

# Press Release

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## **“Rulings anywhere that women must wear the burqa should be condemned - but banning such dresses here would be wrong” says Commissioner Hammarberg**

Strasbourg, 08.03.2010 - “Women should be free to choose how to dress, without interferences neither from their communities nor from state authorities” said Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, in his latest [Viewpoint](#) published today on the occasion of the International Women’s Day.

“Prohibition of the burqa and the niqab would not liberate oppressed women, but might instead lead to their further alienation in European societies” he said. “Rightly, we react strongly against any regime ruling that women must wear these garments. But our opposition to such repressive methods should not lead to banning the same clothing in other countries. This would be an ill-advised invasion of individual privacy and would raise serious questions about its compatibility with international human rights standards.”

The Commissioner stresses that those who argue for a general ban of the burqa and the niqab have not managed to show that these garments undermine democracy, public safety, order or morals. Nor has it been possible to prove that these women in general are victims of more gender repression than others.

“The status of women is an acute problem within some religious communities. This needs to be discussed, but prohibiting symptoms like clothing is not the way to do it, especially as these may not always be the reflection of religious beliefs, but the expression of broader cultural aspects” he said.

“Attempts should be made to broaden the discourse to cover essential matters, including how to promote understanding of different religions, cultures and customs. Pluralism and multiculturalism are essential European values and should so remain.”

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