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### **Musab Abu-Thuraia and Chiheb Battikh oppose Soccer Federation's decision to comply with FIFA's rules forbidding hijab and the display of other political and religious messages**

Original address: <http://montreal.ctvnews.ca/soccer-referee-refused-right-to-wear-hijab-a-second-time-1.659581>

Date: June 20, 2011

#### **Original title: Soccer referee refused right to wear a hijab a second time**

Lac St. Louis Soccer Association referee Sarah Benkiran was denied Monday in her effort to referee for the soccer league while wearing a hijab, which is an Islamic headdress. The Quebec Soccer Federation re-affirmed its stance that it will strictly follow the rules set forth by the world's governing body FIFA, which forbids wearing anything of a religious nature on the pitch.

"It's clearly said," said federation president Dino Madonis at a press conference Monday. "A player and officials shall not display political, religious or personal or commercial messages or slogans of any language."

In the past, Muslim girls were told it was a safety concern, but that appears to no longer be the case.

Benkiran says taking off her hijab is a non-starter.

"For me it's not really an option to take it off," she explained to CTV Sunday. "It's part of my religion. It's part of who I am. It's the way I express myself, so I think I should be allowed to wear it as long as I'm not causing any harm to anybody else and I'm not."

Benkiran isn't the only who has had to walk away from the field because of her hijab. It's one of the reasons why **Musab Abu-Thuraia** created a Muslim league where girls are free to play with their head-scarves.

He's disappointed that it has to be this way.

"We are Canadians, we pay our taxes, we live here, this is home for us," he said. "So for us to not be able to play with the city soccer leagues and not feel welcomed is certainly saddening." Another player in Lac St. Louis also had to put his religious beliefs aside recently, because he was told his Sikh turban gave him an unfair competitive advantage on headers.

"They shouldn't have these kinds of rules over here, the FIFA rules, because there are a lot of cultures in Montreal," Sagerpreet Singh, 14, told CTV Montreal's Camille Ross.

The Muslim Association of Canada says the ruling is a dangerous precedent, perhaps opening the door to further restrictions on religious freedom.

"What's the next step?" asks the association's **Chiheb Battikh**. "In the educational institutions, no political and religious expressions (or) signs, so hijabs would be banned in schools. That's the next step. That's happening in some countries like France."

The Quebec Soccer federation says it would request a change in the rule from FIFA if there were a huge demand for hijabs on the field, but there isn't.

"Personally, I don't see why they should change," Madonis said. "But if there is a change, we're going to apply it."

In the meantime, the only way Benkiran will get back on the field is if she leaves her hijab at home.

## Soccer referee refused right to wear hijab a second time

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### PHOTOS



Sarah Benkiran has been barred from refereeing while wearing her hijab.

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