

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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The Honorable Samuel Brownback
Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom
Office of International Religious Freedom
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW,
Washington, D.C. 20520

January 26, 2018

Re: Arrest of Iranian woman protesting mandatory veiling

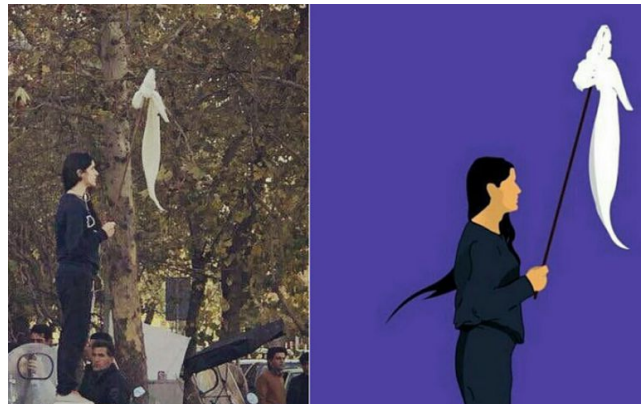
Dear Mr. Ambassador:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to urge you to use your new post to stand up for the rights of a religious dissenter in Iran. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 31,000 members. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

Iran has seen a wave of protests that began at the end of December 2017. One of the most visible protesters was a woman who took off her hijab in Tehran and stood on a pedestal above the crowd, waving the hijab on a stick to protest compulsory veiling laws. These laws violate religious freedom and women's rights. A video of this protest went viral and the brave woman became, quite literally, symbolic of the protests. (Image adjacent.)

The BBC has confirmed that this courageous woman, possibly named Vida Movahed, is a mother to a 20-month-old child.¹ Apparently, she was arrested on the day of the protest, released, and re-arrested. Since that second arrest, she has disappeared.

We call on you to use your new office to advocate for her immediate release.



On January 4, your office said in a press release, "In far too many places around the globe, people continue to be persecuted, unjustly prosecuted, or imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief" and singled out Iran for its "egregious violations of religious freedom."² Stand by those principles and work to save this mother.

Very truly,

Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker
Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-42788549>

² <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/01/276843.htm>