

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Italian Parliament should reject any proposed legislation aiming at prohibiting the wearing of full-face veils in public**

Amnesty International urges the Italian Parliament to reject a draft bill banning the wearing of full veils in public or spaces open to the public. The bill, which was adopted by the Commission for Constitutional Affairs of the Italian Chamber of Deputies on 2 August 2011, foresees a fine of up to 500 euros or compulsory community work, forbidding explicitly the wearing of the “burqa” and the “niqab”. The draft bill will be discussed by the plenary later on this year.

A complete ban on the covering of the face would violate the rights to freedom of expression and religion of those women who wear the burqa or the niqab as an expression of their identity or beliefs. Restrictions on human rights must always be proportionate to a legitimate goal. A total ban on full-face veils would not be.

Italian politicians have argued that the law is necessary for public security and to protect women from being forced to wear full-face veils. Amnesty International believes that legitimate security concerns can be met by targeted restrictions on the complete covering of the face in well-defined high risk locations. Individuals may also be required to reveal their faces when objectively necessary. On the other hand, it cannot be assumed that all women wearing full-face veils do so because they are being forced by someone else. States do have an obligation to protect women against pressure in their homes or communities to wear full-face veils and against any form of domestic violence, and should do this by intervening in individual cases through criminal or family law systems. They must also combat gender stereotypes that result in the discrimination of women. This will require a range of social and public policy and education measures.

Far from upholding the rights of women, a general ban on full-face veils would violate the rights of those who freely choose to wear them, while doing little to protect those who do so against their will, who risk even greater confinement as a result. The obligation to combat discrimination cannot be fulfilled by imposing a measure that is itself discriminatory.

Amnesty International calls on the Italian Parliament to reject any proposed legislation aiming at prohibiting the wearing of full-face veils in public.