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# I'm a Graduate Student Studying International Affairs; Iran's Woman, Life, Freedom Movement has Taught me More About the Country of Iran than Frequent Recent News Headlines on Nuclear Enrichment

By Megan Churchill

I'm from the United States, and although I'm studying international affairs, before interning with Women's E-Learning in Leadership (WELL) I didn't know a lot about the country of Iran. I've learned a lot over the course of my internship this summer with WELL. Like many people, in recent months I've followed the breaking news about the attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities by Israel and the U.S. However, it's been learning about an internal movement in Iran that has taught me the most about the country and its people.

What's taught me the most about Iran and Iranian people isn't articles which center on the amount of enriched uranium that Iran's government or military possesses, instead it's what I've learned about the Woman, Life, Freedom movement that is taking place in Iran today. Below I've explained what I've learned about the origin and the meaning behind the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and the insight that movement has granted me into the present lived reality in Iran.

The Woman, Life, Freedom movement was born as a protest to the murder of a young woman. Mahsa Amini died in custody of the morality police after being beaten, accused of improperly wearing her hijab on September 16, 2022 in Tehran. At Amini's funeral, women removed their veils and chanted, "Woman, Life, Freedom!" This moment sparked protests across the country and the Woman, Life, Freedom movement was born.

"Woman" is the cry of this ongoing movement because today in Iran, under the Islamic Sharia Law, women are not equal to men. Women do not have political power; they are not clerics or members of the guardian council, which has supervisory power over elected politicians. The guardian council, which can also overrule institutions such as the judiciary, is made up of 12 members. 0 of those 12 are women. Lacking power, in Iran women are often not at liberty to

make their own choices and work for their own goals. “Woman” is the cry because today women often don’t have basic autonomy or rights.

“Life” is the cry because the right to life wasn’t granted to Mahsa Amini, and it isn’t granted to many of Iran’s citizens. The right to life and even to believe in the value of life is threatened by the influence of Sharia law in Iran. In Islamic Political Ideology, death is more important than life. Life is seen as a very temporary existence on the way to death. The body – inhabited in life – is seen as evil, while death is the divine. “Life” is the cry because the right to life and to value life are threatened by the powerful influence of Sharia law in the Islamic regime.

“Freedom” is the cry because the freedoms to walk freely, to make choices, to hold power, and to speak openly, are not consistently granted to any minority in Iran. Women in Iran face discrimination but so do ethnic groups in the country. The Azeris, the Kurds, and the Arabs comprise roughly 40% in total of Iran’s population, and each group faces marginalization and discrimination within the country of Iran. “Freedom” is the cry because the right to live freely isn’t granted to the majority of Iranian citizens.

“Women, Life, Freedom!” is the rallying cry of protesters in Iran as they call for their fundamental human rights. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement has grown and extended beyond Iran’s borders since Amini’s death nearly three years ago. This movement began due to the murder of a young Iranian woman, but it isn’t just for women. The majority of people in Iran are oppressed by the Islamic regime and Sharia Law. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement stands against oppression for all humans as it stands for human rights.

Human rights within the country of Iran aren’t issues that are spoken about in U.S. foreign policy the way Iran’s enrichment of uranium is, and human rights don’t as often appear in breaking news headlines. But human rights are influential to the everyday lives of millions of Iranians.

As I’ve learned about the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, I’ve learned that millions of Iranian people are resilient activists. I’ve learned that they are fighting for their basic human rights. I’m glad to have learned about the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran for what it’s taught me about the resilience and spirit of Iranian people; I would have a different perspective on Iran today if my knowledge of the country was centered on nuclear capacity. I’m glad for my knowledge of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, and I believe in the Iranian activists

standing for human rights today.

Megan Churchill is a graduate student at George Washington University, studying global gender policy in international affairs. She is passionate about reporting and fighting for women's rights. She plans to continue working in communications for women's rights organizations.