Iran arrests women's rights activists ahead of 'Woman, Life, Freedom' anniversary

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By Somayeh Malekian

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<https://abcnews.go.com/International/iran-arrests-womens-rights-activists-ahead-woman-life/story?id=102334170>

At least 11 women's rights activists were arrested by security forces in Iran in the northern province of Gilan Wednesday, according to the [Human Rights Activists News Agency](https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-42932/) (HRANA).

However, Iranian officials say the number of people arrested in Gilan is 12, according to the [Tasnim News Agency](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/05/26/2942428/), which is affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard. It quotes the "Intelligence Office of Gilan Province" as saying those arrested are an "organizational team of 12 members, which has a history of numerous anti-security activities over the last year's riots."

HRANA says in most cases, the arrests occurred by raiding activists' homes.

In addition to the arrests in Gilan, HRANA also [reports](https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-42933/) at least one and possibly two other arrests in Tehran on Wednesday.

"Families of these citizens are highly worried as there is no news of their fates," HRANA adds.

An increasing number of detentions and raids by the Islamic Republic have been happening over the past few weeks ahead of the first-year anniversary of the start of the nationwide 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement in the country.

The movement started with the September 16, 2022 [death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini](https://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/protests-grow-violent-iran-death-mahsa-amini-90353034) in a Tehran hospital after she was arrested by the government's morality police for allegedly not covering her hair in full compliance with the Islamic Republic's mandatory hijab rule. Though the government claimed Amini had a heart attack while in police custody, it is widely believed that she died as a result of being beaten by police.

Amini's death led to widespread protests across Iran, which activists have described to ABC News as "the most serious challenge" the government regime has faced in over four decades.

Iran Human Rights [reported in April](https://iranhr.net/en/articles/5795/) that at least 537 people had been killed since the start of the protests and at least 22,000 people arrested. The latter number was later confirmed by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

As the first anniversary of Amini's death approaches, activists, filmmakers and former protestors in Iran are being summoned, arrested or otherwise targeted with strict court sentences by the Islamic Republic's security, intelligence and judicial bodies.

"Some artists and filmmakers feel extremely scared even to leave their homes these days. Some studios have been raided and people who were there were arrested," an Iranian activist who did not want their name to be disclosed for security reasons told ABC News.

"It is paralyzing. But we keep doing what we can," the activist added.

In one of the latest attacks on filmmakers, the regime this month sentenced noted Iranian filmmaker Saeed Roustayi to six months in prison on charges of alleged "anti-regime propaganda activity."

Roustayi traveled to the Cannes Film Festival in France last year to screen his latest film, "Leila's Brothers," which depicts a family's struggle to make the ends meet amid the severe economic sanctions imposed against Iran. The film includes scenes that show street protests, and security forces confronting demonstrators protesting economic hardships.

Roustayi was also ordered to refrain from "association with active filmmaking professionals," and from "conducting activities related to the charges." He additionally must pass a state-mandated university course on "filmmaking while preserving national and ethical interests."

The Iranian House of Cinema, the professional organization for Iranian filmmakers, addressed the Islamic Republic judiciary in a [statement](https://www.khanehcinema.ir/fa/news/2951/%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%AD%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A2%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86) Wednesday, saying such sentences are "humiliating" and "will not bring hearts closer."

Many people are also using social media to express their concerns about the apparent government crackdown ahead of the anniversary of Amini's death.

"The wave of arrests has become very strange," one person [posted](https://twitter.com/movafard/status/1691825989100220910?s=20) on X, formerly known as Twitter. "It is like, if you want to leave the country, they arrest you. If you want to enter, they arrest you. You talk about your daily life on social media, they arrest you. Take a picture, they arrest you. Write, they arrest you. Make a movie with their own permission, it is not enough, they arrest you. You walking on the street? You shouldn't have, they arrest you."