

Iranian Dissident Wins Secularist of The Year Prize

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A woman who has spent her life opposing the mistreatment of women by the Iranian clerical regime has been awarded the £5,000 prize for Secularist of the Year by the National Secular Society.

Mina Ahadi, an Iranian exile now living in Germany, was presented with the prize in London on Saturday (20 October). In his statement honouring Mina Ahadi, Professor Richard Dawkins said:

"I have long felt that the key to solving the worldwide menace of Islamic terrorism and oppression would eventually be the awakening of women, and Mina Ahadi is a charismatic leader working to that end. The brutal suppression of the rights of women in many countries throughout the Islamic world is an obvious outrage. Slightly less obvious, but just as outrageous, is the supine willingness of western liberals to go along with it. It is worse than supine, it is patronising and condescending: "Wife-beating is part of 'their' culture. Who are we to condemn their traditions?" A religion so insecure as to mandate the death penalty for apostasy is not to be trifled with, and ex-Muslims who stand up and fight deserve our huge admiration and gratitude for their courage. Right out in front of this honourable band is Mina Ahadi. I salute her and congratulate her on this well-deserved award as Secularist of the Year."

Mina Ahadi started her serious political activities when she was 16 and living in Iran. She was at university in 1979 in Tabriz at the time of the Iranian revolution and she began immediately to organise demonstrations and meetings to oppose the compulsory veiling of women. This courageous dissent got her noticed by the Islamic regime's authorities and soon she had to go underground to avoid retribution.

The end of 1980 her house was raided by the police and her husband and four of their comrades arrested. Mina escaped only because she wasn't at home at the time. Her husband and the four arrested were all executed by firing squad soon after. She lived underground for some time and then fled to Iranian Kurdistan in 1981, where she continued to struggle against the Islamic regime for the next ten years. In 1990 she went to Vienna. She moved to Germany in 1996 and has lived in Europe since then.

In all that time, Mina Ahadi has struggled mightily for the rights of women. She founded the International Committee against Stoning – which now has over 200 branches throughout the world. She also heads the International Committee against Executions and is the spokesperson for the newly formed women's rights organisation, Equal Rights. She formed the Central Council of ex-Muslims in Germany early this year to help people renounce Islam and religion should they so wish.

This brilliant idea has now been replicated in several other European countries, including in Britain by our own Maryam Namazie. Undeterred by the inevitable death threats, Mina has pressed on, determined as ever to protect women from the ravages of Islam.

Apostasy, of course, is forbidden in Islam and in some Islamist states it carries the death penalty – including in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Mauritania.

She calls such states “Islam-stricken” and her own experience of living and suffering under such regimes has made her ever more determined to rescue others from their clutches.

Secularist of the Year presentation: watch the highlights

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- [Dawkins Says Women Will Defeat Militant Islam](#)
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