

Regards
de femmes



**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
(CEDAW/CEDEF)**

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**Alternative Report to French's
6th and 7th Periodical Reports**

Regards de Femmes

The NGO Regards de femmes works in France and around the world, in partnership with a very large number of women's rights associations, to ensure that all domains, both public and private, offer women and girls security, equality, recognition and respect for their dignity. Those areas of autonomy and freedom allow women to study, receive medical care, be tried in court, work and flourish, together with men and other women.

Equal rights and duties and dignity for women and men have not been entirely achieved in any country, in spite of the signing of various international Conventions and the norms these Conventions should entail.

It is time today for States to take action and make each and every one of these rights effective for all women at all times. France has a solid tradition in the field of universal rights.

We demand that France implement further its international commitments and bolster the application of its constitutional principles in reference to equal rights and duties and the dignity of women and men.

In order to achieve this, Regards de Femmes relies on:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 5 urges States parties to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural attitudes of men and women, with a view to eliminating prejudices and customary practices that are based on gender-based inequality and stereotypes
- The French Republic's Constitution asserts both the principle of equality between women and men and the principle of laicity, which means the distinction between political powers and institutions applying to everyone living within the territory of the French Republic, and the religious beliefs and rules concerning solely the members of any religion.

Fundamentalist and extremist groups' threats against equality between women and men

In France, as in all countries around the world, women's rights and dignity are increasingly being attacked in the name of tradition, custom or religious practices. It should be reiterated that freedom of conscience, a fundamental human right, is inextricably linked to the neutrality of States with regard to philosophical choices and personal beliefs. Both should remain in the intimate domain, since displaying or imposing them can insult the beliefs of others.

To live together with mutual respect, beyond differences, France has a powerful tool for universal emancipation and the gain of autonomy for each person and this tool is laicity, which is a force and a shield for women.

The norms deriving from laicity must allow for the opening of fields of possibilities for each woman, each girl and for access to their self-emancipation.

Under the French Republic, one and indivisible, no one may be reckoned exempt from the law common to all by invoking an affiliation to ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. All girls are entitled by law to the protection of the State, regardless of their parents' religious affiliation.

We require:

The application of the legal framework for girls and women of Muslim affiliation or confession and their protection under the Law common to all.

Many migrant women come to France in order to flee from fundamentalist and conservatism groups and to gain access to the rights of women in France. Others women are calling to stand with them as they take action for universal women's rights.

However, in France, for the last twenty years, religious worship and/or political associations have attempted to divert the principle of equality between women and men and the principle of laicity with the goal of maintaining the voluntary servitude of women, a submission first familial, then marital, under the pretense of tradition, custom, religion or cultural relativism.

These associations accustom girls, then women, to the non-respect of democratic laws in place, particularly laws enforcing equality between women and men. Thus, women and girls are indoctrinated to obey religious rules that proclaim the shame of their bodies and the inferior status of women.

These sectarian and fundamentalist extremists' goal is to impose their capacity to intimidate, if not govern, over all spaces and over minds. After promoting the veiling of women within public space, they pursue their advance against the principle of equality between women and men by giving visibility to little girls as standard bearers for their archaic and patriarchal vision. Thus is modified the perception of public space which is no longer a space of freedom for those who must hide under a cloistering clothing so that, even outside, they remain inside.

We demand the protection of women and girls in view of indoctrination by extremist groups that reject gender equality.

Small girls veiled: accustoming to submission to male domination

Indeed, small girls living on the territory of the French Republic are dressed up by their parents with islamist garments such as "*jilbabs*", which remove them, as early as the age of two, from the commonality of our society in its public space.

Any dress code¹ imposing a claimed modesty upon girls from a very young age, under religious or sectarian pretenses constitutes a marking of servitude and discrimination.

It is appropriate and time to reject such strategies aimed at taking control of a woman's body viewed first as the property of the father, then as that of the husband, something no religious pretext can ever justify in a democratic country whose public policies aim at equal rights between women and men.

Extending little girls' clothing to cover their hair, necks, arms, and even their faces, is to remove them from society, convince them that they do not have the same rights as boys. These alienating dress codes are a stigma for these very young girls forced to bear a guilt for being born of female gender. Thus, little girls are accustomed to feel responsible for sexual violence endured since their way of dressing is not supposed to conform to religious prescriptions dictated by followers of the most obscurantist islamic dogma.

Boys, meanwhile, are exonerated of any responsibility and groomed to perpetuate male domination, the male ownership of the bodies and minds of girls, later those of women.

Male monopoly of domination is thus perpetuated by sexual apartheid. Little girls have to hide when in the public space under the pretense that they could represent a temptation to male predators for whom violence against girls has never been formally prescribed.

¹ Resolution adopted 4 October 2005 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe exhorting all Member States to : "ensure that freedom of religion and respect for culture and tradition are not accepted as pretexts to justify violations of women rights, including when underage girls are forced to submit to religious codes (including dress codes)..." (resolution 1464 para 7.4)

We demand:

- **Measures taken in order to prevent the forced enrolment of children into this hierarchized vision of gender.**
- **The protection of populations facing these methods of intimidation from groups that do not respect the principles of equality in rights and duties and dignity for women and men.**
- **Efficient prosecution and systematic sanctions against such violence.**

Education

The educational code states that, **by means of moral and civic teaching especially, schools have pupils acquire respect for each person, for a person's origins and differences, for equality between women and men and for laicity.** This code devotes numerous articles to equality between girls and boys.

Academic missions for equality provide a range of actions to be taken towards pupils, boys and girls, in order to guarantee equal opportunity beyond gender stereotypes. These missions have also the vocation to raise the awareness of educational teams and to train them to the fact of invisible sexism in order to achieve together a shared watchfulness.

Tools such as "Basics for Equality" (ABC de l'égalité) have been successfully tested in 600 schools.

But this effort is not appreciated within the religious extremist currents from a number of confessions sharing the same patriarchal vision of social relations between girls and boys. These movements are promoting "Basics for Complementarity" (ABC de la complémentarité) that are unequal in nature, rehashing the most archaic modes of social relations between genders. They have banded together to spread rumors via social networks about the surmised contents of these "Basics for Equality" and demanded that parents withdraw their children from school. A few rare extremist families did just so. The Basics for Equality have been removed.

We demand:

- **Effective implementation of the educational code in all schools in France and for each pupil.**
- **The reasons for which government yielded to threats made by a few families and removed the "Basics for Equality"?**
- **Support from school hierarchy for teachers who warn of the rejection of mixed schooling or sports practice for girls.**
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Inheritance

The implementation since 17 August 2015 of European regulation on inheritance rights. This regulation points out that the law applicable to inheritance is the law of the deceased person's last place of residence. But in some countries, the rights of girls amount to half of the boy's share. Therefore, if retirees return and settle in their countries of origin, their female gender children will only receive the half of their brothers' share... even for estates located in France (*professio-juris* excepted).

We demand a government campaign to alert women and girls who may be concerned by this inequality and the measures that can be taken to avoid such spoliation.

Female genital mutilations

French law defines female circumcision as a form of female genital mutilation: The offence of “mutilation” is aggravated if carried out by persons with authority (parents); “genital” relates to sexual offences – when such offences are committed abroad by persons ordinarily residing in France, those persons shall be prosecuted upon their return to French territory.

This form of violence can be committed against female children and teenagers in France or when they go to their countries of origin.

We demand:

- **Improved training for Mother and Child Protection services to better inform families, protect girls, control their physical integrity and refer cases to judicial authorities.**
- **Training of school medical services, wherever they exist, to detect this abuse of children and adolescents and refer it to the court of Law.**
- **Knowledge of judicial steps concerning this matter: number of registered cases, ratios of engaged pursuits and ratios of penal responses, number of condemnations and quantum of sanctions handed down.**

Forced marriages

In France, young girls are subject to early marriage and pregnancy according to the customs of their countries of origin. Nevertheless, the age of consent for both girls and boys is 18 and civil marriage – the only form of marriage recognized by law – must precede any religious “marriage” ceremony. However, parents flout the law by organizing religious marriages for underage girls (sometimes aged under 15).

We demand:

- **Reinforced protection for victims of family violence related to forced marriages.**
- **Awareness training for school staff to recognize these situations and their effects.**

Public policies

We demand that all aid and public subsidy be subject to compliance with the respect of the Republic’s principles of gender equality.