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### **Referendum about the offence of blasphemy**

HRWF/ RTE (12.06.2018) - <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2018/0612/970070-blasphemy/> - Part of Article 40.6.1 of the Constitution of Ireland states that "The publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious, or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law." During its committee stage in 2009, the then Minister for Justice, Dermot Ahern, introduced an amendment to what became the **Defamation Act 2009** creating a new indictable offence of "publication or utterance of blasphemous matter" with a maximum fine of €25,000. The then President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, convened the Council of State to discuss whether the Bill should be referred to the Supreme Court to test its constitutionality but, in the end, decided not to do so. The Act came into force on 1 January 2010.

Now, the Irish Government has approved the holding of a referendum to remove the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution. It is expected to take place in October, possibly on the same day as the Presidential election.

Minister for Justice Charlie Flanagan said: "In terms of Ireland's international reputation, this is an important step.

"By removing this provision from our Constitution, we can send a strong message to the world that laws against blasphemy do not reflect Irish values and that we do not believe such laws should exist."

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The Government said the move is part of a commitment made in the Programme for Government.

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