

Swiss Catholic bishops oppose proposal to ban construction of minarets

FRIBOURG, Switzerland - The Swiss Catholic bishops' conference said it opposed a proposal to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland.

A statement on the conference's Web site said the ban would hinder interreligious dialogue and that Swiss building codes already regulate the construction and operation of minarets, the high, slender towers attached to mosques.

The statement said that, "as bishops and Swiss citizens, we are pleased that there are no longer any special articles relating to religion in the constitution and we wish that no new ones should be introduced."

It said the bishops' opposition to the proposal "is based on our Christian values and the democratic principles in our country."

The ban was proposed by the Swiss People's Party, the largest party in the Swiss parliament. Supporters of the initiative see minarets as political symbols and signs of an increasing Islamic presence in Switzerland.

The proposal will be put to a nationwide referendum Nov. 29.

The BBC reported that mosques in Switzerland tend to be found in old warehouses and factories. It said the largest mosque in the Swiss capital, Bern, is in a former underground parking garage.

The BBC said Switzerland only has two small minarets, one in Zurich and one in Geneva.