

Artistic Freedom Initiative and Voices Unbound release Iran report, marking 'Woman, Life, Freedom' anniversary

New 100-Page Report Details the Repression of Creatives in Iran Following the death of Mahsa Amini, which sparked a Global Movement for Iranians' Human Rights

New York, New York – September 9, 2024 – Ahead of the second anniversary of the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, [Artistic Freedom Initiative](#) (AFI), a leading organization focused on artists' rights worldwide, and [Voices Unbound](#) (VU), an NGO dedicated to providing safe haven for journalists and political activists, are releasing a comprehensive report detailing the repressive policies in Iran which gave rise to the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement and the State's subsequent crackdown on freedom of expression. Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) and Voices Unbound (VU) are releasing this report to highlight the crucial roles that Iranian artists have played in defending human rights through their involvement in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement.

As the 100-page report details, the public's reaction to Amini's death revealed Iranians' breaking point after decades of escalating frustration with the Islamic Republic's human rights abuses and their systematic targeting of women and girls, stemming back to the first days of the regime. During the 2022 protests, creatives in Iran used various mediums and forms of art to express dissent and mobilize support for the movement, thereby playing a pivotal role in galvanizing public sentiment and drawing international attention to the plight of Iranian citizens. In an effort to stifle the movement, the regime has increased its efforts to suppress artistic expression and exert control over influential artists, including through censorship, online surveillance, work bans, celebrity task forces, and punitive measures, including arbitrary arrest and prosecution.

As a group of legal experts, AFI and VU analyze several laws that have been employed against artists that expressed their support of *Woman, Life, Freedom*. The report highlights 15 cases of artists that were prosecuted under vague and overbroad laws related to the dissemination of propaganda, the protection of national security, and the safeguarding of public morality. The report also features several interviews with Iranian artists and creatives that have experienced repression, censorship, and/or arbitrary arrest by the Islamic Republic, including multidisciplinary artist and storyteller, [Jinoos Taghizadeh](#), contemporary artist [Nazanin Noroozi](#), and award-winning photojournalist [Yalda Moaiery](#), among others.

The reason for focusing on these artists, as [Sanjay Sethi](#), Co-Executive Director of AFI, says, is because artists in Iran are not just creators; instead, they are powerful voices against oppression. "Their work has been instrumental in amplifying the calls for freedom and justice. These artists have used their creative expression to push for social change, despite the immense risks involved," Sethi said.

The report includes comprehensive recommendations for the international community to support Iranian artists at risk, including:

- Offering increased resources for legal aid to help artists navigate the oppressive legal systems designed to silence them;
- Providing safe haven and pathways to humanitarian immigration relief for those facing imminent threats;

- Amplifying Iranian artists' voices on global platforms to ensure their stories and messages reach a wider audience;
- Governments and international bodies impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for the persecution of artists.

"The international community must acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Iranian artists as defenders of human rights," [Johanna Bankston](#), Senior Officer of Human Rights Research & Policy at AFI, says. "It is imperative to support their courageous efforts and ensure their safety amidst ongoing persecution."

About [Artistic Freedom Initiative \(AFI\)](#) :

Led by immigration and human rights attorneys, Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) provides pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance for international artists at risk. Dedicated to safeguarding the right to artistic freedom, AFI was founded on the notion that artists are uniquely situated to positively and powerfully effect change, provided their voices can be heard. As artists are increasingly censored, imprisoned, restricted from moving freely across borders, tortured, or even killed, it is more critical than ever that we safeguard the right to artistic freedom and zealously champion the courageous artists who exercise it.. To this end, AFI directly assists artists who have experienced persecution, censorship, or other restrictions on their freedom of expression, and supports artists who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing progressive social change and fundamental human rights. Since 2017, AFI has taken on over 1670 legal cases involving artists at risk.. For more information please visit: www.artisticfreedominitiative.org

About [Voices Unbound](#):

Founded in 2023 by a group of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists, Voices Unbound (VU) was established with the goal to provide safe haven and support for journalists and activists at risk. VU facilitates humanitarian aid, making connections to pro bono legal service providers, and services aimed at social, civic, and economic integration in the United States. Dedicated to safeguarding the rights of journalists and activists at risk, VU was born on the notion that activists and journalists are uniquely situated to positively and powerfully effect change, provided their voices can be unbounded.

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Staff and featured artists available by request for interviews/ quotes

- Sanjay Sethi, Report author
- Johanna Bankston, Report author
- Yalda Moaiery, Iranian photojournalist featured in *I Create; I Resist*
- Nazanin Naroozi, Iranian visual artist featured in *I Create; I Resist*