

# Islam & Women's Equality

Excerpts from the speech by  
Mrs. Maryam Rajavi,  
the Iranian Resistance's President-elect,  
in a gathering of Iranian women

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**Islam  
&  
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# Introduction

Throughout the world, women still suffer discrimination and oppression, for no reason other than their gender. In essence, the plight and suffering of women is the same for all of us. But let there be no doubt that we women have undoubtedly taken major strides forward.

So, in the beginning of this speech, I salute the tens of thousands of women who sacrificed their lives or freedom in the cause of the Iranian Resistance, the thousands of women victimized by the violence and terror of reactionaries in other countries, and those women who endeavor for the equality of women, today. Greetings from the bottom of my heart to you all, for thanks to your efforts, today we do not have to begin our struggle from nothing.

Today, major issues such as peace, social and economic development and the spread of democracy have become unavoidably entangled with the issue of women. All of these issues merit research and study, but our discussion today focuses on Islam's approach to the equality of women and men. I find this a subject deserving far greater attention than has been accorded to it so far, not only because of the challenges existing in Iran, but in light of developments in all Islamic countries and among the Muslims of other nations.

I begin my speech with a reminder of a few obvious facts on

the inequality and oppression women suffer from, before I move on to the main subject.

According to the data released by the United Nations, women make up only 10% of the world's parliaments,<sup>1</sup> and hold only 5.7%<sup>2</sup> of ministerial positions. According to Mrs. Edith Cresson, France's former Prime Minister, the stereotype of power in political circles is masculine; the boss is a man. This model further considers a pro-women outlook as very short-sighted.

The situation is worse in the field of economic management: a glass ceiling covers the world. At most 1 to 2% of senior executives are women.<sup>3</sup> Yet women pay a higher price for unemployment than men do. For the same amount of work, women on average receive less than 75% of men's wages. In some cases, this figure drops to 50%.

Another United Nations study discovered that women contributed \$11 billion to the world economy through their invisible labor.<sup>4</sup> And yet, 70% of the world's poor are women.<sup>5</sup>

The other matter of concern is a woman's struggle to strike the right balance between her job, her housework and the upbringing of her children. Creating harmony between family life and professional life is a laborious exercise which exacts a heavy price from women everyday. Different forms of violence against women - at home and in society - are on the rise, becoming an acute social crisis in many parts of the world.

Women's typical reaction to these conditions is a mixture of passivity and resignation. The question is, why are women being eliminated from the social and political scenes, and why do they acquiesce to their own elimination?

In reply, I find myself in agreement with Simone De Beauvoir's assertion that the story of woman is the very essence of her womanhood. If she is eliminated, if she eliminates herself, if she

is obsessed with a lack of identity and disbelief in herself, and if she is viewed as the "second gender" or "the other gender," it is because she has always been viewed as a woman, not as a human: being a woman means being passive and inevitably on the defensive.

Look back in history and you will see that whether a woman was put down, humiliated and reproached, or whether she was admired and held sacred, it was because she was a woman and none else. The great calamity lies in the fact that a woman is known by her "womanliness," a view which she shares, herself. This vicious cycle of degeneration is the product of gender discrimination which has enchained women.

Despite its defiance, the male-dominated regime is retreating step by step. Yet at the same time, a reactionary, violent and suppressive force called fundamentalism is emerging. Misogynous in character, fundamentalism or religious fanaticism, best represented by Khomeini's successors in Iran, is threatening all the achievements of the civilized world, particularly those of women. Under the banner of Islam, they are denying the equality of women and men.

I will suffice by citing a document from the fundamentalist regime ruling Iran which critiques the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." The mullahs' Council of Cultural Revolution prepared this document on the eve of the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. It describes the Convention as "one of the U.N. 's orchestrated and fundamental initiatives" to realize "colonialist objectives disguised as 'defending women's rights.' " The document views the "Convention's overall spirit," namely women's equality with men, as contrary to the foundations of the clerical regime. It quotes Khomeini's remarks

to the regime's leaders: "State your repugnance at equal rights (for men and women)." It adds: "According to the sayings of the Imam, equality between the sexes destroys all Divine edicts and oppresses women. His Eminence the Imam had denounced as apostates (which automatically carries the death sentence) those advocating this notion."

Although gender oppression is common to all reactionary philosophies, fundamentalist mullahs stand in a class of their own. They derive their vigor and inspiration from their discrimination against and suppression of women; it is their life's blood. Beyond the whip, in a literal sense, the fundamentalist form of oppression is the worst because it is compounded by a cultural persecution which takes advantage of the name of Islam.

Today, I deliberately wish to step out of my position in the Iranian Resistance and speak as a Muslim woman. In my view, fundamentalism clearly runs counter to Islamic thinking. This is precisely what I wish to speak about today. At the conclusion of my presentation, I will try to share with you some of the experience gained in 17 years of resistance by Iranian women, and complement it with our suggestions on the prerequisites for women's emancipation, which must definitely be earned by women themselves. Let me reiterate that in challenging the mullahs, whose reactionary rule has shackled my homeland, I deliberately want to present my case as a Muslim woman.

Notes:

1. *Platform for Action*, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 1995, Chapter 1, Global Mission: No. 28.
2. *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics*, United Nations, Chapter 6, Power and Influence.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Human Development Report 1995*, p. 4.
5. *World of Work*, International Labor Organization, December 1994.

# I

## Misogyny, Driving Force of Khomeini-style Fundamentalism

Rafsanjani, the Iranian regime's President, says: "Justice does not mean that all laws should be the same for women and men... The differences in body, height, sturdiness, voice, growth, muscle quality, physical strength, perseverance in the face of disasters and resistance to disease in women and men show that men are stronger and more capable in all these areas... Men's brains are larger... These differences affect the delegation of responsibilities, duties and rights!"<sup>1</sup>

The fundamentalist mind considers physiological traits as the determining factors. We, on the contrary, believe that on the basis of the reasoning laid out in the Quran, it is the distinctive human characteristics - cognizance, free will and responsibility - that set the criteria. For this reason, and in diametric opposition to what Rafsanjani says, there is no innate difference between women and men in the delegation of rights, responsibilities and duties.

In the mullahs' fundamentalist worldview, gender-based differences are used to justify sexual discrimination and inevitably lead to enmity towards women. This is the bedrock of the fundamentalists' rationale, the *leitmotif* and cornerstone of their ideology, which gives them inspiration and the power to mobilize their forces.

The ruling clerics in Iran issue directives dictating the color and style of women's dress, prohibiting them from smiling in public, and barring them from attending soccer matches. Through such acts, they motivate their fanatic forces and claim that these actions advance the cause of Islam. We, on the contrary, consider such acts detrimental to Islam. We do not tolerate any restrictions or discrimination against women. In tomorrow's Iran, free from compulsion, women will fully enjoy their individual and social rights. The National Council of Resistance ratified and published in April 1987 a 13-point plan on the rights and freedoms of women.<sup>2</sup>

By way of clarification only and without drawing any comparisons on the content, I propose that gender-based discrimination does for fundamentalists what the notion of racial supremacy did for Hitler's National Socialist ideology: with it, he motivated his forces and mobilized them to invade other countries.

Following the oppression of women, suppression of, and violent crackdown on, thought is indispensable to this regime. Another example from Iran's ruling regime: By issuing the anti-Islamic *fatwa* to murder Salman Rushdie, his publishers and anyone selling his book, Khomeini revitalized his zealots, demoralized by the Iran-Iraq War. The regime's theorists called it "a new manifestation of power." We condemned the terrorist fatwa as anti-Islamic and said that Khomeini had struck the most terrible blow to the dignity of Islam.

The mullahs have murdered several Iranian converts. Among others, they arrested the Reverend Mehdi Dibaj on this charge and sentenced him to death. Having been forced to release him under international pressure, they deemed extrajudicial execution the best solution: Reverend Dibaj was murdered

shortly after his release from prison. These acts, in our views, are abominable crimes, especially since the Quran has explicitly emphasized, *la Ikraha fed-din*, there is no compulsion in faith.

In tomorrow's Iran, Church and State will be separated and any form of discrimination against the followers of other religions and denominations in the enjoyment of individual and social rights shall be prohibited. No citizen shall be treated favorably or discriminated against in getting elected, voting, employment, education, judgeship and other individual and social rights on the grounds of his or her belief and non-belief. Neither will the qualification of judicial officials be based on their religious and ideological positions. Any form of compulsory religious and ideological teaching and any attempt to force practice or non-practice of religious rites and customs shall be forbidden. The right of all religions and denominations to teach, disseminate and freely perform their rites and traditions, and the respect and security of all places of worship belonging to them are guaranteed. We have unequivocally stated our views in this respect. The NCR ratified and published the plan in question in November 1985.<sup>3</sup> Prior to that, in our platform, we had pledged to ban and condemn any form of censorship and inquisition. Contrarily, the mullahs scrutinize everyone's beliefs as a prerequisite to employment in offices or admission to universities. They subject all books to stringent screening before publication. They have even required that "Islamic covering," i.e., veils, be drawn onto the pictures of girl children in the school books. Under the aegis of the mullahs, inquisition pervades all sections of society.

We consider all such conduct as anti-Islamic and flagrant abuse of religion to maintain power. Without such methods, the mullahs cannot rule. Lying at the core of the mullahs' "religious

beliefs", however, is gender-based suppression, segregation and discrimination - a phenomenon that can be studied in its theoretical sense or practical applications.

### **Misogyny in eyes of reactionaries**

Theoretically, Islamic fundamentalism establishes its thesis on the differences between the sexes and the conclusion that the male is superior and hence the female is a slave at his service. A parliamentary deputy in Iran is on record as saying, "Women must accept the reality of men dominating them and the world must recognize the fact that men are superior."<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, the fundamentalists do not believe women are human. More recently, however, the fundamentalist ideologues try to equivocate in this respect. One such theorist, Morteza Motahhari, contends paradoxically, "... Women and men are equal in their human essence, but they are two different forms of humans, with two different sets of attributes and two different psyches..." Immediately, the emphasis: "Such differences are not a consequence of geographic, historic or social factors, but are enshrined in the essence of Creation. There is a purpose to these natural differences, and any practice which contradicts nature and man's natural disposition will bring about undesirable consequences."<sup>5</sup>

Worries about the dangers of overlooking the physiological differences between men and women are illusory. The real danger throughout history lies in overemphasizing these differences to justify and legitimize discrimination against women. An evident example is Motahhari's endorsement of the conclusions from the differences between the sexes: "All women are fond of being supervised ... Men's spiritual superiority over women was designed by Mother Nature. No matter how much

a woman wants to fight this reality, her efforts will prove futile. Women must accept the reality that because of their greater sensitivity, they need men to control their lives."<sup>6</sup>

From this standpoint, the right to divorce is exclusive to men, and is justified as follows: "If the man does not put away his wife and remains loyal to her, the woman will also love him and remain loyal to him. Therefore, nature has given the key to the natural dissolution of the marriage to the man."<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, a woman's self esteem derives from the man, and so she does anything to gain his esteem. Her soul and flesh, her feelings, even her basic identity belong to and are identified with him. Man replaces God for a woman, a view plainly contradictory to monotheism.

### **The principal value and criterion**

From the fundamentalist mullahs' perspective, sexual vice and virtue are the principal criteria for evaluation. The most ignoble and unforgivable of all sins is sexual wrongdoing; piety, chastity and decency are basically measured by sex-related yardsticks. Seldom do they apply to the political and social realms. Purity or corruption are essentially judged according to criteria that are in one way or another related to sex. When such a value system evolves into the social norm, the walls of sexual demarcation become taller, thicker and even more ubiquitous. Fundamentalism conceives of woman as sinister and satanic; she is the embodiment of sin and seduction. She must not step beyond her house, lest her presence in society breed sin. She must stay at home, servicing her husband's carnal desires; if she fails to comply, she is compelling her man to commit sin outside the home.

The fundamentalists look at the world and the hereafter

through distorted, sex-tinted glasses. Throughout history they have fabricated their own fantasies and moral lessons and attributed them even to the Prophet Mohammad's ascension to Heaven. Predictably, the fabricated stories focus on the gravity of sexual sins and the severity of punishment meted out when such sins are committed. Here's one reactionary theorist's fantasies shamelessly attributed to the Prophet's *me'eraj*, or his ascension to Heaven : "I saw a woman hanging from her hair whose brain was boiling because she had not covered her hair. I saw a woman who had been hanged from her tongue and Hell's boiling water was being poured into her throat, because she had irritated her husband. I saw a woman in a furnace of fire, hanged from her feet because she had left home without her husband's permission ..."<sup>8</sup>

Such fantasies fabricated by the reactionaries are nowhere to be found in the Quran. The Quran contains more than 6,200 verses, the great majority of which deal with the question of existence, history and the human being, emphasizing the responsibilities of the human race. The total number of verses focusing on religious precepts does not exceed 500, of which only a few deal with sexual vice and virtue.

According to the *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), the Prophet enumerated seven mortal sins, namely loss of faith in God's mercy, homicide, robbing orphans of their belongings, sorcery and demagoguery, usury, and slandering virtuous women. A common theme runs through these seven sins, however diverse they may be: rather than being introspective, they all relate in one way or another to social relations and the individual's relations with others in society.

Looking at the list of the seven mortal sins, the question comes to mind that while one of the mortal sins is slandering women,

why do fundamentalists exaggerate the sexual distinctions? They do so because it is the only way for them to maintain a monopoly on Islam and seat themselves upon the throne of religion. The fundamentalists abuse religion in the most despicable manner. In the name of religion, they induce in their followers a constant feeling of guilt emanating from sex-related criteria. They thus introvert the people, leaving the masses wandering lost within themselves while the clerics reproach them in the most vehement of religious terms. On one side are the sinful throngs, who must look for some way to make up for their wrongdoing; on the other are Khomeini and his clerics who portray themselves as paragons of piety, distant from all sin and forbidden sexual domains. This is the mechanism whereby many of these human beings, who have been turned inward by feelings of guilt induced in them by the demagogic mullahs, are made to feel indebted and obedient to the "pious religious jurist," the Vali-e-faqih. The more sins they commit, the more they owe to the clergy. The mullahs in turn provide these people with enough material benefits to make it worth their while to be recruited into the regime's various agencies of repression.

### **Fundamentalism in power**

When such reactionaries take over the helm of politics, they base their rule on gender-based apartheid and discrimination and legalize the suppression of women. This is where the inconceivable pain and suffering of millions of my fellow Iranian women begin.

### ***Omnipresent clampdown***

The Quran teaches that people should not be subjected to scrutiny, particularly in their private lives. In contrast, Iran's

ruling clerics order their agents to burst into people's homes at midnight to find out if women guests in private parties are observing the compulsory veil. One woman reported that government spies had asked her 8-year-old daughter at school whether her mother wears the *chador* (the black head-to-toe veil) when her uncle visits them at home.

The mullahs' apparatus of suppression is not comparable to those of classical dictatorships, for the basic fact that the conventional methods of social control employed by such dictatorships could not maintain the detested clerics in power. The Iranian regime has 20 specialized, nationwide organs of suppression. Besides, the mullahs have established ostensibly religious societies and associations in all offices, universities, schools, factories, military units, neighborhoods and even in the religious seminaries. The main task of these associations is to keep the public in check. In addition to keeping watch on political behavior, the members of these associations must monitor the relationships between men and women, and focus particularly on the personal behavior of women. It is these duties - supervising the styles and colors of women's apparel; enforcing the segregation of men and women in schools, universities, buses and taxis; and keeping women and men apart at private parties, in parks and on vacation trips - that give these associations and organs their *raison d'être*.

### ***A devastating war***

The clerics continued the war with Iraq for eight years, rejecting all peace proposals, for the simple reason that the war helped them to stay in power. Through deceit and by taking advantage of the lay people's religious beliefs, they sent human waves over minefields. Eyewitnesses have reported that mullahs

were present at the warfronts, preaching to prospective victims and telling them that they would be cleansed of their sins and go to Heaven if they walked over the mines. The world was shocked to find that boy soldiers as young as nine and ten years old were among Iranian casualties and POWs. They carried small plastic keys given to them by the mullahs on the eve of their human-wave assaults and were invariably told that the keys would open for them the gates of Paradise, where their sins would be redeemed.

*Export of terrorism and fundamentalism*

The mullahs whip up this same misogynous hysteria to export their reaction and terrorism to other countries. Their uneducated, disenfranchised foreign recruits are led to believe that sexual promiscuity is the bottom line of all democracies, and that their afflictions are caused by the social inclusion of an evil, seductive being, called woman. Against this backdrop, the recruits are shown photographs of certain unveiled women to fill them with hatred, and prepare the grounds for the assassination of working women and journalists.

In 1963, Khomeini asserted that granting women the right to vote would corrupt society. With this rationale, in the early days of the 1979 revolution the mullahs' hoodlums attacked the prostitutes in Tehran, set their homes on fire and stoned them to death. They believed that this was more than a good deed; it was the most effective, most valuable way to cleanse society.

*The sanctity of family*

According to Islam and Islamic precepts, a woman owns her body and all her property. Under the pretext of the sanctity of the family, the reactionaries consider the man as the owner of

his wife's body and life, thus making her his slave. Under the mullahs, new legislation has been introduced to legalize this viewpoint. Mullah Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the Judiciary, says it all: "Your wife, who belongs to you, is in fact your slave..."<sup>9</sup>

Article 105 of the clerical regime's civil code notes: "In the relationship between a man and a woman, the man is responsible as head of the family." The Council of Guardians, the regime's watchdog body - has decreed that a woman cannot leave her home without her husband's permission, even to attend her father's funeral. Article 1117 of the civil code states that the husband may ban his wife from any technical profession that conflicts with family life or her character. Article 1133 of the civil code states: A man can divorce his wife whenever he so chooses and does not have to give her advance notice.

To justify their gender-based ideology, the Iranian clerics try to sell their reactionary viewpoints and fundamentalist dogma as religious precepts and Islam. In this way, they forbid women from social activity, particularly political, social and ideological leadership so as to solidify women's "second class" standing, portraying it as stemming from women's inherent deficiencies.

#### **Notes:**

1. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, interview with *Ettela'at*, 7 June 1986.
2. Plan on the Rights and Freedoms of Iranian Women, The National Council of Resistance of Iran, 17 April 1985.
3. Plan on the NCR Relationship with Religion and Denominations, The National Council of Resistance of Iran, 12 November 1985.
4. Abbas Abbassi, parliamentary deputy, *Jomhourī Islami*, 8 October 1994.
5. Morteza Motahhari, *Nezam-e Hoqouq-e Zan Dar Eslam (The Rights of Women in Islam)*, Sadra Publications, Tehran: 1990.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Mohammad Baqer Majlessi, *Hayat-ol Qolub (The Life of Hearts)*.
9. Mohammad Yazdi, Head of the Judiciary, *Ressalat*, 15 December 1986.

## II

# Women's Equality In Judgeship and Leadership

The mullahs preach that a woman's place is in the home, that her voice should not be heard by strangers, that she must not call to prayers, that she must not deliver speeches, that she must not sing. Here, banning women from judgeship and religious and political leadership is of paramount significance because it deals with the most important responsibilities. According to Article 115 of the clerics' Constitution, the President, in particular, must be nominated from among the religious men. As a Muslim woman, I declare that these claims are contrary to Islam. In Islam, women enjoy all these and other rights, equal with those of men.

### **Unfounded reasons**

To deny women their right to judge, govern or become religious leaders, the mullahs draw on common collection of citations. Most of their discussions focus on judgment, from which they derive the ban on female political and religious leadership. Hence, if the reasoning behind the ban on female judges is proven to be groundless, the same applies to the ban on women's religious and political leaders.

*Ijtihad* (contemporary interpretation of allegorical verses of the Quran by qualified scholars) requires that every decree or judgment be evaluated according to four criteria: 1. The Quran,

2. The Traditions (meaning the methods, sayings and writings) of the Prophet and the Imams, 3. The consensus of *Ulema* (religious scholars), and 4. Common sense.

The mullahs' logic conforms to none of these specifications.

**1. According to the Quran:**

There are no statements in the Quran depriving women from acting as judges, and religious or political leaders. On the contrary, when the Quran speaks of judgeship and leadership, it addresses both men and women: "God dot command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; And when yea judge between peoples, that yea judge with justice."<sup>1</sup>

Verses 71 of Repentance<sup>2</sup> and 74 of The Criterion<sup>3</sup> underscore women's equal social responsibility and right to leadership. "

**2. According to the Tradition of the Prophet:**

None of the mullahs' citations from the Traditions (*sunna*) imply that the Prophet forbid women from becoming judges or political leaders. Besides, it is common knowledge that after the Prophet's death, women's citations of the Prophet's sayings were considered credible and many have been incorporated into the main body of the *hadith*.

The citations used by the mullahs to prove that Islam bars women from becoming leaders or judges are baseless. The mullahs argue, for example, that if a woman were to become a judge, men would hear her voice when she speaks, promoting sin. Therefore, women are not permitted to sit on the bench. Such reasoning is not only absurd but without credence. Did women, such as Umma Salama, not narrate the Traditions of the Prophet? Did the Prophet's daughter and granddaughter, Fatima and Zeinab, not deliver elaborate sermons in the

mosques and among the people?

**3. According to the religious scholars:**

Contrary to the notion that all religious jurists concur on these prohibitions, some of the most renowned Sunni jurists think otherwise. Abu Hanifah, leader of the largest Sunni branch,<sup>4</sup> does not believe any such prohibitions existed. Mohammad Jarir Tabari, prominent jurist and the author of the acclaimed Tabari's History,<sup>5</sup> wrote: "Since women are allowed to master *Ijtihad*, they can also become judges, just like men."

Sheikh Mohammad Hassan an-Najafi, author of *Jawaher-ol Kalam (The Gems of Discourse)*, cites "consensus" as proof that judges must be male.<sup>6</sup> Allamé Helli, a key Shiite jurist of his time, wrote in *Nahjol-Haq (The Road to Truth)* that there is no such consensus.<sup>7</sup> Hossein Ali Montazeri, the once designated successor to Khomeini who was much acclaimed by his mentor as a jurist, rejects Najafi's contention that there is a consensus in this regard, writing: "In all the books of citations from the infallible Imams I have studied, I have not encountered such a matter."<sup>8</sup>

One can conclude, therefore, that the serious disagreements among the religious scholars make it clear that there are no citations in the Prophet's Tradition or in the *Hadith* which prohibit women from judgeship and thereby leadership.

**4. According to common sense:**

A simple question can be enlightening for any Muslim. How is it possible that women and men bear an equal responsibility, both in terms of their religion and society, to propagate the faith; and bear an equal responsibility, stated in the Quran, to promote justice and Towhid (oneness); but when it comes to the most

crucial means of advancing these objectives - judgeship and religious and political leadership - women are excluded? If women are permitted to master Ijtihad, then how can they be deprived, on a par with lunatics and criminals, of the right to religious leadership, even when more qualified? Why should the public be deprived of a woman's superior insight or more comprehensive understanding of the faith?

We are free to debate, at whatever length, the qualifications required for a jurist, judge or leader, until we arrive at a definite conclusion. It is very different, however, to deprive women of the chance to acquire the necessary qualifications and religious knowledge.

As you can see, according to the criteria of jurisprudence, being a man is not a prerequisite to becoming a judge or a leader. Contrary to what the fundamentalists attribute to Islam, the logic of the Quran clearly articulates that women can be judges as well as religious and political leaders.

Muslims believe, as explicitly proclaimed by the Quran and the Prophet of Islam, that the religion and book of God exist to guide all generations of Muslims. The primary paradox invalidating the fundamentalist point of view, therefore, is that it transforms God's religion and book into a set of rigid, lifeless precepts; as Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph and the first Shiite Imam, said of such interpretations of Islam, "Theirs is the version most alien from Islam and the Quran."

In the famous book, *Nahjol-Balagha (The Road to Eloquence)*,<sup>9</sup> Imam Ali predicted a day that resembles to an amazing degree the present situation in my country, Iran, ruled by the Pharisees. In sermon 361, he says, "There will come a day when the mosques are thriving on the outside, but are corrupted in their guidance. There will come a day when those who build the mosques and

those who attend them are the most evil on Earth."<sup>10</sup>

**Notes:**

1. *The Glorious Quran*, translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 1975), Sura IV: Nisaa (The Women), Verse 58, p. 197.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 461. Verse 71 of Repentance: "The believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil..."
3. *Ibid.*, p. 944. The Quran again speaks on behalf of all Muslims, men and women, in the prayer of verse 74 of The Criterion: "And give us the grace to lead the righteous."
4. Abu Hanifeh was the leader of the largest Sunni branch who passed away in 793 A.D.
5. Mohammad Jarir-e Tabari was a prominent jurist and the author of the acclaimed *Tarikh-e Tabari (Tabari's History)*, one of the most accurate accounts regarding the history of early Islam. Tabari died in 953 A.D.
6. Shiekh Muhammad an-Najafi, *Jawaher-ol Kalam (The Gems of Discourse)*, Beirut: 1981, Vol. 40, p. 12-14.
7. Allamé Helli, *Nahj-ol Haq (The Road to Truth)*, originally cited in *Jawaher-ol Kalam*, op. cit. Allamé Helli died in 1405 A.D.
8. Hossein Ali Montazeri, *Mabani-e Fihi-e Hokumat-e Islami (The jurisprudential foundations of Islamic rule)*, Qom, Iran.
9. *Nahj-ol Balagha (The Road to Eloquence)*, is a compilation of sermons, letters, and sayings of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib.
10. *Nahj-ol Balagha (The Road to Eloquence)*, translation and commentary by Haj Alinaqi Faiz ol-Islam (Tehran: Faiz ol-Islam Publications, 1972), sermon 361.

### III

## Dynamic Nature of the Quran

The fundamentalists preach that Islamic laws and precepts should be carried out today exactly as they were 1,400 years ago. Maybe this is why they are called fundamentalists! Let me comment, in passing, that I do not believe this name is appropriate for them at all. They absolutely do not abide by the fundamentals. Instead, they dogmatically adhere to the secondary commandments and outdated forms, and sacrifice the principles and fundamentals to the pettiest of their own interests. In the 20th century, they absurdly calculate religious fines (*diyat*) and tithes based on the value of camels, sheep, dates and the currency of 14 centuries ago.

Beyond the precepts and rules relevant only within a certain time-frame, we must understand the spirit of Islam and the genuine outlook of the Quran. The precepts must not be interpreted as unalterable dogmas; as circumstances change, they must be replaced with new precepts more compatible with Islam's ideal society. This is the dynamism of the Quran and of an ideology which claims to respond to the problems and needs of humankind and society in any circumstances. When this dynamism is overlooked, it inevitably leads to retrogression, oppression and discrimination emerging under the cloak of Islam.

Dogmatism about the letter of the law while overlooking its spirit is not, of course, exclusive to Islam, but has a long history in all ideologies and creeds. To distinguish right from wrong,

one must first differentiate between the overall objectives and strategies and the tactical means of achieving those objectives. Consider, for example, a boat sailing toward the shore. The ultimate objective is to reach the shore, and the strategy is to go straight ahead, directly east, for example. Paddling, adjusting the speed, and other mandatory behavior at any stage should never be considered unalterable and inflexible. Otherwise, tactics will replace strategy, diverting or reversing the desired direction. The objective will be forgotten, and the means will become the end to themselves.

No matter how definite and unchangeable a goal is, therefore, rules, regulations and tactical precepts are flexible, provided they are not rejected due to opportunism or personal interest. Dogmatic adherence to them will stunt efforts to achieve the final objective or delay its achievement. We must move forward toward the goal, without dogmatism, without opportunism, without profiteering, without an outdated approach to tactical rules, regulations and precepts. Otherwise, we will be deviated from the correct path.

Aside from this introduction, Islam is a religion, an ideology, with fundamental views on humankind, society and history. It defines each of these concepts within the philosophy of *Towhid*, or monism. One fundamental and central theme, derived from Islam's monistic approach to existence, is equality among human beings. It is explicitly emphasized in the Quran that all human beings are equal, regardless of gender, race or nationality. According to this principle, the only criterion for differentiating among people is the extent of their cognizance, emancipation, and sense of responsibility, which in Quranic terminology is called *Taqwa*. The equality of women and men is one of the most obvious aspects of the Towhidi philosophy.

This guiding principle is proclaimed in the chapter The Inner Apartments, verse 13: "O' People! We created you, men and women, and made you into Nations and tribes, that yea may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you."

Another guiding principle is that Islam's social ideal strives for freedom, justice and social unity. The Quran describes the mandate of monotheist prophets as inspiring humankind to rise up and establish Qest, the ultimate stage of social freedom, justice and unity. The sura Iron, verse 25, reads: "We sent aforetime, our apostles with Clear Signs and set down with them The Book and the Balance (of right and wrong), that peoples may stand forth in justice." In such a society, the oppressed and the talented - whose talents have been suppressed - will be free and, at the zenith of their development, will occupy positions of leadership, and the community will flourish. The Narration, verse 5: "And we wished to be gracious to those who were abased in the land, to make them leaders and make them heirs."

Such examples vividly express Islam's genuine views on humankind and history. The leaders of Islam, inspired by this outlook and striving to move toward Islam's ideal society, responded to the extent that their circumstances allowed change. For such a society to be realized, of course, many grounds had to be prepared. It was not possible even for the Prophet of Islam to instantly realize these ideals in the primitive society of his time. The Prophet could not simply issue a decree abolishing even the most violently oppressive and blatant form of discrimination, slavery; instead, he laid the groundwork for its annihilation. The Tradition, guidance and direction provided by the Prophet and the Quran led to the rapid elimination of this inhuman phenomenon. Today, we can appreciate that given the

economic structure of the time and the rudimentary state of the forces of production, any decree to completely abolish slavery would have brought progress neither to the society nor to the system of production as a whole. So premature a measure would have delayed the actual eradication of slavery. It is evident in the spirit of all the teachings and actions of the Prophet, however, that slavery is a stigma on the visage of humanity; one that must be removed as soon as possible, so that the tremendous gap between the infancy and maturity of the human race can be bridged.

It is important to note that today, even the fundamentalists cannot claim that the Quran, because it did not explicitly abolish slavery, condoned the practice, let alone defended it.

So the key is to grasp the spirit and genuine outlook of the Quran. This understanding will enable the followers of this religion at any historical stage to determine the precepts and laws suited to their time. To understand this concept, let us read the Quran to see how verses are categorized and defined. The Family of Imran, verse 7: "He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses fundamental (*muhkamat*); They are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical (*motashabihat*). But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord."

The fundamentalists and reactionaries interpret all the precepts and temporal rules as unchangeable dogma. This interpretation contradicts the Quran's own definitions and categorization. *Muhkamat* are the fundamental principles of Islam, definite and unchangeable. *Motashabihat* are relative, dynamic and flexible. Elsewhere, the Quran uses the term *mathani* (which means flexible and having dynamism) for *motashabihat*.

The Crowds, verse 23: "God has revealed the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, Consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects)."

Take the precepts on inheritance, for example: Fourteen centuries ago, a woman's share was set at half a man's. If the historical circumstances are ignored and this ruling is interpreted as permanent, then its significance at the time cannot be appreciated. Furthermore, the unrealistic conclusion would be that Islam opposes the equality of women and men. In fact, Islam accorded women a share in inheritance at a time when they basically inherited nothing, but were themselves inherited. They were part of their husband's property, to be owned by his heirs or other men of their tribe.

So the very idea of according women the right to inheritance, in and of itself, was a revolution. We all know that until just recently, even in European countries, women had no financial independence. Another important point to note is that 14 centuries ago, women did not play any role in production and men provided for the family expenses. All things considered, it is natural to conclude that when socio-economic progress allows, and when women's socio-economic status has changed or been allowed to change, the Quran's dynamism calls for changes in inheritance laws, and that is why, as we have already declared, women and men enjoy equal and identical rights with respect to inheritance.

The same holds true for many other precepts on social or legal issues, such as testimony, the payment of fines, etc. Consider the precept on testimony, whereby the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man. In this case, too, a dogmatic interpretation would presume that this decree is immutable and eternal. Again, that would mean inequality, attributed to Islam.

Whereas 14 centuries ago, when women had no rights in primitive societies and female infants were buried alive, such decrees were very important, bold initiatives towards establishing women's rights. Now look at the fundamentalists, and see how they have distorted the liberating message and ideal of Islam with their dogmatic interpretations, reducing it to a deficient, short-sighted and profiteering mentality.

I would like to add that the fundamentalist mullahs' claim that they are carrying out the religious precepts in accordance with the Tradition of the Prophet is a blatant lie. It is common knowledge that one of the most brilliant aspects of the Prophet's mission was to emancipate and teach respect for women. It was he who made it a mortal sin to slander a woman, who levied a heavy punishment for the slanderer, and who ruled that to prove the accusation, one had to produce four witnesses. Even when faced with a confession, time and again he simply turned his face away and urged the sinner to repent.

The misogynous mullahs, however, slander hundreds of women every day, detain them, flog them or stone them in public. Imam Ali tells us: "There will come a time when nothing will remain of the Quran but a set of rituals. And nothing will be more common than attributing falsities to God and the Prophet."

Let us also acquaint ourselves a little with Imam Ali's views on the Quran and the religious precepts. "The Quran has spelled out what is lawful (*halaal*) and unlawful (*haraam*); what is obligatory (*wajeb*) and recommended (*mostahab*); what is renewing (*nassekh*) and outdated (*mansookh*); what is general and specific; what is fundamental and allegorical." He continues: "The Quran has proclaimed some things as obligatory, but they have been annulled by the Prophet's Tradition. There are also certain matters that have been considered as obligatory in the Tradition, but the Quran allows

their annulment. There are also matters that were obligatory in their own time, but were later abolished." Do these remarks by Imam Ali endorse the fundamentalist interpretation, or prove the dynamism of the Quran?

The introduction of Ijtihad to respond to the questions and developments of any historic juncture is more solid proof of the dynamism of Islam and the Quran. Ijtihad is undertaken by a decent, competent leader who believes in the religion, has a good knowledge of the ideology and its emancipating mandate, and is also abreast of the developments of the time. Unfortunately, despite official Shiite recognition of Ijtihad, in practice this institution has been used not to reflect the dynamism of the Quran, but to formulate reactionary readings of the precepts and distort the liberating message of Islam.

Relying on the principal Islamic texts, such as the Quran, the Mojahedin have discovered the dynamism of the Holy Book. For their part, the fundamentalists cannot produce any viable counter arguments. Islam, free of rust and reactionary distortions, has become the essential, eternal premise and "breakthrough" ideology of the People's Mojahedin of Iran. Their grasp of genuine Islam was made possible by the organization's ideological research based on the Quran, the original texts of Islamic culture, and 30 years of practical experience under the leadership of Massoud Rajavi. He truly is Iran's most qualified, most decent, most selfless leader and Islamic ideologue. He has conveyed and taught the Mohammadan Islam as a religion of mercy and tolerance, freedom and democracy, progress and advancement of science and society to an unrelenting generation of Muslims.

Years before Khomeini seized power in Iran, the demarcation between the Mojahedin's ideology and the ideas of Khomeini

and his reactionary clerics had surfaced. In the early days of Khomeini's rule, a tremendous number of young people, intellectuals, and progressive clerics chose the Mojahedin's interpretation of Islam and supported Massoud Rajavi. Since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, generation after generation of Iranians have been aware of the views of the reactionaries. Subsequent to the anti-monarchic revolution, these very ideas basically served the political ends of a suppressive regime, enjoying neither influence nor ideological weight. Consequently, a furious Khomeini had to call off his unpopular televised classes in which he interpreted the Quran. He also had to close down the weekly classes at Sharif University of Technology, where 10,000 university students eagerly gathered to listen to Massoud Rajavi teach philosophy and a comparative study on the nature of existence. On March 1, 1980, *Le Monde* wrote: "Among the most important events not to be missed in Tehran are the courses on comparative philosophy, taught every Friday afternoon by Mr. Massoud Rajavi. Some 10,000 people presented their admission cards to listen for three hours to the lecture by the leader of the People's Mojahedin on Sharif University's lawn."

"In the weekly conferences at Sharif University," *Le Monde* continued, "Mr. Rajavi draws help from the Quran, the Old Testament and the Bible as well as from Plato, Socrates, Sartre, Hegel, Marx, and others to explain the Mojahedin's ideology. The courses are recorded on video cassettes and distributed in 35 cities. They are also published in paperback and sold by the hundreds of thousands of copies."

Now, let us study Islam's view of women and compare it, in accordance with its fundamental principles, with the outlook of the fundamentalists. This is a discussion which I think will bring many previous discussions into perspective.

## IV

# Women in Islamic Thought

By defining woman on the basis of her gender characteristics and physiological differences from man, fundamentalists divide humankind into two sexes with differing natures. Such dualism inevitably leads to a relationship based on physical power. One sex becomes stronger, the other weaker. One becomes primary, and the other secondary. According to this formula, one must inevitably dominate the other. The fundamentalists theorize and legitimize this unequal relationship, blame it on nature, and then issue a decree for all time that women are inferior to men.

The Islamic outlook is the complete opposite. Towhid views men and women as absolutely equal. Why? Because it defines human beings by their uniquely human and social characteristics, manifested in humankind's consciousness and free will. From this perspective, women and men are not different. Because they choose in awareness, they are held accountable, both individually and collectively.

Human beings are responsible before their society and the outside world. The bond between human beings, their social milieu and the outside world provides the setting in which their sense of responsibility flourishes. There is an innate, intrinsic need in every human being for this setting.

Islam teaches that human beings are accountable to the Absolute Being, God. In monotheistic anthropology, human beings are not only held responsible before society but before

the whole world as well. With such orientation, human beings, both men and women, are able to break free of the constraints imposed by nature, instincts and society, and take up the task of bringing about change in their social existence.

A world view whose guiding principle is gender-based discrimination constrains human beings under a tight lid, forcing them to introvert. Feeble, in a constant state of debility, the human being is subdued by the circumstances dictated by his or her surrounding and, worst of all, is subjugated by an unjust and merciless "God."

If we have risen up against gender-based discrimination, it is because we cannot stand by and see human beings condemned to a blind destiny determined by circumstances outside their control, such as their physical appearance, nationality, gender, language or other characteristics beyond their free choice. I must add, however, that this rejection of gender-based values, although essential, is not of itself sufficient. To reach maturity, it must be complemented by fusion with a liberating ideology, and an identifiable, objective guide from without. Otherwise, as the clerics and merchants of the gender-based world wish, women will remain feeble, exchangeable commodities, passive and irresponsible. In a woman's psychology, this is synonymous with introversion, coiling up inside, and evading responsibility.

Evidently these two world views contradict one another, each with its own set of mechanisms. Naturally, there are physiological differences between men and women. But the reactionary fanatics overemphasize these gender differences and present them as the basic foundation of the human personality. The fundamentalist looks down on woman as a feeble being to be constantly compared with men and humiliated. Even her basic

social, political and economic rights as a human being are denied. She is recognized only by her "femininity," shunned by society and driven to a corner of her home.

In the fundamentalist mullahs' system of values, discrimination, dualism, war, suppression and bloodshed are the norms. A viewpoint which regards woman as wicked and satanic inevitably sees man as inherently corruptible. Hence, the fundamentalist quests for "purity" through bloodletting and killing. In the final analysis, the reactionaries view humankind as evil. So vengefulness, hostility, deceit, and all the other negative human characteristics become legitimate and predominant.

Indeed, in a society where women are second-class citizens, deprived of their genuine rights, how can any man claim to be free and not suspect his own humanity? Humankind affirms and enhances its humanness through social interaction and relationships. Are men not in bondage, too? I believe they are. Of course, their situation is different. They are enchained by their quest to dominate women and impose their will on them, and inevitably on society and history.

In contrast, monism, or Towhid, bases its values neither on men's physiques and insatiable desire for prominence, nor on women's weakness and femininity. It considers awareness, freedom of choice, and a sense of responsibility as the basis of human character. A woman thus takes on a stable, independent, and completely equal human personality, which is how others view her. From towhid's point of view, women and men complement each other and live in harmony with one another. They need each other to the same degree. Neither is thus an appendage of the other.

This world has its own yardsticks. The sanctity of life,

livelihood, love, mercy, altruism, trust and honesty are the fundamental values. Deficiencies, complexes, and even physical differences - like being male or female, black or white - though real, are not regarded as values. The Towhidi perspective is reflected in the Prophet of Islam's emphasis, 14 centuries ago, on the equality of women and men, and in his invitation to women to become Muslims. The first person to believe in Mohammad's message was a woman. The first martyr to the cause of Islam was a woman. At least three of the first nine Muslims to join up with the Prophet were women.

The human being is described in the Quran as God's heir and vicegerent on Earth. Women, such as the Virgin Mary, are respected on a par with the prophets, and are entrusted with the greatest of historical responsibilities. The Quran chooses its models of humanity from among these women: From Assiyah and Hagar,... to Khadijah and Fatima in the era of Islam .

Today, the grave responsibility of emancipation has been bestowed upon women. This represents not only her own liberation. In it, I envision the liberation of humankind. Let us pause a moment and imagine that the world really is passing through this stage. Now, let me repeat that for us women, "freedom begins the moment we believe that no one can prevent the emancipation of a woman who is determined to live freely, free from the chains we all know so well." I believe that from an anthropological perspective, the crux of the issue lies here. This is the issue that will cure forever the agony - history long - of being a woman. Let the flame of responsibility ignite within a woman, then you will see that no obstacle can stand in her way.

The misogynists wish to separate women from their social and historical responsibility. We must cut short this oppression. If we do so, women will then write their own destiny. Their

liberation will certainly lead to the emancipation of men, a transformation in their thinking and their active role in the cause of equality. Likewise, we will break through the impasse of social development and democratic expansion, for democracy and social progress can also be gauged by the degree to which women are free and bear responsibility.

I am optimistic about the future. I have seen my share of this profound transition in the movement of the Iranian Resistance, where women have risen to free themselves. I would like to share with you a brief review of our experience:

## V

# Women in the Iranian Resistance

Challenging the mullahs' misogynous regime are the Iranian Resistance's women. Not only do they enjoy absolutely equal rights, but they have also overturned the male-dominated value system by taking on key positions of leadership and management. Women account for more than half the members of the Resistance's 570-member parliament-in-exile. The significance and unique features of this experience may be summarized as follows:

Firstly, it pertains to an alternative which embraces a wide spectrum of society and various organizations. This alternative also has extensive political and military organs. Secondly, the experience has been tested in every domain and every sphere of responsibility, including some considered exclusively male. Thirdly, the trend stretches over a decade.

### **The hardships along the way**

To achieve this objective, the Iranian Resistance has traveled a long, arduous path. It was in 1984, three years after the nationwide Resistance against the Khomeini regime began, that the leader of our Resistance raised the question as to why women had not risen beyond the level of department directors, three tiers below the leadership body, within the People's Mojahedin, the Resistance's principal organization. In contrast, in the struggle against the Khomeini regime, they had taken on wide-ranging

responsibilities, and tens of thousands of the movement's martyrs and prisoners were women. He pointed out that for a movement fighting the misogynous mullahs, such discrimination between men and women cannot be tolerated. The issue, ostensibly an organizational matter which had been juxtaposed with ideological and political discussions, was debated for months at the various levels of the organization.

Our struggle against the religious dictatorship had entered a more complicated stage. Women had fought courageously and in large numbers. In sacrifice, resistance and risk-taking, they were leading the way, but in one sphere, the advance was slow and unimpressive: they were not assuming more responsibility.

We had to discover the systematic causes of this stagnation. The few exceptions did not help at all, because women generally did everything but accept positions of responsibility and command. It was as if they had set a specific limit to their talents, such as running a department or a small section of the Resistance. Nor did the men believe that women could actually undertake heavier responsibilities. Even the extent to which women had shouldered responsibility was not taken very seriously. More significantly, the men's interest in promoting their wives went only as far as it did not change the delicate balance in the family.

In those several months of meetings, women spoke at length about their problems. For example, those women who had children did not believe they could undertake any other serious responsibility, even if the problem of child care was solved systematically. Of course, the contradiction between attending to family matters and assuming their political and social responsibilities constitutes a serious problem for all women in any situation. Since women can only achieve equality by taking on serious professions and responsibilities, I believe for an era

the contradiction has to be solved in favor of women assuming responsibility. But, women's non-belief in their potential ran deeper.

You probably know that the organization and liberation army whose backbone these women form, has been described by the journalists and correspondents of the international press who have met them, as one of the best educated armies in the world. The problems these educated women mentioned were mostly about types of work. Technical and military jobs were for men. Political work also seemed impractical, because apparently nobody took women seriously.

After listing a range of problems, they automatically inclined toward marginal jobs or jobs considered one hundred percent fit for females. This was their spontaneous inclination. Women from various parts of the country, with different traditions, of various ages, shared one thing in common: They were women, and we have seen how much women's problems are interrelated.

After several years of practical experience, they are now unanimous in concluding that virtually all these previous obstacles were in their own minds, and derived from their own lack of faith in themselves and in the reality that there are solutions to these problems. Some were afraid to accept the responsibility of command over men and other women, because of this problem. One commander told me that despite her skill at driving trucks, she had been obsessed by the difficulty of getting into these high-chassis vehicles.

Everyone's problems could be summarized in one phrase: Fear of taking on responsibility. The progress of our movement, however, depended on women's fully accepting responsibility. We could not walk on one leg. We needed a revolution to break through these taboos and discover new conviction in women.

Massoud believed that the solution must come from the top, with the participation of women in the leadership. Some concurred; others believed that the solution must come from below, with women's increased participation in executive affairs. I became preoccupied with this problem. For years, ever since I had become politically active, I always thought about how the way could be opened for women's emancipation. I think this inevitably captures the mind of any woman, but sooner or later she may give up thinking about it, because it is just too much, too complicated.

By now, this issue was the subject of debate within a nationwide Resistance movement, and from various angles, I could appreciate the need for this step. When I was nominated for the joint-leadership of the Mojahedin, I was weighed down by the task, and the decision to go ahead was very difficult and quite intolerable. Only one thing removed my doubts: the need I felt existed beyond my own personal attitude for such a step to be taken. The requirements of the Resistance movement were absolutely genuine, and if we wanted to move forward, we had to respond to this need. In addition, during those several months of meetings, I felt that my own and other women's emancipation and ability to realize our full potential, depended on my taking up that responsibility.

None of us anticipated what actually happened. This change - a woman in the leadership - brought about a major internal revolution in our movement. For women, it acted like a spring board. The organization's annual report for that year indicated that the percentage of women in the central council rose from 15 to 34 percent, more than double.

The impasse on women accepting responsibility had been overcome, and it was just the beginning. This leap forward and

the new atmosphere it brought to the organization allowed us to carry on a profound change in outlooks, for we did not intend to stop there. The movement's primary goals, democracy and growth, had become entwined with this drive to emancipate women. We were a movement which believed, body and soul, that any progress and development depended on the women's movement. Therefore, we were poised to go to the end of the line: total rejection of the male-dominated culture. This required a complete overhaul in our thinking. As women gradually occupied key positions at the top and in command, their male subordinates felt as if their world was shrinking. It was difficult for them to believe in women, and their hidden resistance revealed itself in a lack of interest in their responsibilities. Most difficult for the women was their problem, from time immemorial, of not believing in themselves.

It took me several years and thousands of hours of discussions, in small and large groups, to convince these women and men - none of whom ever denied that in theory men and women are equal - to enter this new world in practice, as well. Indeed, to abolish double oppression, you must double your efforts.

Then, gradually, our movement began to see the fruits of its labor in practical terms, and went forward, step by step. In addition to my everyday interaction, I regularly convened meetings to examine individual problems. These meetings were followed up by the officials in charge of each section or department. Three years later, the number of women in the army's general command staff neared 50%. Seven of the 15-member general command were women.

Over these years, the misogynous mullahs closely followed these internal developments and the promotion of our women. Alarmed, they tried in vain to slander our movement, accusing

us of feminism and all sorts of moral corruption. The mullahs were terrified of the impact of this movement on Iran's women and the escalation of their resistance. Finally, in 1988, one of the regime's suppressive organs, called the "Central Komiteh," admitted in an internal report to Khomeini that our revolutionary emancipation of women had in fact strengthened and expanded our movement, and served as a major attraction for Iranian women. One passage of the report read: "The Mojahedin's internal revolution has become a means of proving the organization's advocacy of equal rights for women and men... and it has resulted in more women being attracted and loyal to the organization." Elsewhere it wrote: "They used appealing methods, mixed them with practical application and examples, and achieved their objectives."

We organized our movement in a way that allowed women into all of the sections, departments and fields traditionally reserved for men, giving them access to that expertise. When women began to participate in large numbers in military matters, the NLA conquered the most masculine field of work and responsibility. Women received training up to the command level. Simultaneously, their sisters began to move up the ladder of responsibility in management and politics.

From 1989 to 1993, this drive for equality had taken major strides forward. New values and views on women dominated the movement. As these qualified women began to directly affect the everyday affairs of each department, I began receiving daily reports from men, underlining the serious and effective impact of women's role. In reality, those who had taken part in this transformation were compelled to forget their old value system. They were opening their eyes to this new reality.

The most prominent characteristic, which produced a

significant impact on the work environment, was these women's extreme sense of responsibility, particularly in the sensitive military field. They demonstrated a maximum willingness to learn, displayed a high level of discipline, remarkable decisiveness, and most important of all, a selfless devotion emanating from their humane qualities. The work environment took on a sense of care and human emotion.

We began in our combat organization with independent all-women battalions, but soon merged them into mixed units, for a harmonious structure. Beyond the many values brought to life in this revolution of the mind, I must recall the role of these women - who at the time comprised 50% of the executive committee and 50% of the overall command of the NLA - in keeping the relationship between the sexes healthy. This allowed us to create the first mixed army in contemporary history, an army which challenged the enemy with very high combat capabilities. When women's hidden energies are set free, they demonstrate their constructive role in emancipating men. These women's teamwork allowed them to increase efficiency, contribute to humane interaction, and organize their forces so as to get the most from their staff's experience and knowledge of the field.

At a remarkable pace, we reached a turning point. Our whole apparatus, both men and women, was ready for another leap forward. We adopted a policy of preferential treatment, a policy of female leadership, to rid our movement of the last vestiges of male-dominated tendencies and lead the way to the final stage of gender equality. One of the precious achievements of this era was the new, fresh relationship among the women themselves. Before all else, these women had to love their sisters and feel a sense of solidarity in their endeavors. Such relationships could

become a reality only when these women really believed in one another. Women commanding women - mutual acceptance of this relationship. I think you will concur that this marks the beginning of a mature relationship between human beings.

In 1993, an all-woman leadership council was elected by the Mojahedin's central council. Presently, not only the leadership council, but also the NLA's entire general command is run by women. More than 50% percent of the members of the National Council of Resistance are women as well.

As for the army, following women's entry into its command, a series of re-organizations were undertaken to elevate the command level. During these phases, the number of combat units grew by 300%. With each step forward, our progress gained momentum.

Had our women not gone through this process, they could not have taken the subsequent actions required of a pioneering generation. It was, of course, a tortuous path. Some said it felt as if they had lived an entire lifetime. It was also very difficult on the men. Today, however, we have an energetic generation which has experienced something very important and new in the world. Now that generation is ready to share its accomplishments with the emancipation movement, in the effort to uproot discrimination and gender-based apartheid.

## VI

# Future Prospects

The advancements and achievements of women in this Resistance movement, particularly their ascension to leadership and command positions, translate into the reality that women will annihilate the mullahs' misogynous regime. Their status in the Resistance is the best guarantee that democracy will be instituted and preserved in the post-mullah Iran. This is important, because in most resistance movements, women were marginalized after victory, despite their active role. In our movement, however, this would be impossible, because of two special characteristics:

1. In diametric opposition to the mullahs' rule of absolute male-dominance, the Iranian Resistance is led, commanded and managed essentially by our women.

2. The National Council of Resistance has adopted a concrete plan to guarantee the equality of men and women in tomorrow's free Iran. All members of the Resistance are committed to this program.

Last June, I enumerated a 16-article Charter of Fundamental Freedoms for Future Iran for my fellow compatriots. I reiterated, among others, the rights and freedoms of Iranian women, summarized as:

- The right to elect and be elected in all elections, and the right to suffrage in all referendums.
- The right to employment and freedom of choice in

profession, and the right to hold any public or government position, office, or profession, including presidency and judgeship in all judicial bodies.

- The right to free political and social activity and travel without the permission of another person.
- The right to freely choose clothing and covering.
- The right to use, without discrimination, all instructional, educational, athletic, and artistic resources, and the right to participate in all athletic competitions and artistic activities.
- Recognition of women's associations and support for their voluntary formation throughout the country.
- Consideration of special privileges in various social, administrative, and cultural fields to abolish inequality and the dual oppression of women.
- Equal pay for equal work, prohibition of discrimination in hiring and during employment.
- The right to salary and special accommodations during pregnancy, childbirth, and care of infants.
- Absolute freedom of choice regarding spouse and marriage, which can take place only with the consent of both parties.
- Equal right to divorce; women and men are equal in presenting grounds for divorce.
- Support for widowed and divorced women and for children in their custody; care will be provided through the National Social Welfare System.
- Elimination of legal inequalities with regard to testimony, guardianship, custody and inheritance.
- In family life, any form of compulsion or coercion of the wife is prohibited.
- Polygamy is prohibited.
- Prohibition of all forms of sexual exploitation of women on

any pretext.

I should reiterate here, that since democracy, progress and advancement depend on the emancipation of women, any legislation or social planning must, before all else, consider the question of women's equality with men. The present charter has been drafted and adopted with this in mind. In future, too, more plans and amendments providing for the rights of women and women's equality will be drafted on the same basis.

### **Our message**

If the next century is to be called the century of women's emancipation, then all political, economic, social and cultural progress must travel this road. The emancipation of women is the issue of our time. On the path to resolve the most urgent problem of our society, toppling a religious dictatorship, and instituting freedom and democracy in Iran, we ended up needing to liberate our women, both to vanquish the regime and to guarantee the freedom and prosperity of future Iran.

Peace, progress, and democracy are contingent upon the emancipation of women, the equality of women and men, and women in leadership. Ignoring or neglecting this reality will inevitably aggravate the situation and contribute to war, violence, dictatorship and retrogression.

Allow me to conclude my speech with a summary of our experiences in the emancipation of women:

1. There must be a revolution in thinking, to abolish views and values based on gender-discrimination and male domination, in the conviction that physiological differences do not impede the complete equality of women and men, and that any deprivation or constraints on women's social and individual rights are unjustifiable. This revolution in thinking must be

complemented by a guiding ideology or principle.

2. Having realized their historic responsibility, women must undertake roles in leadership and management, so that the system of male-dominated relationships is overturned. To this end, women must undertake at least 50% of leadership responsibilities.

3. We must compensate for women's historical retardation with preferential treatment lasting for a specific period of time. To this end, it is necessary to establish quotas in favor of greater participation of women in various positions of social responsibilities, particularly leadership. Whatever the circumstances, these privileges must, in spirit, content and practice, serve the interests of emancipation and acceptance of greater responsibility by men and women, and of the rejection of gender-based oppression and exploitation.

4. Women's emancipation must result in the emancipation of men, as well. In fact, the emancipation of women is a precondition for the emancipation of men. Such new relationships are essential to our men, women and children.

Ideologies which do not promote the unity and common identity of women and men seek to eliminate women and further alienate women and men from each other. In practice, this will lead nowhere and fail to result in the emancipation of women. The common nature and identity of men and women, however, and the prospects of instituting humane relationships, mean that equal rights for men and women is an absolutely realistic goal. The 21st century is the century to end gender discrimination and emancipate women. It is the century of peace, development and democracy. At the same time, the reactionaries and fundamentalists, arising from the depths of the Dark Ages, are poised to turn back the wheels of history with their misogyny.

They do not realize that in many parts of the world, including Iran, they will be swept from the pages of history by the capable hands of liberated women.

This is the historic mandate of the free women of our time. If left undone, human society and civilization are exposed to the threat of reactionaries. Doubtless, the anti-thesis of the misogynous fundamentalists and reactionaries, are the free women who will rise up, hand in hand, against them. With the progress of their growing resistance, they will realize the emancipation of women, heralding the liberation of humankind. This is the dawn of the greatest development in society and history. Let us rush to its advent, in struggle and solidarity.

**Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**The National Council of Resistance of Iran**