

Former British foreign minister told to apologize for Islamophobic comments about burqa



London, August 8 (RHC)-- The chairman of Britain's governing Conservative Party told former UK foreign minister Boris Johnson to say sorry for Islamophobic comments he made about Muslim women wearing the burqa. Brandon Lewis said Tuesday that Johnson, who resigned as UK's top diplomat last month, should apologize for describing women wearing burqa as "letter boxes" and "bank robbers."

Lewis said it was right to condemn Johnson's comments as "offensive," as proposed by Alistair Burt, a senior Tory politician. Burt said earlier Tuesday that Johnson had offended the Muslim community by his designation of women wearing burqa.

"I would never have made such a comment, I think there is a degree of offence in that, absolutely right," said Burt, who once worked under Johnson as a minister in the Foreign Office. The call for Johnson's apology came after huge criticism about his article in the Daily Telegraph a day earlier.

Labour Party lawmaker David Lammy said Johnson, whom he called a "pound-shop Donald Trump," was "fanning the flames of Islamophobia to propel his grubby electoral ambitions." Johnson resigned from the government of Prime Minister Theresa May last month after he protested against May's plans for finalizing

Brexit negotiations with the European Union.

Many believe he is seeking to improve his popularity among Tory members to finally replace May who is struggling to keep her post amid widening criticism about her Brexit strategy. In his article, Johnson said he was against banning burqas in public, a stance adopted by May's government and Conservatives in general. However, he said the garment is "oppressive" and directly insulted Muslim women who wear it.

"It is absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letter boxes," Johnson wrote, adding: "If a constituent came to my MP's surgery with her face obscured, I should feel fully entitled... to ask her to remove it so that I could talk to her properly. If a female student turned up at school or at a university lecture looking like a bank robber, then ditto."

However, the Labour Party said Tuesday that an apology from Johnson would not properly address grievances of the Muslim community. It said May should personally condemn the newspaper column "unequivocally."

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