



**PRESS RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

**Face-coverings must be banned during citizenship swearing-in ceremonies**

Montreal, February 26<sup>th</sup> 2015 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, expresses its agreement with the recent decision of the federal government to appeal the ruling of the Federal Court which removed the ban on face-covering during swearing-in ceremonies for Canadian citizenship.

It is unacceptable to display a religious or political symbol in a manner so ostentatious that it acquires more significance than the ceremony itself whose purpose is a formal welcome by one's adopted nation. Furthermore, even in the absence of any symbolism whatsoever, clothing which masks the face is incompatible with the occasion. Indeed, it is inappropriate even if there are no security concerns, i.e. even if the identity of the person is guaranteed by some means other than facial recognition.

The Islamist veil is one of the flags of a politico-religious fascist movement, i.e. Islamofascism, which promotes gender apartheid. The wearing of a full veil such as the niqab or the burqa implies a rejection of the country's values and a refusal to integrate into the host society. Consequently, the person who wears it does not deserve citizenship. Furthermore, even if the ideology underlying this religious symbol were harmless, wearing it during the ceremony would still be inappropriate because incompatible with the necessary separation between religion and state.

To permit, for religious motives, the wearing of clothing which hides the face during a citizenship ceremony constitutes an unacceptable religious accommodation. Such arrangements are anything but reasonable because they are based neither on reason nor on any real need.

This ban which the government is attempting to restore would in no way threaten the freedom of religion of new citizens because it would not prevent them from practicing their religion outside the ceremony. However, the absence of the ban is a violation of the freedom of conscience of the other new citizens in attendance because it forces them to participate in a ceremony which thus acquires the character of a religious event, something which has no place in state institutions.

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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

David Rand

Jaque Parisien

bulletin at atheology.ca

jaque.parisien at gmail.com

Web site: [www.atheology.ca](http://www.atheology.ca)