

Nobel peace prize: Narges Mohammadi wins on behalf of thousands of Iranian women struggling for human rights

Saturday 7 October 2023, by [ELHINNAWY Hind](#) (Date first published: 6 October 2023).

The Nobel prize committee said Narges Mohammadi represented the struggle of many thousands of brave women fighting for their rights.

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Prominent Iranian women's rights advocate Narges Mohammadi has won the 2023 Nobel peace prize for her long fight against the oppression of women in Iran. Mohammadi is serving multiple prison sentences in Evin prison in Tehran on charges which include spreading propaganda against the state. She was [named by the committee](#) for "her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all".

The award comes as women across Iran and around the world continue to protest the treatment of women in Iran after the death of [Mahsa Amini](#) in the custody of morality police, for allegedly violating the Islamic Republic's dress code for women.

The committee said: "The motto adopted by the demonstrators - "Woman-Life-Freedom" - suitably expresses the dedication and work of Narges Mohammadi."

That the Woman-Life-Freedom protests have endured so long in the face of Iranian state repression is in itself remarkable. But this year-long protest, the latest wave of decades of battles fought by women against religious authoritarianism in Iran sparked, seems to be turning into an unprecedented shift in the decades of struggle against one of the most repressive regimes in modern history.

After the 1979 revolution in Iran, Islamic clerics led by [Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini](#) seized a firm grip on government. The regime quickly introduced a raft of oppressive laws [directed specifically at women](#). But despite the [violence directed at them](#) by the regime, women continued at the forefront of protest against oppression in Iran.

Narges Mohammadi joined the struggle as a student in the early 1990s. After graduating in physics and taking employment as an engineer, she began to agitate for women's rights and write columns in reform-minded newspapers.

She was first arrested in 1998 for her [criticism of the Iranian government](#). By 2003 she was working with the the Defenders of Human Rights Centre in Tehran, set up by Shirin Ebadi, who won that year's Nobel peace prize, the first woman from the Islamic world to [receive the award](#).

Mohammadi has been arrested 13 times and convicted on five occasions and sentenced to a total of [31 years in prison and 154 lashes](#). She was incarcerated in Tehran's most notorious prison in 2022 when the wave of protests, which was to become known as Woman-Life-Freedom, began to gain global recognition.

Mohammadi organised solidarity actions with fellow inmates and was punished by the authorities by prohibiting visitors and phone calls. Despite this, she managed to smuggle out an article she wrote for the [New York Times](#), which ran in September 2023 with the headline: "The more they lock us up, the stronger we become."

Women's voices raised in protest

Movements led by women have often been effective at forcing democratic change. Examples are abundant through history and continue to force change.

In Argentina in recent years, the [#NiUnaMenos](#) (Not One Less) movement of women and girls [seeking justice for femicide](#) led in 2019 directly to the establishment by the administration of President Alberto Fernández of a new Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity. Thanks to the persistence of Argentinian women raising their voices, the country is set to chart a path toward change.

Women have been prominent in the rights movement in Chile, both before and after the [Pinochet dictatorship](#). But the current feminist movement there, which is agitating strongly for abortion rights, was strongly influenced by [#NiUnaMenos](#).

As a result of their work, legal protections for abortion were included in a new constitution that was [prepared in 2022](#) to replace the decades-old constitution established under Pinochet. A plebiscite rejected the constitutional redraft in September 2022, but women continue at the forefront of rights protests [as the debate continues](#).

Woman-Life-Freedom

Meanwhile Iranian women continue to march for their rights. One year after the Woman-Life-Freedom movement sprang to life, it remains impossible to predict whether they will succeed in the face of savage repression from the clerical establishment and its conservative supporters.

But the regime's sense of invincibility - and women's marginalisation from politics - has been severely shaken. Even as the security services try to crackdown on protesters, the struggle against the patriarchal regime will continue.

Even if the protests do not lead to the collapse of the regime, the voices of women demanding freedom of speech, bodily autonomy and political engagement may have already [shifted the social and political landscape](#) in Iran.

The Nobel prize panel has recognised Narges Mohammadi for her work over 30 years of agitating for rights for Iranian women. But it has [made it clear](#) that the award is also for the "hundreds of thousands of people who, in the preceding year, have demonstrated against the theocratic regime's policies of discrimination and oppression targeting women".

Women's voices are now becoming a serious threat to the legitimacy of the Iranian theocracy.

Sceptics may say that in the past the regime has always successfully used violence and censorship to silence protest.

But this new wave of protests has reverberated around the world, raising the profile of women's struggle on the streets of Iranian cities and encouraging women across the globe to fight for their own rights and freedoms.

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- The Conversation. Publié: 6 octobre 2023, 17:15 CEST.

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