## 1100

#### Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1100
Land:	Iran
Kilde:	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
Titel:	Iranian Commander Announces New Morality Enforcement Body
Udgivet:	21. april 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	1. juli 2024

### ecoi.net

Document #2110271

### RFE/RL - Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Author)

# Iranian Commander Announces New Morality Enforcement Body

#### By RFE/RL's Radio Farda

The commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) troops in the Iranian capital on April 21 announced the creation of a new enforcement body to uphold the country's strict dress code for women.

IRGC Tehran chief Hassan Hassanzadeh said members of the squad's members have been trained to enforce the hijab "in a more serious manner" at public locations.

The announcement follows reports that authorities have intensified morality sweeps in recent days, with shared images showing the uniformed officers descending on women as part of an operation officials said was codenamed Nour, or Light in Persian.

In a related message imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi said women's narratives of oppression will be heard and will "disgrace" the "misogynist" government.

"Today, the authoritarian theocracy has drawn a full-fledged war against all women on all streets of the country, not out of a position of power but out of desperation," Mohammadi said from Tehran's Evin prison, according to an audio message posted on April 21 on an Instagram page attributed to her.

The message said that journalist Dina Ghalibaf, who was arrested earlier this month after she published a personal narrative about her previous detention by Iran's morality police for not adhering to the hijab law, entered the women's ward in Evin prison "with a bruised body and a narrative of sexual harassment."

Mohammadi added that Iran for years has been witnessing "the narrative of women who have been subjected to abuse, harassment, and mayhem by government officials. We women will stop this war ...or the people of Iran and the world will rise up to our aid."

The death in custody of student Mahsa Amini in September 2022 after an alleged beating by morality police sparked massive street protests and provided momentum to the decades-long opposition to the mandatory head scarf since its imposition by religious authorities following the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Those protests prompted a fierce official crackdown in which more than 500 people have died and thousands have been arrested, with some of those convicted of wrongdoing executed.

Senior Iranian officials said recently that President Ebrahim Raisi's government was behind the new dress-code crackdown, with the Interior Ministry leading the effort.

Some relative moderate lawmakers have questioned a tightening in the current circumstances, with tensions high over military confrontations in the region and Tehran seeking to project influence through allies or proxies and fears high of an escalation of violence between Iran and foe Israel.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi has defended the Nour crackdown, saying "projects implemented in the area of hijab are being carried out within the framework of the law."

Vahidi called the hijab "one of the pillars of the [Iranian] system's identity and a Shari'a principle" that "should not be allowed" to slip into lax enforcement.

Even some strongly pro-Islamic forces in Iran have objected to such rigorous hijab enforcement at the expense of internal solidarity in the face of external threats to the country.

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#### ecoi.net description:

Tehran: Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) announces new enforcement body to uphold dress code for women

Country: Iran	
Source: RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty	(Author)
Published:	

Original link:

21 April 2024

https://www.rferl.org/a/iranian-commander-new-morality-enforcement-body/32914527.html

Document type: Media Report

Language: English

Available on ecoi.net since: 4 June 2024

Document ID: 2110271

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Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T +43 1 589 00 583 F +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice

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