



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

20 December 2011

IRN103920.E

Iran: The enforcement of dress codes

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Dress code regulations

According to the Islamic Penal Code of Iran (1991), "women who appear in public without a proper hijab should be imprisoned from ten days to two months or pay a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Ryal" [500,000 Iranian rials (IRR) = C\$47 (XE 20 Dec. 2011a)] (Iran 1991, Art. 638). The law is reportedly applicable to all Iranian women regardless of their religion (Freedom House 2010, 10; IHRDC Aug. 2010, 11; US 13 Sept. 2011, 5). However, sources state that there is no clear legal definition of what constitutes a proper hijab (Freedom House 2010, 6; US 8 Apr. 2011, 56; *The Washington Post* 23 July 2011), and Freedom House indicates that "there has never been a consensus among the *ulema* [Islamic clerics] on the meaning and extent of Islamic hijab" (2010, 5, 28). The United States (US) Department of State reports that given the lack of a clearly defined dress code, women are "subject to the opinions of disciplinary forces or judges" (8 Apr. 2011, 56).

In practice, women are required to cover their hair and the contours of their body in public (Al Jazeera 15 June 2011; AFP 14 June 2010). Sources note that loose-fitting headscarves, tight overcoats and short trousers that expose the skin are prohibited (Al Jazeera 15 June 2011; *The Guardian* 14 June 2011). Freedom House also reports that women have been punished for "showing part of one's hair, using cosmetics, wearing sunglasses, wearing a tight or short *manteau* (coat or gown), showing skin above the wrist or ankle, showing neckline, and wearing boots over (rather than under) trousers" (2010, 6). Men are reportedly prohibited from wearing shorts (*The Guardian* 14 June 2011) and "tight, low-slung jeans" (AFP 24 May 2010).

Sources also report that, in 2010, the Iranian authorities published a list of acceptable hairstyles for men (*The Guardian* 14 June 2011; US 8 Apr. 2011, 27). The US Department of State notes that regulations on the length of men's hair and beards have been enforced (ibid.). According to international media sources, in January 2011, Iran imposed a stricter dress code at some universities, banning women from wearing bright clothes, short or tight jeans, having long nails, tattoos, body piercings, and wearing hats without veils (*Israel National News* 11 Jan. 2011; Reuters 10 Jan. 2011). Reuters also notes that male students were prohibited from having dyed hair and plucked eyebrows, and from wearing

jewellery and shirts with "very short sleeves" (ibid.).

Enforcement

According to Freedom House, "it is the state's prerogative to monitor and control women's apparel" in order to "protect the honour of the nation's women" (2010, 6, 10). Sources also indicate that the enforcement of the dress code is intended to combat Western cultural influences (Al Jazeera 15 June 2011; RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009). Additionally, sources note that the enforcement of the dress code has intensified since 2005, when the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power (Freedom House 2010, 6; IHRDC Aug. 2010, 9). However, Ahmadinejad is reported to have expressed his opposition to a severe enforcement of the dress code in a live television interview in 2010 (RFE/RL 16 June 2010; *The Guardian* 14 June 2011, *The Washington Post* 23 July 2011; AFP 14 June 2010). Sources indicate that the "moral police" who enforce the dress code work under the supervision of the Supreme Leader (Al Jazeera 15 June 2011; *The Guardian* 14 June 2011), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (ibid.).

Sources note that enforcement efforts usually intensify during the summer (RFE/RL 23 Sept 2009; AFP 14 June 2010; Reuters 10 Jan 2011), although enforcement campaigns were reported to have continued into the winter in 2008 (RFE/RL 23 Sept. 2009). Amnesty International reports that, in April 2011, the Supreme Leader called for "renewed attention to enforcing" the dress code, and that, in May 2011, a "chastity and modesty" campaign was launched to target non-compliers in public spaces, including on university campuses (2011). Sources note that 70,000 trained forces known as the "moral police" were deployed in 2011 as part of the campaign (Al Jazeera 15 June 2011; *The Guardian* 14 June 2011). The enforcement campaign also allowed police to stop and impound cars carrying improperly dressed individuals (*The Washington Post* 23 July 2011; Al Jazeera 15 June 2011).

Penalties

The US Department of State, citing press reports, indicates that more than two million citizens have been stopped or detained by the morality police for inappropriate dress or hairstyles (8 Apr. 2011, 27). Meanwhile, Freedom House states that

[h]arsher enforcement has increased the number of arbitrary arrests and detentions in recent years. ... [S]ince 2006, male and female officers have stopped, verbally scolded, physically attacked, arrested, or temporarily detained thousands of women and some men for wearing insufficiently modest clothing, or "bad hijab." (2010, 6)

Sources indicate that individuals found in violation of the dress code can be fined or arrested (Al Jazeera 15 June 2011; *The Guardian* 14 June 2011). In 2010, Agence France-Presse reported that the penalty for contravening the dress code had increased to 13 million IRR [C\$1,218 (XE 20 Dec. 2011b)] (AFP 14 June 2010). The *Washington Post* reported in 2011 that fines and punishments, which sometimes include whipping, have been increased (23 July 2011). However, according to the Australian newspaper *Sunshine Coast Daily*, it is typical for men contravening the dress code to receive a warning to go to a hairdresser or to go home to change their clothing (25 June 2011). The same newspaper, citing the Tehran Deputy Police Chief, reports that although women often receive a "lecture" on Islamic clothing and values, they can also be arrested if they do

not comply immediately with regulations (ibid.).

The same newspaper indicates that citizens who are arrested are reportedly held until family members bring them appropriate clothing and they sign a statement agreeing to refrain from future violations (*Sunshine Coast Daily* 25 June 2011). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty also reported in 2009 that individuals who commit repeated offences can be detained for longer periods of time, brought to court, and forced to attend "guidance classes" (23 Sept. 2009).

Agence France-Presse reported that, according to the Iranian airport security chief, 71 Iranian women were prevented from boarding planes between March and June 2010 due to their "improper" dress, and 87,714 women were issued warnings by security forces for inappropriate hair coverings (14 June 2010). In September 2010, human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh was arrested and subsequently sentenced to 11 years in prison on charges that included violating the Islamic dress code during a filmed speech she gave (Human Rights Watch 26 Jan. 2011; Canada News Wire 17 Oct. 2011). The US Department of State reports that, in 2010, "vigilantes" attacked young people who were deemed to be "un-Islamic" in their attire or their activities (8 Apr. 2011, 27).

According to *The Washington Post*, local clerics and police commanders blamed the victims for inciting attacks in two cases of "mass rape," in 2011, by being improperly dressed (23 July 2011). In one of the cases, which occurred in May 2011, a group of men allegedly raided a private party in Khomeini Shahr and raped the female guests (AI 1 Aug. 2011; RFE/RL 30 June 2011). The local police chief is reported to have suggested that the women could have avoided being raped if they had been wearing their hijab "properly" (ibid.; AI 1 Aug. 2011).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 14 June 2010. "Iran Bars 71 'Improperly' Dressed Women from Boarding Planes." (Factiva)

_____. 24 May 2010. Hiedeh Farmani. "Iran Police Crackdown 'Targets Posh Cars'." (Factiva)

Al Jazeera. 15 June 2011. "Iran Intensifies Dress Crackdown." <<http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2011/06/2011615155013157336.html>> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2011]

Amnesty International (AI). 1 August 2011. "Iranian Women Call for Action on Gang-Rapes." <<http://livewire.amnesty.org/2011/08/01/iranian-women-call-for-action-on-gang-rapes/>> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

_____. 2011. "Iran." *Amnesty International Report 2011: The State of the World's Human Rights*. <<http://amnesty.org/en/region/iran/report-2011>> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

Canada NewsWire. 17 October 2011. "Nasrin Sotoudeh Is PEN Canada Empty Chair, One Humanity Winner at 32nd International Festival of Authors." (Factiva)

Freedom House. 2010. Nayereh Toohidi. "Iran." *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*.
<http://freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/section/254.pdf> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

The Guardian [London]. 14 June 2011. Saeed Kamali Dehghan. "Necklace Ban for Men as Tehran's 'Moral Police' Enforce Dress Code."
<www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/14/necklace-ban-men-tehran-police> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

Human Rights Watch. 26 January 2011. "Iran: Deepening Crisis on Rights."
<<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/01/26/iran-deepening-crisis-rights>> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

Iran. 1991. Islamic Penal Code of Iran. (Mission for Establishment of Human Rights in Iran) <http://mehr.org/Islamic_Penal_Code_of_Iran.pdf> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC). August 2010. *Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran*. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/files.php?force&file=reports_en/women_s_rights_326101714.pdf> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

Israel National News. 11 January 2011. "Iran Universities Adopt Islamic Dress Code." (Factiva)

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). 30 June 2011. "Iranian Deputy Confirms Attack on Women's Swimming Pool." (Factiva)

_____. 16 June 2010. "Ahmadinejad, the Hijab, and Women in His Car."
<http://www.rferl.org/content/Ahmadinejad_The_Hijab_And_Women_In_His_Car/2073879.html> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

_____. 23 September 2009. "Iranian Police Renew Dress-Code Crackdown."
<http://www.rferl.org/content/Iranian_Police_Renew_DressCode_Crackdown/1829184.html> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2011]

Reuters. 10 January 2011. Ramin Mostafavi. "Iran Bans 'Tight Jeans,' Tattoos at Some Universities." <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/10/us-iran-university-dress-idUSTRE7094G320110110>> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2011]

Sunshine Coast Daily [Queensland, Australia]. 25 June 2011. "Iran Fashion Offensive Raises Its Ugly Head." (Factiva)

United States. 13 September 2011. Department of State. "Iran." *International Religious Freedom Report July-December 2010*.
<<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171734.pdf>> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2011]

_____. 8 April 2011. Department of State. "Iran." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*.
<<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160461.pdf>> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2011]

The Washington Post. 23 July 2011. Thomas Erdbrink. "Ahmadinejad, Clerics Divided over Scarves." (Factiva)

XE. 20 December 2011a. "Currency Converter Widget."
<<http://www.xe.com/ucc/convert/?Amount=50000&From=IRR&To=CAD>>
[Accessed 20 Dec. 2011]

_____. 20 December 2011b. "Currency Converter Widget."
<<http://www.xe.com/ucc/convert/?Amount=13000000&From=IRR&To=CAD>>
[Accessed 20 Dec. 2011]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Australia Refugee Review Tribunal; European Country of Origin Information Network; Human Rights and Democracy for Iran; United Kingdom Border Agency, Country of Information Unit; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks.

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.