

Press Release

## Austria's School Hijab Ban Is Pure Islamophobia Masked Behind Talk of Girls' Rights

On the 11<sup>th</sup> December, Austria's lower house of parliament passed a law banning the wearing of a headscarf that "covers the head in accordance to Islamic traditions" in all schools for girls under the age of 14. It was passed by a large majority and supported by conservative and liberal parties alike. Non-compliance with the law would result in the girl being referred to child welfare services and a fine for the parents, ranging from 150-800 euros (\$175-\$930). The government argued that the new law represented a "clear commitment to gender equality" and aimed to empower girls and protect them "from oppression". Yannick Shetty, the parliamentary leader of the liberal NEOS, stated that the headscarf "sexualizes" girls because it serves to "shield girls from the male gaze" and that the ban was "a measure to protect the freedom of girls". According to the government, the new law will affect approximately 20,000 girls and will come into effect on February 1, 2026, with warnings being issued to the girls and their families about the law's implementation and the requirement to stop wearing the hijab. Then, starting in September 2026, the state will begin imposing fines. This school hijab ban has absolutely nothing to do with safeguarding girls, and everything to do with playing to the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant gallery within Austrian society to shore up electoral support from Islamophobic elements of the public. It is pure xenophobia and Islamophobia wrapped up in talk of gender equality and girls' rights. Furthermore, the government is using Muslim girls as tools to distract public anger away from the poor economic situation in the country, which has been in recession since 2023.

It is absurd that Austrian politicians describe the hijab as being oppressive towards girls, while simultaneously imposing a law that will deprive Muslim girls from dressing according to their own religious convictions, stigmatize and marginalize them further in the society due to their beliefs, and add to the prejudice and racism they face – which is the true face of oppression! Such bans also expose further the sheer farce and hypocrisies of the so-called 'freedoms' that secular liberal states such as Austria, France, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland and others that implement hijab or niqab bans champion and claim they want to secure for Muslim girls and women. Such freedoms are clearly afforded only to those who tow the secular line, and not for those who wish to dress according to their Islamic beliefs! Furthermore, it is laughable that Austrian and other secular politicians argue that the hijab sexualizes girls, while the entertainment, music, fashion and beauty industries within their states systematically and unashamedly sexualize teenage girls and women for profit.

This ban also demonstrates the true face of gender equality – which clearly does not extend to Muslim girls and women deciding their own religious beliefs but rather is aimed at imposing the secular liberal lifestyle and beliefs upon them and forcing them to discard their Islamic ones! Furthermore, Austrian politicians spuriously claim they want to empower Muslim girls but fail to even ask those who wear the Hijab why they adopt the dress. If they did, they would understand that the Islamic dress code is part of a comprehensive social system that aims to regulate the relationship between men and women in order to achieve a healthy cooperation between the genders within the society and secure dignity and respect for all.

As Muslims, all this should be a strong reminder about the utterly flawed and unpredictable nature of the secular system which is totally at odds with Islam and is able to rob individuals at a whim of the right to practice their Islamic beliefs. We urge Muslim girls and all Muslims in Austria to keep steadfast to their Islamic beliefs no matter the oppressive and intimidatory tactics employed by the government to distance them from their Deen, remembering the rewards that Allah (swt) promises those who keep firm to their Islamic obligations in the face of injustice. Allah (swt) says: إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا ﴿٤٠﴾  
"Surely those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah' and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, saying, 'Do not fear, nor grieve. Rather, rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised.'" [Fussilat: 30].

Women's Section  
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