



LONDON, 7 February 2010

PRESS RELEASE

AHMADIYYA MUSLIM JAMAAT CONDEMNS FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY REPORT

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat wishes to express its condemnation and regret at the recommendations of a French Parliamentary Report published on 26 January 2010 which called for a partial ban on Muslim women wearing veils. The recommendations, if adopted, would deny Muslim women the right to cover their faces in public arenas such as hospitals, schools, government buildings and whilst using public transport.

According to the recommendations, any Muslim woman who attempted to flout the ban would be denied the relevant public service. Therefore if the recommendations are adopted into law, then a country who wishes to represent itself as secular and tolerant would in fact be willing, for example, to deny health services to a woman in need of treatment because she chose to cover her face; and it would be willing to deny education to a female on the same grounds. These are but just two examples of the potential consequences of such a ban. Islam has long been misrepresented as cruel and discriminatory, yet it is in France where such acts are being seriously contemplated. Indeed many French politicians have openly stated that the

proposed ban does not go far enough and that if they had their way they would criminalise the covering of the face and implement a full ban across society.

The Parliamentary Report goes on to state that the covering of a face violates French principles of 'secularism' and 'equality'. Anyone with any sense will realise that the Report itself is an affront and a threat to both of these values. This particular Report recommends that Parliament sanctions a law which would discriminate against one particular sex within one particular religion.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat believes that a person's choice of dress is a personal matter. Islam teaches modesty for both men and women but underlying all Islamic injunctions is the Qur'anic principle that *'There is no compulsion in religion'*. Thus if a woman, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, chooses not to cover her head then that is her right but on the other hand if a woman, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, chooses to cover her head or face then that too is her right and ought never to be interfered with. This belief was echoed by President Barack Obama in a speech in Cairo last June. He said:

"...it is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit – for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear. We can't disguise hostility towards any religion behind the pretence of liberalism."

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat hereby wishes to make it clear that no woman should ever be forced to adopt Purdah. The burka and niqab are items of dress that many Muslim women choose to wear due to their pride in its decency and modesty.

Far from being viewed as ‘subservient’, Ahmadi Muslim women are an outstanding example of true freedom of women in practice. They play an active, recognised and valuable role in societies across the world and act as an example of excellence to women in all countries.

It is hoped that the French Parliament rejects the recommendations of the Report and allows Muslim women to live in peace throughout the country. It is also hoped that other countries do not follow a similar path of discrimination, prejudice and intolerance. For freedom to reign, freedom must be preserved.

End of Release

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