

WLUML SPOTLIGHT

Why the women of Afghanistan's support for the Iran uprising is a lesson to us all

This is dedicated to every woman and girl who raises her voice to uplift her suffering sisters around the world. The choice to not build impenetrable walls around your own pain and lean into indifference when it would be easier - and safer - to do so, is deeply admirable.

Mahsa Amini is immortalised not only in Iranian history, but the history of global women's movements and causes. Her murder sparked a nationwide uprising across Iran, which has quickly become a global catalyst for thousands as they demand the rights of women, girls and two generations of Iranians, who despite never voting for an Islamic regime have never known life without it.

The courage of their (mostly) young Iranian neighbours has mobilised many Afghan women to publicly support their cause which closely resembles their own. I've spent a year closely following the brutal restrictions placed on women by the Taliban - and the parallels between Persian and Afghan women are clear. The agenda to relegate Afghan women into subservience and silence is a top priority for the Taliban, with edicts such as the mandatory hijab, ban on working women and implementation of mahram (having to be accompanied by a close male relative in public) all clear indications of their unchanged and oppressive regime. Similarly, many women and girls in Iran have been subjected to enforced head coverings, child marriages, and deprived of marital, divorce and employment rights over the past 43 years.

Women in Afghanistan understand what Iranian women and girls are losing out on - the gift of being able to live, and live freely, which has invoked a powerful (and genuine) need to speak up against this injustice, despite the devastating impact on their own quality of life. I find this absolutely astounding because altruism is a rare practice. Yet, after trawling through twitter feeds of Afghan women marching to the Iranian embassy in Kabul, despite being in an actual firing line in the process, I've noticed that Mahsa's murder has provoked a surge in intersectional resistance amongst Afghan women that we, as women, and women in the west are falling short of.

The wider world is also failing to draw attention to the huge sacrifices Afghan women are taking to further the rights of all women. This provides the very climate the Taliban needs to persecute women and girls with impunity. Across the globe, many of the world's biggest cities have been holding mass-scale and frequent rallies for the people of Iran, with tens of thousands expressing their solidarity for the toppling of the Islamic regime. But the suffering of Afghan women has slipped out of the spotlight, at a time when it should remind us of those women around the world who have yet to taste the basic freedoms that many of us take for granted.

"United we are stronger" is one of the many slogans ricocheting at Mahsa Amini rallies across the globe. If the women of Afghanistan have taught us anything through their support of Iranian women, it's that we owe it to each other to look beyond whatever is topical in the media landscape. Rather, we need to strive for a genuine revolutionary movement which adopts many women groups as part of our freedom story.

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