



Spotlight on Iran



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Men in women's clothing: public outcry ensues after a criminal was forced to march in women's clothing

A massive public outcry emerged after internal security forces dressed a Kurdish man in women's clothing and marched him in the streets of his home town. The young man, who was convicted of assault by a court in the north Iranian city of Marivan (Kurdistan Province), was forced to march in the streets of the city in traditional Kurdish women's apparel.

To protest the humiliating punishment, which was defined by activists for women's rights as an offense to women in general and Kurdish women in particular, the Marivan Women's Association organized a demonstration in the streets of the city.

In the past several days the protest has expanded to social networks. Dozens of web users posted photographs of themselves in women's clothing on a Facebook page created as part of the protest, titled "Being a woman is not a means to humiliate or punish anyone".

The way that the young man was punished also drew criticism from Iran's political system. Last week seventeen Majles members sent a letter to the ministers of interior and justice, saying that the punishment goes against the values of Islam and is an offense to Muslim women.

A massive public outcry has emerged in recent days after internal security forces dressed a Kurdish man in women's clothing and marched him in the streets of his home town. Towfik Dabashi, 25, from the north Iranian city of Marivan (Kurdistan Province), was convicted of assault and disruption of public order. On April 15, police officers marched him through the streets of the city dressed in traditional Kurdish women's apparel. This was done in accordance with a ruling of the court, which made a decision to punish the man in this manner to humiliate him and deter other criminals.

The same punishment was imposed by the Marivan court on two other men but has not been carried out so far.

This is not the first time that the authorities of Iran have imposed this humiliating punishment on criminals. In February 2008 the reformist daily E'temad reported that a criminal from the city of Kermanshah in west Iran was marched through the city streets in order to deter other potential criminals as part of the campaign to increase public safety.

The humiliating punishment imposed on the Kurdish man drew strong criticism and sparked protests both in Marivan and on social networks. The day after the punishment was carried out, the Marivan Women's Association organized a demonstration in the streets of the city, claiming that dressing a criminal in women's clothing is an offense to women in general and Kurdish women in particular. About one hundred men and women took part in the demonstration. Some of the female demonstrators wore red dresses similar to the one that the young man was forced to wear. Reports published on Iranian opposition websites said that, during the protest demonstration, clashes took place between the demonstrating women and the internal security forces, and that some of the women were even injured (http://www.nnsroj.com/fa/detiles.aspx?id=4635&ID_map=20).

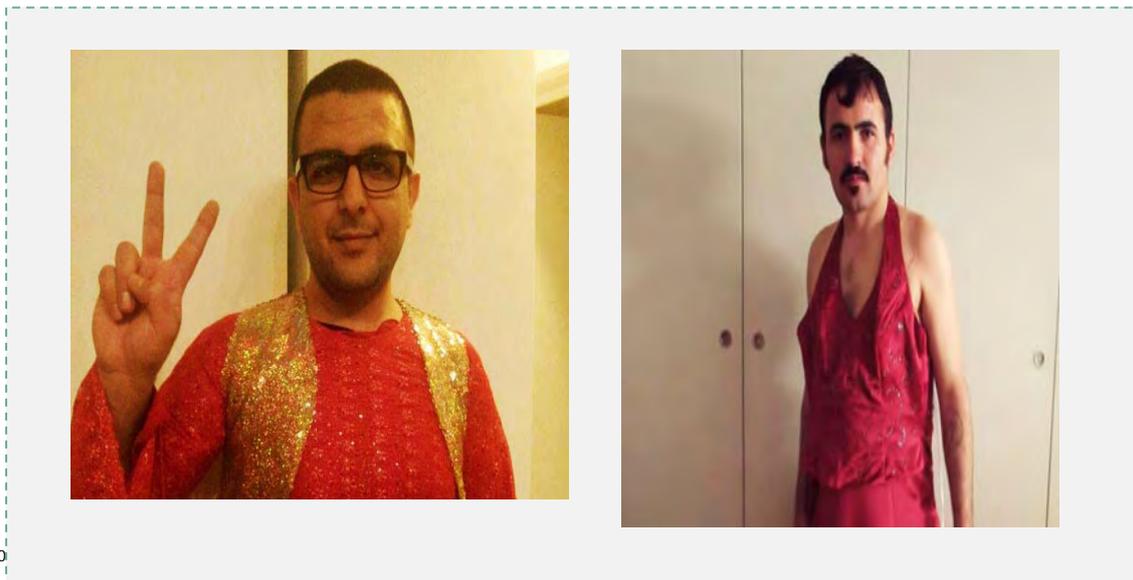
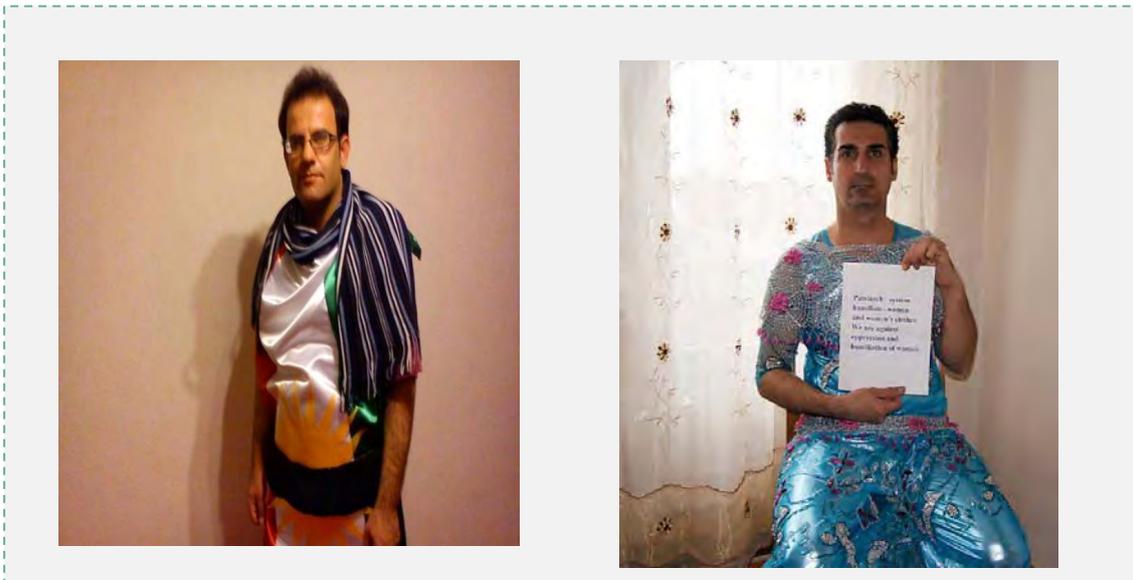


The women's protest in Marivan (http://www.nnsroj.com/fa/detiles.aspx?id=4635&ID_map=20)

In the past several days the protest has expanded to social networks. A Facebook page titled "Being a woman is not a means to humiliate or punish anyone" (<http://www.facebook.com/KurdMenForEquality>) was created as part of the protest.



The page, which has more than 5,200 followers as at April 20, 2013, features dozens of photographs of men dressed in women’s clothing, posted there in solidarity with the women of Marivan and in protest of the punishment imposed on the Kurdish man.



In addition to the public outcry, the original punishment imposed on the Kurdish man also drew criticism from Iran's political system. Last week seventeen Majles members sent a letter to the ministers of interior and justice to protest the punishment. In the letter, the Majles members said that the punishment goes against the values of Islam and is an offense to Muslim women (www.bultannews.com/fa/news/136231).

Commenting on the affair, Abulfazl Abu-Torabi, member of the Majles Justice Committee, said that dressing criminals in women's clothing and marching them in the streets is an illegal method designed to humiliate women and is not consistent with Islamic law (<http://www.yjc.ir/fa/news/4341883>). The Center for Women's Affairs at the presidential office also released a condemnation, saying that the way that the young man was punished is an insult to the dignity of women, which is the foundation for the conduct of the Iranian regime. The center demanded that the internal security forces prevent similar incidents from happening again (Mehr, April 20, 2013).

The reformist daily Shargh, too, strongly criticized the punishment imposed on the young man. A commentary article published by the newspaper this weekend said that criminals should be punished in a way that will preserve human dignity. Even if carrying out the young man's punishment in public was essential for protecting public safety, dressing him in women's clothing was unnecessary and inappropriate, and contributes nothing to the prevention of future crimes. The newspaper took the opportunity to say that, as a matter of principle, it is opposed to the public punishment of criminals, and argued that the claims brought up by the women of Marivan about insulting their dignity are proof that public punishment is unsuccessful. Such punishment, according to Shargh, is not compatible with the values of Islam, according to which punishment is a means to get the criminals themselves to correct their ways rather than to hurt others (www.sharghdaily.ir, April 20, 2013).

In December 2009 another event sparked a similar protest on Facebook when hundreds of web users from Iran and elsewhere posted photographs of themselves wearing veils in a show of support for Majid Tavakoli, a member of the students' protest movement from the Amir Kabir University in Tehran.

Tavakoli was arrested during the Student Day events when, according to authorities, he tried to evade arrest while dressed in women's clothes following a speech he had given to demonstrating students. After his photographs in women's clothing were published in the Iranian media, the activist's supporters claimed that the photographs were faked by the authorities in order to humiliate him and mock the reformist protest

movement. Following his arrest, hundreds of Iranian men joined forces on Facebook to express their protest by publishing pictures of themselves in veils.



Source: Amir Kabir student website, www.autnews.es, December 11, 2009