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**D.A. BROWN: QUEENS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CONVICTED OF HATE CRIME**  
*Violated Religious Beliefs of Sikh Student by Cutting Off Hair*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that an 18-year-old Pakistani student at Newtown High School in Elmhurst, Queens, was convicted of felony hate crime charges after a jury trial stemming from an incident at the school in which a 15-year-old Sikh student was made to remove his dastar (turban) and had his hair cut. The dastar is a traditional Sikh headdress and for religious reasons the hair is never cut.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant has been convicted of a serious attack on the fundamental beliefs of his victim's religion and his freedom to worship freely. Crimes of hate will never be tolerated here in Queens County – in particular the most culturally diverse county in the nation."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Umair Ahmed, 18, of 42-49 77<sup>th</sup> Street. The defendant has been convicted of second-degree menacing as a hate crime, second-degree coercion as a hate crime, fourth-degree criminal possession of a weapon, and third-degree harassment. He faces up to four years in prison when he is sentenced on April 11, 2008, by Queens Supreme Court Justice Joel Blumenfeld.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the evidence, at approximately 12:00 noon on May 24, 2007, the defendant approached 15-year-old Harpal Vacher inside the lunchroom of Newtown High School, located at 48-01 90<sup>th</sup> Street, and stated, that the only way he would forgive the victim is if Ahmed cut his hair. Mr. Vacher said "For what? It is against my religion." Defendant then took his ring and said that if the victim didn't go with him he would punch the victim with his ring and leave a mark of Allah on his face. He ordered the victim to go to the bathroom or the defendant would get the victim after school, cut his hair and send him home naked to his parents. The defendant then got a small pair of folding scissors from another student, took Mr. Vacher into the bathroom and ordered Mr. Vacher to remove his dastar. Mr. Vacher, still apologizing and fearing for his safety, took his dastar off and the defendant cut his hair.

The defendant was arrested by police officers assigned to the NYPD's School Safety Division and the case was turned over to the NYPD's Hate Crimes Task Force for investigation.

Senior Assistant District Attorney Michael E. Brovner, of the District Attorney's Gang Violence and Hate Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Mariela Palomino Herring, Bureau Chief, and Michelle E. Goldstein, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Senior Executive Assistant District Attorney for Trials James C. Quinn and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorneys for Trials John H. Larsen and Robert J. Masters.

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**Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at [www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org).**