

Muslim men convicted of advocating death for gays

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LONDON (RNS) In the first case of its kind, a British court has convicted three Muslim men -- who claimed they were acting under teachings of their religion -- of openly advocating the execution of gays.

Jurors in Derby, England, on Friday (Jan. 20) found Ihjaz Ali, Kabir Ahmed and Razwan Javed guilty of trying to stir up hatred by handing out provocative pamphlets calling for homosexuals to be put to death.

They were convicted under new legislation in Britain that imposes penalties for distributing written material designed to incite tensions because of sexual orientation -- the first such case since the law went into effect 22 months ago.

During their two-week trial, Ahmed denied the charge, claiming instead that "my intention was to do my duty as a Muslim, to inform people of God's word and to give the message on what God says about homosexuality."

The 28-year-old married father added that "we believe we cannot just stand by and watch somebody commit a sin."

The three were charged with handing out leaflets, entitled "The Death Penalty?" which showed a mannequin hanging from a noose around its throat.

The pamphlet carried quotations from Islamic texts saying that only through capital punishment could society be cleansed of homosexuality, "this immoral crime."

Prosecutors claimed the leaflets were "frightening and threatening," but the defendants denied they were meant to threaten anyone.

Conviction carries a maximum prison term of seven years; sentencing is scheduled for February. Two other Muslim men charged with the same offense were found not guilty and were freed.