

Muslim woman files suit against Disney over headscarf dispute

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August 15, 2012

c. 2012 Religion News Service LOS ANGELES (RNS) The ACLU is suing The Walt Disney Co. on behalf of a Muslim woman who claims the company discriminated against her by not allowing her to wear a headscarf while working in a Disney restaurant in Anaheim.

Former Disney employee Imane Boudlal worked at the Storytellers Cafe at the California Adventure park, directly across from Disneyland. In 2009 she requested to wear her hijab while working. The ACLU claims that two months later, Disney supervisors denied her request, allegedly due to Disney policies on employee uniforms.

Managers, however, say they worked with Boudlal on several uniform options including one involving a hat, in keeping with the restaurant's style, to be worn over her hijab.

"We presented Ms. Boudlal with multiple options to accommodate her religious beliefs, as well as offered her several (employment) roles that would have allowed her to wear her own hijab," Disney said in a Tuesday (Aug. 14) statement to Religion News Service. "Unfortunately, she rejected all of our efforts and has since refused to come to work."

Boudlal, a 28-year-old Moroccan American, claims she was fired for repeatedly showing up to work wearing her hijab after her request to wear it was turned down.

This is not the first time Disney has faced a hijab conflict. In 2010, a Muslim member of Disneyland's summer program for college students wanted to wear her hijab, and was allowed to work at a ticket booth with Disney-designed headwear in place of the headscarf. (Disney park employees who work with the public are barred from having visible tattoos or jewelry, including religious symbols, and men cannot wear

earrings.)

Eugene Volokh, a law school professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said Boudlal could have "a pretty solid claim under a pretty long line of case (law) under all sorts of religions which have gotten exemptions from uniform policies for their religious headwear. This is not some special right of Muslims."

Edina Lekovic, policy and programming director at the Muslim Public Affairs Council, noted that Muslim women with hijabs routinely work for the Transportation Security Administration as airport screeners. "If you can have women who wear a hijab who are TSA screeners and work in other aspects of professional life, I can't see why Disney wouldn't make an accommodation," said Lekovic, who wears a hijab.