

Iranian filmmaker faces death penalty in upcoming trial

David Walsh
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Iranian filmmaker Tahmineh Milani faces execution if she is convicted in an upcoming trial. Milani, one of Iran's best-known women directors (*The Legend of a Sigh* [1991], *What Else Is New?* [1992], *Two Women* [1999]), was engaged in promoting her new film, *The Hidden Half*—which had been approved by government censors and the Ministry of Culture—when she was arrested in late August on the orders of Iran's Revolutionary Council. The film, set in the present, depicts in flashback political struggles that took place in Iran in the aftermath of the 1979 coming to power of the Islamic forces. The central protagonist recounts her involvement with left-wing activists, among others.

Milani has been charged with supporting factions waging war against God, and misusing the arts in support of counterrevolutionary and armed opposition groups, according to Ray Privett of Facets Video in Chicago. She told the *Los Angeles Times* (October 26) that one month after *The Hidden Half* opened in Tehran cinemas, four men came to her house and confiscated handwritten notes and scripts.

"According to Milani, they told her, 'We have permission to arrest you'; after 15 minutes, they took her, accompanied by her husband, to the revolutionary court, which is under the control of fundamentalists. Ordinarily, it would have been possible to post a bond and leave, but the judge wasn't there so they couldn't release her. She was taken to a single cell and for several days was not allowed to mingle with other women prisoners. When they met her, they rallied to her defense, giving her fresh clothing, volunteering their shower time for her—and suggesting she make a film about their plight.

"'Every day for five hours, I was questioned [by the court] about my movie,' Milani said. 'I was accused of doing things against national security and collaborating

with anti-revolutionary groups outside of Iran. It is one of the highest accusations they can make, and the sentence is the death penalty.'"

Milani believes that she is a victim of an attempt to discredit officials at the Ministry of Culture and to intimidate other filmmakers. This is perhaps part of a wider struggle within the Iranian regime between opponents and supporters of President Mohammad Khatami, the so-called "reformist."

The filmmaker spent seven days in jail. At two press conferences Khatami expressed his support for Milani and amazement at her arrest. Eventually an appeal by the culture minister to Ayatollah Ali Khomeini won her release. Two hours later additional investigators came to Milani's house and seized pictures, videotapes, notes, film books and scenarios.

Milani and her husband, Mohammad Nikbin, made efforts to get the case closed and their belongings returned, without success. Nikbin told the *Times*, "They have not given us a direct answer about when we'll get them back or what's going to happen."

A "Declaration of Solidarity" with Tahmineh Milani has been circulated within the filmmaking community. It reads:

"As fellow members of the film community we were outraged to learn of the recent arrest of Tahmineh Milani by the Islamic Government of Iran. This is the first time the current Iranian government has taken such action against a filmmaker. Although she has been released on bail, charges against her have not been dropped. We wish to express our solidarity with her."

The signees include Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Steven Soderbergh, Sean Penn, Jamsheed Akrami, Carlos Diegues, Hanif Kureishi, Ang Lee, Mike Leigh, Faye Dunaway, Spike Lee, Dusan Makavejev, Chris Marker, Jonathan Demme, Peter

Sellars, Richard Leacock, Ken Russell and others.

Other filmmakers, organizations, and individuals who would like to express their solidarity with Milani are invited to send faxes to:

His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Khatami,
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
at 98 21 649 5880;

His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudī,
Minister of Justice,
at 98 21 646 5242;

His Excellency Mr. Masjed Jamee,
Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance,
at 98 21 391 3535;

Mr. Mohebbi,
President of the Farabi Cinema Foundation,
at 98 21 670 8155;
and Ray Privett of Facets Multimedia
at 1 773 929 5437.

They are also invited to sign the petition online at www.facets.org/petition.html.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact