



CONFRONTING 'MORALITY' PART 5

# A NEW PATH FORWARD

After being attacked and threatened for attending anti-government protests in 2022, Zhina fled Iran to the Iraqi side of the Kurdish region.

By Heather Murdock  
and Brian Williamson



## ABOUT THIS SERIES

IN SEPTEMBER 2022, MAHSA AMINI, A 22-YEAR-OLD KURDISH IRANIAN, DIED WHILE IN CUSTODY OF THE GASHT-E-ERSHAD, IRAN'S MORALITY POLICE.



SHE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY ON SEPTEMBER 13 FOR "INAPPROPRIATE ATTIRE" AND DIED THREE DAYS LATER AFTER FALLING INTO A COMA.

HER DEATH SPARKED THE LARGEST PROTESTS IRAN HAS SEEN IN DECADES, WITH WOMEN REMOVING THEIR HIJABS AND CUTTING THEIR HAIR IN DEFIANCE.

GENERATIONS OF IRANIAN WOMEN ARE SPEAKING OUT ABOUT THE IMPACT REPRESSION HAS HAD ON THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES.



This series was originally published on [VOAnews.com](https://www.voa.com)



"I SHAVED MY HAIR  
THE FIRST DAY OF  
THE PROTESTS."



"IT WASN'T ABOUT  
NOT WANTING TO  
WEAR HEADSCARVES."



**ZHINA**

a 32-year-old Kurdish Iranian  
living in Iraq

"BUT CAN YOU IMAGINE  
SOMEONE'S HAIR COULD  
BE A REASON FOR  
THEIR DEATH?"



THE 2022 DEATH OF  
MAHSA AMINI, A  
22-YEAR-OLD IRANIAN  
KURD, WHOSE KURDISH  
NAME WAS JINA, LED TO  
PROTESTS IN IRAN AND  
AROUND THE WORLD.  
BEFORE AMINI'S DEATH,  
ZHINA SAYS SHE ALWAYS  
FOLLOWED HER FAMILY'S  
ORDERS.

"I SUFFERED A LOT FROM  
MY FAMILY AND THE  
IRANIAN REGIME. WOMEN  
ARE OBJECTS, ACCORDING  
TO THE GOVERNMENT."



"MY FAMILY FORCED ME  
TO GET MARRIED AT THE  
AGE OF 13. THEY FORCED  
ME TO QUIT SCHOOL."



"HE WAS 33, AND I WAS  
13. I HAD MY SON AT 15."



"I'M SHOCKED NOW WHEN I THINK  
ABOUT THAT TIME. I WONDER,  
'HOW DID I SURVIVE THAT?'"



"I VISITED THE COURT FOR SEVEN YEARS BUT DIDN'T MANAGE TO GET A DIVORCE."



"THEY WOULD NOT LET ME, BECAUSE ONLY THE MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO DIVORCE."



"MY FAMILY DIDN'T SUPPORT ME, BECAUSE DIVORCE WAS TABOO."



"MY HUSBAND FOUGHT WITH ME WHEN I SHAVED MY HAIR."



"HE SAID, 'WHY THE HELL DID YOU SHAVE YOUR HAIR?'"



"... WHY DO YOU WANT TO FOLLOW SUCH WOMEN?"



"HE LOCKED THE DOOR BEHIND HIM WHEN HE LEFT THE HOUSE IN THE MORNINGS."



"BUT I WOULD BREAK THE LOCK AND GO OUT."





"I DID NOT ENCOUNTER THE MORALITY POLICE, BECAUSE MY FAMILY WAS VERY RELIGIOUS."



"IF I WENT OUT, I HAD TO WEAR CLOTHES THAT FOLLOWED THEIR RESTRICTIONS."

Clothes should not be tight, short or revealing.



No makeup.

Clothes had to cover from head to toe.

BUT WHEN AMINI DIED IN THE CUSTODY OF THE MORALITY POLICE, EVERYTHING CHANGED.



"I WAS GOING TO WORK TWO DAYS A WEEK AS A NURSE IN A CLINIC."



"BUT WHEN WE SAW ON SOCIAL MEDIA THAT JINA WAS MURDERED, I WENT TO THE CEMETERY, EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT WANT PEOPLE TO GO."



"HER BODY WAS BROUGHT BACK TO THE CITY OF SAQQEZ, AND THE GOVERNMENT THREATENED HER FAMILY TO KEEP QUIET."



"PEOPLE STARTED GOING TO THE GRAVEYARD AROUND MIDNIGHT. THE GOVERNMENT BLOCKED THE ROADS AND TRIED TO KEEP THE TIME OF HER BODY'S ARRIVAL A SECRET."



WHAT STARTED AS A FUNERAL MARCH QUICKLY EXPLODED INTO PROTESTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD.



OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, HUNDREDS OF PROTESTERS WERE KILLED AS THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDED TO CRIES FOR "WOMEN, LIFE AND LIBERTY" WITH DEADLY VIOLENCE.



TEENAGE SCHOOLGIRLS JOINED THE FRAY, MARCHING AND PROTESTING ONLINE.



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORTED 22,000 PEOPLE DETAINED, INCLUDING CHILDREN BEING HELD AND TORTURED.



IN THE YEAR SINCE SHE WAS MURDERED, THE NAME "MAHSA AMINI" HAS BEEN REPEATED AROUND THE WORLD.



KURDISH WOMEN FROM IRAN SAY IT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM THAT SHE BE REMEMBERED BY THIS NAME.

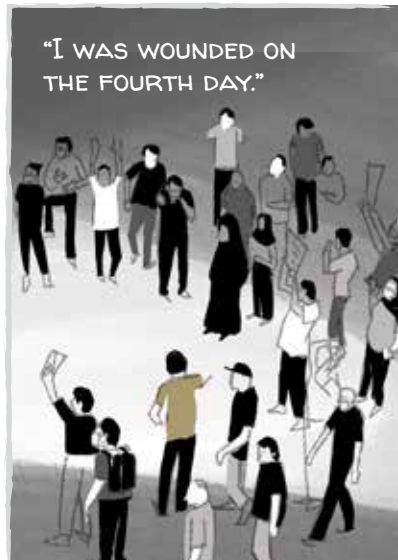


THEY SAY BEING FORCED TO TAKE IRANIAN NAMES FOR LEGAL PURPOSES IS JUST ONE OF MANY INJUSTICES IMPOSED UPON KURDISH PEOPLE.

"ON THE FIRST DAY, THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT SHOOT AT PEOPLE. THEY ONLY TOLD PEOPLE TO GO HOME, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SHOOT."



"I WAS WOUNDED ON THE FOURTH DAY."



"I FELT THAT SOMEBODY HIT ME FROM BEHIND, AND I FELL ON THE GROUND."



"I DID NOT KNOW WHAT IT WAS UNTIL I STOOD UP AND MY FRIEND TOLD ME THAT I WAS STABBED WITH A KNIFE. I GOT 17 STICHES."





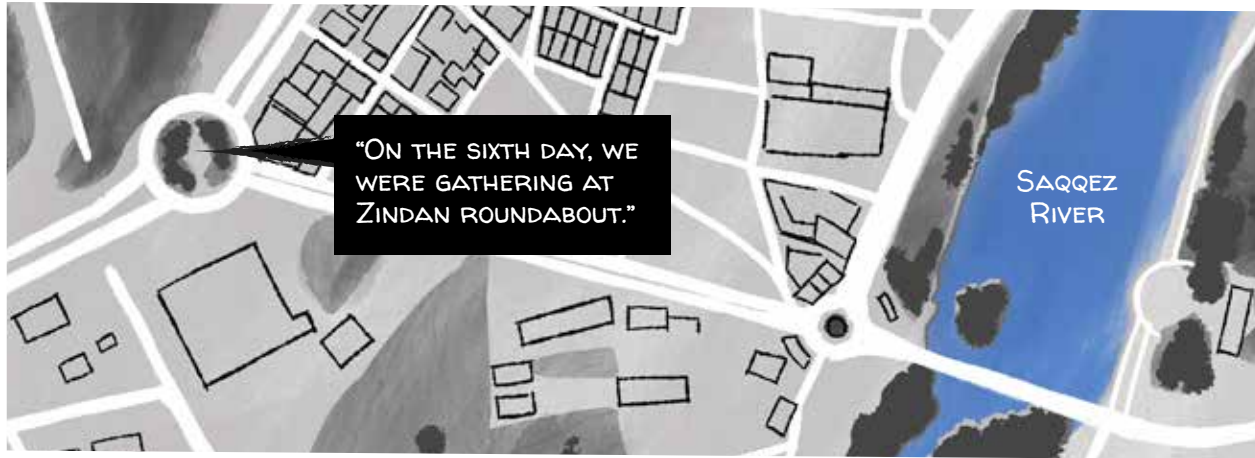
"I WENT TO THE PROTESTS  
EVEN AFTER THAT DAY."



"I KNEW HOW TO GIVE MEDICAL  
TREATMENTS, SO I LOOKED FOR  
WOUNDED PEOPLE TO CARE FOR."



"THE PHARMACIES  
AND HOSPITALS WOULD  
NOT GIVE US MEDICINE,  
BECAUSE THEY ARE  
ALL UNDER GOVERN-  
MENT CONTROL."



"ON THE SIXTH DAY, WE  
WERE GATHERING AT  
ZINDAN ROUNDABOUT."

"ARMED POLICE CAME  
TOWARDS US. THEY  
SHOT DIRECTLY AT THE  
PROTESTERS."



"SINCE I WAS IN THE MIDDLE,  
I HAD ONLY ABOUT 15  
SHOTGUN PELLETS ON MY  
CHEST AND ARM."



"BUT THERE  
WERE OTHER PEOPLE  
WHO WERE WOUNDED  
VERY BADLY."

"WHEN I GOT HOME, THE IRANIAN INTELLIGENCE CALLED AND ASKED ME TO GO TO THEIR OFFICE."



"THEY ACCUSED ME OF GOING TO THE PROTESTS. I DENIED IT, BUT THEY TOLD ME THEY HAVE VIDEO AND PICTURES. THEY KNEW THAT I TREATED SOME WOUNDED PEOPLE."



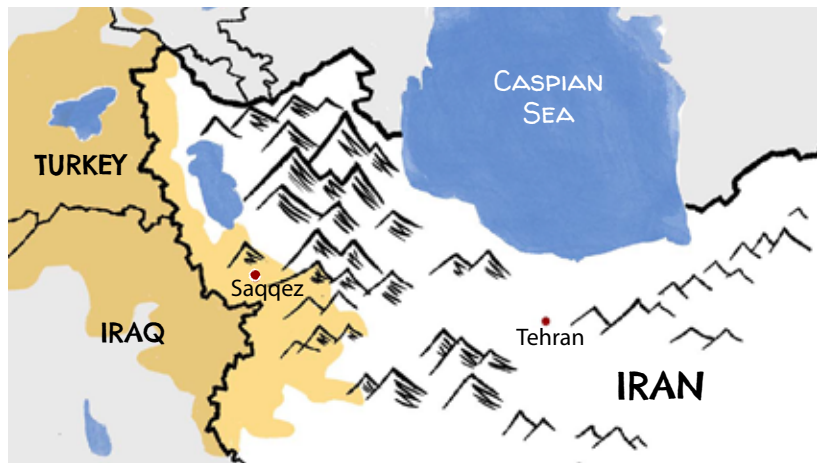
"I FEARED I WOULD HAVE THE SAME FATE AS JINA AMINI AND OTHERS. I WAS CONFUSED AND IN PAIN, SINCE I HAD BEEN STABBED AND SHOT."



"IT WAS MY HUSBAND WHO TOLD THE INTELLIGENCE ABOUT ME."



ZHINA FLED TO THE CITY OF BUKAN, WHERE SHE MET SMUGGLERS WHO PLANNED HER TRIP TO THE IRAQI SIDE OF THE KURDISH REGION.



IN THE KURDISH REGION OF IRAQ AND IRAN, GOODS AND PEOPLE CROSS THE TWO NATIONS' MOUNTAINOUS BORDER BY NIGHT.

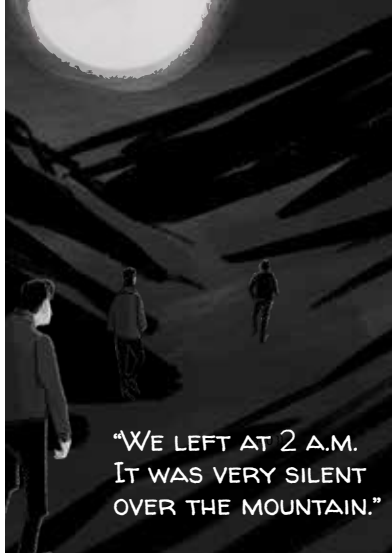




"BEFORE CROSSING THE MOUNTAIN, I ASKED A FAMILY IN THE VILLAGE TO GIVE ME MEN'S CLOTHES TO HIDE THE FACT THAT I AM A WOMAN."



"WE LEFT AT 2 A.M. IT WAS VERY SILENT OVER THE MOUNTAIN."



"YOU COULD HEAR YOUR OWN BREATHING."



"WE WERE SCARED TO MAKE ANY NOISE."



"I COULD SEE A BIT IN FRONT OF ME THAT THERE WAS A PATHWAY WHERE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN BEFORE."



"I WAS RAISED IN A WAY THAT WOMEN CANNOT DO THINGS BY THEMSELVES OR TRAVEL ALONE. ..."



"IN MY PREVIOUS LIFE AS A WOMAN [IN IRAN], I HAD NEVER EVEN BEEN TO THE MARKET BY MYSELF."



"I WAS NEVER FREE OVER THERE."



"THIS BUILT UP, AND WHEN AN OPPORTUNITY AROSE, WE HAD TO LET IT OUT ..."



"TO PROTEST, TO SAY WOMEN ALSO EXIST ..."



"TO SAY WE ARE EQUAL TO MEN."



"WE NEED THE RIGHT TO STUDY AND TO WEAR WHAT WE WANT."





"JINA AMINI'S  
DEATH BECAME  
OUR CHANCE TO  
TELL THE WORLD."



# Confronting 'Morality'

FIVE WOMEN SHARE THEIR STORIES OF GRIEF, SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE UNDER THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC. EXPLORE THE FULL SERIES ON [VOANEWS.COM](https://voanews.com)



## NILU

DECADES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN IRAN HAVE AFFECTED GENERATIONS OF FAMILIES.



## SAHAR

A PRIVATE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FILLED WITH SONG AND DANCING TURNS INTO A PUBLIC NIGHTMARE.



## MAHSA

M.S. WAS IN THE SEVENTH GRADE WHEN SHE WAS ARRESTED AND JAILED FOR WALKING WITH A FAMILY FRIEND WHO WASN'T A RELATIVE.



## ELNAZ

GROWING UP, VHS VIDEOS HELPED ELNAZ SARBAR BOCZEK LEARN ENGLISH AND OFFERED HER A WINDOW TO A WORLD OUTSIDE OF IRAN.



## ZHINA

AFTER BEING ATTACKED AND THREATENED FOR ATTENDING ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN 2022, ZHINA FLED IRAN TO THE IRAQI SIDE OF THE KURDISH REGION.



Explore the series • Available in English, Farsi, Dari, Kurdish, and Pashto

<https://projects.voanews.com/iran/confronting-morality-women-under-the-islamic-republic/>