

Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) Statement on Face Covering (Face Veil or Niqab)

The face coverings or niqab worn by some Muslim women are controversial and sensitive subjects. They arouse strong emotions and opinions in everyone, in Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

We believe that the face covering is not a religious requirement, and is not mentioned in the Quran. The verses in the Quran, regarding any kind of covering of women, are open to interpretation, and scholars have interpreted the vital verses in a number of ways.

The Quran speaks of modesty for both men and women, and this can be achieved by various forms of clothing and is not limited to one specific garb.

We believe it is the decision of the individual woman to decide what she wears, and understand that the rationale varies for each woman.

In the same way that it is not up to us, as women, to tell another woman how to clothe herself, so too it is no man's prerogative to instruct women about any covering or dress. We also believe that no state or government has the right to tell a woman what to wear or how to dress.

We are aware that the face covering is part of a conservative, political movement, but we are reluctant to assume that banning it will curb the messages of this movement.

We acknowledge that it is reasonable to expect an individual to show the face for identification, health, safety and security purposes when accessing services. This can be accomplished by a well thought out accommodation policy. There is no need for legislation or regulation. Therefore, CCMW does not support Bill 94 - An Act to establish guidelines governing accommodation requests within the Administration and certain institutions, introduced by the Quebec government in March 2010.

We are concerned that those women who want to wear the face covering will become further isolated and marginalized if they are refused services. Their active role as parents may also be restricted and this will harm their children. This does not bode well for integration and participation for women and their children.

We are concerned that state interference in this issue may open the possibility of further restrictions and that these restrictions will be based on racism and prejudice against one group of citizens, that is, Muslims. CCMW acknowledges that it does not speak for all Muslim women. We are committed to equity, equality and empowerment of Muslim women. For more information visit our website at <http://www.ccmw.com>.