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## **DUTCH POLITICIAN GEERT WILDERS FACES HATE SPEECH TRIAL**

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BBC

Dutch anti-Islam politician Geert Wilders is due to go on trial accused of racial discrimination and inciting hatred.

The charges were brought after he led a chant for fewer Moroccans in the Netherlands at a rally 18 months ago.

Mr Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), says that he will not attend Monday's trial in Schiphol, calling it "a travesty".

If convicted he faces a fine and a year in prison.

Mr Wilders has repeatedly criticised Islam, calling for the Koran to be banned and for the closure of all mosques in the Netherlands.

'Political trial'

But prosecutors say he crossed the line at a 2014 rally of his PVV party when he asked supporters if they wanted "fewer or more Moroccans" in the Netherlands.

After supporters chanted back "fewer", he replied: "We'll organise that."

Mr Wilders has denounced the trial as an attempt to suppress freedom of speech.

"This trial is a political trial, in which I refuse to co-operate," he said in a statement.

In 2011, Mr Wilders was acquitted of incitement after being accused of encouraging hatred towards Muslims.

The latest trial comes as opinion polls show the PVV doing well, ahead of parliamentary elections in March.

The party is now almost neck-and-neck with Prime Minister Mark Rutte's liberal VVD, with each predicted to win between 25 to 29 seats in the 150-seat parliament.