

24 August 2016

MEDIA STATEMENT

Banning of Burkinis on Beaches – Standing Against Patriarchy in All its Forms

We at Muslim Women's Network UK (MWN UK) are deeply disturbed about the continued banning of the Burkini- an item of clothing some women are choosing to wear on the beach and whilst swimming. The banning sadly highlights the increasing anti-Muslim sentiment across Europe which is clearly at the core of these ludicrous decisions.

While it is true that many countries are at risk of terror attacks, how can the enforcement of dress code, specifically women's dress, lessen such risk? Instead, what it does to is further marginalise minority Muslim communities and works against community integration and cohesion.

To be clear, the Mayor of Cannes' ruling states:

- "Access to beaches and for swimming is banned to any person wearing improper clothes that are not respectful of good morals and secularism."
- "Beachwear which ostentatiously displays religious affiliation, when France and places of worship are currently the target of terrorist attacks, is liable to create risks of disrupting public order."
- The infringement is punishable with a fine of €38 (£33)
- The ban remains in place until 31 August 2016

MWN UK Executive Director, Faeza Vaid said: "Just as the mayor of Cannes described the Burkini as 'a uniform that is the symbol of Islamist extremism', I argue that his ban is secular extremism, and actually gives ammunition to Islamists. As a women's rights activist, I question how can it be okay in 2016 to dictate to women what they wear? Let's be clear: it is NOT okay- and is an abuse of current French laws."

Historically, a number of factors have influenced dress code including; class, ethnicity, work, country of origin and residency, climate, religious interpretations, politics and of course fashion. And as we can see in the photograph above, in many contexts there have existed self-appointed enforcers (most often male) of such dress codes, who validate their patriarchal thinking through law and/or threats of actions, like monetary fines. At the core of these decisions is the control of women's autonomy.

MWN UK urge all human rights activists to stand equally against this direct discrimination of Muslim women, as we would stand for the rights of all women to wear what they choose.

If you, or anyone you know, is being subjected to anti-Muslim hatred, bullying and intimidation, you can call the MWN Helpline for advice on 0800 999 5786. Anyone who fears for their safety should contact the police immediately.

Note to Editors

1. About Us

Muslim Women's Network UK is a national charity that works to improve social justice and equality

for Muslim women and girls and operates a national helpline. We find out about their experiences through research and helpline enquiries and produce resources, deliver campaigns and conduct advocacy work, regularly engaging with government.

MWNUK organisational website : www.mwnuk.co.uk

MWN Helpline website : www.mwnhelpline.co.uk

MWN Helpline contact info: 0800 999 5768 / 0303 999 5786 / info@helpline.co.uk

2. Media Contacts

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