



## International Women's Day 2018 - Belgian Parliament

### Parliamentarians Support Iranian Women in Uprising



On Tuesday 6 March 2018, a conference was held in the Belgian Parliament to commemorate the International Women's Day and in solidarity with Iranian women.

It was chaired by **Els Van Hoof**, MP. Several Belgian and European parliamentarians spoke in the meeting. Speakers included: **Sonja Claes**, Flemish Parliament (CD&V), **Françoise Schepmans** MP/Mayor (MR), **Fatma Pehlivan**, MP (sp.a), **Fatoumata Sidibé**, Brussels Parliament MP (DéFI), **Anna Zaborska** (MEP, Slovakia), **Marijana Petir** (MEP, Croatia), **Daniëlle Vanwesenbeeck**, Flemish Parliament MP (Open VLD), **Latifa Gahouchi**, Senator (PS) and **Elham Zanjani** and **Elahe Arj** from NCRI Women's Committee.

Many speakers endorsed the struggle of Iranian Resistance for democracy and women's rights under the leadership of the opposition leader Maryam Rajavi.

Women in Iran have been in the frontline in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism which the theocratic regime imposed on the Iranian society by hijacking the 1979 revolution. They have kept the freedom movement alive through all these years with great courage and enormous personal sacrifice. Thousands of women, including young girls, as well as pregnant women have been executed for refusing the theocratic rule.

During the years of the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, at least 82 women have been hanged.

**Els VAN HOOF**, Chair of the meeting, Member of Belgian Federal Parliament (CD&V)



Women in Iran have been in the frontline of the fight against Islamic fundamentalism which the theocratic regime imposed on the Iranian society. Thousands of women, including girls as young as 15 or 16, as well as pregnant women have been jailed and executed by this regime for refusing their theocratic rule. The recent uprising also confirmed that the people of Iran do not believe in this so-called reformist-hardline game of the regime. They want a complete change in which women play a very active role. The existence of an organized opposition coalition, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), with an outstanding commitment to gender equality is indeed very heart-warming for us. I have been at the big gatherings several times with other colleagues who are here today. We met the opposition leader Maryam Rajavi and I am very hopeful that with her leadership Iran will soon be a nation with respect for democracy, human rights and women's rights

**Françoise SCHEPMANS**, Member of Belgian Federal Parliament and Mayor of Molenbeek (MR)



It is important to see parliamentarians from different political parties are here united to support Iranian women's freedom movement. If the Islamic fundamentalist rulers in Iran are at war with women rights, despite all the repressive laws and restrictions, the women in Iran remain active, defiant and resilient. The participation of women is a key for the success of freedom movements. One of the ways to measure the democratic nature of political parties or movements, is to look to the role played by women. So I am glad to see that today, women play such a significant role in the battle for democracy in Iran and also that the National Council of Resistance of Iran, is led today by a courageous woman, Maryam Rajavi.

**Elham ZANJANI**, Member of Women's Committee of National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)



During the recent protests, women demonstrated tremendous courage, fearlessly confronting armed security forces despite being empty handed, encouraging others to not fear and carry on, inviting everyone to join the protests, leading the chants, tearing down the images of Khamenei in every city and fending off security forces trying to apprehend young protesters. On the second day of the protests, it was an Iranian woman in the western Iranian city of Hamedan who was the first to lead "death to Khamenei" chants while surrounded by security forces. Another chant was "Reformists, hardliners, the game is over," first chanted by young women and men, university students protesting in Tehran clearly disqualifying any so-called reform within the regime. People have been clearly and openly demanding the overthrow of the clerical regime. Even the IRGC's political deputy said "In the 1980s, the leaders of the street protests by the PMOI were mostly women. And today, too, the ringleaders inciting (the protests) were women." In a protest march against the compulsory veil in March 1979 in Iran, it was in fact members of the PMOI and particularly, Mojahedin women who participated to protect women who opposed the veil, despite wearing headscarves themselves.

**Anna ZABORSKA**, Member of European Parliament from Slovakia (EPP)



I am very proud of many courageous women in Iran who stood behind many of the recent protests. At the same time, I am embarrassed by the reaction of the EU. It failed to show solidarity with the people of Iran. The EU and its representatives have been careful to choose their words to avoid any confrontation with the Iranian regime while many women have been beaten and arrested, the EU remained silent. The core European values are democracy freedom of expression, and respect for human dignity of women and men. They should be reflected in our relationships with Iran. The current policy of the EU towards Iran is one that is based on short-sighted pragmatism, not on values. This regime is a danger, not only for its citizens but also for all the middle east. It is time to recognise that and change our policy. This regime has no future. The future belongs to the young women and men who were brave enough to go to the streets and protest. I would like to thank the Iranian democratic opposition and Maryam Rajavi for their resistance and leadership. You are an inspiration for all of us.

**Fatoumata SIDIBE, Member of Brussels Regional Parliament (DéFI)**



In recent years, I have had the opportunity to participate in numerous events organized by the Iranian resistance in Paris, Geneva and Brussels. I see how these women are the force of change. Women are the driving force in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism. The role of women in the uprising was very impressive. Women have shown that they no longer want to tolerate this regime. They showed that they are not afraid; and that fear has changed camps. The Iranian people no longer see this regime as being able to reform. As long as the mullahs remain in power, there will be no reforms and no democracy possible.

We need to send a message to our governments to put human rights above economic interests. I think that, to my knowledge, the Iranian opposition led by Maryam Rajavi is an opportunity, and an extraordinary chance to lead Iran to a more stable, freer and, above all, a democratic country.

**Fatma PEHLIVAN, Member of Belgian Federal Parliament (Sp.a)**



It is very inspiring to hear such courageous examples of women taking the lead in the struggle to make their country a fair for both women and men. It is sad to hear that several of the courageous women who participated in the recent uprisings have been assaulted and arrested. I hope they will be released soon and continue to inspire women around the world to stand up for their rights against all odds. No doubt that NCRI women's committee will support their struggle as you have done in the past. There is no doubt that your cause is a just cause that deserves the support of all those women who think women's rights are vital for human rights. And you have all our support. We are parliamentarians from different parliaments who gathered here. I think we represent Belgium and also Europe.

**Sonja CLAES, Member of the Flemish Parliament (CD&V)**



During the years of the presidency of Rouhani, at least 82 women have been hanged. No other regime in the world is executing so many women. The Iranian regime's constitution puts women at the disposal of men almost as a captive or a sexual slave. Girls can be deprived of education at the age of 13 and even younger, as the father is permitted to marry her to a much older man. Women are banned from studying in many fields and the Iranian regime's laws deprive women from artistic activities as a source of income.

Despite the fact that more than half of the country's university graduates are women, there is no female minister in the cabinet of Rouhani. There are only 17 women in the parliament which make women's participation 5.8 percent. The Iranian opposition is today led by women and we are very happy about that. We have a competent woman, Maryam Rajavi, as president of the Iranian resistance. I met her when I was in Paris last year with my colleagues. And we were very impressed that so many people from all over Europe were there. This makes you strong. I believe with these strong and committed women in the leadership of the resistance, we have a good chance to reach freedom and democracy in Iran very soon.

**Daniëlle VANWESENBEECK, Member of the Flemish Parliament (Open VLD)**



I would like you to know that you have my full support in your resistance. As a women entrepreneur, I have had my own fight for equal rights here in Belgium. So I see how important it is to have role models. And I think people will follow you. My message to you is : Please never, never give up!

**Latifa GAHOUCI**, Senator, Chair of the Education Committee of Walloon Parliament (PS)



I feel very encouraged by seeing the scenes of the women's struggle in the uprisings in Iran. Allow me to thank you in the name of my political group and Walloon parliament for the struggle that you are leading. This is an exemplary struggle. That someone comes into the street and shouts death to the regime with a loud voice! I know this because I am from a country which used to be a dictatorship. I salute the courage of Iranian women. The freedom of Iran and freedom of Iranian people will be achieved through women's struggle and your struggle.

**Marijana PETIR**, Member of European Parliament from Croatia (EPP)



Women in Iran are systematically discriminated against and marginalised to second class citizens both in law and practice. The Iranian regime ranks 140 of 144 countries according to World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2017. I believe that women have the key for change in Iran. Especially when the biggest challenge to the Iranian Society is Islamic fundamentalism which has today turned into a very serious global threat. And Islamic fundamentalism is by nature based on denigration of women. Therefore, it is very natural that these courageous women are the most serious threat to this regime. This was very evident in the pictures that came from Iran during the recent anti-government uprisings

where women stood in the front line.

