

# Islamists are 'weaponising' claims of Islamophobia to shut down debate on hijabs, report finds

From the [Telegraph](#)

Islamists are "weaponising" claims of Islamophobia to [shut down debate](#) on head scarves and veils, a think tank has found.

A new report by Policy Exchange suggests that freedom and debate to discuss Islamic head scarves and face coverings is being denied by Islamic extremists.

The comments were made in a report by Sir John Jenkins, who spent 35 years in the British Diplomatic Service and was a former Ambassador to Burma, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia, as well as HM Consul-General in Jerusalem and Special Representative to the National Transitional Council. Until his departure from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office he was the government's senior diplomatic Arabist.

Referring to debate surrounding the historical, patriarchal and ideological elements of religious clothing, particularly hijabs and niqabs, he suggested that: "And it is this freedom that Islamists, now using weaponised claims of Islamophobia, too often seek to deny. . . So what is actually at stake, as public expectations of the acceptable and the tolerable are step by step narrowed down, is the functioning of the liberal order that we take for granted. Even so, the primary question is not whether or not to prohibit the veil. It is about whether or not to debate its use, meaning and purpose. . . "

The report, entitled *The Symbolic Power of the Veil*, comes just days after Iran's parliament passed a controversial bill

that would increase prison terms – to up to 10 years – and fines for women and girls who break its strict dress code and dress “inappropriately”. The move comes a year after protests erupted over the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, who was held by morality police for her allegedly improper hijab.

Sir John, a senior fellow at Policy Exchange, concluded: “One thing is clear: attempts to close down debate on such matters because of confected outrage about perfectly reasonable – if sometimes clumsily expressed – expressions of opinion need to be resisted at all costs. The women of Iran at least should teach us that.”

The report also recommends the Government should provide clearer guidance to schools regarding dress codes and religious attire, and provide examples.

Under such guidance, the think tank says, schools may accommodate religious headwear such as the hijab, but they should not require it as part of the uniform.

According to the report, the Government should also resist any [definition of Islamophobia](#) that restricts criticism of religious practices, including the dress code. The report also recommends that the Government should avoid endorsing or promoting specific religious attire. It singles out the Foreign Office for celebrating World Hijab Day in 2018, with hijabs being distributed among civil servants.

The key findings and recommendations in the report are backed by Labour MP Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr), who said: “A certain proportion of Muslim women may wish to wear a hijab or a niqab to publicly demonstrate their Muslim identity. But the wearing of the hijab clearly does not represent all Muslim women . . .”

Zara Mohammed, the Secretary General from the Muslim Council of Britain, said: “The latest report by the Policy Exchange, is deeply troubling given how it appears to misrepresent the

diversity of Muslim women's experiences and choices regarding the hijab. This approach risks contributing to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of Muslim women and regulating what they wear.

"The irony is stark: Khalid Mahmood, a man, presumptuously makes sweeping generalisations about Muslim women's clothing, an area where he lacks expertise, inadvertently perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes that we should actively challenge.

"This report seems to be yet another instance of dog-whistle Islamophobia by Policy Exchange, encroaching on the fundamental religious freedoms of Muslims and dangerously steering us toward a slippery slope reminiscent of France's controversial approach policing what Muslim women wear." *Well, her mahram would want her saying that...*



*This comes at an apposite time after the first pictures are released of a monumental sculpture called *The Strength of the Hijab*, by useful idiot Luke Perry, which is due to be installed (I won't say 'unveiled' as she is very veiled) in the Smethwick district of Birmingham next month. According to the [Independent](#)*

It is believed to be the first sculpture in the world of a woman wearing the head covering, worn by many Muslim women. *The hijab arches proposed for Brick Lane in London in 2010/12 were [never erected](#), although the other structure of that project, the "tower that isn't a minaret, but just looks like one" is still in place outside the [Brick Lane Mosque](#).* The sculpture is five metres tall and weighs around a tonne. (*Or less than a ton, in old money*)

Mr Perry said: "The Strength of the Hijab is a piece which represents women who wear hijabs of the Islamic faith, and it's really there because it's such an underrepresented part of our community, but such an important one. They need

visibility, it's so important, so working with the community to come up with the designs has been really exciting because we didn't know what it was going to look like until now... *A great definition of an oxymoron; veiled, shrouded and covered women need to be seen? Actually they do, but not under a shroud.*

Mr Perry acknowledged the new sculpture could be "controversial", he said it was important to represent everyone who lived in the UK. "I think people are really impressed by the size, certainly, but the level of detail, I think has surprised people too, and that's really satisfying."

The sculpture, commissioned by the Legacy West Midlands charity, is made of steel which will be galvanised before its completion. *Photographs [here](#)*

*No number of pretty henna patterns and symbols of Pakistan, Bangladesh and women's work in the home can disguise that she looks grim and downcast.*

*George Orwell said "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face- forever."*

*You could say, If you want a picture of women in the future imagine either a non-man trying to give birth, or a being moving under a prison of cloth."*