Rejecting hijab dooms woman to 24 years in prison

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You may never have heard of Saba Kord-Afshari, but the 20-year-old Iranian woman was sentenced to 24 years in prison by the Islamic Republic of Iran on Monday for the crime of defying the country’s ‘hijab law’ that forbids all women in Iran from displaying their uncovered head in public.

Kord-Ashrafi is just one of many courageous Iranian Muslim women who have defied the country’s mullahs and their female enforcers by observing what is now known as ‘White Wednesdays’ when girls and women take off their hijabs and bare their hair in public.

Her shocking conviction would have gone unnoticed and unreported had it been left to the mainstream media in Canada, who were too busy celebrating the cloth as exotic attire.

But Irvin Cotler is not one to be silenced. He along with Iranian feminist Masih Alinejad were among the first to bring the injustice towards Kord-Ashrafi to the world’s attention. The former attorney general of Canada and human rights crusader tweeted: “Condemn the brutal & unjust sentence of #SabaKordafshari, who at only 20 years old has just been sentenced to 24 years of imprisonment. Her “crime”? Speaking out for women’s rights in #Iran. We must all, wherever we are, stand in solidarity with Saba & #WhiteWednesdays prisoners.”

Saba Kord-Afshari’s trial began on Aug. 19 when she was charged with “spreading corruption and prostitution by taking off her hijab and walking without a veil [hijab].”

As Iranian, Saudi and other Muslim women around the globe struggled for freedom from the hijab, which they consider a political symbol that has nothing to do with piety, the reaction among the liberal circles in the West was confounding. Here an increasing number of feminists, leftists and the liberal media glorified the hijab as some exotic symbol of women’s liberation that had to be embraced.

On the day Saba Kord-Afshari was imprisoned for 24 years for daring to dump her hijab, that same piece of headdress was depicted in positive light by the Toronto Star in a story on its financial pages about “How to put your investments where your social conscience is.”

The story showed a smiling woman attired in hijab surrounded by words “ethics”, “integrity”, “respect”, “reliable”, “teamwork” and “ethics” rotating around her as she clicked a “Core Values” button in the centre.

It did make me wonder about the world of guilt and fantasy some of my more liberal colleagues live in.

The hijab, as colleague Farzana Hassan and myself have insisted for years on these pages, is a political symbol, not one of piety.

This is best demonstrated by North America’s top protagonist of the hijab, U.S. Congresswomen Ilhan Omar who told Vogue magazine that wearing her hijab allows her to be a “walking billboard” … “To me, the hijab means power, liberation, beauty, and resistance,” she added.

Had the hijab been a symbol of piety, I doubt any Muslim woman would flaunt it while dating married men as is being alleged by a DC woman who claims Rep. Omar and her husband are having an affair.

While Islamists and liberal Canadians fawn over hijabs, Yasmine Mohammed, an Egyptian shared a very unsympathetic judgment on that piece of cloth. She tweeted: “To me, the hijab means female subjugation, victim-blaming, and perpetuation of rape culture.”

A harsh view, but one that resonates with many Muslim victims of Islamism.