

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### PRESS RELEASE

#### **Iran: International community must stand with women and girls suffering intensifying oppression**

The Iranian authorities are doubling down on their oppressive methods of policing and severely oppressing Iranian women and girls for defying degrading compulsory veiling laws, Amnesty International said today.

In a [detailed analysis](#) published today, the organization exposes the authorities' intensified nationwide crackdown on women and girls who choose not to wear headscarves in public. In the latest escalation on 16 July, the spokesperson of Iran's police, Saeed Montazer-Almahdi, [announced](#) the return of police patrols to enforce compulsory veiling and threatened legal action against women and girls who defy forced veiling. This coincided with [videos](#) circulating on social media, depicting women being violently assaulted by officials in Tehran and Rasht, and security forces firing teargas towards people helping women escape arrests in Rasht.

Official announcements reveal that since 15 April 2023, more than a million women have received text messages warning that their vehicles could be confiscated after they were captured on camera without their headscarves. Additionally, countless women have been [suspended](#) or expelled from universities, [barred from sitting final exams](#), and denied access to [banking services](#) and [public transport](#). Hundreds of businesses have been forcibly closed for not enforcing compulsory veiling. The intensified crackdown exposes the dubious nature of the Iranian authorities' [previous claims of disbanding](#) the "morality" police, amid contradictory official statements over its return to Iranian streets.

"Morality policing in Iran is back. The authorities are not fooling anyone by removing the insignia of the 'morality' police from uniforms and patrol vans, while emboldning the enforcers of the Islamic Republic's oppression and subjugation of women and girls to engage in the same violence that killed Mahsa Zhina Amini with impunity. Today's crackdown is intensified by mass surveillance technologies capable of identifying unveiled women in their cars and pedestrian spaces," said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

“The intensified crackdown on unveiling reflects the Iranian authorities’ deplorable disregard for the human dignity and rights of women and girls to autonomy, privacy and freedom of expression, religion and belief. It also underscores a desperate attempt by the authorities to reassert their dominance and power over those who dared to stand up against decades of oppression and inequality during the ‘Woman. Life. Freedom.’ uprising, ”

A woman in Esfahan province who received an SMS message ordering her to immobilize her car for 15 days for removing her headscarf when driving told Amnesty International: “Emotionally and psychologically, all these threats they [the authorities] have made have had a very negative impact on us... The Islamic Republic wants to show that they can go to any extent when it comes to enforcing compulsory veiling... They want to present themselves to the international community as moving away from violence but, in reality, they are carrying out these actions discreetly. They are truly creating fear in our existence.”

On 14 June 2023, the spokesperson of Iran’s police announced that since 15 April 2023, the police have sent almost one million SMS warning messages to women captured unveiled in their cars, 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 “offences” within businesses and that 300 “offenders” had been identified and referred to the judiciary.

In an attempt to further codify and intensify this crackdown, judicial and executive authorities presented the “Bill to Support the Culture of Chastity and Hijab” to parliament on 21 May 2023. Under this proposed legislation, women and girls who appear without headscarves in public spaces and on social media or who show “nakedness of a body part or wear thin or tight clothes” will face a catalogue of penalties that will severely impact their human rights, including social and economic rights. These include monetary fines, confiscation of cars and communication devices, driving bans, deductions to salary and employment benefits, dismissal from work, and prohibition on accessing banking services.

The draft bill includes proposals to sentence women and girls convicted of defying veiling laws “on a systemic basis or in collusion with foreign intelligence

and security services” to two to five years’ imprisonment as well as travel bans and forced residency in a specified location.

Managers of public institutions and private businesses who allow unveiled employees and customers within their premises would face penalties ranging from closures to lengthy prison sentences and travel bans.

The bill proposes a range of sanctions against athletes, artists and other public figures defying veiling laws including bans on engagement in professional activities, imprisonment, flogging and fines.

On 23 July 2023, a parliamentary committee indicated that it sent the revised bill consisting of 70 articles to the open floor of Iran’s parliament for review. The revised text has not been made public.

Simultaneously, the authorities have relied on the Islamic Penal Code to prosecute and impose degrading punishments on women who appear in public without headscarves. Amnesty International has reviewed verdicts issued against six women in June or July 2023 requiring them to attend counselling sessions for “anti-social personality disorder”, wash corpses in a morgue or clean government buildings.

This assault on women’s and girls’ rights is taking place amid a spate of hateful statements by officials and state media, referring to unveiling as a [“virus”](#), [“social illness”](#) or [“disorder”](#) and equating the choice to appear without a headscarf to [“sexual depravity”](#).

The Iranian authorities must 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.

“The international community must not stand idly by as the Iranian authorities intensify their oppression of women and girls. The response of states should not be limited to forceful public statements and diplomatic interventions, but also involve the pursuit of legal pathways to hold Iranian officials accountable for ordering, planning and committing widespread and systematic human rights violations against women and girls through the implementation of compulsory

veiling. All governments must do everything in their power to support women and girls fleeing gender-based persecution and serious human rights violations in Iran, ensure they can access swift and safe refugee procedures and under no circumstances should they be forcibly returned to Iran,” said Agnès Callamard.

\*Note to editors: The “morality” police is referred to as *Gasht-e Ershad* in Persian, and is a special unit of the Law Enforcement Command of Iran (known by its Persian acronym FARAJA).