

Recap of 2023: Iranian Women Remain Resilient in the Face of Harsh Crackdown

In 2023, the women of Iran faced profound challenges and injustices, yet they also showcased remarkable resilience in their struggle against the ruling dictatorship.

In this last issue of the NCRI Women's Committee's monthly reports, we review the most significant events in 2023, concerning women in Iran.

January 2023

Journalists Behind Bars

In January, amidst a continued uprising, numerous journalists, including women, found themselves imprisoned under the clerical regime. Some remain detained to this day, while others faced varying legal outcomes—ranging from jail terms to temporary release on bail, with a few choosing exile.

Among those enduring imprisonment, Niloufar Hamed and Elaheh Mohammadi have been held in the women's ward of Evin Prison since September 2022. They were handed harsh sentences, Niloufar receiving 13 years and Elaheh 12 years, including substantial terms for alleged "collaboration with the hostile US government," a charge widely deemed absurd.

Vida Rabbani, aged 34, also finds herself serving a six-year sentence in the women's ward of Evin Prison, all while battling various health issues.

Nasim Sultan Beigi and Saeedeh Shafiei commenced their 3.5-year sentences in November 2023.

Furthermore, Zahra and Hoda Towhidi have been serving one-year terms in the women's ward of Evin Prison since June 2023.



From left: Niloufar Hamed, Saeedeh Shafiei, Nasim Sultan Beigi, Elaheh Mohammadi, and Vida Rabbani

February 2023

Brutal Gas Attacks on Girls' Schools

February saw the escalation of chemical attacks on girls' schools across Iran. The cruel acts of biological terror appeared to be the Iranian regime's latest attempt to quash protests and the ongoing six-month revolution led by young women and schoolgirls.

The gas poisoning of girl students was mostly limited to schools in Oom. However, on February 14, a girls' high school in Tehran was targeted and the chemical attacks have spread across the country.

According to a Health Ministry deputy, Saeed Karimi, 13,000 students had referred to medical centers to receive treatment for gas poisoning. (Mashreq website, March 13, 2023)

The regime's inaction over three months was the most stark evidence of government involvement in this horrific crime.



March 2023

Intensified crackdown to enforce Hijab

In March, the Iranian regime intensified its crackdown on opponents of the mandatory hijab, expanding a campaign initiated in December. During the Nowruz holidays, businesses catering to those opposing the mandatory hijab were forcibly closed, while security personnel restricted access to airports and historical sites.

Hossein Jalali, a parliament member, announced the finalization of an aggressive plan named "Chastity and Hijab." The plan included severe penalties such as fines ranging from 500,000 to 3 billion tomans, revocation of driving licenses, passport cancellations, and internet bans for public figures and website owners.

The regime's enforcement agencies would monitor seven categories of locations, aiming to control compliance within vehicles, public areas, government offices, educational centers, airports, cyberspace, and among public figures in streets and thoroughfares.

Ahmad Rastineh, a parliamentary deputy, emphasized the necessity for stringent enforcement of the hijab law, framing the issue not merely as improper veiling but as part of a calculated scheme by adversaries to disrupt societal order. He reiterated that wearing the hijab is mandatory by law for everyone in the country.



April 2023

Resumption of stepped up Hijab campaign

In early April, top officials, including the mullahs' President, Ebrahim Raisi, and Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, underscored the obligation to adhere to the mandatory hijab,

warning of strict prosecution for violators. The Judiciary Chief emphasized that any deviation from the law and Sharia in public, such as removing the hijab, would be rigorously dealt with, extending accountability to advisors and instigators involved. He said removing the veil is an example of violating public chastity and the principles of Sharia and law, which the enemy supports.

Officially commencing on April 15, the regime outlined plans to enforce the compulsory veiling dress code and Hijab Plan. Ahmadreza Radan, commander in chief of the State Security Force, assured an error-free implementation through CCTV surveillance, outlining areas like public roads, vehicles, and commercial places where violations would be reported to judicial authorities.

Judicial authorities were directed to support the State Security Force in implementing the new Hijab plan. The regime's leadership made it clear that defiance of the hijab law would result in strict consequences, signaling an intensified crackdown on those not adhering to the mandatory veiling regulations.



Regime passes a bill that fails to mention violence against women

After a prolonged 12-year back-and-forth between the government, judiciary, and the clerical regime's parliament, a so-called bill to eliminate violence against women was finally approved on April 9, 2023. Titled "Preventing Injury of Women and Improving Their Security Against Misbehavior," the approved bill, after years of delays, notably downplays the issue of violence against women. This is evident even in its title, where the word 'violence' has been replaced by "misbehavior," overlooking the gravity of the situation.

The statistics provided by the Iranian regime, known for its opacity, cover a significant portion—three-quarters—of Iranian women, marking a rate more than double the global average for violence against women.

Intelligence Ministry wraps up the chemical attacks

Chemical attacks on Iranian schoolgirls and students resumed after the Nowruz holidays. The regime claimed to have made arrests, but publicized only a few names, showcasing confessions likely obtained under torture. These arrests failed to halt the attacks, which affected over 700 schools across 160 cities, potentially harming 5,000 to 13,000 students. The number of affected students grew, tragically resulting in at least five deaths.

Ironically, the Ministry of Intelligence handled the conclusion of this case instead of the more anticipated entities like the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Health.

On April 28, the Ministry of Intelligence issued a statement blaming the attacks on an external attempt to disrupt Iranian stability, denying the use of toxic substances while acknowledging the spread of non-toxic agents causing panic. They highlighted cyberspace networks spreading

rumors and creating school panic, vowing to arrest and punish those involved. They also pledged to prosecute anyone making baseless accusations against the regime or its supporters.

However, there is ample evidence on government involvement in the chemical attacks on Schoolgirls: 1 – Government's inaction and conflicting statements by officials; 2 – A pre-determined scenario to deflect blame and cover up the truth; 3 – Reporters, parents, and protesters were arrested instead of culprits; 4 – The IRGC Intelligence had exclusive access to test results but did not make them public; 5 – The regime failed to use CCTV cameras' footage to identify the culprits; and 6 – Schools had been instructed to close the doors and confiscate the students' cell phones at the time of chemical attack.



May 2023

Protests to surging executions

The month of May saw the executions of at least 146 prisoners in Iran, including three women and three political prisoners.

On various instances, the families of death row prisoners and their young children gathered outside the mullahs' Judiciary in Tehran or in front of other prisons in Isfahan, Bandar Abbas, Karaj, etc., urging the authorities not to execute their loved ones. They vehemently protested the rising number of executions and demanded an immediate halt to the unjust execution orders imposed on their loved ones.

The families of executed protesters, Saleh Mir-Hashemi, Majid Kazemi, and Saeed Yaghoubi, suffered greatly as the security services did not allow them to bury their children. Security forces buried the three protesters in three distant locations and did not allow their families to hold funeral ceremonies for them. Subsequently, they arrested the father and siblings of the victims.

Apprehension and sentencing of lawyers and teachers

In May, the clerical regime intensified its control over lawyers by summoning 70, including many women, to hearings in the security court at Evin Prison without clear charges. During these hearings, lawyers were pressured to sign prewritten "commitment letters," expressing regret for defending protesters and promising not to engage with external networks or counter-revolutionary elements. The tactic aimed to inhibit lawyers from supporting protests and defending protesters.

A number of lawyers received prison sentences, including two prominent human rights lawyer, Ms. Marzieh Nikara and Ms. Farzaneh Zilabi.



Marzieh Nikara and Farzaneh Zilabi

In a shocking revelation on the death of a lawyer after being released from prison, her mother said that her newlywed daughter, Maryam Arvin, who was arrested for defending her clients, had been injected with drugs under the pretext of injecting tranquilizers and sedatives. The injections caused her death after being released on bail.



From left: Atekeh Rajabi, Fatemeh Tadrissi, and Kowkab Badaghi

The clerical regime also intensified pressure on teachers using arrests, expulsions, and summonses. Teachers protesting for fair conditions faced arrests, with widespread protests across 14 provinces on May 9. Several teachers, like Atekeh Rajabi and Fatemeh Tadrissi, were arrested during these protests, highlighting broader repression. Some teachers, including Fariba Anami and Farzaneh Nazeranpour, faced unjust expulsions and imprisonment, with at least 16 teachers currently held in various prisons. Charges against these educators include meeting families affected by protests and sharing supportive content on social media. In Khuzestan, eleven teachers, including Kowkab Badaghi and Zahra Bakhtiyari, face charges of undermining national security and anti-regime propaganda.

June 2023

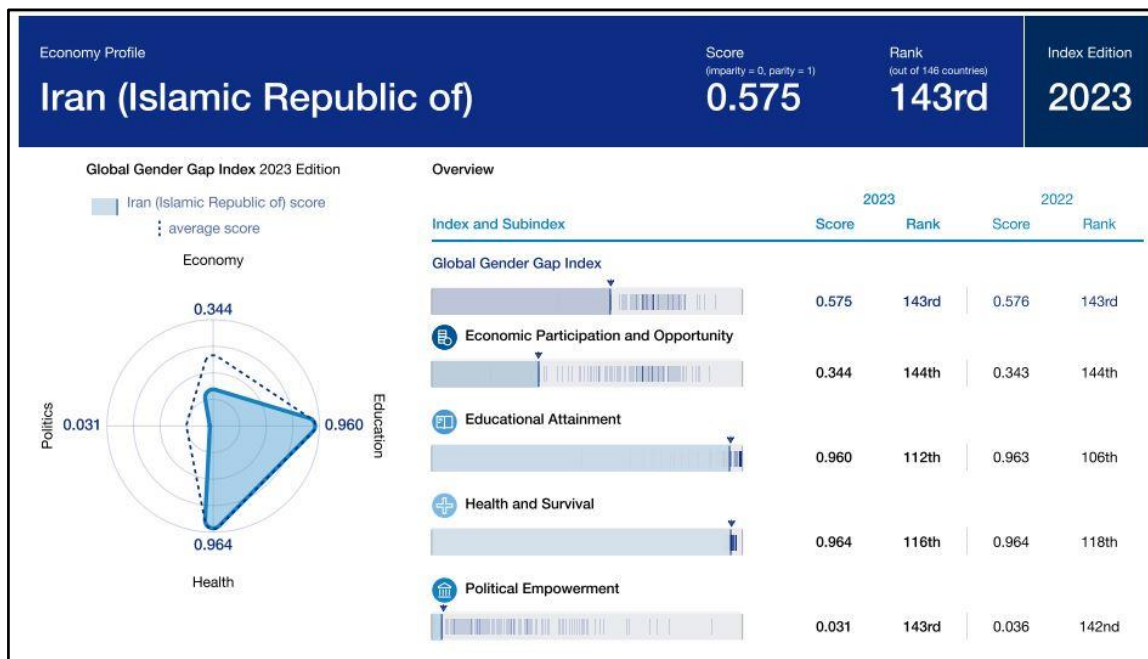
Global Gender Gap Report 2023 finds Iran at the bottom of its index

The World Economic Forum released its latest Global Gender Gap Report on June 20, 2023. According to this report, Iran ranks 143rd among 146 countries in the world examined for this report.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, the gender gap index for economic participation and opportunities for Iran is 34.4%, with the labor force participation rate standing at 20.4% in the 146th rank. The Iranian regime continues to hinder economic gender parity with a

stark income gap of 17.1 percent in the 145th rank. The percentage of legislators, senior officials, and managers stands at 21.9%, with professional and technical workers' percentage standing at 53.4%. Regarding wages for similar work, the gender gap rate for Iran is 54.2%.

Finally, the Political Empowerment subindex registers one of the lowest parity scores for Iran at 3.1%, with women in parliament at 5.9%, women in ministerial positions at 5.3%, and women as heads of state at 0%.



Official statistics on punishments for defying the compulsory Hijab

On June 14, 2023, the State Security Force spokesperson announced that since April 15, 2023, the police had sent almost one million SMS warning messages to women captured unveiled in their cars. The SSF issued 133,174 SMS messages requiring the immobilization of vehicles for a specific duration, confiscated 2,000 cars, and referred more than 4,000 repeat offenders to the judiciary across the country. He added that 108,211 reports on the enforcement of compulsory veiling laws had been gathered about the commission of offenses within businesses and that 300 offenders had been identified and referred to the judiciary.

From March 21 to July 22, 2,251 cases were filed against women who removed their Hijabs. Out of these cases, 825 resulted in convictions.



Picture by Reuters

July 2023

Women faced harsh penalties for defying the compulsory Hijab

Women in Iran faced severe repercussions for defying the mandatory Hijab. Penalties included termination from jobs, tasks like cleaning corpses in a morgue or performing janitorial work, and even imprisonment. One woman received a two-month jail sentence and a two-year travel ban for not wearing the veil, alongside mandatory psychological sessions. Another woman, caught driving without a Hijab, was ordered to wash corpses for a month and fined instead of facing prison time. An intern, also failing to cover her hair, was relegated to janitorial work. Others faced community service as punishment. Additionally, a woman faced harassment from state security forces, as captured in a video released by Reuters.

Heightened Hijab Enforcement: Crackdown on Businesses

Various Iranian ministries instructed their divisions to bar unveiled women from accessing hospitals, tourist sites, and museums. Officials in Tehran Province enforced strict Hijab regulations, urging staff to act decisively against Hijab violations. Hospitals were directed to condition medical services on adherence to Hijab rules without specifying emergency situations. The Tehran municipality hired 400 "Hijab guards" to enforce veiling in metro stations, spending a significant amount monthly on this initiative.

The State Security Force closed numerous businesses and arrested managers for serving women without proper veiling. The public and revolutionary prosecutor of Damavand County arrested bank staff for attending to an unveiled woman. Legal action was taken against female employees at major companies, including Digi-Kala and Taqcheh, for appearing without compulsory Hijab at the workplace. These businesses faced temporary suspension but resumed operations following public backlash.



Hospital does not allow women without Hijab

Guidance Patrols make a comeback

The clerical regime reintroduced patrols targeting women not adhering to the compulsory dress code. The State Security Forces (SSF) spokesman announced the return of monitoring patrols and vowed legal action against non-compliant individuals.

Amid widespread outcry, the SSF removed the "Guidance Patrol" label from their vans but continued using unmarked vehicles to apprehend women. The move sparked resistance, with clashes reported in various cities, including Rasht and Isfahan.

Considering the initial tensions, the SSF retreated and sufficed to filming non-compliant women instead. However, clashes persisted as anti-vice patrols and plainclothes agents harassed and arrested women, resulting in violent altercations in places like Shiraz and Hamedan.

Amnesty International called on the Iranian authorities to “abolish compulsory veiling, quash all convictions and sentences for defying compulsory veiling, drop all charges against all those facing prosecution, and unconditionally release anyone in detention for defying compulsory veiling. The authorities must abandon plans to punish women and girls for exercising their rights to equality, privacy, and freedom of expression, religion, and belief.”

August 2023

Sweeping Dismissal of Professors across 150 Universities

The Iranian regime's crackdown on universities, particularly professors and students involved in protests, intensified before the anniversary of the 2022 nationwide uprising. Professors supporting student protests or the nationwide movement faced termination or suspension. This included prominent female professors across multiple universities.

The push for "Homogenization of the Higher Education Body" affected 150 universities, alarming students who observed increased security control and perceived encroachment by repressive forces. Students protested the dismissals, hailing the professors as esteemed educators.

The dismissal of professors were viewed as a "purge" aimed at replacing individuals who opposed the regime's repressive policies with those aligned with the ruling regime. A National Security Council resolution called for recruiting 15,000 aligned faculty members, blaming faculty as the main cause of the unrest in 2022.

«اعتماد» نام ۵۲ نفر دیگر از استادان اخراجی، بازتسبیته اجباری یا تعلیق و منقصل از تدریس و انتشار می کند

موج دوم حذف اساتید به نام خالص سازی

طی دو سال اخیر بیشترین حذف در دانشگاه‌های آزاد، تهران، علوم پزشکی تهران و علامه طباطبائی رخ داده است

تعداد استادان حذف شده از نظام آموزشی در دولت سیزدهم به ۱۱۰ نفر افزایش یافت

از دانشجویان و درجه‌داران از طریق فضای بیابان‌های دوم از طریق بررسی هیات‌های اجرایی جنب‌انگشی نامشروع نیز از این جملات هر چه صرف دیگری روزی در تصمیم‌گیری و در لای این دانشسور جراحی دانشسور

Over 2,800 Students Summoned to Disciplinary Committees

Students across several Iranian universities were summoned by intelligence and security forces to pledge abstention from protests. Around 59 students were expelled, while over 100 faced semester-long exclusions, and hundreds lost their dormitory accommodations. At Bou Ali University of Hamadan, 200 students, predominantly female, unexpectedly lost dormitory privileges.

Moreover, over 2,800 students from various universities have been summoned to disciplinary committees. Tehran province alone saw 1,443 summonses across multiple institutions.

September 2023

Over 600 women arrested on the anniversary of the Uprising

The clerical regime, considerably weakened by the uprising in 2022, had already started a wave of arrests and rearrests of rights activists, student activists, former political prisoners, and families of the protests' martyrs a few months earlier.

In response to brewing discontent, the clerical regime deployed 44,000 troops to quell potential protests. Security forces tightened control, even disallowing small gatherings of three persons in some areas of Tehran. Helicopters patrolled overhead, and security used pellet guns against civilians.

Despite this, determined people of Iran, especially women and youth, protested, leading to clashes with security forces in several cities. Over 600 women were arrested in Tehran, alone, with 130 detained in the Qarchak Prison. Shop owners in Kurdistan staged a solidarity strike, and despite heavy security presence, protests and clashes continued in Mashhad and Kermanshah between young demonstrators and security forces.

The following photos show the brutality of security forces towards those who dared to go to the streets.



On September 16, 2023, IRGC mercenaries violently attacked women detainees at Qarchak Prison, resulting in at least 20 wounded inmates. Many suffered beatings, were relocated to solitary confinement, and deprived of necessities like boiling water, food, and medicine. The next day, clashes erupted between women, youths, and security forces in Hamedan, marked by chants "death to Khamenei" and "death to the Republic of Executions." In a shocking scene, security forces surrounded a lone woman for arrest in District 13 of Hamedan.



A lone young woman surrounded by security forces in Hamedan

The intelligence and security services officially announced the arrests of 357 individuals in Tehran and other cities, including the arrests of dozens of individuals affiliated with the opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK).

Nevertheless, the PMOI Resistance Units carried out 414 anti-repression operations in Tehran and 40 other cities at the height of repression in just two days.

Approving the new Hijab bill to crack down on students

The Iranian parliament passed the controversial Bill to Support the Family through the Promotion of the Culture of Hijab and Chastity just in time before the anniversary of the Iran uprising on September 16, and the beginning of the new academic year on September 23.

The bill, consisting of five chapters, aims to enforce strict dress codes and behaviors, justifying restrictions on women's attire in the name of preserving family values. It emphasizes obligations on government agencies to promote Islamic life, enforce the compulsory veil, and educate the public on Hijab and Chastity.

Chapters outline duties for over 30 government ministries and organizations, involving workplace segregation, enforcing dress codes in schools, and penalties for violations. The legislation even conditions employment, promotion, and services on individuals' adherence to the dress code. Additionally, it delineates harsh punishments and fines for violators, extending its reach to cyberspace and business premises to ensure compliance.

Although the legislation is not yet approved by the Guardian Council to be enforced as a law, but reports revealed strict dress codes enforced by female agents at universities, involving head coverings and knee-long attire. Universities implemented regulations using banners, patrols, and even facial recognition technology.



Banner indicating clothing regulations at Tehran's Amir Kabir University

Coffee shops around campuses were ordered closed, with concerns cited about these spaces being potential centers for activities against national security and religion. These actions reflected the regime's anxiety about potential protests.



Camouflaged cars roaming on Tehran University's Campus

New Hijab Bill Criticized as Gender Apartheid

UN Human Rights Council-appointed experts strongly criticized Iran's proposed Hijab law, branding it as potentially constituting "Gender Apartheid."

Expressing deep concern, the experts highlighted the law's sanctions against women and girls for not wearing the headscarf in public, describing it as a systemic tool aimed at subjugating women into complete obedience.

They warned of severe punishments for non-compliance, potentially leading to violent enforcement, particularly impacting economically disadvantaged women. Urging Iranian authorities to reassess the compulsory hijab legislation in line with international human rights standards, they called for ensuring the full rights of women and girls in Iran.



Armita Geravand, victim of violent enforcement of compulsory Hijab

October 2023

The Harrowing Murder of Armita Geravand

In October, the tragic murder of Armita Geravand after being assaulted by a Hijab Patrol in a Tehran metro station shocked the world.

From the outset, the intelligence services took control of the case, tightly restricting access to the victim by her family, friends, or media. Attempts to restrict information included threatening students at Armita's school.

The regime-controlled media presented conflicting accounts in an attempt to gauge public reaction to Armita's death, which likely occurred shortly after the incident, akin to the situation with Zhina Mahsa Amini, who also passed away three days later.

Armita Geravand, born on April 2, 2006, was a healthy and talented young woman. She excelled in Taekwondo, achieved a third-degree black belt, and displayed a passion for painting.

On October 1, 2023, Armita was allegedly attacked by a Hijab patrol in a Tehran metro station, suffering severe head trauma and slipping into a coma. Reports indicated that her condition was critical, leading to brain hemorrhage and near brain death.

The regime's failure to release full CCTV footage from the metro raised suspicions about the government's narrative and reinforced speculations about the regime's Hijab patrols as culprits.

November 2023

Upwards of 2,850 Hijab Monitors Recruited in Tehran's Metro Stations

The state-controlled Etemad daily newspaper published the cliché of a highly confidential document by the Ministry of Interior, which indicated the recruitment of 2,850 Hijab Monitors or Hijab patrols in the metro stations.

The directive dated, May 30, 2023, and addressed to some government agencies, including Tehran's Municipality, and the Metro Company of the Capital, stated, "Entry of individuals who remove their Hijab to government-run places is conditional on their observance of the legal dress code."

Ahmad Vahidi, the Interior Minister, declared, "The Ministry of Interior supports those who promote virtue and forbid from evil before the law."



In the following month, Hijab monitors and plainclothes agents were seen at Tehran's City Theatre Metro Station searching passengers' personal belongings without a written warrant and taking pictures of their telephone registry, a blatant disregard for privacy and due process.

Also, the Governorate of Qom issued a directive, instructing female government employees to attend work with the head-to-toe black chador and without any make-up.

Masked Security Forces Raid University Classes

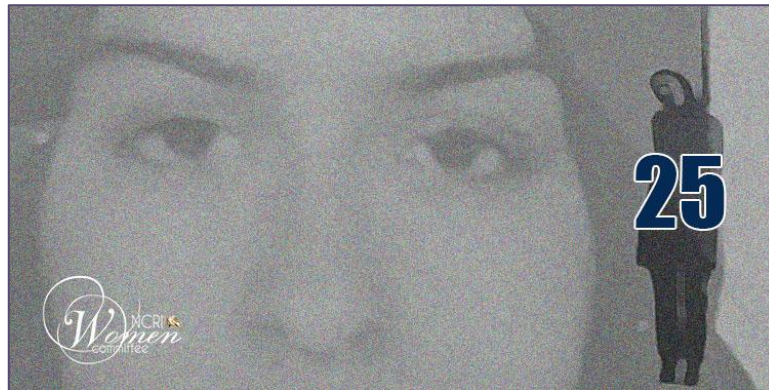
On November 20, 2023, a disturbing event unfolded at Melli University, where masked security forces carried out a raid. They targeted the library, psychology classrooms, as well as classes in the School of Literature and Human Sciences.

Their action involved confiscating student ID cards from female students who were not adhering to the compulsory hijab rule. In response, students across multiple universities in Tehran initiated a two-day protest strike, boycotting their classes in solidarity.

December 2023

Five ordinary women executed

In step with the escalating rise of executions, December saw the execution of five women in one month. Twenty-five women were executed throughout 2023.



Political prisoners and families of slain protesters receive long prison terms

The clerical regime arrested and re-arrested hundreds of rights activists and opponents, throughout 2023. However, in December it issued heavy sentences for a number of them.

The regime handed down three more years to Maryam Akbari Monfared, one of the longest-held female political prisoners, extending her sentence to 18 years, and preventing her release after completing her 15th year this year in prison.

Under the inhumane laws of the clerical regime, political prisoner Maryam Akbari was supposed to be released in 2019 after serving 10 years of her sentence. Her primary 'crime' over the past decade has been seeking justice for the martyrs, according to the regime's perspective.

The regime issued long prison sentences for political prisoners affiliated with the opposition PMOI/MEK. Zahra Safaei received a 5-year sentence while Massoumeh Yavari was sentenced to 13 years in jail.

Three female PMOI prisoners, Marzieh Farsi, Forough Taghipour, and Nasim Gholami Fard, were charged with Bagh-y (or armed insurgency), a charge that is punishable among others with the death penalty.



From left, Massoumeh Yavari, Marzieh Farsi, Maryam Akbari, Zahra Safaei, Forough Taghipour

Political prisoner Massoumeh Senobari has been detained in solitary confinement, isolated from other inmates, for over a year in the Fardis Prison of Karaj, also known as Kachouii. Born in 1988 and the mother of a girl, Massoumeh Senobari is accused of being a leader of the protests.

Additionally, Mahsa Yazdani, the mother of a slain protester, Mohammad Javad Zahedi, was summoned to serve 5 years in prison for seeking justice for her son.

Political Prisoners Protest Judicial Authorities' Entrance to the Women's Ward of Evin Prison

On December 27, 2023, Ali Al-Qasimehr, the Head of Tehran's Department of Justice, accompanied by judges Iman Afshari and Mohammad Reza Amouzad, visited Evin Prison's women's ward, sparking protests from the detained women. These prisoners expressed objections against the regime and the presence of the judicial authorities.

In response, prison guards intervened aggressively, assaulting the inmates and escorting the authorities out. The prison administration disconnected their communication lines, threatened them with new charges, and menaced them with internal exile to various locations within Iran.

Among the political prisoners held in Evin Prison's women's ward are individuals associated with the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK), including Shiva Esmaili, Sudabeh Fakharzadeh, Zeinab Hamrang, Fereshteh Nouri, Azar Mousazadeh Karvandi, Zahra Safaei, Maryam Banou Nassiri, Arghavan Fallahi, Parvin Mir-Asan, Marzieh Farsi, Forough Taghipour, Nasim Gholami Fard, and Elham Fouladi.

Systematic Use of Sexual Violence Against Iranian Protesters

Amnesty International's report, released on December 6, 2023, detailed instances of extensive sexual violence used by security forces to intimidate and coerce dissenters.

The report recounted experiences from 45 survivors, encompassing 26 men, 12 women, and seven children, who suffered rape, gang rape, and other forms of sexual abuse at the hands of intelligence and security personnel.



Honor killings and femicides are not criminalized in Iran

Honor killings and femicides have evolved into systematic violence, enchaining Iranian women and girls within their homes, schools, streets, and society at large. Even within the supposed safety of their homes, Iranian women and girls are not shielded from danger.

The mullahs' patriarchal and misogynistic regime, governed by inhumane laws, fosters and perpetuates such crimes.

The NCRI Women's Committee's data from media reports documented 132 cases of honor killings and femicides since January 2023, exceeding official figures, comprising 85 femicides and 47 honor killings.