

IRAN

Iranian Artists Slam Government For Banning Actresses Who Protested Hijab Law

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"As far as I know, only the judiciary can issue such a verdict," said veteran cinema and theater actor Reza Kianian. "Art and artists cannot be dictated to from above."

Several high-profile Iranian artists [have objected](#) to a move by the Culture Ministry to ban some Iranian actresses who have publicly opposed the mandatory hijab law.

Veteran cinema and theater actor Reza Kianian on October 26 questioned the legality of the ban on his Instagram account, asking whether the constitution allows "anyone or any ministry to deprive someone of their right to work without a final judicial verdict?"

"As far as I know, only the judiciary can issue such a verdict," [he said](#),

adding that the "magnitude and value of an artist is determined by the people. Art and artists cannot be dictated to from above."

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The dispute broke out after an official from the cinema organization affiliated with the ministry that oversees culture and Islamic guidance announced a ban on actresses opposing the mandatory hijab in cinematic films. The names of more than 10 actresses were released by state media as being on the list.

Then on October 25, Mohammad Mehdi Esmaeili, the culture and Islamic guidance minister, appeared to widen the ban, saying, "It is not possible to work with those" actresses who had previously protested the mandatory hijab by appearing without it in public places and events.

Among the banned artists whose names have been made public are Baran Kosari, Vishka Asayesh, Taraneh Alidoosti, and Katayoun Riahi.

Reacting to the minister's statements on her Instagram account, Riahi wrote: "My dignity does not allow me to work in today's cinema? Who the hell are you to say so?!"

Riahi, a veteran actress, made headlines when she removed her mandatory hijab in solidarity with nationwide protests against the Iranian government after the death in September 2022 of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini while in police custody after allegedly breaking the hijab law.

Several Iranian actresses subsequently showed solidarity with the protesters by removing their hijabs.

The act met with a harsh response from the Islamic republic's security apparatus, leading to the arrest of several, including Alidoosti, Riahi, and Hengameh Ghaziani.

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Mohammad Rezaei Rad, a playwright and theater director, also responded to the government's new order on his Instagram account, pledging his support for his colleagues while urging more men to join him in rejecting the policy.

Acts of civil disobedience have increased in Iran since the death of the 22-year-old Amini. Authorities have responded with a brutal crackdown on all forms of dissent, detaining thousands across the country.

Violators of the hijab requirement can face up to two years in prison, although proposed legislation would increase the maximum sentence to up to three years for repeat offenders.

While the protests appear to be waning, resistance to the hijab, or mandatory head scarf, remains high as it is seen now as a symbol of the state's repression of women and the deadly crackdown on society.

Several prominent public figures have also been summoned by the police or arrested, including prominent rapper Toomaj Salehi.

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