

NEWS RELEASE

From the office South-East England's Green Party MEP Caroline Lucas

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EURO-MPs ATTACK FRENCH HEADSCARF BAN CROSS-PARTY MEPs LAUNCH RELIGIOUS RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

FIVE British and French Euro-MPs have launched a campaign to persuade fellow MEPs to condemn the French ban on wearing conspicuous religious symbols in schools as an unlawful violation of human rights.

Caroline Lucas, South-East England's Green Party MEP, said: "The ban violates the human rights of free expression and freedom to practice religion, undermines multiculturalism and is likely to create tension and racist attacks."

Dr Lucas and four other MEPs from the UK and France have tabled a 'written declaration' calling on fellow Euro-MPs to promote religious rights and freedoms across the EU by condemning the French prohibition on the wearing of conspicuous crosses, skull-caps, turbans or veils in schools.

Denouncing France's ban – which was introduced to prevent Islamic staff and pupils wearing traditional 'Hijab' headscarves - as an affront to civil liberties and attack on Muslim communities, Dr Lucas will tell a Brussels press conference that momentum is gathering for a EU-wide campaign to prevent the spread of the law.

"Women and girls who have freely chosen to wear Hijab as an essential part of their Islamic beliefs and lifestyle should not be forced to endure a directive likely to heighten religious and ethnic discrimination," she said.

Dr Lucas, who has recently returned from an EU election monitoring mission in Palestine, added: "Earlier this year I visited Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories and saw for myself the dangers of religious intolerance, bigotry and hatred.

"The civil liberties affronted by this ban are central to the ideals of the French republic - and the French government must defend them, standing up for Muslims, Jews, Sikhs and Christians, and for a multicultural Europe free of the violence and mistrust which characterises the conflict in the Middle East."

The written declaration is the Brussels Parliament's equivalent of an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons – and will become official policy of the European Parliament if it receives the backing of half the house before it expires in May.

Dr Lucas will host a press conference in Strasbourg tomorrow (Wednesday, February 23rd) to launch the campaign. She will be joined by the declaration's co-authors Claude Moraes (Labour), Sarah Ludford (Lib-Dem) and Philip Bushill-Matthews (Conservative), as well as representatives of the UK-based Assembly for the Protection of Hijab and the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe.

Sister Intissar Khriji of the Assembly for the Protection of Hijab welcomed the

declaration, and called on all concerned citizens to lobby their MEPs to sign up, increasing the likelihood of its adoption as European Parliamentary policy.

She said: "We call on all MEPs and citizens of Europe to support the Written Declaration as a show of unity against the discriminatory legislation recently adopted by some European governments including the French.

"Religious and cultural freedoms are a foundation of European societies and it is our duty to act now in order to preserve these ideals for the generations to come."

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Notes to Editors

1. For more information on the Assembly for the Protection of Hijab see www.prohijab.net
2. For copies of the written declaration or a current list of signatories please contact Ben on any number below.

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