

Iranian court orders arrest of filmmaker

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Iranian film director Tahmineh Milani was arrested August 26 (or August 27, according to some reports) on orders of Tehran's Revolutionary Court and remains in custody, despite efforts to win her release. The detention was reported by several international sources on Wednesday and confirmed in a press release from the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) on Friday.

The IRNA item reports that Milani was arrested "for her support for 'counterrevolutionary grouplets' in her last movie [*The Hidden Half*]." The news agency quoted the court, which declared that she "has abused arts as a tool for actions which will suit the taste of the counterrevolutionary and *mohareb* [those who fight god] grouplets."

According to the BBC, which reported that she was detained on Monday, Milani "has been held since then and her husband is reported to have seen her for just a few minutes." Milani's arrest is only the latest in a series of attacks by reactionary Iranian officials against all signs of opposition and independent political or intellectual life.

Born in Tabriz in 1960, Milani is one of Iran's leading female filmmakers. She is best known for *Two Women* (1999), which appeared at the *New Directors/New Films* series at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in July 2000. The film criticized the situation of women in contemporary Iran, epitomized in the figure of a woman trapped in an oppressive and abusive marriage. Its depiction of domestic violence was apparently hailed for its treatment of a taboo subject.

Film director Bahram Beizaei told the Associated Press (AP) that "it is widely said that her arrest was related to her latest film, *The Hidden Half*, and her interviews with newspapers in recent weeks." In one of those interviews Milani said feminism was a means of "fighting [Iran's] male-dominated system" and a way of "salvation for women who are deprived of equal

rights. So I spend my energy making films that inform the public of the consequences of injustice" against women.

Ray Privett of Facets Video, who has issued several press releases on the arrest, cites Dr. Jamsheed Akrami, a professor at William Paterson University in New Jersey, in regard to recent comments made by Milani to an Iranian newspaper: "Apparently she was talking in that interview about the Iranian Left and the role they played during the Revolution—about how they were suppressed by the Islamic government, and about a number of friends who had been executed and arrested.... It seems that this is what angered the Islamic courts who ordered her arrest." Milani is the first filmmaker to be arrested in years, although rumors circulated last year that Jafar Panahi, director of *The Circle*, might face legal problems.

Milani's arrest was also linked, by a relative who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity, to a speech Milani gave in New York last month in which she criticized Iran's clerical establishment for imposing restrictions on women.

The film that the "Revolutionary Court" criticizes in its statement, *The Hidden Half*, which is currently playing in Iran, apparently depicts a married woman's memories of an affair in the early 1980s—immediately after the 1979 revolution that ousted the Shah and brought the Islamic clerics to power.

In a sign of nervousness about reactions to Milani's arrest, the student news agency ISNA quoted an unnamed official at the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry who commented, "In our opinion, the accusations leveled against Tahmineh Milani are based on a misunderstanding which we are trying to resolve. We hope to be able to announce her release as soon as possible."

In another sign of political and social tension in Iran, a major riot erupted in the northeastern part of the

country on Thursday. Crowds went on the rampage in Sabzevar, in Khorasan province, blocking roads, setting tires on fire and attacking public buildings, including the governor's office, a religious site and the site of Friday prayers. The protests followed the Iranian government's announcement a few days earlier that Khorasan was to be split up into three provinces and that the city of Mashhad and the towns of Birjand and Bojnurd would become provincial capitals. Residents of Sabzevar want the province divided in four so their town will also serve as a capital, in the hope that this status might attract funds and government projects to the poverty-stricken area that borders Afghanistan.

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Iran

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