

## Press Statement by Shabina Begum

I welcome today's court decision and take this opportunity to extend my thanks to my legal team.

Today's decision is a victory for all Muslims who wish to preserve their identity and values despite prejudice and bigotry.

The decision by Denbigh High School to prevent my adherence to my religion cannot unfortunately be viewed as merely a local decision taken in isolation. Rather it was a consequence of an atmosphere that has been created in Western societies post 9/11; an atmosphere in which Islam has been made a target for vilification in the name of the "war on terror". As a young woman growing up in a post 9/11 Britain, I have witnessed a great deal of bigotry, from the media, politicians and legal officials. This bigotry resulted from my choice to wear a piece of cloth, not out of coercion, but out of my faith and belief in Islam.

It is amazing that in the so-called free world, I have to fight to wear this attire. This amazement has not been left unnoticed in my community, the Muslim community, who sees a concerted effort to dehumanise Muslims and vilify Islam. I suspect cases like mine will not be the last, but nevertheless I hope that my case will give strength to others.

I would like to make one final point, which I hope in years to come policy makers will take note of. A growing number of young Muslims, like me, have turned back to our faith after years of being taught that we needed to be liberated from it. Our belief in our faith is the one thing that makes sense of a world gone mad; a world where Muslim women, from Uzbekistan to Turkey, are feeling the brunt of policies guided by western governments.

I sincerely hope, therefore, that my small victory - to gain an education - brings hope to millions of Muslim women around the world.

That is all I would like to say at the current time.

Thank you.

2nd March 2005

