

## **Statement from Iranian left and communist women in exile to World Women's Conference**

Iran is a country that has gone through important political, social and economic developments in the last three decades. In 1979 when the Islamic fundamentalists seized the power, Iran's population was 35 million but today Iran has a population of 75 million and women constitute 35 millions. With the further development of capitalist relations in 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran became one of the important strategic countries due to its political and economic position. Iran is one of the largest producers of oil and gas in the world. These specifications have linked the fate of country to the fate of the world imperialist for over a century. With further and deepening integration of Iran into the imperialist world, politically and economically, we can be certain that the developments in Iran are not only influenced by the world's situation but also it has an important role to play in the developments of the Middle East and political equation of the world.

In the late 70's Iranian people's struggle to overthrow the regime of the Shah a servant to western imperialists started. Women in their millions with the goal of emancipation and equality took part in these struggles. The climax of these struggles was the 1979 insurrection which led to the overthrow of the Shah's regime and seizing the power by Islamic clerics.

We the Iranian women were the first to experience brutality of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore history and experience of our struggle and resistance and analysis of the mechanisms of our oppression could play an important role in raising the consciousness of the women's movement in the world as a whole.

The clerics who had just seized the power in order to realise their Islamic regime as a model for the world; first of all targeted the women by announcing that 'covered woman with Islamic Hijab' was the embodiment of the success of Iranian revolution.

To materialise their goal, in March 1979, less than two weeks of establishing their cleric rules they made Hijab compulsory for the women. At the very same days they announced that women's place is 'at home' and they must go back to their homes because motherhood is the identity and the biggest task of women in Islam. But thousands of women had already stepped into the political life of our society. It was impossible to send these politically awaked and conscious forces back to their homes easily. In response to this announcement thousands of women protested in historic demonstration of 8<sup>th</sup> March 1979. In this demonstration against Khomeini and new Islamic regime, when thousands of women shouted 'we did not make revolution in order to step backward' was in fact the birth of a women's movement that continued in the form of resistance

and struggle against the religious fundamentalist's oppression and is continuing its struggle until present time. In fact the Iranian women in this demonstration that continued for several days declared that they were not going to give in to those oppressive and anti-women laws of Islamic regime.

The question of women and establishing its inferior position became an important subject and characteristic of the religious state. Therefore the religious fundamentalist state was established and consolidated only through a series of acute and intense struggle on the position of women in the social relations of the society.

Islamic Republic of Iran by announcing compulsory Hejab as the symbol of Islamic revolution, in fact declared the political and social program of the Islamic state. Hejab became one of the main feature of the social and power relation that protection and domination of private ownership is its central part.

The newly born cleric regime was faced with a wide spread protest against compulsory Hejab and was forced to retreat at first, but after a rein of repression and terror that led to the massacre of beginning of 80's and suppression of a number of political trends in the society, including left and communists, democrats, they managed to impose the decree of compulsory Hejab.

The law of compulsory hejab in fact was completed when the punishment of 'stoning to death' of women was introduced. Hundreds of women who had been forced to sell their body due to economic and social difficulties were rounded up and executed in order to give lessons to the others. Then women were banned from becoming judges and juries, because according to Sharia law, women are weak and their brains are incomplete, therefore they are not able to judge. On the same basis two women witness become equal to a man. Polygamy became the natural right of men. Women were stripped from their right to divorce and all the right to divorce was given only to men. Man can divorce woman or keep her in slavery for ever, because in the logic of Islamic rulers, god created men as superior to women, and women are only an object to be possessed by her father before the marriage and by her husband after the marriage.

Any man, who is suspicion of his wife of wrong doing or of disloyalty, is allowed to kill her without any condition or legal prosecution. Father also has the same right: right to kill. These are underlying laws governing murder of hundreds of women in the hands of their husbands or their fathers and tens of children in the hands of their fathers in the past thirty seven years.. All these instructions and religious beliefs against women have been implemented and backed by punitive laws of Islamic republic.

Women were band to travel and work without the husband's prior permission. They were denied the right to custody of their children even if they were succeeded a divorce. The homosexuals were penalised by death sentences and

the life of a woman was legally valued half of that of a man life. According to tribunal laws if a man murders his wife, to prosecute the husband, the family of the murdered wife must first pay a lump sum Of money to husband's family. 'Retaliation as a punishment' or (Ghesas) widely is practiced in Iran Implication of such anti-women system has been disastrous for the position of women in Iran . Many women artist arrested and executed under pretext of symbol of western cultures. Many had to flee to western countries, many highly educated and specialist women forced to stay at home. State support for violence and oppression at home and legalisation of such violence against women paved the way for men to assault and harass women at home. Huge increase in suicide and self burning, executions and stoning to death, husband killing and so on in the past few decades are the results of a religion fundamentalist political system.

These are all one side of the coin but the other side of that is the thirty seven years long women's resistance and struggle in Iran . In the past three decade there have been continuous battles between women in Iran and the Islamic Republic regime; battles in many aspect and sphere, individually and collectively and in various forms and ways. The struggles and resistance of thousands and thousands of women political prisoners in Iran which is unprecedented in the contemporary world is a living proof of their political awareness. They refused to submit to a system where its important distinction is subordination of women to men.

The presence of outrages and rebellious women in the streets against Hejab control squads, the arrest of over thousands of women only in the last summer due to so called violation of the code of Islamic cover all points to the failure of Islamic systems in one of most important projects in materialising the Islamic society. The Islamic regime expected that the youth could be educated in a complete Islamic manner, because they had not seen 1979 revolution. They thought the new generation will submit to these anti women laws and there would be no need for special military forces to impose them. But the continuation of struggle of women, especially new- generation of youth destroyed the dreams of Islamic Republic. New generation not only did not submit to these types of control, but forced the regime to allocate even more forces on the ground.

Despite gender separation in educational system, 60% of students and higher education's graduates are women, because they use every opportunity for progress and participation in the society affairs.

Any basic demand of women for emancipation and freedom is tied to separation of religion from state and elimination of religion in all spheres of social lives in the society.

Women's movement is one of the powerful movements in Iran and it has had an important role in shaking the pillars of the power structure of Islamic Republic and can play an important role in further political developments in

Iran and the region. At the present political situation in Iran and the world, the women's movement has been confronted with a complex situation. At present there are two so called feminist tendencies. These two tendencies promote choosing either pro imperialist or pro Islamic Republic patriarchal and anti women regimes. Any support to any of these two powers will practically and inevitably lead to strengthening the other power.

What is needed for women's movement in Iran now is to be able to safeguard its independence and continue its struggle together with other social movements for the overthrow of anti-women Islamic Republic regime. In this path women's movement in order to be strengthened need the support of progressive and revolutionary forces around the world, and to wage the women's cause in a world scale as well.

If we look at Middle East it is not a coincidence that one after another Islamic regime is being established either through the imperialist invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan or in the wake of the struggles of the people in the Middle East and North Africa. And at the centre of these transformations women are the first social force to be controlled and oppressed. In Afghanistan and Iraq the legalization of Sharia law against women; in Libya the legalisation of polygamy; in Egypt the unprecedented increase in female genital mutilation, in Tunisia and Syria the re-establishment of punishing women by stoning; the rise in the hejab, whether enforced or arbitrary, all these are undeniably a concentrated expression of Sharia law.

All these represent the real bloody wars of these two outmoded forces – capitalist-imperialism and religious fundamentalism – to subjugate, oppress and control women. These two forces are equally oppressive and act as brothers in preserving their common interests, as they establish militarized regimes against women through hate and extreme violence.

Because of all this, we as women can, through revolutionary internationalist struggle against these two outmoded and anti-women forces, succeed in getting rid of their blood soaked, male and "holy" hands from the lives of millions of women who are being crushed in homes, factories, fields, streets and brothels violently, mercilessly and without precedent. Only through this kind of struggle can women chart the course of their emancipation and achieve a society without exploitation and oppression.

Without the fight and overthrow of these two outmoded forces, there is no other clear prospect for the emancipation of women and indeed of all humanity –which is impossible without the full participation of women.

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