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## **AFGHANISTAN: Taliban order Afghan women to wear burqa in public**

***The militants took back control of the country in August last year, promising a softer rule than their previous stint in power between 1996 and 2001, which was marked by human rights abuses.***

Times Now (07.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3ynGA02> - The Taliban on Saturday imposed some of the harshest restrictions on Afghanistan's women since they seized power, ordering them to cover fully in public, ideally with the traditional burqa.

The militants took back control of the country in August last year, promising a softer rule than their previous stint in power between 1996 and 2001, which was marked by human rights abuses.

But they have already imposed a slew of restrictions on women -- banning them from many government jobs, secondary education, and from travelling alone outside their cities.

On Saturday, Afghanistan's supreme leader and Taliban chief Hibatullah Akhundzada approved a strict dress code for women in public.

"Those women who are not too old or young must cover their face, except the eyes, as per sharia directives, in order to avoid provocation when meeting men who are not mahram (adult close male relatives)," said a decree approved by Akhundzada and released by Taliban authorities at a ceremony in Kabul.

It said the best way for a woman to cover her face and body was to wear the chadari, a traditional, blue, all-covering Afghan burqa.

"They should wear a chadari as it is traditional and respectful," it said.

Akhundzada's decree also said that if women had no important work outside then it was "better they stay at home".

The Ministry for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which released the new order, announced a slew of punishments if the dress code is not followed.

It said a woman's father or male guardian would be summoned and could even be imprisoned if the offence was committed repeatedly.

Women working in government institutions who did not follow the order "should be fired", the ministry added.

Government employees whose wives and daughters do not comply will also be suspended from their jobs, the decree said.

The new restrictions were expected to spark a flurry of condemnation abroad.

***- 'Regressive' -***

Many in the international community want humanitarian aid for Afghanistan and recognition of the Taliban government to be linked to the restoration of women's rights.

"It is an unexpected regressive step and will not help Taliban in winning international recognition," said Imtiaz Gul, head of the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies.

"Such steps will only intensify opposition to them."

During their first regime, the Taliban made the burqa compulsory for women.

Since their return to power, the much-feared vice ministry has issued several "guidelines" on dress but Saturday's edict is one of the harshest restrictions on women.

"Islam never recommended chadari," said a women's rights activist who asked not to be named.

"I believe the Taliban are becoming regressive instead of being progressive. They are going back to the way they were in their previous regime."

Another women's rights activist, Muska Dastageer, said Taliban rule had triggered "too much rage and disbelief".

"We are a broken nation forced to endure assaults we cannot fathom. As a people we are being crushed," she said on Twitter.

The hardline Islamists triggered international outrage in March when they ordered secondary schools for girls to shut, just hours after they reopened for the first time since their seizure of power.

Officials have never justified the ban, apart from saying girls' education must be according to "Islamic principles".

That ban was also issued by Akhundzada, according to several Taliban officials.

Women have also been ordered to visit parks in the capital on separate days from men.

Some Afghan women initially pushed back strongly against the restrictions, holding small demonstrations where they demanded the right to education and work.

But the Taliban cracked down on these unsanctioned rallies and rounded up several of the ringleaders, holding them incommunicado while denying they had been detained.

In the 20 years between the Taliban's two stints in power, girls were allowed to go to school and women were able to seek employment in all sectors, though the country remained socially conservative.

Many women already wear the burqa in rural areas.

## **AFGHANISTAN: Taliban religious police issue posters ordering women to cover up**

France24 (07.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3q9yzHg> - The Taliban's religious police have put up posters around the capital Kabul ordering Afghan women to cover up, an official said Friday, the latest in a string of creeping restrictions.

The poster, which includes an image of the face-covering burqa, was slapped on cafes and shops this week by the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Since returning to power in August, the Taliban have increasingly curtailed freedoms -- particularly those of women and girls.

"According to Sharia law, Muslim women must wear the hijab," the poster reads, referring to the practice of covering up.

A spokesman for the ministry, responsible for enforcing the Taliban's harsh interpretation of Islamic law, confirmed to AFP on Friday that it was behind the orders.

"If someone does not follow it, it does not mean she will be punished or beaten, it's just encouragement for Muslim women to follow Sharia law," Sadeq Akif Muhajir said.

In Kabul, women already cover their hair with headscarves, though some wear modest western clothing.

Outside of the capital the burqa, which became mandatory for women under the Taliban's first regime in the 1990s, has remained common.

"What they're trying to do is to spread fear among the people," a university student and women's rights advocate, who did not want to be identified, told AFP.

"The first time I saw the posters I was really petrified, I thought maybe (the Taliban) will start beating me. They want me to wear a burqa and look like nothing, I would never do that."

The Taliban, which is desperate for international recognition to allow funding flows to reopen to the war-racked country, have so far refrained from issuing national policies. Instead, they have published guidance for men and women that has varied from province to province.

"This is not good. 100 per cent, this will create fear," said Shahagha Noori, the supervisor of a Kabul restaurant where the poster had been put up by the Taliban.

"I think if the Taliban get international recognition, then they will start to enforce it."

Although the Taliban have promised a lighter version of the hardline rule that characterised their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, women are largely excluded from government employment, and secondary schools for girls have remained shuttered in several provinces.

They have also been banned from travelling alone on long journeys.

No nation has yet formally recognised the Taliban government and diplomats face the delicate task of channeling aid to the stricken Afghan economy without propping up the hardline Islamists.

## **AFGHANISTAN: Taliban imposes new dress code, segregation of women at Afghan universities**

By Frud Bezhan

RFE/RL's Radio Azadi (03.09.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3jRzfOE> - The Taliban has imposed a new dress code and gender segregation for women at private universities and colleges in Afghanistan, in line with a decree issued to educational institutions and obtained by RFE/RL.

All female students, teachers, and staff must wear an Islamic abaya robe and niqab that covers the hair, body, and most of the face, according to the extensive document issued by the Taliban-run Education Ministry on September 5. The garments must be black, the text added, and women must also wear gloves to ensure their hands are covered.

Classes must also be segregated by gender -- or at least divided by a curtain -- according to the order, which added that female students must be taught only by other women. But it added, though, that "elderly men" of good character could fill in if there were no female teachers.

Since seizing power after the collapse of the internationally recognized government in Kabul last month, the Taliban has said "women and girls will have all their rights within Islam."

The militants have attempted to project a more moderate image and reassure Afghans and the world that it has changed. During its brutal regime from 1996-2001, the Taliban oppressed women and severely restricted girls' education.

But the Taliban's new rules -- which came into effect on September 6 as private universities reopened -- highlight how women's lives are set to dramatically change under the rule of the hard-line Islamist group after the gains of the past 20 years.

### **'Clear Sign Of Repression'**

"The new changes like gender segregation in schools and universities are clearly creating more fear and a culture of discrimination against women and girls," said Samira Hamidi, an exiled women's rights activist who fled Afghanistan due to threats by the Taliban.

"Women wearing black veils do not represent Afghan culture," she added. "It is a clear sign of repression in the life of women and girls."

Before the Taliban's return to power, Afghan women studied alongside men and attended classes with male teachers. There was also no dress code that forced women to cover themselves.

But women are now confronted with a new, harsher reality.

Photos widely shared by Afghans on social media showed men and women at Ibn Sina University, a private institution in Kabul, [separated in classes by a curtain](#). Many of the women pictured wore black robes and hijabs, although their faces were visible -- an apparent violation of the new dress code.

According to the decree issued by the Taliban, women should wear an abaya, the figure-shrouding outer garment, and niqab, a cloth that covers the face except for the eyes.

Maryam, a woman from the southeastern city of Khost, told Radio Azadi that many women were ready to wear a hijab, which covers the head. But she said the all-encompassing niqab or burqa would not be "acceptable to Afghan women."

### **'Good Behavior'**

The Taliban also imposed the wearing of burqas in the 1990s.

The Taliban's decree also said men and women should use separate entrances and exits at universities and colleges.

"Universities are required to recruit female teachers for female students based on their facilities," the document said.

If it is not possible to employ female teachers, then institutions "should try to hire elderly men teachers who have a record of good behavior."

While women must study separately, they are also required to finish their classes five minutes earlier than men to stop them from meeting outside.

The documents also stipulates that women must remain in waiting rooms until their male classmates have left the building.

Despite the new restrictions, the Taliban permitting education for women is a positive, said 18-year-old Salgy Baran, who received the highest score in Afghanistan on her university entrance exams this year.

"The Taliban must deliver on what they promise," she told Radio Azadi, referring to the militant group's pledge to protect women's rights, including the right to education. "Our university professors must be encouraged and appreciated, and we must be optimistic about the future."

### **Violating Women's Rights**

But others are not convinced that the Taliban has changed and will permit women to exercise their right to education and work.

After the U.S.-led invasion, university admission rates soared in Afghanistan, particularly among women. Millions of girls of all ages also flocked back to school, though the gains in female education were mainly restricted to the cities.

Women also played a role in public life as ministers, members of parliament, and provincial officials. They also had the right to vote and work outside their homes.

When it previously controlled Afghanistan from 1996-2001, the Taliban forced women to cover themselves from head to toe, banned them from working outside the home, limited education only to pre-adolescent girls, and required women to be accompanied by a male relative if they left their homes.

The Taliban has, thus far, reimposed many of the same repressive laws and retrograde policies that defined its extremist former rule.

In Kabul, the Taliban has advised women to largely remain indoors. The militants have dismissed female journalists working for state-run television. The Taliban has also

ordered many former female government workers not to return to work even as their male colleagues went back. Many girls' schools have also remained shut in the capital.

Scores of women have staged protests in Kabul, the western city of Herat, and the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif in recent days, demanding equal rights.

Protest organizers said Taliban militants violently dispersed a crowd of women who had taken to the streets of Mazar-e Sharif on September 6 to call for their rights to be preserved and their inclusion in the new government.

Dozens of women held placards with slogans such as "Violation of women's rights = Violation of human's rights" and "We want political participation at all levels," [according to photos shared on social media](#).

[Frud Bezhan](#) covers Afghanistan and Pakistan, with a focus on politics, the Taliban insurgency, and human rights. He has reported from Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Turkey. Prior to joining RFE/RL in 2011, he worked as a freelance journalist in Afghanistan and contributed to several Australian newspapers, including The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald. [BezhanF@rferl.org](mailto:BezhanF@rferl.org)

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## **BELGIUM: Burkini or not in swimming-pools? Strasbourg must decide**

### ***BANNING BODY-COVERING SWIMWEAR: THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE SUBMITTED A THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION TO THE ECtHR IN MISSAOUI AND AKHANDAF V. BELGIUM***

**By Cathérine Van de Graaf**

Human Rights Center of Ghent University (28.10.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3DkWwAX> - On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, the [Human Rights Centre\[1\]](#) (HRC) of Ghent University (Belgium) submitted a third party intervention (TPI) before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR or the Court) in the communicated case of [Missaoui and Akhandaf v. Belgium](#), after being granted leave to intervene by the President of the Court's Third Section.

In the case, the Court is asked whether the prohibition of body-covering swimwear in a public swimming pool in Antwerp constitutes indirect discrimination based on religion under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR or Convention). In our submission to the Court, we highlight relevant elements of the Belgian legal and societal context as well as possible pathways for development of the Court's reasoning, based on our Centre's expertise on the topic.

#### ***Facts of the case***

With this application the Court is asked to rule on the prohibition of body-covering swimwear imposed on the basis of the police regulations of the city of Antwerp (Belgium). The applicants are two women of Muslim faith who wished to swim in a swimming pool in the city but were denied entrance.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2017, they first lodged a motion of cessation against the regulation before the president of the Antwerp Court of First Instance. The motion was based on the Decree of the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2008 on the framework of the Flemish policy of

the equal opportunities and treatment and the Law of the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2007 to combat certain forms of discrimination. Their request was rejected by a judgment of 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2018. Then, on November 23, 2020, the Antwerp Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal lodged by the applicants against this judgment. Finally, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2021, a lawyer at the Court of Cassation gave a negative opinion on the chances of an appeal against the judgment of the Court of Appeal.

As such, the applications exhausted the domestic remedies and the case was submitted to the Court on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2022. Relying on Article 14 in conjunction with Article 9 of the Convention, the applicants complain of indirect discrimination based on religion.

### ***Legal and societal context***

In the third party intervention, we first highlighted several relevant elements of the legal and societal context of the case of which the Court might not be aware. This includes the situation regarding bans on body-covering swimwear in swimming pools in Belgium, the broader context of other bans on religious signs/dress in Belgium, the broader context of hostility against Muslims in Belgian society, and the treatment of bans on religious signs/dress in international human rights law.

### ***Bans on body-covering swimwear in swimming pools in Belgium***

First, we referred to a [study](#) from 2017 by the HRC, focusing on Flanders (the Dutch-speaking Northern part of Belgium), which revealed that regulations concerning the wearing of body-covering swimwear were commonplace in public swimming pools. Among the 128 pools about which information could be obtained, only 30 responded that they allowed or would allow body-covering swimwear.

In the 76 swimming pools where 'burkinis' were not allowed, interviewees were asked what the reason was for the bans. 50 interviewees replied to that question by stating reasons such as hygiene (36 mentions), water quality (3 mentions), safety (13 mentions), majority morals favouring uncovering (7 mentions), the burkini being offensive (3 mentions) as well as concepts of neutrality, integration, tradition, and gender equality (each 1 mention).

We also mentioned the July 2017 [advice](#) of the Belgian inter-federal equality body (Unia) on body-covering swimwear. The advice states that a ban on body-covering swimwear is discriminatory against those who wear such swimwear for religious reasons, and that it affects individual autonomy and religious freedom. Thus far, three local 'burkini bans' have been challenged in court. The [Court of First Instance of Ghent](#) held in two judgments of July 2018 that such a ban violates the prohibition of discrimination based on religion.

One of these judgments was upheld when challenged before the [Ghent Court of Appeal](#), the other was never challenged. However, the Court of First Instance of Antwerp ruled in a judgment of December 2018 that an implicit 'burkini' ban in a public swimming pool in the city of Antwerp did not amount to an indirect discrimination on grounds of religion. This diverging case law by courts in Ghent and Antwerp confronts local governments with legal uncertainty which will be further clarified below.

### ***Other bans on religious signs/dress and hostility against Muslims in Belgian society***

In Belgium, bans on veiling are "[spreading like an oil spill](#)" across the [various sectors of society](#): when confronted with any manifestation of Islamic veiling, banning has become the default option in Belgian society. This way, veiling – whether it is in the form of a

headscarf or as part of a swimsuit – is de facto denormalized and almost automatically problematized.

The ban on body-covering swimwear case is an example of a particularly disturbing trend where Muslims wearing a hijab are denied access to services and facilities which other persons can make use of without any impediments. We cite cases where women were refused to enter an ice-cream bar, the terrace of a restaurant, the gym, a bowling alley and now a public swimming pool because they wore religious clothing.

This negative attitude seems to have resulted in a [growth](#) of explicit and measurable physical and verbal attacks toward Muslims. These [hate crimes](#) are often heavily gendered. In a [study](#) conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, out of all Muslim respondents in Europe (10 527), 31% of Muslim women who at least sometimes wear religious clothing in public reported experiencing harassment 12 months before the survey.

The decision-making processes over the 'burkini' often took place at a local level with often very limited actors involved where personal attitudes can easily play a role (as shown by [this study](#)). We thus invited the Court to be mindful of how the myriad of above-mentioned bans [facilitate and legitimatise](#) Islamophobic discourse by the general public.

### ***Bans on religious signs/dress in international human rights law***

We submitted that, in 2016, when multiple French municipalities banned body-covering swimsuits on their beaches, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [expressed its support](#) for the French Conseil d'État's decision to overturn the ban in one of those municipalities, and urged other municipalities to repeal their bans as well, calling them 'a grave and illegal breach of fundamental freedoms' and 'highly discriminatory'.

Additionally, we mentioned the clear consensus among UN treaty bodies that the practice of bans on religious dress in public spaces, particularly those affecting Muslim women, reveals problematic attitudes towards Muslim women in Belgium, and violate those women's right to freedom of religion as well as right to non-discrimination. We also noted that – on a global level – bans on body-covering swimwear [remain few](#). They occur almost exclusively in only three European countries – France, the Netherlands and Belgium – and even in those countries, they are only implemented on an individual basis, by a minority of swimming pools and municipalities.

### ***Legal Reasoning under the European Convention on Human Rights***

We respectfully submitted that (explicit and implicit) bans on body-covering swimwear in public swimming pools are not in conformity with Article 9 ECHR taken alone and read in conjunction with Article 14 ECHR. Since it is clear that Muslim women wear body-covering swimwear for religious reasons, there can be no doubt that the issue falls within the ambit of Article 9 ECHR. In view of the limited scope of our intervention, we particularly focused on the context of legal uncertainty that surrounds bans on body-covering swimwear bans, which impacts the legality test under Article 9 ECHR, and the discriminatory nature of these bans.

We stated that the [Court has held](#) on multiple occasions that only a standard stated with sufficient precision to enable a person to regulate their conduct can be considered a 'law'. In the context at hand, vague provisions are not uncommon and – as the present case also demonstrates – their interpretation or application to a concrete case is often left to the person working at the ticket desk. We discussed that, if people working within the

swimming pool have doubts about how certain rules should be applied, a person visiting the swimming pool will *a fortiori* be unable to regulate their conduct.

First, we argued that a general policy can constitute a case of indirect discrimination if it causes 'disproportionately prejudicial effects' which discriminate against a group, in spite of its ostensibly neutral phrasing. Some swimming pool regulations do explicitly mention body-covering swimwear, or even 'burkini's, as banned, whilst dress code regulations in other swimming pools solely contain a more generally formulated dress code, from which a ban on body-covering swimwear is subsequently deduced. In the present application, the latter is the case.

Hence, whilst Muslim women are not denied entry to swimming pools on the grounds of their religion as such, the swimming pool regulations do institute a difference in treatment on account of the prejudicial effect which they inflict onto them. Here, we outlined that Muslim women (who wear body-covering swimwear) constitute a vulnerable group, because they clearly appear today as a minority group that is suffering 'from widespread stigma and exclusion'. We submit that the jurisprudence on vulnerable groups should therefore apply, and 'very weighty reasons' should be required to justify a *prima facie* case of discrimination in the exercise of the freedom of religion.

We discussed the objectives that have been relied upon by municipalities according to the abovementioned study carried out by Unia and submit that none of these can be qualified as sufficiently weighty reasons capable of justifying a blanket (implicit) ban on body-covering swimwear in swimming pools.

First, we stated that, in spite of their legitimacy, neither hygiene concerns, nor concerns pertaining to the alleged complexity of verifying the correct use constitute sufficiently weighty reasons in this respect.

Then, we mentioned that, in light of the current absence of any concrete evidence in this regard, the argument regarding the protection of safety remains purely hypothetical and consequently does not constitute a (sufficiently weighty) reason capable of justifying a ban on body-covering swimwear.

We reminded the Court that, in the broader context of the neutrality of public services, it generally did not consider the behaviour of the users to pose a potential threat to the neutrality of the State. As certain swimming pools have invoked the fact that body-covering swimwear might be considered offensive by fellow swimmers by way of justification, we mentioned that the Court has [already indicated](#) that the wearing of a burkini is an instrument that actually enhances the integration of Muslim women. We therefore submit that the argument of 'living together' cannot be legitimately relied upon in order to justify a blanket ban on body-covering swimwear.

Consequently, we respectfully asked the Court to not to accept (as in previous [case law](#)) the aim of gender equality when it is not accompanied by concrete evidence of the alleged oppression of women, and to allow women to regulate their own appearance in the swimming pool.

We submitted that the present case offers a perfect opportunity for the Court to engage with intersectionality, which is increasingly recognized as a necessary dimension for supranational human rights bodies to engage with. The situation of Muslim women who prefer to wear body-covering swimwear in a country such as Belgium exemplifies the relevance of intersectionality analysis. Their gender, religion and race interact in a way that places them in a unique position and subjects them to a variety of vulnerabilities at all levels of society. As such, legal analyses that artificially limit their cases to the religious aspect consequently ignore the ways in which 'burkini bans' impact Muslim

women not just based on their religion, but on its specific intersection with their [gender](#) and [race](#).

The [full third party intervention](#) can be found on the website of the [Human Rights Centre](#).

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[1] For the Human Rights Centre, the academic team consisted of Dr. Pieter Cannoot, Dr. Sarah Ganty, Dr. Cathérine Van de Graaf, Tobias Mortier and Sarah Schoentjes.

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## **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](#)  
[Women in niqab speak: A study of the niqab in Canada](#)

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## **DENMARK: Hijab ban proposal sparks debate, protests in Denmark**

***A new recommendation to ban Muslim headscarves in Danish elementary schools has been met with a backlash in Denmark.***

By Anna Gudmann Hansen

Al Jazeera (12.09.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3ddpOIG> - The Danish Commission for the Forgotten Women's Struggle – a body set up by Denmark's ruling Social Democratic Party – has [recommended](#) that the country's government ban hijabs (Muslim headscarves) for students in Danish elementary schools.

The August 24 proposal is one of nine recommendations with the stated aim of preventing "honour-related social control" of girls from minority backgrounds. The other recommendations propose providing Danish language courses, promoting modern child upbringing practices in ethnic minority families, and strengthening sexual education in elementary schools.

Huda Makai Asghar, 15, would be forced to take off her headscarf if the ban is implemented. The ninth grader at the Kokkedal Skole – a school outside of the Danish capital, Copenhagen, with close to 800 students – has been wearing the hijab for two years.

“I have always known that we have freedom of religion in Denmark. I can wear what I want, and I can believe in what I like. So when I heard about the proposal, I was surprised,” she told Al Jazeera on the phone.

Asghar feels the idea of a ban violates her freedom, and that of girls like her, and that it is wrong to force her to take the headscarf off.

“I can’t do that; it is a part of me,” she said.

The ban proposal has sparked a backlash in Denmark.

Iram Khawaja, an associate professor at the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University, has been outspoken against the proposal.

Her research focuses on how children from religious and ethnic minorities navigate Danish society, and she is co-founder of the Professional Psychology Network Against Discrimination.

According to Khawaja, a ban will not solve any of the issues faced by girls who are subject to social control.

“On the contrary, a ban can add to bigger issues. The girls who are already being exposed to negative social control will be put under increasing pressure,” she told Al Jazeera.

“It is problematic to equate wearing the hijab with negative social control – there are also girls who do not wear the hijab who are exposed to negative social control,” Khawaja added.

According to the commission’s report ([PDF](#)), the “use of scarves in elementary school can create a division between children in two groups – ‘us’ and ‘them’”.

The study was conducted by the research companies Als Research and Epinion on behalf of the Danish Ministry of Education. It is based on a survey of 1,441 students in sixth to eighth grades from 19 elementary schools and eight independent and private schools, as well as 22 interviews with students and 17 interviews with teachers.

According to Khawaja, a study from 2018 on the extent of negative social control showed that few Danish school children – 8 percent of the participants in the study – are actually exposed to social control.

“The majority of girls wearing the hijab are doing it of their own free will,” Khawaja said.

According to her, simply making the recommendation and the debate that will follow could have negative consequences.

“It will, of course, have consequences if the ban is put into action, but I believe there are already negative outcomes now. Simply putting the proposal out there is already

stigmatising, problematising, and casting suspicion on a large group of religious minorities," she said.

"Although the intentions are good, it ends up stigmatising and disempowering the ones you are trying to help."

Lone Jørgensen, principal of Tilst Skole, an elementary school in Jutland with approximately 700 students, does not support the recommended ban, either.

"The ban would create a law between the children and their parents, and the children would get stuck in between," Jørgensen told Al Jazeera.

"My job is to run a good school for everyone, where there is room for everyone and everyone is of equal value."

### **'Part of Denmark'**

On August 26, several thousand people took to the streets of Copenhagen to protest the ban proposal.

According to the Danish newspapers [Arbejderen](#) and [B.T.](#), several thousand took to the streets.

Midwife and activist Lamia Ibnhsain, 37, organised the event, titled "Hands off our hijabs".

"I realised that our voices are invisible in society. The initial intention with the demonstration was to go to the streets and make our voices heard," she told Al Jazeera.

Ibnhsain said she has had "a lot of difficult feelings" following the ban proposal.

She has felt "othered", placed under suspicion as a mother, and she fears a ban might add to some girls feeling "wrong" compared to others.

"Muslim women wearing the hijab are everywhere in Danish society. They are doctors, psychologists, bus drivers, and artists. They are a part of Denmark," she said.

Ibnhsain is a mother to two girls – an eight-year-old and a 16-year-old.

Her older daughter wears the hijab, while the youngest wears it on days when she feels like it.

Ibnhsain explains how talking to her girls about a possible ban has been tough.

"My girls are wearing the hijab with joy and happiness. The hijab is a matter of the heart, and it should under no circumstances be turned into a political discussion," she said. "It violates my girls' basic rights."

### **The commission**

The commission was set up by the current ruling party, the Social Democratic Party, in January.

Although it presented the recommendations unanimously on August 24, two members of the commission later on retracted their support for a hijab ban following the debate, which led to one of them withdrawing completely from the commission, stating that she could not support the proposal of a ban.

In a written response to the criticism of the study presented to the commission in an email, the secretariat behind the commission told Al Jazeera it had been set up by the government and its mission was to present recommendations on how to ensure that all women from a minority background could enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other Danish women.

"The commission focuses on how Danish society can reinforce the efforts against honour-related social control, which we know from research is a problem in certain environments in Denmark," it said in an email response.

"The study from 2018, which is referred to, states that only 43 percent of the ethnic minority girls in the study are allowed to see male friends in their spare time, while the same is the case for 88 percent of the ethnic Danish girls," the statement read.

"And 13 percent of ethnic minority girls are afraid that their families will plan their future against their will, while the same is the case for 5 percent of the ethnic majority girls. One of the aims of the commission is to bring recommendations on how to equalise differences like these between Danes who are ethnic minorities and majorities," it added.

The secretariat said the commission consisted of nine members with different backgrounds and knowledge – "they are people with practical experience, research backgrounds, and people who have experienced these issues personally. All know about the challenges related to countering honour-related social control".

The commission is set to make additional recommendations in the coming months.

*Photo: On August 26, people took to the streets to protest a proposed hijab ban in Danish elementary schools [Courtesy of Lamia Ibnhsain]*

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## **EGYPT: Women with hijab found to face bias in Egypt**

***Women wearing hijabs (Muslim headscarves) are being discriminated against by businesses in Egypt, a BBC Arabic investigation has discovered.***

By Ahmed Elshamy

BBC News (27.08.2022) - <https://bbc.in/3QDYWiR> - The evidence appears to violate Egypt's constitution, which bans discrimination based on religion, sex, race or social class.

Since 2015, some Egyptian women wearing a hijab have taken to social media to complain about such treatment.

Mayar Omar, a 25-year-old research executive from Cairo, says she has faced repeated problems going to some high-end restaurants.

"You want to feel that you can be yourself when you enter a venue and no-one is forcing you to do something, or make you feel that you are the cause of a problem for the venue or your friends."

On hijabi lifestyle social media groups, BBC News Arabic found what appears to be a growing trend, with women accusing numerous venues of refusing them entry if they are wearing a hijab.

"In most cases the main cause is classism," Nada Nashat, a lawyer and women's rights activist, said. "So we find discrimination against hijabi women in venues that like to present themselves as upper-middle or upper class."

"But we also find discrimination against non-hijabi women in lower and middle classes."

BBC News Arabic tried to make a reservation at 15 upmarket venues across Cairo that had been accused online of discriminating against hijab-wearing women.

Most of the venues asked for the social media profiles of all guests and 11 venues stated that head coverings were not allowed.

We sent an undercover married couple, with the woman wearing a hijab, to some of the venues that told us that hijab-wearing women were not allowed entry.

At L'Aubergine in the upmarket neighbourhood of Zamalek, the doorman immediately told the couple that the headscarf was forbidden as they had a bar inside, and that this might offend women wearing a hijab.

The manager too was adamant, saying: "The headscarf is forbidden."

When presented with our recorded evidence, L'Aubergine told us it was "inaccurate" and that refusing women who wear the hijab is not a house rule, adding: "We denounce it."

The venue also told us: "We have reiterated our house policies to staff to avoid any confusion in the future."

At Kazan, in the same neighbourhood, the couple was once again told by the doorman: "The problem is the headscarf." When asked why, they simply stated: "This is the house rules."

At the final venue, Andiamo in Heliopolis, the couple was initially refused entry. After appealing, they were told they could enter but would have to sit in a corner as the manager said: "It's a ministry of tourism instruction, and if they find any hijabi woman beside the bar, they'll fine us."

Neither Kazan nor Andiamo responded to requests for comment.

### ***'Find an alternative'***

BBC News Arabic presented the evidence to Adel El Masry, chairman of the Chamber of Tourism Establishments and Restaurants.

"Never in any era of the ministry of tourism has a decision been issued banning veiled women [from leisure venues]," he said. "This is not acceptable. Discrimination is unacceptable, these are public places."

BBC News Arabic also gathered evidence suggesting that hijab-wearing women were being restricted from buying holiday apartments by a major developer, La Vista. The company has projects in Cairo as well as several high-end coastal developments.

In the past it has sold properties to women with hijabs, but our investigation found many social media posts accusing La Vista of changing its policy and now placing restrictions on them.

An executive at a multinational company told BBC News Arabic how he had contacted several property brokers to buy a property at La Vista, but that they told him: "Sorry, La Vista are a bit difficult regarding the hijab."

BBC News Arabic contacted six property brokers, posing as a buyer whose wife wears a hijab and who wanted to buy a unit at a La Vista coastal project. They told us it would not be possible to purchase a unit.

One told our undercover reporter: "Can I speak to you frankly? Definitely look for an alternative."

Another went even further, stating: "To be frank with you, regarding the North Coast and Sokhna projects, they are discriminatory."

One broker explained how the process worked. "They will not say that we won't sell you a unit, but they will say that this project you have selected is closed now and when it's open, we will call you, and they won't."

When our undercover reporter phoned La Vista stating that his wife wore a hijab, he was told he would be put on a waiting list and there were no properties available.

Several weeks later he visited the La Vista office but this time didn't say that his wife wore a hijab. He was told there were property units available immediately and when he asked what kind of people lived there, the agent told him: "The idea is that all the people we have look like each other."

She stated that one La Vista development "has no veiled women at all".  
La Vista has not yet responded to requests for comment.

Amira Saber, an Egyptian MP who has campaigned for women's rights, said the Egyptian constitution was clear that discrimination of this kind was not allowed.

"I will certainly use one of my parliamentary tools to ask the officials in the government how we can ensure that this does not happen again, and if it does happen, the perpetrator must be punished," she said.

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## **EU: Top EU Court sets limits on workplace head-scarf ban**

***Ruling sets out conditions on when such prohibitions comply with the bloc's antidiscrimination laws***

By Laurence Norman and Noemie Bisserbe

Wall Street Journal (15.07.2021) - <https://on.wsj.com/3C693GP> - The European Union's top court said Thursday that employers may ban the wearing of head scarves and other religious symbols but set out conditions on when such prohibitions comply with the bloc's antidiscrimination laws.

The ruling comes amid intensifying debate in Europe over racism and the protection of minority rights following a surge of anti-immigrant parties over recent years. Rules over wearing head scarves, which vary widely across the bloc, have come to symbolize controversy over calls to integrate Europe's Muslim population.

French President Emmanuel Macron and other French authorities have increasingly sought to curtail the display of religious symbols amid a campaign [to assert the country's secular state](#).

Meanwhile, following widespread antiracism protests in the U.S. after the killing of George Floyd, there have been growing calls in some Western European countries to push back against discrimination and racism.

Judges of the Luxembourg-based European Court of Justice in their ruling Thursday upheld a 2017 decision by the court saying that a private company's decision to ban the wearing of a head scarf to promote a neutral working environment wasn't necessarily discriminatory.

The ruling permits employers to bar religious, political or philosophical symbols in a workplace if such guidelines are universally applied by the company because of the need for neutrality for business purposes, for example a school where parents don't want their children to be supervised by people who manifest their religious beliefs.

However, the judges moved to limit the circumstances under which a ban is justified after two German courts had asked for guidance on cases involving two women: a special-needs caregiver at a child-care center who was temporarily suspended from her job and a cashier who sued for discrimination after she was ordered to come to work without a head scarf.

The court said that in addition to applying the rules equally to all political or religious groups, a company must have evidence that its activities would suffer adverse consequences and that the scale and severity of this impact justified the ban.

The ECJ also said national courts should take into account additional protections against discrimination that some countries, including Germany, have embedded in their laws. And the court signaled it would be discriminatory if a company chose to ban conspicuous symbols, like the head scarf, but didn't forbid all smaller visible religious or political signs.

The 2017 EU court ruling had prompted a backlash from Muslim and Jewish groups who warned it could exclude some people from their communities from certain jobs. The decision has also faced criticism from some former senior ECJ legal officers. Thursday's ruling drew attacks from advocacy groups.

"Laws, policies and practices prohibiting religious dress are targeted manifestations of Islamophobia that seek to exclude Muslim women from public life or render them invisible," said Maryam H'madoun, a policy officer at the Open Society Justice Initiative.

France's highest appeals court in recent years has sided with employers in cases involving Muslim women wearing head scarves at work, when a company's internal policy clearly banned overt religious symbols. In 2017, that court ruled in favor of French information-technology firm [Micropole](#) SA, which dismissed Asma Bougnaoui, a design engineer, after a customer complained about her head scarf.

French civil servants aren't allowed to wear overt religious symbols at work under France's strict secular rules. But these rules don't apply in the private sector.

Islam and its place in French society has been [at the center of a heated debate](#) in France in the wake of recent terrorist attacks.

Mr. Macron [has proposed a bill to Parliament](#) that aims to push back against what he calls Islamist separatism, which he describes as a political and religious project to create a parallel society where religious laws take precedence over civil ones. The bill is currently before the Senate, which has sought to add provisions barring school field-trip chaperones from wearing overt religious symbols, and banning burkinis in public swimming pools.

In Belgium recently, there was a major political incident after a Belgian-Moroccan woman resigned from her role as a government representative at a women's equality institute following attacks from politicians on her use of the head scarf.

Following protests in universities, Belgium's Wallonia region recently lifted a ban on religious symbols at schools including higher education.

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## **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 they 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](#)

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## **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.

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## **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.

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## **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.

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## **IRAN: Iranians asking whether to abolish or continue headscarf requirement**

[Middle East Monitor](https://bit.ly/3GuI5NU) (18.11.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3GuI5NU> - Following the death in police custody of [Mahsa Amini](#) this September, the controversy over Iran's headscarf requirement resurfaced, with some prominent figures in the country openly criticising the rules, *Anadolu News Agency* reports.

Iran has been [gripped by mass unrest](#) since mid-September over the death of Amini, a 22-year-old woman who died in custody after being arrested by the country's morality police.

At least 342 people, including 43 children and 26 women, have been killed by security forces during ongoing nationwide protests in Iran, according to a human rights group.

First, on 25 September, the Union of Islamic Iran People Party asked that the government take the necessary legal steps to abolish the mandatory headscarf legislation.

President Ebrahim Raisi, when asked about the practices of the morality police in a 28 September state TV interview, said: "If it is thought that the method of implementation is incorrect and that new ideas exist, these new ideas can be discussed and implemented."

"Values cannot be modified, but the manner in which the law is applied can be debated," he said.

On the question of whether patrols should be reconsidered, Raisi said that the best practices should be considered in enforcing the law and that they must provide a platform for dissenting views.

He also implied, however, that they have no plans to overturn the headscarf law.

During this time, some of Iran's most prominent figures spoke out against the mandatory headscarf requirement. Former Parliament Speaker, Ali Larijani, is among them. In an 11 October newspaper interview, Larijani emphasised that the protests have deep political roots and urged a modification of the mandatory headscarf law.

On 17 September, retired Brig. Gen. Hossein Alaei, the former Navy Commander of the Revolutionary Guards Army, similarly questioned the patrols of the morality police.

He said it should be asked if the required headscarf practice has a place in religion, suggesting that it might make more sense to deploy patrols against thieves who steal women's phones and handbags.

Some religious figures, while in limited numbers, challenged the compulsory headscarf application, which has been enforced since Iran's revolution in 1979.

Following the revolution, prominent religious figures such as Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani are among the few clergy who reject the mandatory headscarf.

There are now relatively few clerics in Iran who openly condemn the headscarf requirement.

### ***Further reading***

[US wants to oust Iran from UN women's body](#)

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## **IRAN: The fight against the veil, a symbol of patriarchal norms**

***The veil in Iran has been an enduring symbol of patriarchal norms – but its use has changed depending on who is in power***

By Amy Motlagh

[The Conversation](#) (14.11.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3hQ21QV> - In images of the uprising that followed the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini on Sept. 16, 2022, perhaps the most iconic ones, aside from that of Amini herself, are those of unveiled Iranian women photographed from behind, facing police barricades or raising a fist at the scene of mass protests.

The [wide use of images of Iranian female protesters](#), without the headscarf, in the Western media highlights how the veil can often be seen as the single most important measure of women's rights and well-being.

Indeed, oftentimes outside of Iran, wearing a veil is seen as oppression – and its removal as emancipation and freedom. This understanding, however, fails to take into account the veil's broader symbolism and ignores the complex history of mandatory veiling and unveiling in Iran in the 20th and 21st centuries.

### ***Islamic Republic and the veil***

During the 1979 revolution, veiling became a symbol of resistance to the Pahlavi monarchy that ruled from 1925 to 1979. For many during the revolution, the [veil was a symbol of authentic national identity](#). It was used to push back against the Westernization and erosion of Iranian values that ignited the revolution.

After the Islamic Republic, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, came to power, the veil became compulsory. Since then, certain forms of veiling – such as donning the chador, a

cloaklike garment that covers the entire body and is required of women visiting a mosque in Iran – have come to be seen as [signaling affiliation with](#) or support for the Islamic Republic.

Less comprehensive forms of veiling, such as a rusari, or head scarf, and the knee-length tunic or coat known as a rupush, are understood as signs of minimum cooperation and potentially a rejection of the norms of the Islamic Republic. These types of veiling allow the wearer to adjust the amount of hair shown and the fit and the length of the tunic. Women accused of “bad hijab,” as Amini was, are [typically those adopting this form of veiling](#).

However, in pre-1979 Iran, wearing the veil did not necessarily mean that a woman was straightforwardly “religious.” Instead, it could [signal a variety of other social meanings](#), such as being conservative, upholding traditional values or an indication of personal modesty, among others.

### ***Pahlavis and the era of modernization***

Indeed, four decades before the Islamic Republic was established, the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, had forced women to remove their veils through the Mandatory Unveiling Act of 1936.

Pahlavi, who installed himself as king in 1925 after overthrowing the Qajar monarchy, viewed the entry of unveiled women into public spaces as an essential component of modernity, modeled on Western norms.

As a consequence of the 1936 act, women were prohibited from veiling in public. Refusal to comply was met with [sometimes violent enforcement](#) and removal of the offending garment. While men too were instructed to wear European-style trousers, suits and hats, it was women’s bodies that were at the nexus of these reforms.

Pahlavi’s complex project of modernization included reforms to law and education, and the end of gender segregation of many public spaces. The reforms offered women greater rights and protections should their husbands choose to divorce them, and opened up new educational opportunities. But Pahlavi viewed the presence of unveiled women in public space as essential to signaling these changes.

My book “[Burying the Beloved](#)” examines how ideas about women’s personhood and rights were explored during this period by novelists in Iran, particularly through stories about marriage. This era saw the publication both of the first novel by a woman and the first female protagonist in Persian fiction. Novels of this period [revealed social anxieties around the legal reforms](#) that gave women larger roles in society and more rights in marriage.

Pahlavi abdicated in 1941, during World War II, and his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who ascended the throne, adopted a more lenient attitude toward this law. He did not rescind it, but neither did he violently enforce it. At the same time, the modernity his regime promoted was signaled by a cosmopolitan secularism – [no veiled woman](#) could hope to advance in the diverse areas of society, politics and economy patronized and controlled by the monarchy during his rule, which lasted until 1979.

Social and familial pressures [reigned over women’s veiling](#), accompanied by changing cultural mores facilitated by virtually wholesale adoption of Western sartorial styles, cinema and other media.

### ***Dying to show their hair?***

Over the past few weeks, I have repeatedly seen comments on news articles that insist, "Women in Iran are literally dying to show their hair!" But a rejection of the head scarf in the context of these protests is not a simple demand for one personal freedom.

Instead, it should be understood as a rejection of many things. Protesters in Iran are pushing back against an oppressive regime that has refused to brook any dissent and has destroyed voices for reform through imprisonment, exile or death. They are also pushing back against a long history of laws, beginning before the 1979 Revolution, that have used women's bodies as symbols of political ideology.

The veil that is being removed is therefore not an insistence only on the right to personal freedom and expression – though it may be that for some who are removing it – but also a rejection of patriarchal norms that have animated both the pre-revolutionary regime and the Islamic Republic.

### ***Further reading***

[Images of veiled Muslim women are used to justify the war](#)

[Unrest across Iran continues under state's extreme gender apartheid](#)

[Head-covers have always been political in Iran](#)

[Women have been rebelling against restrictions since the Islamic revolution in 1979](#)

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## **IRAN: Police fire on Mahsa Amini mourners**

**Iranian police are reported to have fired on protesters in Saqqez, home city of Mahsa Amini who died in custody after being arrested for allegedly wearing her hijab "improperly"**

By David Gritten

BBC (27.10.2022) - <https://bbc.in/3fe5nfR> - Thousands gathered near the grave of the Kurdish woman and clashed with security, 40 days since her death.

A rights group and witnesses said officers fired live rounds and tear gas at the crowds in the city.

Protests swept across Iran after Ms Amini, 22, died on 16 September.

She had been detained three days earlier by the morality police in the capital, Tehran, and fell into a coma after collapsing at a detention centre.

There were reports that officers beat her with a baton and banged her head against a vehicle, but police denied that she was mistreated and said she suffered a heart attack.

On Wednesday, security forces were deployed in Saqqez and other parts of Kurdistan province, in anticipation of fresh demonstrations on the 40th day of mourning for Ms Amini - a culturally significant occasion for Iranians.

**Videos showed thousands of mourners walking along a road, through a field** and across a river to bypass roadblocks and reach the graveyard where Ms Amini is buried.

The crowds were heard shouting "Woman, life, freedom" and "Death to the dictator" - two of the signature chants of the protest movement - as well as **"Down with traitors"** and **"Kurdistan will be the graveyard of fascists"**.

It was not clear whether members of Ms Amini's family were present.

A source close to the family told the BBC's Jiyar Gol that intelligence agents put pressure on her father to say that they were not holding a ceremony.

Kurdish human rights group Hengaw, which is based in Norway, later tweeted that mourners had marched towards the provincial government's office in Saqqez and that security forces had [opened fire on people in Zindan square](#).

Reuters news agency quoted an unnamed eyewitness as saying: "The riot police shot mourners who gathered at the cemetery... Dozens have been arrested."

The semi-official Isna news agency reported that "a limited number of those present at Mahsa Amini's memorial clashed with police forces on the outskirts of Saqqez and were dispersed".

Hengaw also reported demonstrations in several cities in Kurdistan. It said police had used live fire in several places, [including in Marivan](#).

The first protests took place after Ms Amini's funeral in Saqqez, with women ripping off their headscarves in solidarity.

The protests evolved into one of the most serious challenges to the Islamic Republic since the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Women have been at the forefront, waving their headscarves in the air, setting them on fire and even cutting their hair in public.

Another Norway-based organisation, Iran Human Rights, says at least 234 protesters, including 29 children, have been killed by security forces in a crackdown on what Iran's leaders have portrayed as "riots" fomented by foreigners.

Opposition activists said protests marking the 40th day of mourning for Ms Amini were also held in other parts of the country, including Tehran.

Video appeared to show that [security forces fired tear gas inside a girls' school in the capital](#) in response to a protest by students.

One young female protester inside Iran told BBC World News: "You cannot imagine how tough it is to go to streets knowing that they are ready to shoot. But we are not afraid."

"It's not about me. It's about the next generation. We want to have a normal life."

She added: "I don't know when our protests will come to an end, but today Iranian society is more awake than ever and we are ready for big changes."

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## **IRAN: Iranian authorities plan to use facial recognition to enforce new hijab law**

***Government says it will use technology on public transport in crackdown on women's dress***

By [Weronika Strzyżyńska](#)

The Guardian (05.09.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3L0ceF2> - Iranian government is planning to use facial recognition technology on public transport to identify women who are not complying with a strict new law on wearing the hijab, as the regime continues its increasingly punitive crackdown on women's dress.

The secretary of Iran's Headquarters for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice, Mohammad Saleh Hashemi Golpayegani, announced in a recent interview that the government was planning to use surveillance technology against women in public places following a [new decree signed by the country's hardline president, Ebrahim Raisi](#), on restricting women's clothing.

The decree was signed on 15 August, a month after the 12 July national "Hijab and Chastity Day", which sparked countrywide protests by women who posted videos of themselves on social media with their heads uncovered on streets and on buses and trains. In recent weeks, the Iranian authorities have responded with a spate of arrests, detentions and forced confessions on television.

"The Iranian government has long played with the idea of using facial recognition to identify people who violate the law," said Azadeh Akbari, a researcher at the University of Twente, in the Netherlands. "The regime combines violent 'old-fashioned' forms of totalitarian control dressed up in new technologies."

The hijab, a head-covering worn by Muslim women, became mandatory after Iran's revolution in 1979. Yet, over the decades since, women have pushed the limits of the stipulated dress code.

Some of the women arrested for defying the new decree were identified after videos were posted online of them being harassed on public transport for not wearing the hijab properly. One, 28-year-old [Sepideh Rashno](#), was arrested after a video circulated on social media of her being berated for "improper dress" by a fellow passenger, who was then forced off the vehicle by bystanders intervening on Rashno's behalf. According to the human rights group Hrana, Rashno was beaten after her arrest and subsequently forced to apologise on television to the passenger who harassed her.

Rashno is not the first person to suffer violent repression as a result of going viral on the internet. In 2014, six Iranians – three men and three women – [were sentenced to one year in prison and 91 lashes](#) after a video of them dancing in Tehran to Pharrell Williams's song Happy had more than 150,000 views.

Since 2015, the Iranian government has been phasing in biometric identity cards, which include a chip that stores data such as iris scans, fingerprints and facial images. Researchers worry that this information will now be used with facial recognition technology to identify people who violate the mandated dress code, both in the streets and cyberspace.

"A large chunk of the Iranian population is now in this national biometric data bank, as many public services are becoming dependent on biometric IDs," said Akbari. "So the government has access to all the faces; they know where people come from and they can easily find them. A person in a viral video can be identified in seconds."

She added: "By doing that, the government proves a point: 'Don't think that a small thing happening on a bus somewhere is going to be forgotten. We know who you are and we will find you and then you will have to suffer the consequences.'"

"Ebrahim Raisi is a real ideologue," said Annabelle Sreberny, professor emeritus at the Centre for Iranian Studies at Soas University of London. "There are terrible economic and environmental problems facing Iran. The inflation rate may now be reaching 50%, but the government is choosing to focus on women's rights."

Sreberny added: "I think it is part and parcel of a failing government that is simply not dealing with these massive infrastructural, economic and environmental issues. And women are seen to be a soft target."

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## **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.

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## **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 Chapayev.

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.

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## **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.

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## **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.

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## **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.

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## **TURKMENISTAN: "Beauty Ban": Severe restrictions on women's appearance, ability to travel**

By [Farangis Najibullah](#)

RFE/RL (04.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3P16a0x> - In Turkmenistan, women are no longer allowed to wear "tight-fitting" clothes, dye their hair, or use beauty accessories such as false nails or eyelashes.

In a new, Taliban-style ban, traffic police in Turkmenistan also now prohibit male drivers of private vehicles from picking up women unless they are related. Females are also banned from sitting in the front seat next to the driver.

Still further bans have been made on women having cosmetic surgery, such as breast enhancement, lip fillers, or even eyebrow microblading, which is popular with many young women in Turkmenistan.

Dozens of women have reportedly lost their jobs in recent weeks for allegedly having had breast implants or lip fillers.

The informal restrictions in the tightly controlled Central Asian country came into force this month -- shortly after new President Serdar Berdymukhammedov took office in a sham March 12 election in which he replaced his father.

In unprecedented raids in public places and offices, police have rounded up women wearing false eyelashes and/or nails and taken them to police stations, multiple eyewitnesses in the capital, Ashgabat, and other Turkmen cities tell RFE/RL.

According to one Ashgabat resident, the women were told to remove their beauty accessories and pay a fine of about \$140. That is half of a monthly salary for the average Turkmen.

Officers also stop women on the streets and public transport to check if they have cosmetically enhanced their lips, a resident of Balkan Province said. "Police demand that women remove their face masks to check if they had used lip fillers," the woman said on condition of anonymity.

In a further restriction of women's rights, the government has banned male drivers of private cars from offering a ride to a woman who is not a family member. Traffic police stop private cars carrying female passengers and demand proof that the women are related to the driver.

In Balkan Province, several people told RFE/RL that women are no longer allowed to take the front seat next to drivers -- both in taxis and private vehicles. It's not clear if the same rule was introduced in other parts of Turkmenistan.

Drivers in Balkan Province can face a \$2,000 fine if they have a woman in the front seat, even if she is a family member, one car owner said. After 8 p.m., drivers are not allowed to pick up a female passenger at all, whether a relative or stranger, he said.

In Turkmenistan, women -- with few exceptions -- are largely prohibited from driving, although the government has never publicly issued any formal ban on women being behind the wheel.

Instead, the authorities often use various methods -- such as making it difficult for women to obtain a driver's license or for them to renew their expired licenses -- which effectively bans them from driving.

### ***No Announcement***

There was no official announcement or explanation for the latest restrictions, which are being enforced by local authorities and law-enforcement agencies across the country.

Office workers say officials and company managers have held special gatherings to discuss the new rules on women's clothes, beauty routines, and appearances, but declined to explain the reason or present a copy of the document ordering the ban.

Similar restrictions were introduced in the past, although they have never been strictly enforced.

Authorities in the Muslim-majority country have always encouraged women to wear traditional clothes, shunning both Western-style outfits and the Islamic hijab.

A traditional outfit consists of an ankle-length, long-sleeved, embroidered dress, often made from a colorful fabric. Traditional headwear for girls is a colorful embroidered hat, while women often wear a kerchief tied behind their heads.

Traditional clothing serves as a women's uniform in the workplace, at official meetings, and at public events.

Some women also still wear Western-style clothes, although it's not common among Turkmen women to sport clothes that are deemed too revealing, such as miniskirts, shorts, sleeveless dresses, or tops with plunging necklines.

The new ban takes the restrictions a step further, outlawing jeans and any tightly fitting clothes. A woman from the city of Mary told RFE/RL on April 27 that police were deployed in the streets to detain women in jeans.

"Police take their photos, prepare a report, and make the women pay a fine," the woman said on condition of anonymity. Similar incidents were reported in Ashgabat and the Lebap and Balkan provinces.

### ***'I Hereby Pledge'***

Women working in the public sector have been ordered to obey the rule not only at work, but also everywhere else in public, several workers told RFE/RL.

The women were told to sign a written pledge that they will not wear tight clothes, dye their hair, microblade their eyebrows, or use Botox and false nails and eyelashes, among other numerous restrictions. They said the document includes a line that states, "If I embarrass my organization by not following these requirements -- both at work and outside work -- I agree that I should be dismissed from my job."

Those who refused to sign were fired, a local RFE/RL correspondent reported, citing multiple eyewitnesses.

"Every morning, officials in government agencies check female employees' clothes and appearance. If they find any shortcomings, they don't allow women to enter the office and they send them home to correct the wrongdoing," said an Ashgabat woman describing her own experience.

"Also, inspectors can turn up in the office at any time for more checks," the woman said on May 2.

According to several sources in Ashgabat, at least 20 female flight attendants were dismissed in recent weeks over their alleged use of Botox and lip enhancement. And about 50 female employees of the national railway service were fired for having breast implants and lip fillers, the sources claimed.

RFE/RL contacted the relevant authorities -- including the national airlines and rail services and various government agencies -- for comment but received no response.

The bans have led dozens of beauty salons to close down across the country after getting warnings from police against offering "banned" procedures and services to customers. RFE/RL correspondents reported that law enforcement agencies raided beauty salons in Mary Province in early April and threatened the owners with hefty fines and 15 days in jail if they broke the new rules.

### **Last Straw?**

Protests and public criticism of government policies are extremely rare in Turkmenistan, where opponents often end up in prison or are forcibly placed in psychiatric hospitals.

But some activists and other Turkmen say the latest restrictions could be the last straw for people's patience. Turkmen have been unhappy with decades of government clampdowns on their rights and freedoms, while the country has also been mired for several years in a severe financial crisis that has led to chronic food shortages and skyrocketing unemployment and inflation.

In Balkan Province, several women told RFE/RL that they had had enough and wouldn't rule out mass anti-government protests. "The new president turned out to be a woman-hater," one Balkan resident said. "There is no gender equality in Turkmenistan at all anymore."

"Turkmen women are extremely unhappy with these restrictions," said Dursoltan Tagaeva, a prominent Turkmen activist who lives in self-exile in Turkey. "Even those who didn't support [opposition activists] are now becoming increasingly vocal and have begun voicing their unhappiness with this situation," she told RFE/RL on May 2.

In a rare incident in Ashgabat, two outraged women refused to pay a fine and started a loud argument with a police officer who stopped them over their false eyelashes on April 27, an eyewitness told RFE/RL.

"The women demanded the policeman show them a copy of the document that bans [false eyelashes]," the witness said.

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## **USA: Assaults on Muslim women force some to rethink hijab**

By Yonat Shimron

RNS (12.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2gF5MXs> - 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.

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## **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.