

Not available for publication
before 1 p.m. on 10 December,
2023.

Check against delivery

THE
NOBEL
PEACE
PRIZE

Nobel Lecture

given by

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2023

Narges Mohammadi

Delivered by

Kiana and Ali Rahmani

Oslo, 10 December, 2023.

Copyright © The Nobel Foundation, Stockholm, 2023.

General permission is granted for the publication in newspapers in any language.
Publication in periodicals or books, or in digital or electronic forms, otherwise than in summary,
Requires the consent of the Foundation. On all publications in full or in major parts the
above underlined copyright notice must be applied.

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I express my gratitude to the honorable members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee for awarding the prestigious and honorable Nobel Peace Prize to the glorious movement of Women, Life, Freedom and to a woman, a human rights defender, and a democracy advocate, who is imprisoned. Your meaningful and powerful support is deeply appreciated.

I am confident that the undeniable impact of the Nobel Peace Prize on the recent powerful movement of Iranians for peace, freedom, and democracy will go beyond the strength of individual struggle and resistance, and this gives me hope and inspires me.

I am one of the millions of proud and resilient Iranian women who have risen up against oppression, repression, discrimination, and tyranny. I remember the unnamed and courageous women who have lived a life of resistance in various areas of relentless oppression.

I write this message from behind the high, cold walls of a prison. I am a Middle Eastern woman, and come from a region which, despite its rich civilization, is now trapped amid war, the fire of terrorism, and extremism. I am an Iranian woman, a proud and honorable contributor to civilization, who is currently under the oppression of a despotic religious government. I am a woman prisoner who, in enduring deep and soul-crushing suffering resulting from the lack of freedom, equality, and democracy, has recognized the necessity of her existence and has found faith.

In the midst of the flames of violence and the perpetuation of tyranny, our cause has for years been more about survival than the improvement of our quality of life. Essentially, it has become about the possibility to stay alive, survive, and live in a world where human life is exposed, without protection or shield, to the power of arrogant authoritarian governments, and remains helpless against everything.

In the current world, there is a significant and alienating gap between these two situations. We are in the struggle to stay alive. This is our reality. We live that struggle consciously and voluntarily, taking action that may not guarantee a safe life.

Tyranny is an endless, boundless malevolence which for a long time has cast its grim shadow over millions of displaced human beings. Tyranny turns life into death, blessing into lament, and comfort into torment. Tyranny oppresses humanity, free will, and human dignity. Tyranny is the other side of the coin of war. The intensity of both is devastating; one directly, with its destructive flames of visible devastation, the other insidiously and deceitfully, tearing apart humanity.

Giving up one's life in the valley of terror and the insecurity of tyranny is like living the frantic life of an unarmed, defenseless human under fire from missiles and bullets.

Tyranny and war create a multitude of victims, and not only those who lose their lives; tyranny and war challenge the humanity and dignity of the survivors, the observers, and those who remain silent. Who can claim that, in this struggle, humanity remains?

The people, the determining factor in the democracy equation in Iran.

Respected audience,

With this introduction, I want to revisit the moment when Ms. Reiss-Andersen announced the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and the echoes of Ms. Reiss-Andersen's statement. To the beautiful and meaningful slogan of the Iranian people's movement: Women, Life, Freedom.

I opened my Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech by citing the name of the Iranian people's movement, and the focal point of my analysis and strategy is the people of Iran and Iranian society.

The complex equation of fundamental changes and developments aimed at achieving democracy, freedom, and equality in Iran is contingent on the determining factor of the people, although other fixed and variable parameters also play a crucial role in this equation and should not be overlooked.

The people of Iran have strived for the realization of democracy, freedom, and equality. They have consistently emphasized non-violent protests and civil resistance in their pursuit of these demands, seizing every opportunity to build a society built on peace, prosperity, and development. However, the world is witnessing a relentless and ruthless government opposing the civil demands of its people for freedom and equality, by means of oppression, massacres, executions,

and imprisonment. Democracy, due to its inherent capacity for freedom and equality, has been a fundamental demand of Iranian society, and almost unanimously, civil society calls for fundamental changes and a transition to democracy as a component of the future political system of Iran.

Islamic Republic: A tyrannical and anti-women religious government

In the political arena, the Islamic Republic blocks any political movement in society, restricts political opportunities, and suppresses both collective and individual actions. The Islamic Republic is fundamentally alienating itself from its people.

Due to an uncompromising approach, a rigid structure, non-democratic laws, and opaque and fraudulent mechanisms and procedures, elections and voting are irrelevant to the majority of the people of Iran. The Islamic Republic has reduced the coefficient of political participation to zero, severely suppressing independent civil organizations, and strives to leave no space for freedom beyond its interference and supervision. The government systematically deploys discrimination based on religion, gender, and ethnicity to target others on its agenda.

In the judicial realm, it must be explicitly stated that the judicial power of the Islamic Republic is a manifestation of injustice and tyranny, a violator of human rights. The independence of the judicial branch is impossible when the head of this branch is directly appointed by the Supreme Leader and revolutionary courts are under the control of security and military institutions. What is not achievable in this judicial system, is justice.

In the cultural domain, the government has endeavored to sustain its ideological machinery and propaganda organizations at an exorbitant cost to maintain ideological acceptance and widespread propaganda in Iranian society. Despite all this, the government's ideological machinery has lost its functionality, challenging the legitimacy of the government.

In the economic arena, the system supports rentierism, cronyism, and plundering by handing over monopolies and special privileges to groups loyal to itself, turning the economic sphere into a system of plunder and oppression. Systemic corruption, inefficiency, mismanagement, embezzlement, and looting of public assets have plunged Iranian society into poverty, deep inequalities, unemployment, and further disarray. The severe consequences of these policies put the lives of the people and their dignity and status at risk of collapse and destruction. The regime's response to protesters has always been to create cases, arrests, imprisonment, and bullets. The events of November 2019 bear witness to this claim.

I want to emphasize that the Islamic Republic has jeopardized many of the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other human rights treaties, impacting the political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of people's lives.

The Women, Life, Freedom movement: an accelerator of the democratic process

In such circumstances, the widespread Women, Life, Freedom movement emerged as a continuation of historical struggles, shaped by the agency of Iranian women, following the killing of Mahsa Amini, also known as Zhina Amini, and accompanied by extensive support from men and youth in Iranian society.

In this context, Iranian women in particular, are confronting the religious, authoritarian regime, enhancing our capability and opportunity to challenge cultural and institutional traditions, and becoming a powerful force in the struggle and the resistance movement, outlining a vision of governance and democracy for a future Iran.

Women have gained this influential position through 45 years of experience with discrimination and oppression in the private and public spheres and with sexual and gender apartheid, counteracted by their tireless resistance.

The Women, Life, Freedom movement, with its overarching idea of a transition from religious tyranny, expedited the process of achieving democracy, freedom, and equality in Iran, lending clarity and significance to the historical demands of the Iranian people. This movement has contributed significantly to the expansion of civil resistance in Iran, encompassing movements of women, youth, students, teachers, workers, human rights activists, environmentalists, and others. Essentially, it is a movement for fundamental change.

The movement functions as a subset of contentious politics, grounded in the trajectory of civil rights struggles, social movements, and the relentless efforts of the people to achieve a civil society. Despite being currently under severe government repression, it remains alive and dynamic.

The intensified oppression of women through the mandatory hijab, – a disgraceful government policy – will not force us to conform because we believe that the mandatory hijab imposed by the government is neither a religious obligation or a cultural tradition, but rather a means of maintaining authority and submission throughout society. The abolition of the mandatory hijab is equivalent to the

abolition of all roots of religious tyranny and the breaking of the chains of authoritarian oppression.

The reality is that the regime of the Islamic Republic is at its lowest level of legitimacy and popular support, situated in a position of unstable equilibrium, and the emergence of any element as a catalyst for change? will mark the final form of opposition policies and the transition from religious tyranny. This is because belief in democracy and human rights is not limited to intellectual matters among Iranian intellectuals; it has been actualized in collective and individual actions across the whole of Iranian society.

Strategy for strengthening civil society and ensuring human rights in Iran

Respected audience,

The powerful and widespread movement of the Iranian people requires the growth, expansion, and empowerment of the institutions of civil society and the development of an organizational? structure to mobilize the forces within the movement.

Furthermore, civil society is the essence of democracy, and without a strong civil society, the future of democracy in Iran will not be guaranteed. Iranian civil society has valuable historical experiences and, despite severe government repression, has continued to survive in various forms. Now is the time for international civil society to support Iranian civil society, and I will exert all my efforts in this regard.

The realization of democracy is contingent upon the realization of human rights. Human rights have reached the level of historical awareness among the people of Iran and constitute the focal point of the activities of many movements, currents, and groups. It has the capacity and power to create widespread national solidarity and coalitions.

The support of global public opinion through reputable international media will undoubtedly have significant effects on the continuity and strengthening of the democratic movement of the Iranian people.

Respected audience,

Undoubtedly, the people of Iran will continue their struggle, but in today's globalized world, the importance of the role of governments and global civil society

– including international organizations and institutions, media, and independent non-governmental organizations – is undeniable.

I deeply appreciate the support of international human rights organizations and of women's civil society organizations, artists, the global PEN network of writers, intellectuals, and global media for their impactful support of the Women, Life, Freedom movement.

Nonetheless, the reality is that there is a lack of serious attention, practical coherence, and proactive approach to supporting the triumph of the Iranian people on the part of governments and international organizations. The policies and strategies of Western governments have been ineffectual in truly empowering the Iranian people to achieve their goals, making democracy more achievable in this part of the world, and ensuring peace.

Human rights do not come about in a vacuum. In Iran, human rights are under the multilateral pressures of powerful oppressive forces. Western governments should not postpone democracy and human rights by adopting strategies focused on the continuation of the Islamic Republic's rule. It is expected that the global civil society will provide more tangible support to the Iranian people's efforts for democratic transition and non-violent struggle to achieve peace, democracy, and human rights without further delay.

Strategy for the formation of international will and consensus

Respected audience,

Recognition of the right to national sovereignty and the right of peoples and nations to determine their destiny, after the heavy cost of war, marks a highly progressive chapter in the history of humanity and a significant step towards safeguarding peace. However, history shows that the issue of aggression and violation by rulers against their own people's fundamental rights remains a significant and unresolved problem, endangering global peace and causing suffering to humanity.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations and the existing mechanisms, treaties, and international and European courts have not prevented persistent and brutal suppression, destruction of lives, violation of the fundamental rights of individuals, torture, discrimination, and oppression by rulers against their defenseless populations. In today's world, economics, religion, and governance in many nations are under the sway of powerful interest groups

with entrenched histories, and the newly formed institution of human rights is under pressure from those institutions.

More violations have been perpetrated of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights than of any other international convention. What is the solution? Has the time not come for the world to urgently find a unified and coherent solution?

It is my belief that the globalization of peace and human rights is more fundamental and effective than the globalization of anything else.

The reality is that the consequences and repercussions of human rights violations – which are the cost of maintaining authoritarian governments – do not remain within geographical borders. The severe and irreparable consequences of migration, displacement, war, unrest, military interventions, and the creation of environments conducive to terrorist groups and extremism, such as the wide-ranging consequences of interstate warfare, spread throughout the world.

It seems that in the globalized world, either human rights will become respected internationally or human rights violations will continue to spread across state borders. I will do my share, alongside human rights activists and defenders, toward the global realization of human rights.

Respected audience,

I am honored to be the second recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize from the proud country of Iran, alongside my esteemed mentor and colleague, Ms. Shirin Ebadi. Iran, with its ancient and illustrious civilization, has always been a symbol of elevation and progress. We are the inheritors of this civilization and its values.

Our history, cultural heritage, and civilization are not only our connections to the past, but also shape our future and provide a foundation for us to lean on together. We stand for democracy and human rights, which is perhaps not surprising for such resilient and hardworking people who have been pioneers in advocating for limiting government power, seeking freedom, and pursuing justice in the region.

The elements of stability and continuous resistance and struggle in the composition and fabric of the history, culture, and beliefs of the Iranian people have been powerful and influential. The current resistance by the people, representing diverse ethnicities, religions, and political perspectives and from all over Iran, is commendable.

The Women, Life, Freedom movement is indebted to all the previous resistance movements, from the widespread and bloody protests against the fraudulent presidential elections of 1988 to the water protests in the bloody November of 2019; from the protests against the downing of the Ukrainian passenger plane to the ongoing protests by teachers, workers, retirees, and other social groups.

Today, the youth of Iran have transformed the streets and public spaces into an arena for widespread civil resistance. Resistance is alive, and the struggle endures.

Continued resistance and non-violence are the best strategies. This is the difficult path that Iranians have always taken, relying on their historical awareness and collective will. The Iranian people will dismantle obstruction and despotism through their persistence. Have no doubt – this is certain.

With hope and eagerness, and alongside the resilient and courageous women and men of Iran, I extend my hand to all forces, movements, and individuals that focus on peace, the global covenant of human rights, and on democracy. I am confident that the light of freedom and justice will shine brightly on the land of Iran. At that moment, we will celebrate the victory of democracy and human rights over tyranny and authoritarianism, and the anthem of the people's triumph on the streets of Iran will resonate worldwide.

Narges Mohammadi
Azar 1402 (Dec 2023)
Evin Prison, Iran