

## France Bans the Burqa

Joy Close, Staff Writer

France has passed a law banning the wearing of burqas and other full body coverings often worn by Muslim women, according to an article written by David Gauthier-Villars and Charles Forelle in the September 15 issue of The Wall Street Journal. The bill passed with votes in support 246 to 1. In the article, Gauthier-Villars and Forelle quote French President Nicholas Sarkozy as having said last year that he believes the burqa is "a sign of enslavement and debasement." Women found ignoring the ban can be issued a maximum fine of €150, or \$190, and may also be asked to attend classes on what the French government is calling "republican values." In addition, those who encourage others to ignore the ban may have to spend up to a year in prison or pay a maximum fine of €30,000.

Although many find the bill an infringement on the religious rights of Muslim women, France is not the only country that is cracking down on external expressions of the Muslim faith. According to Gauthier-Villars and Forelle, Switzerland has banned the building of minarets, the tower sections of Muslim mosques, and Belgium and Spain are following France in banning Muslim apparel

like burqas and other coverings. Even Sweden, often considered a fairly tolerant country, is pushing to pass a bill that encourages Muslims within its borders "to integrate more."

Mohammed Beyakhles, a member of the human-rights group United Against Islamophobia, shares the opinion of many that the passing of the burqa ban is the government's way of putting a "veil on social and economic problems." Many Muslims see the banning of the burqa as a "populist ploy aimed at stigmatizing France's six million Muslims - Europe's largest Muslim community."

According to Gauthier-Villars and Forelle in their article on the burqa ban, when the ban was first introduced in the French parliament last year, a radical North-African Muslim group threatened France in messages found on Islamic websites. This July, a French citizen was taken hostage and killed by a member of al Qaeda in Mali. Minutes after the ban was passed in France, an anonymous caller announced that the Eiffel Tower was a terrorist target. Due to the call's proximity to September 11, the threat was taken seriously and the Eiffel Tower was evacuated.

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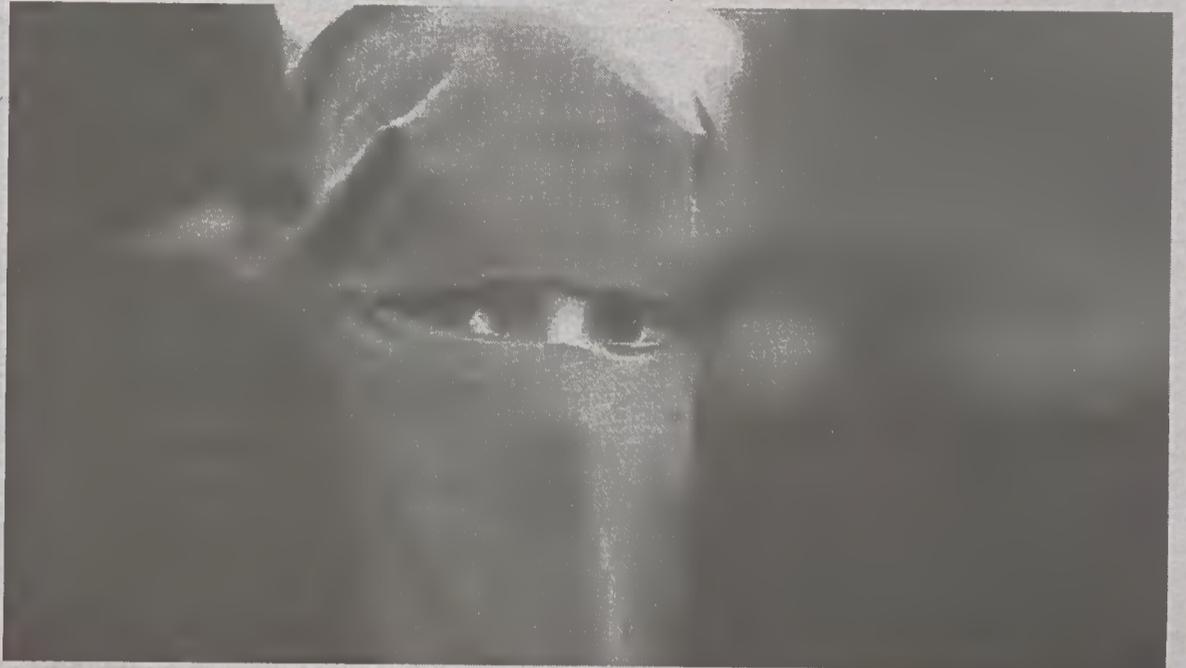


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