

Lausanne 8 March 2023

Letter of the Libre-Pensée Romande to Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis

Dear Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis,

With all due respect for your function and person, as well as those of all Department of Foreign Affairs' staff, we can only write to you that it is with shame, shock and dismay that we learned of the serious symbolic incident of 22 February 2023, in the sense of Human Rights, Gender Equality, Social Justice and Solidarity in the human race.

This incident was provoked by our Swiss diplomatic representative, dressed in chador, on the occasion of an interreligious meeting in a theocratic state with theological authorities of Iran. More serious still, since it was justified by our DFA by the importance given to inter-religious dialogue, without considering the legitimate interests and necessary protections of non-believers in Switzerland, in Europe and throughout the world, in particular of those who challenge the compulsory wearing of the veil, through the voice of free women in Iran.

We therefore express our total disapproval of this way of doing things.

We, members of the Free Thought of French-speaking Switzerland, members of the Swiss Association of the Free Thought, and members of the networks of the Free Thought and Secularism in Europe, recognized as entities for the dialogue with the European authorities, through article 17 of the TFEU,

We totally deplore this way of acting which, moreover, calls into question in a very violent way the expression of the principle of absolute freedom of conscience, enshrined in the UDHR, to which our Confederation subscribed by its membership to the UN, to the Council of Europe and by the recognition of the European Court of Human Rights, and which thus subscribes to the principles of equality and respect for the convictions of non-believers. Non-believers represent more than a third of the population in Switzerland and much more in Europe. These principles and values of secularism are reflected in contemporary legislation in EU countries, as in most Council of Europe countries.

We would like to remind you that these principles and values are also at the heart of the contemporary pillars and foundations of the Academies of Sciences, Arts and Letters of all European countries.

In anticipation of a much-needed change in the approach of our Swiss diplomacy to this thematic issue, and in anticipation of an acknowledgement of receipt and a response from your Department, please accept, Mr. Federal Councillor, our most respectful greetings to you and your staff.

For the committee of the Libre pensée romande, The president. Thierry Dewier

Copies to :

Association Femme Vie Liberté - Zan Zendequi Azari - Switzerland Association Femme Vie Liberté - Zan Zendequi Azari - International Association of Swiss Freethinkers Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, FDFA Switzerland Federal Department of Justice and Police, FDJP Switzerland Federal Department of the Interior, FDHA Switzerland Cantonal and Federal Equality Offices, Switzerland Rectors of the Universities of Western Switzerland and HES-SO and of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, University of Europe