



Rassemblement pour la laïcité (Alliance for Secularism)
Veiled Teacher at Western Quebec School Board
RPL Denounces Political & Media Exploitation

December 12th, 2021 — The *Rassemblement pour la laïcité* (RPL) denounces the media and political exploitation of the announcement of the job transfer of Ms. Fatemeh Anvari, teacher at the English-speaking Chelsea elementary school of the Western Quebec School Board (WQSB), for non-compliance with Quebec’s State secularism law (Bill 21). We do not doubt Ms. Anvari’s competence nor that she was appreciated by her students. However, having been hired by the School Board after Bill 21 was passed into law, she was fully aware of her duty of religious neutrality and the School Board knew full well that her hiring was illegal.

“The State secularism law was adopted democratically and is applicable throughout the entire territory of Quebec. Applied in schools, it protects children’s freedom of conscience by imposing on teachers a duty of religious neutrality, both in fact and in appearance. In the same way that teachers have a duty of discretion and may not display their political preferences by wearing badges or buttons, they must not display their religious preferences by wearing religious symbols on the job. That is the law. Ms. Anvari had a choice between obeying the law and wearing an overt religious symbol while on duty. She chose to display her religious beliefs. As a result, she herself chose to exclude herself from the teaching profession,” declared Mr. Claude Kamal Codsì, president of the *Rassemblement pour la laïcité*.

The State has a duty of religious neutrality in its relationship with its citizens. Respecting this duty is all the more important in schools when dealing with young children. School should be the place where we transmit knowledge and common civic values, such as equality between women and men, free from any religious pressure.

“It is distressing that some politicians and columnists continue to confuse people by describing the hijab as a mere ‘headscarf’ or even a symbol of freedom. They ignore the fact that wearing the hijab is a religious practice associated with a religious movement that fiercely opposes any form of freedom for women, as we see in countries that practice totalitarian Islam, such as Iran or Afghanistan for example. They also ignore the fact that many citizens from Muslim countries ask only to integrate into our society and send their children to schools free from religious influence. Such Muslims, who have often left their countries in order to flee religious indoctrination, are held hostage by a minority in the host country which opposes the values of secularism and equality,” declared Nadia El-Mabrouk, board member of the RPL.

“Symbols broadcast messages and meanings and Ms. Fatemeh Anvari knows this very well. The secular school is no place for the transmission of religious messages, whether through teaching or religious display. Rather, it is a place where respect for children’s freedom of conscience takes precedence,” concludes M. Codsì.

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