



“Il n’est nullement question de faire gouverner la société par les femmes mais bien de savoir si elle ne serait pas mieux gouvernée par les hommes et par les femmes.”

John Stuart MILL

Une association pour
ré-agir au féminin

**REGARDS DE FEMMES COMPLEMENTARY REPORT
ON FRANCE'S REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

1- Introduction

Regards de Femmes, a 1901 law French association created in 1998, and an ECOSOC NGO with the United Nations ECOSOC since 2009, sets out its modes of action in its statutes as follows:

- To intercede at all levels, in particular to political, economic, associative, trade union, religious and philosophical leaders, to push for progress in the recognition of the rights of women and girls by all means consistent with the ethics of the association.
- To use every legal means, including before all courts, in application or in defense, and in particular as a civil party for its corporate purpose (articles 4, 3 and 4).

Regards de Femmes made legal recourse to the Committee on the Rights of the Child about the veiling of little girls by their parents, having called on the French public authorities to respect the best interests of the child, and his or her dignity, and not having received any response from them.

In 2016, *Regards de Femmes* flagged up this child abuse in an open letter to the Minister of Justice, Mr. Jean-Jacques Urvoas and to the Minister of Women's and Family Rights, Ms. Laurence Rossignol.

The petition, ‘Stop Child Abuse’ had over 15,000 signatories, including ministers and parliamentarians. It was handed over to the President of the French Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, on 7 December 2017.

These alerts to successive governments have gone unanswered; they are listed in the Appendix.

The indifference of French governments with regards to the abuse of young girls is all the more unacceptable given that their public policies seek equality between women and men.

2- Observed situation

On the territory of the French Republic, parents have been making their little girls wear Islamist clothing, such as jilbabs, which from the age of 2 sexualize their body, reducing them to the state of a sexual object to be concealed in public space as a source of disorder. (See the Appendix for a photo sales catalogue for jilbabs from two years old and photos and video links of veiled little girls, taken in the streets, in France.)

The veiling of little girls is a major risk for their cognitive and social development and their mental and physical health, as discussed in Part 3.

Moreover, protecting children from parental mistreatment is provided for in the French Republic's legislative arsenal.

All young girls have the right to state protection, regardless of their parents' religious affiliation. No one can break away from the common law by invoking their membership of an ethnic, linguistic or religious group. (France's reservation on article 3.2)

Little girls of Muslim descent have, like other girls, the right to the protection of the French Republic.

3- International Convention on the Rights of the Child

The veiling of girls violates the provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on November 20, 1989 and ratified by France on 7 August 1990.

3.1 This practice flouts its four fundamental principles:

3.1.1 Non-discrimination (Article 2)

The veiling of girls amounts to differential treatment between girls and boys within the family and in public spaces.

Using girls' clothing to cover their hair, necks, arms, or even their faces is to cut them off from society, to teach them that they do not have the same rights as boys. It is a matter of indoctrinating children into a hierarchical view of the sexes. It is unacceptable for girls to have to hide themselves in public space, on the pretext that they are a temptation for male predators who have not been forbidden to commit violence against girls.

3.1.2 The best interests of the child (Article 3)

It is, by contrast, the parents who raise girls to conform to the patriarchal role attributed to girls, and to adhere to strict religious prescriptions. Boys are conditioned to perpetuate masculine power, to assume masculine possession over the bodies and minds of girls, and later women. Children from an early age, both girls and boys, are consigned to ideological determinism.

3.1.3 The right to live, survive and develop (Article 6)

Cognitive and psycho-affective development is considerably threatened owing to a failure to be introduced to otherness. How is it possible to open up to the different other, that alone can enrich you? What relationships are prepared for? What culture of intolerance is promoted?

3.1.4 Respect for the views of the child (Article 12)

It is the parents who decide to veil their little girls to conform to their own representation of the gender roles assigned to girls and boys. To claim that the children are the ones who want to wear the veil (at least, those who are able to talk) is baseless. Imitation is a mechanism of identity building in children. Depending on the setting in which a girl lives, she may believe that it is an obligation, or a type of advancement, to reproduce the model given by her mother, or the women in her family circle.

Such family appropriation prepares the little girl for the voluntary servitude of marital appropriation, and **constitutes mistreatment by a person in authority.**

For the World Health Organization (WHO), child abuse refers to violence and neglect towards anyone under the age of 18.

It includes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment (...) resulting in real or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity, in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. (Articles 19 & 39).

3.2- It contravenes the health and well-being of the little girl

WHO defines health "as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not just the absence of disease or infirmity".

Veiling young girls compromises the three components of health, especially since it occurs at a crucial stage in physical, emotional, psychological, cognitive and relational development. (Article 6.2).

Indeed, childhood is a period of intense change that affects physical development and motor skills, the brain, cognition (memory, reasoning, understanding of the world, etc.), language and the ability to communicate, learning, emotions and their management, social relations, and health in general.

Early childhood veiling is a 'traditional' practice harmful to the health of the child (Article 24.3). It violates several rights of the child, including the right to receive treatment, to be protected from disease, protected from violence, abuse and from all forms of discrimination, the right to play and have leisure time, the right to freedom of information, expression and participation.

Wearing the veil is not an issue of a simple item of clothing like any other headgear, but constitutes a real choice for a whole way of life. It imposes a single way of existence, hierarchical social relations between the sexes, and a gendered 'apartheid'.

We can see the harmful impact of wearing the veil on:

3.2.1 - Mental health

The veil has the stated purpose of shielding women from male lust, or men from sexual temptation. It results in reducing the whole body of a girl to her anatomical sex alone, at an age when she cannot psychologically bear this excess of sexuality.

The veil is an indelible marker of the sexualization of the body. Yet, to fight against the hypersexualization of little girls, the French Republic has strictly prohibited mini-miss competitions for children under 13 years old. It subjects them to prefectural authorization for 13-16 year olds (4 August 2014 law for the 'real equality between women and men' and decree 2015-795 of 30 June 2015).

Why are little girls veiled by their parents not protected from hypersexualization like other little girls living in France?

Many psychiatrists, including Professor Saida Douki, who has chaired the Federation of Arab psychiatrists, have shown that the veil locks the girl into a 'double bind'. It adultifies them as a sexual being, making no difference between infantile and adult sexuality, and it infantilises them as a human being endowed with reason.

3.2.2 - Physical health

- Vitamin D deficiency has been observed among veiled women, owing to low daily sun exposure. The effects will be all the more severe and irreversible the earlier the barrier is put in place. The veiling of girls at this stage of their weight and height development puts them at a major risk of

growth retardation, reduced immunity, muscular hypotonia, and hypocalcemic convulsions. Bone demineralization puts them at risk of fractures. (Article 24)

- Hair loss. If hair is fixed in place and asphyxiated for hours, it ends up weakening and falling out. Hair is not simply a matter of ornamentation; it has vital protective functions from external stresses, and helps to regulate the scalp's temperature.

3.2.3 - Mental and social well-being

How do we extend the opportunities available to young girls if the veil means restrictions on:

- freedom of movement, hampering the exploratory activities necessary to discover the world,
- natural curiosity, as necessary for intellectual development,
- sporting and recreational activities (article 31),
- human contact.

The veil is an absolute obstacle to relational development. From the outset, it excludes the male half of humanity, and likewise, non-Muslims or Muslims who do not wear it. Very early on, it locks the child into a closed world.

The fully veil restricts the will and potential for development in the little girl, all claims to be equal to her brothers.

If a woman is deprived of social nourishment, given the role of a sexual object, living her life on the margins of society, what place can she take up in society, if she has had her faith in herself and in others, and any social skills, amputated during her childhood?

The veiling of little girls promotes a true culture of confinement. And it brings about a split society in which women are made into shadows rather than subjects. An undemocratic society.

On 31 January 2013, the Tunisian Association for the Rights of the Child denounced the veiling of little girls as "a crime against children".

4- Recommendation

We call for girls of Muslim decent to benefit, like all other young girls and boys living in France, from the protection of Article 375 of the Civil Code which states:

"If the health, safety or morals of an unemancipated minor are in danger, or if the conditions of their education or of their physical, emotional, intellectual and social development are seriously compromised, measures of educational assistance may be ordered by justice at the request of the father and mother jointly, or one of them, the person or service to which the child has been entrusted or the guardian, the minor themselves or the public prosecutor. In cases where the public prosecutor has been notified by the president of the departmental council, he ensures that the minor's situation falls within the scope of article L. 226-4 of the social action code and families. In exceptional cases, the judge can act on their own motion."