

Canadian Muslim group urges public ban on burqa: "The burqa marginalizes women"

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A Muslim group that opposes the introduction of Shari'a, or Islamic law, in Canada, is urging the federal government to ban the wearing of the burqa in public, saying it "marginalizes women."

In addition to the burqa, a garment that covers the entire body with only a mesh screen for the eyes, the Muslim Canadian Congress is also calling for a ban on the niqab, a veil covering head and the face that allows only a slit for the eyes.

The Toronto-based Muslim group says that the garments are not a requirement of Islam or the Qur'an. The suggested ban would not prohibit the hijab, a headscarf that is often worn by Muslim women.

"In Canada we recognize the equality of men and women," said Farzana Hassan, a spokesperson for the MCC. "We want to recognize gender equality as an absolute. The burqa marginalizes women."

The issue is also one of public safety, said Hassan, noting that "to cover your face is to conceal your identity." The MCC said the Qur'an's calls for modesty can be expressed in different ways.

The request by the Muslim group follows a decision by Egypt's top Islamic cleric banning face veils in classes and dormitories at a prominent Sunni Islamic school. Similar bans are under consideration in several European countries, including Denmark, Italy and France.

Another Muslim group, meanwhile, argued that the burqa is a minor issue in Canada, since only a minority of Muslim women wear it, but the right to wear such garments is protected by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. "This is a free country, in which people choose what to wear," said Zijad Delic, the national executive director

for the Canadian Islamic Congress. -*Religion News Service, Ecumenical News International*