

## **The Role of the First Name and Family Name in a Multicultural Society.**

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My paper concerns the use of religious names (first name and /or surname). There is a growing number of requests to the courts and to the Ministry of Justice is to change the first name into a religious name. In the Netherlands we have a system in which the change into another surname usually has to be authorized by the ministry of Justice (the law actually says 'the king') and the first name can be changed by the court. Sometimes this request is made because a person changed his or her religious conviction (including the children) or because a person is afraid that he will suffer from discrimination or prosecution in another country. I have gathered some very interesting decisions of the courts.

However, there are as yet no good criteria for these changes. If it looks reasonable, the court or the ministry of Justice will allow this change into another name. I think we need better criteria to decide upon these issues, because the persons who wish to change their names and/or the names of the children must know in advance (before making unnecessary costs) whether they have a reasonable chance that the authorization will be given. Besides this, we don't have a list of names that are not allowed. What if a parent wishes to name his child Al Kaida, Atheist, God or Jesus Christ?