

IRAN

JAILED FOR PROTESTING FORCED VEILING LAWS



Monireh Arabshahi © Private

Defenders of women’s rights **Monireh Arabshahi**, **Yasaman Aryani** and **Mojgan Keshavarz** have been arbitrarily detained in Shahr-e Ray prison outside Tehran since April 2019. They have been charged with offences including “inciting and facilitating corruption and prostitution” through promoting “unveiling” only because they campaigned against abusive forced veiling laws. None have had access to a lawyer. All are prisoners of conscience.

The three women’s rights defenders were arrested in relation to a [video](#) that was widely disseminated on social media. The video, shot on International Women’s Day 2019, showed them without their headscarves, distributing flowers to female passengers on a Tehran metro train and discussing their hopes for women’s rights in Iran. They have been charged with serious offences simply for peacefully protesting Iran’s degrading and discriminatory forced veiling laws. Their prosecution is part of a wider crackdown since January 2018 on women’s rights defenders campaigning against forced veiling laws.



Yasaman Aryani © Private

Following her arrest on 10 April 2019, Yasaman Aryani spent the next nine days in solitary confinement in Vozara detention centre in Tehran. During this time, she was subjected to intense interrogation sessions without a lawyer. She was pressured to make a forced “confession” that “opposition elements” from abroad “incited” her human rights activism and to proclaim she is “repentant” and “regrets” her activities.



Mojgan Keshavarz © Private

On 26 June 2019, the women’s rights defenders were transferred from Shahr-e Ray prison outside Tehran to Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran for an indictment hearing. They were denied access to a lawyer and told by the judge that they could have a lawyer when appealing the verdict. They have said that the judge was abusive to them and said, “You all appear to be [drug] addicts” and “I will make you all suffer”. Charges against them include “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”, “spreading propaganda against the system” and “inciting and facilitating corruption and prostitution” through promoting “unveiling”, in connection to their campaigning against abusive forced veiling laws. Yasaman Aryani is facing an additional charge of “insulting Islamic sanctities”. Monireh Arabshahi’s support of workers’ rights was also cited as “criminal” activity.

Please send a letter to the Head of the Judiciary.

- * Urge him to release Monireh Arabshahi, Yasaman Aryani and Mojgan Keshavarz immediately and unconditionally as they are prisoners of conscience, jailed solely for their human rights work.
- * Until they are free, insist that they have regular contact with their families and a lawyer of their choice.
- * Call on his government to stop criminalizing the work of women's rights defenders including those who peacefully protest forced veiling, and to abolish forced veiling laws.

Write to

Head of the Judiciary Ebrahim Raisi
C/o Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN
Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 28
1209 Geneva, Switzerland
Salutation: Dear Mr Raisi

Additional information

On 8 March 2019, a video (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Buv38GbhDAf/>) went viral showing Monireh Arabshahi, Yasaman Aryani and Mojgan Keshavarz without their headscarves, distributing flowers to female passengers on a metro train in Tehran and discussing their hopes for women's rights in Iran. In the video, **Yasaman Aryani** hands a flower to a woman wearing a hijab and says she hopes that one day they can walk side by side in the street, "me without the hijab and you with the hijab". Following the posting of the video, security forces arrested her on 10 April 2019 by at her family home in Tehran. The next day, **Monireh Arabshahi**, her mother, was arrested after going to Vozara detention centre in Tehran to inquire about her. **Mojgan Keshavarz** was arrested by force on 25 April 2019 at her home in front of her nine-year-old daughter.

The women's rights defenders were denied access to an independent lawyer of their own choosing after being told that the Note to Article 48 of the Code of Criminal Procedure applies due to the "security" nature of their cases. This requires individuals facing charges related to "national security" and certain organized crimes to select their lawyer from a list of names approved by the Head of the Judiciary.

Their prosecution is part of a wider crackdown on women's rights defenders campaigning against forced veiling laws. On 4 June 2019, Fereshteh Didani was arrested and is now held in Shahr-e Ray prison, which is used to incarcerate women who have been convicted of serious violent crimes. She had a hearing before branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran on 26 June 2019, but no information is available about what charges she faces. On 1 June 2019, Saba Kordafshari was arrested and held in solitary confinement in Vozara detention centre until 11 June 2019, when she was transferred to Shahr-e Ray prison.

In the last few years, a growing movement against forced veiling laws has emerged in Iran, with women and girls standing in public places, silently waving their headscarves on the ends of sticks or sharing videos of themselves walking down the street with their hair showing. This movement includes White Wednesdays, a popular campaign which urges women to share pictures

and videos of themselves on social media every Wednesday, wearing white headscarves or white pieces of clothing in protest at compulsory veiling, My Stealthy Freedom, which encourages women from Iran to post online pictures of themselves without headscarves by way of opposing forced veiling, and My Camera My Weapon, which aims to raise awareness of the constant harassment and assault that women and girls face in Iran's streets as a result of forced veiling laws.

The Iranian authorities have felt threatened by the strength and force of this movement and waged a crackdown in response. Since January 2018, they have arrested dozens of women's rights defenders, including four men. Some have been tortured and sentenced to prison terms or flogging after grossly unfair trials. In an official statement on 23 February 2018, the police warned that women peacefully protesting the discriminatory and abusive practice of forced veiling would now be charged with "inciting and facilitation corruption and prostitution", which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/05/iran-abusive-forced-veiling-laws-police-womens-lives/>

Making criminals of women and girls who refuse to wear the hijab is an extreme form of discrimination. Forced veiling laws violate a whole host of rights, including the rights to equality, privacy and freedom of expression and belief. These laws degrade women and girls, stripping them of their dignity and self-worth.