

Ohio teen disqualified from track meet for wearing hijab

An Ohio teen is speaking out after being disqualified from an Oct. 19 cross-country meet because she was wearing a hijab.

Noor Alexandria Abukaram is a 16-year-old student at a private Islamic school. She is on the cross-country team for Northview High School, the local public school in Sylvania, Ohio, northwest of Toledo.

Abukaram says officials did not inform her that she had been disqualified. Instead, she found out after running, when she went to look at the boards where race times were displayed, and discovered that her name was not posted.

“I was humiliated, disappointed, rejected and in denial. I couldn’t believe what just happened,” she said in a Facebook post.

The teen said an official had conducted uniform inspections before the race, but did not tell her that her headscarf was a problem.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association said the rules require runners to receive a waiver to wear religious headwear that does not comply with the association’s uniform rules.

Abukaram’s coach had not applied for the waiver.

An association official said the waiver was immediately approved once it was filed, and Abukaram will therefore be able to compete in the future. He also said the association is considering the possibility of removing the requirement of a waiver for religious headwear, the *New York Times* reported.

Still, Abukaram objects to the fact that she has been competing all season and her hijab has only now, after half a dozen meets, been flagged as an issue.

She also criticized the way officials handled the matter. During uniform inspections, she said in a Facebook post, an official notified one of her teammates that she would need to change her shorts in order to comply with the rules. The girl was able to change her attire and compete in the race.

“The officials did not give me the same respect that they gave my teammate who was also violating a rule when they told her to change her shorts and gave her the chance to fix her self,” Abukaram said.

“I wasn’t given the chance to explain myself to them because they didn’t have the decency to tell me what the issue was.”

The teen said she does not understand why a special waiver is necessary for religious headwear in the first place.

“They don’t have to prepare anything special for me, I don’t have any disabilities, I am just running just like anybody else,” she told the New York Times.

Bans on Islamic headscarves and other religious symbols – particularly in the workplace – have been a controversial issue in Western nations in recent years.

In 2017, the Court of Justice for the European Union ruled in favor of a headscarf ban in the workplace, as long as it has a legitimate company aim and is based on internal company rules requiring neutral dress, which must also ban crucifixes, skullcaps and turbans. The ruling drew criticism from religious freedom advocates, who said employers should offer reasonable accommodations for workers’ religious beliefs.

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a clothing store that cited fashion reasons in declining to hire a woman because she was wearing a hijab.

“An employer may not make an applicant’s religious practice, confirmed or otherwise, a factor in employment decisions,” said the court’s majority opinion, authored by Justice Antonin Scalia.

A ban on teachers wearing the headscarf was ruled unconstitutional in a German court in 2015. In Austria and the German state of Bavaria, full-face veils are banned in public.

In 2013, four Christian British Airways employees won a legal case in the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled their employer engaged in illegal discrimination for telling them they could not wear their crosses.