

## 2023 Sakharov Prize laureate: Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran

Respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights is a core value of the EU, which it promotes through its policies. The European Parliament's Sakharov Prize honours the work of those who stand up for these freedoms and rights. With peace and human rights under increased attack today, the prize remains as relevant as ever. This year it has been awarded to the late Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran. The award ceremony will be held during the European Parliament's December plenary session.

### Significance of the Sakharov Prize

Every year since 1988, Parliament has awarded the [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) to individuals or organisations for their outstanding achievements in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. Initiated by a 1985 parliamentary resolution, the prize is named after [Andrei Sakharov](#), the eminent Soviet-Russian nuclear physicist, dissident, human rights activist and 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner. The prize symbolises Sakharov's courageous defence of human rights (notably the freedom of thought and expression) and personal freedom, both of which he had been denied for several periods in his lifetime.

### Award procedure and the 2023 Sakharov Prize finalists and laureate

A political group, or [at least 40 Members](#) of the Parliament, can [nominate](#) a candidate for the Sakharov Prize each year. From the list of [nominees](#), three finalists are shortlisted in a joint vote by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Development and the Subcommittee on Human Rights.

The three [finalists](#) for the 2023 Sakharov Prize were: 1) **Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran**; 2) **Vilma Núñez de Escorcía and Bishop Rolando José Álvarez Lagos** from [Nicaragua](#); and 3) **women fighting for a free, safe and legal abortion in Poland, El Salvador and the USA**. On [19 October 2023](#), Parliament's Conference of Presidents decided unanimously to award the prize to Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran.

Announcing the decision, Parliament's President [Roberta Metsola](#) reminded the plenary that just over one year had passed since Jina Mahsa Amini's murder on 16 September 2022, a date that would 'live in infamy', and one that 'marked a turning point'. She said the European Parliament is proud to stand alongside the brave and defiant Iranian women, men and young people who continue to fight for equality, dignity and freedom in Iran. She reassured Iranians that 'Parliament hears you, the world sees you and we are with you', noting that 'by choosing them as laureates for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2023, this House remembers their struggle and continues to honour all those who have paid the ultimate price for liberty'.

### Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran

Wearing a headscarf (hijab) in public is mandatory for women in Iran. On 13 September 2022, Amini was [arrested](#) by the [morality police](#) for wearing her headscarf 'improperly'. She died on 16 September 2022, following three days in police custody during which she was allegedly tortured and received head injuries. Her funeral in her native Kurdistan in north-western Iran on 17 September 2022 sparked protests that quickly spread to cities all over the country, including the capital Tehran. The protests, under the '[Woman, Life, Freedom](#)' slogan were [led by women](#), who removed and burned their hijabs and cut their hair, in solidarity with Amini. These protests, [notable](#) for their vehemence in opposing regime policies, can be seen as part of a 'continuum of protests' in the months leading up to Amini's death over a range of concerns, including [skyrocketing living costs](#) and restrictions on political and civil rights. During the protests that followed Amini's death, the security forces are believed to have killed at least 537 [protesters](#), including 68 minors. Thousands were detained, including hundreds of students, dozens of journalists, artists, filmmakers and other public figures. [Eight men](#) have so far been executed for their participation in the



protests, amid concerns that they did not receive a fair trial. At least 26 protesters have reportedly been sentenced to death in connection with the protests, and dozens more have been charged with offences carrying the death penalty. On 24 November 2022, the [UN Human Rights Council](#) mandated the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran to investigate alleged human rights violations in Iran related to the protests that began on 16 September 2022. On 28 October 2023, a [16-year-old Iranian girl, Armita Garawand](#), died after a confrontation with officials enforcing mandatory hijab rules in the Tehran metro on 1 October left her in a coma. While attending Garawand's funeral, 2012 Sakharov Prize laureate [Nasrin Sotoudeh](#) was severely beaten and re-arrested.

## Women's rights in Iran

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, [women's rights](#) in Iran have been [restricted](#). Several laws introduced after the revolution imposed a public dress code for women, including a mandatory headscarf. Under relatively moderate President [Hassan Rouhani](#) in 2013-2021, enforcement of the dress code was relaxed and women increasingly defied modesty laws. However, after '[ultra-conservative](#) cleric' President Ebrahim Raisi took office in 2021, the morality police once more enforced the dress code. On 15 August 2022, President Raisi signed a [decree](#) enforcing Iran's headscarf and chastity law, which resulted in a new list of restrictions regarding how women can dress. Simultaneously, reports surfaced of authorities in Iran cracking down increasingly on women deemed to be in violation of rules on wearing the hijab. In September 2023, the Iranian parliament approved a [new bill](#), under which women can be imprisoned for up to 10 years for violating the country's mandatory veiling laws. In early November, [United Nations experts](#) expressed shock at a new wave of attacks on girls and women, and called for the repeal of gender discriminatory laws, including on compulsory dress codes. The UN Human Rights Committee has [called](#) on Iran to disband its morality police, and repeal laws and policies that criminalise non-compliance with compulsory veiling.

## Human rights situation in general

Iran has [ratified](#) six international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, but not the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Formally, the protection of fundamental rights is anchored in the country's [constitution](#). According to [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), the human rights situation in Iran is dire. The rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are heavily suppressed, torture and other ill-treatment remains widespread and systematic, and women, lesbian, gay, bi, trans and intersex people and ethnic and religious minorities face widespread discrimination. [Executions](#) have also risen markedly; Iran has already executed 616 people in 2023, surpassing 600 recorded [annual executions](#) for the first time since 2016.

## EU position on human rights in Iran

The EU has been concerned about the human rights situation in Iran for years. In 2011, the EU imposed [targeted sanctions](#), in response to serious human rights violations in Iran, including travel restrictions and asset freezes. These sanctions currently apply to 227 people and 43 entities. On 23 March 2012, additional restrictive measures were introduced, namely an embargo on equipment that may be used for internal repression and on equipment that may be used to monitor or intercept internet and telephone communications, measures extended annually ever since. Since 17 October 2022, as a direct response to the widespread and disproportionate use of force by the Iranian security forces during the protests following Amini's death, the Council has adopted [eight packages](#) of restrictive measures (travel bans and asset freezes) targeting 216 individuals and 37 entities. These sanctions were imposed within the context of existing restrictive measures on Iran related to violations of [human rights](#), which the EU adopted in 2011.

**European Parliament position.** On 6 October 2022, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the death of Amini and repression of women's rights protesters in Iran, voicing support for protesters' aspirations to a 'free, stable, inclusive and democratic country' and condemning use of force by Iran's security forces. On 19 January 2023, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the EU response to the protests and executions in Iran. This was followed, on 16 March, by a [resolution](#) on Iran, in particular the poisoning of hundreds of schoolgirls. On 23 November, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the latest attacks against women and women's rights defenders in Iran, and its arbitrary detention of EU nationals.