



## Celebrate diversity

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Comment

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HEADGEARS have never made so much news as a symbol of intolerance and ignorance.

American Sikhs are protesting at the stigmatisation of their faith because of a new United States security policy to screen turbans.

Some cartoonists made headlines by creatively transforming similar headgears into bombs.

One of them, a Dane, was recognised by German Chancellor Angela Merkel for "freedom of expression".

A conservative daily reportedly deemed it as "probably the most explosive appointment of her chancellorship so far".

So it is not surprising that last month Merkel led a charge against multiculturalism.

She evoked "the primacy of German Leitkultur", a term that allegedly underpins the country's Judeo-Christian traditions as well as the principles of the age of the enlightenment.

Merkel's Germany wants all of its residents, including the so-called "parallel communities" to assimilate Judeo-Christian culture and values for multiculturalism to flourish.

She was quoted as saying: "This approach has failed, totally", adding that immigrants should adopt and integrate into German culture and values.

"We feel tied to Christian values. Those who don't accept them don't have a place here," she adds.

Multikulti, as Merkel puts it, is the concept where "we are now living side by side and are happy about it".

Many people understand multiculturalism quite differently — as a form of diversity rather than a melting pot where all have to assimilate or else they "don't have a place here".

This is a subtle way to stigmatise the faith of other communities, especially the marginalised.

It is a dogma of "us" versus "them" much like the dark years of former US President George W. Bush.

The UK *Guardian* newspaper reports that a recent poll found that just a third of Germans believe their country is being "overrun" by foreigners.

So, why the assault?

Is it an overreaction just like France's decision to ban the burqa?

According to the Interior Ministry, only 1,900 women in France wear the burqa.

Again, is this a delicate way to stigmatise the faith of other communities in the land of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* — giving France the dubious honour of being the first European "democracy" to undertake such a drastic measure?

In contrast, the French Council of State warned that the ban could be incompatible with international human rights laws and the country's constitution.

France has an estimated five million Muslims — the largest of such population in Western Europe.

More ironically, *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) — based on a fundamental document of the French Revolution — defined "liberty" in Article 4 as follows:

"Liberty consists of being able to do anything that does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of every man or woman has no bounds other than those that guarantee other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights."

US President Barack Obama bypassed the Holy Sikh temple at Amritsar on his visit to India last week. The alleged reason is donning a headgear might make him appear Muslim.

The world's most developed democracy prefers to vote with its feet.

By walking away, Obama gave such a huge endorsement of intolerance and ignorance, making his gesture as the first US President to celebrate Guru Nanak's birthday at the White House a hollow, hypocritical move.

And generally, his overtures to peace and tolerance globally are mere lip service.

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