

## **The founding of the Committee to Support the Women's and Youth Movement in Iran - The Mahsa Jina Amini Initiative**

For thousands of years, Iran has made its contribution to the civilisation and culture of mankind; time and again, impulses have emanated from it that helped to shape history. Geographically located in what has always been a political and social flashpoint, the people of this country have always been challenged to assert their cultural and political identity.

With the fall of the Shah's regime in February 1979, many Iranians hoped that Iran would develop in freedom and independence in the spirit of democracy, respect for human rights and humanitarianism. However, this was shattered when Ayatollah Khomeini came to power. The Iranian present is characterised by the suppression of all freedoms. There is no freedom of expression and assembly, no freedom of the press and information, and no freedom of religion. Ethnic and religious minorities are oppressed. Members of the Bahai community in Iran are denied access to education and work. Principles of the rule of law are completely absent. Torture of political dissidents is the order of the day. Arrests and executions take place without charge, without trial and without the possibility of defence. Prisons are full of men and women, sometimes even children, arrested on trivial pretexts. The terrorisation of the population, especially women, by the paramilitary units such as the "Basidj" and morality guards "Gashté Ershad" is the order of the day.

The protests of women and youth in Iran, which have been going on for weeks, can basically be seen as the continuation of the protests of the Iranian people that started in December 2017, who not only took to the streets because of the economic misery, high youth unemployment, growing income disparities and increase in the price of essential goods, but have also been an expression of the nationwide rejection of a corrupt and repressive system that has ruled the country for 43 years. Due to widespread corruption and abuse of power, the regime has lost religious and socio-political legitimacy in the eyes of many of its supporters and thus no longer enjoys respect among the Iranian population. In terms of foreign policy, the Islamic Republic of Iran's military activities in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq, have affected stability and peace in the region.

The death of Mahsa Jina Amini, a young woman who was arrested by the "custom guards" for not observing the Islamic hijab and subsequently died from blows to the head, marks a new stage in the forty-three-year history of the Islamic Republic of Iran's existence. The ongoing protests are the largest nationwide demonstrations since the 2009 presidential election, when over a million people took to the streets to protest against the electoral fraud at the time. In recent weeks, mostly young people took to the streets in 130 cities to protest the killing of Mahsa Jina Amini. It is women's uprising against their four decades of oppression and discrimination in the Iranian God State. "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi - Woman, Life, Freedom" are the main slogans of the current protests in Iran. The public burning of headscarves has become a symbol of the struggle against the oppression of women in the Islamic God's state. There has never been such a protest action before.

What is also significant about these protests is the fact that this time men are deliberately taking to the streets together with women to support the women's movement as such in Iran and to lend weight to the demands for the abolition of the hijab and discrimination against women. It is also the uprising of young people between the ages of 16 and 25, a young generation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who are also standing up against years of repression and oppression.

In this situation, it is more necessary than ever not only to draw the attention of the public, especially in Austria and the EU member states, to the Iranian tragedy, but also to put a stop to the influence as well as the activities of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran abroad by appealing to the European Member States as well as the Council of Europe.

For this purpose, the "Committee for the Support of the Women's and Youth Movement in Iran - The Mahsa Jina Amini Initiative" has been founded.

The aims and objectives of the above-mentioned "Committee" are as follows:

- 1) To inform the public in Austria, the EU Member States, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, as well as the UN Human Rights Council about the progress and further developments of the women's and youth movement in Iran.
- 2) To make the following demands by appealing to the above-mentioned institutions:
  - Stronger controls on the establishment of companies by Iranian nationals' resident in Austria and other EU Member States who are close to the Iranian leadership. Such companies are mostly bogus in order to circumvent the UN and US sanctions on the one hand and to transfer considerable funds from Iran to foreign countries on the other.
  - To take initiatives to freeze or confiscate the above-mentioned funds that have been transferred abroad in this way, in order to return them later to a democratic government in Iran.
  - To envisage visa restrictions for members of the Iranian leadership or those close to the leadership or security forces of the country.
  - To carry out more rigorous monitoring of those European companies that are active in the information and communication sector and that maintain economic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is known that the shutdown of the Internet in Iran to prevent communication between young people and demonstrators facilitated by European companies.
  - In accordance with the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, the number of the embassy staff members of the Islamic Republic of Iran abroad should be reduced as much as possible. It is known that a large number of the embassy staff members accredited abroad consists of the security agents provided by Revolutionary Guards or the Iranian Ministry of Information. These security agents have the main task of reporting on individual Iranians belonging to opposition groups abroad, with audio-visual material sent to Tehran. These observations abroad result in these Iranians and their relatives being subjected to reprisals and political persecution by the security forces in Iran.
  - To initiate a thorough review of the asylum applications of Iranian asylum seekers, as former members of the Iranian regime have been applying for political asylum in Austria for some time.

The "Committee" also calls on all democratically and humanitarian-minded people in Austria to support the realisation of human rights and the establishment of a democratic social order in Iran.

The "Committee to Support the Women's and Youth Movement in Iran - The Mahsa Jina Amini Initiative" - is non-partisan and independent in political and financial terms. Its activities are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the UN Covenant on Political and Civil Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

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#### **Initiators of the "Committee":**

- Dr. Homayoun ALIZADEH, retired, Deputy Director, the Federal Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Austria;
- Dr. Heidemarie FENZL, retired, Director of the Refugees and Migration Department the Federal Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Austria;
- Dr. Georg LENNKH, retired Ambassador, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Austria;
- Arash TAJMIR RIAHI, filmmaker, President of the Academy of Austrian Film.

The following public figures have joined the “Committee” as honorary members in chronological order:

1. Mrs. Elfriede Jelinek, writer, Nobel Prize for Literature (2004).
  2. Dr. Heide Schmidt, former member of the National Council and founder of the Liberal Forum.
  3. Ms. Terezija Stoisits, former Ombudsman and long-serving member of the Green Party at the Austrian Parliament.
  4. Ms. Monika Helfer, writer.
  5. Mr. Michael Köhlmeier, author and audio book speaker.
  6. Mrs. Dr. Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic, Member of the Green Party at the Austrian Parliament.
  7. Mr. Dr. Helmut Brandstätter, Member of the NEOS Party at the Austrian Parliament.
  8. Mrs. Gertraud Knoll-Lacina, former Superintendent, Presidential Candidate (1998), and politician of the Austrian Social Democratic Party.
  9. Ms. Eva Maria Holzleitner, member of the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) at the Austrian Parliament.
  10. Mr Nikolaus Kunrath, Member of the Viennese Parliament and Member of the Viennese Municipal Council, Green Party.
  11. Mr. Prof. Stefan Schennach, Member of the Austrian Federal Council, Member of the Council of Europe, Chairperson of the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) of the Parliamentary Group in the Federal Council.
  12. Mr. Martin Engelberg, Member of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) at the Austrian Parliament.
  13. Mrs. Dr. Gudrun Kugler, Member of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) at the Austrian Parliament.
  14. Mr. Dr. Reinhold Lopatka, Member of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) at the Austrian Parliament.
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