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PRESS STATEMENT

India: Stop infecting college campuses with the communal poison

Monday 14 February 2022, by [IMSD](#) (Date first published: 11 February 2022).

Presentation

More than 150 secular human rights activists strongly condemn the attempt by Hindutva forces and the BJP government of Karnataka to engulf college and school campuses in the already raging communal fire in the state.

At the same time, IMSD disagrees with the claim of the agitating Muslim girls that their demand is in conformity with their Constitution-protected fundamental right to freedom of religion. While this may be the belief of the orthodox and patriarchal clerics, any number of modern-day Islamic scholars, men and women, rightly maintain that hijab has nothing to do with the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet. The veil, in other words, is not mandatory in Islam.

The signatories include leading progressive secularists from across the country, namely, Javed Anand, Prof. Zeenat Shaukat Ali, Shabnam Hashmi, Teesta Setalvad, Prof. Ram Puniyani, Feroze Mithiborwala, Kavita Srivastava, Varsha Vidya Vilas, Shama Zaidi, Javed Naqvi, Firoz Abbas Khan, Fr. Cedric Prakash, Lara Jesani, Prof. Nasreen Fazalbhoy, Ammu Abraham, Anjali Monteiro, Annie Namala, Anuradha Kapoor, Aruna Gnanadason, Prof. Brinelle D'souza, Navdeep Mathur, Adv. Niloufer Bhagwat, Persis Ginwala, Vidya Dinkar amongst others.

For the full statement & list of signatories, kindly refer to the attachments as below.

Stop infecting college campuses with the communal poison

Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy (IMSD) strongly condemns the attempt by Hindutva forces and the BJP government of Karnataka to engulf college and school campuses in the already raging communal fire in the state.

The issue of whether Muslim girls should or should not be permitted to wear hijabs in those pre-university colleges where a uniform dress code is in place is something to be sorted out between the agitating Muslim girls and the managements of the concerned colleges. But virtually overnight the dispute has been converted into a Hindu vs Muslim conflict by the saffron scarves-clad pro-Hindutva boys taking to the streets. College campuses have thus been transformed into yet another playing field for the BJP and other right-wing Hindu majoritarians.

IMSD accepts the principle of uniforms for schools/pre-university colleges so long as they are religion-neutral and non-discriminatory. We strongly suspect, however, that the unilateral and

abrupt decision of some pre-university colleges to bar entry in the classrooms of hijab wearing Muslim girls is not inspired by lofty principles but a capitulation to divisive politics.

At the same time, IMSD disagrees with the claim of the agitating Muslim girls that their demand is in conformity with their Constitution-protected fundamental right to freedom of religion. While this may be the belief of the orthodox and patriarchal clerics, any number of modern-day Islamic scholars, men and women, rightly maintain that hijab has nothing to do with the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet. The veil, in other words, is not mandatory in Islam.

All that the Quran asks of both Muslim women and men is that they dress “modestly” and “decently”. Beyond that the Quran does not specify a particular dress code. The mode of dress of men and women in different countries and cultures is different. So long as they are “modest and decent” Muslims are free to adopt any style of dress.

It is noteworthy that the winds of change have been blowing across the Muslim world in recent decades. Even the otherwise highly controversial crown prince Mohammad Bin Salman of the erstwhile ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia has publicly pronounced, with the support of senior Saudi clerics, that women in his country need not wear head-cover (hijab) or the black full-body abaya so long as their attire is “decent and respectful”.

IMSD respects women’s right to choose how they dress. But this choice cannot be counter-posed to the right of school managements to prescribe a religion-neutral, non-discriminatory uniform in their campuses. Besides, we are not unaware of the obscurantists among Muslims imposing the hijab on 5-year-old girls.

IMSD calls upon all sections of Indian society to stand with the secular and progressive principles enshrined in our Constitution and strive to maintain peace and harmony in our campuses and society at large.

Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy - IMSD

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P.S.

• Sabrang India. 12 Feb 2022:

<https://sabrangindia.in/article/stop-infecting-college-campus-communal-poison-indian-muslims-secular-democracy-imsd>