

The West turned its gaze away from Iran, but the regime's cruelties are far from over



By **Nasrin Parvaz**, Author, Human rights activist • Updated: 28/07/2023

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More than 30 years ago, the regime in Tehran tried to silence me. My heart aches for the young women imprisoned and still suffering in Iran today, Nasrin Parvaz writes.

In the 1980s, I was imprisoned in Iran for eight years just for taking to the streets and fighting for my freedom and demanding liberty.

The regime in Tehran tried to silence me with torture and threats of sexual violence. My heart aches for the young women who are still being subjected to the same kind of torture that I was more than thirty years ago.

On 15 March 2023, Sepideh Qolyian, one of Iran's most prominent female activists, was re-arrested only a few hours after being released. Prior to that, she had already spent five years in prison.

Sepideh was imprisoned in Evin Prison — one of the primary sites for housing Iran's political prisoners since 1972 — kept in solitary confinement in its notorious Wing 209 and threatened with rape by the prison guards.

Sepideh is one of many sharing the same harrowing fate.

Tehran has continued to ramp up its use of systemic torture

Thirty-five years ago, I was held in the very same wing, and it was used as a torture chamber. Prisoners then, just like now, were threatened with rape and were physically and mentally abused.

Some of my fellow prisoners hanged themselves with their chadors because they just couldn't go on anymore.

A chador — a full body-length piece of fabric — covers the whole body except the face, and it was compulsory to wear when I was imprisoned.

Hundreds have been killed in the streets, and hundreds more have been shot in the eyes, chest and genitals. I've listened and watched in horror as the stories of violence and torture continue to trickle out of my home country.



A woman holds a banner as people demonstrate against the Tehran regime's oppression in Lyon, January 2023 AP Photo/Laurent Cipriani

The regime's excuse for the hijab law is that women should be covered. But we, Iranian women, know that we are just mere scapegoats being used to suppress an entire country.

The regime has recently ramped up its use of systemic torture to frighten and silence activists since the death of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's abusive "morality police" in September 2022.

- [Iran responding to Mahsa Amini protests with 'overwhelming repression'](#)
- [UN experts demand accountability for death of Mahsa Amini in Iran](#)

The authorities have responded to the largely peaceful protests, which began in response to Mahsa's death, ruthlessly, with brutal, and in many cases lethal, force.

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Executions and torture-tainted confessions

And the stories really are horrific. Stories of people being tortured, left to sit in solitary confinement for days on end, and denied medical treatment for their injuries.

There have also been reports of children as young as twelve being sent to detention centres and being physically, psychologically and sexually abused.

Over the last few months, we've seen prisoners who were arrested during the protests being sentenced to death and executed.

Prisoners have been tortured into confessing, and if physical torture didn't work, interrogators would threaten their families. Many women have reported being raped whilst in prison.



The Eiffel Tower lits the night with the a slogans "Woman, Life, Freedom" and "Stop Executions in Iran in support for the protests across Iran in Paris, January 2023AP Photo/Michel Euler

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Forced confessions have long been used by this regime, but the reports of torture emerging since the killing of Mahsa have been truly alarming.

- [Iran's morality police back on the streets to impose strict Islamic dress code](#)
- [Protests in Iran: the transformation of a movement in the face of repression](#)

And there are many prisoners currently at serious risk of being executed. In most cases, there's absolutely no evidence, just a torture-tainted confession.

This month, the UN reported that 26 people have been sentenced to death in relation to the protests since November 2022.

Keep shining a spotlight

I've watched as the West has slowly turned its gaze away from what's happening in Iran.

Yet, we need to continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the women and people demanding the basic rights we take for granted and enjoy every single day.

We must try and save the lives of those sentenced to death by raising the political cost of their executions and making sure that those languishing in prisons are released.

I'm still hopeful that one day the regime — the people in power, the prison guards, the interrogators — will have to answer for the atrocities they've committed.



A participant of a demonstration with her face painted with a peace dove and the Persian name Mahsa Amini in Hamburg, January 2023 Georg Wendt/dpa via AP

I'm calling on the international community and media to keep shining a spotlight on my country to demand that the regime stops using torture immediately.

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Nasrin Parvaz became a civil rights activist when the Islamic regime took power in 1979. She was arrested in 1982, tortured and imprisoned for eight years. Parvaz is the author of "One Woman's Struggle in Iran: A Prison Memoir", and "The Secret Letters from X to A".

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