

Community comes together to mourn, hail activists in Iran



September 16 marked the one-year anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman who died in police custody after her arrest for not wearing a hijab.

Her arrest and death was condemned around the world, sparking waves of protest across the globe, particularly in Iran, calling for the end of the regime that has been in power for more than 40 years.

One year on, that passion for justice is as strong as ever, and local leaders marked the anniversary at Aurora's Royal Rose gallery where an artwork created by the Iranian-born Aitak Sorohitlab was unveiled and candles were illuminated in the windows of the gallery in the heart of Aurora's downtown core.

"This has been an incredibly difficult year for the Iranian community all around the world," said Michael Parsa, the Iranian-Canadian MPP for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. "This was a movement, an uprising that turned into a revolution because the brave women of Iran – women and girls, men who stood by them, every single person in Iran stood up and said, 'No more. We will not take this persecution.' All of the voice of unity, with empty hands, pushed back against a tyrant, the murderous regime of Iran who has systematically violated the rights of women, religious minorities, members of the LGBT community, and the time has come for all of us to stand with them. This is a very powerful statement.

Joined by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Parsa added: "Women. Life. Freedom. – it is a slogan that will turn Iran once again back to freedom, back to democracy, where no woman, no girl, should have to worry and fear persecution or violence in the hands of this brutal regime. What you're doing is heartfelt. We feel the love and we can't thank you enough."

For Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy, who was appointed last week as chair of the Liberal Party of Canada's Women's Caucus, the realities of what is being seen in Iran is "incomprehensible."

"We have our challenges, but one thing I know is Canadians are all with Iranians. I don't think there's a single person in Canada who would say they should not be supporting the people of Iran," she said. "It's so easy to be divided and we can't do that. This is a human rights issue, this is a women's issue, this is a feminist issue, this is an issue that we all have to just join together and do our best and just work as best we can to ensure that we support the people of Iran who are here in Canada and we do everything we can to ensure that that regime falls.

"It's imperative for all of us in democratic countries to come together, to work together, to make sure that stranglehold on Iran tightens and we apply pressure on all countries around the world until that government falls and that government will fall. It must

fall.?

Sorohitlab told the assembled crowd that the banner she had created was inspired in several distinct ways, including art created by women in the washrooms of the University of Tehran because that was one of the few places they could convey the message.

?May it spark conversations and actions that lead to a brighter, more equitable future for all,? she said, noting that in addition to women, men and those who identify as part of the queer community have also suffered under the regime.

Near the end of the formal remarks, Mayor Tom Mrakas and Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland expressed their solidarity as well.

?I am very proud that we have stood up with the women from Iran and the people of Iran and not only flew the true flag of the Iranian people, but said ?No more' to this terrorist, murderous regime that needs to go because at the end of the day all women should be free,? said Mayor Mrakas.?

Added Councillor Gilliland: ?Art can have a huge impact in releasing energy, emotions and feelings for someone and can serve as a window of new opportunities. In order for an individual to reach their full creative potential, we need to listen to their feelings and spend time contemplating over them. Being in touch with how you feel can spark a wide variety of creativity that can blossom into an impact for both the individual and the world. As you can see, this is affecting the world and what's going on in Iran.?

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