



UN rights chief says Swiss ban on minarets 'clearly discriminatory'

1 December 2009 –The United Nations human rights chief spoke out today against the Swiss ban on the building of new minarets, calling it a discriminatory and deeply divisive step which risks putting the country on a "collision course" with its international rights obligations.

"I hesitate to condemn a democratic vote, but I have no hesitation at all in condemning the anti-foreigner scare-mongering that has characterized political campaigns in a number of countries, including Switzerland, which helps produce results like this," High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stated.

The ban results from a referendum held on Sunday on the subject, which was not supported by the Government of Switzerland, she noted in a news release.

Ms. Pillay said that banning an architectural structure that is associated with one religion only is clearly discriminatory.

"Some of the politicians who proposed this motion argued that it wasn't targeting Islam or Muslims," she said. "Others claimed that banning minarets would improve integration. These are extraordinary claims when the symbol of one religion is targeted."

The High Commissioner added that such a ban is "discriminatory, deeply divisive and a thoroughly unfortunate step for Switzerland to take, and risks putting the country on a collision course with its international human rights obligations."

Yesterday Asma Jahangir, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, voiced her regret at the vote and its negative consequences for Muslims in Switzerland.

"Indeed, a ban on minarets amounts to an undue restriction of the freedom to manifest one's religion and constitutes a clear discrimination against members of the Muslim community in Switzerland," she stated.