



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on April 12, 2011

French Ban on Islamic Face Veils Now in Effect

The law has been a matter of controversy for some time, and French police recently received orders not to arrest women wearing burqas if they are near a mosque.

The ban is a response to the growing Muslim population in France, now at about five million, and both its refusal to assimilate and its increasing demands for rights not accorded to others.

Protesters Arrested

[Passed in](#) October, the law forbids Islamic face coverings such as the [burqa](#), a garment that completely covers a woman, leaving a mesh screen for her to see through, and the [niqab](#), which covers everything except the eyes. It is the second such law passed in Europe. In April last year, [Belgium banned](#) the burqa and other face veils.



The law passed with support of Right and Left, and the day the ban went into effect, [London's Daily Mail reported](#), signs of approval popped up in town halls. "The Republic lives with its face uncovered," one said.

Breaking the law, as the Associated Press reported, invites a \$215 fine and a requirement to attend citizenship classes. Anyone who forces woman to wear a veil goes to jail for a year and could pay a \$43,000 fine, which could double if the person being forced to wear the covering is a minor.

Outside Notre Dame cathedral yesterday, police took away two veiled women. One of them was Kenza Drider, a convert to Islam, who claimed the ban was discriminatory. Drider, the AP reported, "calls the ban racist."

She said she would continue to wear her veil to go "shopping, to the post office and to City Hall if necessary. I will under no circumstance stop wearing my veil. If I am warned verbally and must appear before the local prosecutor.... I will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights," she told AP Television News in Avignon.

The *Daily Mail* [quoted her](#) thusly:

[Wearing the veil] is not an act of provocation. I'm only carrying out my citizens' rights, I'm not committing a crime.... If [the police] ask me for identity papers I'll show them, no problem.

[Another protester](#) outside the cathedral, Aisha, a 28-year-old mother of two, shouted, "We view this ban as an assault on our human rights, and those staging counter demonstrations are solely here to cause trouble."

A Muslim activist has told women to ignore the law and wear the veil in an act of civil disobedience, [the Daily Mail reported](#). Said Rachid Nakkaz in a webcast,



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The street is the universal home of freedom and nobody should challenge that so long as these woman are not impinging on anyone else's freedom. I am calling on all free women who so wish to wear the veil in the street and engage in civil disobedience.

Meanwhile, in London, protesters held signs aloft explaining the goal of those who support the veil. "Shariah 4 France," [one said](#). "Nicolas Sarkozy Burn In Hellfire," declared another.

The terrorist al Qaeda organization, which staged the attacks of September 11, 2001 in this country, [warned it would](#) strike France if the ban passed.

Will It Be Enforced?

It appears as if the law [may not be enforced](#). French Interior Minister [Claude Guéant](#) ordered police not to arrest women near mosques, and so-called "citizen unveilings" are also prohibited and could lead to the arrest of the unveiler, as it has in one case.

As well, the head of one French police union doesn't think much of trying to enforce the law, [the Daily Mail noted](#). Said Patrice Ribeiro, "I can't see police going to book dozens of veiled women doing their shopping in Venissieux or in Trappes."

Another union official told the AP that police may not use force to remove veils and must call the prosecutor for further legal action if women refuse to do so. According to the AP, "only in very extreme cases, he said, would a woman be jailed for refusal to remove a veil."

Another said the police have more important things to do than chase veils, [the Daily Mail reported](#).

The country [already suffers](#) with more than 700 Muslim "no-go" zones where tourists and even police dare not tread.

Guéant recently [called for](#) a major reduction in immigration to the country. He also plans to expel upwards of 30,000 illegal immigrants in 2011.

In February, French President [Nicolas Sarkozy declared](#) multiculturalism a failure.



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