

Women A Force for Change

Maryam Rajavi

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Maryam Rajavi

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Preface by the Publisher

This publication is a collection of excerpts from lectures and speeches by Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI),¹ on the struggle of Iranian women against the fascist dictatorship ruling Iran.

Mrs. Rajavi, who leads a resistance movement engaged in a grueling and complex struggle against one of the most atrocious dictatorships in today’s world, sternly believes that in addition to their struggle for equality, women have a historical mission to bring freedom to today’s society. In other words, today’s women represent the force for progressive change in our societies. Mrs. Rajavi views this not as an out-of-reach ideal, but an imperative for today’s world.

Various aspects of Maryam Rajavi’s viewpoints gathered in this book have been presented in the course of the speeches she has given at conferences organized for women’s rights activists at the European Parliament, Germany, France, Belgium and Finland from 2006 to 2010. This collection familiarizes the reader with the status of Iranian women and their achievements in their struggle against the dictatorship of “velayat-e-faqih” (absolute rule of the supreme religious authority) in Iran.

In 2006, a similar collection was published that primarily covered Mrs. Rajavi’s views on genuine Islam and how it views women.

The publication book has been divided into chapters each of which cover specific topics. Some of the issues relating to circumstances at the time of the speeches have been omitted and the format of the original texts has been modified for publication purposes.

¹ *National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) is a democratic coalition of organizations and personalities committed to a democratic, secular republic in place of the current theocratic regime in Iran. It has 530 members, more than half of whom are women.*



I

Women against Fundamentalism

By the end of 1920s, the gender equality movement succeeded in achieving women's right to vote. During the next fifty years, the movement made significant strides in attaining greater legal equality for women. During the last decades of the twentieth century, it fought against obstacles against freedom and equality for women in various realms. The question, however, remains: What should the goals of the equality movement be today?

Let us first ponder as to why this question is essential for our times. Today's immense global developments offer both great opportunities as well as considerable threats to the equality movement. The movement is positioned to become a decisive parameter in shaping the future of our world, while at the same time running the risk of becoming a follower rather than a pioneer.

One of the fundamental questions is: What is the equality movement yearning for? In other words, are we merely seeking sporadic power-sharing roles and prepared to sanction the status quo? Are we going to be satisfied with a few revisions in women's rights? Certainly not!

A closer examination of present conditions suggests a different strategy, namely that we shall leave this

bifurcation altogether and live up to our role in transforming the world. This strategy demands an active participation in the political struggle aimed at removing the obstacles against equality and freedom. The equality movement should not limit itself to its present objectives; freedom can only be realized through continuous progress and reaching for ever higher horizons.

Therefore, although considerable achievements have been earned through women's struggle in the past century, still no progress can be considered as perpetual. No social advancement, even when it takes the shape of a law, may be deemed as permanent. This is because the dominant culture throughout our world remains to be injustice and discrimination against women. History has taught us that nowhere does the sovereign power give up its privileges willingly. Therefore, these powers will not, out of their own free will, simply agree to respect the rights and the true place of women in society.

We all agree that it is imperative for women to engage in active political struggle. This principle raises the question of what destination the struggle of women in our era should be directed to? Will we remain on the right path if we expanded the domain of our fight to include the right to employment, having safeguards against violence and aggression, and against victimization of women and children in human trafficking? Or, should we expand our struggle to include the right to abortion and protection of oppressed women? Or, is it that our objective should be something quite different all around?

The aforementioned challenges are indeed valuable and should continue. Their activists should be honored on Women's Day. However, in the current situation, where a flurry of blood, terror, rape and poverty is shattering people's lives in the Middle East, the equality movement is called upon to wage an all encompassing struggle. Today, the Middle East is burning in the flames of fundamentalism. But, the perils of this ominous calamity have transgressed the Middle East to the extent that Western citizens also feel its destructive fire every now and then. This plague is so horrendous that it leaves us with very little choice. We either have to succumb to it and sacrifice the achievements of humankind, in particular those of the movement for equality and justice, or alternatively, we must rise up to fight it with all our might.

You may ask, 'Since fundamentalists target the freedom and rights of women in countries with an Islamic culture, how could women in other parts of the world such as Europe and the U.S. feel its effect?' To answer your question, I would like to point to the palpable prospect of a nuclear war that the fundamentalists ruling Iran are threatening our world with. I would also like to mention the flames of terrorism spread by the mullahs not just in the Middle East but in other parts of the world as well. In addition, the destructive currents generated by fundamentalists in Islamic countries, in particular those aimed against women, will undoubtedly encourage and strengthen male domination elsewhere in the world.

Three decades ago, the prominent American feminist

Susan Brown Miller touched on an important reality regarding violence and aggression. She believed that with each act of violence or aggression perpetrated against a single woman the hegemony of all men in society who had nothing to do with that particular act of violence would be further cemented and fortified. On the other hand, all women in society who were not the target of that instance of violence would be further terrorized and intimidated.

I believe this is a very important conclusion. It enables us to realize the regressive effect of fundamentalism on women's equality movement all over the world. Additionally, we should open our eyes to the new phenomenon of fundamentalism in Islamic communities. These communities also exist in Western countries, giving way to a challenge in recent years with an ever-increasing sphere of influence.

These issues lead us to two fundamental conclusions:

- First, the participation of women in heated political struggles that seek to do away with obstacles against equality is an imperative that cannot be forsaken;
- Second, in the current situation, the essence of this struggle lies in confronting the wave of fundamentalism that is threatening the Middle East.

We are now at a point where we must pose the question, 'Has the equality movement done what is essential against fundamentalism?' 'Has it fulfilled its historical

responsibilities as a pioneering movement?'

Suppression of women: principal feature of fundamentalism

So far, all that the world has encountered about today's Iran only amounts to no more than a small part of the tragedy that has transpired in the lives of women in my homeland. The essential characteristic of the fundamentalism ruling Iran is its misogynist nature. In practice, nobody can sense this characteristic more than Iranian women, who feel it with every fiber of their being. Like massive rubble, the rule of the mullahs has crushed all their rights, freedoms, culture, and family and private lives. Consider the following:

- Thousands of women have been executed; an unprecedented number anywhere in the world
- Tens of thousands of female political prisoners have been tortured in prisons
- Those tortured include pregnant women and mothers in front of their children's eyes
- Women's social and economic status has been denigrated to that of second-class citizens
- Gender apartheid has been imposed
- Even women's commute in the streets are limited
- Compulsory veiling has been instituted, whereby the color and type of dresses are controlled, and women's faces are cut with

blades or splashed with acid as punishment for non-compliance with forced veiling

-Women's right to divorce and custody over their children have been violated

-A reactionary ideology prevails that encourages polygamy and temporary marriages justified through the mullahs' infamous Sharia law

-Medieval and degrading punishments such as stoning to death are carried out, the main victims of which are women

-Injustices and discriminatory treatments are imposed in economic affairs, with regards to employment opportunities, or in educational spheres

-In a wealthy country such as Iran, young girls are sold as a result of family poverty; They are smuggled out of the country by criminal gangs affiliated with the clerical regime

-Body parts of innocent girls are sold due to poverty and starvation

-Women are systematically raped in prisons.¹

¹ In the summer of 2009, Mehdi Karroubi, one of the defeated candidates in the mullahs' presidential elections, who had twice occupied the seat of parliament speaker in mullahs' regime, revealed that the agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and prison wardens rape women and men in prisons. He also presented detailed evidence in this regard. However, as usual, the mullahs' judiciary repudiated the allegation. Rape, as a means of torturing female prisoners, has been systematically employed by the mullahs in their prisons for the last three decades. However, this revelation, made by one of the high-ranking former authorities of the regime, caused a huge scandal for the clerical regime both within Iran and internationally.



In her speech at the European Parliament on February 23, 2010, Mr. Rajavi presented a book containing the names and photographs of 2,700 PMOI women executed or tortured to death by the Iranian regime

Rape is the primary form of torture used against women in the prisons and other suppressive centers. After all other kinds of torture and executions fail to pacify women, and when the torturers are forced to kneel in the face of the power of the resistance of female political activists and members of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK), the final weapon of the animalistic nature of the savage male, i.e. rape and defaming of women, comes into play by the mullahs and the members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The most despised henchmen in the regime's prisons, such as Asadollah Lajevardi and Haj Davoud Rahmani, have been known for resorting to this

crime. In the 1980s, among the women's wards in prisons, there was a special ward called the "residential unit". This ward was set up for raping women prisoners, marking an unparalleled tragedy in history. Women prisoners were told there: "When we are finished doing these things to you, you will be ashamed to return to your families."

Rape is at the same time the *raison d'être* of organs like 'Monkarat' [The Anti-Vice Bureau]². The records of savagery committed against innocent women and girls by this organ from its inception until present day are voluminous. This is why we assert that the enmity of this regime with the Iranian people, and the struggle of the Iranian people for freedom against this regime are not limited to uranium enrichment, nuclear weapons, or even Iraq. It is a struggle over the entirety of the clerical fascism whose culture and history can be summed up into one word: aggression; Aggression against the dignity and rights of all Iranian women and men.

Therefore, I have to say to my sisters throughout Iran that although the pain of inequality, humiliation and insult is devastating, and although the mullahs have trampled upon all your rights and personal, family, social and political freedoms to deny you your human identity, there is nonetheless a tremendous hidden power in you that has turned the Iranian woman into the force for overthrowing the clerical regime.

² *This organ specifically controls relations between men and women. Its agents have on innumerable occasions arrested women and young girls on bogus charges of «actions contrary to chastity» or «naveiling» and then raped them in their detention centers.*

When you rise up in the heart of Tehran, when you crush the mullahs' demagoguery on the nuclear program and cry out in every gathering that this program is only a means to prolong the rule of Velayat-e-Faqih; and when you assert that freedom and minimum livelihood is the Iranian people's inalienable right [as opposed to the regime's slogan 'Nuclear program is our inalienable right'], you cause tremors in the clerical regime. The dreams of the Iranian people will be realized through your determination and it is you who are the future of Iran.

The antagonism and crimes of the mullahs' regime against you signal that the regime is afraid of you. The Iranian society is thirsty for a new era and burning with the desire for change. The condensed forces of change in Iran are concentrated in you as the forerunners of this struggle. The decisive defeat of fundamentalism is in your hands.

Export of fundamentalism to the Middle East

In the tumult of the frightening explosions, bloodcurdling terrorism and warmongering fomented by the mullahs in their export of fundamentalism to the Middle East and Islamic countries, the trampling of rights and freedoms of women is hardly noticeable. Fundamentalism has taken the lives of women in these countries to distant pasts. An important case in point is Iraq where the U.S. carried out an invasion in 2003, and then committed a grave mistake by allowing gangs affiliated with the clerical regime to rise to power. Their rule in recent years has caused an

accelerated abolition of Iraqi women's rights and freedoms, and has planted the seeds of a gender apartheid system in the country. Iraqi women have seen many of their previously attained rights taken away from them and have been condemned to a life of fear, insecurity and poverty.

It is extremely disheartening for me when I hear that in our neighboring country Iraq, acts of aggression, assault and murder against women have increased sharply. Women physicians and university faculties are murdered, young women are kidnapped in the streets and incidents such as rape of university students by paramilitary forces have become commonplace. Inhumane punishments are carried out against women. Beauty parlors are attacked and destroyed. A great number of female high school and university students were even forced to abandon their school and education. A number of all girl schools were completely closed down and a large segment of the female population has become impoverished and homeless.

In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria, Sudan, Somalia, and anywhere that fundamentalism sprouted with the direct or indirect meddling of Iran's mullahs, women have been the very first victims.

The imminent danger of the nuclear program

The perils of fundamentalism for the international community, including its menacing effect on the achievements of women's equality movement, also surface

in its attempts to obtain nuclear weapons. The clerical regime represents a fundamentalist state whose survival is dependent upon warmongering and export of terrorism. The moment such a regime gets its hands on a nuclear weapon is the moment of the inception of a war that can no longer be controlled.

We are living in a crucial moment in history. We are all faced with a dire and urgent situation. Let us imagine ourselves for a moment in the year 1938 on the verge of the Second World War. Assume that we are aware of the tragic events that will follow. Would we have refrained from making any sacrifice or effort to prevent that war from breaking out? Certainly not!

Hereagain, the significance of women's movement becomes evident. Women are at the forefront of peace movements. Women have the capacity to prevent the mullahs from attaining a nuclear bomb through their global campaigns. They can also urge their respective governments to distance themselves from the fundamentalists ruling Iran.

Once the mullahs, armed with nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, are allowed to complete their dominance over the Middle East, the flames of their ominous plague will also threaten European countries.

The mullahs and their allies assert that a war is in the making unless the world placates or appeases the regime. Instead, the Iranian Resistance has introduced the third option. The third option rejects both appeasement and

foreign military intervention and instead advocates a regime change by the Iranian people and their organized Resistance. The third option represents the only solution that is completely compatible with the goals of the equality movement, which means that women have a profound role to play in it.

I call on all movements that advocate peace and human rights, in particular the equality movement, to support this third option. I urge all my sisters who work for peace on both sides of the Atlantic to stand firm and refuse the clerical regime's efforts to rob women of the fruits of their struggle in an attempt to prolong its own rule.



In her speech at the European Parliament on December 15, 2004, Ms. Rajavi announced her 'third option' in dealing with the Iran crisis

Together, we can not only prevent the outbreak of an ominous war, but also defeat the barbaric despotism in Iran, thereby preventing a bloodbath in the Middle East.

The West's appeasement policy undermines women's struggle

I deem it necessary to bring to the attention of the global equality movement a great obstacle that is preventing change in Iran. This obstacle is the policy of appeasement towards the mullahs. You may ask how this policy is obstructing Iranian women's movement for freedom and equality. The answer is:

- First, this policy suppresses the opposition movement in Iran and obstructs bringing change to the country;
- Second, it paves the way for expansion of fundamentalism and terrorism;
- Third, it creates a political opportunity for the regime to become a nuclear power;
- Fourth, this policy is a violation of democratic laws and values and justice in western nations.

The policy of conciliation, which effectively works to support the religious fascism, serves as an obstacle on the path of Iranian women to obtain freedom and equality.

If in the distant past, there were only a small

number of progressive women who carried the banner of struggle for freedom and equality, today, more than 1,000 courageous women are advancing a movement with exalted goals. They are at the focal point of the confrontation with the religious tyranny ruling in Iran.

These women, all of whom are prepared to stand up against fundamentalism, exist. However, the policy of appeasement is blocking their way while at the same time aiding the clerical regime. This astray policy has allowed the mullahs to place a siege on Camp Ashraf, Iraq, where these courageous women reside, thereby making them a target of the regime's conspiracies. Today, women in Ashraf are under the threat of expulsion from Iraq, or of becoming a bargaining chip, and are compelled to tolerate an array of restrictions. We are in need of a global movement that would rise up and defend the beating heart of struggle for freedom and equality and thereby present our world with a noble gift.

It is our expectation that as Iranian women confront religious fascism, you as the liberated women of western countries rise up against the policy of conciliation and against the statesmen who support mullahs' religious dictatorship. This is a humanitarian, ethical and freedom-seeking duty because those who advance appeasement are directly responsible for solidifying the religious dictatorship in Iran and thereby the expansion of terrorism and fundamentalism.

For years, they officially stated that in compliance with the Iranian regime's requests, they had designated the Iranian opposition movement, the People's Mojahedin, as "terrorist." For over three years, they even defied the verdicts of European and British courts that ruled in favor of delisting the organization. Finally, through an extensive political and legal battle, our Resistance forced the EU's Council of Ministers to repeal this tag. However, the main EU states still impose various blockades against the resistance movement through their policies. In the U.S., the Department of State continues to keep the resistance movement in its blacklist to preserve the equilibrium with the mullahs although there is no substantive evidence or legal reason to support that listing.

I sincerely call on the activists of the equality movement worldwide not to allow West's bedrock values, which are a beacon for your societies, to be trampled upon as a result of a collusion that will further strengthen fundamentalism. Let us join hands and stand against the selfishness of governments and institutions that are working to imperil the achievements of humankind, especially those of women. Indeed, the day that we succeed in replacing the dictatorship in Iran with democracy and freedom, and the day that Iranian women attain freedom and equality, will be the day that the movement for gender equality and the movement against fundamentalism will both be taking a great leap forward.

International solidarity

Today, a common menace threatens us and our sisters in Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Somalia, Afghanistan and other countries. Hence, we must form a united front against fundamentalism and the policy of appeasement. The issue at hand is not just a sisterly solidarity among oppressed women in Iran, Iraq and other countries in the region, but something far greater; world peace and security is at stake.

The activities of women's movement are not merely meant to be complementary in the fight against fundamentalism; quite the opposite. Without the pioneering role of women, overcoming this monstrosity is impossible. The reality of the pioneering role of women in the fight against fundamentalism has been proven in the history of the Iranian Resistance's struggle during the last quarter century. Without the decisive involvement of women, our movement would not have survived against the religious fascism. This is the exigency of this era, an era where the solutions and the mindset that back the male-dominated world have reached their demise. This era is in need of a new solution, founded on the values offered by equality.

Women have an enormous and as yet untapped potential to affect change in the world towards freedom and equality. This noble capacity will guide human society to genuine freedom. When women rise up to this struggle, they tend to discover their hidden powers. We only learn about our real powers when we partake in a serious struggle. This is a path that leads to new opportunities and rebirths. It

is on this path that women will overcome their destructive skepticism about their true might and will learn that they not only are worthy of this struggle but that they themselves are the real leaders for emancipation.

With this conclusion in mind, we now answer the fundamental question, "Does the world need the equality movement to step into the realm of resistance against fundamentalism?" The answer is 'Yes!' Women are at the forefront of this struggle. Without their participation, the world cannot overcome the calamity that threatens humankind. The heart of the matter is that the demise of fundamentalism can only be realized through women's leadership.

Yes, the equality movement is the source of our power and unity in an active and organized struggle. This is a movement that heightens the flames of resistance and returns to humankind its dignity and noble values. This is the progressive force for today's victory and tomorrow's promises. So let us rise up together for the sake of our ideals and our historic responsibilities. This is our duty; it is within our capacity; and it is what the present and future generations expect from us.

Decisive defeat of fundamentalism

But how can we defeat fundamentalism and misogyny? How are we to avoid the abortion of democracy in countries under the influence of fundamentalism?

The answer lies in the leadership of women. If you are to destroy the culture of male-dominance as an inhumane culture, you would have to destroy it in its entirety. Therefore, the establishment of democracy without the active participation of women in the political leadership is impossible and in the end any progress it makes would prove to be vulnerable and reversible. This is our approach when standing up against the Iranian regime, which threatens humankind by its export of fundamentalism and its attempt to obtain nuclear weapons.

As I envisage the realization of my ideals for equality and triumph of our struggle, I have real hope that today's darkness and gloom can indeed be replaced by brightness and joy. Chains and shackles can be torn apart, and freedom and emancipation can be attained. Women, whose powers may not be taken seriously today, can and must reveal their true potentials. Fundamental change in women is not a farfetched dream and neither is the emancipation of humankind. The only conceivable solution for emancipation is one that views the ideal of equality as being indispensable. This is the goal that lies ahead of us and we shall surely succeed in achieving it.

II

Capacity for Democratic Change

The Iranian Resistance has the requisite political and social capacities to bring about democratic change in Iran. The most significant weapons in our arsenal are: An extensive social base; the presence of 3,400 resistance activists in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, many of whom have been involved in the struggle for freedom for over three decades; with an organization and a progressive and legitimate ideology.



Thousands of residents of Ashraf in a gathering at the Camp



Iranian women taking part in anti-Shah demonstration in Tehran

However, the common denominator of all these devices that makes them into a potent weapon is women's leadership. As a result of being subjected to suppression and exploitation over centuries, women have a great incentive to struggle and yearn for changing what is holding them back. We have experienced in our struggle with the Iranian regime that women are like compressed springs that once released from the shackles of discrimination and offered the opportunity to be responsible, would experience an immense leap of progress. The participation of women in the 1979 anti-monarchic revolution, their heroic struggle against mullahs' dictatorship - including their remarkable resistance in torture chambers and their impressive role in the organized Iranian Resistance - proves that their power is the rising star of our time. This growing force sets women in motion on a colossal social scale to affect a democratic change in Iran and turns them into an enormous power that would liberate our nation. Hence, they are the principal force in the Iranian Resistance.

The active participation of women in leadership and the solutions they offer turns men into a force of change as well. This notion in fact presents a disconnect from the mindset that arises from the world of exploitation. Men, who have become alienated from their true human essence due to the male-dominated culture, rediscover their human potentials. This transformation, which should be regarded as a true awakening and a real cultural transformation, is the trigger for the eruption of hidden energies.

A guarantee for democracy

How does the decisive role of women guarantee democracy?

The democratic capacities in any government or alternative force may be viewed by the active and equal participation of women in political leadership. Otherwise, limitations and obstacles that deny women their rightful political place will not only prevent women's democratic rights, but work to damage the very foundations of democracy itself. This would be so because democracy, in its most basic form, is founded on human rights. Democracy is not supposed to preserve only men's political rights. There should be no gender discrimination in a democracy. When half the society is denied equal share in power, democracy in the other half is either nonexistent or fragile. The truth of this argument may be better recognized upon a closer examination of societies around the world. Such a study reveals that the level of participation of women in political leadership is the true measure of democratic progress in that society. When the leadership role of women comes into play, despotic relations based on a male-dominated culture are bound to retreat.

The notion of involvement of women in leadership is part of a novel mindset whose attributes are respecting others rather than humiliating them, accentuating positive traits and strengths in others rather than highlighting their weaknesses and negative points, loving others rather than hating them, and collective work rather than individualistic endeavors. Every one of these traits is an indispensable element for a democratic and cooperative political life.

Role of women in economic progress

The presence of women in political leadership plays a vital role in economic progress, as well. Today, offering women more power is described as "the engine for development." Development projects in recent decades have experienced negative growth in many spheres. Not only have they failed in improving the general conditions within society, but have exacerbated the rate of poverty in underdeveloped nations. Women everywhere are the main victims of poverty. According to figures announced by the United Nations, only one percent of the world's total revenue belongs to women. Such standards as government transparency and accountability as well as the efficiency of government services have plummeted. Instead, violence, corruption and illegal activities have risen dramatically.

The reality is that in the current circumstances where a lopsided power sharing scheme exists against women in various societies, the idea of development arises out of a worldview of despotism, corruption and wasting of human and material resources. The way out of this impasse is the recognition of women's role. Such an approach not only taps into women's tremendous capacities to push for progress of all humankind, but also sweeps away the male-dominated culture that has been acting as a barrier.

Gender equality, considered a human right, is at the heart of the United Nations' development plan for the third millennium. This platform stresses, "Having an equal voice in political decision-making, from the family to the highest

government levels, is a key element to empower women.”

In the 1990s, some of the world’s greatest economists took a step forward and stipulated that economic development requires freedom. They also asserted, “Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic and social participation and leadership of women.”¹

The Iranian Resistance’s experience

My conclusions regarding the active and equal participation of women are not founded on a theoretical appraisal of the current situation. Rather, they speak of a reality we discovered during our struggle against the ruling mullahs in Iran.

In the struggle to bring down the ruling theocracy, our movement realized that it was impossible to cast aside the emerging obstacles to achieving democracy and freedom with the same motivations and dynamism of the past century. The political and international circumstances had created such a bottleneck that not only the movement’s advancement, but even its survival demanded a much tougher and much more costly struggle. We recognized that we should advance our own ideals and mindset. Therefore, we found the role of women in leadership to be an imperative.

¹ Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 203.

Bringing women to leadership positions proved to be the best answer to affect democratic change in Iran. It became the source of a major cultural transformation in the ranks of our Resistance. If I were to offer a brief account of this process, I shall only say that the history of the progress of women in assuming key positions in our Resistance precisely parallels the advancement of our struggle against the fundamentalist religious despotism ruling Iran.

After taking the first step in this regard, we came across several critical junctures. At each one, we had to make a definitive choice. We either had to abandon the ideals of freedom, democracy and liberation of the Iranian people, or we had to make a decision to sacrifice even more than we already had. We had to face the challenges before us more vigorously to preserve and advance the movement.

With every choice we made, it became more evident for us that success in the path that demanded more dedication could only be realized with the active and equal participation of women. In other words, the ultimate thesis of that internal transformation in the ranks of our movement for over 20 years and evolved step by step was that it is only through women’s participation in leadership that democracy and freedom can be realized.

Why this is so? Because we are facing a religious fundamentalist regime that has based itself on misogyny and thus, the only force capable of defeating it should by necessity dispense with misogyny once and for all.

Contemporary political and economic developments in other countries testify to this fact. Instead of outdated solutions, the substantive involvement of women offers novel solutions. Thus, recalling the aforementioned three options to deal with the Iranian regime, we are not condemned to choose between appeasement and war. Fundamentally, these two options emanate from the same essence that is dictated by the present governing model. Implementation of this model is only realized through force and violence, and the destruction of enormous resources and wealth. This model is alien to the extraction of humankind's endless capacities. It is powerless and feeble to push aside the obstacles in the path of humanity's progress. Once we set aside this mindset, we realize that the impasse that had forced us to choose between the status quo and war had not been a genuine impasse at all. Submitting to appeasement or to war would be to surrender to blind fate. But, the real solution is a democratic and humane one, namely the active participation of women in the leadership of the Iranian Resistance and the running of Iranian society's affairs in the future.

A progressive ideal

What do we mean by active and equal participation of women in leadership?

In addition to occupying managerial positions, this also means parting with a male-dominated ideology, work habits, and cultural values as well as replacing them with new humane values.

To help explain this, I discussed as an example the Iran crisis, which is a very critical issue in our world today, to reveal the profound differences among a number of solutions. On the one hand, all proposed solutions, whether based on appeasement or war and foreign intervention, lead to an impasse and a gloomy outlook; as if no other option exists. That is to say, if we refuse to accept the status quo, namely a despotic, regressive and barbaric fundamentalist regime, then we are left with no other choice but going to war. We reject this fait accompli. We have not and will not accept to be confined to prevalent modes of problem resolution that offer no hope for human liberty. Proposals and strategies that stem from the exploitative mindset cannot offer a way out of this crisis. The mindset that stems from women's leadership, however, cultivates and fosters the true resources of humanity and opens endless doors.

The notion of leadership to which we are referring is the product of the blossoming of a humane facet and it focuses on humane relationships. This represents a great rebellion against male-domination and the regressive culture.

Therefore, when women assumed leadership positions in our resistance movement, we were not just looking at a managerial-style shift. The goal was to eliminate gender discrimination. It was not as if men left their posts so that women could occupy them and preserve the same sort of relations and use the same methods. It was not as if women walked in the footsteps of their male predecessors or joined a male-dominated club; not at all. The goal was to replace the obsolete relationships based on a male-dominated

ideology with humane relations.

The presence of women in leadership did not eliminate or pacify men. On the contrary, it liberated them from the shackles of a male-dominated culture that had enchained their minds, affections and willpower. They shared their experiences with women and subsequently learned a great deal from them who had conquered new horizons of their own. Therefore, we view women's leadership as a progressive human ideal.

III

Status of Iranian Women

In June 2009, in an atmosphere created by a rift at the top of velayat-e-faqih regime (absolute clerical rule) in the course of the sham presidential elections, an extensive social turmoil erupted in Iran. This uprising spread to Tehran and at least thirty other cities, which made it the most important socio-political upheaval since the beginning of the mullahs' reign. From the outset, analysts were so impressed by the role played by Iranian women in the uprising that some dubbed it a 'Women's Revolution.'

The three principal elements for women's pioneering role

For anyone even slightly familiar with the dictatorship in Iran, the position and status of Iranian women is a somewhat bizarre phenomenon. Iran is ruled by a medieval regime whose distinctive character is its misogyny. This regime resorts to the most inhumane punishments such as stoning to death and gouging out of eyes. These suppressive measures are mostly used against women.

As such, the Iranian women's prominent role in

the struggle for freedom is a question mark for many. Clearly, this role did not come about overnight. In fact, three major elements have steered women to their current position: years of struggle for freedom and equality; the misogynist nature of the ruling regime; and the presence of an organized resistance with gender equality as its ideal.

First factor: Struggle for freedom and equality

Iranian women have a 150-year history of struggle for equality and against dictatorship. This history has placed Iranian women in a progressive position both culturally and intellectually. Women have played a huge role in three major movements in Iran during the twentieth century. These are the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the nationalist movement for control over Iran's oil resources in the 1950s, and the anti-monarchic revolution of 1979. Having said all that, I should particularly emphasize the brilliant struggle of the Iranian women against the ruling fundamentalist regime since 1979. This regime began its campaign of suppression and discrimination against women with the slogan 'Put on a scarf or get a slap in the face' and then strived to carry out the most abhorrent massacres and tortures against them.

From the early days of the regime's rule, women in the PMOI played a prominent role in confronting it. These women, although wearing scarves themselves

out of their own beliefs, courageously stood against the repugnant slogan that imposed a dress code on women. For a regime that ruled under the cloak of Islam, it was very difficult to tolerate Muslim PMOI members, especially women, at the helm of opposition against it.

To fight this monster, women, especially in a traditional society that was now under the rule of a religious dictatorship, faced many difficult barriers. In most cases, the first barrier was always the woman's family and her parents. Women had to forgo their education, marriage and children to be able to join the struggle. In a struggle against a savage regime that would even hang minors, there was no place for a family life, especially for those in the frontlines.

In addition, contrary to men, women joining the ranks of the Resistance had to tolerate cynicism, insults and humiliation within society. So, they needed to muster the ability to endure this hardship. For example people used to say:

-These women have left their parents and siblings because they have no affection;

-Can women participate in the struggle and be effective against such a regime?

-It is better for women to take care of their families and children; who else would do these chores in their absence?

-Once women are arrested and sent to prisons and torture chambers, their families will be humiliated.

Despite such rants, however, extensive participation of women in the struggle against religious fascism created a new culture in Iranian society. There were many parents who joined their children in the struggle against religious fascism and sacrificed their lives, too. Women's broad participation in the resistance against religious fundamentalism is in itself a sign of inevitable victory. Subsequently, the regime's propaganda machine began a campaign of demagoguery and charlatanism that would surpass the likes of Josef Goebbels. The regime orchestrated a campaign to discredit the politically active or PMOI women to stop others from joining the Resistance. However, these efforts failed in the face of the burning desire of women for equality and freedom. Women in the Resistance movement stood firm and successfully passed these grueling tests.

Second factor: The Iranian regime's misogynist nature

The second element was the misogyny of the regime on which we have already elaborated in previous chapters. In fact, when the mullahs came to power in 1979, due of their medieval ideology, they could not tolerate women being active in any social realm. They

thus turned Iran into a great prison for women.¹

Third factor: An organized resistance with equality as its ideal

The third element is an organized resistance movement with strong roots in Iranian society. The conviction of this movement in the equality of men and women created a leap in the advancement of gender equality in Iranian society. The presence of the PMOI as the Resistance's pivotal force with its profound belief in equality and a tolerant interpretation of Islam greatly influenced Muslim men and women not just in Iran but in the region at large.

In this organization, key positions are occupied by women. In the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) – the

1 *5 Although religious fundamentalists portray suppression of women and the entire society as a decree by "Islam," these actions in fact have nothing to do with Islam. Fourteen centuries ago, in the early days of Islam, at a time when infant girls were buried alive, Prophet Mohammed gave women the right to own property, the right to inheritance, the right to divorce, and the right to vote. The Prophet respected the expression of independent political positions by women. True Islam revokes gender discrimination and as stipulated in the holy Quran, considers humankind's emancipation as the highest human value (Verse 13 of Hojorat [Apartments] Chapter says: "We created you as man and woman and put you in nations and tribes so that you can recognize one another; however, the noblest amongst you in God's eye is the most emancipated one").*

The ruling mullahs exploit Islam to justify their fascist and wicked rule. Otherwise, stoning, rape and discrimination against women has nothing to do with Islam and the faith of Prophet Mohammed. In true Islam, it is the gender apartheid, misogyny and the male's aggressive traits that are renounced, impure and considered anti-Islamic, not the independent and equal character of women. This topic is covered in detail in another book by Mrs. Rajavi entitled "Women, Islam & Equality," which is a compilation of her earlier lectures.



Plenary session of the National Council of Resistance of Iran

Resistance's parliament-in-exile - 52% of the seats belong to women. I should, in particular, mention Camp Ashraf here. Based in Iraq, Ashraf is home to 3,400 members of the PMOI and is entirely led by women. Leading Ashraf was a colossal test for women in the Resistance, especially in light of the fact that it has continuously been the target of bloody assaults and conspiracies by the mullahs and their mercenaries and operatives in Iraq.

Women in Iran's uprising

This rich precedent of resistance revealed itself most prominently in the uprisings that have erupted in Iran since June 2009. Iranian women have participated on a large scale



A major demonstration in Tehran on invitation of PMOI mothers, held on April 27, 1981, to protest the killing of PMOI sympathizers, in particular two young PMO female supporters by the regime's agents



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in anti-regime demonstrations and play an active role in the extensive social networks that back the demonstrations. They courageously stand against attacks by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and encourage their compatriots to participate in demonstrations. Many have been wounded in the process. We also see mothers who gather every Saturday in different locations of Tehran to inspire people to carry on with the uprising.

There were many young women who were imprisoned in recent months and endured various cruel torturers inside



prisons. On the other hand, we also have young women who organize the uprisings. It is no accident that Neda Agha-Soltan became the symbol of the Iranian people's uprising and the scenes of her death inspired global respect for, and solidarity with, the Iranian people. The involvement of these women is a testament to the maturity of the uprising and their presence in the Resistance serves to guide the Iranian people towards the ultimate toppling of the mullahs' regime.

After a realistic analysis, we thus encounter the hegemonic role of women in these uprisings, which goes to prove that women are the solution to the problem of religious fundamentalism and that the prospect for the defeat of fundamentalism lies in their hands.





*What do we
want, other
than Freedom?*



IV

A Radiant Example: Ashraf



Top: A monument paying tribute to Ashraf Rajavi. Camp Ashraf is named after her. Bottom, Leadership of Camp Ashraf, from right, Zohreh Akhyani, PMOI Deputy Secretary General; Mojgan Parsaie, Vice President of the Iranian Resistance; Sediqeh Hosseini, PMOI Secretary General, Faezeh Mohabatkar, PMOI Deputy Secretary, Fahimeh Arvani; PMOI Deputy Secretary General; Ozra Alavi Teleqani, Abbad Davari, senior advisor to PMOI Secretary General

Today, the issue of women and the need for their active participation in all political, social and economic realms has become an imperative for the progress of democracy and peace. Without the active participation of women, the struggle for freedom cannot be advanced. Without their active and equal presence in decision-making positions democracy will be devoid of its very essence. And without their real and actual involvement, instead of a healthy economy, only poverty, inequality and a waste of material and human resources would be the hallmark of our times.

With this in mind, I would like to mention a brilliant example that shines in the history of Iran and Islam. To be precise, I would like to talk about the three-decade-long experience of women's struggle in the Iranian Resistance. At the heart of this resistance is the perseverance of Ashraf City.

Ashraf is about 70 kilometers from the Iran-Iraq border, and is home to 3,400 women and men who have spent ten, twenty or even close to a quarter of a century of their lives there to prolong the struggle for democracy in their homeland. There are also about 1,000 pioneering women living in Ashraf. This is the largest concentration of pioneers of the equality movement in the world. Many of them are university students or graduates from Europe, U.S., Canada and Iran. Dozens of them have been political prisoners and have on average experienced roughly five years under torture in the regime's prisons. Their struggle over the last three decades has inspired Iranian women and youth to rise up and fight for freedom and equality.

For the last three decades, the Iranian Resistance has waged an all out resistance against a religious fascism that promotes gender apartheid; a reactionary monstrosity that nonetheless utilizes the most advanced technologies of the day for suppression and censorship against the Iranian population. This regime represents a new phenomenon in history. It resorts to state terror, misinformation, intimidation, and above all exploitation of religion.

Confronting this source of darkness and evil would have been impossible if the most fundamental human values such as equality, liberty, freedom of choice and democracy were not engrained in this Resistance. It was with such an ideology that the 1,000 courageous and selfless women in Ashraf managed to persevere against the mullahs' regime.

Women's leadership: The source of the Resistance's power and unity

Let us look at how the role of women in the Iranian Resistance was taken to test and how it blossomed in the most perilous and tortuous situations. You may have read reports about the attacks and conspiracies against the Iranian Resistance in recent years. However, many people are still in the dark about how the Resistance managed to defeat these plots.

With bases inside Iraq and near the Iranian frontier, the Iranian Resistance was completely neutral during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Despite declaring its neutrality, the

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Resistance's bases were bombed by the U.S. and Britain at the behest of the mullahs' regime. Following the bombings, the Resistance's bases became the target of attacks and lootings by the Iranian regime's agents and proxies. The clerical regime then embarked on extensive and expensive plots to destroy the movement. They, for example, placed a siege on Ashraf City.

In these conditions, Ashraf's leadership, which is comprised of women, had the task of defeating the conspiracies and tapping into the strengths of the organization while prolonging the movement and avoiding any deviation from the Resistance's sole focus on the main enemy, namely the mullahs' regime in Iran.

I have, on many occasions, praised these women for the role they played in Ashraf because they were at the helm of the movement at a time when the prospects for victory looked too grim indeed. The balance of power in Iraq and the region was clearly not in their favor, and chance and luck were not on their side. Still, they led the movement at such volatile times with no past lessons or precedents to draw on. Through their own vigilance, correct decision-making, risk taking and self-sacrifice, they weaved the cloth of this endurance at every turn. Women's leadership, put to test in Ashraf, succeeded in the face of great adversity with courage, endurance and respect for moral values.

The men in this movement, who in their struggle against the male-dominated culture have reached great peaks of their own, also played a significant role in the



Despite PMOI's publicly declared neutrality in the 2003 Iraq war, its bases were heavily bombed by the coalition forces

campaign of perseverance owing to their progress in the realm of humanity. Alongside women, they rose to their responsibilities in a splendid fashion. General David Phillips was in Ashraf in 2003 during the years that investigations were conducted on PMOI members. General Phillips, who at the time was a colonel, with the responsibility to protect Ashraf City, wrote in his letter in 2005 to Human Rights Watch:

I personally spent a year of my life in Iraq with the responsibility for Camp Ashraf...

I was exceptionally impressed with the dedication of the female units. These units were professional and displayed strong support for freedom, democracy and equality for women...

I was very impressed specifically by the all female units. I would like my own daughters to someday visit these units for the cultural exchange. Were it not for the ongoing insurgency throughout Iraq, I would sanction my daughter to travel to Camp Ashraf and meet these very dedicated and professional female members of the Mujahedin e-Khalq.¹

¹ *Even before the downfall of the Shah after the February 1979 revolution, PMOI women took a public stance against the manifestation of mullahs' misogyny. This came at a time when the clerics had not assumed power yet: "Publication of revealing statements by PMOI women with regards to actions by unorganized inexperienced groups such as threatening unveiled women or stabbing, setting on fire, or splashing acid on them is instigated by mercenaries and it sets off new warning alarms" (state-run Kayhan daily, no. 10615, 17 January 1976, page 7)*

The contributing factors for perseverance

I would like to mention very briefly how the perseverance of Ashraf was made possible. What were the contributing factors and where did they emanate from? This perseverance or endurance was made possible through an incessant struggle for equality. In other words, it was the byproduct of a ceaseless struggle between equality and inequality and between the enchainment of humankind and its emancipation.

Figuring out the conundrums haunting societies in today's world is inconceivable without a commitment to gender equality. Discovering this reality was the fruit of years of struggle against the misogynist mullahs' regime, which evolved into a fundamental change of culture in the PMOI in the 1980s.

The Iranian Resistance's Leader, Massoud Rajavi, described this transformation as one that represented the antithesis to the ideology of the mullahs and other reactionaries. He stipulated that its aim was to "cast aside gender-based exploitation, symbolized by the mullahs and their Revolutionary Guards."

This mindset paved the way for women's struggle for equality. The PMOI came to the important breakthrough that if it were to stand against religious despotism, it would have to fight all the ideological and cultural remnants of the fundamentalists.

In a nutshell, we realized that the eradication of gender-based ideology frees a tremendous amount of energy from within the Resistance movement itself. It generates an astounding dynamism for taking huge strides forward, which would then act as the source of the Resistance's capabilities and strengths. This transformation brought with it invaluable human experiences. Here, I shall discuss the most important building blocks of this transformation.

The first element was the active participation of women in the leadership of the resistance movement and its various positions of decision-making. Women's long-standing role in the struggle formed the basis for this development. It was realized that we needed this leadership in order to overthrow the mullahs and we embraced it. The martyrdom of thousands of PMOI women in the struggle against this regime in the first half of the 1980s testified to the fact that these women deserve a leadership role and without them the Resistance movement would be hard pressed to advance.

Of course, around the world today, we witness efforts aimed at increasing women's role in political and economic management, which in its own right is valuable. Nevertheless, the experience of the Iranian Resistance shows that the ultimate and definitive solution for breaking the spell of inequality is only achievable through a profound transformation. Women's hegemony in the Iranian Resistance, a development which caused foundational transformations within, opened the way for women to

accept responsibilities, gain expertise and hone their abilities in all fields.

Therefore, the presence of women in leadership has been a factor in both the longevity of this movement as well as its dynamism for political and cultural maturity. When women assumed leadership positions, they created a real framework for a profound struggle against the remnants of the male-dominated culture in the mindset and relationships of the whole movement, which cleansed the ranks of the Resistance and encompassed both women and men.

The second important contributing factor was to forsake family life and concentrate all energies, power, affections and attention to the struggle against the religious fascism for the cause of freedom and equality in Iran.

The prerequisite for waging a full-time struggle to realize the ideal of liberating one's homeland was to forsake the comfort and tranquility of normal life and its amenities. Otherwise, women could not have obtained the opportunity to be present at the very heart of a formidable battle, let alone assuming any leadership responsibility.

I should point out here that prior to this decision, members of the Resistance carried out normal family lives in various locations in Iraq. Their children attended kindergartens and schools set up in Ashraf. Family life was not an impediment to active participation in the Resistance. However, from the early 1990s the security situation in Iraq deteriorated to the detriment of the PMOI. Iraq became a



PMOI children in kindergartens and schools in Ashraf and other camps prior to 1991

country afflicted with war, and the PMOI was the target of continuous bombings and terrorist attacks. For this reason, it became impossible for the families to get together in Ashraf City or other PMOI bases in Iraq. PMOI members had two options: Abandoning their full-time struggle and leaving the arena, or sacrifice everything to keep the flames of the Resistance burning.

In the end, members of the Resistance chose to make greater sacrifices to free their people. This new level of sacrifice dwarfed even sacrificing one's own life because it demanded forsaking family attachments. And it was needed for prolonging the struggle.

The third contributing factor was the establishment of new democratic relationships within the ranks of the Resistance.

This movement, by virtue of making significant strides in the sphere of gender equality, has succeeded in elevating democratic relations within its ranks to a higher level. This has led to an atmosphere where transparency, honesty, criticism and self-criticism among individuals could thrive and various viewpoints and opinions could be freely exchanged. When a number of people get together to carry out the struggle, first and foremost, their own internal relations would necessarily have to be based on the principle of democracy and freedom of choice.

Forming such an internal dynamic in the midst of a complicated and demanding struggle against a formidable enemy is no easy task. In fact, for a movement experiencing

the harshest forms of suppression it is imperative to have internal unity. Every individual in this movement should see it incumbent upon him/herself to foster this unity. The prerequisite to build such a bond is freedom and democracy within the organization.

The Resistance movement responded to these imperatives by forming novel human relationships. One can point to numerous meetings held by people working together closely or in the same department. In addition to the meetings organized for coordination of activities or political discussions, there were also meetings in which reciprocal constructive criticisms could be voiced.

The fourth contributing factor is the historical birth of a generation of men who deeply believe in the ideal of gender equality. In a profound transformation, they have rid themselves of a backward culture, behavior, mindset and belief systems, while overcoming and dispensing with an ideology that perceives women as mere objects. In their regular meetings, they endeavor to distance themselves from this decadent mindset. They experience seeing women and men as equals. Free of the gender-based mindset, they attempt to see women as their equals, noting their positive attributes. They, therefore, strive to recognize and discover women as independent, equal, free, and liberated beings.

After this cultural transformation, these men step into a higher intellectual realm with a belief in equality that is coupled with work and assuming responsibilities. This means that men in the Resistance discover that in the

absence of equality, half of the energy and creativity would vanish. Therefore, where one's expertise and practical skills are involved, they refuse to judge women by old yardsticks. They realize that in the realm of work and responsibility, these women have created new and modern methods and values. If these methods and values are recognized and learnt by men, it would also cultivate a world of creativity, dynamism and capability in them. Men in the Resistance develop a novel attitude which helps them recognize women's strengths as human beings.

At first glance, it might seem to an outside observer that as men come to accept women's leadership, they become passive and less responsible in their work because they have lost their hegemony. However, experience has proven the complete opposite. In fact, when men consciously choose this path, their sense of responsibility in their work increases tenfold compared to the time they were in positions of power. The reason for this change is that they become liberated from their inhuman mindset and culture that used to work to block their own progress and creativity.

The emergence of human essence and capabilities

The process whereby women began to occupy leadership positions was of course a very difficult one. However, its progress and evolution manifested new capacities in the characters of each and every member and in particular women.

Women have achieved many of the ideals of the equality movement. Their experience can only be described by terms such as “rebirth,” “creation of a novel culture” and a “chronicle of humanity.” They overcame the historic disbelief in themselves and arrived at a new conviction, both in theory and in political and social practice, which manifested women’s tremendous capabilities. These women shed their fear of defeat and sense of weakness in the face of adversities and hardships. Instead of simply giving up, they learned to cultivate in themselves the power to overcome defeat; and instead of hopelessness, they learned to open their eyes and discover the opportunities and the always available paths to achieve victory.

Once women found out how effective their independent and responsible characters could be in advancing the cause of struggle against religious despotism, they abandoned the irresponsible and dependent world where their existence was conditional and contingent on their ‘men,’ in favor of the world of the ‘responsible women’ with the task of leading a struggle with all its incessant changes.

Realizing that now that they were in leadership positions they needed all their power to achieve their objectives, women recognized that they were in need of constant change; that they needed to continuously learn and teach; that they always need to learn about new ways and methods for carrying out their work. They had effectively entered a new world governed by new laws. Stagnation, stillness and inability to move forward in

this new world meant a regression to the one they had already left behind. They had in effect stepped into a world where any delay in resolving its problems and contradictions, would eventually cause them to regress. Therefore, indecisiveness gave its place to strength and facing hardships head on became part of the new spirit.

These women do not crumble under the weight of their mistakes and defeats; rather, they use these as opportunities to gain new insights and experiences. For them, accepting responsibilities is unconditional, bold and unlimited; and they embrace ever-changing tasks with open arms. Since they have prepared themselves for the worst case scenario in every endeavor, they have heightened their potentials and capabilities. They are faithful that for any problem there is a solution. It is only the enemy that wants to portray everything as impossible, all doors closed, and humankind as weak and incapable. That is why their enemy, namely the mullahs ruling Iran, are extremely afraid of these women. Where divergence of opinions arises, instead of simply reacting to views opposed to theirs, they strive to identify the source of the problem and find a way out of the impasse. They have reached such a high level of human dignity that even when confronted with negative behavior or comments that may hurt their egos, they do not reciprocate. They have learned not to focus on the individual characters and behaviors of their interlocutors, but instead exhibit tolerant behavior and patience. These enable them to concentrate on the root causes which when left unacknowledged give way to antagonisms and foster counterproductive rancor.

This is a giant step in the exaltation of social relations that, if generalized, shall lead to an energetic and united world where only sisterly and brotherly love can reign. Fortunately, this trait is also taking root among the men in the PMOI.

Women in the Iranian Resistance have also developed the capability to markedly increase their love for their fellow human beings. This helps them to think of others before all else and their first priority, which they think about and find solutions for, is to find ways to help, teach, and better organize a greater number of their sisters to pave the way for their advancement. They teach them how to solve complicated and multifaceted problems in the departments they are tasked to lead.

These noble values have enabled them to form, organize and teach a united and harmonious society of women ready to tackle the most demanding responsibilities in all fields. This is truly a new phenomenon in the social evolution of humankind. This element is imperative to the functioning of all societies, even the most advanced ones, to help them reach acceptable levels of democracy and progress. In social processes, the heart of the problem lies in the antagonism between the interests of the individual and society. The complexity of this problem is in the fact that the solution varies in every case and there is no general formula to cover all cases. Instead, in each case there is a judgment to be made as to which party has to forgo its 'right.'

Women in the Resistance movement have learned through experience that in each cooperative endeavor, the correct solution is to give priority to the interests of their sisters. This would then open the way for participation of women at all levels to manage society.

These women have sworn not to forgo the ideal of freedom and democracy no matter what the balance of power dictates. They are resolute in fighting dictatorship and despotism in all its forms and are ready to pay the price for it whatever it may be. They are prepared to sacrifice their flesh and blood, their affection for their families, fathers, mothers, husbands and children, and endure even the hardships of changing one's culture, especially those cultures of patriarchal regimes.

This, then, is the new phenomenon we are referring to: a new generation with thousands upon thousands of experiences. This generation has travelled this long and historic path with breathtaking speed and has resolved numerous hardships thereby turning into a treasure full of experiences for the Iranian people and especially for all freedom-loving women around the world.

I would also like to thank a generation of men in the Iranian Resistance that has created an unparalleled value system by being committed to the ideal of equality and through distancing itself from the male-dominated culture. By adopting a mindset that sees people not based on their genders but as human beings and equals, they have unearthed their own true human identity.

Men, who in practice consider women as equals and accept their leadership, have increased their sense of responsibility tenfold. Through a change in their views and customs, they have found the key and the secret to perpetual change in the path to equality. On the other hand, we have women that profoundly believe in emancipation. They believe in the inevitability of their people's freedom, prosperity and ability to herald a new era in their country. The women of the Iranian Resistance are tenaciously working towards the realization of that goal.

Appendix



Mrs. Rajavi in meeting in solidarity with Iran uprising and the women in Ashraf in Berlin, on March 24, 2010. Women from different German political parties attended the meeting



A conference on solidarity with women in the Iran uprising and in Camp Ashraf was held on March 5, 2010, at the headquarters of National Council of Resistance of Iran. Mrs. Rajavi and equality movement activists from Europe, North America and the Middle East spoke at the conference



Mrs. Rajavi in meeting is solidarity with Iranian women in Helsinki, Finland on March 11, 2010. Finnish women from different women and professional associations attended the meeting



A meeting, entitled «Women, Pioneers of Democratic Change in Iran,» was held on February 23, 2010, at the European Parliament. President of the EP's Commission on Women, two EP vice presidents and MEPs attended the conference.

On February 23, 2010, in a session entitled, 'Women, the vanguards of democratic change in Iran,' held at the European Parliament, Mrs. Maryam Rajavi introduced her viewpoints on the emancipation and equality of women in a future Iran.

Women's Freedoms and Equality in Tomorrow's Iran

1- Fundamental freedoms and rights

- Women shall have the equal right to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, social class or demographics, women everywhere, in whatever village or city, must have the same rights as men in all economic, social and political spheres. Discrimination¹ against women must be abolished in all its forms.²
- Women are free to choose their place of residence, occupation, and education. They must have the opportunity to travel freely, have the right to freely choose their clothing and spouse, and have the right to leave the country, to obtain foreign citizenship, to devolve citizenship to their children, to divorce, and to obtain custody and guardianship over children.³
- Belief in a specific faith or religion must not count as a factor to degrade any women or to prevent

them from access to employment opportunities or educational and judicial resources.

2- Equality before the law

- Women must enjoy protection of the law equal to men.
- Women must enjoy access to guaranteed judicial recourse in the face of violence, rape, discrimination and deprivation of liberty.
- Women must have equal rights as men before the courts.
- Courts must view testimonies and affidavits submitted by women as equal in weight to those submitted by men.⁴
- The legal age for girls shall be 18. Prior to this age, girls shall not be subject to criminal punishment;

3- Freedom of choosing one's own clothing

- Women are free to choose their own clothing. Government interference in this regard is prohibited.
- The law of forced veiling shall be repealed.⁵
- Laws that prescribe administrative punishment for lack of veiling of female workers or employees shall be repealed.⁶
- Written or unwritten laws on controlling the clothing or behavior of women under the rubric of

“mal-veiling,” which have violated Iranian women’s right to freedom and security, shall have no place in tomorrow’s Iran.

4- Equal participation in political leadership

- Women shall enjoy the right to participate “in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.”⁷
- Women must specifically enjoy the right to equal participation in the country’s political leadership.⁸
- In order to dispense with any inequality, I will propose that the government appoint women for at least half of its posts. I will also propose that political parties choose at least half their candidates from among women for parliamentary elections.
- Any laws that cause prohibitions or limitations on women occupying government posts or senior judicial and legal positions must be repealed.

5- Equality in the economic sphere

- Women shall enjoy equal rights as men in terms of inheritance, entering contracts and management of property.⁹
- Women shall have equal opportunities as men in

the labor market.¹⁰

- Women must receive equal pay for equal work as men, in addition to having job security and complete benefits.
- In accessing housing, appropriate nutrition, medical services, and employment, as well as athletic and artistic endeavors, women shall enjoy equal opportunities as men.

6- Equality in the family

- Women must have free and equal right to choose, marry or divorce a spouse.
- Polygamy is prohibited.
- Marriage before reaching legal age is prohibited.¹¹
- Familial responsibilities such as housekeeping, raising children, employment, and educating children are the obligation of both men and women.
- Women shall have the rights to obtain custody over their children.¹²
- Employment of young girls below the legal age shall be prohibited. They will enjoy special privileges in field of education.

7- Prohibition of violence

- Various forms of violence¹³ against women, acts of intimidation or forcible deprivation of their freedoms shall be considered a crime.

8- Prohibition of gender exploitation

- Sex trade is prohibited.
- Trafficking of women and forcing them into prostitution is a crime and those responsible shall be criminally prosecuted.¹⁴
- Anyone committing sexual crimes against children shall be prosecuted.
- Any exploitation of women under any pretext is prohibited. All traditions, laws and regulations according to which the parents, a guardian or anyone else put girls or women at the disposal of others on the pretext of marriage or any other pretext for sexual gratification or exploitation will be repealed.¹⁵

9- Repealing Mullahs' Sharia laws

- The mullahs' Sharia laws shall not have a place in the laws of the future Iran.
- Emphasis shall be "to repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women."¹⁶
- Appalling and brutal laws such as stoning shall be repealed.¹⁷
- All laws authorizing crimes against women under familial pretexts shall be repealed.¹⁸

10- Social benefits

- Women must have access to social benefits, especially as it relates to retirement, unemployment, old age and other forms of disability, in addition to the right to maternity leave during pregnancy and after delivery, and the right to sufficient nutrition and free services during this period.
- The government is should plan for providing nursery and day care for the children of working women.
- All employed women should have access to nursery and day care centers for their children.
- Women belonging to minorities, female refugees or immigrants, women living in villages or remote areas, underprivileged women, female prisoners, young girls, and disabled or weak or old women, shall enjoy special financial, educational and medical support from the government.
- Depriving women employed under temporary contracts of social benefits shall be prohibited.
- Dismissing women from work or reducing their wages due to pregnancy or delivery, or obligating them to perform harmful jobs during this period shall be prohibited.
- Responsibility for supporting single women who provide for their families is a necessary task of the government.¹⁹

Endnotes

1 “The term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Part I, Article 1).

2 The constitution of the clerical regime has made gender equality contingent upon the criterion of “conformity with Islamic criteria.” According to Article 20 of that constitution, “All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria.” And Article 21 states, “The government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria.” Since the ruling mullahs have a reactionary interpretation of Islam rendering it in effect a misogynistic religion, their views and laws are based on discrimination and suppression against women.

3 The clerical regime’s Civil Law has explicitly rejected the rights of women in these respects, stating among other things:

“The husband has the right to prevent his wife from engaging in a profession which goes against the interest of the family or the honor of the husband or the wife” (Article 1117).

“A man can divorce his wife any time he so chooses” (Article 1133).

“A wife must live in the home her husband chooses, unless she is given the right to choose the location of her residence” (Article 1114).

4 In accordance with the Iranian regime’s laws, a woman’s testimony in court has half the weight a man’s testimony has.

5 Article 638 of the Islamic Punishment Act (ratified in 1996) states: “Anyone who openly engages in a forbidden act in public or in public places will receive punishment proportional to the act in addition to imprisonment ranging from 10 days to two months or up to 74 lashes. In the event that they commit an act which essentially has no attributed punishment but nonetheless tarnishes public morals, the punishment shall only be imprisonment ranging from 10 days to two months or up to 74 lashes.” Amendment: “Women who appear without Sharia veiling in public and public places will be sentenced to imprisonment ranging from 10 days to two months or monetary penalties ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 rials.”

6 Paragraph 20 of Article 8 of the laws on “Examination of Administrative Offenses” (ratified in 1993) deems lack of compliance with forcible veiling on the part of women as an “offense in places of work,” which carries punishments such as written warnings or in some cases even dismissal from work.

7 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women.

8 According to the clerical regime's laws, women cannot be president or judges:

Article 115 of the Iranian regime's constitution views the right to hold the office of presidency as limited to only "religious and political statesmen."

Article 163 of that constitution has made qualifications for a judge contingent upon the "principles of religious jurisprudence," stating: "The conditions and qualifications to be fulfilled by a judge will be determined by law, in accordance with principles of religious jurisprudence."

The "Law on Conditions for Appointing Judiciary Judges" (ratified in April 1982), states, "Judges will be appointed from among men with the following qualifications: 1. Practical faith, justice, and commitment to Islamic principles and loyalty to the system of Islamic Republic of Iran..."

In 1985, amendments were made to the above law allowing women to hold advisory positions or become investigative magistrates in judicial bodies. But, they still cannot draft judgments.

9 Inheritance under the regime's laws is based on the notion that the share belonging to a woman is half of what belongs to a man. This ratio appears in all of the mullahs' civil laws regarding inheritance rights.

10 Women only account for 12 percent of the active labor force in Iran.

11 Amendment 1 of Article 120 of the regime's Civil Law states, "The legal age for boys is 15 and for girls is 9 lunar years (8 years and 9 months)." Despite Article 1041 of the Civil Law, which has prohibited "marriage before puberty," this amendment legalizes forcible marriage of girls younger than 9 years old.

12 In accordance with Article 1169 of the Civil Law, when a husband and wife are divorced, "The mother will have priority for raising the child up to two years after birth. After this period, the father will have custody, except in case of young girls over whom the mother will have custody until the seventh year."

13 The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Article 2) states, "Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs."

14 Experts from the US State Department's 2009 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP): "Iran is a source, transit, and destination for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and involuntary servitude. Iranian women are trafficked internally for the purpose of forced prostitution and forced marriage. Iranian and Afghan children living in Iran are trafficked internally for the purpose of forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation, and involuntary servitude as beggars or laborers to pay debts, provide income, or support drug addiction of their families. Iranian women and girls are also trafficked to Pakistan, Turkey, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom for commercial sexual exploitation. ... The law permits temporary marriage for a fixed term ("sigheh"), after which the marriage is terminated. Some persons abuse this institution in order to coerce women into sexual exploitation; there are reports of Iranian women sold into fixed term marriages to men from Pakistan and Gulf states or into forced prostitution. It was extremely difficult for women forced into sexual exploitation to obtain justice: first, because the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man, and second, because women who are victims of sexual abuse are vulnerable to being executed for adultery, defined as sexual relations outside of marriage. ... The government reportedly punishes victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, for example, adultery and prostitution. There were reports that the government arrested, prosecuted, and punished several trafficking victims on charges of prostitution or adultery" (pp. 161-162).

15 The National Council of Resistance of Iran: Plan for Women's Freedoms and Rights, ratified on April 17, 1987.

16 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

17 Articles 102 to 105 of the mullahs' current penal code (Islamic Punishment Act) states the following about stoning:

"For the purposes of stoning, a man shall be buried until the waist and a woman shall be buried until the chest, after which the stoning shall be carried out" (Article 102).

"Whenever a person manages to flee from the hole in the ground they were placed in, if their adultery has been proven with the power of a testimony, then they shall be returned for the continuation of the sentence. But, if the adultery has only been proven by their own admission, then they shall not be returned" (Article 103).

"The size of the stone for stoning must not so big as to kill the person with one or two hits. It must also not be too small so that it cannot be called a stone" (Article 104).

18 Some articles in the mullahs' current penal code (Islamic Punishment Act) state:

"If a father or grandfather murders their own child, he will not be punished in kind [death penalty] and will be sentenced to provide financial compensation to heirs of the slain and maximum or minimum punishment allowed by law" (Article 220).

"Manslaughter shall only be subject to a retaliatory punishment if the slain did not deserve to die in accordance with Sharia. If the slain deserved death, the murderer must demonstrate this in court in

accordance with the principles” (Article 226).

19 This expression is used for women who are the sole breadwinner for families that in some instances are comprised of older parents or several children. These women have either lost their husbands or have divorced, or are married but their husbands are on the run, addicted to drugs, in prison, unemployed, an immigrant or disabled. They usually earn a living from seasonal or low-paying jobs. Such families are among the poorest sectors of society in Iran. According to a 2006 census in Iran, the number of such households was 1,641,000 at the time. But, on December 22, 2009, a government official told the media that that number has now peaked at two million.

