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Jewish groups back Muslims on minaret ban

By **MATTHEW WAGNER AND HERB KEINON**


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Citing [religious discrimination](#), a diverse coalition of Jewish organizations is objecting to Switzerland's ban of minarets on local mosques.

Swiss voters this week approved by a strong majority a referendum outlawing the construction of minarets. The measure, pushed by the right-wing [Swiss People's Party](#) (SVP), was supported by 57 percent of the population.

However, Jewish organizations, realizing that a crackdown on Islam could have repercussions for Jews as well, have come to the defense of Muslim worshippers, arguing that the Swiss's move was unjustifiable.

Rabbi Pinchas Dunner, executive director of the Conference of European Rabbis, an Orthodox [organization](#), said "a war on religious freedom cannot defeat Islamic extremists. The best weapon against radical Islam is support for moderate elements in the Muslim community and promoting interfaith dialogue."

In contrast, the Anti-Defamation League tied the move to religious discrimination against Jews.

"This is not the first time a Swiss popular vote has been used to promote religious intolerance," said the ADL in a press release. "A century ago, a Swiss referendum banned Jewish ritual slaughter, in an attempt to drive out its Jewish population."

Noting that the "Swiss government opposed the initiative during the campaign and underscored its commitment to religious freedom in a statement after the vote," the ADL urged Swiss leaders to "be vigilant" in their



A model of a minaret, burning candles and a banner that reads "This is not my Switzerland" are seen on the Bundesplatz square in front of the governments building in Bern, Switzerland, to protest the acceptance of a minaret ban initiative on Sunday. Photo: AP

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"defense of religious freedom, even though the SVP is the largest party in the Swiss Parliament and has two of the seven government ministries."

The American Jewish Committee's David Harris echoed these statements. "The referendum result amounts to an attack on the fundamental values of mutual respect," he said.

"While there are certainly understandable concerns in Europe over Islamist extremism, these cannot be legitimately addressed through a blanket assault on Muslim communities and their religious symbols," he added.

Meanwhile, it appeared that Italy might hold an anti-minaret referendum of its own.

Roberto Caldeoli, leader of Italy's right-wing Northern League party, said, "Respect for other religions is important, but we must put the brakes on Muslim propaganda, or else we will end up with an Islamic political party."

French Ambassador Christophe Bigot told *The Jerusalem Post* that "Muslims, like Catholics, like Jews, should be allowed to worship the way they wish. So why limit construction of mosques?"

"What is important in Europe is to work for moderate Islam, for an Islam that is based on education, openness and freedom. The decision of the Swiss state will be to limit the activities of the worshippers.

"I don't think this is very helpful. This promotes the idea that we have a problem with Muslims. We don't have problem with Muslims. We have problem with Islamists, and Islamists and Muslims are two radical differences. And this kind of decision blurs the lines."

Asked if France's ban on the burka was not the same, Bigot answered, "A minaret is part of the mosque, and the Muslims go to the mosque if they are religious. A very small percentage of women wear the burka. And here we are talking about a very, very isolated minority among Muslims."

Asked if the burka ban was an infringement of religious freedom, Bigot replied that "religious freedom has to be combined with the duties of every citizen, and among the duties of every citizen - this is the French perception - there is kind of a minimum agreement of shared values, and among them is that every woman has the same rights as every man.

"And, as we know, the burka most times is imposed on women by men. So just from this perspective we don't think burka is appropriate. This is not a free act, it is an imposed situation placed on them."

Asked if the minaret ban could spread to other European countries, Bigot said that "the issue is different in France. The discussion we have is how do you finance the construction of mosques, and how do you create a national Islam.

"How much are we able to curb the influence of foreign countries on Islam in France. This we think is a valid debate, because we want a French Islam; we don't want an Islam that is importing values from parts of the world completely disconnected from European values."

Hegumen Filaret (Bulekov), a Moscow Patriarchate representative at the Council of Europe, voiced support for Switzerland's ban.

"Accusing Switzerland that it is somehow discriminating against the Islamic minority would be at least lopsided," Filaret told Interfax new service.

"The issue of minarets is not an issue of religious freedom, but it is an issue of political presence of people of a certain faith and ethnic background in a country. Taking into account a rapid rate of Islamization, visible signs of Muslims' presence would have, in particular, a political tint," he said.

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200. JEWISH GROUPS BACK MUSLIMS ON MINARET BAN chris simpson - Australia (12/05/2009 09:38)
199. bart 72 - the people of switzerland don't want islamic minarets. how many islamic countries are there? if they love islam and sharia law maryjane - california (12/05/2009 09:21)
198. 156 - other bob - right thing to do for who - a good deed? that depends on whose viewpoint. therein lies the problem maryjane - california (12/05/2009 09:01)
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196. With all due respect Rabbi Dunner,the moderate Muslims nowadays... Jonah - (12/05/2009 07:58)
195. Re #162 Mr.NARick - USA jonah - (12/05/2009 08:23)
194. #185 stop repeating like a parrot stop repeating like a parrot - (12/05/2009 08:10)
193. Re #184 "IRAN #1" Agree with you... jonah - (12/05/2009 08:10)
192. I am another Hebrew who thinks it is wrong for Muslims to be so intolerant (no other religions or conversions in many muslim/arab countries) and to jae - usa (12/05/2009 07:43)
191. tell the Jewish groups to take a hike! Mark - (12/05/2009 07:39)
190. Liberalism is intolerant for any morality outside of its own. Liberalism rejects the inherent sanctity of life, giving importance to how you feel Asher - usa (12/05/2009 07:36)
189. This is what happens to confused far left "liberal (whatever that subjectively means)) Jews, void of identity and often KNOWLEDGE of Judaism

jae - usa (12/05/2009 07:28)

188. 155 Youre right. In Islams case most muslims ancestors were forced to convert to Islam. Youre right you didnt get to choose.

jae - usa (12/05/2009 07:23)

187. Islam = conquest of the world, subservience to 1 pedophile terrorist; Judaism= conquest of mans humanity. BIG DIFFERENCE

jae - usa (12/05/2009 07:20)

186. 1.57 Billion Muslims. Let them find their own wise men, lawyers, statesmen, al-Jewsneera, the Pope even for support.

Arthur Rosen - Canada (12/05/2009 07:19)

185. First they came for the communists,

Anonymous - USA (12/05/2009 07:10)

184. Indeed some jews are idiots

IRAN#1 - (12/05/2009 06:31)

183. minarets

brahm - (12/05/2009 06:21)

182. What ? You cant say No to a Muslim?

RedHogg - (12/05/2009 06:06)

181. Foolish Action

Richard - USA (12/05/2009 05:53)

180. Jews back Muslims on minaret etc.

GJ Tryon - Canada (12/05/2009 05:30)

179. # "123. Name one such Islamic country" Maldives

Ben - Australia (12/05/2009 04:46)

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