

Statement of the Finnish Muslim Community on the Ban Debate Concerning Religious Clothing

We, the undersigned religious communities, foundations and associations belonging to the Finnish Muslim community take a stand on the recent debate concerning the banning of religious clothing and in particular the face-covering niqab veils in schools as well as in public places. Our statement is based on deep concern about the narrowing of fundamental rights and the effects of populist politics on equality in Finnish society.

The discussion has been followed in the Muslim community with concern and disappointment as this is a classic example of populism. Political debate is being directed towards a marginal phenomenon that in practice does not even occur in Finnish schools and at the same time real challenges such as lack of resources, bullying and the increase of mental health problems among young people are left in the shadows. It is also worrying that concepts such as burka, niqab and regular scarf are constantly confused with each other which shows ignorance and strengthens the perception that this is primarily identity politics campaigning against the Muslim minority. Burka is an Afghan garment that covers the whole body including the face, niqab covers the face except for the eyes and an ordinary scarf (hijab) covers the hair and the neck but leaves the face visible. These garments are completely different in their meanings and backgrounds, and they should not be confused with each other.

In Finland the use of niqab is very rare and the use of burka is non-existent. The majority of Muslim women use a hijab that does not cover the face at all. This statistical reality reveals that the ban debate is not about real problem-solving but about ideological symbolic politics. It is difficult to understand why special legislation should be enacted for such a marginal phenomenon, which would be directed at a minority and restrict their fundamental rights.

It is also important to note that niqab is used almost exclusively by adult women who make considered and voluntary decisions as part of their own spiritual path. Among minors the use of niqab is marginal and if coercion were to occur, the current legislation already provides means to protect these individuals. A general ban would therefore not promote the rights of children or women but would instead restrict the agency of Muslim women and weaken their position in society. It should be noted that Finnish Muslim girls live in a multicultural environment and make their choices amid many different influences and pressures. Their agency must be safeguarded in the same way as that of other young people. Section 6(3) of the Finnish Constitution guarantees children the right to be treated equally and as individuals, and to be allowed to influence matters pertaining to themselves to a degree corresponding to their level of development.

For many Muslim women, religious clothing is a part of their identity and an expression of their spirituality. It can be an empowering choice that increases self-esteem and strengthens the connection to one's faith and community. The experiences of Muslim women vary individually, but what is essential is that every woman and girl has the right to make her decisions herself without external coercion. True equality is not realized if only choices that fit into the cultural norms of the majority are allowed. Women cannot be liberated by restricting their clothing, but their choices must be respected and their voices heard.

The discussion on the necessity of bans more broadly reflects the position of minorities in Finnish society. Symbolic bans and the use of minorities as instruments of political struggle weaken the sense of belonging and create the impression that not everyone is considered full members of society. Such politics can increase Islamophobia and experiences of insecurity which is in contradiction with the goals of building an equal and open society. The real challenges in schools are related to completely different issues and they cannot be solved by restraining a marginal clothing phenomenon.

It is also important to state that the use of niqab does not constitute a security threat. Even though face veils may give rise to difficult feelings in other people, subjective discomfort cannot be a reason to restrict the fundamental rights of others. Possible practical challenges such as identity verification can be solved without general bans, as experiences with face masks during the corona period have shown.

The Finnish Constitution guarantees everyone freedom of religion and equality, and these rights also belong to Muslim women and youth. Restrictions on fundamental rights must be based on real needs, and based on the arguments discussed in this statement, there are none.

Internationally, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has already stated that France's niqab ban on public places is contrary to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. In Finland, the Non-Discrimination Act obliges both authorities and education providers to promote equality. Restricting the clothing choices of Muslim women would be in stark contradiction with these obligations and would place them in an unequal position compared to others.

Demands of the undersigned

We, Muslim organizations and religious communities that are operating in Finland, urge politicians and decision-makers to focus on real problems that concern education, the well-

being of young people and the cohesion of society. Finland must be a country where every person has the right to freedom of religion and equality and where the symbols of minorities are not used as political weapons. We need more dialogue and understanding, not populist bans that only divide society. Freedom of religion and equality are fundamental rights that belong to everyone, and they cannot be selectively applied only when they fit into the prevailing cultural norm. Finland must remain a country where the rights and opportunities of all are realized equally regardless of their religious conviction or cultural background.

Signatories, 24.9.2025

1. Suomen Muslimifoorumi
2. Nuoret Muslimit
3. Helsinki Islam Keskus
4. Espoon Islamilainen Yhdyskunta Suomessa
5. Korson Kulttuurikeskus
6. Itä-Vantaan Islamilainen Yhdyskunta
7. Suomen Islam-Keskus Säätiö
8. Federation of Islamic Organizations in Finland
9. Finnur Ry
10. Islamic Multicultural Dawah Center
11. The Islamic Rahma Center in Finland
12. Ummah Islamilainen Yhdyskunta
13. Savon islamilainen yhdyskunta
14. Turun Islamilainen Yhdyskunta
15. As-Salaam Islamic Center & Masjid As-Salaam
16. Andalus Islamic Center
17. Amal ry
18. Oasis Keskussäätiö
19. Tariq Al-Hidaya Islamilainen Yhdyskunta
20. Pak-Fin Islam kulttuurikeskus
21. Suomen Muslimien Foorumi
22. Suomen Bosnjakkien Islam-yhdyskunta
23. Hyvinkää Islam Keskus
24. Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta
25. Resalat Islamilainen Yhdyskunta
26. Mahdin Nuoret
27. Sahaba
28. Lahden Islamilainen Diyanet Seurakunta
29. Tampereen islamilainen säätiö
30. Daar Al-Salam
31. Varsinais-Suomen islamilainen yhdyskunta
32. Turun kurdimuslimien yhdistys
33. Anjuman-E-Islahul Muslimeen
34. Turun Kosovon-Albanien Islamilainen yhdistys
35. Ashti Yhdistys
36. Isra ry
37. Andalus FC
38. Tampereen Islamin Yhdyskunta
39. Turun Islamilainen Diyanet Seurakunta
40. Nuorten Muslimien Foorumi