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Banning the burqa [1]

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Under David Cameron?s leadership the Conservative party has taken great pains to rebrand itself as a multicultural, more socially liberal party. However, there will always be individuals that will let this front down, and most recently this has been done through the comments of Philip Hollobone, MP for Kettering.

According [3] to The Telegraph, Hollobone used a Commons debate on International Women?s day to state: "I seriously think that a ban on wearing the burqa in public should be considered." He reveals he realized ?how inappropriate and, frankly, offensive, it is for people to wear this apparel in the 21st century", when he stumbled across a burqa?d woman in a park. For a start, the context for this ?revelation? seems to suggest how little exposure Mr Hollobone has to Britain?s veiled Muslim population, making one wonder how informed his judgment of the burqa can be. However, it is his suggestion that the burqa should be banned because he, and others, find it offensive that is his mistake.

Freedom of expression and freedom of worship help form the bedrock of a free, open and tolerant society. For Hollobone to say, therefore, that the burqa ?goes against the British way of life? is at best absurd, and at worst rather worrying.

By choosing International Women?s Day to highlight his opposition to the more restrictive forms of Islam, Hollobone may have believed he was championing women?s rights. However, his ill-thought plan to ban the burqa would cause more harm than good, by attacking a visible symptom of an illiberal movement and not the roots. Making it illegal to wear the burqa in public would do nothing to change the opinion of those who believe it is essential for women to remain covered, and would simply see women confined to the walls of their homes.

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