

Speech made by Shadi Sadr on receiving the Lech Walesa Award

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely honoured that the jury at the Lech Walesa Award has chosen me as the recipient of this prize. To be accompanied by the founders of the Boroumand Foundation has added to my delight. To be granted this Prize, not only bears an honour but an importance. It is important not only for myself, but also for the battle going on in Iran for three decades: the battle for freedom and for democracy. The Lech Walesa Prize is given to support those who fight against political and social terrors. In fact, on one hand, this prize is a reminder for those who anxiously follow Iranians' daily struggle against political and social tyranny through the media and, on the other hand for those who do not know, it can be the beginning of awareness and solidarity. All this is a heart-warming support for those people who face batons, bullets, and knives on the streets of Tehran; for those who spend hard days behind the high walls of Evin prison and other jails in Iran; and for those who carry on the fight for freedom in spite of horror and insecurity. This prize is the recognition of millions of Iranians who are not prepared to tolerate dictatorship and human rights violations anymore; and for this reason it is even more important.

Two months ago, plain clothed agents violently arrested me in one of the streets of Tehran and I ended up in Evin prison for the second time. At that time, I could not dare imagine that one day so soon I would be speaking in an open society against systematic human rights violations in Iran free from the fear of being charged with actions against national security. I was taken to another building, separated from the section 209, and in the control of the Intelligence and Security Ministry with about 15 imprisoned men. The screams of these men being brutally beaten while interrogated were meant to be my torture. At that time, I could not dare imagine that one day so soon I would be speaking about mental and physical torture of prisoners in Iran in order to extract false confessions against themselves and against the protestors. On the days that, blindfolded, I would be taken through the corridors of the Section 209 of Evin prison to the interrogation room to be persuaded that all my activities in defending women's rights were a part of United States ploy to overthrow the Iranian regime; and that me and others within the women's movement and human right activists were nothing but puppets in the hands of western countries who taught us change and with their prizes created of us credible social agents of change and that ultimately through us they would introduce secularism and equality to the society at large, I could not dare imagine that I would be standing here and taking advantage of the Lech Walesa Prize as a tribune to expose and discredit their meaningless justifications and deceptions.

Today I am very happy to be here and to talk freely about the lack of freedom in Iran. I am very happy for the opportunity to remind everyone that for thirty years we Iranians have endured systematic human rights violations; but more importantly to stress that for thirty years we have resisted the systematic violations of human rights.

In the last ten years, as an advocate of women's rights movement in Iran, I have witnessed how this movement and other social movements such as that of the students', workers', and ethnic minorities' have tried to take advantage of even the smallest window of opportunity to further their aims publicly. The flames of resistance have been kept alive throughout

these years in spite of insecurities, work and travel bans, imprisonments etc and activists have not allowed the flames to be extinguished under oppression and tyranny.

However, after the result of the presidential elections in June, millions of Iranians showed that they even if they were not counted in the last thirty years, that despite being humiliated, oppressed, imprisoned, tortured and raped or even killed they have a voice, that they do count and that they are not dead. They came in their thousands upon thousands to the streets to make themselves heard. If until now it appeared that we were just a few who dared to say “No!” publicly, now millions of people have raised their hands as a sign of final victory and have said “No!” to dictatorship and human rights violations.

The response to this multitude of “No’s” was a form of martial law in the streets, beating people, arresting them, mental and physical tortures, rapes, and finally death. For three months this has been the practice in streets and prisons of Iran. These events are reminders of the 1980’s, when thousands of political dissidents were silenced cruelly in prisons. The only difference between the eighties and the post-election events is that in those years, the opponents were affiliated to political organisations. Just like now they were abducted, imprisoned, tortured, raped, and executed. Now, however, although the same treatment is meted out the people are members of the public with no affiliation to any political groups or parties. Another difference is that in the last three months, pictures and news about the daily human rights violations are broadcast so rapidly through internet and citizen journalism that unlike the eighties, the world is conscious and sensitive to Iran. But this is not enough. We need a global action.

As a feminist, I would like to mention once again the issue of rape and sexual tortures of prisoners, particularly women prisoners, and demand international action. Many evidences point to the fact that not only in the post-election events, but all through the last thirty years, rape and other kinds of sexual tortures have not been sporadic but systematic, used to intimidate, humiliate, and break the morale of imprisoned women. For years this kind of torture had been concealed, but now through the public declaration of its victims and also through exposes by authorities of the regime, it has become a topic of social dialogue. But this is only the beginning of a path which cannot be resolved without global solidarity.

Today, all of us share a global responsibility with respect to these systematic violations of rights in the past thirty years, of which rape and torture of imprisoned women is just a part. I remind myself and all others of our collective responsibility to bring to justice the authorities who have been responsible of such acts of systematic violations. The voices of the protesters in Iran have only been heard after the sacrifices of hundreds with their lives, sustained injuries and imprisonments. To hear the voices of this movement, to create a worldwide solidarity with the Iranian people who fight for freedom and democracy and to feel responsible against the abuse of their human rights and to convene a worldwide action to take the perpetrators to the court of law and to seek justice is what we seek. Thinking of the victims and sympathising with those whose body and soul is raped and contaminated is not enough. Let’s think every day as we wake up what can we do to seek justice for the victims and the punishment for the abusers.

Thank you