

# URGENT ACTION

## A DECADE IN JAIL FOR DEFYING FORCED VEILING

Two Iranian women's rights defenders, Yasaman Aryani and Monireh Arabshahi, have each been sentenced to 16 years in prison, while a third, Mojgan Keshavarz, has been sentenced to 23 years and six months in prison. They are all prisoners of conscience jailed solely because of their peaceful campaigning against discriminatory forced veiling laws. If the verdicts are upheld on appeal, they would each be required to serve 10 years of their prison sentences.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

*Head of the Judiciary Ebrahim Raisi  
C/o Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN  
Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 28  
1209 Geneva, Switzerland*

Dear Mr Raisi,

Two women's rights defenders, **Yasaman Aryani** and her mother, **Monireh Arabshahi**, were unjustly sentenced on 31 July 2019 to 16 years in prison, while a third, **Mojgan Keshavarz**, was unjustly sentenced to 23 years and six months in prison. All three prison sentences consist of a one-year term for "spreading propaganda against the system", a five-year term for "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security", and a 10-year term for "inciting and facilitating corruption and prostitution" through promoting "unveiling". Mojgan Keshavarz's sentence includes an additional prison term of seven years and six months for "insulting Islamic sanctities". If these convictions and sentences are upheld on appeal, each woman would be required to serve 10 years of her prison sentence, as per sentencing guidelines in Iran's penal code.

The trial of Yasaman Aryani, Monireh Arabshahi and Mojgan Keshavarz, conducted before Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, was grossly unfair. They were not allowed to access their lawyers at any stage of the process. They have said that the judge presiding over the court yelled and swore at them and threatened them with years of imprisonment in Shahr-e Rey prison, where women convicted of serious violent crimes are held in dire conditions. The judge rejected the women's pleas to access their lawyers and said that their lawyers would not be allowed to access their court files or represent them until the appeal stage.

The three women's rights defenders were arrested in April 2019 in relation to a video that went viral on social media, showing them without their headscarves, distributing flowers to female passengers on a metro train on International Women's Day on 8 March 2019, and discussing their hopes for a future when all women in Iran would have the freedom to choose what to wear. Following their arrests, they were held in prolonged solitary confinement, which violates the absolute prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment under international law, and pressured to appear before a camera, "confessing" that foreign elements were behind their activism against forced veiling and "repenting" their actions.

**I urge you to release Monireh Arabshahi, Yasaman Aryani and Mojgan Keshavarz immediately and unconditionally as they are all prisoners of conscience, jailed solely for their human rights work. Pending their release, ensure that they have regular contact with a lawyer of their choosing. I also urge you to stop criminalizing the work of women's rights defenders and abolish forced veiling laws.**

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As Monireh Arabshahi, Yasaman Aryani and Mojgan Keshavarz have been convicted of multiple charges, each incurring a separate prison sentence, if their convictions and sentences are upheld on appeal, they will have to serve the single lengthiest sentence, which is 10 years in all their cases.

On 8 March 2019, a [video](#) went viral showing Monireh Arabshahi, Yasaman Aryani and Mojgan Keshavarz without their headscarves, distributing flowers to female passengers on a metro train in Tehran and discussing their hopes for a future when all women in Iran would have the freedom to choose what to wear. In the video, Yasaman Aryani hands a flower to a woman wearing a hijab and says she hopes that one day they can walk side by side in the street, “me without the hijab and you with the hijab”. Following the posting of the video, Yasaman Aryani was arrested on 10 April 2019 by security forces at her family home in Tehran. The next day, Monireh Arabshahi, her mother, was arrested after going to Vozara detention centre in Tehran to inquire about her and taken to Shahr-e Rey prison in Varamin near Tehran. Mojgan Keshavarz was arrested by force about two weeks later on 25 April 2019 and similarly taken to Shahr-e Rey prison.

Following her arrest, Yasaman Aryani was held in solitary confinement in Vozara detention centre, without access to her family and lawyer, for nine days. During this period, the authorities concealed her fate and whereabouts from her family, so subjecting her to enforced disappearance. After persistent inquiries by her family, she was allowed to call them briefly six days after her arrest. According to information obtained by Amnesty International, she sounded distressed over the phone and could not speak freely, which indicated that security officials were present. While held in solitary confinement, she was regularly threatened with, among other things, the arrest of her younger sibling and father unless she appeared before a camera retracting her opposition to forced veiling, denouncing the White Wednesdays campaign against compulsory veiling laws and expressing “regret” for allowing herself to be “incited” by “anti-revolutionary opposition agents” outside the country. She was also taunted with claims that her case had been forgotten by the outside world.

On 18 April, Monireh Arabshahi was transferred to Vozara detention centre. She and Yasaman Aryani were then put into a van and driven to an unidentified location in Tehran, without being given an explanation. As soon as they were taken out of the van, they were confronted with camera crews from the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) corporation, who filmed them without their consent. They were then taken to a room to be “interviewed” by the IRIB and, when they objected, were told that they had no choice but to answer the questions. The mother and daughter subsequently spent a night at Vozara detention centre and, on 19 April, they were taken to Shahr-e Rey prison where they have since remained.

The safety and wellbeing of Yasaman Aryani, Monireh Arabshahi and Mojgan Keshavarz are at risk in Shahr-e Rey prison. There are frequent reports from the facility of assaults against inmates both by other inmates and prison staff, as well as a prevalence of mental health issues, self-harm among prisoners and rampant drug use. The prison water is reportedly salty and unsuitable for drinking, leaving prisoners with no option but to purchase overpriced containers of drinking water from the prison shop. Prison meals are described as inedible and most prisoners choose to purchase their food from the prison shop, which mainly consists of canned products. Prisoners generally receive financial assistance from their families or work in prison to purchase water and food. Other common complaints include frequent power outages, a lack of proper ventilation or air conditioning facilities, filthy and insufficient bathroom facilities, very low water pressure in the showers, and a severe shortage of beds (meaning many prisoners have to sleep on the floor). Prisoners are also denied access to adequate medical care, leading to the prevalence of contagious diseases including tuberculosis and infectious hepatitis.

Forced veiling laws violate a whole host of rights, including the rights to equality, privacy and freedom of expression and belief. These laws also degrade women and girls, stripping them of their dignity and self-worth.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Persian or English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 19 September 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN** Monireh Arabshahi (she/her); Yasaman Aryani (she/her); Mojgan Keshavarz (she/her)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/0656/2019/en/>