Parliamentary Assembly
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Resolution 1887 (2012)[1]
Final version

Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe: for equal opportunities

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In the Council of Europe member States where Islam is not the religion of the majority of the population, Muslim women are often victims of stereotyping, since their religious beliefs are seen as the only defining element of their identity. The media contribute to this phenomenon by reporting on Muslim women mainly as victims of so-called "honour crimes" and in relation to their clothing. All too often, political debate and legislative action concerning Muslim women is concentrated on the issues of the headscarf, and even more the integral veil, instead of focusing on non-discrimination and equal opportunities.

2. This approach does not reflect the complex reality of Muslim women in Europe, many of whom want to be actors of change and empowerment, and does not respond to the needs of present-day multicultural societies. Rather than being isolated, stigmatised or confined by stereotypes, Muslim women should be encouraged in their quest for equal opportunities in society and provided with better instruments to play an active role in all aspects of life.

3. Many Muslim women – migrants or their descendants – face particular problems in the process of feminisation of migration. These problems include, *inter alia,* restrictions on family reunification and recourse to irregular migration due to the closing of regular channels of migration.

4. To this end, a set of measures to combat discrimination, including multiple discrimination, in access to health care, education and employment should be introduced. Likewise, violence against women and domestic violence – including those forms which disproportionally affect women and girls from a Muslim background – should be tackled through an appropriate legal and political framework, as well as through far-reaching awareness-raising activities.

5. At the same time, positive measures should be introduced to make it possible for Muslim women to be protagonists of their own empowerment. Investing in education, encouraging networking and participation in civil and public life, as well as assistance in their professional development, are key actions needed to raise Muslim women's awareness of their rights and help them realise their full potential.

6. Recalling its Resolution 1743 (2010) and Recommendation 1927 (2010) on Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe, and its Recommendation 1975 (2011) on living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly reiterates that Council of Europe member States will not abide by the fundamental values enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5) unless they protect human rights without discriminating on any grounds, including gender and religion.

1. Assembly debate on 26 June 2012 (22nd Sitting) (see Doc. 12956, report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Kyriakidou; Doc. 12976, opinion of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Comte; and Doc. 12973, opinion of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Erkal Kara). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 June 2012 (22nd Sitting).

7. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

7.1. with regard to combating discrimination:

7.1.1. introduce an effective legal framework to combat all forms of direct and indirect discrimination, on any grounds, and establish – if they have not already done so – a national body to monitor the content and implementation of anti-discrimination legislation, to advise the legislative and executive authorities and to provide aid and assistance to victims;

7.1.2. take measures to ensure that "multiple discrimination" is included as a notion in their legislative framework;

7.1.3. systematically condemn racist acts, discriminatory treatment, racist speech in public discourse and the stigmatisation of any religious community;

7.1.4. sign, ratify and implement without delay Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 177);

7.1.5. protect Muslim women's freedom to choose their clothing in compliance with the laws of the State in which they reside, imposing restrictions only where necessary in a democratic society to preserve the dignity of women, to guarantee gender equality, for security purposes or when required for the exercise of a function or for vocational training, and ensuring that those who force women to wear a particular item of clothing are sanctioned in a dissuasive, effective and proportional manner;

7.1.6. encourage the media to reflect Europe's ethnic and religious diversity in the selection of journalists, reporters and presenters;

7.1.7. encourage the media not to limit the portrayal of Muslim women to aspects relating to their religious beliefs and as victims of violence, by giving more media coverage to examples of integration, participation and their calls for equality;

7.2. with regard to integration policies and the promotion of respect:

7.2.1. promote mutual respect among all people, irrespective of their religious backgrounds, through education – in particular citizenship and human rights education – and with the organisation of awareness-raising campaigns highlighting the benefits of diversity and, in particular:

7.2.1.1. support the implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education;

7.2.1.2. pursue initiatives in the field of intercultural education relating to diversity of religions and non-religious convictions in order to promote tolerance, mutual understanding and the culture of "living together", drawing on the principles set out in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education;

7.2.1.3. promote the use of the Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education, published by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe;

7.2.2. promote Muslim women's active empowerment, by establishing incentives for Muslim women's active participation in society, encouraging the development of Muslim women's organisations, facilitating the creation of networks and giving visibility to women who have been successful in European society;

7.2.3. step up efforts and allocate sufficient financial resources for the implementation of integration policies at the local level through a comprehensive strategy including awareness-raising activities and specific training on diversity for law-enforcement officials, mayors and public administration staff members;

7.2.4. promote family reunification policies and access to nationality and dual nationality for migrants and their descendants as a means of integration and ensure that there is no discrimination in terms of gender, religion or ethnicity in the implementation of the laws and rules relating to these policies;

7.2.5. ensure that all girls, including Muslim girls, have access to all levels of education and that they dispose of support structures to help them remain in education;

7.2.6. in co-operation with non-governmental organisations, develop specific training programmes for older Muslim women who wish to access employment to gain skills and qualifications;

7.2.7. set up special scholarships and programmes to encourage girls and women to pursue vocational and university education and ensure that information about them is widely available;

7.2.8. allocate sufficient funds for the teaching of the language of the host country where appropriate;

7.2.9. impose effective, proportional and dissuasive sanctions for cases of discrimination in access to employment and in the workplace;

7.2.10. develop awareness-raising campaigns and introduce dissuasive sanctions for government agencies and banks in order to combat discrimination against Muslim women in the allocation of loans and grants for business start-ups;

7.2.11. encourage political parties to reflect Europe's diversity in the choice of their candidates for elections;

7.3. with regard to combating violence against women:

7.3.1. sign and ratify, for those that have not yet done so, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210);

7.3.2. condemn any reference to honour as a justification for violent acts;

7.3.3. ensure the protection of women in Europe from violence, regardless of their religion, cultural background or nationality, or regular or irregular migrant status;

7.4. with regard to access to health:

7.4.1. make information on maternal care and reproductive health available in the languages of the population concerned;

7.4.2. ensure, whenever possible, the presence of interpreters in health facilities providing emergency and maternal health care;

7.4.3. provide training on cultural diversity for health professionals while ensuring that the functioning of the health system is not disrupted by patients' religious customs.

8. The Assembly calls on Muslim religious leaders to:

8.1. publicly condemn violence against women, domestic violence and so-called "honour crimes";

8.2. issue public statements explaining that the practice of female genital mutilation is not a requirement of the Muslim faith.