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Switzerland votes against religious freedom

Amnesty International deeply regrets the choice of Swiss voters today to introduce a ban on the construction of minarets into the constitution. The ban, which takes immediate effect, violates both the freedom of religion of Muslims living in the country and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religious belief as set out in several international human rights instruments that Switzerland is a party to.

"The yes vote comes as a surprise and a great disappointment. That Switzerland, a country with a long tradition of religious tolerance and the provision of refuge to the persecuted, should have accepted such a grotesquely discriminatory proposal is shocking indeed," said David Diaz-Jogeix, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The general prohibition of the construction of minarets violates the right of Muslims in Switzerland to manifest their religion. It can do lasting damage to their integration."

Islam is the second largest religion in Switzerland after Christianity, and its followers represent over 4 per cent of the country's population.

The ban is expected to be rejected by either the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland or the European Court of Human Rights.

See also: Switzerland: Banning the construction of minarets would violate international human rights law (EUR 43/001/2009).