



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Maryam Ghasemi Educational Charity Institute, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 May 2024]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## Discrimination against Muslim Women in Western Countries

Muslim women have fought for their human rights all over the world. In non-Islamic countries, they face discrimination and violence. As a result, veils such as the hijab and the burqa are increasingly (intentionally) the subject of political debate, security concerns and media coverage. In this political discourse, it is the bodies of Muslim women that are regulated and subjected to political measures in the name of national security, preservation of national identity and gender equality in Western societies (for example, France bans the wearing of a burqa or niqab in public spaces). It seems that there is a hidden global consensus on the need to regulate Muslim women's bodies, either because these women cannot recognise what is good for them, or because they have somehow been brainwashed and cannot see their own suffering. In short, they deny Muslim women their agency — their ability to think and act independently.

In this climate, veiled Muslim women are either seen as oppressed or as a threat to national identity. These hegemonic messages have entered public opinion through various processes and instruments, but primarily through the Western media.

Muslim women are a rapidly growing demographic in the United States of America that reflects the full range of this country's racial, ethnic, and multicultural heritage and includes U.S.-born Muslims of various ethnicities, immigrants from many countries and regions, and converts from diverse backgrounds. Many Muslim women, though by no means all, wear the hijab in accordance with their religious beliefs: These women wear a headscarf, also known as a hijab, and loose-fitting clothing in public and in the presence of men who are not part of their immediate family. Some women also cover a large part of their face with a veil known as a niqab. Muslim women, like all people in the United States of America, have the right to practise their religion. They also have the right to equal treatment and the right not to be discriminated against or harassed because of their religion, gender, or beliefs about their nationality or ethnicity. These rights are protected by numerous sources of law.

Muslim women have been banned from wearing their head coverings in a number of contexts. They have been harassed, dismissed from their jobs, denied access to public places and discriminated against in other ways for wearing the hijab. Because of their visibility, Muslim women who wear the hijab are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and have been increasingly targeted for harassment in the post-9/11 era. While it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on discriminatory incidents, reported cases of discrimination appear to be on the rise.

The veil is often portrayed as a symbol of oppression, fundamentalist beliefs and a threat to Western democratic values. This reductionist view of the veil, combined with the increasing terrorist attacks in Western countries in the name of Islam, creates a climate of prejudice against Muslims. As a result, veiled Muslim women become a symbol of Islam and are often the target of physical and verbal Islamophobic hate crimes in Western public spaces.

- At work: Muslim women were denied the right to wear a headscarf if they worked as police officers or in other professions. Women were also dismissed if they refused to take off their headscarves. Teachers in public schools were banned from wearing religious clothing, a ban that was authorised by some state laws and upheld by some courts.
- At school: Muslim girls who wear a headscarf, or whose mothers wear a headscarf, were harassed and attacked. Students were also denied the right to wear the hijab at school and prevented from participating in extracurricular activities, including music concerts and sporting events.
- In public places: Muslim women and girls have been denied the right to enter public buildings, shopping centres and swimming pools unless they allow themselves to be searched by male guards or remove their head coverings and other clothing worn for religious reasons.

Many Muslim women are well acquainted with the principles of universal modernity and values of individualism and professionalism. They actively adopt parts of these values and reflect them in their everyday lives.

This growing group of Muslim women has access to higher education, engages in social and political debates, they wear fashionable clothes, and take an active role in spreading and improving understanding of Islam. Moreover, these women are technologically adept and social media-savvy. They have various reasons for wearing the veil, not exclusively because their religion or someone else has forced them to do so. Muslim women's lifestyles and their reasons to wear a veil are highly influenced by factors such as their backgrounds and the social and political environments they live in and are shaped by.

we are deeply concerned that the proclaimed gender equality in the EU and the United States of America is being jeopardised by the ever-increasing discrimination based on religious beliefs. A cohesive, democratic and peaceful society must take a firm stand against all forms of religious intolerance and gender inequality. all member states must take decisive steps to sensitise its Member States to feel equally concerned by the need to combat stigmatisation and discrimination against Muslim women. To this end, it is important that the intersections of discrimination they face on the basis of religion and gender are recognised. Stigmatising and exclusion of Muslim women will further exacerbate social division, increase isolation and create further tensions that urgently needs better social participation and engagement from all parts of society. A continent that prides itself on the rule of law cannot continue to witness the open violation of the fundamental rights of a section of its population.

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