

## Khamenei Attributes Peaceful Anti-Hijab Protests to 'Enemy' Influence



In his first reaction to Iranian women's peaceful protests against compulsory hijab, Iran's Supreme Leader has said these are 'the outcome of the enemy's widespread propaganda, and spending hefty sums in order to influence Iranian women's attitude towards hijab.'

Trying to undermine the protests against compulsory hijab that has grabbed international attention, ayatollah Ali Khamenei said 'All that propaganda and expenditure led to the insignificant result of a few girls taking off their headscarf.'

He said, however, that what has caused concern for him is that 'some insiders also talk about compulsory hijab.'

Criticizing 'journalists, pseudo-intellectuals and some clerics' for their comments about compulsory hijab, Khamenei quoted his predecessor Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini as saying, 'hijab must be there and attempts to abolish it must be strongly resisted.'

Khamenei who has been refusing to talk to reporters for over three decades and his ideas have not been challenged stressed that 'hijab makes women immune to sexual harassment and gender inequality.'

This comes while according to pro-administration news website Entekhab in a January 29 report, the age of prostitution in Iran has dropped to 16 years, and billboards disdaining sexual harassment in Tehran and other major Iranian cities indicate that despite four decades of forceful enforcement of compulsory hijab the issue of sexual harassment is still a major social problem in Iran.

Meanwhile Iranian laws systematically bar women from travelling independently, guardianship of their minor children, and rising to political status, and taking up leadership and military responsibilities.

Speaking only three days earlier on March 5 Iran's Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said that 'strict measures' to enforce hijab have not been fruitful. Speaking at a meeting in Tehran on Sunday March 5, he called for 'thorough studies to find the root cause' of the failure, reported the official government news agency IRNA.

He also said that dress code patrols, the police and the judiciary have not been able to enforce hijab rules following the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) further quoted Rahmani Fazli.

Khamenei's made the comments against peaceful protest to compulsory hijab on the same day that reports from Tehran said the police used violence against a group of women protesters in front of Iran's Labor Ministry in downtown Tehran.

Peaceful demonstrations by young women protesting against compulsory hijab gained a new momentum in late December, simultaneously with widespread protests against poverty and social inequality in over 80 Iranian cities.

Reports say at least 25 Iranian women protesting against hijab have been arrested, often violently, in Tehran and other cities.

In one of the most recent cases, an Iranian woman who removed her Islamic head scarf on a Tehran street has been sentenced to two years in prison.

The U.S. State Department has condemned the arrests, saying the women were "exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms by standing up against the compulsory hijab.

In February, London-based human rights watchdog Amnesty International reiterated its calls on the authorities to "end the persecution of women who speak out against compulsory veiling, and abolish this discriminatory and humiliating practice".

New York-based organization Human Rights Watch has also called on Iran to drop charges against women peacefully protesting compulsory hijab and to stop prosecuting women over dress code.

Source: Radio Farda