

'Reasonable accommodation' debate rages in Canada over football turban ban

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A provincial Canadian football federation has been suspended by the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) over its refusal to allow Sikh children wearing turbans to play in official matches.

The CSA said it had taken the action against the Quebec Soccer Federation after it gave no indication of overturning the ban, which has triggered a national debate about religion's place in the public sphere.

The Quebec Soccer Federation (QSF) said the move was being taken for safety reasons.

The CSA suspension says the ban will be lifted once it receives demonstration that the QSF has lifted the ban and satisfactorily applies the Canadian Soccer Association's policy in the matter.

QSF is reported to have made a decision in response to its ban but will not reveal it until next week.

Quebec Premier Pauline Marois, defended the Quebec Soccer Federation's ban on turbans, saying: "I think the Quebec federation has the right to make its own rules. It's not subject to the Canadian federation in that respect."

The World Sikh Organization of Canada said it was considering a legal challenge.

Many commentators have also condemned the ban. Patrick Lagacé, a columnist for Montreal's La Presse said Quebec has a "strange view of secularism". He said "We collectively reserve our outrage for cases when secularism comes heads on – in a real or perceived manner – against religions other than Catholicism.

"When it comes to "our" religion, we are suddenly much more lenient. In the National Assembly, behind the Speaker's throne, you find a crucifix. If you think it sends a bad message about separation of church and state, too bad – politicians of all stripes will tell you that it's not a religious object; it's a symbol of our cultural heritage!"

Mr Lagacé also accused the political class of remaining silent when the mayor of Saguenay, Jean Tremblay, launched a "legal crusade" for the right to say a prayer before city council meetings.

A FIFA spokesperson confirmed that Sikh turbans & patkas can be permitted under Law 4 of the laws of the game.

In 2012, The International Football Association Board (IFAB) [lifted a ban](#) on female footballers wearing the Islamic headscarf on the field of play.

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