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Court says Britain failed to protect stewardess' right to wear cross

Simon Caldwell Catholic News Service | Jan. 15, 2013
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The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the British government violated the rights of an airline flight attendant by failing to protect her right to conscience and religion.

It found that Nadia Eweida, 60, a Coptic Christian, suffered discrimination when she was told by British Airways, her employer, to stop wearing a cross on her uniform.

Her case was one of four claims of religious discrimination against English Christians heard by the court, but the only one to succeed.

A ruling Tuesday dismissed the cases brought by Gary McFarlane, a relationships counselor fired after he said he had a moral objection to offering therapy to same-sex couples; Lillian Ladele, a registrar who objected to presiding over civil partnership ceremonies for same-sex couples; and Shirley Chaplin, 57, a nurse who said she was forced from her job for wearing a cross in breach of uniform policy.

McFarlane and Chaplin said they would appeal the judgment at the court's Grand Chamber.

The court decided that in the case of Eweida there had been a violation of Articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which protect freedom of thought, conscience and religion and prohibit unjust discrimination. It awarded her $2,670 in compensation and a further $40,000 in costs.

The four took their fight to Europe after the highest British courts defended their former employers.

Speaking Tuesday after the judgment, McFarlane said, "I simply wanted to do my job in light of my Christian identity, but I was policed and punished for my thoughts, for my beliefs."

McFarlane added: "Recent equality legislation has not led to greater respect for difference but to the punishment of difference of opinion."

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