



Rights and freedom

'There's no other option but to fight': Iranian women defiant as 'morality police' return

Activists speak of their dismay at renewed patrols to enforce wearing of the hijab, but insist protests will continue ahead of the anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death

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The return of Iran's infamous Gasht-e-irshad ("morality police") has been greeted with dismay, but protesters who spoke to the Guardian said they would not be dissuaded from taking to streets again.

A police spokesperson confirmed last week that they had started patrolling the streets to deal with civilians who "ignore the consequences of not wearing the proper hijab and insist on disobeying the norms".

The announcement comes just two months ahead of the anniversary of the [death in custody](#) last September of Mahsa Amini, 22, who had been detained for allegedly not properly wearing the Islamic headscarf. Her death led to the [largest wave of popular unrest](#) in years in Iran.

The Guardian spoke to women who took part in the nationwide protests after Amini's death, who said they have already seen police harassing girls on the street for not wearing the hijab.

"I felt indifferent to the news that the 'morality police' have been reinstated. Western media insists on telling us Iranians that Gasht-e-irshad was abolished, but I don't know a single Iranian friend of mine

who believed that,” says a 22-year-old from Rasht.



📷 Protests in October 2022 at the Islamic Azad University in Tehran protest after the death of Mahsa Amini. Photograph: UGC/AFP/Getty Images

“They [the morality police] were never gone and were being deployed as security personnel in universities or as civilians in public places. What the world sees is a tiny glimpse of what’s happening here. Although everything looks normal to the ones who don’t care about us women, if you notice, they are everywhere.

“I have worn the headscarf all my life, by choice, and my sister doesn’t. I have always worn it halfway on my head. They killed Mahsa for showing less hair than I do and I know with this official announcement they have now been given a free hand to turn more violent.”

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In recent months, Iranian women and girls have been posting pictures and videos of themselves on social media defying the mandatory hijab law. “So many dozens of kids didn’t die [in vain] so a year later we will go back to how we were before September 2022,” says a university student from Tehran.

“Whether or not the regime wants to accept, we will hit the streets again and there’s no going back. We are already planning huge protests leading up to the one-year anniversary of Mahsa’s death. There will be more arrests or worse. These are scare tactics and we won’t fall for this.

“The morality police harassed me even before the protests began. The security forces shot me with a paint gun on my head. I don’t fear them. If we fear them and back off, what will be left of the sacrifices made by the protesters who lost their lives and their families? I am ready to continue the fight.”

Among those **killed during protests** after Amini’s death was Minoos Majidi, a 62-year-old mother who was shot with 167 pellets. She reportedly said to her family before attending protests in Kermanshah: ‘If I don’t go out and protest, who else will?’ Her daughter Mahsa Piraei said her mother always valued women’s rights and freedom.

“By intensifying repressions, arrests and harassment under the pretext of hijab law, the Islamic Republic sends a message to the Iranian people: that we will beat and kill, and if anyone protests, they will be killed too, just like they killed my mother. This circle will continue as [long as] this regime will remain in power, as its foundation is built upon violence and crimes.”



📍 Mahsa Amini's death led to the largest wave of popular unrest in years in Iran. More protests are planned to mark the anniversary in September. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Although the morality police have existed in some form since the Islamic revolution in 1979, the current form, the Guidance Patrol, was formed as an arm of the police force in 2005. Since then, it has enforced strict hijab laws with multiple reports of violent arrests and detentions.

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In 2014, Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist and activist, launched My Stealthy Freedom, an online movement encouraging women to share pictures of themselves without a hijab. Alinejad continues to receive images and videos of defiant Iranian women and girls.

“The battle over the hijab became a powerful rallying [cry] against the gender apartheid regime in Iran and a sign of regime change,” said Alinejad, adding that, after Amini's death, demonstrations quickly escalated into calls for the overthrow of Iran's clerical regime.

“Women were burning their headscarves, cutting their hair and burning morality police vans. These women became the nightmare of the whole regime and that is why the government try to resume hijab

laws to prevent another uprising on the anniversary. They know very well that the next wave of women-led revolution in Iran will be much heavier.”

University students have **faced harassment**, suspensions and expulsion for refusing to wear a hijab. News of morality police patrolling the streets has created more anxiety.

“I’m almost getting cold and numb with this news,” says one university student from a city in north-east Iran. “The events of last year are repeating themselves, even though my life is the same. Even simple things have become a dream for us. In this hot weather of 38 degrees do they expect us to go out in a chador?”

The student added that the move to reinstate the morality police was only to provoke women to go out in protest so they can be arrested as a warning to others.

A resident in Tehran said morality police had been noting down the car number plates of women spotted without a hijab. “They have been clicking pictures of me and my friends who have been stepping out without our headscarves. I fear they have already collected enough data to go after us, one by one,” she says.

“I got into an argument with one of them recently outside a court. The agents harshly ask women to wear a hijab and when we refuse, they take our pictures, videos and our ID cards. Then we are summoned to the court. I am still going out without a hijab despite the announcement, because we are too many of us who have now decided to defy the law and fight.

“If we fear, they will behave worse and torture more of my people. As an Iranian woman, I say that there’s no other option but to fight. We are not afraid of the morality police.”

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