I would just like to make two points to the committee if I may. **First**, I agree entirely with what Ivan McKee MSP (SNP, Glasgow Provan) said about Scotland's blasphemy laws during the Hate Crime Legislation: Bracadale Review debate on 7 June, 2018. Scotland can be in no position to criticise other countries for enforcing a blasphemy law when not only do we still have it in our law but our government has expressed no intention to change this; in other words, we're keeping the law even if we don't use it, but then have the "brass neck" to turn round to other countries and criticise them for enforcing a law that we have too. This smacks of hypocrisy and cuts the high ground from under us: it is immaterial that we don't enforce that particular law because it is still the law all the same.

**Second**, I don't agree that blasphemy is a hate crime. Sheriff Gordon, whom I quoted in my petition, took the view hate crime legislation could cover the same or similar conduct covered by the blasphemy law, but I cannot agree that expressing one's view on religion or the existence of God can be regarded as hateful in any way; conversely, if this were to be the case, then it would also be a hate crime (to non-believers) for believers to express their views on religion or the existence of God to non-believers. That, to my mind, makes a mockery of freedom of speech and freedom of expression, which are already heavily limited. I mean, what is the point in being able to speak or express oneself freely if someone else taking offence (subjectively) can criminalise it? Some views, then, become acceptable and not hate crimes, and others become unacceptable and hate crimes. That, again, is not the mark of a free democracy and underlines my first point. So I would encourage the committee to consider blasphemy law separately from hate crime legislation.