

The French Statute on Religious Dress at School
in the News

The [Toronto] National Post, 2 October 2004 [in English];

The [Melbourne] Age, 21 October 2004 [in English];

Libération (Paris), 18-19 December 2004 [in French and in English Translation].

"Muslim Schoolgirl Shaves Head to Protest, Comply With French Ban on Islamic Headscarves", *The [Toronto] National Post*, 2 October 2004.

Muslim schoolgirl shaves head to protest, comply with French ban on Islamic headscarves

A Muslim schoolgirl bowed to France's ban on Islamic headscarves in state schools yesterday by returning to class and removing her veil to reveal she had shaved her head bald in protest. "I will respect both French law and Muslim law by taking off what I have on my head and not showing my hair," Cennet Doganay, 15, said outside her high school in Stras-

'THE LAW DOESN'T RESPECT ME'

bourg, in eastern France. "I respect the law but the law doesn't respect me." School officials, who had only let her into a study room since early September while negotiating her return to class without a headscarf, al-

lowed her to re-enter the Louis Pasteur Lycée and made no comments to journalists outside. About 120 schoolgirls across France insisted on keeping their headscarves when school resumed on Sept. 2 and a ban on veils and other conspicuous signs of faith was imposed. Most have since given in under threat of expulsion from school. *Reuters*

Pupils expelled over headscarves

Mulhouse, France

A French school has expelled two girls for wearing Muslim headscarves in the first such case since Paris imposed a controversial ban on religious symbols in state schools last month.

The year 7 students, aged 12 and 13, had refused to remove their headscarves since the school year resumed in September.

They refused to budge despite repeated meetings with teachers and their parents, said Michelle Feder-Cunin, principal of the school in Mulhouse, in the country's east. "The disciplinary council has decided to definitively exclude the two pupils from the school," she said.

France imposed the ban in September to reassert the neutrality of its state schools and counter what teachers said was rising Islamist radicalism reflected in the wearing of headscarves, denial of the Holocaust and attacks on Jewish schoolmates.

The law barred what it called conspicuous signs of faith such as the headscarves, Jewish skull-

caps and large Christian crosses but left some leeway — such as for discreet jewellery — because a complete ban would have been a violation of European human rights laws.

In Paris, Education Minister Francois Fillon said about 70 girls around France risked expulsion by refusing to bare their heads despite warnings from school officials.

Three Sikh boys in a Paris suburb are also fighting the ban because it would mean taking off their turbans, he said, adding: "The law applies to everybody."

Pupils expelled from school can either attend private schools, which charge fees, or continue their education through correspondence courses.

Lazhar Fortas, a French citizen of Algerian origin whose daughter Khouloude was one of the two expelled on Tuesday, said he could not understand how the school could shut her out.

"She was a top student last year, first in her class, she had no problems, she went to gym class, did everything, was even her class delegate," he said. **Reuters**

"Voile: 43 élèves exclus depuis la rentrée", Libération, 18-19 December 2004.

Voile: 43 élèves exclus depuis la rentrée

L'Education nationale a dû gérer 639 cas. L'Alsace détient le record des exclusions.

Q quatre mois après la rentrée, 43 élèves ont été définitivement exclus de leurs écoles, en application de la loi sur la laïcité. Ce bilan, établi par le ministère de l'Education, n'est pas terminé. Quelques conseils de discipline doivent encore avoir lieu.

A la rentrée, 639 élèves s'étaient présentés la tête couverte d'un foulard, d'un bandana ou d'un turban sikh. Quelques jours plus tard, 538 d'entre eux décidaient de retirer leur couvre-chef. Restaient 101 cas. D'après les ser-

vices de François Fillon, 41 élèves se sont inscrits au Cned, et 17 dans un établissement privé - dont une bonne dizaine en Belgique.

Avec 17 conseils de discipline, l'Alsace détient le record des exclusions. Les élèves ont majoritairement exercé un recours devant les rectorats, qui ont tous confirmé les exclusions. Plusieurs procédures ont, par ailleurs, été déposées devant les tribunaux administratifs. Des membres de la communauté musulmane ont assuré que des jeunes

filles ont «préféré» renoncer à une scolarisation plutôt qu'à leur foulard. Le ministère dément: «Il n'y a pas eu de cas de déscolarisation.»

La «phase de dialogue», prévue dans le dispositif de la loi, devait initialement durer deux semaines. Mais chefs d'établissement et inspecteurs d'académie redoutaient d'avoir à exclure des élèves en tout début d'année, les ravis-seurs des deux otages français en Irak exigeant l'abrogation de la loi sur la laïcité.

Cette «dramatisation» de la

rentrée des classes, soulignée par Hanifa Cherifi, responsable de la laïcité au ministère, explique en partie les retards pris dans le processus d'exclusion. Mais, à mesure que le temps passait, les chances de trouver un établissement de repli pour les élèves s'amenuisaient. Ainsi, les trois élèves sikh d'un lycée de Bobigny (Seine-Saint-Denis) se sont vus opposer une fin de non-recevoir par les établissements contactés, même privé hors contrat avec l'Etat. ◀

M.-J.G. (avec AFP)

The Veil: 43 Students Expelled Since the Beginning of the School Year.

The Ministry has had to deal with 639 cases. Alsace leads in the number of expulsions.

Four months after the beginning of the school year, 43 students have been definitively expelled from their schools in application of the statute on secularism. This assessment, established by the Ministry of Education, is not final. A few disciplinary meetings must still be held.

At the beginning of the school year, 639 students came to school with their head covered with a scarf, a bandanna, or a Sikh turban. A few days later, 538 of them decided to remove their headgear. This left 101 cases. According to the [administrative] staff of François Fillon [the Minister of National Education], 41 students enrolled at the Cned [*Centre national d'éducation à distance, i.e., National Center for Distance Learning*] and 17 in a private institution — out of which ten or so went to Belgium.

With 17 disciplinary meetings, Alsace leads in the number of expulsions. The students mostly presented their claims before the rectorates [*i.e., the school boards*] which all confirmed the exclusions. Many suits have also been launched before administrative tribunals. Members of the Muslim community have stated that there are young girls who have “elected” to give up their school education rather than their scarf. The ministry denies this: “There has been no case of a student ceasing to go to school”.

The “dialogue stage” contemplated by the statute was initially planned to last two weeks. But principals and school inspectors were afraid that they would have to expel students right at the beginning of the school year [at a time when] the kidnapers of the two French hostages in Irak were demanding the repeal of the statute on secularism.

The “dramatization” surrounding the beginning of the school year, underlined by Hanifa Cherifi, [the officer] responsible for secularism at the ministry, accounts in part for the delays in the process of expulsion. But as time went by, the chances of finding another institution for the students diminished. Thus, the three Sikh students in a Bobigny senior high school [*i.e., a northern, largely working-class and low-income Paris suburb*] were turned down by the institutions that were contacted, even by private institutions.