

Iranian women shed veils for Facebook page

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May 14, 2014

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(RNS) Thousands of Iranian women are sending photos of themselves without their hijab, or veil, to a new London-based Facebook page dedicated to allowing them "stealthy freedoms."

The Facebook page—called "Stealthy Freedom of Iranian Women"—was set up by Iranian journalist Masih Alinejad and has attracted almost 150,000 likes.

Alinejad told the Guardian, which first reported about the site, that she has been inundated with messages and photos since launching it May 3.

"I've hardly slept in the past three days because of the number of pictures and messages I've received," she told the newspaper.

The photos show women sans veil in parks, on the beach, or on the street.

"All of the photos and captions posted have been sent by women from all over Iran and this is a site dedicated to Iranian women inside the country who want to share their 'stealthily' taken photos without the veil," Alinejad wrote on the Facebook page.

"My stealthy freedom while driving in the streets of Tehran," wrote Maryam, alongside an image showing her behind the wheel of a car.

"I like to feel the wind blowing on my face."

Alinejad said on the site that she tries hard to verify that the pictures were sent from genuine accounts and asked people for permission before publishing them, but does not reveal their full names.

"I have no intention whatsoever to encourage people to defy the forced hijab or stand up against it," she said. "I just want to give voice to thousands and thousands of Iranian women who think they have no platform to have their say."

Alinejad said she was not personally opposed to the hijab, noting that her mother is veiled, but believes people should have the freedom to choose.

She wrote that the page does not belong to any political group and the initiative reflects the concerns of Iranian women, who face legal and social restrictions.

The late Ayatollah Khomeini decreed the mandatory hijab in 1979 only a few months after the Revolution. While Iranian women frequently test the requirement by wearing the veil loosely, or

allowing their hair to show, the religious police try to enforce it with frequent crackdowns and arrests.</p><p>Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has spoken out against such crackdowns but done little to try to get the religious code relaxed.</p>