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Iran

# Women challenge religious power

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**On December 27th, 2017, on the eve of popular protests in which many women participated, Vida Movahed mounted on an electricity box, a few steps from the University of Tehran, without a veil and with a white cloth hanging at the end of a pole.**

According to the legislation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the judge can inflict on a woman appearing in public without a hijab a symbolic fine of the order of 10 euros, or a prison sentence ranging from ten days to two months.

The 31-year-old mother of a 19-month-old child was arrested immediately and transferred to Evin Prison. She was finally released a month later as a result of the efforts of human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh, who herself spent three years in prison between 2010 and 2013. But she had to pay a bail bond of an amount equivalent to 50 times the minimum monthly salary.

This heroic act was taken up by other women in the capital, then in other cities.

The second woman who dared to remove her veil is called Nargues Hosseini. Aged 32, and originally from central Iran, she is a master student in sociology. She was also arrested and imprisoned in Ghartchak Prison, which is well known for its poor sanitary conditions. The same lawyer agreed to defend her and in particular stated that, even if she had the means to do so, her client would refuse to pay the bail bond of an amount equivalent to 90,000 euros which was demanded from her. According to her lawyer, Nargues Hosseini is accused of drug use and "incitement to corruption", which in Iran is equivalent to the opening of a brothel! The invention of accusations of this kind is not new, because the regime is expert in this domain.

Other women in Tehran and other cities have broken the same ban. They also appeared in public without a headscarf, and with a white cloth at the end of a pole. According to the Iranian police, by February 1st 29 women had been arrested (information confirmed by Amnesty International).

A Persian-speaking radio station based in the Netherlands interviewed one of the participants in this movement: "When I came out of my house to get up on this bench, my heart was beating very hard. Of course I was scared, because I did not know what would happen to me. When I arrived, I put my headscarf on the pole and the moment was very strong. On January 29th, she stayed on the bench for 30 minutes. She says, among other things, "My act is not just about taking off my veil. When I think carefully, I find that a state that does not respect the way I want to dress and intervenes in all our personal choices, public, social and political, is a dictatorship, the worst of dictatorships."

This bold new way of publicly defying the regime is not limited to young women. For example, although the temperature was freezing, we saw a very old woman with a hunched back hoist herself up with her cane and make the same gesture.

All these courageous acts are a symbol of the refusal of many Iranian women to continue to endure what women have suffered for nearly 40 years.

Just before the gesture of Vida Movahed, this previously unknown woman, the white flag was certainly the sign and symbol of peace, but also of surrender and capitulation. From now on, it also means insubordination, challenge, disobedience and daring.

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It should be noted that abroad, attempts have of course been made to attempt to appropriate such heroic deeds. This is particularly the case of a journalist of Iranian origin, formerly a "reformer", who campaigns on Voice of America [2] for the restoration of the Shah monarchy, swept away by the revolution of 1979.

This article was published in French by *L'Anticapitaliste*, weekly paper of the NPA in France, issue 648, February 2018, taken from the site [Socialist Solidarity with Iranian Workers](#) .

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[1] Public statement of Amnesty International dated 24 January 2018:

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1377832018ENGLISH.pdf>

[2] Unlike Deutsche Welle, Radio France Internationale or BBC World Service, Voice of America is directly controlled by the United States Government.