

Charter of Quebec Values: Daycares risk losing Muslim educators, group warns ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

During the one year that Karima Al-Ouatiq has worked at a daycare in the St-Laurent borough, not one parent has complained about the fact that she wears a hijab.

But if the Quebec government has its way, Al-Ouatiq and three of her fellow daycare workers may have to choose between removing their hijabs or quitting their jobs.

"The fact that I wear a hijab is irrelevant," Al-Ouatiq said on Tuesday. "No one should be able to tell me not to wear one, the same way we don't tell people not to wear pants or T-shirts."

The Quebec government released details of its controversial charter of values on Tuesday. If the charter is adopted by the National Assembly, it will ban government employees from wearing religious symbols in daycares, secondary schools and other educational institutions.

Al-Ouatiq said the daycare where she works is multicultural, and many Muslim parents are happy that some of the educators wear hijabs.

"You can't tell a Muslim woman wearing a hijab that she can't work with children," she insisted.

She said she expects the Muslim community to protest against the government's plan.

"The Muslim community and the Arab community will do something," she said. "They won't just sit on their hands."

Al-Ouatiq said she believes Quebec's proposed restrictions on religious symbols are part of a "wave that is coming from Europe."

"Pauline Marois wants to be the hero," she said.

Government policies that divide people into different camps are not productive, she said.

"If it continues like this, we are going to have clans, those who wear hijabs and those who don't," she said.

If the Charter of Quebec Values is adopted, it will lead to the loss of Muslim daycare workers in Montreal, the North Shore and South Shore, said Marie-Claude Plante, coordinator of the Association des garderies privées du Québec, which represents about 325 daycares across Quebec.

"We have seen reports in the media where educators have said they will choose the veil," she said. "We will lose some of them. They are good educators."

The president of one of Quebec's largest unions said he agrees with the idea of Quebec being neutral.

However, he said the province is sending a funny signal to its cultural communities by proposing restrictions on religious symbols, while at the same time refusing to take the crucifix out of the National Assembly.

"We think they should take the crucifix and put it in a museum," said Jacques Letourneau, president of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, which represents teachers in CEGEPs and universities, daycare workers and government employees.

"However, we feel that affirming the state's neutrality doesn't mean that everyone hired by the state can't show their allegiance to their religion."

Letourneau said the CSN will consult with its members before taking an official position on the charter.

The proposed restrictions will also affect teachers working in high schools across the province.

Catherine Renaud, president of the l'Alliance des professeures et professeurs de Montréal, which represents teachers in the Commission scolaire de Montréal, said she wasn't sure how many teachers in the board wear hijabs.

The union hasn't received any calls from Muslim teachers who are worried about losing their jobs, she said.

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