

# Human Rights Court considers the French ban on face coverings

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The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is today (27 November 2013) hearing the case of a French woman, identified by her initials SAS, who is challenging the country's ban on the full face veil.

The 2010 law bans the wearing in public of burqas, niqabs and other face coverings with fines of up to €150 for offenders. The French government argues that the ban is necessary to protect the state's strict secularism.

The plaintiff says she is a "devout Muslim and she wears the burqa and niqab in accordance with her religious faith, culture and personal convictions."

She argues that the ban on face coverings is discrimination and an infringement of her freedom of religion and of expression as well as freedom of assembly. She assures the court that "neither her husband nor any other member of her family puts pressure on her to dress in this manner." She says she will remove the veil when required for security purposes, but otherwise would claim the right to wear it at any other time.

The plaintiff will be represented by a UK law firm based in Birmingham because she says she doesn't feel comfortable with French lawyers.

Meanwhile, lawyers for France will ask for the case to be dropped, saying that two similar cases brought before the court and using the same arguments have been rejected. They argue that the veils are intrinsically discriminatory against women and a threat to public security.

The judgment is expected early next year.

See also: [\*French appeals court upholds right to ban headscarf at work\*](#)

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