



International Women's Day Conference in Paris Featuring Women Dignitaries from 28 Countries

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Maryam Rajavi: Women's Active and Equal Participation in Political Leadership Is Indispensable to Democracy

On the eve of International Women's Day, we pay tribute to the women who have championed the cause of equality, made sacrifices, and paved the way for others, ushering in a new era.

As a result of these struggles, hardships, and four decades of resistance against religious tyranny, I stand here today with pride to underscore the following truths:

Women are the actors for change.

Active and equal participation of women in political leadership is essential for democracy.

The emancipation of women is a prerequisite for the emancipation of men.

The defeat of the Velayat-e Faqih regime will be accomplished by pioneering women.

In today's world, amidst the largest wars and humanitarian crises, ranging from the Middle East conflict to the war in Ukraine, innocent women and children invariably emerge as the first victims.

The definitive solution lies in overthrowing the fundamentalist religious tyranny ruling Iran. Women in the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK) and the combatant women of Iran play a decisive role in achieving this goal.

Gender Equality, the Prime Challenge of our Time

While the issue of equality between men and women may seem accepted by many and has been enshrined in the laws of most countries, it remains the fundamental challenge of our time. So, how can we achieve it?

The experience of the Iranian Resistance has demonstrated that the struggle against dictatorship, as seen in the ongoing fight against Islamic fundamentalists ruling Iran, and the fight for equality are not two separate endeavors.

Because it is impossible to combat religious tyranny without unleashing the immense energy of pioneering women and men.

A progressive movement aiming to challenge religious tyranny must confront the reactionary ideology, which is rooted in gender classification and debilitating egoism, and prioritizes individual interests over the collective interest. It is imperative that such a movement rejects all traces and elements of this ideology in both its philosophical outlook and interactions.

For equality to be realized, it is crucial to abandon reactionary and objectifying views of women. Rather, we should foster a culture and engage in interactions where women are seen as independent, not reliant on anyone else. Women must not be seen as possessions but as independent, capable of steering their own destinies and leading the world to a better future.

Dear friends,

In 1979, the revolution in Iran was hijacked, and a regime emerged that espouses cultural and ideological beliefs rooted in previous millennia. This regime regards women as second-class citizens, as evidenced by its current leader, Ali Khamenei, who has repeatedly stated that he views women's role solely within the confines of the household and childbearing.

The pressing question arises: why did the regime, which came to power by usurping the revolution in the latter half of the 20th century, prioritize the suppression of freedom-loving forces, particularly women?

Was this solely due to the regressive nature of the new rulers, or were there other factors at play?

Indeed, following the overthrow of the Shah's dictatorship, women rose as a vibrant and fervent force, pushing forward some of the most progressive demands for liberation. Khomeini created a religious pretext for repression.

The authorities were keenly aware that to suppress society effectively, they first needed to subjugate women.

As a result, they deprived women of all their rights, notably the basic right to choose their attire freely, under the pretext of adhering to Islamic commands. Yet, the imposition of the hijab and any form of coercion contradicts the liberating spirit inherent in Islam.

In contrast the NCRI has adopted a plan for the separation of religion and state for tomorrow's Iran.

In recent months, the mullahs' parliament passed a new "Chastity and Hijab" Law that serves as an organized social and security program aimed at imposing repression, the sharp edge of which targets women.

Simultaneously, threats to enforce compulsory hijab for women in public places have expanded to include production and administrative units, as well as educational centers.

Additionally, the pressure and harassment against female political prisoners have intensified, yet with each passing day, these prisoners are demonstrating increasing defiance against the regime. Although the enemy incarcerates the rebellious women, they transform the prison into yet another battlefield.

Indeed, the mullahs employ extreme measures to prevent women from taking to the streets and reigniting the uprisings.

Look at this devastated society. More than 27 million Iranian women of working age are inactive. Women's economic participation and their representation in the labor market rank among the lowest globally.

The first casualties of the mullahs' ruthless exploitation, the shattered economy, unemployment, and homelessness, are the oppressed women throughout Iran.

From here, I address Iran's awakened women, especially the pioneering young generation:

The salvation of millions of Iranian women, ensnared by oppression, poverty, and exploitation, lies in your hands.

Rise up and let your cries echo across Iran and the entire world:

No to compulsory hijab, no to imposed religion, and no to compulsory government. We can and we must overthrow the Velayat-e Faqih regime.

We say to Khamenei and the mullahs that the chains of inequality and oppression against Iranian women, alongside the shackles of religious superstitions and coercion, will no longer endure.

The era of oppressing and ignoring women will come to end and you will be overthrown by these freedom-loving and liberated women.

The day will come when no one shall face scrutiny for their attire, personal life, or religious and political beliefs. No woman will be executed, flogged, or enchained any longer.

The sound of chains breaking can be heard. This is the sound of revolution.

This marks the end of the medieval order and the dawn of a new order based on freedom, democracy, and equality.

The NCRI's 12-point Plan on Women's Rights and Freedoms guarantees Iranian women's rights in the future free Iran.

Over Four Decades of Struggle by Iranian Women

After the anti-monarchist revolution, awakened women, predominantly organized within the ranks of progressive forces and the PMOI, joined the battle with the most formidable reactionary force in Iran's history. Tens of thousands of them were tortured or executed by the ruling mullahs.

Look at these pictures. These are just a few of the pioneers in the struggle against the two dictatorships of the Shah and the mullahs: Azam Rouhi Ahangaran, Marzieh Oskouii, Fatemeh Amini, Ashraf Rajavi, Homeira Eshragh, Sorayya Abolfat'hi, Zahra Rajabi, Zohreh Qaemi, Saba Haftbaradaran, Asiyeh Rakhshani, Neda Agha Sultan, Yalda Aghafazli, Hannaneh Kia, and Ayda Rostami. We salute each and every one of them.

I mentioned that tens of thousands of women have been tortured and executed by the clerical regime. Take note of this figure, as it foretells the beginning of a new era in the contemporary world, particularly in Iran. Let's examine the characteristics of this era.

This era is defined by the rise of a formidable force in Iran's political landscape—the force destined to overcome the religious dictatorship. This force has earned its ability and competence through enduring imprisonment, torture, and active engagement in political, military, and ideological arenas.

In the early years of Khomeini's reign, young combatant women, many of whom were supporters of the PMOI, erected a staunch barrier against his regime.

The day following the peaceful demonstration on June 20, 1981, the Khomeini regime executed 12 young PMOI supporters who had participated in protest. Most of them were minors. Yet, even at the moment of execution, these young women refused to reveal their names to the enemy.

Khomeini committed countless crimes against women and applied vicious tortures against them, including putting them in cages, coffins, and sending them to residential units in Qezel Hesar Prison.

During the massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in 1988, the clerical regime hanged most of the women who were members or supporters of the PMOI.

Paying this heavy toll served as motivation for women's advancement and assuming responsibilities within the Resistance movement.

In the past three decades, women have held all the highest positions of command and leadership in the PMOI and the National Liberation Army of Iran.

During this time, eight of them were elected as the PMOI's Secretaries General. My dear sister, the late Ozra Alavi Taleghani, was the Acting Commander in Chief of the National Liberation Army of Iran.

During the Eternal Light operation, the indomitable spirit and assertive demeanor of these women instilled such fear in the enemy that, even after 35 years, they are still remembered with trepidation.

Throughout the 14-year period of perseverance in Ashraf and Liberty, these women served as the decisive and guiding force during the battle.

Furthermore, 56 percent of NCRI members are women.

For years, women of the PMOI Central Council, women within the ranks of the Resistance Units, and at the forefront of the uprisings in Iran have shouldered the mission of overthrowing the Velayat-e Faqih regime.

In the December 2017-January 2018 uprising, the November 2019 uprising, and the 2022 nationwide uprising sparked by the tragic murder of Zhina Amini, which continued for several months with the sacrifice of 750 protesters, brave women of Iran were at the forefront of these movements, showcasing to the world their pivotal role in the struggle.

Women's Leadership Seriously Challenges the Mullahs' Regime

These days, with great fanfare, the mullahs are holding a sham trial in absentia in Tehran for 104 members and officials of the PMOI and the Iranian Resistance. Their alleged crime is fighting to overthrow the regime.

One of the most significant charges formally leveled by the regime's prosecutor against this movement is that it has accepted women's leadership.

They are correct. Women's leadership has challenged their regime's existence.

Of course, similar mock trials have been repeated before in the form of thousands of movies, TV series, books, and articles by the regime's various institutions.

For years, the notorious Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and the terrorist Quds Force have launched an extensive campaign of demonization against the Iranian Resistance.

Their efforts, despite repeated failures, aim to undermine the structure of this movement, target its leader, and tarnish the liberated and unblemished interactions between the women and men within this movement.

This is their desperate reaction to the societal allure surrounding the status of women within the Iranian Resistance.

The mullahs and their accomplices, notorious for leading the world in executions, especially of women, aim to misrepresent the sacrifices of these steadfast women as proof of their ruthlessness and lack of empathy.

Yet, it is not just within the Iranian Resistance, but also in other liberation struggles or resistance wars against occupiers, like the ongoing conflict involving the people of Ukraine, where the self-sacrifice of women who forsake everything, including their children, to join the battlefield, is truly admirable.

When the mullahs inundate their courts, prisons, and media with derogatory remarks against the women of the Iranian Resistance, it signifies the victory of the Iranian Resistance's emphasis on gender equality.

Furthermore, it reinforces the movement's view that the regime's downfall, with women at the forefront, will be realized.

I must emphasize that the progress of both women and men within the People's Mojahedin, through difficult and complicated barriers, was facilitated by the founders' monotheistic ideology and Massoud Rajavi's leadership. His anti-exploitative approach has steered the resistance on a path of liberation for over fifty years.

Beacons Lighting Up the Path

The extensive involvement of women in the movement for regime change is neither random nor spontaneous. It is the result of a rich history and a series of precedents that have positioned Iranian women at the forefront of the uprisings.

The PMOI Central Council, consisting of 1,000 vanguard women, has become a role model of sacrifice and struggle for Iranian women, particularly for girls and women in the Resistance Units. These women have made immense sacrifices, including their personal lives and families.

The PMOI women, in an unyielding and emancipatory struggle, have rebelled against a culture entrenched in gender classification and debilitating egoism, and represent a new revolution.

Let's uncover the beacons of hope they have kindled along this path both in theory and action.

In a nutshell, the essence of their experience can be summarized in the motto of “we can, and we must.” They have succeeded in overcoming the inhibiting force of self-doubt, and achieving a renewed belief in themselves.

Amidst the shadows of misogyny, jealousy, exclusion, and harmful rivalry, they have adopted sacrifice and compassionate sisterly emotions as their creed.

They have moved beyond antiquated values like appearance and age that drain their emotional energy.

Rather than expressing “I wish to be this way,” they assert, “I have the ability to be this way.”

They are at the forefront of embracing significant responsibilities, setting an example in collective management. They eschew self-centered ambitions and the mindset of “me-first” and “everything-for-me.” Yet, in sacrifice and responsibility, they always lead and are the first to step forward.

They have managed to cultivate within themselves the ability to listen to others, which is the key to advanced relationships and a supreme human capability.

They have come to understand that differences of opinion, a diversity of methods, and criticisms do not drain energy but rather act as the source of strength and advancement.

Instead of becoming ensnared by their own and others’ weaknesses, they compensate for each other’s deficiencies and proceed with doubled energy in sincere relations.

They have learned to take risks in the face of challenges, no matter how daunting, and not to succumb to the balance of power.

Yes, by joining forces, they open paths that were once closed. Today, PMOI women and men have transformed the methods of combating ideologies of gender classification and debilitating egoism into codified theories.

Through diverse educational and apprenticeship programs, they apply these theories in their daily practices. In this fight, they have acquired the power to eradicate these deep-rooted historical bonds and constraints.

Their rallying cry is that oppression and inequality are not an eternal and immutable fate. This dire destiny can and must be overturned.

Hence, their ranks extend far beyond a mere thousand individuals. Alongside rebellious girls and Resistance Units throughout Iran, and supporters of the PMOI worldwide, they constitute an unending procession on the journey towards freedom and liberation.

Women's Hegemony, an Emancipating

Now, we approach the most challenging transformation: the hegemony of women.

The question arises: Is this not a premature transformation? Shouldn't this change be deferred to future decades when current societies have reached higher levels of social evolution?

Our response is that dismantling the grip of inequality is impossible without a substantial leap forward. This leap entails ascendancy of women, which carried particular weight in our struggle against the misogynistic dictatorship. The active and equal participation of women in political leadership and other areas of responsibility depended on it.

But what does the hegemony of women entail? Does it mean sharing the traditional forms of masculine power? No, it does not. It signifies an emancipatory transformation.

Women's leadership is not limited to assuming managerial positions and it is not synonymous with participating in traditional forms of masculine power. Rather, it is about transforming the nature of that power itself.

According to Massoud Rajavi, "A new creation is underway, aiming to attain human unity and perfection. It is a rebellion and revolt against a culture built on the exploitation of women, and seeing them as commodities, a culture that enslaves both women and men."

Relationships entrenched in gender inequality, and systems that relegate women to the margins lead to perpetual quest for power, tyranny, monopolistic tendencies, arbitrary decisions, squandering of national resources, and widespread corruption and oppression.

The remedy to this pervasive crisis lies in women's participation in leadership, a new and glorious development that will transform the world.

Doing Away with Patriarchy

When aiming for a deep and radical implementation of equality, we encounter this question: Does this transformation involve marginalizing men?

No, solutions that seek to replace men with women do not lead to the liberation of women.

The new message of the Iranian Resistance is that changing the patriarchal ideology, rather than merely shifting power dynamics, is indispensable for advancing the cause of equality.

Furthermore, our movement's experience has shown that when men embrace women's leadership, it transforms the dynamics of male relationships, fostering fraternity and compassion.

Yes, in a world of liberation and freedom, the advancement of both women and men is not in opposition to each other; rather, they complement and complete one another.

The men of our movement have this message for Iranian men: equality, fraternity, and emancipation.

I Believe We Will Triumph

Changing the current situation and ending the darkness and corruption of this era, which has primarily targeted women, is determined primarily in our faith and belief.

I firmly believe that we can and must build a new world founded on freedom and equality.

Women and men, who rebel against the reactionary worldview, and an ideology that objectifies women, will pave the path to equality.

I believe that one day, the notion that women were seen as commodities will be regarded as a shameful chapter in human history. And every woman will be recognized as an individual with the right to choose and with full authority over her own life.

I believe that equal participation of women in political and economic spheres guarantees freedom, democracy, security, justice, and progress.

I believe that defeating fundamentalism and the religious tyranny ruling Iran is possible, through the leadership, resilience, and emancipation of Iranian women and men.

I believe women serve as the pivotal force driving the transformation of destiny in our time.

The most glorious experience of my life is witnessing the tireless struggle of the women and men in this movement toward emancipation and the creation of relationships devoid of discrimination and inequality.

Armed with this experience, I declare, with more hope than ever before, that the dawn of freedom and the arrival of democracy and equality in Iran are inevitable and certain with the democratic revolution of the Iranian people.

Long live freedom

Hail to women

And God bless you all.