

# Andrew Fogle

Persian-English  
Translation Portfolio



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## Letter of Said Hussein Mirdamadi Addressed to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei

Persian Original:

<http://www.kaleme.com/1394/10/20/klm-234594/>

The position taken by Mr. Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, regarding Saudi Arabia's recent transgression in martyring Ayatollah Nimr Bagir al-Nimr – a position rightful and proper– has been conveyed by the media, reaching the ears of those who follow such things. It's fitting to quote from it here in order to express our intent:

“In a class session yesterday morning, the leader of the revolution strongly condemned Saudi Arabia's momentous criminality in causing the martyrdom of the learned and pious Sheikh Nimr Bagir al-Nimr. Emphasizing the dire need for the world to sense responsibility in the face of transgressions such as the cleric's execution and Saudi actions in Yemen and Bahrain, Khamenei averred that “the unjustly spilled blood of this wronged martyr will soon have effect, and the hand of divine vengeance will seize the collars of Saudi politicians.”

He continued: “This man of knowledge who has been so wronged was neither provoking people to arms nor secretly plotting conspiracies; rather, he worked to openly criticize revenant religious extremism, enjoining good and forbidding evil.” Khamenei added “The Transcendent Almighty does not pass over innocent blood spilled unrightfully; His hand will swiftly be upon the politicians and officials of the Saudi regime.” Fiercely criticizing the silence those who claim to support freedom, democracy, and human rights in a Saudi power structure which took the life of a man solely because of his criticism and protest, Khamenei further emphasized that “The Islamic world and entire globe ought to feel responsible for such things.”

The Supreme Leader further stated that “The Almighty will most assuredly glorify the martyred Sheikh Nimr; an avenging hand will doubtless come upon the necks of those who trespassed against his soul. This is the very substance of consolation.”

Such sentiments from Mr. Khamenei are right and proper; founded on the inviolability of the rights of peaceable speech in Saudi Arabia, they bear precisely the same meaning inside the Islamic Republic for the great mass of political prisoners, prisoners of conscience, and journalists who find themselves under pressure. There are those who for years have been locked away in the prisons of the Islamic Republic for such offenses as open criticism, enjoining good and forbidding evil in the face of nationalist extremism and patriotic zealotry; for offering advice for the improvement of the Muslim faith (in the words of Imam Ali) they have been reined in, their mouths shown shut. They are people who have seen injustice, nigh most of whom have neither provoked people to arms nor spun plots and conspiracies against the regime, either openly or in secret. Nonetheless the legal, intelligence, security, and Sepah apparatuses continue at the Supreme Leader’s bidding to level all sorts of accusations against these pitiable folks for purposes of their own tyrannical agendas: “undermining the regime,” “publishing falsehood,” “conspiracy,” and so on. Meanwhile, some of these unjustly condemned have to their name worthy histories in the service of the revolution, having mobilized and encouraged the people for elections. Our excellent Leader, informed of such injustice, simply ignores it, registering no response other than silence – even while the stories which have come down to us from the Prophet and his house in the purity and chastity of holy Islam inform us that refusing to help a person facing wrongdoing, when such help can be given, is considered collaboration with wrongdoing itself. Here the question is raised: How is that our respected religious authorities have remained silent in the face of so much clear injustice, failing to defend those who have suffered wrong?

A curious anecdote is to be found in the Javaahar Alsana of Sheikh Hor Ameli\*: God sends an oracle to the prophet Shuaib: «انى معذبٌ من قومك اربع ماه الف من شرارهم، وستين الفا من خيارهم، فقال<sup>(١)</sup> يارب هؤلاء الاشرار فما» «بال الاخيار فاوحى اليه أنهم داهنوا أهل المعاصي ولم يغضبوا الغضبى» God the Almighty reveals to Shuaib: “From amongst your people I shall afflict forty-thousand of the wicked and sixty-thousand of the righteous.” Shuaib begs: “It is fitting that evil be punished, but why beset the righteous?” God answers: “The oracle has come because they flatter tyrants and the iniquitous, and do not lift their eyes from the wicked.”

On the basis of this fine tale we should expect that silence in the face of the injury done by the security apparatus will incur God’s wrath and tribulation. We see that the Saudi regime imprisoned Sheikh Nimr on false charges of being a terrorist; as our own President stated in a letter addressed to the Foreign Minister of Denmark: “Incarceration is not a way to answer criticism!” On this account we repeat: Prison is no way to answer criticism! Criticism of a government in which two former vice presidents are presently serving jail time for corruption – a bizarre occurrence without precedent in any other state. Criticism of the leader of a government who for ten days sat at home and fumed, concerned so little about meeting the fate of Bani Sadr that he wouldn’t return to work. Imprisoning critics is the greatest kind of tyranny, and jailing internal dissidents is yet another, which «الملكُ يبقى» «مَعَ الكُفْر ولا يبقى مَعَ الظُّلم» It is bewildering that interrogators ask of some journalists: “Why is it that you cross our red line by granting interviews with Western media?” Is there even one Iranian statesman,

either inside or outside the country, who has not given an interview with Western media? Even Imam Khomeini granted such interviews. It is a “crime” that for years did not land one in prison. To use Khamenei’s language: the unwavering hand of divine vengeance will seize the neck of those powers who force injustice on the captive and oppressed.

As a citizen who cannot sit quiet in the face of oppression and thus risk divine retribution, I now address Mr. Khamenei:

1. These righteous expressions you’ve made concerning the House of Saud’s great crime against Ayatollah Nimr (their incarceration of innocents for the offence of criticism) – do they not also extend to the oppressions of lengthy incarcerations for journalists, prisoners of conscience, and political prisoners? To the illegal house arrest of three true comrades of the revolution, whose only crime has been to criticize the corruption and malfeasance of security officials? Will the people not say that this is a case of the pot calling the kettle black? Which one of these people has taken up arms against the regime, to warrant such tyranny? How has oppression come to be so endemic that even the limited freedoms prescribed for those jailed because of their politics and opinions – their rights by law – are not spared?
2. Why is it that counseling the Muslim faith, the enjoining of good and forbidding of evil - which is the duty of the religious experts, Maraji, and people together – has been suspended, as dread of security forces, brutal rulings, and a stifling atmosphere have intensified in the Islamic Republic of Iran? Do such commands not represent a suspension of divine obligation as well? The enjoining of good and forbidding of evil enjoy such significance that some jurists (the Mu’tazili) regard it a basic principle of religion. Every kind of power, facility, and condition in the country is at your disposal: state broadcasting, media, the judiciary, intelligence services, interior ministry, the Sepah, the armed forces, the mosque lecterns, the Basij, and so on. Why do you not make use of your command to prevent the social and political disorders which manifest themselves in riots, embassies on consulates attacks, attacks on legal assemblies and individual speeches, attacks against the offices of dissident Maraji who enjoin good and forbid evil, the violation of legal freedoms, and harsh and unfair sentencing in the judiciary?
3. Why is it that the country’s seminaries - which have historically remained untouched by material and secular attachments, benefitting only of spirituality, divine relief, the favors of the Imam of the Age, and the stewardship of pious people – are now stained by the presence of the state and security forces? With heavy hearts we now see the classes and offices of high Maraji, those who enjoin good and dissent, defiled by seminarians calling themselves guarantors and protectors of the Guardianship of the Jurist. And yet there is no decisive response from you.
4. Mosques all over the country – which ought exclusively to be strongholds of monotheism in the struggle against all forms of idolatry and status worship, and enjoy rightful

freedom from other entanglements – have unfortunately come to such a state that if an Imam leading prayer does not conspicuously name, support, and invoke a particular official (especially the Supreme Leader,) he'll be expelled from the mosque by the Basij, who then find a more obedient cleric to make use of. Such an affair does not just raise questions of direct idolatry, which such indirect idolatry brings to mind. For example: our neighborhood mosque in Mashhad had for a spell an accomplished and renowned prayer leader who managed to increase the number of young worshippers several fold. By reason of the fact that he invoked “servants of the country” in general and more rarely uttered the name of the Supreme Leader (not to say that he failed to utter it altogether,) he was, despite his popularity among congregants, suddenly dismissed by the Basij. This decision resulted in the dispersal of a great many worshippers, who thereafter did not return to the mosque for prayer.

5. In the universities and centers of higher education, great injustices are done in a stifling atmosphere of censorship where opinions are investigated, rightful freedoms are trampled, and professional security is lacking. An air of hopeless despondency has intensified among the faculty and staff, worse even than at the time of the Shah's Savak, depriving all of a sense of enthusiasm for their work.
6. In the judicial apparatus - for purposes of whose improvement Imam Khomeini, in his brilliance, sought cooperation from the Ulama and seminaries - we now witness with regret the verdicts and malfeasance of unrighteous individuals and judgments at odds with reality. This widespread procedural fraud may bring in train bribery and miscarriages of justice that the pen is powerless to record. It's curious to note here that most of this malfeasance and miscarriage of justice issues from those who pretend to be supporters of the Guardianship of the Jurist. By way of further explanation I refer to the process of interrogation used by the judiciary and intelligence services, on the basis of which invalid methods of judgment have taken shape and erroneous punishments and lengthy sentences have been meted out to political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. In most such interrogations, prisoners are asked in regard to their opinions: “How do you view the Guardianship of the Jurist and the ‘leaders of sedition?’ ” Or they're questioned about their personal lives: “Where have you travelled? With what purpose? Which persons attended classes there? What conversations did you have? Such interrogations are decidedly at odds with the holy Qoran; chapter 11, the Hejrat surah, commands: “Do not pry into others' business.” Such prying is forbidden and in error.

Note, in this same course, the sixth section of Imam Khomeini's Decree of Eight Clauses: “No one has the right the right to enter a house, shop, or place of personal business without informing the owner, either in the name of exposing criminal acts or the commission of sin, for prosecution of surveillance. Nor have they the right to insult a person or commit inhumane or un-Islamic acts, or listen to another's telephone or audio tape in the name of exposing crime or revealing places of sin. For exposing

sin and crime, however great they may be, all of the following are themselves sins and crimes: eavesdropping, searching through people's secrets, prying into the transgressions of others, and divulging secrets from one person to another. Because some of these represent dissemination of vice and sin, they are great transgressions; any who commit them are culpable and deserving of punishment to the full extent." In this light we see that in the process of interrogation and punishment none of the aforementioned precepts are honored; thus the majority of issued sentences are tyrannical and unjustified. The impermissibility of violating privacy is among the absolutes of human rights; upon the totality of this point all the Ulama and law experts are of one mind. Now, who among those accused for political reasons – who have had agents storm their residences, their computer cases carried off, and their papers and books rifled through - have enjoyed such security?

7. Another issue - which bears exceptional importance in Islam – pertains to nonviolence, kindness, and tolerance. The virtues of kindness and tolerance abound in what we read; we'll refer here only to one or two instances. The Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, commanded: «لو كان الرفق خلقاً يرى، ما كان فيها خلق الله شيء أحسن منه» If tolerance appears in the form of visible creature, nothing among God's creation is more virtuous (Kaafi J. 2)

He also commanded: «ان الله رفيق يحب الرفق، ويعطى على الرفق ما لا يعطى على العُنف» God is a friend who loves kindness, a reward given for kindness and tolerance, not for force and vulgarity (Kaaf J. 2)

A story from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq relates that «جاء جبرئيل الى النبي (ص) فقال يا محمد ربك يقرأ السلام ويقول دار خلقتي» The messenger Gabriel, peace be upon him, arrives and says: "O Mohammed, He who sustains you sends greetings and commands: Get along with my creatures."

And the most significant of the chapters of the exalted Qoran : «فبما رحمه من الله لنت لهم» A condensed translation will suffice: "For the blessing and mercy of God, be warm and welcoming with other people; if you are angry and hard-hearted they will scatter from your side, so forgive them and wish them knowledge. In your dealings with them give counsel, but when you so resolve put your trust in God, for the Almighty loves the faithful." (Al Amran /159)

Did you note it? These are Islam's commands regarding nonviolence, kindness, and tolerance for creation. We see now the actions of a certain judge (Abolqasem Salavati) who, in the case of a political prisoner, gives a six-year sentence for an accusation that legally merits only one year. He tells the accused: "We are treating you this brutally so as to make an example for Iranians outside the country." Of late the examples keep mounting. Where is the kindness and tolerance of Islam, and where the un-Islamic violence and intolerance of our judicial system? "Whence does this path come, and where shall it lead?" (Hafez.)

8. Mr. Khamenei, sir! You claim to show generosity to the confined and yet attack them unilaterally at every opportunity with words like these: "Why have they not come to regret their actions and give up their work with those who insult Hossein's Ashura, confirming

and defending their global arrogance? I don't know when and how restitution can be made for such wounds to the body politic. We draw a line at the sedition of 2009." Have you yet given those detained one chance, one toehold, one microphone, one hearing, so that they might defend themselves, or the opportunity to register their points of view in the free press? It's a contest in which one side has at its disposal all kinds of opportunity, power, and media, while the other side is captive without any means of self-defense. Adjudicating between parties with such grievous differences between them is painstaking work – a task only to be taken up in a divine court.

9. Mr. Khamenei, sir! Save for God most high, no one – even the exalted prophets and immaculate Imams – is without need of advice, the work of enjoining good and forbidding evil. The sole difference is that the prophets are advised by God. We read his counsel to them in the Qoran: «يا ايها الرسول لا يحزنك الذين يسارعون في الكفر» O, you who are sent by God! Those who hurry down the way of unbelief, declaring with their tongues that they have faith while their hearts are empty, sadden you (Ma'ede 61.) Or consider how the surah continues in chapter 61: «وان حكمت فاحكم بينهم بالقسط إن الله يحب المقسطين» If you judge among them, judge fairly, as God loves justice. Thus the Prophet advises the Imams and successors of holy Islam, and the Imam as father advises his children as the Commander of the Faithful advised his sons. Such is the work of advising you - you who are neither God nor a prophet nor an Imam – which has its own place. As they say, great men make great mistakes. At a time when a suffocating social atmosphere is the order of the day, even your great masters and religious experts, anxious about club-wielding thugs, do not dare to counsel you. Your advisers are reduced to furniture in your meetings with heads of state, no purpose to be seen of them. The Council of Expert's duties amount to rubber stamping and singing praises.

On the basis of abundant narratives which emphasize advising all as part of the Muslim faith, and stress the enjoining of good and forbidding of evil as an important part of our obligations (if not the primary part,) when I see the public square empty I sense the duty to bring a few short sentences to Mr. Khamenei's attention: Dear Mr. Asid Ali! Based on the exalted book which you certainly believe in, «فمن يعمل مثقال ذره خيرا يره ومن يعمل مثقال ذره شرا يره» All of these judgments afoul of the holy law to which we've referred will be accounted yours, for you have assumed supreme leadership. Even if you did not directly order the verdicts and misdeeds, in the court of heaven – which is not far off – you will be made to answer for them one by one, even if such a response takes many thousands of earthly years. In an eye blink your system of power and government will change form and come to an end, as «الملك لا يبقى مع الظلم» The examples of this – the passing away of your comrades – will be set by God every day before your eyes as a lesson, so that you might finally learn. Before it grows too late, so long as you have not departed this earth, you must think of atonement. Go before these prisoners, “conspirators,” and those confined to house arrest – those who have seen great injustice – and put an end to such damaging and irreparable waywardness. For short of idolatry nothing is worse and more hateful in the presence of God than the oppression and ensnarement of His servants, injustices from which they have no refuge but for the Almighty.

I conclude with a fond memory of your late grandfather, Ayatollah Said Hashem. In his day there were many clerics given to worldly affairs and factionalism (a trend which has been amplified by modern technology.) Without naming a particular person, he said “The way some of these clerics act, it’s as if they’re certain salvation isn’t found in works.” I, just a youngster in those days, said to him: “Sir! How is it possible that these mullahs who study jurisprudence, doctrine, and the precepts of Ali’s act contrarily and wander astray?” He answered in simple language: “Mr. Hossein! The devil who deceives these clerics is more a mullah than they are. Just as Adam, himself a prophet, deceived and was driven from heaven, a learned devil tricks the learned man.”

“To the king, an hour of earthly life was better / than a hundred years of pious refrain“ - Hafez

Peace To You



## Transcription: Darya Safai Interview

Rendered from Persian audio; text not available. Video resource:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbqcoHGCa1s>

Truth be told, from the time I was a child I'd thought that there was always some difference in how girls and boys get treated. After growing up, I saw that this problem was rooted deeply in our law. As an adolescent, I always asked myself why, in this society, I had to put on a covering when boys didn't; this was always a question for me. I thought: is it really fair that I have to go around like this when a boy can go around as he pleases? That I've got to cover myself in these clothes in the summer, when he gets to wear short sleeves? In general, the older I got, the more I realized that all these problems we have are so widespread because they're in fact permitted by law. It's possible that there are also cultural issues, but it's the law that provokes and encourages them. I can't at all accept such discrimination between men and women. I told myself that if that if there should ever be a time that I, or we, or everyone would protest this difference between men and women that we've set up in the law (if indeed such a thing be possible) it would mean that our experience would be demonstrating that we're changing our minds. It was then that I imagined that maybe the fate of we women was in our own hands, and that it only needed us to fight for it, as many others have fought. Fight to say to the authorities that we do not agree with gender discrimination, this difference between men and women, this gender segregation, the way that they're making us into two separate beings. To fight to say that it's only when men and women are equal and alike that they both can flourish. And it was really from here that I resolved to take these things I was thinking into the public square.

The first time I'd ever been to an arena for volleyball, my husband and I had agreed to go together to watch a competition and cheer on the national team. I saw a series of things there that really struck me. Because all of us have been exiled from our country in some way; for whatever reason, even if

economic, we used to be able to live at home, so naturally if we've gone abroad for whatever reason we can't forget the spiritual blows we've taken for being out of the country. I also kept an eye to the fact that, apparently, some people had entirely forgotten that even if we were in the arena, the women of Iran – who until two years ago comprised 60 to 70 percent of spectators in volleyball gyms – have spent the last two years standing expectantly behind closed doors. I don't understand at all why they were suddenly deprived of being able to watch the games. In fact it just flashed in my mind that, if I went to the arena that time, all of my aims would come down to two points. The first is that there are women in my country expecting to go to the arenas. All leisure activities have been taken from them. Because of a kind of gender discrimination, things are ending up hard for these women. And it's not just in arenas: these past two years in particular I've seen it in the quotas they've instituted in the universities. In some fields, for some kinds of expertise, they basically only trained men and excluded women. Meaning that when I looked at this history and saw how, in the past two years, the course of this exclusion had only gotten worse, I considered whether I could play some role here. The second point that I've taken up in the area of my own activities, the completion of which I've thought of as my own duty, has to do with the Sun and Lion flag – which, in my opinion, has a very long history in Iran and is among the symbols of our country. It was after all the official flag of the country before '79, when it changed, as every country establishes its own flag. I decided to remind people of this flag – in fact, to remind them of our identity – because I didn't want them to forget what crimes have been visited on our dear ones under the flag of this Islamic Republic, including the Nedas and the Sattars. We have not a few people who have taken blows for no reason from this Islamic Republic; it's really our duty to remember them in some way.

It was here that I decided to concentrate the scope of one of my activities, bringing the flag to a wide number of gyms. So I thought that, with this work, I was defending a national identity equal to the one the authorities insist on handing to me.

Dear friends: the flag you see, this flag that you see here – right now I'm going to put it in there in place of the other one to give us all some relief. Look! It's done.

A little clarification I have: it would be very self-serving if I just went to the arena and forgot about my countrymen, just like I did the first time. But there was this feeling of interdependence with those beside me that I didn't know; the people I saw were just so alive. I sensed how beautiful this interdependence is and how much we need it, to feel like we have a common point between us – even if we have differing thoughts, even if this is still Iran.

Presently, I've chosen this right – the right of women's admittance to sporting events – as one small element of the many rights women don't have. One of my purposes is, ultimately, to be able to make use of the help of women inside and outside the country, men inside and outside the country, all of my fellow Iranians, those who have gone down this path before me, those who have joined up with me, and those pursuing this course alone, in order to bring our women into arenas with a particular sense of interdependence. At present this is my chief aim. My long-term goal – hopefully, ideally – for the actions I've taken, am taking now, and will ceaselessly take in the future, is that someday I'll bear witness to the fact that my countrymen have not forgotten their rights. I mean, in truth, that our society becomes so used at times to what the authorities take from it that we only express ourselves

through groans and whispered complaints, or in a way that just grumbles about it. We should battle with these issues in a fundamental way and not allow our civil rights and rights as citizens to be taken from us. As an Iranian I imagine that the most important thing uniting us is that we all know we're Iranian and that we have rights as citizens. Even in different religions: imagine a Muslim, an Iranian Jew, a Baha'i, an Iranian Christian. So far as they're Iranian, there shouldn't be discrimination between people. These civil rights exist for women, men, various ethnic groups, and different faiths. When we, men and women both, talk about the civil rights of every person, we have a duty to take the hands of our own daughters, mothers, and friends and lead them out into society.

No physical attacks, no; rather, it's been verbal assaults. There have been people who come up to me very gravely and disagree with my work, even those that say I ought to take everything away and not sit in front of the camera. Even in the arena, there were Islamic Republic security agents who certainly don't welcome any sort of protest I would make, from protest against the limitations on women in gyms to my replacement of the Islamic Republican flag with the Sun and Lion one. The authorities would go tell the agents: stand here, get this stuff out of here. And they'd send the agents after me. But I too was sure of my course, and with the confidence that I'd done nothing bad and that this was naturally my right, I resisted and kept trying to express my protest peacefully with a slogan and a flag. I'd done nothing worth trembling or forfeiting my rights over.

I imagine, since it is my right to go to the arena, that they'd ultimately be forced to retreat. There are those who have been forced to accept ladies into gyms so they wouldn't miss out on their own games. This is very important. Time and time again it's happened that I've been forced to cancel my appointments to get myself quickly to an arena for the sake of my protests and demands, in order to do these things. Afterwards I'd be forced to work double the days after I got back, to finish up work for all the patients I'd had to cancel. It's been taxing, but I'm still confident it's had a bright side too.

I study here; I stay fifteen minutes, once I've eaten I go back to the clinic.

Usually I don't leave time; whenever there's time between patients I eat something real fast. Right now I just anesthetized a patient. I told him in five more minutes the anesthesia process will be done, so I've got five minutes to eat this sandwich.

I explained to him that his lip has gone to sleep, since it feels sort of sleepy. I don't want him to be terrified not knowing why it's gotten to be like this. I told him in another two or three hours everything will go back to the way it was before, because some patients worry, especially if it's their first time with anesthetics, why their face is in such a strange state. I told him now that there's no problem, in another two or three hours the feeling in his lip will be back to normal.

Now, for example, in my Antwerp clinic, there are children whose parents still have no answer and no residency \*(as in, status, from the government?). They bring their kids and I treat the kid's teeth for free. I always liked doing this sort of thing in my own country, because I know that in Iran there are lots of kids in need of these treatments and lots of parents in need of this help. I always liked being at the service of the people of my country, but unfortunately fate was such that I landed on this side of the world. Though I think that helping all people is noble work, I've been deprived of being able to work for my own people. I hope someday soon I'll be able to offer this aid inside Iran.

One of my favorite past-times is reading books. Sometimes when I get out of work, after I've checked Facebook, I really like to take a book in my hand and distance myself from work space and start to rest a little.

I believe that every right that is trampled on, that we allow to be taken from us, is a right we've lost. With our protests we make it very difficult for them to alienate these rights, because they see that we're ready for them and refuse to give them permission. When we when our rights back again, we find a kind of self-esteem: that our refusal to be silent in the face of injustice brings results that make us hopeful we'll be able to work across all areas. It is here that, for me, women going to arenas is a key issue, because we can keep the women's movement strong. And it's possible to think more radically about whether or not it's only women going arenas that's worth considering. Certainly it's not: in a way freedom of choice over the hejab – freedom to choose clothing, types of clothing – is the most important thing we're fighting for presently. But in a way restoring women's free choice over clothing is not the sort of demand we can make within the framework of the Islamic Republic; so long as it is predicated on this basis, choice over clothing will not be put in our hands.

Truthfully, the bulk of my compatriots' reactions to the work I've done have been very positive. They've encouraged me greatly, they've been grateful, they're happy that these issues in the arena are finally getting talked about. And I've been met with many great responses. Meanwhile there have of course been people with criticisms, for instance: have we really achieved all our other rights, so that only going to the arena remains? Or they have criticisms such as that the conditions in the arena aren't suitable for women's presence, that I ought to spend a moment in an arena to see what kind of situation it's in. Or there are people that if girls come now, they'll ruin the place – as if women are ruined people? As if the people who want to go to the arena are messed up? Or that the arena just isn't an appropriate environment – of course there have been criticisms of this kind.

On the question of how long and to what point these activities will continue, I ought to say that I've concentrated my efforts specifically on bringing women into arenas. I started with volleyball, presently I'm working on football arenas. I'm looking for women to be able to go to the arenas; this is the main objective at present. But of course after we're successful here, they will still be a great many limitations on women in contemporary society under this regime. We'll be able to start work in other areas as well.

I think that when a human rights activists does something, its educational value for my countrymen is entirely dependent on how media and news websites cover it. Because at the end of the day an activist can only perform a public act in the place she is; publicizing news of it is very important. This is why the role of the media and news sites will be a key one in educating people – in fact, for informing them and teaching them about the things it's possible for them to do. For example, among the news sites, there are some sites that do a lot to spread information – like Tavaana or other sites that perform an education role. This is how more people inside and outside the country become aware of a series of activities and get involved in them. My hope is that someday all Iranian citizens will enjoy equal rights.

I think I'm able to start with this reasonable demand, a preliminary right: it is the civil right of every

woman to go to the arena beside her family, her spouse, her friend, her comrade, her child, to enjoy herself. I think we should fight for our preliminary civil rights, keep the civil struggle alive and flourishing, and not permit our rights to be trampled.



## Auto Industry Reporting

Various sources.

Economic News

23 Azar 1394 – 14 December 2015

Rouhani to Officiate as Peugeot, Iran Khodro Tie Knot / 11% Decrease in Chinese Auto Production

<http://bit.ly/1UoFtQD>

As Iran Khodro and Peugeot prepare to renew their relationship, it appears that President Hassan Rouhani will be the one to pronounce them man and wife. According to informed sources, the agreement between the two parties will be finalized during Rouhani's upcoming trip to France, with a team of Iran Khodro negotiators set to accompany the President. Following the Geneva agreement, Iran Khodro and Peugeot held talks in which they agreed to renew their collaborative partnership after the lifting of international sanctions against Iran, albeit under new terms. 50-50 shares, exports out of Iran, and heightened domestic manufacture are reported to be among the stipulations for renewal of the venture; the French automaker has apparently agreed to the conditions.

Reprinted in: Pars Business, 55 Online – Economy Online

Radio Fardaa

24 Azar 1394 – 15 December 2015

Germany or Italy: Where Will Iran Find Its New Auto Partners?

<http://bit.ly/1P5QRic>

There have been periods when the Iranian auto industry has been criticized for having far too much French influence. Many have claimed it would be better for the industry to seek for itself a new primary partnership with a country other than France. Following the nuclear accord, reports circulated that the Iran Khodro company was pursuing collaboration with a non-French European automaker. Independent of its old partnerships, Iran Khodro began talks with the Italian company Fiat and the German firm Volkswagen. Should Volkswagen come to an agreement with Khodro, it might rock the company to its core. Because of the widespread influence of the Peugeot lobby among Khodro executives, some of course doubt that the Volkswagen will gain serious ground. So influential is the Peugeot presence that even with a unilateral withdrawal it's maintained a greater share than Renault, the fellow French competitor which continued to work with Iran despite sanctions. The comparatively higher levels of technology and quality in Volkswagen products demonstrates the German automaker's superiority over the Italian Fiat. There are a number of reasons that Fiat might nonetheless prove a more attractive brand for Iranians. The first is that Fiat tends to produce more economically-priced cars than Volkswagen. Another important point is the relative flexibility of Fiat over Volkswagen, which stems from cultural differences between the companies. In industry, Germans are generally more orderly and conservative than Italians – a point which in the eyes of many Iranian executives is of course a strike against Italy. Typically, Italian industry is more open and transparent in its business dealings with partners – a fact which might prove more attractive to Iranian executives. A third point might bear both positives and negatives for Iranian industry managers: Fiat's collaboration with Chrysler of America.

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Isna News

26 Azar 1394 – 17 December 2015

The Appearance of New World Powers Can No Longer Be Overlooked

<http://bit.ly/1QuAYW4>

In a conversation with the publication *Analytica Iranica*, Iran's ambassador to France has stated that Peugeot-Citroen is among the French companies which, under pressure from U.S.-based General Motors, decided to abruptly halt a 25-year working relationship with Iran. The move dealt a considerable blow to the image of French companies in Iran to France's own great detriment, resulting in the firing of thousands of workers and millions of Euros in annual losses. Curiously,

at the same time it was pressuring Peugeot-Citroen to end its collaboration, General Motors was working to expedite its own access to the Iranian auto market. These days recognizing its strategic blunder, Peugeot is taking pains to make restitution, all the while aware that considerable ill will is still harbored in the Majles and Iranian public opinion. Iran's market is highly developed and diversified, and in recent years has even exported car parts to France – a clear demonstration of the country's industrial prowess and infrastructure, to say nothing of its technical knowledge and human resources. Iranian companies ought to be considered fully equal partners in shared production and regional export. If the political will to recognize this exists in the French government, France might well become Iran's first foreign friend in such matters.

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Fars News Agency

27 Azar 1394 – 18 December 2015

<http://bit.ly/1OA5vLU>

Recession's Reign Over Auto Market Continues / Installment Payment Plans Increase

Supplies of domestic cars and the government's 25-million toman loan program for auto purchases have caused a decrease in inventories of Iranian auto dealers; parking opportunities for automakers needing to deliver cars to installment-plan customers are also bound to become scarce, a problem accompanied by an increase in the price of some auto models. In such conditions, the auto market is faced with further recession. Cash purchase applications on the market are few, as are customers able to pay cash for retail.



## Profile: Zahra Rahnavard

Persian original:

<https://tavaana.org/fa/content/%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D9%87%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%9B-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%DA%AF%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1>

### Abstract

Zahra Rahnavard is a university professor, artist, and crusading intellectual who has been under house arrest from February 2011 to present. In 2009, Foreign Policy magazine named her one of the world's most distinguished thinkers.

From youth, Rahnavard has tread a long and winding road in search of truth, never flinching at the cost. Born to a nonreligious family, she first encountered religion through the teachings of Ali Shariati. After donning a chador, she would go on to marry Mir Hossein Mousavi, the man who would later become Iran's prime minister after the revolution. In the course of the Green Movement, she was decisively present at Mousavi's side. Presently, Rahnavard has been confined to her home along with Mousavi for her resistance in the name of the demands of the Iranian people.

### Background

Zahra Kazemi, who would go on to be known by the name of Rahnavard, was born August 19, 1945 in the city of Borujerd.<sup>1</sup> Her father, Sadeq Kazemi, was an army colonel and war college professor.

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1. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

Her mother, Ehteram al-Sadat Navab Safavi, was in turn the cousin of Said Majtabi Navab Safavi, the renowned founder of the Islamic Fedayeen.<sup>2</sup> Rahnavard married Mousavi in 1969, and the two would go on to parent three girls: Kukeb, Zahra, and Narges.<sup>3</sup>

Rahnavard recognizes the influence of three women on her personality, and says of the environment in which was raised: “My personality took shape under the influence of three women: at the outset my exceptional grandmother, and also my mother and maternal aunt. My grandmother spoke three languages with me, which I was expected to take in: the language of the Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet; the language of Hafez, Sa’di, and Mowlana; and the language of the proverbs. My kind mother shaped another part of my personality with her bravery, chivalry, free spiritedness, and sacrifice. And my maternal aunt, who was the embodiment of wisdom. She had formally studied French. She was an instructor of Persian and French literature, and most importantly the mother of my first professor, Akbar Amirnezam, himself a pupil of Professor Kemal Al-Malak. Amir Nezam was a master of calligraphy, miniature, watercolor, oil painting, forgiveness, and greatness. My father’s job as a dissident officer at odds with the regime lead through rough roads, fearsome passages, and various cities, preparing me for a life filled with ups and downs. The four corners of Iran, and afterwards the four corners of the world – from New York to Dehli, Paris, and Africa – they all taught me to believe every impossibility.”<sup>4</sup>

## From Islamic Art to Islamic Politics

The year 1969 was an important one in Rahnavard’s life. Upon completing her undergraduate specialty in sculpture at the University of Tehran,<sup>5</sup> she put on an exhibition entitled “Qandriz”. Two people’s review of this exhibition would prove a turning point in Rahnavard’s life. The first was Ali Shariati, the intellectual who would lately greatly influence Rahnavard; the second Mir Hossein Mousavi, whom she would betroth later that same year.<sup>6</sup> Shariati invited Rahnavard to exhibit at the Hosnieh Ershad. During the time in which Rahnavard and Mousavi had set up a joint painting exhibition in the institution’s corridor, Shariati invited the audience of one of his speeches to view the work of the young couple.<sup>7</sup>

Rahnavard had by now become Shariati’s student and Mousavi’s spouse. With intellectual innovation in mind she became religious, adopting the hejab for herself. Having taken up the hejab in the tumultuous and revolutionary environment of the Hosnieh Ershad, she began to focus on religious studies and Qur’anic research.<sup>8</sup> She says herself of these events that “Islamic teachings had a greater compatibility with my artistic spirit. If nationalism was attractive to me from a political angle, Islam was worth believing in its entirety. Perhaps if I hadn’t been an artist, I wouldn’t have been able

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2. <https://www.facebook.com/zrahnavard?v=info>

3. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

4. <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/0/4161/25990>

5. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

6. <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/84949>

7. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

8. <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/84949>

to forge such a complicated relationship with Islam... It was here that I came to see how wide a dominion Islam has, how an answer for everything may be found within it. Consequently, if you're looking for a golden moment of my faith, you ought to search for it in artistic aesthetics. Afterwards I also experienced pilgrimage and prayer... It came to pass that I arrived at certainty from the path of doubt. Actually I think that this was a golden key the Almighty had placed in my heart: at the outset I discovered Islam's artistic dimension, and afterwards became aware of its social and political dimensions.”<sup>9</sup>

Rahnavard also worked for a short while for Khushe Magazine, under the editorial leadership of Ahmad Shamlou. As a student, she once went to the magazine's office with criticism of an art exhibit. Shamlou accepted the criticism and requested she write for an upcoming issue. The collaboration was, however, short-lived, as the magazine was closed down by the Shah's government.<sup>10</sup>

## A Revolutionary Muslim Intellectual

In this same period, Rahnavard continued her education, receiving a graduate degree in art studies from the faculty of fine arts in 1972.<sup>11</sup> Her restless nature did not for a moment hold her back from her quest for truth as she put years of hard work behind her. She was a young intellectual woman with a hejab who studied, put on art exhibitions, wrote books, and made speeches – all alongside her domestic life. One of her books, “The Message of a Muslim Woman's Hejab,” featured an account of correspondence between Rahnavard and her sister on the matter of the hejab.<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps strange that publication of this book would not be allowed after the victory of the revolution, in a time when the government would come to regard the hejab as one of its fundamental symbols. Rahnavard says concerning these events that “The book didn't order the hejab, but thematized it as a symbol of a society. I treated the hejab in an entirely voluntary way in this book, and placed authority over it with the individual person. After the revolution, the book was never printed.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1976, Rahnavard immigrated to America along with her two daughters to continue her work in the membership of the Confederation of Iranian Students. Only a little while later, on the cusp of the revolution, she returned to Iran to begin a new chapter in her and her husband's life.<sup>14</sup> After the revolution, Mousavi became a member of the Islamic Republican party and editor of its newspaper. After a period at the helm of the Foreign Ministry, he became the Prime Minister of Iran in 1981.<sup>15</sup> Rahnavard preferred activity in the civil and cultural realms, however, and for a few years served as editor of *Etela'ate Banun* magazine (which has since been rechristened *Rahe Zeynab*).<sup>16</sup> In those years she also had a hand in editing university materials, and was a member of the committee which

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9. <http://fararu.com/vdcgzn9x.ak9t34prra.html>

10. <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/84949>

11. <http://fararu.com/vdcfmcd0.w6dj1agiiw.html>

12. <http://chrr.biz/spip.php?article13528>

13. <http://www.iranianuk.com/article.php5?id=44989>

14. <http://fararu.com/vdcfmcd0.w6dj1agiiw.html>

15. <http://bit.ly/WiQDNU>

16. <http://bit.ly/1AcLDHT>

compiled and edited art textbooks.<sup>17</sup>

Rahnavard continued her studies alongside these efforts, beginning a doctorate in political science at the Free Islamic University in 1985.<sup>18</sup> After some years spent focusing on cultural, artistic, and university work, Rahnavard joined Mohammad Said Khatami's electoral campaign in 1996. Upon being elected the following year, Khatami appointed Rahnavard as a political advisor. Rahnavard returned to university work in 1998, assuming leadership of the Al-Zahra Women's University. She remained here for eight years, finally departing the position some time after Mohammad Ahmadinejad's government took power.<sup>19</sup> Rahnavard was furthermore a confirmed member of the Academy of Art from 1988 onward.<sup>20</sup>

## The Green Movement, a New Chapter

As the 2009 presidential election drew near, a new chapter was opened in Rahnavard's life. Mousavi had always been reckoned a serious option for the Reformists, but had previously not been motivated to enter the field. Four years of the Ahmadinejad presidency, which Mousavi regarded as dangerous for the country, were enough to convince him to throw his hat into the ring; after Khatami's withdrawal from contest, Mousavi became the leading Reformist candidate. At first, Rahnavard was not pleased with the decision, saying herself that she had preferred the two keep to civil life and not enter the ruling class.<sup>21</sup> She nevertheless eventually defended Mousavi's decision, regarding it as her intellectual duty: "For the sake of our marriage I have never once collaborated with Mr. Mousavi in the public sphere. You know I've always been independent. I started down the path to maturity much earlier and with great endeavor, and continue on it. Accordingly, if anyone else had come to me whose approach was in line with my own ideals, I would have helped them. It seems to me that any person who wants to change their miserable conditions ought to be given assistance."<sup>22</sup>

Rahnavard relates that after Khatami and Mousavi came to an agreement regarding the latter's participation in the election, she undertook to use the forum to communicate her own views and attract the votes of women and youth: "I'll make use of every opportunity, given the conditions are there for me to discuss freedom and democracy – whether at an academic event, in the electoral arena, or at an artistic function. In my opinion these are opportunities for expressing my grievances, namely freedom, democracy, and equality between men and women."<sup>23</sup>

## A Woman with a Floral Headscarf

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17. <https://www.facebook.com/zrahnavard?v=info>

18. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

19. <https://www.facebook.com/zrahnavard?v=info>

20. <http://bit.ly/1AclDHT>

21. <http://fararu.com/vdcgzn9x.ak9t34prra.html>

22. <http://fararu.com/vdcgzn9x.ak9t34prra.html>

23. <http://www.iranianuk.com/article.php?id=44989>

Rahnavard's appearance beside Mousavi in campaign ads soon made turned her into a phenomenon in the Iranian election. Previously it had not been customary for presidential candidates to appear in ads and on the campaign trail with their spouses. Rahnavard, however, with her floral Turkmen headscarf and jean top underneath her black crochet chador, stood beside Mousavi. Occasionally hand-in-hand with her husband, she took steps which promised a new day for the women of Iran. Her actions were even covered by foreign media, who christened Rahnavard "the Michelle Obama<sup>24</sup> of Iran."<sup>25</sup>

It was perhaps for just this reason that Rahnavard's foes ordered a counterattack. Her doctoral studies became one of the issues which Ahmadinejad raised in the course of debate: displaying a picture of one of Rahnavard's certificates bearing her photo, he claimed the university had accepted her prior to the qualifying period without her having a master's degree. Taking issue with this criticism, Mousavi described his spouse as the most intellectual women in Iran whose studies had been legitimate.<sup>26</sup> Rahnavard said graciously of her husband's estimation: "Mr. Mousavi has said that I'm the most intellectual woman in Iran. On this point I beg the forgiveness of all women; they're all brighter than me. Perhaps these were feelings of marital affection from Mr. Mousavi. Everyone knows Iranian women are in a league of their own, and I'm a student of all of them. Perhaps Mousavi wanted to say I was among the most intellectual women; perhaps also his confidence in me is a little much."<sup>27</sup>

The next day, the Free University published an announcement certifying Rahnavard's degree as legal, insisting that her acceptance had indeed entailed an entrance exam.<sup>28</sup> According to the announcement, Rahnavard was obligated to pass a previous section after a 1990 change in regulations, receiving her political science Master's at the outset in 1993, and her Doctorate in 1995.<sup>29</sup> During a subsequent news conference, Rahnavard made her own degree public while heavily criticizing Ahmadinejad: "If there were doubt as to my Doctorate, why did this ninth government raise me to the position of a top professor?"<sup>30</sup>

## Leadership of the Green Dissidents

The Iranian elections would, however, create great tumult among the people, with unforeseeable results. The high probability of Mousavi's victory in the first round of voting - or at minimum his and Ahmadinejad's standing in the second round - engendered a broad wave of support for Mousavi. The official vote tally insisted on a definitive victory for Ahmadinejad. Mousavi did not accept this result, alleging fraud. Supporters of Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, and other Reformist candidates launched the protests which became known as "the Green Movement." It was a movement which would bring in train many months of widespread street demonstrations. Rahnavard, beside her

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24. The wife of Barack Obama, President of the United States

25. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

26. <https://www.facebook.com/zrahnavard?v=info>

27. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

28. <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/0/4161/25990>

29. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

30. <http://www1.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum=100908825702>

husband and Karroubi, would become one of the three prominent faces of the protests.<sup>31</sup>

In the course of the demonstration, a group of protesters was killed at the hands of security police, and a great number of them detained. Rahnavard's role was to highlight this reality in her media appearances. In this period, she stood beside Mousavi in the most difficult of circumstances, having assumed responsibility for some of the movement's leadership. She became a source of comfort by visiting the families of political prisoners and those who had lost their lives in the protests. In a note addressed to Rahnavard, the journalist Jila Baniyaghub wrote that Rahnavard was greatly concerned for the families of the political prisoners while recognizing no difference between her own comrades and those jailed for other political reasons. She was more interested in attending to forgotten inmates and lesser-known casualties: "Those days they very often went to visit the families of the political prisoners and martyrs of the Green Movement. You'd say that, even if it's important to see such people, you preferred those whose names had been forgotten, those who were less often sought after. You went to Omid's house, in the southern portion of Tehran, a place whose name you'd never heard of. You went to see the family of the martyred Misam Abadi, who were also living in the southern part of the city – nearly the outskirts."<sup>32</sup>

The government of Iran regarded the Green Movement as a threat. After cracking down on the main body and middle ranks of the movement, authorities eventually hunted down the leadership of the civil and political activity. When, on February 15, 2011, the people affirmatively responded to Mousavi and Karroubi's call to again occupy the streets, a decisive order was issued for the house arrest of the leadership. From February 16 onward, all their communication with the outside world was cut off and security police stationed inside their home.<sup>33</sup> This state of affairs gave way to full house arrest, which continues today.

## The People's Rights

As a widely-known civil and political figure, Rahnavard's life comprises many different chapters. As a rule she's undertaken to make her own positions on various issues clear by way of interviews, speeches, and writings. Very often, media outlets like to focus on her personal life, her relationship with Mousavi, her childhood, her views on the hejab, and her particular style of dress, pestering her with such questions. On the subject of the colorful clothes she wears along with her Islamic hejab, she says that "The Almighty created color for everyone; my clothes indicate this fact. The issue, however, is that both good and bad use can be made of color. It's important to protect the juridical boundaries that relate to the hejab, to which I am firmly committed."<sup>34</sup> Rahnavard is furthermore at odds with pressure exerted on youth dress codes: "A person doesn't have the right to patrol other people, pressuring them not to wear color, or some shape, or some brand – things which are matters of taste. The maturity and common sense of society - people, women, and youth – ought to be

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31. <http://bit.ly/1Cznq2B>

32. <http://www.zhila.eu.com/spip.php?article376>

33. <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/11/29/klm-48021>

34. <http://fararu.com/vdcgz9x.ak9t34prra.html>

respected.”<sup>35</sup>

Rahnavard prefers to be recognized as an artist or intellectual rather than a politician and says of her own childhood that “My life has been rife with contradiction, contrast, and variation. I grew up in a large family with two kinds of thought, ranging from traditional religiosity to nationalist liberalism, even communism. Thus freedom of thought occupied a special place in our family. My father was an officer, though one at odds with the Shah’s regime. For just this reason we were forced to live in a different corner of the country every six months, a difficulty which introduced abundance of variation into my life.”<sup>36</sup>

Rahnavard has always emphasized her interest in civil society work: “I’ve never wanted to be a political leader. I’ve wanted to be a freedom-fighter active in the public sphere. I’ve always held back from entering the government, preferring work in art and the university instead. But if you deem me a follower of freedom, I’m prepared to pay any cost to insist on the rights of the people.”<sup>37</sup>

## Islamism and Democracy

Rahnavard says of her own acquaintance with Mousavi: “Mousavi and I have something in common; both of us wanted to overthrow the Shah’s regime and had novel criticisms pursuant to that situation. In fact all the young dissident people on faculty had such points of view... afterwards another, more important thing would overlap between us: we were both artists. Later still we realized we were both subversives. When the Islamist tide surged, it pulled me in fully, even more than it pulled in Mousavi. My mind was entirely empty; he at least had the necessary fundamentals.”<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere she remarked “From our marriage onward, Mousavi and I have had an arrangement to struggle to build a new regime of full freedom and democracy. The agreement still stands, and we labor and advise each other accordingly.”<sup>39</sup>

## Defender of the Rights of Women

One of Rahnavard’s most beloved causes is women’s rights. In her time on the Women’s Social and Cultural council, she opposed gender-based university quotas. Expressing her enthusiasm over the high number of female students enrolled in universities, she said of women’s demands that “I’ve been active in the area of women’s rights for three decades. It seems to me that, at the present time, women’s demands are at a level not matched in our contemporary history. Even in Khatami’s eight years they didn’t reach this apogee. This is because women are rigorously comparing themselves with those all over the world, and coming to see that even if they don’t have more than those other

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35. <http://fararu.com/vdcgzn9x.ak9t34prra.html>

36. <http://fararu.com/vdcgzn9x.ak9t34prra.html>

37. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA\\_ts0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA_ts0)

38. <http://fararu.com/vdcgzn9x.ak9t34prra.html>

39. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA\\_ts0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA_ts0)

women, they don't have less, either. Particularly from the angles of social and intellectual activity... Women's issues are at their peak right now. With this in mind I'm happy that elections are beginning for the tenth presidency of the republic, with women's demands at their apex. - in the hope that the necessary harmony between women's conditions and their demands and the decisions of the three branches of government shall come to pass, and that these demands shall be accomplished to the extent possible."<sup>40</sup>

Rahnavard thinks of freedom and democracy among her fundamental ideals alongside women's rights, saying that she's struggled in this field across several different spheres: "From the victory of the revolution until the Reformist government, I was only a simple teacher. Afterwards, at the insistence of the government, I accepted that I should go into political life from the public sphere and become a political consultant for Khatami. My recommendations always had to do with freedom and democracy and innovation in Islamic thought, which Khatami was also pursuing. I'd been a university president for eight years, and I'd fight to realize my ideals of freedom, democracy, and women's rights at the academy."<sup>41</sup>

In the likely event of Mousavi's election, Rahnavard said of her would-be role at the president's side that: "It seems to me very regular, natural, and legal, and reasonable that opinions be expressed before them, so that we wouldn't have to pay a price on the world stage and that, domestically and internally, we could present a model of cooperation and sympathy between man and wife. Perhaps the reason for this mistake was the prevailing ignorance of constructive relations between spouses among the strata of tastes which had not given our responsibility a chance. But I'm hopeful that, afterwards, such a thing will happen."<sup>42\*</sup>

## The Misery of Failed Ideals

After the Green Movement took shape, Rahnavard, in her capacity as a leader, undertook to keep the spirit of struggle and resistance alive. Having nurtured close relationships with the families of political prisoners and those who had lost their lives, she said of her own role: "According to Dr. Shariati, these who have passed on have done the work of Hossein; we who realize it must do the work of Zeynab. If Zeynab had not been at Ashura, the message of that day would never have reached the ears of the world and its freedom-seekers. The families of political prisoners can spread the message of the Green Movement, which is a continuation of the holy battle of Ashura - in the form of letters, pursuing justice, visiting Marjah, writing to prominent freedom fighters all over the world, and connecting with every global movement for freedom. These are some of the ways that families can play this important role."<sup>43</sup>

At this time, Rahnavard was endeavoring to express the people's demands of the government: "I don't think of the current government as legitimate, but nonetheless it has a duty to fulfill the people's

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40. <http://fararu.com/vdcgz9x.ak9t34prra.html>

41. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA\\_ts0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA_ts0)

42. <http://fararu.com/vdcgz9x.ak9t34prra.html>

43. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA\\_ts0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA_ts0)

demands. We have a people whose ideals at the time of the revolution were freedom, independence, and Islamic Republic. Unfortunately, the structure framed by these ideals has collapsed; never before have they been worse off. Today we're faced with an extremely perverse dictatorial regime which has placed a deceitful mask of Islam on its face. The people want freedom justice, democracy, and prosperity from all systems of government. We also expect the government to throw open the doors of the political prisoners and free them unconditionally. Censorship must be lifted, students and universities must be left free, strictures must not be placed in the field of human studies, domestic economic production must increase, our intense reliance on imports must be lessened, and we must build a good reputation on the international stage."<sup>44</sup>

After news of the executions of a number of civil activists became known In June 2010,<sup>45</sup> Rahnavard wrote a letter to the families of those killed, protesting the matter: "Here I relate a message to all the grieving mothers, to the women whose husbands and children have been executed or murdered at the hand of street hirelings: Oh brave, fearless women, I am beside you in this great grief and gloom. Know that this blood will be atoned for, that the heavy pain of our young people will be the price of the dawn of democracy and freedom, though also the pity and woe of all this tyranny of the regime upon the nation. A nation to which no one belongs save God the all-knowing."<sup>46</sup>

## Welcome Criticism

Another of Rahnavard's particularities is her openness to criticism and critique. She had a conversation with Nik Ahang Kuser, editor of the website Khodnevis, at a time he was becoming famous as a critic of the Green Movement with his caricatures and articles. In the course of this conversation, Rahnavard deemed the criticism a blessing for herself: "Criticism is a blessing and an opportunity for the criticized. Even when the one doing the criticizing is himself criticized, it's an opportunity for him. When we subject ourselves to criticism, we mature intellectually and personally. We render ourselves immune from egocentrism and selfishness, and at length from political dictatorship. Speech, and more distinctly, criticism of you, criticism of me, criticism of Mousavi, criticism of the Green Movement, criticism of the people – meaning when all of us are subjected to criticism, it's an opportunity for reform for all of us. Of course a cartoonist has his own particular method of criticism which takes away some of the sting and bile. The criticism of a humorist is its own sort of thing, poetic criticism in a literary domain another, and newspaper criticism has its own special form."<sup>47</sup>

In this very interview Rahnavard addressed Mousavi's insistence on "the golden era of the Imam": "Those years were years of glory and pride, along with errors and mistakes and extremisms. I'm speaking of a period thirty years ago. For the sake of consecrating that which was great and for fault-finding the shortcomings and extremism. As a critical intellectual who locked herself up in the ivory

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44. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA\\_ts0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q3zwBA_ts0)

45. <http://www.peykeiran.com/Content.aspx?ID=16510>

46. <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/15279>

47. <http://khodnevis.org/article/42512#.VAosRhpDsmN>

tower, and whose moans are recorded there, I must keep in mind that in our thoughts and beliefs we have fourteen infallibles – no more. So no individual ought to be made absolute in the first place. Why can't we come to an agreement on the principles and values of freedom and democracy?"<sup>48</sup> Emphasizing the fact that the Green Movement was rainbow of various forces, Rahnavard said that "In such a kaleidoscope of colors, why don't you grant the right to Mousavi, a religious man who adores Khomeini, to show his own hue? He's said he's beside us, meaning one color in a rainbow of thought, culture, taste, ethnicity, and language. This spectrum includes the most precious religious people and the beliefs and concerns of others. Freedom and democracy have no color. Why don't you extend to Mousavi, a religious individual who loved Khomeini, the right to refer to him kindly?" Rahnavard nonetheless recognized the executions of summer 1989 as black marks which could not simply be washed away.<sup>49</sup>

## Accomplishments

From an artistic point of view, Rahnavard's life has been a whirlwind; she's set up a great many exhibitions. She is the creator of such sculptures as "Ashura Noon," "Glass on Tales of Love," two memorial statues entitled "The Bird's Tree" and "Moon and Bird," and a piece called "Narges of the Lovers" installed in Mothers' Square in Tehran.<sup>50</sup> At present Rahnavard has written more than thirty books in the fields the Qur'an, Islam, politics, culture, and art; a portion of them have been translated to English, Arabic, Urdu, German, and Italian. Titles of her work include "Along with Moses' Uprising," "The Message of the Muslim Woman's Hijab," "The Colonial Roots of the Hejab's Discovery," "The Study of Islamic Art," "Art, Love, and Beauty," "Mourning in the Mangrove," "The Zeynab of the Age," "National Government," "Travel Letters from the Dwellings of Tibetan Women," "Aesthetic Criticism in Islam," "Christianity and Marxism," "Modernism, the Women's Discourse," "The Philosophy of Art and the Social Approach," "Phenomenal Allusion in Horrible Beings\*," and "Postmodernism and Iranian Art."<sup>51</sup>

In the year 2004, Rahnavard was chosen as one of 2,000 distinguished 21st century professors by the Cambridge International Biographical Center. The same year she was also selected as the fiftieth personality on a list of prominent Iranian intelligentsia by the Cultural Pride Association.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, in 2007, Rahnavard became the first woman in history to achieve full professorship in the faculty of arts at the University of Tehran.<sup>53</sup> In 2009, she was named one of the world's top intellectuals by Foreign Policy magazine.<sup>54</sup>

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48. <https://khodnevis.org/article/42512#.VAosRhpDsmN>

49. <https://khodnevis.org/article/42512#.VAosRhpDsmN>

50. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

51. <http://kaleme.com/1392/05/28/klm-155342/>

52. <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/84949>

53. <http://bit.ly/1u20uot>

54. <http://atf/13dgCKe>

## Now What?

This year, Rahnavard will make the fourth year of her house arrest beside Mousavi. No one besides those close to the family can possibly visit the two, and even family members are strictly limited in their appointments. The only time that persons other than family have been able to see them in close quarters took place in March 2014, when the pair were taken to Rahnavard's mother by security agents. A group of teachers and families of political prisoners had also incidentally gone to visit. Mahsume Dehghan, spouse of lawyer and advocate of human rights and political prisoners Abdolfateh Soltani, reports that Rahnavard's only suggestion in the course of the visit was that "we all must prepare to achieve our demands."<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps Rahnavard, confined beside her husband, is these days busy drawing portraits of Neda Aghasoltani, as she has said previously.<sup>56</sup> She and Mousavi remain faithful to everything they committed themselves to with the people, living with the Green Movement even still: "The Green Movement occupied all of us; these days it's the entirety of our lives. The green movement is the crystallization of thirty years of our unrequited ideals – perhaps even a hundred years, from the Constitutional period until the Islamic Revolution. Mousavi and I think, breathe, and live the Green Movement. The Green Movement wasn't born yesterday. Look at the word itself; green is the crystallization of a great many of the beautiful ideals of our people."<sup>57</sup>

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55. <http://bit.ly/1pEHTJ8>

56. One of those who lost their lives during the Green Movement

57. <http://www.iranianuk.com/article.php5?id=44989>

