



Grand Chamber hearing concerning the prohibition on wearing the full-face veil in public in France

The European Court of Human Rights is holding a **Grand Chamber**¹ hearing today **Wednesday 27 November 2013 at 9.15 a.m.** in the case of **S.A.S. v. France** (Application no. 43835/11)

The case concerns the complaint of a French national, who is a practising Muslim, that she is no longer allowed to wear the full-face veil in public following the entry into force, in April 2011, of a law prohibiting concealment of one's face in public places.

The hearing will be broadcast from 2.30 p.m. on the Court's Internet site (www.echr.coe.int). After the hearing the Court will begin its deliberations, which will be held in private. Its ruling in the case will, however, be made at a later stage.

The applicant is a French national who was born in 1990 and lives in France.

Under Law no. 2010-1192 of 11 October 2010, which entered into force on 11 April 2011, it is prohibited for anyone to conceal their face in public places in France.

In the applicant's submission, she is a devout Muslim and she wears the burqa and niqab in accordance with her religious faith, culture and personal convictions. As she has explained, the burqa is a full-body covering including a mesh over the face, and the niqab is a full-face veil leaving an opening only for the eyes. The applicant also emphasises that neither her husband nor any other member of her family puts pressure on her to dress in this manner. She adds that she wears the niqab in public and in private, but not systematically. She is thus content not to wear the niqab in certain circumstances but wishes to be able to wear it when she chooses to do so. Lastly, her aim is not to annoy others but to feel at inner peace with herself.

Relying on Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment), the applicant complains that as it is prohibited by law, on pain of criminal sanctions, to wear a garment designed to conceal the face in public places, she risks not only incurring such a sanction but also suffering harassment and discrimination, if she wears the full-face veil. Relying on Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life), she also complains that the statutory prohibition on the wearing in public places of a garment designed to conceal the face prevents her from dressing in public as she chooses. Under Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), the applicant complains of a violation of her right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as a result of the same circumstances. In her view, her inability to wear the full-face veil in public places is incompatible with the freedom to manifest her religion or belief individually or collectively, in public or in private, by worship, teaching, practice and observance of rites. Relying on Article 10 (freedom of expression), the applicant complains of a violation of her right to freedom of expression, as a result of the same circumstances and because she is thus unable to wear in public a garment that expresses her faith and religious, cultural and personal identity. Relying on Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association), she complains of a violation of her right to freedom of assembly and association, as a result of the same circumstances, and of the fact that she is prevented from assembling with others in public wearing the full-face veil. Lastly, under Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination), the applicant complains that the statutory prohibition on wearing a garment designed to conceal one's face in public places gives rise to discrimination based on gender, religion and ethnic origin, to the detriment of women who, like herself, wear the full-face veil.

1 Under Article 30 of the European Convention on Human Rights, "Where a case pending before a Chamber raises a serious question affecting the interpretation of the Convention or the Protocols thereto, or where the resolution of a question before the Chamber might have a result inconsistent with a judgment previously delivered by the Court, the Chamber may, at any time before it has rendered its judgment, relinquish jurisdiction in favour of the Grand Chamber, unless one of the parties to the case objects."

Procedure

The application was lodged with the European Court of Human Rights on 11 April 2011. On 28 May 2013 the Chamber to which the case had been allocated [relinquished](#) jurisdiction in favour of the Grand Chamber.

Composition of the Court

The case will be heard by a Grand Chamber, composed as follows:

Dean **Spielmann** (Luxembourg), *President*,
Josep **Casadevall** (Andorra),
Guido **Raimondi** (Italy),
Ineta **Ziemele** (Latvia),
Mark **Villiger** (Liechtenstein),
Isabelle **Berro-Lefèvre** (Monaco),
Boštjan M. **Zupančič** (Slovenia)
Elisabeth **Steiner** (Austria),
Khanlar **Hajiyev** (Azerbaijan),
Ledi **Bianku** (Albania),
Ganna **Yudkivska** (Ukraine),
Angelika **Nußberger** (Germany),
Erik **Møse** (Norway),
André **Potocki** (France),
Paul **Lemmens** (Belgium),
Helena **Jäderblom** (Sweden),
Aleš **Pejchal** (the Czech Republic), *judges*,
Mirjana **Lazarova Trajkovska** (“the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”),
Julia **Laffranque** (Estonia),
András **Sajó** (Hungary), *substitute judges*,
and also Erik **Fribergh**, *Registrar*.

Representatives of the parties

Government

Edwige **Belliard**, *Agent*,
Nathalie **Acel**, *Deputy Agent*,
Sylvain **Fournel**, Rodolphe **Feral**, Patricia **Rouault-Chalier** and Eric **Dumand**, *Advisers*;

Applicant

Ramby **De Mello** and Tony **Muman**, *Counsel*,
Satvinder **Singh Juss**, Anastasia **Vakulenko**, Eirik **Bjorge** and Ashraf **Ali**, *Advisors*;

Third parties

Belgian Government

Isabelle **Niedlispacher**, *Deputy Agent*.

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