

Table of Contents

- ***CANADA: Burkhas, niqabs pose public safety risk***
- ***EU: European Court of Justice rules against the wearing of the headscarf in the private sector***
- ***FRANCE: I created the burkini to give women freedom, not to take it away***
- ***INDONESIA bans mandatory Islamic 'hijab' scarves for schoolgirls***
- ***INDONESIA: Indonesia's Aceh orders female flight crews to wear hijab***
- ***ISRAEL: Court tells city to remove religiously inspired signs directing women to wear modest clothes***
- ***KAZAKHSTAN: Hijab Vs. Education: Kazakh schoolgirls face dilemma over head-scarf ban***
- ***MOROCCO: Burqa ban in Morocco sparks anew the debate over women's rights***
- ***NIGERIA: Muslim lawyers reject Nigeria's FCT high court's new dress code***
- ***SWITZERLAND: Swiss region of St Gallen votes to ban 'burqa' in public places***
- ***USA: Assaults on Muslim women force some to rethink hijab***
- ***WORLD: Ten things you need to know about the hijab***

CANADA: Burkhas, niqabs pose public safety risk

The new bill in Quebec banning the niqab has drawn much criticism. Here Tarek Fatah talks about the reasons he supports the bill. More links below on other perspectives.

By Tarek Fatah

The Toronto Sun (24.10.2017) q- <http://bit.ly/2iFaT9K> - The slur of "racism" has been hurled at Muslims who support Quebec's Bill 62 — the new law banning face coverings, for example the burka and niqab, when giving or receiving government services.

From Ontario Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne to Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown, many white politicians and liberal media commentators have been quick to label any support of Bill 62 racist.

Since I, a Muslim, support Bill 62, I guess that makes me a racist.

Indeed, it's not uncommon to hear whispers suggesting Muslims like me who support the burka and niqab ban are "sell-outs" within the Muslim community.

And that white politicians who oppose Bill 62 are trying to salvage the reputation of our community, despite our supposed betrayal.

After all, what do these politicians have to lose?

The political race to the bottom to curry favour with the so-called "Muslim vote bank" in Canada, as they see it, has worked well for both Conservatives and Liberals.

Charmed as they are by many second-generation radical Muslims who were born in Canada, some of whom hate western civilization more than their parents do.

But none of the attacks on Quebec's burka/niqab ban was more disingenuous than one told by a well-coiffed hijabi on Canadian television recently, dismissing the public safety aspect of people wearing facemasks.

This young Muslim woman claimed there has not been a single incident where someone wearing a burka committed a crime.

To set the record straight, here are just a few examples of criminal activities committed by men and women wearing burkas and other face coverings in Canada:

- Two months ago, on Aug. 17, 2017, an armed robbery took place at a Scotia Bank branch in Milton, Ontario. Police said one of the two suspects was wearing a balaclava.
- On Sept. 9, 2015, two burka-wearing male teens charged into a Toronto bank in the Yonge Street and Highway 401 area. Both were later arrested in Ajax.
- On Oct. 14, 2014, two men wearing burkas robbed a Toronto jewellery store in the York Mills and Leslie Street area, and walked away with \$500,000 worth of gold and precious stones.
- On Aug. 18, 2010 an armed robbery by two masked men took place at a Scotiabank branch in Vaughan, north of Toronto.
- Ottawa police have in the past cited a handful of robberies in that city involving male suspects using Muslim women's religious garments as disguises.

Some of us will never forget how a young Toronto Muslim woman, Bano Shahdady, threw off her burka as she was divorcing her husband, only to be stalked by him disguised in a burka. He entered her apartment building and killed her in July, 2011.

It was a story few media were willing to delve into, but because I knew the family, one journalist did report about this burka-related murder that almost went unreported.

Around the world, numerous criminals have fled arrest wearing burkas, everywhere from London's Heathrow airport to the infamous Lal Masjid armed revolt by jihadis in Islamabad.

My plea to vote-grabbing Canadian politicians of all political stripes in English-speaking Canada is, for once, be honest.

Put the racist card aside and recognize burkas and niqabs pose a serious public safety risk.

Further reading:

[Quebec veil law Bill 62 sparks protests and confusion](#)

EU: European Court of Justice rules against the wearing of the headscarf in the private sector

European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI) (14.03.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2lZsRIR> - The European Court of Justice (ECJ) issued a ruling against two women employees who were dismissed because they wore the headscarf. *"An internal rule of an undertaking which prohibits the visible wearing of any political, philosophical or religious sign does not constitute direct discrimination,"* the court said in a statement. *"However, in the absence of such a rule, the willingness of an employer to take account of the wishes of a customer no longer to have the employer's services provided by a worker wearing an Islamic headscarf cannot be considered an occupational requirement that could rule out discrimination."*

The Court also ruled that a ban may also constitute "indirect discrimination" if people adhering to a particular religion or belief were specifically targeted. The Court added that indirect discrimination is permissible if it is "objectively justified by a legitimate aim," such as a company's policy of neutrality, as long as the means of achieving it are appropriate and necessary.

The two cases concern two female Muslim employees in [Belgium](#) and [France](#) who had been dismissed for refusing to remove their headscarves, which did not cover the face.

The Belgian woman had been working as a receptionist for G4S Secure Solutions, which has a general ban on wearing visible religious or political symbols, while the French claimant is an IT consultant who was told to remove her headscarf after a client complained.

The case of the Belgian women stems from an "unwritten rule" where G4S banned employees from wearing signs of their political, philosophical or religious beliefs, although the company only updated its workplace regulations the day after the woman started wearing a hijab.

Although the rules apply to all beliefs, the ECJ said it was possible that such rules could be deemed indirect discrimination for targeting Muslims or other religious groups with visible manifestations of their faith and referred the issue back to the Belgian Court of Cassation.

Soraya Post, Co-President of ARDI, said: *"I welcome the decision that employers are not now allowed to pander to the prejudices of their clients. However at a time of increasing hate crimes against Muslims, this ruling sends the wrong signal and will lead to only further direct and indirect discrimination against Muslims both in the labour market and in society at large. Muslim women already face high levels of discrimination and difficulties in accessing the labour market according to the European Network Against Racism's Forgotten Women project and this decision will prevent more Muslim women from being able to access the labour market. Moreover in countries where national law doesn't provide appropriate safeguards, this ruling opens a Pandora's Box and will result in many Muslim women and those who wear visible manifestations of their faith being fired under the guise of neutrality. This is anything but neutrality."*

Sajjad Karim, Vice-President of ARDI, said: *"Today's ruling in effect makes Muslim women and people from other religious groups have to choose between their fundamental right to religious expression and access to the labour market. This is*

unacceptable and will only isolate people with religious convictions who wish to express their belief."

More reading: [Court of Justice of the European Union PRESS RELEASE No 30/17](#)

FRANCE: I created the burkini to give women freedom, not to take it away

By Aheda Zanetti

The Guardian (24.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2c7ogvO> - When I invented the burkini in early 2004, it was to give women freedom, not to take it away. My niece wanted to play netball but it was a bit of a struggle to get her in the team – she was wearing a hijab. My sister had to fight for her daughter to play, had to debate the issue and ask, why is this girl prevented from playing netball because of her modesty?

When she was finally allowed to play we all went to watch her to support her and what she was wearing was totally inappropriate for a sports uniform – a skivvy, tracksuit pants, and her hijab, totally unsuitable for any type of sport. She looked like a tomato she was so red and hot!

So I went home and went looking for something that might be better for her to wear, sportswear for Muslim girls, and I couldn't find anything, I knew there was nothing in Australia. It got me thinking because when I was a girl I missed out on sport – we didn't participate in anything because we chose to be modest, but for my niece I wanted to find something that would adapt to the Australian lifestyle and western clothing but at the same time fulfil the needs of a Muslim girl.

So I sat down on my lounge room floor and designed something. I looked at the veil and took away a lot of the excess fabric, which made me nervous - would my Islamic community accept this? The veil is supposed to cover your hair and your shape, you just don't shape anything around your body. But this was shaped around the neck. I thought, it's only the shape of a neck, it doesn't really matter.

Before I launched it I produced a sample with a questionnaire to find out what people would think - would you wear this? Would this encourage you to be more active? Play more sport? Swim? A lot of people in my community didn't know how to accept this, but I developed it commercially and made a good business.

The burkini came to everyone's attention when Surf Lifesaving Australia introduced a program to integrate Muslim boys and girls into surf lifesaving after the Cronulla riots – they had a young Muslim girl who wanted to compete in an event. She wore a burkini.

After September 11, the Cronulla riots, the banning of the veil in France, and the international backlash that came with it – about us being the bad people all because of a few criminals who do not speak on behalf of Muslims – I really didn't want anyone to judge girls wearing these. It's only a girl being modest.

It was about integration and acceptance and being equal and about not being judged. It was difficult for us at the time, the Muslim community, they had a fear of stepping out. They had fear of going to public pools and beaches and so forth, and I wanted girls to have the confidence to continue a good life. Sport is so important, and we are Australian! I wanted to do something positive – and anyone can wear this, Christian, Jewish, Hindus.

It's just a garment to suit a modest person, or someone who has skin cancer, or a new mother who doesn't want to wear a bikini, it's not symbolising Islam.

When I named it the burkini I didn't really think it was a burqa for the beach. Burqa was just a word for me – I'd been brought up in Australia all my life, and I'd designed this swimsuit and I had to call it something quickly. It was the combination of two cultures – we're Australians but we are also Muslim by choice. The burqa doesn't symbolise anything here, and it's not mentioned in the Qur'an and our religion does not ask us to cover our faces, it's the wearer's choice to do so. Burqa is nowhere in any Islamic text. I had to look the word up, and it was described as a kind of coat and cover-all, and at the other end you had the bikini, so I combined the two.

This negativity that is happening now and what is happening in France makes me so sad. I hope it's not because of racism. I think they have misunderstood a garment that is so positive – it symbolises leisure and happiness and fun and fitness and health and now they are demanding women get off the beach and back into their kitchens?

This has given women freedom, and they want to take that freedom away? So who is better, the Taliban or French politicians? They are as bad as each other.

I don't think any man should worry about how women are dressing – no one is forcing us, it's a woman's choice. What you see is our choice. Do I call myself a feminist? Yes, maybe. I like to stand behind my man, but I am the engine, and I choose to be. I want him to take all the credit, but I am the quiet achiever.

I would love to be in France to say this: you have misunderstood. And there more problems in the world to worry about, why create more? You've taken a product that symbolised happiness and joyfulness and fitness, and turned it into a product of hatred.

Also, what are the French values? What do you mean it doesn't combine with French values, what does that mean? Liberty? You telling us what to wear, you telling us what not to do will drive women back into their homes – what do you want us to do then? There will be a backlash. If you are dividing the nation and not listening and not working towards something you are naturally going to have someone who is going to get angry. If you are pushing people away, and isolating them – this is definitely not a good thing for any politician to do, in any country.

I remember when I first tested the burkini. First I tested it in my bathtub, I had to make sure it worked. Then I had to test it by diving in it, so I went to the local pool to test that the headband would stay put, so I went to Roselands Pool, and I remember that everyone was staring at me – what was I wearing? I went right to the end of the pool and got on the diving board and dived in. The headband stayed in place, and I thought, beauty! Perfect!

It was my first time swimming in public and it was absolutely beautiful. I remember the feeling so clearly. I felt freedom, I felt empowerment, I felt like I owned the pool. I walked to the end of that pool with my shoulders back.

Diving into water is one of the best feelings in the world. And you know what? I wear a bikini under my burkini. I've got the best of both worlds.

INDONESIA bans mandatory Islamic 'hijab' scarves for schoolgirls

AFP/ Dawn (06.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rAuWrY> - Indonesia has banned schools from forcing girls to wear Islamic "hijab" headscarves after the case of a Christian pupil pressured to cover up sparked outrage in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The move was applauded Friday by rights activists, who say non-Muslim girls have been forced for years to wear a hijab in conservative parts of the country.

State schools across the Southeast Asian archipelago of nearly 270 million will face sanctions if they fail to comply with the edict from education minister Nadiem Makarim.

On Wednesday he said religious attire was an individual choice, and said schools "cannot make it compulsory".

Schools that violate the rules could see their government funding cut, he added.

"The decree is a positive step to protect women's rights in Indonesia," said Andreas Harsono, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch in Jakarta.

He said public schools had forced millions of girls and women teachers to wear a hijab, prompting "bullying, intimidation, social pressures -- and in some cases, expulsion and forced resignation" if they didn't.

There have been concerns about growing religious intolerance in a nation where nearly 90 percent of the population follows Islam.

The headscarf issue grabbed headlines after a Christian student in West Sumatra's Padang City was pressured to wear a hijab.

She refused, and her parents later secretly recorded a meeting with an official who insisted that school rules required all girls to wear a hijab, regardless of their religion.

The school later issued an apology after the video went viral.

Religious affairs minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas described the Sumatra case as the "tip of the iceberg".

"Religion is not supposed to be a reason for conflict or a justification to act unfairly towards those with different beliefs," he said.

The new regulations will not apply to conservative Aceh province, which follows religious law under a longstanding autonomy deal.

INDONESIA: Indonesia's Aceh orders female flight crews to wear hijab

Under Aceh's rules, non-Muslim females can opt to wear modest clothing instead

Gulf News (30.01.2018) - An Indonesian province said on Tuesday it is ordering Muslim female flight attendants landing in the region to don a hijab upon arrival — or face punishment by religious police.

Muslim women in Aceh, on the island of Sumatra, are required to wear the Islamic headscarf under religious law, while non-Muslim females can opt to wear modest clothing instead.

But some Muslim flight attendants who do not regularly wear the hijab were skipping the local practice during short layovers, forcing Aceh to issue the new regulations, said Mawardy Ali, head of Aceh Besar district which includes provincial capital Banda Aceh.

“I hope the airlines respect the uniqueness of Aceh where Sharia is implemented,” he said, adding that he would aim to meet with some half dozen affected airlines this week.

“We are disseminating this regulation to the airlines through the end of this week. Later, we’ll talk about punishment if we find there have been violations,” Ali added.

“If a (Muslim) crew member fails to comply, we will reprimand her. If she does it repeatedly, I will order Sharia police to nab her.”

He did not say what sort of punishment would apply to those who refused to comply, though hijab violations usually result in a stern reprimand.

Ali said any sanction would not include public flogging — a common punishment in Aceh for a host of crimes including selling alcohol and having gay sex.

It was unclear how many flight attendants could be affected.

Many women in Indonesia, the world’s biggest Muslim-majority nation, do not wear the hair-covering scarf and Islamic law only applies in Aceh — the region won special autonomy in 2001 as part of a deal to end a long-running separatist insurgency.

Concern has been growing among rights activists about rising religious conservatism in Aceh, where police at the weekend forcibly cut the hair of a group of transgender women and made them wear male clothing to make them more “manly”.

Indonesia’s national carrier Garuda and its low-cost arm Citilink service Banda Aceh, which hosts the province’s main airport.

Garuda said it would comply with the new regulations and may add a special uniform worn by its female staff on Middle-East bound flights — which includes the hijab — to Aceh flights.

“Garuda respects the local culture in Aceh,” said company spokesman Ikhsan Rosan.

Citilink spokesman Benny Butarbutar, meanwhile, said the carrier has already been using an Islamic-compliant uniform for its attendants servicing Banda Aceh since 2015.

Other airlines affected include Indonesian budget carrier Lion Air and its full-service subsidiary Batik Air, which operate regular flights between Aceh and other parts of the Southeast Asian archipelago.

AirAsia and Firefly, both Malaysia-based, are the main foreign carriers that operate flights to Banda Aceh.

ISRAEL: Court tells city to remove religiously inspired signs directing women to wear modest clothes

Religion Clause (20.06.2016) - <http://bit.ly/28Qf7HH> - In Israel yesterday, the Jerusalem District Court ordered the mayor of the city of Beit Shemesh to remove signs posted around the city by ultra-Orthodox Jews instructing women to wear long sleeves and long skirts. Other signs tell women to keep off sidewalks near synagogues and yeshivas where men congregate. According to today's Haaretz, the suit seeking removal of the signs was filed three years ago on behalf of four Orthodox women who live in Beit Shemesh. They argue that the signs encourage violence and harassment against women who ignore them. A Magistrate's Court ruled in the women's favor last year, but the city has ignored the ruling. So plaintiffs went to a higher court which has now given the city's mayor three weeks to remove the signs, and told the city to act more forcefully in the future to prevent new signs from going up.

KAZAKHSTAN: Hijab Vs. Education: Kazakh schoolgirls face dilemma over head-scarf ban

By Sanat Urnaliev and Farangis Najibullah

RFERL (19.11.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2zRXY8P> - Thirteen-year-old Gulsezim Samat hasn't attended classes since mid-October, when she was told to remove her head scarf before entering her school in the Kazakh village of Chapaev.

The school in West Kazakhstan Province, like all educational institutions below university level in the country, is enforcing an official decree by the Education Ministry that bans the wearing of religious symbols in schools.

The January 14 decree made school uniforms compulsory, and effectively barred Islamic clothing such as the head scarf, or hijab. The policy has been enforced as of September 1, the beginning of the academic year.

While many students in the Muslim-majority country have complied and removed their head scarves, a small number of parents in West Kazakhstan Province are demanding that courts revoke the ban, claiming it is unconstitutional. Similar demands have come from parents in the provinces of Mangistau, Aqtobe, and South Kazakhstan, among others.

As court trials await, dozens of female students across the country who have refused to abide by the measure have been out of school for several weeks.

In Samat's school in Chapaev, 16 of the 20 female students who wear head scarves are complying with the new regulation, local officials say. Four others, including Samat, are not.

'Just A Piece Of Cloth'

The new regulation was discussed during meetings with a parent committee before its implementation began, says Tlekkabyl Gabdushev, deputy governor of the district of Akzhaik where the Chapaev village is located.

He says the female students who agreed to remove their head scarves "are coming to school, studying, playing, without any problem."

Samat's father, Berikbek Samat, who works at the same school as a physical education teacher, is adamant that his daughter not comply with the ban.

"A head scarf is just a piece of cloth," he says. "It doesn't hinder studying."

Berikbek Samat claims that his wife, a Kazakh-language teacher, can't get a job "because of her head scarf."

Berikbek Samat's wife has been unemployed since the evening school where she worked was closed down, he says.

The 34-year-old father of three says he works as a cab driver after his day job finishes to make ends meet.

It's unclear how many Kazakh students have stayed away from school owing to the measure, but education officials say that many parents who initially refused have since complied.

According to the city education department in Oral, the capital of West Kazakhstan Province, only 40 of the 112 hijab-wearing students in the province agreed to remove their head scarves.

The department says it will fine parents for noncompliance, and that repeat offenders will be referred to judicial authorities.

"No one has been fined so far, however" says Svetlana Bakhisheva, the head of the provincial education department.

In the western city of Zhanaozen about 60 girls, most of them primary school students, stopped going to schools for at least two weeks in September after they were told to remove their head scarves.

Zhanaozen education officials do not believe the measure singles out conservative Muslims.

Tattimbet Zhumagaliev, the head of the Zhanaozen education department, points out that 58 female students were not allowed to enter school buildings "because they were wearing miniskirts," which is also a violation of school-uniform rules.

Constitutional Right

On November 15, a court in Astana began hearing a lawsuit filed by a group of parents from Aqtobe Province who demanded that the court overturn the Education Ministry's ban on head scarves.

In 2011, eight female students in Aqtobe successfully sued a university over its hijab ban.

Kazakhstan's constitution guarantees the right to practice any faith freely and without restriction.

Kazakh officials have increasingly expressed concerns about the threat of religious groups. The government blames "radical religious movements" for a deadly attack on an Aqtobe gun shop and army unit in June 2016.

In April, President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who has ruled the country since 1989, said the country needed a legal ban on certain Islamic clothing, such as garments that cover the body from head to toe and so-called Salafi-style ankle-length pants for men.

"The number of Kazakh girls who are fully covered with black clothing is on the rise," Nazarbaev said, adding that the trend was "incompatible" with Kazakh traditions.

"Kazakhs wear black garments only for funerals," Nazarbaev said, but he made no mention of banning others forms of Islamic clothing worn in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's official school uniform for girls consists of a "classic-style blouse" worn with a skirt or ankle-length pants. The color of the uniform and skirt length is decided by individual school administrations and requires official approval by parent committees.

While the decree on uniforms does not specifically mention headwear, it does not allow religious symbols to be worn with the uniform, which would rule out the hijab.

MOROCCO: Burqa ban in Morocco sparks anew the debate over women's rights

Africa Times (11.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2iFVBjS> - Morocco's decision to ban the burqa, at least in part, has again touched off a controversy over women's right to choose to whether they wear the full-body Islamic covering, or whether the burqa represents an unacceptable security risk to society.

The Moroccan Ministry of Interior has announced it will prohibit the manufacture and sale of the burqa, effective immediately across the nation. The Morocco World News reported Tuesday that the ban is meant to stop criminals who have "repeatedly used this garment to perpetrate their crimes," according to media reports.

The decision was countered by a Moroccan human rights organization that issued a statement condemning the ban – although technically, Morocco's new law does not yet infringe on the right to wear one, as opposed to making or selling them. The ban violates women's right to express their identities, and political, social and cultural beliefs, it said.

Similar bans have long sparked debate in Europe, where this summer Switzerland joined France and Belgium in enacting a ban, and other nations with geographically limited or partial bans in place. The ban in France extends to those who would force a woman to wear a burqa, which is often associated with extremist or jihadist thought.

Yet Muslim nations in Africa also have banned the burqa, primarily for security reasons. Chad enacted a law in 2015 after bombing attacks in N'Djamena by people who were wearing them.

Former Prime Minister Kalzeube Pahimi Deubet said the risk of terror attacks in which the burqa serves as camouflage – as well as the niqab, which also covers the face – warranted the decision. The region's Boko Haram threat prompted similar bans in parts

of Niger and Cameroon. Nigeria and Senegal have considered it, while Congo-Brazzaville enacted a law that bans it in public places, specifically to limit the terror threat.

NIGERIA: Muslim lawyers reject Nigeria's FCT high court's new dress code

By John Chuks Azu & Abass Jimoh

Daily Trust (10.04.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2HrdfVJ> - Muslim Lawyers' Association of Nigeria (MULAN) has rejected the new dress code for lawyers by the FCT High Court and the ban of hijab in the Law School.

In a statement released at the end of its National Executive Council meeting in Benin City, Edo State on March 31, MULAN condemns the directive that prohibits the use of any apparel underneath wigs by lawyers and by extension the hijab by female Muslim lawyers.

In the release signed by its president, Dr. Kamal Dawud, Esq., the association said the new rule ran contrary to the 2004 resolution of the Body of Benchers which allowed female Law School students and legal practitioners to use head cover underneath their wigs.

"On this ground and by the provisions of Section 38 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, this directive is unfortunate, draconian, illegal, unconstitutional and unlawful," Dawud said in the statement.

"MULAN NEC condemns the directive in the press release in the strongest term and urges the FCT High Court to reverse its decision contained in the press release forthwith."

On the hijab controversy, MULAN said the constitutional provision affirmed the religious rights of citizens, and resolved to design a hijab compliant collaret with bib for use by Muslim female legal practitioners to conform with the tradition of the legal profession.

SWITZERLAND: Swiss region of St Gallen votes to ban 'burqa' in public places

Northeastern canton of St Gallen bans face veils in what critics call an Islamophobic move.

Al Jazeera (23.09.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2DmnWdQ> - The Swiss region of St Gallen has voted in favour of a "burqa ban", prohibiting all face-covering garments in public spaces, a decision that a local Islamic organisation has termed "Islamophobic".

In a referendum on Sunday in the northeastern canton of St Gallen, nearly 67 percent of voters approved the ban, the second region in Switzerland to do so after Ticino two years ago.

Three other Swiss cantons - Zurich, Solothurn and Glarus - have rejected introducing such bans in recent years.

The referendum was held after local parties, Green Party and Young Socialists, demanded a vote following the passage of a law in St Gallen parliament last year.

That law stated that "any person who renders themselves unrecognisable by covering their face in a public space, and thus endangers public security or social and religious peace will be fined".

Drafted following an uproar in the canton over a girl who wore a face veil to school, the law, critics said, does not define when a woman wearing veil constitutes a danger. They also warn of arbitrary sanctions.

The Islamic Central Council of Switzerland slammed the ban as "Islamophobic". Other opponents argued the ban was "useless" since very few women wear "burqas" or other face-covering veils in St Gallen.

National referendum

Last year, the Swiss government opposed a nationwide "burqa ban", saying it should be up to the regions to determine if such measures were appropriate.

A national referendum on the issue is expected next year after the right-wing Swiss People's Party gathered 100,000 signatures required to put any subject to vote under Switzerland's famous direct democratic system.

In 2009, Switzerland banned the construction of minarets at mosques in a similar referendum, attracting worldwide attention.

Earlier this year, a survey by two Swiss papers found that an emphatic 76 percent of respondents favoured a ban on face veils, while 20 percent opposed it.

Several other European countries including Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France and the Netherlands have introduced full or partial bans on face veils and head coverings in recent years.

USA: Assaults on Muslim women force some to rethink hijab

By Yonat Shimron

RNS (12.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2qF5MXs> - Melissa Grajek was subjected to all kinds of taunts for wearing the hijab, but an incident at San Marcos' (Calif.) Discovery Lake sealed the deal.

Her 1-year-old son was playing with another boy when an irate father saw her and whisked his son away, telling Grajek: "I can't wait until Trump is president because he'll send you back to where you came from."

The man then scooped up a handful of wood chips and threw them at Grajek's son.

At that moment, Grajek thought, enough was enough. She decided to take off her head covering.

"I had been on the fence regarding hijab, but that incident made it clear my religious choices could be putting my son at risk," she said.

Grajek's decision to doff the hijab follows weekly, if not daily, news reports of assaults against Muslim women.

Last week (Dec. 6), Ilhan Omar, the newly elected Minneapolis state representative was leaving the White House, which she visited to talk about policy initiatives, when a cabbie threatened to yank her hijab while shouting expletives and calling her "ISIS."

A day earlier, a man pushed a New York City transit worker down a staircase at Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan, yelling, "You're a terrorist, go back to your own country!"

And two weeks ago in Brooklyn, another man threatened an off-duty police officer with his pit bull, telling her and her son to "go back to your country."

All three women were wearing hijabs.

Assaults or intimidation of Muslims had been steadily rising well before the election but they became more common during the divisive campaign of President-elect Donald Trump, who called for a ban on Muslim immigrants and proposed a registry for U.S. Muslims.

A Pew Research Center analysis of hate crimes statistics from the FBI shows that the number of physical assaults against Muslims reached 9/11-era levels last year. The number of anti-Muslim intimidation crimes — defined as threatening bodily harm — also rose.

Now some imams across the country are saying it's OK to take the hijab off, at least temporarily.

Imam Abdullah Antepli recently asked a group of women at the Islamic Association of Raleigh (N.C.) how many of them felt unsafe in public.

Dozens of hands shot up.

He then told them the extraordinary circumstances under which Muslim Americans now live may require extraordinary measures — including doffing the hijab, at least for a while.

"I'm not trying to be alarmist," said Antepli, the chief representative of Muslim affairs at Duke University. "But the nation is being sucked into a combustible mix. We have to think unconventionally."

Antepli's call to remove the hijab, which he repeated at a mosque in Cary and in home gatherings of Muslims in Raleigh and Chapel Hill, is rare but not unheard of.

In Texas, Imam Omar Suleiman, president of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and resident scholar at the Valley Ranch Islamic Center in Irving, said women's fears should be taken seriously.

"It's important to give our women support and validate the fear they're feeling," said Suleiman, who is also a professor of Islamic Studies at Southern Methodist University. "Fear isn't quantifiable; it's to the person's own experience."

While Suleiman doesn't foresee a blanket call to abandon the headscarf, he advises women to consider practical measures, such as wearing a hoodie instead of a hijab if they feel like they may be in danger.

For many Muslim women, the head covering is a quintessential mark of their identity — much as the kippah or yarmulke is a customary requirement for Orthodox and some Conservative Jewish men.

While often understood as a symbol of modesty and privacy, the hijab is much more for those Muslim women who choose to wear it. They view it alternately as a sign of religious devotion, discipline, freedom from Western expectations, or simply a way to be in a continuous state of prayer.

Many Muslim women would never think of giving it up, even if it means being targeted.

“This is a difficult time,” acknowledged Khalilah Sabra, a Raleigh Muslim activist who works for the Muslim American Society’s Immigrant Justice Center. Just last month, a man spit in her face as she descended the stairs of the Garfield, N.J., Municipal Court, where she was testifying in a domestic violence dispute.

He came up to me and said, “Get the f— home,” she said. “I had to pause and decide do I fight or let it go?”

Sabra decided to buck up and carry on.

“We have to stand up for our religious rights and encourage women to stand their ground,” she said.

Others, however, are taking security measures.

On Nov. 9, when New York’s Muslim Community Network posted a notice on Facebook about a self-defense workshop, leaders expected 50 or 60 women would respond. Within hours, 2,700 women had signed up.

The third such workshop at Judson Memorial Church in the Greenwich Village neighborhood took place Saturday (Dec. 10).

On Wednesday, the Council on American-Islamic Relations will sponsor a free self-defense workshop at Aqabah Karate studio in College Park, Md.

“A lot of people have been traumatized,” said Debbie Almontaser, the Muslim Community Network’s board president. “We want them to come in and feel empowered once they’ve finished the training.”

The workshop’s instructor is a woman, and the instruction is preceded by a group talk where women can share their fears and get advice on how to respond.

Other Muslim women are buying pepper spray, taking firearms training or applying for concealed carry permits.

And quietly, some Muslim women are uncovering their hair.

“One of the reasons women are encouraged to dress modestly is for their protection,” said Engy Abdelkader, senior fellow and adjunct professor at Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service. “Once that purpose is no longer served there’s an argument that it becomes a matter of necessity to remove it or make it less conspicuous with a hat, for instance, in order to preserve her safety.”

While Abdelkader still wears her hijab, Rose Ashraf has taken it off.

For Ashraf, there was no traumatizing incident. An operations director for a food service management company, Ashraf, who lives in Houston, said her bosses were very supportive of her hijab.

But her work requires frequent travel and being a single veiled woman at airports, hotels and restaurants forced her to constantly look over her shoulder.

"By wearing the hijab, I felt like I was a target," said Ashraf, who converted to Islam shortly before she married a Muslim in 1973. "I was always on guard for what might happen: Is someone going to react negatively? Can I trust this person?"

Three months ago, she took off the headscarf. She feels safer, now, she said, but wishes she could also practice her faith more freely.

WORLD: Ten things you need to know about the hijab

By Jessica Ham

Culture Trip (01.10.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2hFecRI> - The hijab, which is the Islamic expression of modesty and devotion, is more often than not misunderstood and misinterpreted in both society and mass media. What is the hijab, why do people wear it, and why should we care? Here are 10 things you need to know about the hijab before making an assumption about Islam.

The hijab is not just the scarf

Contrary to popular belief, the hijab is not just the physical scarf that many Muslim women choose to wear over their hair. The hijab in its entirety is the belief that as a Muslim, one must try to diligently live every day in respect of God, with modesty, and show devotion to the religion as a whole. By wearing the physical scarf, it is one way of expressing one's love for Islam. In this way, hijab can also be the way one acts, thinks, and treats others, aside from wearing the physical scarf.

There are many different forms of hijab

The hijab comes in many forms, and in many levels of covering one's body as well. The shape of the scarf over the head differs from person to person, some choose to cover their faces as well, and some only choose to dress modestly while still showing their hair. These are all forms of hijab, even if it does not look like the stereotypical one sees in the media.

The hijab also applies to men

Because the overarching meaning of hijab is to live one's life modestly with love for God, the hijab also applies to men. While not as well known outside the Muslim community, men also strive to wear the hijab both physically and mentally every day, the same as Muslim women. The men's physical hijab however focuses more on covering the lower body and not the hair or upper body.

Who can Muslims take off the hijab for?

The hijab, once worn as a scarf covering one's hair and covering the body, can only be taken off in front of family members or women. A Muslim woman wearing the hijab will therefore usually refrain from showing her hair to any man not related to her by blood.

The hijab is a choice for the majority of Muslims

Putting aside extreme countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, Muslim women are not always forced to wear the hijab. In fact the majority of them choose to wear it and are in love with their hijab, and are completely free to choose when and how to wear the scarf.

There will never be one uniform reason on why Muslims choose to wear hijab

Although there may be some general similarities to why Muslim women choose to wear the hijab, there will never be one overarching specific reason why that satisfies all. Muslim women choose to wear the hijab for countless different reasons, from personal to religious purposes, from interpretations of the Quran to fashion; the reasons behind every single person's choice to wear the hijab will differ. But that is the beauty of it, that it is not a universal object that conforms everyone. In fact, it can express every person's unique strength and belief system.

What the Quran says about the hijab

Although there are many interpretations to what the Quran actually says about the hijab, the most common understanding comes from these verses:

"Say to the believing men that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them" (Quran 24:31)

"Oh you Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the women of the believers to lengthen their garments. This is better so that they will be recognized and not harmed. God is the Forgiver and the Merciful" (Quran 33:59)

The hijab is not oppressive or restraining

Although this misconception is slowly changing, the hijab is still too often equated with oppression. The hijab is in no way oppressive or restraining to the majority of the 1.6 billion Muslims around the world, and does not prohibit them from pursuing their dreams, acting the way they want, dressing how they like, or marrying who they love. The hijab is far more often than not a freedom of expression.

Why the hijab is empowering for millions of Muslims across the globe

The important thing to understand about the hijab is that it is in fact extremely empowering for millions of Muslim women. The hijab empowers them with the pride and love for their religion, and the power of modesty also helps many feel stronger. Being modest means forcing people to judge you based on your mind and your heart, and less so on your face or body. This gives courage and self-esteem to many who choose to wear the hijab.

Understanding the hijab is understanding another form of feminism

Finally, because the hijab can be so empowering to so many people, wearing the hijab has become an expression of feminism. Wearing the hijab can mean to many that they have the freedom to choose how to self-express. Because a woman is using self-expression and not being forced to dress a certain way by societal pressures, many women then feel empowered and more equal to men because they are forcing people to judge them on their capabilities and not on how sexualized their bodies can be.