

Speech by Shadi Sadr addressing the Iran delegation members
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Six months after the people's protest to the declared outcomes of the presidential election, human rights conditions in Iran have deteriorated noticeably.

People's peaceful gatherings have been oppressed brutally through being beaten up by baton, tear gas, getting injured or killed, arrested and being put into solitary cell for a long period, physical and mental torture, rape and slaughter in prison.

Today, six months after the start of the post election popular movement, the intensity of the suppression, even though failing to extinguish street protests, has reduced the numbers of participants. In the latest of these, the demonstrations of November 4, many people in Tehran and at least ten other cities, used the minimum security provided because of the anti American annual state organized demonstrations, to come out on the streets. This time, even more than ever before, it was the women who came out as the leaders of the street movement, and became the objects of attacks by security forces and beatings and baton blows.

I want to arrive at the core topic of my talk which is a study of the women's role in the ongoing popular movement in Iran. I would like to explain who these women are who so courageously and in such large numbers come out, what do they want, what role do they play, and, finally, where are they heading. Now, and under the new, post election conditions what opportunities does the women's movement, as the major base for expressing the demands of women, have, and what questions and challenges is it facing? And, eventually, what role can the world community play in promoting this movement?

With the ascension to power of the Islamic republic in 1979, many of the laws in favour of women were declared contrary to Shari'a and annulled.

Within the family women lost the right to divorce, (the right of parenthood over children?) custody of the children, and the right to marry without the father's consent. All relationships outside marriage were declared a crime and the punishment for extra marital relationship for men and women became stoning to death. On the social arena women were forced to observe the regulations regarding cover, women judges lost their jobs, presidency and many other political positions of power became a male monopoly, and women met various limitations regarding university education and entry into the job market. Meanwhile the activities of oppositional political organizations with female members were banned and feminist organizations fared no better.

My generation spent its childhood under such conditions. On the one hand we had to go fully veiled to schools where, as in buses and other public areas, regulations of sexual apartheid prevailed. We had to face the religious education that told us that if a string of our hair was shown we would be hanged from that very string on the Day of Judgment, while we could not ignore our desire to experience sex or to watch Hollywood movies and television shows. This way of life required daily resistance, conflicts, and concealment in the face of laws that forbid many pleasures of life. Women of my generation were forced to resist a long list of discriminatory laws and

policies both on the private and the public arenas. Perhaps going through some of these laws and policies would help to give a more accurate picture of the condition of women in Iran.

The bond and the collaboration between male domination (patriarchy) and fundamentalism in Iran has created conditions for women that can be called "control of the mind and the body." In this system, in addition to the long list of civil and punitive laws that subordinate women—including the duty of submission in relation to sex in marriage, polygamy for the man, the requirement of the father's permission in marriage, the requirement of the husband's permission to apply for a passport and travel abroad, the absence of unconditional right to divorce for the wife, the testimony of a woman counting for half that of a man, criminalization of extra marital relationships, the legality of the killing of the wife by the husband if found having sex with another man, the criminalization of being seen in public without the veil—we have daily new policies aimed at driving the women increasingly to the back rooms of the house. I can refer to the new policies to limit women's entry to the universities, half time employment of married women which reduces the demand for women in the job market, changes in school books for girls and the inclusion of house keeping, child care and care for husbands in the girls' curriculum, dividing the sexes at the universities and other public spaces, and eventually, submitting the running of school girls to the clergy to make the content of their education even more religious than before.

But what is important to point out is that despite the common view of Iranian women in the West as passive and resigned, the women have resisted these laws and policies, not only individually, but in collective forms, and have had achievements as well. The Iranian women's movement has, especially over the last ten years, actively pushed women's demands into the public arena and forced concessions in the form of certain reforms in laws and policies. The activists of this movement have, despite all oppressions and pressures, including imprisonment, being deprived from leaving the country, loss of jobs, expulsion from the university, closure of the offices, and so on, managed to actively fight against policies and laws designed to institutionalize the subordination of women and efforts to send them back to the house. But the most important achievement of the movement has been to spread the idea of freedom and equality, that is, gender consciousness, among women. This consciousness, together with the growth of urbanization, the expansion of literacy, and the increase in the number of educated women, created a considerable number of women who question the conditions under which they are made to live. The relatively open pre election atmosphere provided the opportunity for women to, along with other groups, articulate their demands on the streets on a large scale. While previously, with one or two exceptions, all gatherings in relation to women's rights had been brutally suppressed, with the outbreak of the street protests, and, alongside them, the intensification of the suppression, the women stayed in the streets and for the period of five months turned into the major actors of the street movement, challenging the roles and expectations that defined them as dependents and subordinates. The women who, over the last thirty years had accumulated a wealth of experiences in daily skirmishes with the police over the issue of the veil, knew better than others how to confront security forces. The

violence of the police Guard reminded them of the experience of violence at home, and when there was talk of rape and sexual abuse, they carried with them the experience of the daily assault on their human dignity. That was why on the streets the women acted with more maturity and experience.

The colorful presence of the women in post election street protests had many characteristics that, put together, challenged all the accepted gender clichés. Young women in clothes that, by the standards of the Islamic Republic, were considered unsuitable articulated their demands alongside the men, not in separate ranks, as was expected of them. Indeed the first message of the colorful presence of women in the street protests was the practical breakdown of the compulsory veil and the regulations of gender apartheid in public spaces. Meanwhile women, who, during the first few days of the protest, were generally just present, found their specific roles as the suppression accelerated and intensified. Acting in groups, they prevented the arrest of young men and tried to release those already captured by the security forces. Many of them led the street defenses, and, particularly in more recent events, we can see many scenes of young women initiating and leading the slogans, even though in the political leadership of the movement women do not have an observable presence. During the entire period many women were also arrested on the streets, among whom can be found activists of the various social movements, women with connections to political parties, journalists, and ordinary, non professional women. After being released some of these women have related their experience of sexual abuse and torture. The death of some others such as Taraneh Mousavi, about whom there's evidence of rape and murder, resulted in the issue of the rape of political prisoners being widely discussed, so that for the first time after the 1979 revolution activists of the women's movement are now following up cases of rape and sexual abuse of women political prisoners in order to bring to justice the commanders and perpetrators of such acts. : In many cases women political prisoners were made to confess to having had sexual relations with male political prisoners, particularly among the male reformists. These women were used as bait to snare the political men.

But the main question remains: what do these women who, so courageously have claimed the streets and continue to resist in the face of suppression, want?

It seems that the women who have risked their lives in the streets for democracy and freedom by challenging the regulations of the veil, gender apartheid, and the cliché of the submissive and obedient woman have, in practice, shown the bond between the gender demands and the more general democratic demands. But gender demands are so far not manifest in the slogans of the popular movement and the positions of its leaders.

Even though in the past activists of the women's movement have repeatedly and in various forms presented women's demands in various forms, they have not as yet managed to graft these demands to the larger popular movement, and, as representatives of women, present gender demands as part of the demands of the popular movement. Severe suppression of civil activists and the difficulty of continuing the activities in the public sphere for the known activists of the women's movement is only one of the reasons why the continuity of the development of the women's movement in Iran is at risk.

The question, however, to be asked nowadays by the human rights activists and politicians all over the world who are interested in Iranian issues is what to do to prevent violation of human rights in Iran.

I believe right now the point to be taken into consideration with regard to human rights condition in Iran is the necessity of adopting effective positions. The approval of political resolutions regarding human rights violation in Iran and calling upon the Islamic republic government to observe those rights even if is necessary but is not enough. New strategies need to be employed giving equal importance to both human rights condition and Islamic republic's nuclear issues simultaneously.

Putting more emphasize on human rights condition instead of nuclear energy will bring about the support of Iranian people. Iranian people have not shown so much disagreement with the nuclear policies of the Islamic republic. The effective strategies need to be equipped with a kind of obligation to be guaranteed regarding human rights situation in Iran. The reality is that we are talking about a government that has violated human rights systematically and comprehensively in every field. It responded sometimes to the international pressure through releasing a political prisoner, stopping an execution verdict or not carrying out a stoning sentence as a temporary reaction to the international request. But in general it continues to violate human rights consistently. Under this circumstance, it is necessary to think about new strategies.

Giving the same priority to the human rights as that has been given to the nuclear energy and the inclusion of human rights as the topic for negotiation in various political, economic relationship fronts between Iran and European countries can be an effective method since the guarantees that have been taken into account regarding Islamic republic's nuclear file have resulted in more violation of human rights. It seems that the time has come for the European countries to adopt political and cultural sanctions against Iranian government as long as human rights are violated in Iran. These sanctions can be in direct connections with specific instances of violation of women's rights, political prisoners' rights and violation of rights including freedom of speech and gathering or violation of minorities' rights.

The second strategy to be taken into consideration by the European Union is to support the ideas and plans suggested by civil society activists and Iranian lawyers regarding the necessity of establishment of truth finding commissions. Those commissions will be assigned to do the investigations with regard to the violation of human rights in prisons and especially the rape of political prisoners. The commissions will be responsible to put the commanders and those who committed systematic violation of human rights particularly after the election into trial and guarantee their punishment.

The reality is that since the judiciary system is not independent in Iran, not even one person has been introduced or punished as the killer of the protestors or the responsible person for raping prisoners yet while up to now more than 100 families have announced that their children have been killed during the recent events either in the streets or in the jail.

There is no clear statistics on the number of those prisoners who have been raped but some of the victims announced that they are ready to talk about it or to register

complain against the rapists. To avoid not responding to the systematic violation of human rights in Iran and under this circumstance it seems necessary to initiate truth finding commissions with the help of international institutions to gather information, documents, witness and to use the international judiciary mechanism to make the agents of violation of human rights in Iran to be questioned and punished.

My last recommended strategy is to support the human rights defenders and their plans and activities. The Human right defenders in Iran nowadays are in the front line putting their life at risk and they are at the same time the only group that has not stopped their activities even under the worst conditions. A large number of those defenders are in jail right now and there is the possibility of getting arrested or facing long period of imprisonment threatening the rest. Now some of them are released but still are under control. The European countries need to find a way to support or save the human rights defenders. Making it possible for those defenders to get visa and to be able to travel to Europe and be out of Iran for a period need to become an approved policy.

In comparison to the services available to the authors and artists who face threat in their countries, the opportunities to help human right defenders are zero. The programs that give the human rights defenders the opportunity to leave their country for a while and escape the danger can save the civil movement leader's life and their struggle for human rights and democracy.

The reality is that we do not want our leader to be in prison anymore. At the end, I hope the European Union representative delegation for Iran to be successful in adopting effective strategies to prevent the violation of human rights.