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# Iran denies healthcare to women who refuse to wear the hijab

‘Horrorfying’ directive as anniversary of death of Mahsa Amini approaches

By Ahmed Vahdat

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Women who refuse to wear the hijab will be denied hospital care under a new edict issued by Iranian authorities.

Officials in the northern city of Lahijan told healthcare providers the “provision of all services” was subject to compliance with the country’s strict dress laws.

“Hospitals and clinics”, whether private or public, must “implement” the rules on their premises, Mohammad Taghi Najafzadeh, the director of the city’s health and treatment network, wrote in a letter sent to the heads of local facilities.

The move was swiftly condemned by rights groups, who denounced the directive as “horrifying”.

“This is by far the most blatant contravention of Iranian women’s legitimate civil and human rights and against all civilised norms,” Kambiz Noroozi, a human rights lawyer, told the Etemad newspaper.

“Sending such a letter to our health authorities is unique in the medical world and it means that if a woman is at risk of serious injury, or even death, and needs treatment that health professionals should not serve her just because she did not wear a hijab,” he said.

“This is tantamount to committing a criminal act.”

Mr Noroozi claimed identical directives had been sent to healthcare providers throughout Iran. He did not provide evidence to support that assertion.

The draconian decree in Lahijan follows authorities’ closure of several shopping malls, as well as major insurance companies and other firms across Iran last week after it was discovered that female staff had removed their headscarves while working there.

### ‘Polarising and divisive’

Iran has in recent weeks increasingly cracked down on women and girls who refuse to wear the hijab as the anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini approaches.

Amini died in police custody after being detained for allegedly violating the hijab rule, which applies to all women and girls over the age of nine.

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Her death sparked nationwide protests that posed one of the starkest challenges to Iran’s theocracy since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

A Hijab and Chastity Bill, which introduces a series of harsh fines and possible prison sentences for individuals who refuse to wear a headscarf in public, is currently moving through the country’s parliament.

The new law has been condemned by Mohammad Khatami, the former Iranian president, who called for a referendum on the issue of mandatory hijab – saying it was “a polarising and divisive matter that ignores the wishes of the majority of the Iranian people”.

“The government must recognise the fact that a substantial part of our society rejects and opposes the mandatory hijab, and coercions to implement it has failed to succeed,” Mr Khatami was quoted as saying by Etemad.

Authorities have also redeployed the widely-feared morality police, who had largely stopped patrols following the death of 22-year-old Amini last September.

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
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