

# UNVEILED

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## Let's turn International Women's Day into a day of protest against the regime of sexual apartheid in Iran!

8 March, International Women's Day, the international day of protest against all forms of oppression and discrimination against women. To mark this day, Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran and others are calling for the condemnation of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its systematic misogyny and sexual apartheid.

In this day and age, apartheid is no longer identifiable with racial apartheid but with the sexual apartheid of regimes like the Islamic Republic of Iran. This regime has intensified, legitimised and strengthened the subjugation of women with its laws and legal system. From the outset, it has enforced compulsory veiling with brute force, including by throwing acid on unveiled women's faces and imprisoning and flogging those deemed to be transgressors. Like the former racial apartheid of South Africa, it has also segregated women in buses, workplaces and all other public spaces. Women

are barred from many occupations. They don't even have the right to enter sport stadiums. According to Sharia law, women are the property of men and have no duty but to serve their male 'guardian' and take care of their husbands and children. Women's right to inheritance is half that of men's. Women's testimony is worth half that of men's. Women can hardly get a divorce without their husband's permission yet men can divorce their wives without reason and even without their being present. Women don't have the right to travel, work, study and more without their male 'guardian's' permission. The marriage of an adult woman is not valid and cannot be registered without her father's consent. Sexual relations outside of marriage are punishable with death by stoning, the most brutal form of execution. Any protest against sexual apartheid and women's enslaved position is met with brute force.

In light of this stark reality, the Islamic Republic of Iran must

face the same public outrage and condemnation as did Apartheid South Africa. The Islamic Republic of Iran must be condemned and isolated by 21st century humanity. The political isolation of Apartheid South Africa in the early 90's is a successful example of the shared efforts of people across the world in getting rid of an inhuman regime. The Islamic Republic of Iran can and must meet the same condemnation and expulsion. Any appeasement toward this regime only helps it at the expense of the rights and lives of people in Iran.

On March 8, Equal Rights Now calls for solidarity with the egalitarian struggle of women and men in Iran. Over the last 30 years, the movement against sexual apartheid has been taking shape there in universities and schools, in factories and workplaces, in the family and on the streets. This movement is becoming increasingly expansive.

According to official statistics, in Iran, hundreds of thousands of

youth and women are arrested and punished annually for not observing the veil. They are sometimes lashed. This shows not only the regime's oppression but also the massive scale of resistance and struggle. The appeal against the situation of women in Iran under the Islamic regime in Iran is an appeal against a reactionary regime and the political Islamic movement that is resorting to terror and medievalism. The emancipation of women in Iran is a call for the emancipation of women in countries and communities ruled by political Islam and Sharia and will strengthen the women's liberation movement internationally.

On March 8, we call on public opinion to support the women's liberation movement in Iran by demanding an end to political relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and an end to sexual apartheid.

*Long Live International Women's Day!*

[www.equalrightsnow-iran.com](http://www.equalrightsnow-iran.com)

## Join the fight against sexual apartheid

Sexual Apartheid is the outrage of our century. In Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and countries ruled by Islamic laws, millions of women and girls are segregated, degraded and relegated to second class citizenship. Keeping women and girls separate and unequal are important pillars of Islamic rule, affecting every aspect of people's lives. Just as a mass movement rejected Racial Apartheid in South Africa, so too must it reject segregation based on sex in Iran and everywhere.

8 March 2009 will be the 30th anniversary of the mass demonstrations against veiling and sexual apartheid that took place in Iran after Khomeini proclaimed the day before that women were to be veiled in workplaces. The protests were suppressed and the Islamic regime in Iran went on to impose compulsory veiling for girls and women and segregate the society at large.

The women's liberation movement in Iran, however, continued to mobilise and grow in strength and numbers. Today, it is a resolute



movement against sexual apartheid and discrimination against women and for freedom and equality.

Equal Rights Now - Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran is calling on people everywhere to pay tribute to this movement by recognising 8 March (International Women's Day) as the International Day against Sexual Apartheid.

We also call on individuals, unions, parties and organisations to condemn sexual apartheid and the political Islamic movement that perpetrates it by continuing to sign on to the below declaration.

## Declaration against sexual apartheid

Americans for Humanism, USA; Ophelia Benson, Editor, Butterflies and Wheels, USA; - Shahnaz Bokhari, Chairperson, Progressive Women's Association, Pakistan; Pamela Bone, Journalist and Author, Australia; A. C. Grayling, Author and Philosopher, UK; Maria Hagberg, founder of organisation against honour killings, Sweden; Hope Knuttson, President, Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, Iceland; David Pollock, President of the European Humanist Federation, UK; Terry Sanderson, President, National Secular Society, UK; Michael Schmidt-Salomon, philosopher; CEO of Giordano Bruno Foundation, Germany; Joan Smith, Novelist, Columnist and Human Rights Activist, UK; and Peter Tatchell, Human Rights Campaigner, UK.

Add your name to the declaration:  
[www.equalrightsnow-iran.com/sexual\\_apartheid.html](http://www.equalrightsnow-iran.com/sexual_apartheid.html)

**Join the fight against sexual apartheid!**

We, the undersigned, unequivocally oppose sexual apartheid and the subjugation of millions of women living under Islamic rules and laws.

We condemn regimes and the political Islamic movement that perpetrate sexual apartheid, including in Iran.

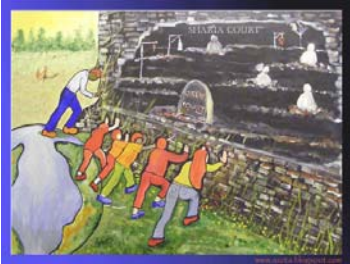
We support the legitimate struggle of millions of women and men for freedom, equality and universal rights.

Sexual apartheid, like racial apartheid, has no place in the 21 century.

This declaration has already been signed by: Norm R. Allen Jr., Executive Director, African

***For more information  
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# Equal Rights Now joins One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain



(Equal Rights Now and One Law for All Spokesperson), Fariborz Pooya (Iranian Secular Society and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain Chair), and Carla Revere (Lawyers' Secular Society Chair).

Equal Rights Now is a signatory to and coalition partner of the One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain. This campaign gives people a chance to voice their opposition to political Islam and Sharia law in Britain, but also Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, demand one secular law and full citizenship rights, demand an end to cultural relativism and racism, and defend universal rights.

On the 7th, the campaign is organising a rally in the North Terrace, Trafalgar Square, London, 3:30-4:30pm followed by a march towards Conway Hall from 4:30-5:30pm. Then it is organising a public meeting entitled Sharia Law, Sexual Apartheid and Women's Rights from 6:00-8:00pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Speakers include: Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (Journalist and British Muslims for Secular Democracy Chair), Naser Khader (Democratic Muslims Founder), Gina Khan (One Law for All Spokesperson), Kenan Malik (Writer and Broadcaster), Maryam Namazie

Prizes for the One Law for All Art Competition will be awarded at the March 7 public meeting. Anyone can participate in the competition by submitting a painting, drawing, photograph, animation or short video in digital format no later than February 27, 2009. The goal of the art competition is to expose the discriminatory nature of Sharia and religious-based tribunals and/or promote equal rights for all citizens, as embodied by the campaign's emblematic phrase: One Law for All. All submissions will be reviewed by a panel of prominent judges, namely, AC Grayling (Philosopher), Deeyah (Singer), Johann Hari (Journalist and Playwright) and Polly Toynbee (Writer and Columnist).

You can sign the petition or find out more about this campaign by visiting its website [www.onelawforall.org.uk](http://www.onelawforall.org.uk).



# Join the international campaign against the civil law of Kurdistan, Iraq

The Kurdistan parliament in Iraq has recently passed the Civil Law of Kurdistan, despite the protests and objections of many activists and secularists. The recently-passed Civil Law establishes the enslavement and inferiority of women. It makes gender discrimination legal. The new law encourages men to marry more than one wife whilst imposing a male 'guardian' on women; it promotes the practice of trading women for money at marriage, and maintains the inferiority of women in cases of inheritance, in addition to other discriminatory rules derived from Sharia law. The acceptance of this reactionary law by ruling nationalist-Islamist forces dominating the parliament is a stark violation of women's rights. It is a continuation of the past 17 years track-record of these forces, which has resulted in violations of women's rights, the promotion of religious and tribal practices and values, and the heinous crimes of 'honour killings.' We believe that humanitarian forces can and must fight this discriminatory law and get rid of it. We, therefore, announce the launch of our international campaign against the Civil Law in Kurdistan - Iraq which demands the immediate abolition of the Civil Law, passed by the parliament of Kurdistan and firmly opposes all forms of slavery and sexual discrimina-

tion against women. It also calls for the prohibition of any form of interference of Sharia or any religious laws in the family or public life, and the complete separation of religion from the state. The Campaign aims to propose an alternative secular Civil Law which is based on the principals of full equality between women and men and the most contemporary standards. This secular civil law prohibits polygamy, trading of or dowry for the bride or any such practices in marriage, any form of pressure and coercion whether by an individual or party on the woman in her right to choose a partner or spouse, and decide about their mutual life, and any restrictions on women's equal right to proceed with separation or divorce.

We call upon all egalitarians and secularists, all groups or individuals who believe in gender equality, whether in Kurdistan, Iraq, or around the world, to endorse this campaign by adding their support to our campaign.

For further information or to add your name as a signatory to this important campaign, please contact:  
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# Thirty years of struggle for freedom and equality

Sohaila Sharifi

There is a short video clip on some websites showing Iranian women's 1979 historic march on International Women's Day. Each time I watch this clip I feel overwhelmed with emotion and pride. The black and white, not so great quality, video clip shows thousands of women from all walks of life - veiled and unveiled - marching through the streets of Tehran protesting Khomeini's latest speech in which he had said that it was the duty of Muslim women to cover themselves and spread the message of the 'Islamic revolution.' His fatwa was to become law and every woman was forced to observe it. In the clip, some of the women are holding up banners and some have their fists raised and are chanting slogans. After all, for many of them it was also their revolution - that had been crushed by the political Islamic movement.

Whilst the protestors are mostly women there are a considerable number of men supporters among them too. The majority of women are wearing modern, smart clothes, some according to the latest fashion and some simply in jeans and a coat or a jumper. Some have their hair loose and parted in the middle; others have it tied back or clipped to the sides. They don't look very different from women anywhere else in the world. It is their angry faces and their passionate cries though that differentiates them as brave revolutionaries who had fought shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the country and had just managed to overthrow one of the most powerful dictatorships in the region. It is the slogans they

are chanting that give me goose bumps each time I watch the video clip. Because what they are demanding, the slogans they are chanting and the songs they are singing are still as relevant as they were thirty years ago: 'Freedom is our culture; to stay at home is our shame; Liberty and equality are our undeniable rights;' 'We will fight against compulsory veiling; down with dictatorship;' 'In the dawn of freedom, we lack freedom for women;' 'women's rights are neither eastern nor western; they are universal;' 'Freedom does not take rules and regulations;' 'We want equal rights;' and 'we haven't had a revolution to be taken backwards.' A young girl is telling a French reporter how she and her friends have been out demonstrating against the Shah for nearly a year hoping that they would get a better life, freedom and equality, and how things are moving in the opposite direction. It is like going back many centuries, she says. Somewhere else a middle-aged woman wearing a floral chador is explaining that she had grown up with her veil and her chador and doesn't mind wearing it, however, 'it is not for myself that I am here,' she says, 'I have young daughters who are educated and independent and they don't want to be told what to wear. It is to support them that I am here today.'

Thirty years on, many of these women (or at least those lucky enough to survive the Islamic regime's brutality) still dream of the freedom they have fought for and which had been so brutally suppressed. They have passed

on the dream to the next generation and are now watching with a mixture of fear and fascination at how their young sons and daughters are pursuing the same dream and fighting the same regime with even more passion and bravery. Some like Mina Ahadi refused to let go of the banner and carried it all the way from Tabriz and Tehran to Berlin and London and proudly lead the fight for secularism and freedom across the world.

The battle between the Islamic regime and the Iranian people, particularly women, started from that historic demonstration and has continued. Throughout these decades, the veil has remained the main focus on both sides. The Islamic regime and its hezbollah thugs have brutally thrown acid on made up faces, slashed uncovered legs and literally pined the hijab to the foreheads of those who refused to comply. They sacked any working women who refused to observe the hijab and throughout the past thirty years they have come up with more restrictions and tricks to keep the veil on women only to face increasing resistance and a stronger and more militant movement especially from the younger generation. It is interesting to note that unlike their parents and the older generation, the majority of young people who are standing up against the government and bravely shouting that they don't want an Islamic regime have never seen anything different; they have been born and raised under the strict rules of Sharia and yet they demand unconditional equality and freedom. One can only conclude

that despite the government's every effort, it has never managed to kill the dream of those who marched the streets of Tehran thirty years ago.

The women's liberation movement in Iran is a growing and uncompromising movement that has taken the lead in the fight against political Islam not only in Iran but in some European countries too. It has become an international movement. The hijab has become one of the main pillars of not only the Islamic government in Iran but also of political Islam worldwide. Today we have to fight the veil not only on the streets of Tehran and Isfahan, but on the streets of London and Berlin. Today we have to fight against Sharia law not only in Iran but in Canada, Britain and Sweden. Today we have to save children from faith school and religious indoctrination not only in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iran but in Britain and many other European countries.

Iran, however, remains the main battlefield, because that is political Islam's stronghold; and as long as it is so, there is no other alternative but for freedom lovers, secularists and those who dream of equality and a free life to topple the regime of sexual apartheid in Iran. The movement for equality and freedom in Iran, the women's liberation movement, the worker's struggle and the growing Left and secular movement in Iran are the pillars of the international Left, secularist and humanist movements. This movement in Iran needs to be supported and strengthened.

***Long Live International Women's Day***