

## World Hijab Day Promotes a Symbol of Sex Inequality, Not Women's Rights

Women's Declaration International UK (WDI UK) oppose the promotion of World Hijab Day, arguing that celebrating religious clothing imposed exclusively on women and girls contradicts international standards on women's human rights.

Women must always be free to dress as they choose. However, WDI UK does not support the celebration of dress codes that apply only to women, with no equivalent requirements for men. Practices that dictate how women should behave, appear, or cover their bodies are rooted in sex discrimination and reinforce unequal power relations between women and men.

Under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), states are required to eliminate customs and practices based on stereotyped roles for women and men, and to modify social and cultural patterns that position women as subordinate or responsible for male behaviour. Female-only religious dress codes directly conflict with these obligations.

In many countries, the hijab is not optional. It is enforced through law, social coercion, and violence, with women and girls punished for non-compliance. Even where not legally mandated, many women face intense family and community pressure, often from childhood. These realities cannot be separated from the symbolism of the garment itself.

A symbol that is used globally to regulate women's bodies, restrict their freedom, and mark them as morally responsible for male conduct cannot be credibly reframed as empowerment. Equality cannot exist where modesty, obedience, and invisibility are demanded of women alone.

WDI UK stands in solidarity with women and girls in Iran, Afghanistan, and all countries where fundamentalist, coercive, and patriarchal religious systems control women's lives and bodies.

In Iran, women face arrest, assault, and imprisonment for refusing compulsory veiling; in Afghanistan, women are erased from public life entirely, barred from education, work, and free movement under the Taliban's sex apartheid.

These conditions are not anomalies but part of a global and historical pattern in which women have been subordinated through religion-based laws and customs, from compulsory veiling and segregation in parts of the Middle East and South Asia, to enforced modesty codes, marital obedience, and sexual control justified by religion across cultures and eras.

Women worldwide have resisted these systems, from Iranian women burning hijabs in protest, to Afghan women defying bans on education, to earlier feminist struggles against religiously enforced dress, silence, and submission in Europe, the Americas, and beyond. WDI UK affirms that no belief system, religious or cultural, can justify the denial of women's autonomy, equality, or freedom, and that women everywhere have the right to live free from coercion, punishment,

and patriarchal control imposed in the name of faith. Women's rights require the freedom to believe, to dissent, and to reject sexist norms without fear or punishment.

Celebrating women's subordination under the banner of choice undermines the very principles of equality and dignity that women's rights movements exist to defend.