

WLUML SPOTLIGHT

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Where there is silence, there is death Make sure that they are heard

Iran has been rocked by protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, 22. She was arrested by Iran's morality police for allegedly breaking hijab rules. Mahsa's photograph, and the future that was taken from her, has become a weapon for a generation of young Iranians tired of being abused, silenced, and forced to live in fear. As a result of Masha's death, several issues have come to light, including Iran's restrictions on freedom and its ailing economy.

Mahsa is the latest of a long series of young women imprisoned or killed by the Iranian authorities. Some reach the news, others are abused under the veil of secrecy. In 2018, Maedeh Hojabri was arrested for posting a video of herself dancing in her bedroom without a hijab. In 2019, Fatemeh Khishv, known by her Instagram username of Sahar Tabar, was sentenced to 10 years. Her photos featured her face altered through plastic surgery and photoshop, which was seen as "corruption of young people" and "disrespect for the Islamic Republic".

The people of Iran have always fought for their rights in the past, but this time seems to be different. Many protests have been led by women. Some have burnt their veils, while others have cut their hair in public. Men have also shown up, determined to support women as their equal counterparts.

Having spent many years working with young Iranians, I can attest that the people of Iran are not their authorities. Even though the government seeks to promote gender inequality, people feel quite the opposite. It is an equally courageous group of people who are taking to the street, willing to risk their lives together for what they believe in and for this they are particularly feared.

The authorities clearly have their own M.O. since once again they have curtailed internet access, blocking access to Meta Platforms, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Despite this, the people of Iran have discovered their voices thanks to virtual private networks (VPNs). Through these services, the people are able to communicate with the media and friends abroad, asking for their support. Additionally, they provide intel on the situation on the ground as it happens.

They report that the Islamic republic has given officers the authority to shoot, a video shows a 15-year-old child shot in the head and a young girl wounded, a young man was attacked with gas for going to buy medicine. Unarmed people are being murdered. As people see it in the street, "it's a war".

Since owning weapons is illegal for civilians, people are trying to fight back by throwing rocks. Furthermore, people are being arrested in their homes, and no one knows where they are taken. A simple message is being shared with us by young Iranians: if they try to blind you, see, share the videos of what they are doing and if they try to silence us, be our voice.

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