

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### PRESS RELEASE

#### **Iran: International community must not be deceived by dubious claims of disbanding ‘morality police’**

The Iranian authorities’ vague and conflicting statements on the supposed disbanding of Iran’s so-called “morality police” must not deceive the international community about the continuing violence against women and girls embedded in compulsory veiling laws and fuelled by ongoing impunity for those violently enforcing them, said Amnesty International today.

During a press conference on 3 December 2022, Iran’s Prosecutor General, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, said: “The ‘morality police’ (*gasht-e ershad*) has nothing to do with the judiciary and it was closed by whichever [body] that established it in the past.” He then qualified his statement, adding: “The judiciary will continue to regulate people’s behaviour in society,” indicating that the policing of women’s bodies under compulsory veiling laws will continue. [State media outlets](#) reported the next day that “No official authority in the Islamic Republic of Iran has confirmed the closure of the morality police”.

“The Prosecutor General’s statement was deliberately vague and failed to mention the legal and policy infrastructure that keeps the practice of compulsory veiling against women and girls firmly in place. To say that the ‘morality police’ has nothing to do with the judiciary distorts the reality that, for decades, the criminalization of women and girls under abusive and discriminatory compulsory veiling laws has been rubber-stamped by judiciary. In the face of outrage in Iran and globally over this extreme form of gender-based discrimination and violence, the Iranian authorities are simply passing the buck to each other to evade responsibility,” said Heba Morayef, Amnesty International’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“The international community and global media must not allow the Iranian authorities to pull the wool over their eyes. Compulsory veiling is entrenched in Iran’s Penal Code and other laws and regulations that enable security and administrative bodies to subject women to arbitrary arrest and detention and deny them access to public institutions including hospitals, schools, government offices and airports if they do not cover their hair. Until the day all these laws and regulations are scrapped, the same violence that resulted in the arrest and death in custody of Mahsa (Zhin) Amini will continue against millions of other women and girls.”

Iran’s “morality police” is a sub-branch of the country’s police force, which falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Interior. Despite the Prosecutor General’s statement attempting to distance the judiciary from the “morality police”, under Iran’s Code of Criminal Procedure, police officials are considered “judicial officials” (*zabetan-e qaza*) who may carry out arrests and interrogations under the supervision and instruction of the Prosecutor.

The “morality police” place the entire [female population under surveillance](#), but the policing of women’s bodies is not confined to the state. Iran’s abusive, [discriminatory and degrading forced veiling laws](#) enable not only state agents but also [vigilantes](#), who are non-state actors, to harass and assault women and girls on a daily basis in public.

Forced veiling laws violate a whole host of rights, including the rights to equality, privacy and freedom of expression and belief. They also degrade women and girls, stripping them of their dignity, bodily autonomy, and self-worth.

Under Article 638 of Iran’s Islamic Penal Code, any act that is deemed “offensive” to public decencies is punished with an imprisonment term of 10 days to two months, or 74 lashes. An explanatory note to the article states that women who are seen in public without veiling are to be punished with an imprisonment

term of 10 days to two months or a cash fine. The law applies to girls as young as nine, which is the minimum age of criminal responsibility for girls in Iran. In practice, the authorities have imposed compulsory veiling on girls from the age of seven when they start elementary school.

“It is important to remember that protesters in Iran are not calling just for the dismantling of the ‘morality police’ but for the transition of Iran to a new political and legal system that would respect their basic human rights and freedoms. The popular uprising taking place across Iran reflects nationwide rage over decades of oppression against the people of Iran, many of whom continue to be unlawfully killed on a daily basis simply for wanting freedom, democracy and human rights,” said Heba Morayef.

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**For more information or to arrange an interview, please  
contact: [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org) or [ghina.bouchacra@amnesty.org](mailto:ghina.bouchacra@amnesty.org)**