



**HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**  
**Warsaw, 26 September 2016**  
**Working session 11: Tolerance and non-discrimination I**

**Rise of Islamophobic political discourses: a threat to the tolerance in Europe**

**Introduction**

In past decades, Islamophobia has been on the rise in Europe. Multiple reports have pointed to the disproportionate impact of such discriminations on Muslim women. Many Muslim Women are notably more easily identified to their faith through their clothing such as the headscarf.

With the rising Islamophobia in Europe, we also notice a dangerous rise in Islamophobic public discourse on behalf of policy-makers and parties from the entire political spectrum.

We can see how the framing of Muslim women and their religious belief, notably in how they choose to dress, as antagonistic to European societies, has succeeded in marginalizing them in the public opinion and moreover, has played a key part in fostering discrimination, intolerance and hate speech and crimes against these women.<sup>1</sup>

**Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women**

Dangerous amalgams by politicians has had a direct impact on Muslim women in daily aspects of their lives, such as how they choose to dress, or their access to employment or higher studies. These amalgams contribute to the construction of a false image of the Muslim women that choose to wear religious garb and associates them with the actions of marginal acts of extremism and terror, or with a certain perception of Islam.

**Spread of disruptive discriminatory political discourses**

It is apparent now, that discrimination and harassment against Muslim woman has become a tolerated norm. Former **UK Prime Minister David Cameron** famously declared that “Muslim women were traditionally submissive”. In **France, current Prime Minister Manuel Valls** has declared that the headscarf must become an essential fight for the French Republic. Similarly another member of Valls’ French government, **F. Rossignol** ironically minister for women’s rights has compared on live television, Muslim women who choose to wear the headscarf to “Negros” that choose slavery. France in particular seems to have institutionalized a witch-hunt against Muslim women, with **MP Manuel Valls** also declaring that there should be a ban on headscarves in universities, while former **President Nicolas Sarkozy** has stated “we don’t want women wearing headscarves”. In neighboring Germany, **Bavarian Interior minister Joachim Herrmann** declared "It is clear that the burqa isn't the right article of clothing for the population in Germany," In the **UK, UKIP chief Nigel Farage** said about Muslim women wearing the burqa that they were "oppressed" and were a potential security threat”. In **Belgium, Flemish deputy Nadia Sminate** declared on the burkini: “I don’t think women, in the name of faith, would want to wear such a monstrosity”.

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<sup>1</sup> For example in France, a 2014 survey found that 79% of respondents stated that the headscarf was a problem for the “vivre-ensemble” (living-together). This has shown an 11points increase to the same survey in 2013. Another poll in Sweden found that 64.4% of Swedes believed that Muslim Women are oppressed and in the UK, a poll states that 30% of British people believe the hijab to be a threat. (ENAR Forgotten Women Report).

## Consequences of Islamophobic public discourse

These are only excerpts from a plethora of declarations and statements by numerous European politicians. Such rhetoric definitely liberates islamophobic speech and crime across society, but more worryingly; it systematically fails at involving the main subject of interest in the discussion. All these declarations, speak *for* Muslim women rather than *with* Muslim women. They are labeled, as oppressed and unfit to decide for themselves, personified into one homogenous group, a dangerous, oppressed group that we must regulate and legislate against or worse, that we must save and emancipate. This infantilization and personification of Muslim women is indeed deplorable and symptomatic of a profound misunderstanding of Muslim women by the political class. The infantilization also sends us back to the outrageous comparison made by French minister Rossignol, which not only strips women of all their freedoms (including freedom of expression and freedom of belief) and human rights but goes as far as denying their condition of fully fledged free human beings.

This type of discourse, which condemns the influence and social pressure in poor neighborhoods, paradoxically carries another form of social pressure, from the state this time, which creates an even stronger exclusion of Muslim women.

Such discourses are scarcely ever condemned by higher European authorities or by other parties in the political spectrum. The danger lays in the fact that they are never questioned and as such, may be taking for face value as factual truths.

## Conclusions

France can be viewed as a prime example of a drifting state when it comes to the fundamental rights of all its citizens. France's Muslim minority, and more particularly women, has been facing relentless harassment by policy-makers and politicians at large. It is noted that all mainstream parties mutually agree on discriminating positions regarding Muslim Women.

## European Forum of Muslim Women's Statement

What we particularly deplore at the European Forum of Muslim Women, is the total lack of reprimand or sanction from the international community as such stigmatization goes on, despite multiple reports by Human Rights NGO's. We also deplore the existing double standards of guarding human rights and gender equality of all women, regardless of religion and faith.

We recognize that a wide-spreading conducive environment availing the rise of Islamophobia is fueling:

- An expression of sexism and gender equality (e.g. through increasing the gender gap in employment amongst Muslim women)
- A rampant expression of Gender Based Violence based on one's religion (e.g. hate crime against religious groups)  
A tolerated and institutionalized violation of women's human rights (violating the freedom of expression and right to a private life, right to security etc.)

## European Forum of Muslim Women's Recommendations

We hence urge all the present country delegations to take heed of the issue of increased institutionalized discriminations through public discourses, more pressingly in countries such as France where it has become rampant, and to take the available means to hold such countries accountable to their commitment to fundamental rights.

We hence urge all the present country delegations to acknowledge institutionalized discriminations and to hold such countries accountable to their commitment to fundamental rights.

We urge country delegations to adopt a code of conduct for political representatives.

We urge all states to protect the rights of all women, including Muslim women, in their freedom of expression, of thought and of religion.

Finally, we acknowledge that this issue requires intersectional response, and are looking forward to all civil society actors in achieving equality for all women regardless of their background.