



General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 March 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-fifth session

26 February–5 April 2024

Agenda item 6

Universal periodic review

Written statement* submitted by The Institute for Protection of Women's Rights (IPWR), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[9 February 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Violation of the Rights of Muslim Women in Germany

Introduction

It is estimated that between 3.8 and 4.3 million Muslims live in Germany, representing about 5 per cent of the total German population, and Germany has the largest Muslim presence in Western Europe after France .

After 11 September 2001, an increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes was noted, particularly in the United States of America. Such negative stereotypes can naturally affect Muslims in their professional and social lives. Islamophobia is not limited to the United States of America, but is also increasingly common in European countries such as Germany, which was analysed in this study. Most Muslims in Germany are members of immigrant communities, and the majority have a Turkish background. During the labour shortage in the 1960s and early 1970s, “guest workers” were actively recruited from Türkiye . Contrary to Germany’s original intentions, however, these “guest workers” came to stay. Today, they and their descendants are an integral part of the German population.

In recent decades, reports of discrimination and violations of the rights of Muslim women in Germany have increased. These problems range from threats and assaults to a lack of integration in education and employment.

As the headscarf stands out as a religious symbol, Muslim women in particular are discriminated against – whether in everyday life, when looking for accommodation or on the labour market. The 2003 legislation banning the headscarf for female teachers at public schools in eight federal states has sometimes influenced other employers in their attitude towards veiled women. The headscarf tends to trigger stereotypes and prejudices against Muslim women, who are seen as politically violent and therefore potential troublemakers in the organisation. In addition, women who wear a headscarf are seen as more family orientated, which reinforces prejudice and discrimination in relation to pregnancy. Ultimately, employers may tend not to hire women wearing headscarves in order to avoid potential economic damage.

Furthermore, according to the same study, discrimination against Muslims is often not perceived by employers as a ‘real’ form of discrimination. This is also the reason why accused employers often explicitly say that their rejection is based on the headscarf, without understanding that this can be a form of religious discrimination. Muslim women who wear a headscarf find it particularly difficult to access the labour market, as a study from 2016 shows, for which 1,500 fictitious job applications were sent out.

According to the results, women with headscarves and Turkish names had to apply four times as often as equally qualified women with typical German names without headscarves in order to be invited for an interview. For jobs requiring higher qualifications, they had to apply up to eight times more often.

Studies show that female applicants with headscarves are often not even invited to an interview, regardless of their qualifications. In a recent study conducted by the University of Linz, more than 1,500 applications with the same CV were sent to different companies in Germany with different pictures and names. For applicants with German-sounding names, 18% of companies responded with an invitation to an interview, while only 13% responded to an applicant with a Turkish-sounding name. Only 3% of companies responded to applications showing Muslim women with headscarves on their CVs with an invitation to an interview.

The Inssan Network Against Discrimination and Islamophobia also reports that women are often victims of hate speech and hate crime, which is predominantly perpetrated by men. Research shows that a significant number of Muslim women do not go out alone because they fear possible attacks. Others only go out in groups, avoid going out after dark or avoid certain places in Germany where there is more racism. Self-defence courses are becoming increasingly popular among Muslim women .

Recommendations

In addition to condemning rights violations, we propose practical solutions and recommendations to address concerns about Muslim women's rights in Germany:

1. **Lobby for legislation:** Review and strengthen existing equality laws to ensure comprehensive protection for all women, regardless of their religious background. Also adhere to the provisions on freedom of expression, such as Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" and that this right includes the freedom "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, teaching, observance or practice".
2. **Educational programmes:** Advocate for educational initiatives that promote cultural and religious diversity and increase understanding and respect among the general public. This can help to counteract stereotypes and prejudices against Muslim women. Also recommend providing religious rights training programmes for government officials and law enforcement officers to ensure that they properly understand and enforce religious freedom laws.
3. **Work with civil society:** Facilitate increased cooperation between the German government and civil society organisations advocating for women's rights. Support these organisations in their efforts to monitor and report on the situation to ensure a more transparent assessment of the situation of Muslim women in the country.
4. **Cultural awareness:** Propose the implementation of cultural awareness training programmes for law enforcement agencies, judicial authorities and public service providers. This can help reduce discriminatory practises and prejudices against Muslim women.
5. **Engage the media:** Encourage responsible media coverage that avoids perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices against Muslim women. Encourage positive portrayals and stories that emphasise the contribution of Muslim women to society.
6. **International co-operation:** Suggest promoting international co-operation on women's rights issues. This could include sharing best practises with other nations and dialogue that promotes a global understanding of the challenges faced by Muslim women.
7. **Promote a culture of religious respect:** Advocate for the organisation of support programmes aimed at promoting a culture of respect for different religions in society. This initiative can help to reduce religious discrimination and prejudice.
8. **Cooperation with religious organisations:** Encourage active cooperation with religious organisations and civil institutions to participate in implementing laws and addressing religious freedom issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we call on the Human Rights Council to take decisive action to protect the rights of Muslim women in Germany and to ensure their full participation in society and the protection of their fundamental human rights. Only through collective efforts can we build a world where diversity is celebrated and the rights of all people are respected.

These measures can help to strengthen social cohesion and promote a shared learning process to overcome the challenges and promote the rights of Muslim women in Germany. Furthermore, we call on the Human Rights Council to facilitate direct dialogue with local communities and organisations representing Muslim women in order to better understand their needs and concerns.

Raising awareness for the advancement of Muslim women in Germany is not only important to advocate for social justice, but also plays a crucial role in creating a vibrant, dynamic and diverse society. These important steps towards constructive change should be supported and monitored by the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Therefore, the Human Rights Council should continuously work with the domestic communities and organisations representing Muslim women to implement proactive and corrective measures to improve the status of Muslim women's rights. These measures will not only help to strengthen the rights of these women, but will also have a positive impact on strengthening human rights principles and gender equality in Germany and beyond.
