

**DR. CAROLINE LUCAS**

**Green Member of the European Parliament  
for the South East of the UK**

His Excellency Gerard Errera  
French Embassy  
58 Knightsbridge  
London  
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25 January 2008

Your Excellency

**Re: The proposed French ban on the wearing of ‘conspicuous’ religious symbols in schools and hospitals**

I write as a Member of the European Parliament for the South East of England to express my deepest concern regarding the proposal to outlaw the wearing of ‘conspicuous’ religious symbols in French public institutions – notably the Islamic headscarf, the Jewish skullcap and ‘large’ Christian crosses.

I am most impressed by President Chirac’s bold words in defence of France’s fine tradition of secularism, and in opposition to discrimination. Given the many Muslims in my constituency I am particularly pleased to hear President Chirac’s affirmation of Islam’s place among France’s religions.

However, I must question how the proposed ban will help to turning these words into reality. It is not clear to me how the wearing of the headscarf and other garments places the secularism of schools and hospitals under threat. Nor is it clear to the thousands of Muslim women who took to the streets of Paris on 22 December, to oppose this ban, chanting “Yes to secularism...No to Islamophobia”. As Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, has said, “There is no such thing as a neutral public space in which everybody has to put aside that which makes them distinctive.”

Women and girls who have freely chosen to wear the headscarf as an essential part of their Islamic beliefs and lifestyle, should not be forced to suffer under a ban which limits their freedom of expression and their freedom to practice their religion. These freedoms are, I know, extremely dear to the French people.

Please convey to the French Government my opposition, and the opposition of so many of my constituents, to this ban. As a supporter of France’s stand against the illegal war on Iraq, I would be extremely sad to see such a measure become law, which can only fuel the Islamophobia that continues to grow across Europe at this time.

Yours sincerely

Dr Caroline Lucas MEP

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