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## **First French fines for veiled women a ‘travesty of justice’**

The first fines issued in France today against two Muslim women wearing full-face veils in public are a violation of their rights to freedom of expression and religion, Amnesty International said today.

A court in Meaux near Paris fined Hind Ahmas €120 and Najate Naït Ali €80 for wearing the niqab, a full face veil, in public.

The two women were originally stopped in the street by police on 5 May near the Meaux Town Hall, during a demonstration against the veil ban.

“This is a travesty of justice and a day of shame for France. These women are being punished for wearing what they want,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“Instead of protecting women’s rights, this ban violates their freedom of expression and religion.”

The ban on face coverings in all public places in France, including streets, schools, trains and courtrooms, entered into force on 11 April.

“We fear that women in France who choose to wear the niqab in public now feel confined to their homes, because it is illegal for them to walk down the streets of their own country dressed as they wish to be dressed,” said John Dalhuisen.

When proposing the ban, the French government had argued that the measure was necessary for public safety and to protect women from being pressurised into wearing full face veils.

Amnesty International disputes this, and believes that the state can protect women against such pressure by combating gender stereotypes, violence against women and discriminatory attitudes, and by applying criminal and family law where appropriate.

Any legitimate security concerns over face-coverings should be met by targeted restrictions in well-defined high risk locations.

“For security purposes, complete public bans on face-coverings are unnecessary and discriminatory,” said John Dalhuisen.

“For the protection of women, the state has measures at its disposal which are far more appropriate than a ban which confines women who choose to wear the full face veil to their homes.”