

France to ban pupils' religious dress

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Pre-reading: Key Vocabulary

Match the words with their meanings

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. secular | a. very easy to see; obvious |
| 2. headscarf | b. a set of basic laws for a country that describe the rights and duties of its citizens |
| 3. commission | c. a part of a law that officially states that something must be done |
| 4. conspicuous | d. not religious; not connected with religion |
| 5. clause | e. to refuse to accept something |
| 6. neutral | f. an item of clothing worn by women or girls |
| 7. reject (verb) | g. not supporting either side in a war, disagreement or argument |
| 8. constitution | h. an official group of people who prepare a report on something |

2 What do you know?

Which of the following words from the text do you associate with the Muslim religion, which with the Christian religion and which with the Jewish religion?

1. headscarves
2. Yom Kippur
3. crosses
4. skullcaps
5. Eid

Now read the text.

France to ban pupils' religious dress

Level 2 | Intermediate

France to ban pupils' religious dress

Jon Henley in Paris

It seems probable that people will not be allowed to wear Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols in French schools and other public buildings after a special commission published its report last week. The commission told the French government that new laws were needed in order to protect the secular nature of the French state. The group, appointed by President Jacques Chirac and led by the national ombudsman, Bernard Stasi, recommended that all "conspicuous" signs of religious belief - including Jewish skullcaps, large Christian crosses and Islamic headscarves - should be forbidden in state schools.

The report also recommended that the laws should include a clause requiring that all public service employees "should be strictly neutral". According to some reports, some Muslim women had demanded that their husbands should be with them at all times in hospital and would accept only female doctors. The report said the new laws must remind all health service users that "it is forbidden to reject a healthcare

worker, and that everyone must respect the rules of hygiene".

In a gesture of respect to "all spiritual options", the report said the Jewish and Muslim holy days of Yom Kippur and Eid should be made official school holidays, and companies should think about ways of allowing their employees to have a day off on the religious holiday of their choice.

Mr Chirac said that he was in favour of a law protecting France's secular republic, "I will be guided by respect for republican principles and the demands of national unity and the solidarity of the French people", he said.

People in multicultural societies like Britain or the USA might think that it was strange, or even absurd, to introduce a law to protect secularism, especially as its main aim seems to be to deal with the increasing number of Muslim girls wanting to wear headscarves at school. In France, however, secularism is guaranteed by the constitution and, in the eyes of the republic, everyone is supposed to be

equally French whatever their religion or ethnic origin.

Mr Stasi said the aim of the proposed law was to preserve constitutional secularism and to oppose "forces trying to destabilise the republic", in other words Islamic fundamentalism. But he also said that the law was not directed at the mainly moderate Muslim community of 5 million. "Muslims must understand that secularism is a chance for Islam", Mr Stasi said. "Secularism is the separation of church and state, but it is also the respect of differences".

The main teachers' union, the SNES, said that the proposals did not do enough to encourage secularism in schools.

The Guardian Weekly 20-12-03, page 4

France to ban pupils' religious dress

Level 2 | Intermediate

3 Comprehension Check

Match the beginnings with the endings.

1. The commission has recommended a new law ...
 2. The new law will forbid ...
 3. The report also recommended that ...
 4. The main teachers' union ...
 5. Yom Kippur and Eid ...
 6. President Chirac ...
 7. The idea of a special law to protect secularism ...
 8. According to Mr Stasi, ...
-
- a. ... was not particularly happy with the report.
 - b. ... might seem strange to people in multicultural societies.
 - c. ... might become official school holidays.
 - d. ... to protect secularism in France.
 - e. ... all public service employees should be strictly neutral.
 - f. ... fundamentalists were trying to destabilise the republic.
 - g. ... is in favour of a law that will protect secularism in France.
 - h. ... the wearing of headscarves and other religious symbols in schools.

France to ban pupils' religious dress

Level 2 | Intermediate

4 Vocabulary

Fill the gaps using words from the text.

1. An _____ is a person who deals with complaints about public organisations.
2. If something is _____ it is completely stupid.
3. _____ is the belief that original religious laws should be followed very strictly.
4. A _____ is something done to communicate good intentions.
5. _____ is the practice of keeping things clean in order to prevent diseases.
6. A _____ society is one where people of many different cultures live together.

5 Vocabulary: Word Building

Complete the table

Verb	Noun
1. protect	_____
2. recommend	_____
3. propose	_____
4. separate	_____
5. oppose	_____
6. appoint	_____
7. accept	_____
8. introduce	_____

6 Discussion

Do you think that people should be free to wear whatever they want to school?
Do you agree with the wearing of religious symbols?

France to ban pupils' religious dress

Level 2 | Intermediate

Key

1 Key Vocabulary

1. d; 2. f; 3. h; 4. a; 5. c; 6. g;
7. e; 8. b

2 What do you know?

1. Muslim
2. Jewish
3. Christian
4. Jewish
5. Muslim

3 Comprehension Check

1. d; 2. h; 3. e; 4. a; 5. c; 6. g;
7. b; 8. f

4 Vocabulary

1. ombudsman
2. absurd
3. fundamentalism
4. gesture
5. hygiene
6. multicultural

5 Word-Building

1. protection
2. recommendation
3. proposal
4. separation
5. opposition
6. appointment
7. acceptance
8. introduction