

Vatican speaks out on Muslim women's veils: Joins chorus of European leaders

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Top Vatican officials have added their voice to a chorus of European leaders critical of Muslim women who wear veils that conceal their faces.

Presenting Pope Benedict XVI's annual message on immigration, Cardinal Renato Martino of the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace told a news conference on November 14 that religious immigrants "must respect the traditions, symbols, culture and religion of the countries they move to."

Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, a top church authority on immigration, noted that the objections were directed primarily at the *niqab*—a full-face veil worn by women in many Muslim societies.

The comments marked a subtle shift in the Vatican's stance on the wearing of the Islamic veil in public. Two years ago the Vatican criticized France for introducing a ban in public schools on "conspicuous" religious symbols, including Islamic veils that cover only the head. It argued that the ban violated fundamental rights of religious expression. *-Religion News Service*