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# A year after the death of Iranian protestor Mahsa Amini, has anything changed?

September 17, 2023 · 8:24 AM ET  
 Heard on Weekend Edition Sunday



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A year after the death of a young woman after being arrested by Iran's morality police, NPR's Ayesha Rascoe speaks to Holly Dagues of The Atlantic Council about calls for change in Iran.

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AYESHA RASCOE, HOST:

It's been a year since Iran's morality police detained a 22-year-old woman named Mahsa Amini. They stopped her because they said she wasn't following Iran's conservative dress code for women. Within three days, Jina, as she was also known, was dead. Her death triggered months of protests across Iran with protesters chanting woman, life, freedom.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTERS: (Chanting in non-English language).

RASCOE: The government crackdown that followed was deadly, with thousands arrested and an estimated 500 killed and at least seven people executed in connection with the protests. Holly Dages is a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, and she joins us now. Welcome to the program.

HOLLY DAGRES: Thank you for having me. It's an honor.

RASCOE: For months after Mahsa Amini's death, protesters seemed to be out on a daily basis across Iran, you know, chanting women, life, freedom. Where is that protest movement now?

DAGRES: Well, Ayesha, I know that there's some skepticism in the West about where these protests are going, but we're now a year into these ongoing anti-establishment protests, and they've been happening day in and day out in various forms, whether it be women not abiding by mandatory hijab rules, ethnic minorities like in the southeastern province of Sistan, Baluchestan, protesting every Friday after prayer, people chanting from the rooftops and their windows that they don't want an Islamic republic and, of course, graffiti that's been scrawled on the walls calling the supreme leader of Iran a murderer. To me, these protests have been sustaining this whole year, and unfortunately, they're not getting the attention that they deserve.

RASCOE: So what, if anything, has changed for the average Iranian?

DAGRES: We've actually seen a crackdown increase in the lead-up to the protest anniversary. Iranian women have been getting text messages. The Iranian authorities have been using surveillance technology that actually identifies their faces. They've been threatened that they would have their internet connection cut off, their cellphones cut off. Women have even been threatened with

fines and, more gruesomely, even with threats of actually having to wash bodies in a morgue. And these are all reports that Amnesty International has put out, another rights organization. So these aren't rumors. These are facts that are being documented.

RASCOE: You're Iranian yourself. What are you hearing from young Iranians inside the country who were perhaps hopeful that they could see some real changes?

DAGRES: Well, the youth I've been in touch with - they want the Islamic republic gone. They see that their story had made headlines a year ago, so they're wondering, why isn't the international community doing more?

RASCOE: As the anniversary is approached, there has been heightened security presence. Can you talk a little bit about that?

DAGRES: Yes. So just in the lead-up to the protest anniversary, we've seen that there's been a massive crackdown not just of activists, but of journalists and the family of those that are killed. Just this past week, Mahsa Jina Amini's uncle was arrested, and her father was brought in for interrogation. We've also seen that there's been a heightened security presence in the capital, Tehran, and other cities. We've also, of course, been hearing a lot about the internet issues - that it's dropped. It's slowed down. And the reason that the authorities messed with the internet, of course, is because it's how Iranians share information with the world when the security forces are brutally cracking down on protesters, but also for rights organizations to document it.

RASCOE: And in addition to this crackdown in surveillance, there's also a new draft law that would allow a 10-year prison sentence for women who don't wear headscarves. Can you talk about that?

DAGRES: This new law - it's just an additional measure to what's been happening for the past four decades. And it signals to me that this is a regime that does not want to give an inch to its people, and it

wants to repress them furthermore rather than giving in to their basic needs and wants.

RASCOE: And I know that you mentioned that journalists have been targeted and others. There has also been an ousting of academics recently who supported the protest.

DAGRES: The latest is that they're not just being sacked. They're being replaced by regime loyalists. And it's - again, this signals that this is a regime that doesn't want to listen to the needs and wants of its people.

RASCOE: It sounds like, from what you're saying, that the regime is doing what it can to crack down to kind of keep this from spreading even further. Is - am I looking at that the right way?

DAGRES: Let's say tomorrow they decided they - this law wasn't going to happen, and they're going to allow women to wear whatever they want in the streets. Truth be told, that's just a Band-Aid on the bigger issue, which is that this is an irredeemable regime that's systematically corrupt, repressive and mismanaged. And we're seeing from ordinary Iranians who are taking to the streets that they want this regime gone. And until that happens, I don't think you're going to see protests in the country end or civil disobedience end because they've had enough. They don't want the status quo.

RASCOE: That's Holly Dages, nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. Thank you so much for speaking with us today.

DAGRES: Thank you so much, Ayesha.

(SOUNDBITE OF RIVAL CONSOLES' "FRAGMENT")

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