

AIR FRANCE STEWARDESSES MUTINY OVER ORDER TO WEAR HEADSCARVES

News / Airlines



Air France stewardesses, furious at being ordered to wear headscarves in Tehran, say they will refuse to fly to the Iranian capital when the airline resumes the service later this month.

Female members of flight crews have been ordered to cover their hair once they disembark in Tehran and unions are demanding that the flights be made voluntary for women.

The resumption of a thrice-weekly service between Paris and Tehran, planned for April 17 after an eight-year break, follows a thaw in relations since Iran agreed to dismantle large sections of its nuclear programme.

Iranian women have been forced by law to cover their hair or face stiff fines since the 1979 Islamic revolution. In staunchly secular France, however, public signs of religion have been frowned upon since a 1905 law separating church and state.

French women see Islamic headscarves and veils as an affront to their dignity. Headscarves are banned in French state schools and offices, and it is illegal to wear the full-face Muslim veil in

public.

Flore Arrighi, head of the UNAC flight crews' union, said: "It is not our role to pass judgement on the wearing of headscarves or veils in Iran. What we are denouncing is that it is being made compulsory. Stewardesses must be given the right to refuse these flights."

She added that female staff were entitled to exercise "individual freedoms".

The financially ailing French airline, which sees the resumption of Tehran flights as an "excellent" business development, pointed out that other airline staff were obliged to comply with Iranian rules. "Tolerance and respect for the customs of the countries we serve are part of the values of our company," a spokesman said.

In Saudi Arabia, stewardesses must wear the "abaya", a long robe that covers the body, but unlike Saudi women they are not compelled to wear face veils.

Air France argued that French law allows "the restriction of individual liberties" if "justified by the nature of the task to be accomplished."

Air France planes on the tarmac at Charles de Gaulle Airport

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The deputy head of the SNPNC flight crews' union, Christophe Pillet, said: "Female staff do not wish to have dress regulations imposed on them, especially the obligation to wear an Air France scarf that completely covers their hair as soon as they leave the plane."

Stewardesses normally have a choice between a uniform with a skirt or trousers, but they have been instructed to wear a long jacket and trousers on Tehran flights.

Mr Pillet said flight crews were prepared to wear headscarves in Iran when out of uniform, but objected to being ordered to wear them as part of their uniform.

Unions want Tehran flights to be made voluntary without penalties for staff, deductions from wages or consequences for their careers.

Another union representing flight crews, UNAC, has written to the minister for women's rights and families, Laurence Rossignol, complaining about the headscarf order.

Ms Rossignol, who describes herself as "a feminist with a modern vision of the family", was herself embroiled in a row over headscarves last month prompted by Marks and Spencer's decision to sell the burkini, or full body swimsuit. Women who wear veils or Islamic headscarves, she said, were like "negroes who supported slavery".

Françoise Redolfi of the UNSA union said Air France had told staff it was restoring rules that applied before 2008, when Air France discontinued flights to Iran as the country's relations with western nations deteriorated over concerns that it was seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

"The general environment now is much more sensitive," she said. "Many female members of flight crews have informed us that it is out of the question that they be obliged to wear headscarves. It is not professional and they see it as an insult to their dignity."

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SOURCE: THE TELEGRAPH

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