



PRESS STATEMENT

EU Court decision on workplace headscarf ban

Brussels, 14 March 2017 – A decision by the EU Court of Justice backing private sector workplace bans on headscarves seriously undermines the right to equality and non-discrimination, a group of anti-racism organisations said today.

Brussels, March 14th 2017 - The European court of Justice ruled today that employers can ban visible religious symbols including the headscarf. The backing of this headscarf ban by the highest court of justice in Europe, is a serious threat to the principles of equality, justice and freedoms that EU must uphold while also clearly going against the EU equality law, more specifically the employment directive, which is meant to -amongst other things- protect employees from discriminations based on religion.

The two cases the court was asked to rule on were both brought by women who were the victim of an unfair dismissal by their employers for choosing to wear the headscarf.

Muslim women are already one of the most targeted groups in Europe for the visible expression of their faith in public and in particular at work. Many struggle to access and remain in the employment sector, facing a triple penalty with gender ethnicity and religion. In Belgium 44% of employers agree that wearing a headscarf can negatively influence the selection of candidates. In France, a 2014 CV testing shows that a Muslim woman wearing the headscarf applying for a job has a 1% return rate.

This ruling will further alienate Muslim women from the workplace, preventing them from strengthening their economic independence and their emancipation in the society by being part of the workforce.

The Courts of Justice, meant to defend the weak and uphold universal values of freedom and equal rights, have given into the populist winds blowing across the world. After witnessing a Muslim ban in Trump's America, we now see an effective ban on visible Muslim women in the workplace.

The European Forum of Muslim women, a network of Muslim women organisations working all across Europe, on behalf of its members and on the European Muslim women that will be directly and indirectly affected by this ruling, strongly condemns and deplors the decision rendered today by the European Court of Justice.

Muslim women have been let down by the courts meant to protect them. A blank check has been given to employers to discriminate against the Muslim women who wear the headscarf and who consider it not just a religious symbol but rather an intrinsic practice of their faith.

The European Forum of Muslim women will continue advocating for equal rights and freedom of religion and of thought in a pluralistic Europe, albeit in an increasingly difficult and populist political context.

For further information-please contact

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