

Number 10

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Hello. My name is Afaf Alaa. What is number 10? Is it simply a number between nine and eleven, or the number of my fingers? Maybe it's just the number of years in a decade? In this case, no. It is the 10th goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to reduce inequalities. Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, were approved by the United Nations in 2015. These goals are a universal call to action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and ensure that everyone lives in peace and prosperity by 2030.

Here is my Number 10 story. To be specific, my 10.3 story. SDG 10.3 aims to ensure equal opportunities and end discrimination. When I got to junior high school I was excited and eager to join the school tennis team because I felt like the sport was cool and powerful. Not only that, but I knew that my mother had wanted to play tennis one day, but she had never had the chance to, so I thought I would do it for her. I've come to realize that goals are personal and deep, even a child's goals. However, what if those goals are met? Or not met?

I applied to join the tennis team just like anyone else, but I provoked a different reaction. My teacher said that she needed to talk with me. My heart fluttered, because I did not understand what was going on. Then my teacher said, "Are you really going to join the tennis team? If you do and play in competitions, you have to show your legs PROPERLY!"

But truth be told, I am a Muslim girl and I had already decided to wear my hijab later that year and cover my body. But it seemed that my choice to wear the hijab and to play tennis would not be allowed. Should I just give up on what I want to do because of a dress code that has no logical reason? Is it okay to neglect my rights to choose as a female, and as a Muslim? If I did, what other rights would I have to give up? Women and girls are sometimes pushed to make choices against their best interests. This should not be.

For a long time, women have been struggling with unfair clothing policies. And it's still a problem. For example, in the 2014 Asian games, the Qatari women's basketball team withdrew because they were not permitted to wear their hijabs. Recently at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, there was a controversy about requiring woman's beach handball players to wear bikini bottoms and how the Norwegian team resisted that. Their action paid off and the International Handball Federation revised its uniform rules. Yes, women are fighting back against all those rules and changes are happening.

In 2017, I fought back too. I wanted the tennis association to understand that their clothing policy was unfair. All I wanted was to have an equal opportunity to play tennis. So, I insisted on joining the team and I was determined to play in competitions while still covering my body. I was the first hijabi Muslim in Ishikawa to play tennis and my school didn't know what to do about it. That's when they had to negotiate with the tennis association about the dress code. What happened as a result of my

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determination? They actually changed the rules and allowed me to wear a covering under my uniform. I was able to get my rights, and play in competitions with my teammates. Now I have a lot of good memories of playing, and tennis is my favorite sport.

Wait! My story is not done yet. The next year, another Muslim girl decided to join the team. She wasn't asked to show her legs properly as I was. I helped to make her a path to follow. I started my own number 10 story with space for others to join in and add their own chapter to it.

How about you? What is your number 10 story? With my number 10 story, your number 10 story, her, his, their number 10 story, we can achieve equality and leave no one behind. Thank you for listening.