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Iran: Authorities target women's rights activists with arbitrary arrest, flogging and death penalty

Iranian authorities have escalated their crackdown on women's rights defenders, journalists, singers and other activists demanding equality or who defy compulsory veiling using arbitrary detention, unjust prosecution, flogging, and even the death penalty in a bid to quash Iran's women's rights movement, Amnesty International said today.

Since International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March, the Iranian authorities have arbitrarily arrested at least five women's rights activists. These arrests come amid an intensified crackdown that has included summoning women's rights activists and journalists for interrogation, and arresting women singers for performing without the mandatory hijab while shutting down their social media accounts. In the lead up to IWD, the authorities flogged a male singer 74 times for performing a protest song against Iran's discriminatory compulsory veiling laws and, in February 2025, sentenced a women's rights activist to death.

"In the wake of the Woman Life Freedom uprising of 2022, the Iranian authorities consider the widespread defiance of women and girls demanding their rights as an existential threat to the political and security establishment. Instead of addressing systemic discrimination and violence against women and girls, they are attempting to crush Iran's women's rights movement," said Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office.

"Ahead of a key UN Human Rights Council session tomorrow to deliver findings on the human rights situation in Iran, and in the context of the Council's ongoing negotiations to extend the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on Iran and the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, the international community must stand up against impunity and for the rights of women and girls in the country.

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Diana Eltahawy, MENA Deputy Regional Director

"States must use their leverage to press the Iranian authorities to stop harassing women's rights activists and immediately release those arbitrarily detained. They must also pursue legal pathways to hold accountable Iranian officials reasonably suspected of committing widespread and systematic human rights violations against women and girls, including through the implementation of compulsory veiling."

The mandates of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Special Rapporteur are set for renewal at the ongoing 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council (24 February to 4 April 2025). On 18 March, the Council is set to hold a joint interactive dialogue with both mandates.

Women's rights activists arrested for participating in IWD events

In the lead up to IWD, the Iranian authorities threatened women, warning them against gathering and demanding their rights.

Since 10 March 2025, Ministry of Intelligence agents arrested four Kurdish women's rights activists, namely Leila Pashaei, Baran Saedi, Sohaila Motaei and Soma Mohammadrezaei after they participated in IWD events in Kurdistan province. They are being arbitrarily detained in solitary

confinement cells at a detention centre in Sanandaj, Kurdistan province, and have been interrogated without their lawyers.

Baran Saedi was arrested from her family home in Sanandaj on 10 March 2025. She was previously detained during the Woman Life Freedom uprising of 2022 and released on bail after two months.

Soma Mohammadrezaei was arrested at her workplace in Sanandaj on 10 March. Security forces had previously summoned and threatened her on multiple occasions in relation to her women's rights activism.

Sohaila Motaei was arrested in Dehghan on the evening of 10 March. She was previously briefly arrested in January 2025 for protesting death sentences against women prisoners. She was also detained during the Woman Life Freedom uprising and sentenced to five years in prison for charges including "spreading propaganda against the system."

Leila Pashaei was arrested from her home in Sanandaj on 10 March 2025 after speaking against compulsory veiling, child marriage, violence against women, and executions of women in Iran during an event on IWD. During the speech she said: *"Women in Iran are held captive by authorities who fear the power of women... The women's movement has passed the point of no return.... Women worldwide, especially in the Middle East, will never be silenced again."*

Pattern of Suppression and Intimidation

The recent arrests occurred within the context of a broader campaign to suppress women's rights activism and defiance of compulsory veiling through a range of coercive measures. Activists, journalists, singers and other public figures are among those targeted through arbitrary detention, torture through flogging, coercive interrogations and threats, and shutting down social media accounts.

On 11 March 2025, **Nina Golestani**, a writer and women's rights activist, was arbitrarily arrested at her parents' home in Gilan province by the Intelligence Unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). According to a statement by her husband, Javad Sajadi Rad, on Instagram, IRGC agents stormed her parents' home, searched it and confiscated her personal belongings. They then took her away for interrogations and subsequently transferred her to Lakan prison in Rasht, Gilan province. She was released on bail on 16 March 2025.

On 7 March 2025, a day after several women journalists participated at a media event in Tehran without headscarves, the judiciary's Mizan News Agency issued a statement calling their actions "contrary to public decency". The journalists were interrogated at the office of the prosecutor in Tehran's Evin prison and judicial cases were opened against them.

On 5 March 2025, singer **Mehdi Yarrahi**'s flogging sentence of 74 lashes was carried out in connection to his song called "[Your Headscarf \(Roosarito\)](#)" commemorating the first anniversary of the Woman Life Freedom uprising.

On 27 February 2025, singer **Hiwa Seyfizade** was arrested during a live performance in Tehran. An official announced that she was arrested for "unauthorized solo singing", which is banned for women in Iran. She was released on bail on 1 March 2025. Her Instagram account has since been closed, with two posts from the Public Security Police on her page stating: *"This page has been blocked [by order of the judicial authorities] due to the production of criminal content."*

In February 2025, imprisoned women's rights activist **Sharifeh Mohammadi** was sentenced to death for a second time on the charge of "armed rebellion against the state" (*baghi*), solely in relation to her human rights activities, including supporting women's rights. The Supreme Court had overturned a prior death sentence by a Revolutionary Court in October 2024, sending the case back to lower courts.

On 14 December 2024, singer **Parastoo Ahmadi** was detained after she [livestreamed](#) a concert in which she appeared unveiled in public in a shoulder-baring dress. The video went viral, amassing two and a half million views. She was released on bail several hours later.

On 13 December 2024, **Reza Khandan**, a human rights defender, was arrested to serve an unjust prison sentence in relation to his campaigning against compulsory veiling. Reza Khandan, who is the husband of lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, was sentenced to six years in prison by a Revolutionary Court in January 2019.

Background

Iran's [compulsory veiling](#) laws, which apply to girls as young as seven, violate a whole host of rights, including the rights to equality, freedom of expression, religion and belief, privacy, equality and non-discrimination, personal and bodily autonomy. These laws also inflict severe pain and suffering amounting to torture or other forms of ill-treatment.

In its March 2024 report, the Fact-Finding Mission found that the Iranian authorities have “committed a series of extensive, sustained and continuing acts that individually constitute human rights violations, directed against women [and] girls...and, cumulatively, constitute what the mission assesses to be persecution.”

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact press@amnesty.org