

Press Release

Today the Community Enforcement Officer, Tomorrow Another Profession: Why This Debate Concerns Us All

Following my previous press statement, **“The Secular Illusion of Neutrality: How the Headscarf Ban for Community Enforcement Officers Confirms a Targeted Anti-Islam Agenda,”** in which I placed the discussion surrounding the headscarf ban for community enforcement officers (boas) within the broader context of secularism and the concept of “neutrality,” I received several responses from within the Muslim community that call for further reflection.

A recurring comment was: *“Why should we concern ourselves with this? According to our beliefs, a Muslim woman would not pursue a position as a community enforcement officer or police officer anyway.”*

This response deserves attention. Not because the discussion about which professions a Muslim woman should or should not pursue is unimportant, but because the core of this issue lies elsewhere. The debate is not merely about a specific career choice, but about how society deals with visible Islamic expressions and how much space Islam is given within the public sphere.

This distinction is essential. Social changes rarely occur through one isolated measure, but often through a series of decisions, discussions, and boundaries that gradually shift. Therefore, it is important not to view this issue in isolation, but within the broader discussion concerning the position of Islamic expressions in society.

When there is discussion about a headscarf ban for community enforcement officers, we sometimes also hear the response from within the Muslim community: *“A Muslim woman, according to our beliefs, would not pursue a role as a community enforcement officer or police officer, so why should we concern ourselves with this?”* From the perspective of that specific profession, such a thought may seem understandable. However, when we only look at the profession itself and not at the bigger picture, we risk overlooking a much more significant development.

The discussion is not only about whether a Muslim woman wants or is allowed to work as a community enforcement officer. It is also about how the government deals with visible Islamic expressions in society. For a Muslim woman, the headscarf is not simply a piece of clothing, but an expression of her faith, identity, and obedience to Allah (swt). When the government prohibits this expression within a certain profession, it therefore does not only affect the person who wishes to perform that job. It also affects the broader right of Muslims to visibly practice their faith.

That is why it is important not to look exclusively at the specific profession being discussed today. The core of this debate is not only that Muslims are restricted from accessing certain positions through such measures, but also that a visible Islamic expression is once again being identified as something that supposedly does not belong within the public

sphere. From this perspective, this does not merely affect one professional group, but the broader position of Islam and Muslims within society.

Previously, the discussion concerned the police; now it concerns community enforcement officers. In the future, the same reasoning can be applied to other public functions, educational environments, or social positions that may directly affect many more Muslims. The central question is therefore not only which profession is being restricted today, but which standard is being established for the future.

This development does not stand alone. In The Netherlands, a partial ban on face-covering clothing was previously introduced, which also restricted the wearing of the niqab in places such as educational institutions, public transport, government buildings, and healthcare institutions. In addition, discussions surrounding halal slaughter regularly return, where an Islamic practice is once again brought into question. The subject differs each time, but the underlying movement shows similarities: visible Islamic practices are increasingly treated as something that must be adapted, restricted, or removed from certain parts of the public sphere.

This connects to the broader assimilation policy that we previously wrote about in our book: **“The Future of Muslims in the Netherlands: After 20 Years of Assimilation Policy”** (available for free download via hizb.nl). Within this context, Muslims are not only expected to respect the law and participate peacefully in society. There is increasing pressure to adapt Islamic norms, values, and visible expressions to a secular standard.

Secularism is presented as neutral, while it itself also represents a specific vision of mankind, society, and the role of religion. When that vision determines which religious expressions may or may not be visible, it is no longer a matter of complete neutrality, but rather the imposition of one dominant view of society.

Our silence also has consequences. When every new restriction is met without a clear response, this may give politicians and policymakers the impression that further steps will face little resistance. Silence can therefore unintentionally create room for such policies to expand further. This means that awareness and involvement are necessary.

Such developments usually do not happen all at once. They emerge step by step. First, it concerns a small group or a specific situation; later, the same reasoning is applied to a new area. What is introduced today as a limited exception can become the general principle of tomorrow.

In several countries surrounding the Netherlands, there are already far-reaching restrictions on wearing the headscarf and other Islamic expressions. It is therefore not unthinkable that the Netherlands will move in the same direction. This is precisely why it is important that Muslims remain alert, express themselves substantively, and unite when fundamental Islamic expressions come under pressure.

Today, it may not concern a profession that you personally would choose. But it does concern the space that Islam and Muslims are given within society. Therefore, this development deserves our attention, our involvement, and a collective, principled response.

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