandishing a knife and an ISIS flag, with banners reading "**Secure our borders**" and "**End the threat of radical Islam**". The bonfire was lit a day early on **Thursday 9 July** — ahead of the traditional 11 July date — after the PSNI began an operation to remove the replica mosque from the pyre.

Police charged a **56-year-old man with incitement to hatred** under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. He appeared in court on Friday 10 July, **denied the charges, and was refused bail**. The PSNI are treating the display as a "hate-motivated criminal offence".

The same Moygashel bonfire site burned an effigy of **migrants in a boat** in July 2025, which was also investigated as a hate incident. The bonfire has also displayed controversial banners in previous years.

Key Timeline

Date	Event
Wed 8 Jul	Replica mosque appears atop the bonfire pyre in Moygashel, Co Tyrone
Thu 9 Jul	Bonfire lit early as PSNI move to remove the effigy — man arrested

Date	Event
Fri 10 Jul	Suspect appears in court, charged with incitement to hatred, denied bail
Sat 11 Jul (Eleventh Night)	Bonfire scenes across NI; the burnt-out Moygashel site smouldering

The Bonfire Display

- **Structure:** A replica mosque with a figure holding a knife, appearing to brandish an **ISIS flag**, placed at the top of a traditional pallet bonfire
- **Banners:** "Secure our borders", "End the threat of radical Islam"
- **2025 context:** The same site burned an effigy of **refugees in a boat** — figures of colour, one dressed in Islamic attire — also investigated as a hate incident
- **Bonfire Association statement:** Moygashel Bonfire Association said the display might "shock, offend or outrage" but defended it as **freedom of expression**, claiming their "opposition is not to people, but rather to ideology and government policy" and blaming "uncontrolled illegal mass immigration"
- **Loyalist activist Jamie Bryson** was present when the bonfire was lit, telling BBC News NI "nobody in the unionist or loyalist community should be targeting anybody" and seeking to reassure the Muslim community "this is not about them as people"

Muslim Community Responses

Dr Umar Al-Qadri — Chair, Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council

Described the bonfire effigy as "**a very painful moment**" for Muslims across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

“For us this isn't a political statement, for us, it's a message of exclusion, and intimidation, that you do not belong here, you do not belong in Northern Ireland.”

"People have the right to celebrate their traditions and have their bonfires, but I think when you put flags, when you put pictures of political leadership, when you put mosques on top of these bonfires, it's not a tradition anymore, it's basically

hate, it's intimidation."

"This is not culture anymore. This goes beyond that."

He added that he feels supported by police and other church leaders, and that the "vast majority" of people in NI are welcoming and kind, but that these types of incidents are **rising**.

Source: BBC News NI, 10 Jul 2026 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gym11g6gxo>

Wasif Naeem — Belfast Islamic Centre

“ "They are essentially targeting the whole community. We don't stand for violence."

"We are a peaceful community."

He said there are concerns of Islamophobia after three summers of riots in NI, adding **"it is getting worse and worse"**.

Source: BBC News NI, 10 Jul 2026

Nora Rashwan — Owner, Nora's Palace (Belfast Lebanese restaurant)

Called the burning of a replica mosque a **"red line"**. In a social media post she said there was deep concern felt by many Muslims across NI at any threats or acts aimed at burning or attacking a mosque during bonfire celebrations — "completely unacceptable and can never be justified".

On BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback programme she said racism has been a problem in the past, **is a problem now**, and she **doesn't know what will happen next**.

“ "Before, people were not focusing on religion like this or on people's colour, now something strange has happened, and everything has changed."

She came to Northern Ireland as an asylum seeker after fleeing **Syria 16 years ago**. She said she has friends whose daughters came from Kuwait to study at Queen's University Belfast but are **now planning to leave** because they do not feel safe.

"I've never seen anything at this level in Belfast."

Sources: BBC News NI; TheJournal.ie, 11 Jul 2026 <https://www.thejournal.ie/northern-ireland-muslim-community-bonfire-mosque-moygashel-7097580-Jul2026/>

Amadu Djaura — Trustee, Dungannon Muslim Community (Dungannon Islamic Centre)

The Islamic Centre is just over **3km / 5 minutes' drive** from the bonfire site.

“It's very, very stressful and scary for us.”

"It's not acceptable. It's offensive and we don't understand why it's happened because we never cause any trouble, we're not doing anything wrong. We are just practicing our faith and respecting other faiths."

He said the PSNI carried out regular patrols of the centre on Thursday for safety but that officers **"didn't encounter anyone because people are too scared to go there"**.

“It's terrifying and shows that some people are looking at us like we are criminals.”

"Acts of hatred and disorder is not good for the community and it's not good for the reputation of Northern Ireland either."

He also noted an **AI-generated banner** outside a children's playground in Moygashel — an image showing children playing on one side and men being stopped at a barrier on the other, with the words **"not welcome, not wanted, not here"**. The banner has been removed by PSNI and replaced by locals several times since late May. Similar banners have since appeared in other areas.

“The poster basically said, 'Muslims not welcome here'. This year, it's getting worse. The message is just hatred, but we don't know why there is this hatred.”

Source: TheJournal.ie, 11 Jul 2026

Dr Naomi Green — Assistant Secretary General, Muslim Council of Britain (based in NI)

Described the burning as feeling like "**groundhog day**".

- “ "This isn't an isolated incident, it's just yet another thing in a string of things that have happened."
- "It just makes me sad."
- "Muslim communities [and] minority communities are not the priority in Northern Ireland."

She called on the Executive Office and political parties to take action:

- “ "Why has there not been leadership on this from the top, from the people who are in power, instead of leaving it all to a policing decision?"
- "It's time for action instead of statement."

She said she feels "**there is no political will to handle this**".

Source: BBC News NI, 10 Jul 2026

Other community voices

- **Mohamaed Afnan:** "Most people are very nice. There are certain people who don't like certain religions but that is part of life."
- **Billy:** "It should not be happening. We are a peaceful community trying to live out here trying to practice our faith."
- **Huzzi:** "What happened last night I've never seen before. It's quite scary."

Political & Institutional Responses

Figure/Organisation	Response
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Hilary Benn (NI Secretary)	Called it a " sickening and cowardly act of intimidation "
PSNI Chief Supt Norman Haslett	"Hate crime has no place in our society and will not be tolerated" — confirmed bonfire was lit early to prevent police removal of the effigy
Amnesty International	Called it a " blatant attempt to stir up anti-Muslim hatred " ; urged police to act with urgency
Archbishop of Dublin Michael Jackson (Church of Ireland)	"Extremely alarming" to see sectarianism " morph " from sectarianism to racism — called it a "massive wake-up call"
Church of Ireland & Catholic Archbishops	Issued a rare joint statement calling it " grossly offensive "
DUP MLA Brian Kingston	"Appalled" by arson of Gospel Hall on Shankill Road (linked context) — noted false information online had whipped up opposition

Wider Context

Rising Islamophobia in NI

- **Race hate crime in Northern Ireland** has reached its highest level since records began in 2004 (Amnesty International)
- The attack followed **three summers of race riots** in NI, including the **June 2026 Belfast riots** where migrants' homes were targeted and water cannon deployed
- An average of **4-5 anti-Muslim incidents** were reported every week in June 2026 across the UK, with >40% being arson or firebombing attacks (Muslim Council of Britain)
- **Newtownabbey**: A mural reading "Islam is Satanic" was erected
- **Belfast**: "Muslims out" graffiti spray-painted on walls in loyalist areas
- **Shankill Road**: An old Gospel Hall due to be turned into an international food store was **gutted by deliberate arson** (last month)
- **AI-generated "not welcome" banners** appeared outside a children's playground in Moygashel (late May), later spreading to other areas including south Belfast

Legal Action

- **56-year-old man** charged with incitement to religious/racial hatred under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987
- Appeared at Laganside Magistrates' Court on Friday 10 July
- **Denied the charges, refused bail**

Social Media Discourse

Bluesky (searched 13 Jul 2026)

- **@thejournal.ie**: "Around three kilometres from the Co Tyrone site... the Dungannon Islamic Centre. 'It's very stressful and scary for us,' said a committee member"
- **@eoghan.eurosky.social**: "The ease with which Loyalists have slid from hatred of Catholics to hatred of Muslims and immigrants suggests many of the takes over the years urging understanding for their special historical sensitivities may have been pushing things just a wee bit"
- **@dup-online**: "The horrible bastards in Moygashel have unveiled this year's racist bonfire topper. The Arabic text at the top translates as 'Islamic Fascism'... The Muslim population in NI is estimated to be 12,000 — c. 1/200 or just 0.6%"
- **@kristian7ross**: "The lack of action from the PSNI on the Moygashel bonfire before it was set alight earlier is astounding yet not surprising"
- **@rankednews.bsky.social**: "'Not welcome here': Fear in Northern Ireland's Muslim community after recent Islamophobic incidents"

Nitter / X (searched 13 Jul 2026)

- **@UlsterTillDeath**: Criticising Ulster Unionist leader Jon Burrows for "larping on about the mosque effigy" and calling for "political expression and freedom of speech to be policed"
- **@verumnetwork**: "Refugees turned into life-sized bonfire effigies. Muslims told they were not welcome. A replica mosque placed on a bonfire and lit before police could remove it. All in the same place. Moygashel. Not once. Repeatedly."
- **@AnalystNews_**: "A replica of a mosque was put on top of a bonfire and burned down in Moygashel, Northern Ireland. This is just one incident of rampant racism and Islamophobia sweeping the United Kingdom, fuelled by politicians spreading lies about Muslims and Islam."
- **@AbtIslamNet**: "An anti-Muslim display featuring a replica mosque atop a loyalist bonfire in Northern Ireland has prompted widespread solidarity with the Muslim community"
- **@Proudofthisland**: Framing the bonfire as "Patriots Refuse to Back Down" — claiming the PSNI "walked away defeated"

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10. "Moygashel linked anti-Muslim banner removed in south Belfast" — Irish News <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/moygashel-linked-anti-muslim-banner-removed-in-south-belfast-K6JPITVCQFHOPIGO65B6AG4EZA/>

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