

Quebec bans Sikh daggers from capitol

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TORONTO (RNS) Lawmakers in the province of Quebec voted unanimously on Wednesday (Feb. 9) to ban the kirpan, a Sikh ceremonial dagger, from the legislature building.

The opposition Parti Quebecois said it was acting to underscore Quebec's neutrality in dealing with religious groups, while the governing Liberal Party argued that the ban is needed for security reasons.

The vote came a month after four Sikh men who were invited to testify before lawmakers were barred from entering the building because they were carrying kirpans.

Louise Beaudoin, a PQ member of the assembly, said she introduced the motion because two fundamental rights were clashing -- the right to religious freedom and the right to security.

"You have choose one of these rights, and in a secular society, you chose to argue in favor of limiting religious rights," Beaudoin told the Globe and Mail newspaper.

Balpreet Singh of the Ottawa-based World Sikh Organization of Canada said in a statement Wednesday that "we're disappointed that the wearing

of the kirpan, which is a human rights issue, has been politicized."

Kirpans are permitted in Canada's federal parliament buildings, and one Sikh member of parliament wears his daily.