



March 2023

# International Liberty Association Newsletter

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## EDITORIAL

First of all, Happy Iranian New Year (NoRuz), which started on 20th March with the arrival of Spring. May the new beginning, be a harbinger of justice, freedom, and the elimination of oppression against women in general and the liberation of Iranian women in particular for their courage and risk-taking.

Iranian women have been fighting for equal rights for more than 120 years, and throughout this period they have paid a heavy price.

In the revolution of 1979, women played a very active role but with the establishment of the mullahs' government, under the pretext of medieval laws, they treated women as second-class citizens in order to prevent their progress in various fields of work, production, and politics.

In the past months, we have witnessed the risk-taking and courage of Iranian girls and women who rose up against years of injustices. A large number of girls and young women were martyred by direct firing from the repressive forces and thousands of people were arrested and imprisoned. In the face of torture and death they continue their rebellion and protest.

To honour and support them on International Women's Day (IWD), we called on everyone to be the voice of Iranian ... continued on p.2

## ILA HONOURS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



On Friday 24 February 2023, the International Liberty Association held its annual gala to commemorate the upcoming International Women's Day (IWD).

IWD is a global holiday celebrated annually on 8 March as a focal point in the women's rights movement, bringing attention to gender equality ... continued on p.2

## CHEMICAL ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS A NEW LOW IN THE TACTICS OF THE MULLAHS

A series of mysterious chemical attacks on girls' schools across Iran have finally made headlines. The videos showing schoolgirls unable to breathe are indeed, heart-wrenching. While Iran's officials tried to play down this disturbing crime, the evidence suggests a systematic, organised, state-sponsored revenge tactic.

The chain poisoning of schoolgirls began almost three months ago, yet the tragedy ramped up in the first week of March, with hundreds of girls falling sick due to chemical attacks on their schools.

"Until yesterday, 25 provinces with approximately 230 schools have been involved, as a result of



which more than 5,000 male and female students were poisoned", the state-run Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) quoted a member of regime's parliament as saying, on 6 March.

By blaming imaginary "adversaries" and "human error" and speaking of "mass hysteria" regime officials have tried to twist the truth and ... continued on p.3



## ILA honours International Women's Day *continued from p.1*

and violence against women.

Driven by the universal female suffrage movement, IWD originated from movements in North America and Europe during the early 20th century.

IWD became a mainstream global holiday following its adoption by the United Nations (UN) in 1977 and is now commemorated in a variety of ways worldwide.

The first public manifestation of IWD during the recent history of Iran was on 8 March 1979, a few weeks after the establishment of the new regime, after the revolution that ousted the dictatorship of the Shah.

When exiled in Paris, Ayatollah Khomeini promised to reporters that he would not interfere with the domestic governance of Iran and that all women would be free and would not be forced to wear the hijab. However, as soon as he set foot back on Tehran's soil, he went back on all his previous announcements. The first thing he did was impose a dress code for all women in the workplace. Women working for the government and even in the military were told to wear the hijab or face losing their job. The nationwide protest on 8 March 1979 was the reaction of stalwart Iranian women, who were supported by many men who also did not want to go backwards in history.

The ILA has been



**In March 1979, men joined women in unison, calling for the protection of women's rights in Iran**

commemorating this important international day since its inception because women's rights are important human rights that we are obliged to defend and protect. This year we celebrated the day a bit early due to the availability of the venue.

The event's agenda was full of speeches by young women who have suffered the misogynistic policies of the mullahs' regime over these past four decades, as well as talks by British supporters interspersed with elegant musical performances. We dedicate this

newsletter to this event, and excerpts of some of the speeches appear below:



"My name is **Sepiedeh Orafa**. I'm 27 years old and currently working as a policy advisor on foreign affairs in the Dutch parliament.

I'd like to firstly thank the International Liberty Association for inviting me ... *continued on p.3*

### Editorial *continued from p.1*

women as best they can and defend their rights and demands.

In this regard, we have dedicated this newsletter to covering the ILA's IWD gathering. Many women and young people are currently in prison and are subject to torture and execution, and their families are being

threatened and harassed by the authorities, so we will do our best to be their and their families' voice in this difficult situation.

We obviously need your continued help and support to raise the voice of the brave women of Iran. This is a matter of vital importance because the Iranian regime is trying its best

to prevent the dissemination of information by censorship and by cutting or slowing down the internet to prevent the spread of news of its crimes.

Your unwavering support gives the brave Iranian women hope and encouragement to continue their struggle for freedom and basic rights.



## ILA honours International Women's Day *continued from p.2*

to speak at platforms like this, to represent the voice of the millions of Iranians who are standing up for their freedom.

It is important to stress that the leadership that women have shown at these protests, is not a new or isolated phenomenon. Iranian women have been at the forefront of every new wave of protests since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, often at great risk. They played central roles in the 2009, 2017 and 2019 street protests. In the 1980s, when women protested the implementation of the mandatory hijab, the women who were wearing the hijab would voluntarily make a protective human wall to protect women without the hijab from beatings by the regime's forces.

The current protests infamously began with the killing of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. Every woman in Iran can identify with what happened to her: almost everyone has experienced being harassed by the morality police for not being veiled 'properly' or not showing 'appropriate behaviour'. Thus, her killing was a catalyst for the nationwide protests, that soon

reached far beyond the issue of just the mandatory veil. Mandatory veiling is but one of many misogynous laws Iran's clerical regime has adopted. The regime's constitution considers women's rights half of a man's, allows polygamy, facilitates horrific honour killings, and prevents women from having an equal share in society.

During the current protests in Iran, women showed their strength and leading role, laying bare the regime's weakness. In the early days, multiple young female protestors who lost their lives, became symbols of the protest movement alongside Mahsa Amini: amongst them were 16-year-old art-student Nika Shakarami and 16-year-old Sarina Esmailzadeh, who were both brutally beaten to death, and 20-year-old Hadis Najafi, who was filmed just hours before her death while she was tying up her hair into a bun to join her brothers and sisters in the protest, during which she was shot. This image of her tying up her hair from behind went viral all over the world.

The young age of these girls is shocking, but unfortunately these are not isolated incidents: just a

few weeks after the start of the protests, the deputy commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), said that the average age of protesters who were arrested was just 15.

Despite all the dangers, oppressions, violence and killings, women in Iran keep being at the forefront of the protests."



"My name is **Raha Heshmatikhah**, a Dutch-Iranian master's student in clinical psychology. I am honoured to be

invited by the International Liberty Association to speak in this event.

This year, I cannot celebrate the International Women's Day without addressing the ongoing uprising in Iran which I am sure you have all heard of. It is not surprising that the uprising is led by women because they are the foremost victims of this misogynist regime. They have been discriminated most under this regime denying them every basic right including the right to choose their own clothes. For years every time the Iranian ... *continued on p.4*

## Chemical attacks on schools a new low in the tactics of the mullahs *continued from p.1*

divert attention from their likely role in the increasingly organised chemical attacks.

The regime's current health minister, Bahram Einollahi, considered the poisoning as a "minor incident without any microbial origins".

The regime's president, Ebrahim Raisi, blamed "mass hysteria" and dismissed the case as "enemies' propaganda".

However, even state-run media are appalled by the issue, and are now questioning the official narrative.

"The main issue is why the

government has so far failed to present a comprehensive and satisfying report. Seemingly, there are some parties who benefit from this incident", the state-run *Etemad* daily newspaper wrote on 7 March.

Protests have erupted in dozens of Iranian cities in recent days. Parents, teachers, and students across Iran have been holding demonstrations chanting: "We don't want this child killing government!"

Instead of addressing their concerns, regime security forces attacked protesters in several cities, and videos on social media



show government forces beating protesting mothers.

It is clear that the UN and other international bodies must act and form a fact-finding mission to investigate this heinous attack on young girls, which many believe is a revengeful attempt by the regime to instil fear and silence among them after several months of protest for their most basic rights.



## ILA honours International Women's Day *continued from p.3*

women rose for human rights and women's rights they got arrested, sentenced to long imprisonments and execution. Even pregnant women were not excluded from being executed.

To make it short, as an Iranian woman, I want to say that we want freedom and a free society in every aspect. We don't want to jump from the frying pan to the fire. We reject the awful present but we don't want to go back to the past. We want to move forward and look to the future and therefore, I support the 10-point plan of Mrs Rajavi, NCRI (National Council of Resistance of Iran) leader, which stresses: complete gender equality in the realms of political, social, cultural, and economic rights, and equal participation of women in political leadership. Abolishment of any form of discrimination; the right to choose one's own clothing freely; the right to freely marry and divorce, and to obtain education and employment. Prohibition of all forms of exploitation against women under any pretext.

I do my best every day to propagate this idea."



"My name is **Roya** and I was born and raised in Sweden. My father fled and escaped Iran because he was politically

active in his youth and when he was 16 years old he was arrested and was in prison for seven years. So when he arrived in Sweden, I then had the privilege to grow up in a country with freedom and democracy. Today I'm studying structural engineering in Stockholm, something I love to do and am ambitious about and my main driving force is the hope that one day I may be able to help build, rebuild, Iran into the incredible country I, and we all know it will

be. Although, I must give credit to the amazing students, especially girls in Iran who are probably much more capable than I am. But of course, because of my own background, I feel a strong sense of responsibility to fight for the people in Iran, for the children and the young girls, the women who stand up bravely against the regime. They are the ones I look up to and learn from.

In fact, my father named me after another brave woman called Roya who was executed in the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in Iran and now, it is my obligation to stand up and continue her fight, and the fight of all Royas in Iran, because she was not the first and last woman that got executed.

As I mentioned my father was a political prisoner where he was tortured physically and mentally. I can see the scars he is suffering from to this day. He saw his friends get executed and today, hearing the news of other young girls and boys getting executed by this regime reignites many emotions. All they want is to live freely as students, to walk the streets together without fear, to gain education and be able to do what they love, just as I am.

On a final note, I mentioned to you where my name came from, but I didn't tell you what it means. It means 'Dream'. We and all Iranian people dream of a free, democratic and wonderful Iran and it is a dream which I am sure will soon be realised. Thank you!"



### Mary Banks:

"I don't even know how I got involved, it happened maybe three or four years ago, and I think I signed

a street petition, but, you know, I always feel that these things are all meant to be. I feel that there's no such thing as coincidence and the fact that we're all here, the fact that we're all here supporting this

wonderful charity, I just think we should all thank ourselves for our support and for being here and for being so blessed to be working for the people we're working for."



### Sue

### MacDermott:

"It is a great honour to be here today, speaking to you about my passion about supporting the

International Liberty Association and its mission to defend human rights in Iran. I am a woman, the youngest of four siblings, with three alpha male brothers. I learnt realistically at a very early age to stand up for myself as a woman. So I've always understood and been inspired by the strength and resilience of women around the world, especially those living in oppressive and restrictive regimes, and today I would like to share my motivation for supporting the ILA, and why I believe this is an important cause for us all. Our involvement, that of myself and my husband, with the ILA goes back over 15 years and I feel extremely fortunate and proud to be supporters of this, such wonderful, organisation.

As a British woman I am proud to be a part of this, and thank you all for being here today. I understand the importance of speaking out against injustice, especially when it affects half of the world's population. That's a lot of people.

Whilst the UK is not perfect, we are extremely fortunate to live in a country that fully recognises women's rights. So let us work together in our hearts and our hands to build a better world for the people in Iran and for all people everywhere. The fight for freedom is never easy but with the support of organisations like the International Liberty Association we can make the world a better place."

... continued on p.5



## ILA honours International Women's Day *continued from p.4*



"My name is **Aminah**. I came from Iran and I have been living in Norway for 10 years now.

I came from a family that both my mother and my father were teachers and after the revolution of Iran, like so many freedom-lovers, they were hoping for freedom and democracy in Iran, but, as so many of us know, Khomeini stole the revolution and got power and said no to all other freedom-lovers, and that's why when I was one year old, my father got arrested and after some months my mother and I also got arrested and they sent us to prison. I don't remember much from that time, but my mum says that they took us to the prison where there were basements that people were getting tortured, women especially, 24 hours a day and we were in a corridor that people were blindfolded and tortured and I as a child had to walk around and see all this brutal face of the regime, and I was there with my mum for almost four months

and we were in a room with 32-33 women that there weren't enough space for all of them to even sit on the floor. But finally, because of my mum insisting a lot, they sent me out to my grandparents and since that time I had to visit my mum and my father behind the dusty glasses of the prison just for some minutes every week, just one day in a week.

When I was five years old, finally after four years they came out of prison and I could be with both of them as a family again. One year later, when my brother was just 10 days old, my father got arrested again and he was sentenced to be in prison for five years. Two years later, in 1988, the summer of 1988, suddenly all the political prisoners were forbidden to have visiting with their families. My father was also one of them. They took us three months with no answer from the regime what was happening and why we cannot see our beloved ones. Finally my grandfather got a telephone call and said that, they said to him that they executed my father. They put them in the mass graves and they still don't know where their graves are. Among them they killed 30,000 political prisoners in just one or two months,

and many of them, like my father, they were supposed to come home, but they never came. And we're still seeking for justice. Among them were so many women. My mother had friends that they were even pregnant and they killed them. You see, these days, in front of all these cameras, mobile phones that they take pictures with those, still they are killing our people in the streets just because they are chanting for freedom. We just want freedom. We just want to live normal, like so many others in the world, right at this century. We just want to be free. We don't know why they do this to us, but we don't give up and I'm really thankful of you that you are here, I just ask you please, please, please be our voice, please stand with us, because we cannot do it alone. We need your support, we need the whole world to stand beside us because if Iran gets free so many other countries around that area, they will also be in peace, so it's not just because of Iran, it's because of so many other countries around that area. So thank you so much and I really hope that one day very soon we can invite you all to a free Iran and celebrate freedom there."





## ILA'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EVENT IN PICTURES





## YOUR COMMENTS AND MESSAGES TO THE BRAVE WOMEN OF IRAN

**Mark:** "I think you are all extremely brave in your stand against the oppression in your country and your campaign for women's rights. You are much in my thoughts and admiration. Keep courage, keep strong."

**Christopher:** "You have suffered so much for so long, you deserve a brighter future and my greatest wish is that the day will come soon when the women of Iran will not only feel happy and safe, but will be the leaders of your great country."

**Margaret:** "I have great respect for you and please know I am thinking of you and hope that freedom comes to you all very soon."

**Paula:** "Thank you for being the light, the hope and the heartbeat to a free Iran and a freer world."

**Jeremy:** "Some inspirational speeches, may all your aspirations and dreams come true. All our love and support for your fight."

**Susannah:** "I salute the brave women of Iran who are standing up for freedom. You are some of the bravest people I know."

Here in the west we follow your people's revolution and pray for your safety and eventual freedom."

**Keith:** "My heart feels for you. Your pain and suffering, your bravery is immense and a witness to us all. We are with you."

**Debbie:** "You are strong, you are brave, you are powerful. We fully support you in your quest for freedom."

**Amrit:** "As a young Indian woman who fought for her own freedom in the UK, I am always inspired and in awe of your bravery and

strength. Never do I see you angry, you use love to fight the tyrants. You will have your voice, and the rest of the world too!"

**Carol:** "I feel for your suffering and salute your incredible bravery. I hope that eventually justice will prevail and you will have the freedom you deserve."

**David:** "Just a voice from the UK



to wish you strength and to say we hope your freedom comes soon."

**Jennifer:** "My very best wishes to you and my hope that the situation in your beautiful country will improve soon."

**Fernando:** "Bravo my ladies. Keep the fight to the end!"

**Kay:** "My admiration of your



bravery, hoping for your freedom to come soon."

**Susan:** "My grandfather's people were from Samarkand. We are cousins. We have a history and longing for freedom. My grandmothers and my grandfathers found it - I know in the courage we share, in the DNA of hope, your courage will lead to freedom for

all the women of Iran. Thank you for that courage. We are under the same sky and I remember you when I look up at the stars."

**Eric:** "Unfortunately courage and bravery carries a price. I hope you can all believe in a free Iran. There are many of us who believe in your cause."

**Genevieve:** "Never has your voice mattered more!

Hold onto your dreams... they are your salvation! We dream, we hope, we fight your fight with you always. My heart bleeds tears."

**Juliette:** "Keep fighting, keep hoping, never forget you are not alone. We are praying for you,

thinking of you. Your bravery will go down in history."

**James:** "We are always thinking of you and our support will not end until we can all meet in your homeland with a democratic government and freedom!"

**Michael:** "You are not forgotten - especially today, commemorating

International Women's Day - 24th February 2023 - and we salute you and we laud you for your courage, tenacity and bravery. Hold fast. Be strong. We are with you."

**Inga:** "Dear Iranian women, I have followed your plight and fight for many

years. I admire you immensely, and have strong feelings for you. You have proven yourselves to be incredibly brave. You will be successful. I look forward to visit your new Iran."

**Will:** "I am in awe of your bravery, and hope my own young daughters demonstrate such courage when needed. The world is with you."



## THE CRY – A POEM BY FARROKHI YAZDI



Performed at our event by the singer Gisso Shakeri and musician Homayun Tajjali.

*In the prison of the cage, when will the  
bird of my heart become happy?*

*Unless the day comes, when it is free  
from this prison of sorrow, becomes free*

*The beatings of the heart become  
moaning, slowly, slowly*

*If these moans become louder, they  
become a cry, shouting cry*

*I am happy with these ruins since I  
know*

*When the ruins pass the limit,  
prosperity will follow, becomes prosperous  
Smell of blood comes from the tear and  
cry of the people, smell of blood*

*If you give iron water and fire, it will  
become a sharp steel*

*In the prison of the cage, when will the  
bird of my heart become happy?*

*Unless the day comes, when it is free  
from this prison of sorrow, becomes free*

*Out of extreme injustice, a hardworking  
unknown blacksmith*

*Will become the bearer of the flag, like  
Kaveh, the ironsmith*

*I am certain that these situations will  
be gone, since*

*The foundation of injustice and  
oppression, will be uprooted, will be  
uprooted*

*In the prison of the cage, when will the  
bird of my heart become happy?*

*Unless the day comes, when it is free  
from this prison of sorrow, becomes free.*

# Join us at our live event for the occasion of Easter and NoRuz

**Date and time:** Saturday 29 April 2023, 1pm–5pm

**Location:** ILEC Conference Centre, London Suite  
47 Lillie Road, West Brompton, London SW6 1UD

Please send an email or call the ILA to reserve your place:  
[info@iliberty.org.uk](mailto:info@iliberty.org.uk) Tel: 020 8452 3481

