

Press Release

Face Veil Ban in Swiss State Emphasises Yet Again the Xenophobic Dangers of Secular Rule against Islam and Muslims

On Monday 23rd November, Switzerland's southern state of Ticino approved a ban on Muslim women wearing the Niqab in public places, including in shops, restaurants and public buildings. Women found wearing the garment in public could face a fine of up to £6,500. The local government initially suggested banning the covering along with balaclavas and masks worn by demonstrators. However, MP's voted for a law that only applies to the face veil worn by Muslim women, emphasizing how the new ruling has specific anti-Islam motives. The ban follows a public referendum held on the issue in September 2013 in which 2/3 of the voters backed the move, reflecting the rising and significant levels of anti-Islamic sentiments within many Western secular states. Switzerland already revealed the xenophobic colours of its secular system by its ban of mosque minarets in 2009 – with around 60% of Swiss voters backing the proposal. Indeed, the demonization and banning of particular Islamic beliefs and practices has become the order of the day for Western governments, intent on coercing Muslims away from their Deen.

Through this ruling on the face veil, Switzerland has joined the uncoveted ranks of other Western secular nations such as France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy who have stigmatized and marginalized Muslim women and relegated them to second-class citizens through partial or full bans of the Niqab. Such bigoted legislation, along with the relentless anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim rhetoric peddled by secular governments, politicians, and media has generated a nightmare environment for Muslim women in the West who are the frontline targets of anti-Muslim hate-crimes due to their Islamic dress. Such crimes have spiraled in recent years within Western states, including following the Paris attacks. However, instead of trying to extinguish the flames of community tensions at this sensitive time, Western governments seem intent on fuelling them through racially charged legislation as with the Swiss Niqab ban, or emotive speeches fear-mongering against Islamic beliefs and practices. All of this carries an underlying divisive and dangerous message that Muslims and their Islamic culture are a threat for Western societies, resulting in entire Muslim communities being placed under a cloud of suspicion, as well as feeding the agendas of racists.

Surely questions need to be asked about the credibility of any system where women dressing modestly according to their religious beliefs are criminalized while it is perfectly legal for politicians or xenophobic parties such as the Swiss People's Party, the French National Front, or PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against Islamization of the West) to openly espouse their inflammatory anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant vitriol, fanning the flames of racism and fuelling the rise of hate-crimes against minorities. All this reflects the inherent danger and contradictions of the secular system which allows xenophobic views to be entertained in the name of freedom of expression while simultaneously robbing religious minorities of their basic right to practice their harmless beliefs. It shatters the claim that only secular rule can guarantee tolerant, civilized, harmonious societies. It also emphasizes the ideological cracks of secularism – a system which feels threatened by a handful of harmless women wearing a religious dress; a system that has demonstrated its inability to accommodate the beliefs of different religious communities in a manner that is respectful and just; and a system under which the incitement of prejudice towards Muslims and Islam has become the normalized, accepted state of affairs of politics, politicians, and the media.

In stark contrast to the false unjust democratic system, the Islamic system of the Khilafah Rashidah based upon the method of the Prophethood prohibits outright any coercion in belief or preventing religious minorities from practicing their rituals and beliefs. It also prohibits any discrimination in the rights of citizenship afforded to Muslims and non-Muslims, and has zero tolerance for racism or attacks on the beliefs of followers of other faiths. This is why many historians refer to the glorious rule of the Khilafah as the "Golden Age" of prosperity and security for the Jews and other religious minorities who lived under its just laws. It is this system that offers a sound, credible model for guaranteeing the rights of minorities and establishing harmonious societies.

Dr. Nazreen Nawaz

Director of the Women's Section in the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir

