

Forum: GA3 - Social Humanitarian & Cultural Committee

Issue: Protecting the human rights of female civilians in Iran.

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Position: Head Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates of the Social Humanitarian & Cultural committee,

I am delighted to welcome you to this year's inter-school MUN conference as part of the social humanitarian & cultural committee. My name is Dara Lockitt and until last September, when I Joined Queen Elizabeth's Grammar school, I had very little idea what MUN was. During my first year at QE I started to take part in MUN and attended last year's inter-school conference. I hope that you all enjoy the two day conference when it comes around just as much as I did.

This topic guide is a basic guideline on a very relevant topic which means that historically things have been summarised. I strongly advise looking into this topic to a greater extent in a wider view point and in the position of your delegation. The issue surrounding women's rights in Iran is something that has been publicised extensively in recent years. Researching this topic has only made me more aware of how rights around the world are never consistent and how lucky we are in the UK today.

This guide has led me to find out so many different parts of this issue that I never understood before. I hope that you find researching this topic to be not as daunting as it might seem to be. The historical context led me down many rabbit holes and the more present issues in the media and reports have led me to understand much more about how, for example, the UN works in particular.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me, no matter how small the question might be, at: q4303@queenelizabeths.kent.sch.uk

I cannot wait to meet all of you,

Dara Lockitt.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Women's rights issue in Iran has been a major topic for revolution and calls for reform since the late 1970s. Throughout the history of Iran, women's rights have been strongly linked to religion specifically within Islamic beliefs and branches such as Shi'i. The main goal of the women's rights movement is to abolish the discriminatory laws in place against women and take steps towards passing laws that protect the lives of all women in Iran.

The recent death of Mahsa Amini on 16th September 2022 has only brought larger awareness to the world over the infringement of rights women face daily in Iran. Amini's death sparked protests, movements of solidarity and online posts demonstrating how individuals are working for step by step improvements of women's rights.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Human rights

Basic rights which many societies believe that all people should have¹.

Women's rights

The rights, claimed by and for women, of equal privileges and opportunities with men².

Hijab

An Arabic word meaning barrier or partition. In Islam, it is the principle of modesty and includes behaviour as well as dress for both males and females. A Hijab can refer to 'the complete covering of everything except the hands, face and feet in long, loose and non see-through garments'³.

Women Human Rights Defenders

Women Human Rights Defenders are all women and girls working on any human issue and people of all genders who work to promote women's rights and rights related to gender equality⁴.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historic overview

In 1979, it was declared that hijabs would be mandatory for all women in their workplace. The law did not come into act until 1983, however the Iranian revolution of 1979 brought about masses of women who spoke up for an Islamic republic which they believed would give them equality. When the law for compulsory hijabs came into place, the penalties for not wearing a hijab properly in public spaces included imprisonment and lashings⁵. The implementations of this law overturned the 1936 outlawing of traditional veils by Pahlavi as it was seen "as a sign of 'backwardness'"⁶.

¹ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/human-rights>

² <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/womens-rights>

³ BBC - Religions - Islam: Hijab.

⁴ WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

⁵ <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-headscarf-politics>

⁶ <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202201070683>

Prior to the Iranian revolution, women in Iran had gained the right to vote in 1963. This year also gave women the right to file for divorce without the risk of losing complete custody of their children and the right to run for parliament. The legal age of marriage was also raised from 15 to 18 under Family Protection laws of 1975.

However, under Khomeini after the revolution, the Family protection laws were suspended, lowering the age of marriage for women to nine years old since this age is deemed as the age of legal puberty. As well as this; schools were separated by gender and men were allowed to marry a second wife without informing the first wife⁷.

After Khomeini's death, 1989, Rafsanjani came to office which brought about a new political change and the end of the Iran-Iraq war that had been going on for eight years. His government improved the restrictions on women, including allowing divorce proceedings by women to happen again. Women could go back into employment that included areas such as engineering and business which had been banned by Khomeini's government. Until 2004, Iran's presidents all took steps towards bettering the lives of women and making equality a more realistic goal. This included the age of marriage being raised back to thirteen by this time.

From 2005 to 2013, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad brought strict rollbacks on progress made by the past presidents. Women's employment became restricted in certain industries again and majors to do with engineering and business were not offered to women. This strict enforcement of social views were enforced through the "morality police" or "guidance patrols", which increased its presence to enforce that all women - religious or not, citizen or not - wore a hijab in public spaces⁸ and acted appropriately. Throughout his presidency, the number of activists as groups and individuals speaking up drastically increased overall.

However, in 2013 Rouhani came into office and reforms were drafted to look into sex discrimination in the job market. During his presidency in May 2017, women wore white headscarves as a form of protest against the 1983 law⁹.

Embrahim Raisi, the current president of Iran (as of July 2023) came into office in August 2021. During six months of his presidency between 1st January 2022 and 30th June 2022 a report stated that executions had killed "at least 251 people"¹⁰. While not all these penalties were due to protests and activists for women's rights, it does show how the use of the death penalty had increased under his government.

On 13 September 2022, Masha Amini was arrested by the morality police. Three days later, she died of government reported natural causes in custody. Her death sparked protests where many women would remove their headscarves within schools, universities and streets. Protests have been held around the world to demonstrate the need for change in Iran and to raise awareness of the issues many face at present time¹¹. As of April 2023, 537 protesters had been reportedly killed and 19,200 people were detained¹².

⁷ <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/aug/11/iranian-womens-movement-four-phases>

⁸ <https://www.dw.com/en/who-are-irans-morality-police/a-63200711>

⁹ [Why Iranian women are wearing white on Wednesdays - BBC News](#)

¹⁰ [Iran: Horrific wave of executions must be stopped - Amnesty International](#)

¹¹ [Protests in Iran: Death of Mahsa Amini - House of Lords Library](#)

¹² [2022 Iran protests: Human rights and international response - House of Commons Library](#)

Human rights in Iran

As of 2022, reports were made that “security forces unlawfully fired live ammunition and metal pellets to crush protests” against the Islamic Republic system. Men, women and children were injured and killed as a result of this retaliation from forces in Iran¹³. On a wider scale minorities living in Iran like the Baluchi have been subject to political oppression enforced by threats of the death penalty.

Those who no longer live in Iran but still have relatives and close ones in the country must also be careful what they say about the regime in place since it could result in the Iranian authorities detaining their friends and families. Additionally they themselves have the very real threat of becoming subject to harassment for speaking out against the Iranian government.

Additionally, from a religious point of human rights, while 99.6% of the population was reportedly Muslim in the 2016 census¹⁴ it makes the 0.4% of the population a major minority that have faced abuse and harassment for not conforming to the majority.

The Dangers of Uprising

In March 2023 the United Nations Human Rights office held a discussion on the Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights¹⁵. The topic was focused on the situation of human rights in Myanmar since within two years of a coup being staged “more than 3,000 civilians have been killed; more than 1.3 million civilians have been displaced; more than 16,000 political prisoners were behind bars; and 17.6 million people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance”. The link was made through the discussion to the Human Rights violations happening in Iran since over 22,000 people had been arrested by Iranian authorities and inhumane methods of punishment have been inflicted to citizens. The punishment being used by authorities in Iran points towards international crimes. The peaceful protests being used at the moment by Iranian citizens show how willing they are to put their lives at risk to gain the most basic human rights as a collective and for women. If justice isn’t given to citizens and the authorities accountability for their crimes are not upheld, the situation in Myanmar could become a reality to an extent in Iran.

Volleyball

The national sport of Iran is volleyball and yet women in Iran are not allowed to watch it be played by men. The international volleyball federation has been asked to uphold a ban that stops Iran from being able to host future tournaments unless it allows Iranian women to attend¹⁶.

However as of June 23rd, 2023, there has been a report that Iran may pull out of the VNL this year due to visas not being granted¹⁷.

¹³ [Human rights in Iran Amnesty International](#)

¹⁴ [Selected Findings of the 2016 National Population and Housing Census](#)

¹⁵ [Human Rights Council Hears about Reports of Massacres of Civilians in Myanmar and Possible Crimes against Humanity in Iran Following Mass Protests in Both Countries | OHCHR](#)

¹⁶ [Women's Rights in Iran | Human Rights Watch](#)

¹⁷ [Iran may pull out of 2023 VNL - Tehran Times](#)

Repression of Women Human Rights Defenders

Women human rights defenders in Iran have reported over the years being arrested without a warrant on vague grounds such as ‘propaganda against the state’¹⁸. Violence by authorities against peaceful protesters have become more and more frequent since 2017. Peaceful acts including taking off headscarves in public places to demonstrate protest lead to immediate arrests like in the 2017 Revolution Street girls protests. Peaceful expressions of protests are often criminalised by Iranian authorities to portray them as political opponents.

Additionally, reports of not being given a lawyer once arrested have either been ignored or these activists are reportedly given a list of lawyers preselected to choose from. Most women political prisoners are sent to Evin Prison in Tehran where they are denied family visits, including visitations with their children and denied phone calls.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

The UN

On 14 December 2022, the economic and social council drafted a resolution on the removal of Iran from membership in the commission for the rest of the term till 2026. While 8 countries voted against and 16 abstentions, 29 countries voted in favour of the draft and immediately removed Iran from membership in the commission on “the Status of Women”¹⁹. While this is not a direct action to fix the situation, as pointed out by China’s representative, it does show that the Status of Women is something that the UN takes very seriously.

The EU

The EU has condemned the violent approaches used by authorities against protesters in Iran. The EU does not have a delegation in Iran currently (December 2022)²⁰. In March 2023, the EU renewed its sanctions on Iran that have been in place since 2011 until April 2024

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Date of Event	Description of Event
1963	Iranian women gain the right to vote, the right to file for divorce and the right to run for parliament
1975	The Family Protection laws raised the legal age of marriage for women from 15 to 18
February, 1979	The Iranian Revolution
December, 1979	Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini becomes the supreme leader of Iran

¹⁸ [Beyond the Veil: Discrimination against women in Iran](#)

¹⁹

https://press.un.org/en/2022/ecosoc7109.doc.htm?_gl=1*zhvji*_ga*MTg2OTE5NTExNy4xNjg5NDUwNic0*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTY4OTQ1MDY3My4xLjAuMTY4OTQ1MDY3My4wLjAuMA

²⁰ [Iran and the EU | EEAS](#).

1982	The Family Protection laws were suspended, the age of marriage for girls was lowered to 9 and schools became separated by gender.
1983	Hijabs were made as mandatory for all women by law as a result of the Iranian Revolution
August, 1989	Abolishment of the Prime minister position after 9 years of Moussavi holding the position
August, 1989	Hashemi Rafsanjani becomes the president
June, 1989	The current supreme leader Ali Hosseini Khamene
August, 1997	Mohammad Khatami replaces Rafsanjani as president
2002	The age of marriage for girls was raised to 13
August, 2005	Mohmoud Ahmadinejad replaced Khatami as president
August, 2013	The current president Hassan Rouhani replaces Ahmadinejad

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Economic and Social Council Adopts Controversial Draft Resolution to Remove Iran from Commission on Status of Women, Emphasising Lack of Rights in Country

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The Family Protection Act (1975)

This act meant that all divorces would have to be listened to by the Divisional courts²². While this did not solve the issue as a whole, it took a step in the right direction to give women a more equal chance to use the court system in Iran.

²¹

https://press.un.org/en/2022/ecosoc7109.doc.htm?_gl=1*zhvji*_ga*MTg2OTE5NTEyNy4xNjg5NDUwNjc0*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTY4OTQ1MDY3My4xLjAuMTY4OTQ1MDY3My4wLjAuMA

²²

<https://learningpartnership.org/sites/default/files/resources/pdfs/Iran-Family-Protection-Act-1975-English.pdf>

POSSIBLE FUTURE SOLUTIONS

A responsible party could be put into place to ensure that women's rights are respected and protected under the law and society authorities. This will allow progress to be made in a short period of time rather than the small steps we have seen over the decades. This responsible party could also work closely with the UN to make sure that rights are respected and protected up to a global standard.

The strengthening of global women's rights movements could inevitably put enough pressure on the government to accept the changes they need for equality. However this approach could also lead to mass detainments and executions of protestors and activists under the government authorities.

The EU could adopt policies that support the protesters' demands short term, while from a long term point of view plans could be focused on empowering the citizens in their fight to establish a long-lasting political change within government.

A major step would need to be targeted towards the abolishment of the compulsory hijab laws, which discriminate against women on a daily basis and since currently authorities can interpret if the dress code is being followed or not and if not women can lose their jobs resulting in "economic coercion"²³. Additionally, the rights in place around family life and the right to a divorce need to be made equal for both men and women since, for example, a woman's freedom of movement is reliant on her husband's approval once married. Additionally, the access to family planning programs have more recently been reduced in the forms of access to free contraception.

If the EU is to make an approach towards Iran it should be in support for the Iranian people through looking at how to support the gender equality movements since equality is crucial for a country's development overall.

²³ [Rethinking the EU's Approach to Women's Rights in Iran - Carnegie Europe](#)

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