



International Women's Day Conference 2025

22 February 2025

Maryam Rajavi: Women, Pioneers of Freedom

Distinguished Guests,

My dear sisters in cities and villages across the country,

My dear sisters in Ashraf 3,

Happy International Women's Day, a day that symbolizes uprising and rebellion to build a new world devoid of repression, oppression, and exploitation.

We pay tribute to the women who laid the foundation for this day, and we salute the countless heroines whose names shine brightly in the long history of Iranian women's resistance, particularly those in the Resistance Units who today are prepared to be arrested, tortured and executed.

Their struggle is the continuation of a struggle that has continued for nearly 44 years in Iran. Khamenei has time and again described it as a civil war. On one side are the masses of the people of Iran, and on the other is a religious fascism that seeks to guarantee its survival with nuclear bombs.

The Pioneering Role of Women

The times have changed. Khamenei's war machine in the region lies in ruins, and now, the regime's power structure inside Iran is next to fall. Freedom is confronting tyranny, and without doubt, dictatorship is doomed to go. Just as the people of Iran brought down the Shah and expelled him with his dynasty and court. He called himself, "God," and officially considered monarchy as "God-given blessing," a blessing that of course was forbidden for women and only bestowed to the male offspring from one generation to the next.

The king was the shadow of God. Now, the Vali-e Faqih or the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, is also officially called the Guardian of all Affairs of the Muslims of the World.

According to his Constitution, the supreme leader is the absolute monarch and God's representative on earth. But an uprising is on the horizon.

The ideals of the revolution that Khomeini hijacked in 1979 will surely and definitely prevail. This time, the difference is that it is an organized uprising.

It knows what it does not want. But also, as Massoud Rajavi pointed out in the outset, 43 years ago: This time, it knows what it wants; freedom, democracy, a democratically elected republic, and what has been summarized in the Ten-Point Plan of the Iranian Resistance.

The other outstanding difference is that this time, women are pioneering. Vanguard of freedom whom you have probably seen in the image of Tahereh Tolou whose body was hanged from a cliff, with a dagger in her heart, while dressed in the uniform of the National Liberation Army.

The Core of Social Relations Is Misogyny

Dear friends and sisters,

Every year, International Women's Day offers us a moment to reflect on the journey we have made and the commitments we must undertake for the future—a future that must ensure human liberation and a better world.

We must ask, has global progress, particularly over the past century, not moved toward reducing oppression, repression, and the subjugation of women? Undoubtedly, these are positive strides.

Throughout history, as technology has advanced and human knowledge has expanded, suffering of humanity has gradually subsided. Yet today, when we examine the status of women, we see that at its core, society remains deeply misogynistic.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Iran, where women endure the ruthless oppression of a religious dictatorship.

From both hard-won victories and bitter defeats, especially in our enchained homeland, one fundamental truth stands clear: the presence of women—their leadership and decisive role in the fight against religious tyranny—is essential to the regime's downfall.

Likewise, in a free Iran, the same role and responsibility are the requisite for true democracy, and lasting economic and social development.

40-Year Experience of Women in the Iranian Resistance

Dear sisters,

Let us take a moment to reflect on the experience of women in the Iranian Resistance.

Forty years ago, a groundbreaking transformation took place within the the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran PMOI/MEK,—one that positioned women and leadership at its core, directly defying Khomeini's misogynistic ideology. A major cultural transformation that released immense energy from men and women in the Iranian Resistance and expanded the battle for the overthrow of religious fascism.

Thirty-seven years ago, independent women's battalions and brigades were formed within the National Liberation Army of Iran.

For the past thirty-five years, nine women have successively held the highest leadership position within the PMOI.

Thirty-three years ago, the hegemonic leadership of qualified women in the PMOI was declared. This affirmative action was essential to expedite the removal of historical retardations and compensate for negative discriminations against women.

And ten years ago, the PMOI's Central Council was established, comprising 1,000 pioneering women.

As my dear sister, Sarvnaz Chitsaz, the Chair of the NCRI Women's Committee, told you during yesterday's expert and specialized meetings, these women have created an enduring historical role model for the women of Iran after decades of remaining steadfast and resilient:

By participating in the battles of the National Liberation Army of Iran,

By enduring torture and imprisonment,

By standing strong amid bombardments, armored assaults, and missile attacks in Ashraf and Liberty,

despite successive displacements,

and after leaving their homes and loved ones.

Women comprise more than half of the members of the National Council of Resistance of Iran. The NCRI is the only political coalition in Iran's contemporary history, which, four decades ago, unanimously adopted a comprehensive plan on women's rights and freedoms.

Therefore, today, we are not speaking of a hypothesis or a mere theory. It is the enduring experience of Iran's pioneering women that has unfolded in the course of a revolutionary and liberating struggle.

I must emphasize that the monotheistic and anti-exploitative ideology of Massoud Rajavi as the leader of this movement paved this path.

The Necessity of Negating Debilitating Individualism

Dear sisters and brothers,

Now, and at this point, I would like to elaborate on a fundamental, but perhaps surprising, question: Is enduring imprisonment and torture, sacrificing one's life and wealth, enough to stand firm against religious tyranny and advance this struggle?

Is abandoning one's home and family sufficient?

The answer is that these sacrifices are undoubtedly essential. Yet, given the length of this battle, the inhuman nature of our adversary, and the deeply entrenched structures of oppression, exploitation, and misogyny, this fight demands a profound cultural— or as the PMOI put it, an “ideological” struggle. Why?

During this longest, bloodiest, and the most complex battle in the Iranian history over the past 43 years, we have learned a great lesson. We learned that we need to perpetuate and promote this struggle against religious fascism in a world obsessed with appeasement and coupled with a massive demonization campaign against the Resistance of a oppressed nation. But two fundamental factors are essential:

First, rejecting gender-based ideologies. This means rebelling against a culture that seeks to portray women's weakness and incapacity—and consequently, a commodified view of them—as enduring. I have spoken extensively about this subject in the past years.

Today, I want to focus on the other aspect, which is the elimination of selfishness, Narcissism, and egotism. These characteristics are what the PMOI call them debilitating individualism versus unique and transcendent individualism. The same arrogance and jealousy that hinder collective work and organization, and serve as the dynamism for social and historical retardation.

I will explain how debilitating individualism manifests itself in the struggle for freedom and liberation. Why is its negation necessary? Ultimately, how does the struggle against it enables organized collective action, and the formation of united groups?

The reality is that in the face of every organized activity and against cohesive and collective relationship there stands an automatic, albeit regressive, tendency, which is the debilitating individualism.

This internal obstacle or tendency manifests itself in selfishness and in various forms of rejecting the collective. It insulates a person and severs their relationships with others.

What eliminates the interests and benefits of the collective and the community is rooted deeply in the “me-first” and negative individualism. In fact, individualism dispossesses the collective.

Their most significant effects include:

Marginalizing and disregarding the collective

Viewing others negatively and excluding them

Seeking superiority

Evading responsibility

Losing honesty and courage

In confronting this tendency, the members of this movement have cultivated relationships built on listening and learning, respecting and uplifting one another.

Women who have made this choice view sacrifice for others a necessity and a higher value in relationships. Through this, they have gained resilience, self-confidence, and an ever-greater capacity to give.

One by one, they have untangled the knots created in human relationships under the influence of exploitative systems, traditions, and the culture of oppressive governments.

And in doing so, they have demonstrated that every individual possesses an infinite capacity to give and to sacrifice.

A question may arise:

Does setting aside individualism diminish a person's abilities and sense of responsibility?
And is it even possible?

The answer is that what is being set aside is the tendency that stifles human potential. What is being removed is the barrier that makes a person indifferent, unresponsive, and detached from the world around them.

The true capability of humans lies in their ability to rise up in struggle when darkness, oppression, and tyranny prevail, never relying on the powers, chances, or events to bring about change.

She/he is the one who determines her/his fate and becomes the force for change.

As the hero of a Shakespearean play declares:

“The time is out of joint—O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!”

Yes, the moment one rises to change the world is the moment one believes that he/she can change and begins to transform.

Dear sisters,

Today's world of politics is unfortunately driven by individualism, greed, deceit, fear, and gender discrimination. Human values have degenerated. Yet, in the midst of this, a resistance has risen—one that embodies truth, purity, and courage, and is standing as a formidable challenger to the monstrous rule of the Supreme Leader.

This resistance has risen to free the people of Iran from the grip of religious fascism, to break the chains of regressive and exploitative ideologies—indispensable to this struggle—and to overcome disbelief and remove all obstacles in the path of struggle, and forge their own path to victory—by its own hands and its collective action.

Outcome of This Struggle is the Flourishing of the Collective

Friends,

I must emphasize that the point is not to deny individual differences or to weaken the evolving individuality and personality of human beings.

What we advocate is the flourishing of transcendent individuality—the true essence of human existence. As Massoud Rajavi put it: “Each person must have their own unique identity. Every human being is unparalleled in the entire universe. This unique identity must be freed from the forces that diminish it.”

The most significant outcome of this struggle is the flourishing of the collective and the relationships within it, which amplify their capabilities, sense of commitment, and willingness to take risks.

The collective we envision is characterized by solidarity, formed through sacrifice and giving to one another.

Members of this collective move forward based on shared principles and agreements. It is a collective where its members function as one body, seamlessly interwoven.

With such a united collective, women have been able to open the way in the realm of responsibility. They have discovered the power of leadership, time management, and energy extraction, and they have harnessed the opportunities for struggle.

They have discovered the laws of collective work and, day by day, have become more united and cohesive than before.

From here, another guiding principle emerges for this struggle: the essence and spirit of social relations is solidarity, not selfish individualism.

Following this vision and struggle has turned a generation of liberated and responsible men into the steadfast pillar of the fight for the regime's overthrow.

These individuals have risen against oppression and exploitation, against patriarchal power, and against gendered societal norms. This rebellion purges the mindset, emotions, and perspectives of men from possessiveness and entitlement, fostering a true sense of brotherhood among them.

Let us cast aside once and for all the myth that aggression, dominance, and objectifying views are inherent to men.

Men whose hearts and consciences are filled with selflessness, truth, and human integrity have affirmed this guiding principle: the liberation of women is an indispensable condition for the liberation of men.

For this reason, from the outset, we said and continue to say that women's acceptance of responsibility and their hegemony is not tantamount to pushing aside men and rejecting their brothers. Rather, they are the requisite for their humane revival, enabling them to double their capacity of accepting responsibilities. These men are liberated from the captivity of gender-based ideologies and objectification of women, liberated from the captivity of selfishness and egotism.

Women, Force for Change

My dear brothers and sisters,

I want to remind you that it was in this cultural framework that 30 years ago, in a gathering of Iranians in Earl's Court, London, I declared, "Humanity can only rid itself of vile reactionary and fundamentalist forces when women take on their leading role in this global campaign."

I think over the past 30 years, the accuracy of these words was proven in our region and the world.

At that time, I addressed the mullahs and reactionaries, saying: 'No matter how much humiliation, oppression, repression, torture, and slaughter you wield against Iranian women, it will be by the hands of these conscious, free, and liberated women that your reign of injustice will be dismantled everywhere.'

Today, the rebellious young women who create uprisings in Iran stand as the embodiment of the will of Iran's fighting women. With the rallying cry of "Women, Resistance, Freedom," they stand firm against every form of coercion.

As we have always said: No to compulsory hijab, no to compulsory religion, and no to compulsory governance.

Yes, women are the force for change.

The struggle of Iranian women is not only about freedom in choosing one's attire but, far beyond, that is about rebellion to achieve freedom, a right that is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The people of Iran reject all forms of dictatorship, including the Shah and the mullahs. Undoubtedly, the Iranian people's democratic revolution will triumph, and a society will be built based on the separation of religion and state, a principle the NCRI has championed since four decades.

An Enormous Human Treasure

Dear friends,

I told you about the experience of the women within the Iranian Resistance.

I have accompanied them during this long journey, spanning over five decades. I have personally experienced countless moments of contradictory feelings, from the bitterest to the sweetest.

From the long line of brave young women who were either my comrades or worked under my responsibility, and the moments when I learned the bitter news of execution, torture, or martyrdom of those heroines from the radio, the enemy's wireless network, or other means.

I never forget those moments and every time, I wish I were in their place.

My other memory is from one of the massacred victims who told her comrades using Morse code: "I am Zahra Khosravi. I have been given only 20 minutes to write my last will. They want to execute me." Then she asked her friends to send her regards to us.

Another one of those moments was my final call with Zohreh Gha'emi, the valiant commander of Ashraf, on the day when 52 members of the PMOI were massacred by Khamenei's mercenaries.

In those moments, when Ashraf was under raid, she was very calm and composed when she called to inform me of the attack. She said Khamenei's guards had attacked Ashraf and were at the door of her building. Our call was suddenly cut off. I was anxious and worried. I called her back. One of our brothers picked up the phone. He could hardly speak, but he said, "I have been wounded and Zohreh has been martyred."

How can one ever forget such moments? Never!

Prior to that when I heard the final words of Saba Haftbaradaran before she died of her gunshot wounds. She said, "We will stand to the end." Her image is always in my mind.

And I remember those moments when supporters of the Iranian Resistance around the world rose up and went on hunger strike to break the siege of Ashraf. I saw them growing increasingly frail. And today, whenever I see any one of them, I remember those days.

And I remember those moments when I watched the rebellious girls during Iran uprisings conquering the streets despite getting wounded or arrested.

Just recently, Sara, who is one of the members of Resistance Units, wrote me a letter. She noted, “In a few hours, I am going to jail. I don’t know what will happen, but I know that I will never forget my pledge as a PMOI woman.”

These are very difficult moments, but immediately afterwards I can see their revitalizing impact on the people of Iran and in their vanguard movement.

The sweet and hopeful moments for me, however, are when I see the relentless and determined fight of my daughters and sisters in this long journey, especially when they victoriously overcome harsh cultural and ideological barriers, and disbelief.

I wish I could capture the essence of these glorious moments.

Time and again, I have witnessed, the transformation, rebirth, and rise of countless women as they soar towards the height of liberation. Whenever they encounter an obstacle, they fight and say their mantra is “we can and we must.”

Sweet moments for me are also when I see you, friends of the Iranian Resistance. You, who stand firm under the regime’s barrage of attacks and demonization and do not forego your support for the Iranian Resistance.

I am very grateful and truly humbled before each and every one of you.

Although the mullahs have destroyed our country, I believe that with such an enormous treasure of human assets we can rapidly reconstruct everything, restore the trust of our betrayed people, and revive the lost beliefs. This is my pledge to all of you and our pledge to the people of Iran.

My dear sisters!

When you leave here, share with your children, daughters, and mothers the story of this Resistance. Tell them of brave souls who navigated perilous and tortuous paths, who fought back even as they were pursued but never abandoned the battlefield. Speak of those who chose to die on their feet rather than live on their knees.

Tell them they sacrificed everything to show us their readiness and determination to fight for our ideals—freedom and equality for all the people of Iran, and for peace and security both regionally and globally.