

Iranian Women's
One Million Signatures

Campaign for Equality

The Inside Story

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani



Women's Learning Partnership
Translation Series

Iranian Women's
One Million Signatures

Campaign for Equality

The Inside Story

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani

Foreword by
Mahnaz Afkhami

Women's Learning Partnership
Translation Series

Copyright © 2009 by Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)
ISBN Number: 978-0-9814652-0-3

Design: Xanthusdesign.com

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

BY NOUSHIN AHMADI KHORASANI

Women Without a Past, 1998

Women's Historical Calendar, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2007, 2008

Senator: Biography of Senator Mehrangiz Manouchehrian,
co-authored with Parvin Ardalan, 2003

Under the Shadow of the Godfathers, 2003

Diaries: Sixteen Iranian Women Reflect on Their Daily Lives, 2008

CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	1
----------------------	----------

PREFACE.....	5
---------------------	----------

CHAPTER ONE

Why the One Million Signatures Campaign?.....	11
The Perils of Polygamy.....	16
Women and Men Under Polygamy.....	19
Answering the Critics.....	30

CHAPTER TWO

The One Million Signatures Movement: Toward a New Era in Iran	35
Without a Place: The Female Experience in Iran	40
Democracy from the Bottom Up.....	42
Face-to-Face Dialogue and Social Change	46
Feminism and Islam.....	49
Another New Generation: Men in the Campaign.....	51

CHAPTER THREE

Internal Challenges of the One Million Signatures Campaign	53
The Goal or the Journey? Means versus Ends.....	55
Lobbying versus Informing	58
Individualism versus Conformism.....	61
A Perfect but Limited Opportunity.....	65
Organization: Tight but Not Too Tight	69

CHAPTER FOUR

The One Million Signatures Campaign and Other Movements	73
Interaction with Political Parties.....	75
Relations with Other Women’s Movements.....	77
The Problem of the Transnationals	80

EPILOGUE	83
-----------------------	-----------

POSTSCRIPT

Ten Days that Shook Iran: The Women’s Rights Movement and the 2009 Presidential Election.....	87
--	----

APPENDICES

I. One Million Signatures Campaign Petition Demanding Changes to Laws That Discriminate Against Women.....	101
II. The Campaign Plan: About “One Million Signatures Demanding Changes to Discriminatory Laws”	105
III. The Effect of Laws on Women’s Lives.....	113
IV. Which Laws Are We Seeking to Change?	129
V. The Family Protection Act (1975).....	141
VI. One Million Signatures Campaign Timeline	155
VII. Statement on the Occasion of the June 2009 Presidential Elections in Iran.....	171

ENDNOTES.....	177
----------------------	------------

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	183
-------------------------------	------------

FOREWORD

The volume you hold in your hands is the second in a series of translations launched by the Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). The goal of the series is to make available to the widest possible audience works of importance to women that are produced in the developing world. We focus especially on those that define women's issues, identify fields of opportunity, and chart strategies to improve women's lives.

The present volume bears a close connection to the first, *Guide to Equality in the Family in the Maghreb* (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). Both books offer well-researched arguments that bring together thinking on religion, human rights, and constitutional and national law with insights from the social sciences in ways that will aid the cause of reform. The Maghreb case drives home the value of raising awareness about women's issues at both the popular and elite levels, the need for NGOs to work together, and the importance of maintaining a disciplined focus on issues of immediate concern to women. In the pages that follow, Iranian activist Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani ably shows that campaigners for women's rights in Iran have moved beyond the basic

tenets of the Maghreb campaign to advance new understandings and new methods of activism.

Iran's One Million Signatures Campaign for the Reform of Discriminatory Laws is an extraordinary phenomenon. It is democratic, nonhierarchical, open, and evolving in a polity that is none of those things. The campaign brings to mind the image of raindrops falling, forming rivulets, and then converging on an ever-larger scale until they become a river. First there is a murmur, a trickle, and then, gradually, a torrent of voices sounding together and reaching far and wide.

The genius of the movement lies in its capacity to connect its members' thoughts and deeds in ways that adapt and change as conditions require. The context is on the one hand the clash between an Iranian civil society with a century-old record of growing sophistication and important roles for women, and on the other an archaic legal system that cannot be reconciled with the exigencies of modern life. With each passing day, the tension between these two contradictory realities ratchets up a bit, fueling a sense of urgency that may help to explain why so many in the campaign are so lucid and selfless about their struggle. It is almost as if they simply cannot afford to be any other way, given what is at stake and the gravity of the circumstances.

Noushin's account provides a valuable case study of how to build a movement in the 21st century, not only to bring change in societies ruled by autocratic governments or influenced by radical fundamentalism, but also in the more open and tolerant societies that have yet to achieve full equality for women. As a chief reason for the campaign's astounding success in mobilizing a powerful network, she cites the deliberate practice of constant, searching discussion among a core group of experienced activists who are also open to the views of the thousands of younger women who have thronged to become campaign activists themselves, often at considerable personal risk.

This is not to say that all the lessons Noushin cites are positive ones. She describes the ways that thirty years of revolutionary tumult, preceded

by more than a decade of ideological infighting, smashed oppositional politics into often-useless shards. She then shows, however, how the founders of the One Million Signatures Campaign learned from this and managed to set aside ideological differences, avoid distractions and emphasize specific, concrete demands to attract the support of women from a variety of backgrounds and belief systems. Agreement need not be total. It can be centered on incremental changes and reforms that are thoroughly within the realm of the plausible.

This “circumstantial” or issue-based approach to feminism has not only won the campaign legions of supporters, but also helped it to form a nimble coalition of women’s groups. Together they were able to push back parliamentary passage of a nefarious Family Protection Act first proposed by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The same strategy led six organizations and seven hundred individual activists to prepare a list of women’s demands for presentation to the 2009 presidential candidates. That effort mobilized many women who were unhappy with the regime’s pre-selection of candidates and the consequent lack of choice. They took advantage of the election campaign to connect with other networks and expand their own.

Their demands led the two preapproved reform candidates, Mir Hussein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, to shift their public positions toward gender equality, moving away from the complementarity model for male-female relations favored by the Islamic Republic. The campaigns of both men also then vowed to support ratification of the UN’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)—a document that Iran’s Guardian Council has condemned as anti-Islamic.

The diversity of women and their massive participation made their power explicit. It created a dynamic relationship between their visibility and their power—each strengthened and augmented the other. The massive demonstrations that broke out across Iran after the contested presidential election of 12 June 2009 further demonstrated

the strength of the women's network, which now seemed to work as one with the labor and student movements.

Observers noted the display of ways and means for linking seasoned activists with one another and with everyday citizens through face-to-face contacts and door-to-door campaigning. Attentive Iran-watchers also marveled at other achievements: the campaign's robust understanding that its aim is not merely to get a million autographs but to recruit a million activists; the maturity with which the campaign has dealt with the Iranian diaspora as well as regional and international advocacy organizations; the campaign's deft use of state-of-the-art technology to reach backers at home and abroad; the skillful marrying of ideas to actions; and finally, the intersectionality revealed by the campaign's ability to integrate the women's efforts with those of numerous men (often from student, labor, democracy, and human-rights groups). Intersectionality is an ideal more often praised than realized, but the One Million Signatures Campaign has shown how the thing can be done.

In the end, the simple courage and perseverance of women whose peaceful signature-gathering is condemned as a crime against the state reminds us that ideas and beliefs cannot be silenced. During the brief three-and-a-half years that the One Million Signatures Campaign has been in existence, every original signatory of its charter has been harassed, imprisoned, dragged into court, and sentenced to months or years of imprisonment. Many others have been subjected to similar punishment. But still the campaign grows.

The rivulets that wended their way to become a stream, and then made a rushing river, keep cascading on. The torrent flows along the long arc of history that Martin Luther King, Jr., once said bends toward justice. The sound of its waters is now so loud that all the world can hear.

Mahnaz Afkhami

Founder and President

Women's Learning Partnership

PREFACE

The “Campaign for the Collection of One Million Signatures to Reform Discriminatory Laws Against Women”—or more concisely, the One Million Signatures Campaign—got its start on 12 June 2006 after a gathering held to mark Iranian Women’s Unity Day in Tehran’s Haft-Tir Square. At the gathering, a variety of groups representing a broad spectrum of ideas had come together to demand the reform of laws, especially family laws, that discriminate against women. In one form or another, Iranian women had been seeking such changes for the better part of a century. But the One Million Signatures Campaign would represent a more broad based and dynamic push for reform in this area than the country had ever before seen.

After more meetings and preparation that stretched into the summer of 2006, the campaign published three key documents. These were: 1) a petition for legal change that was to be the instrument bearing the one million signatures; 2) a plan that briefly defines and explains the campaign’s goals and methods and sketches the duties of its various committees; and 3) a pamphlet, titled *The Effect of Laws on*

Women's Lives, for campaign activists to hand out as part of their efforts to elicit signatures.¹ (Each document is reproduced in the Appendices to this volume.)

The documents were and are meant to connect the efforts of the campaign's diverse members—meaning both activists and petition-signers—to a thought-action continuum. The documents also reflect the foundation and shared understandings of a large cross-section of the current women's movement, and as such are of great importance to the history of the movement.

The actual gathering of signatures began on 27 August 2006, with the goal of eventually persuading at least a million people (or about one out of every seventy Iranians) to affix their names to the petition.



Now, several years later, the One Million Signatures Campaign has attracted many allies and activists. It has created a loose, unofficial network and has opened wide new horizons as a fresh type of civil movement. In charting the path and pioneering the methods that it has, this movement has transformed established local and regional notions of what an advocacy campaign can be and do. It is not restricted to the Internet; it is out in the streets. It is not merely compiling information and publishing studies; it is trying to foster change. It goes well beyond such traditional models as exist in the region. No one in the Middle East has seen its like before.

The One Million Signatures movement is a living thing. Every day people join while others leave or at least become temporarily inactive. It has no particular headquarters or central command; it is nowhere and everywhere, placeless yet ubiquitous. Some come, work for a time, and raise awareness of the problematic laws among other women in their hometowns and provinces. Others leave the network and return

later. Still others take part wholeheartedly in the campaign, making it their own, and then leave it behind for any number of reasons. At every juncture, new people enter or step up their activity. Thus, a live and dynamic though unstructured and unfixed network of participants is moving forward ceaselessly. No one person can regulate the pace of this movement. As the Noble laureate and human rights attorney Shirin Ebadi has noted, “Even if we wanted to, we couldn’t stop the One Million Signatures Campaign.”

In a similar way, today no one person (or group) can claim leadership of the movement. No one can consider herself its guardian because, truly, no person can consider the movement a mirror of all of her inner thoughts, opinions, and ideas. This is where we find ourselves with a new, polycentric movement composed of a pluralistic fabric. The reverberations of this pragmatic movement have been felt throughout the land as a force that is beyond individual persons and groups, as well as beyond the operational limits of a campaign, as that term is currently understood in Iran.



The essays in this book flow from my personal impressions, understandings, and concerns. Some of these pieces have been published before. Yet the common themes upon which they dwell leads me to see them as belonging together between a single set of covers.

These articles, mostly published on websites dedicated to women’s issues (including *Zanestan* and *Change for Equality*), as well as some new chapters that I have added for the purpose of enhancing the coherence of the work, are in fact the results of numerous questions with which I have been grappling. What appears here are the indefinite and, of course, refutable answers that I have devised in response to those questions. It should go without saying that these answers, born

of my personal understanding and judgement as one of hundreds of members of this campaign, are not necessarily the ones that would be given by other activists in the movement. The One Million Signatures Campaign is brimming with diverse understandings, interpretations, and views, and I can claim only to speak for myself.

The diverse inclinations, thoughts, and cultures found among the campaign's members are direct expressions of our multicultural society. This is especially the case because the movement's open atmosphere has successfully provided a suitable setting for its members' talents, tastes, and opinions to flourish.

My main reason for putting together this collection has been to express my gratitude to the campaign—to the compatriots and true friends with whom I have worked and shared my heart and mind. Whether we talked face to face, walked together from street to street, or exchanged ideas via letters, our cooperation has provided me with rare experiences and new knowledge. This is true of beloved colleagues whose positive efforts I witnessed step by step, though from a distance, as well as of those who, with much humility, carried out their work anonymously. As a result, I decided to document a small part of the creative and energizing atmosphere of this *de facto* Feminist School that the campaign has created.

I hope that, with the publication of this collection, other members and supporters of the campaign will also find themselves moved to leave behind accounts of other parts of the effervescent reality of this young movement by writing down their own experiences, impressions, and understandings. Indeed, as members of a dynamic and fruitful movement, today it is the duty of each and every one of us to document as best we can our concerns, understandings, and interpretations so that historians may one day recover a sense of our movement's nature and meaning as we who were present at the creation understood them.

The four chapters that follow reflect the movement's complex influence at every turn. In the first, I attempt to articulate the campaign's legal demands on the basis of the day-to-day realities of my own life. In Chapter Two, I describe the nature and results of the face-to-face dialogue method that has become the campaign's trademark. Chapter Three deals with the complex problems of the campaign's internal relations. In this chapter, I discuss the challenges and contradictions existing in the operation and the reciprocal relations between the campaign's members from the perspective of my personal understanding. In the fourth and final chapter, I take a closer look at how the One Million Signatures movement has interacted with other social movements, especially women's movements abroad, as well as with political parties.

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani

Tehran, Iran

1

WHY THE ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN?

As Iranian women, we suffer as a result of unjust laws that make us second-class citizens in the very land of our birth. Our country's legal system defines a woman's human and social rights as half those accorded to a man. Discriminatory laws harm not only individual women, but also the family, for they have rendered relations within it dysfunctional. These laws have brought on a crisis, as women throughout our ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse society recognize a shared sense of suffering that cries out to be lifted.

As is so often the case, the weakest are the hardest hit. As an educated woman with enough money to pay for lawyers; as a follower of the country's official religion (Shia Islam); and as a native speaker of its official language (Persian), I can avoid or cushion the impact of these unjust laws. Women without my advantages, however, cannot. Hundreds of thousands of women from the poorer classes suffer terribly because of these laws—laws whose elimination or reform would have a staggeringly beneficial effect on their lives.

Many Iranian girls from underprivileged families—girls for whom travel, higher education, a job outside the home, or the single life generally are simply not options—nonetheless look to marriage as a liberation of sorts because it promises to let them exchange the tutelage of several male relatives (fathers, brothers, uncles) for the supervision of only one husband. Improving our cruelly unequal family laws would help these girls immeasurably.

Whether in the areas of child-custody rights, domestic violence, or the laws of marriage that allow polygamy, fairer and more humane legislation could prove a turning point for countless Iranian women who now live in fear of losing their children, being beaten or killed with impunity, or waking up one day to discover that their husband plans to take on a second wife.

Will equal and humane laws fully rectify the situation of women in Iran? No, but by the same token, no such rectification can be imagined without them. The legal changes that the campaign seeks are no small goal. The significant effects that would flow from them are all the more reason to devote ample energy, as the campaign does through its educational efforts, to the work of preparing the ground for them, not only in the legal and political worlds, but within the setting of Iranian society and culture as well.

It is also important not to underestimate the degree and intensity of resistance to legal reform, first of all from official quarters. Sadly, the Islamic Republic has no shortage of decision makers who will not or cannot see how the existing legal regime has wounded so many women and families, and who offer such bizarre justifications for it that one wonders if they really live in the same country as we do.

Some officials retreat into pious praise of the family as a symbol of “love, sincerity, and abundant generosity” even as reports and statistics tell a story of domestic pathologies fed and enabled by discriminatory laws. This bitter reality is hinted at now and then by newspaper stories telling of “accidents” that are actually maimings, murders, and suicides

caused by domestic abuses that the law refuses to punish or restrain. Instead of relying romantically on families and an idealized vision of the family to take care of such problems, these reports lead us to seek the removal of laws that make it fatally easy for male heads of households to commit cruelty and violence where there should be love and peace.

Even where good intentions and a will toward domestic love and peace exist, the largely unchecked legal power that men enjoy is a great moral hazard that tends in the long run to poison family life and relations between the sexes.

The life experiences of women living under the unjust Islamic law that allows a man to take multiple wives and divorce any of them whenever he wishes show that in many Iranian families, husbands and wives are so estranged from one another that they cannot experience love in an equal relationship.

Most violence against women and girls takes place within their families, covered up and enabled by laws that lopsidedly favor men. One study found that 52.7 percent of its female subjects had undergone physical assault during their married lives, whether by being slapped, kicked, punched, or beaten with an object. The findings also show that 27.7 percent of the women felt that they had faced "obstacles to social, intellectual, and educational growth." The barriers they reported included limits on family and social relationships, bans on seeking work outside the home, bars to further schooling, and lack of freedom to take part in social associations.²

Exact statistics for more recent years are hard to come by, but it can be confirmed that between 1976 and 1986, the number of men with more than one wife increased by about 145 percent.³ Personal accounts suggest that the numbers of men taking advantage of their legal rights to unilateral divorce and polygamy have continued to rise.

Behind the numbers are innumerable women who have found themselves first consigned to humiliation and misfortune on a

husband's whim, and then forced to confront the reality that under the law there is absolutely nothing they can do about it. Some seek a most terrible way out—by self-immolation—though that too is hard to pin down since it appears likely that many such deaths are hushed up and recorded as something else by families and local authorities anxious about their reputations.

A study conducted in the western province of Lorestan revealed that in 1997 the suicide rate among married women was twice that of married men; that women who had been homemakers accounted for the largest number of suicides; and that nearly half of all the province's suicides that year were ascribable to conflicts within families.⁴ The ranks of the campaign's activists are full of women who have all too often seen such tragedies up close, and seek legal reform as a way to help prevent more of them from happening. These women are not deterred by officials who pepper them with outlandish accusations of being in the pay of the U.S. government or seeking to engineer a "velvet revolution" against the Islamic Republic.

Another and smaller study, this one done in the town of Khodabandeh in Zanjan Province, found that about a fifth of women who had been victims of domestic violence lived in families with multiple wives, and that the number of female victims of violence in this one small town exceeded 116 during the course of a year.⁵

An in-depth study of women who have fallen into prostitution has revealed that:

Many mothers are aware of the presence of fathers and brothers in the most private realms of their daughters' lives but, for a variety of reasons, such as fear of breaking the sanctity of the family, of contributing to its disintegration, or of violent reactions, not only do they not say anything, but also they often take out their own anger and frustration on these already-victimized daughters of theirs.⁶

This study found that 88 percent of its subjects had married before the age of 17, and that approximately 36 percent of those girls had been forced to marry against their will.

The window that these studies provide into women's lives under an unfair legal regime explains the passion and resolve of the One Million Signatures Campaign. Laws that sow discord and facilitate violence need to be changed.

To the extent that they will admit such problems even exist, officials and clerics too often want to deal with them purely as matters eliciting exhortations rather than legal penalties. Thus authorities will sermonize about how beating women is "improper" according to Islamic morality and call for men to respect their wives and daughters, but will do nothing about the gigantic asymmetry that exists under a system where women must live up to absolute, readily enforceable duties to submit to their husbands' sexual demands, never to leave their husbands' sides, and so on, while men can treat their own obligations as matters of suggestion whose violation brings no real, and certainly no legal consequences.

What is needed to protect women is not preaching, but laws. If ethical lessons alone could create families filled with love and security, the defenders of equal rights would have nothing to do and would hardly be pressing the case for change, as they are, at the cost of so much trouble. Moral pronouncements are fine, but they should be conducted with an awareness that the unfair laws themselves teach baleful lessons that warp society's morals, for how moral is a society that treats one sex as a kind of master race and the other as a collection of servants with few or no rights?

The existing discriminatory laws affect the explicit as well as implicit dimensions of our day-to-day lives; they help to shape relations between women and men and parents and children; and they influence women's relationships with one another.

A country's laws play a role in forming its collective conscience and sense of morality. The legal rules that touch on family life frame and influence the relations within families. In a larger sense, these rules also determine how the family as an institution relates to the rest of society.

The family is one of society's key building blocks. The system that rules the family necessarily has a profound influence on the larger social order. Family law, in other words, reaches well beyond the family itself and affects all of society. The importance of this type of law can therefore scarcely be overstated.

THE PERILS OF POLYGAMY

As regards marriage and the family, societies tend to be one of two kinds: Either they are monogamous, meaning that a person may legally have only one spouse at a time, or they are polygamous, or more properly, polygynous, meaning that a man may legally take more than one wife at a time (Islam traditionally has allowed up to four). There have been other kinds of societies, of course, but these two have been the main types historically, and the others need not detain us here.

The two systems point toward two highly different ways of ordering gender relations within both the family itself and society as a whole. Legal systems too are, for the most part, defined by these two gender systems. Therefore, here I will compare the polygamous and the monogamous systems, solely from the perspective of the identity, rights, and lives of women.

Where polygamy is treated as legitimate, the family is defined on the basis of one man and potentially several permanent wives. In some cases, as in today's Iran, even "temporary wives" may also be permitted. No one woman can enjoy a special position under such a scheme, since her husband is legally free to go beyond the one-man-one-woman bond by marrying—or even just having temporary relations with—some other woman or women besides her.

In a society where only monogamy is legal, a man may have one or more mistresses, but such liaisons on his part can in no way have the legal status that his marriage does. Under monogamy, then, a married woman does not have to worry that a rival can at any time be instantly elevated to a legal status equal to her own as her husband's wife, with all the advantages that the marriage contract implies. A husband's extra-marital relations, in other words, can never negate the rights enjoyed by his wife. The original wife is legally his "one and only"—the sole woman officially recognized by the law, and the only one who can receive the benefits of marriage. A mistress may have the upper hand carnally and even emotionally over her lover's wife, but a mistress can never have the upper hand from a legal standpoint.

In Iran and other societies that allow polygamy, by contrast, a rival can easily shatter a woman's enjoyment of the legal benefits of marriage. In such societies, the legal institution of marriage provides a woman with no secure advantages. At any moment, her husband can bring home another wife who becomes eligible to inherit his property, with whom the first wife must share her home, and so on.

For this discriminatory system to work, the unilateral right to an easily attainable divorce must be made the sole prerogative of men. If women had the right to initiate divorce proceedings, the whole edifice could crumble since a wife could meet the threat of a rival wife's appearance by dissolving the marriage.

Iran's legal code gives husbands the upper hand in other ways as well. A man who murders an allegedly unfaithful wife, for instance, is eligible for reduced punishment. Women brought before the law for adultery can be stoned to death. Were the laws permitting polygamy and temporary marriage to be repealed, however, the application of fearsome penalties for adultery such as stoning would lose its purpose. They would be rendered moot because, in a legal system that allows polygamy, penalties for sexual relations outside marriage seem meant

primarily to control the behavior of women and not men. This differentiation exists because a system supporting polygamy and temporary marriage in fact legitimizes sexual relations outside marriage for men and only for men.

Although women can be and are sometimes treated unfairly in monogamous systems, it is undeniable that women enjoy stronger and more secure legal rights under a regime of exclusive monogamy than they do under legal regimes that allow polygamy and hence keep all wives living in fear of partial displacement.

Even though a large majority of Iranian marriages are monogamous, the country's legal scheme ignores the values that underlie monogamy. The laws lay the basis for a national understanding or convention that also governs families with monogamous values, who find themselves legally marginalized even though they form the numerical majority.

This legal system leads to institutionalized violence against women through the sheer force it accords to Islamic penal codes that give great and unchecked powers to men. The more modern and civil principles that underlie monogamy receive short shrift in Iran's judicial system, distorted as it is by the need to defend polygamy in all its gross inequality.

In addition to the legal discrimination that it imposes upon women, the system that holds polygamy to be legal has bad spiritual and emotional effects on family life. Such a system makes husbands and wives more distant than they have to be. It is archaic in that it lends itself to the primal sexual needs of men and to reproduction (an ongoing social need), but at a grave cost to the richer (and perhaps more modern) sense of the family as a place of emotional and affective bonding—a place of love, nurture, and belonging. A law code that lets one partner in a marriage add to the number of spouses is unable to regulate the inner life of the family in a healthy way. In an

age of globalization and rapid communications, when the experiences of different nations are transparent to others as never before, this has given rise to crises within the institution of the Iranian family. Most Iranians today believe that marriage is about more than simply meeting sexual and reproductive needs. But the legal system lags behind this understanding, and women suffer most from the disjuncture.

Even though most Iranian marriages today are not polygamous, polygamy's very existence as a legally available institution is a source of enormous grief and trouble to women in particular and to the family in general. Whatever defenders of the multiple-wives system may say, the truth is that it is unable to foster stable families in our society. A legal system that recognizes only monogamy will have better chances of doing so. Such a system makes more sense for Iran today in a number of ways that will benefit not only women, but all Iranians. In the establishment of monogamy as the sole legitimate form of marriage lies our best hope for securing the survival and stability of the family in our country.

WOMEN AND MEN UNDER POLYGAMY

As we have noted, in legal systems that accept polygamy, the relationship between husband and wife becomes too easily reduced to a matter of reproduction and male sexual gratification. Such a system distorts the concepts of womanhood and manhood. For instance, a man's ability to choose additional wives on the basis of his wealth breeds a crudely economic view of manhood. Womanhood, for reasons already explored, becomes fraught with insecurity, and being a wife does not mean anything near what it means in an exclusively monogamous society.

In Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, the fear of the husband marrying again is passed down from one generation of women to the next and becomes part of women's collective historical memory. Although this calamity may not actually happen in most cases, its

existence as an ever-available possibility held forth to men by the legal system weighs heavily on women's hearts and souls. Healthy and intimate emotional relations between husbands and wives are unlikely to thrive in such an atmosphere, and marriage, for women, becomes a source of insecurity more than stable identity. Becoming a mother, especially of a son, seems to offer a measure of relief and higher status, but this too can be distorting as that role takes on outsized dimensions with numerous implicit and explicit consequences for a woman's life.

Another source of protection and relief to which fearful married women often turn is their birth family. Even after years of marriage, many an anxious Iranian wife, with no right to work outside her home and no right to the exclusive affections of her husband, remains unduly reliant on her own blood family. This may address a woman's immediate needs, but again at the cost of breeding yet another form of dependency—this time not on one's husband, but on one's father or senior living male blood relative.

The values promoted by a legal system that allows polygamy also distort relations among women, filling them with a spirit of mutual suspicion and unhealthy competition. At the root of the problem, again, is the way polygamy empowers male caprice. How can a married woman form normal friendships with single women when the latter, especially if they are at all younger, must be viewed as potential rivals liable to intrude upon her marriage bond? This problem is evident in the unspoken, almost subconscious tendency of married Iranian women to shun those women among their neighbors who are widows or not yet married.

Rivalries among women exist under monogamy too, of course, but in legal systems that recognize only this form of marriage, the "other" woman at least cannot legally enter a man's family life as a second wife while his first one is still around. In such societies, high rates of divorce and so-called serial monogamy may be problems, but

at least the rights surrounding divorce are far more equally distributed among men and women. Women also suffer less economic dependence under monogamy as opposed to polygamy because they are not barred by law or custom from working outside the home. To suffer anxiety over the thought that “my husband may be cheating” is surely terrible, but the anxiety that must come with the thought that “my husband can bring up to three other women into my home as his extra wives and will then commit regular adultery with them under my own roof while the law forces me to accept this situation as entirely legitimate” is surely worse.

By liberating the willfulness of one marriage partner while severely restricting the freedom of the other, legalized polygamy builds layers of instability, mistrust, and resentment into the deepest levels of some very basic human relationships. Instead of offering people support, reassurance, and calm in a difficult world, their closest relationships become under polygamy fountainheads of worry and fear. In fact, in societies where the legal system supports polygamy, the only relationship that tends to remain reassuring and stable is the one between a mother and her child.

As mothers, women in Iran enjoy relative freedom, a stable identity, societal respect, and a lasting emotional relationship. It is through her children that a wife and mother comes into contact with society and finds her worth recognized, even if marginally. If a woman has a son, she can aspire to an even more solid position as a mother-in-law. Indeed, a son’s marriage gives a woman in a country like Iran probably the highest status she will ever gain. Even though this role too falls within the realm of the home, it nonetheless gives women some power. The power in this case is that of controlling the family’s younger women, such as the daughter-in-law and her daughters. In her book *Zanan-e Kotak-khordeh* [The Beaten Women], sociologist Shahla E’zazi of Tehran’s Allameh Tabataba’i University notes that most of the

female domestic-violence victims whom she interviewed told her that their mothers-in-law were the primary agents of the abuse.⁷

Because in polygamous societies so much can depend on the mother-son bond, that too tends to become dysfunctional. When all the emotional, spiritual, and material dimensions of a woman's life grow so dependent on this singular role, the burden becomes too heavy to bear. Pathological dependence, manipulation, and even compulsion creep into what was once among the most spontaneously warm and close of all human relationships.

At a crass first glance, polygamy might sound ideal for men, but this is often not the case. They, like women, expect a stable emotional relationship from the institution of family, but the mistrust that polygamy injects into the institution of marriage impedes this. Perhaps only with his mother can a man enjoy the total sense of security that his anxious and watchful wife cannot give him. But even then, his mother's dependence on the mother-son bond for her own sense of identity, power, and stability can lead her to build a sort of passive-aggressive cage in which to trap her son so she can keep him forever. This can be expressed in a mother-in-law's assertion of tight control over her son's wife (or wives), a control for which the son may depend upon her. In the worst case, Iranian mothers can end up as emotional hostages to a tense and constrained domestic order in which they act as something akin to prison trustees.

In wider perspective then we can see that a legal code supporting polygamy inevitably sustains a web of twisted, repressive relationships that taint the whole of society, forcing family life itself into narrow and sterile confines. This legal structure—whose architecture is plainly evident in Iran's family laws and penal code—imparts a tone of harshness and inflexibility to social relations and has become so powerful that it often rules the institution of the family. The strain of continuing to impose this stern and severely biased order on a demographically

young society such as Iran's—with all its Web-surfing, globally aware people below the age of 30—has led to crises within the institution of the family.

All this explains why the abolition of polygamy and the adoption of a legal code that recognizes monogamous marriage alone is such a key demand of the One Million Signatures Campaign. Without such reforms, there is no hope for bringing stability to families or creating space in which more humane relations between men and women can flourish.

The desire to change unfair laws affecting women is hardly restricted to activists of the One Million Signatures Campaign. On the contrary, legal reform has become an important goal to many women. Two studies covering the years 2000 to 2002 reveal some of the discontent, albeit among a fairly specialized population. The studies found that 65 percent of female students polled at Tehran University oppose the unequal way in which inheritance laws treat men and women; 68 percent reject the idea of giving more weight to male rather than female court testimony; 75 percent reject paying more in “blood money” for a male's as opposed to a female's death; and 90 percent voice strong opposition to the concepts of both multiple and temporary wives.⁸

Not surprisingly, many officials deny that there is a widespread desire for change. I doubt that they are correct, but even assuming they are, this still does not justify their continual disregard of the harm that unfair laws do to half of society and to the family, an institution that these policymakers claim to hold sacred. It was with a refreshing candor that an officeholder in the Caspian Sea port city of Nowshahr admitted that:

The prevalence of multiple wives and the increase in divorce rates are among the most important issues for women in this city.... [I]ncidents of divorce and acts against public decency have increased remarkably in Nowshahr. The prevalence of multiple wives in this city has weakened the

institution of the family and has had a negative effect on the emotions and psyches of women.⁹

Given men's legal right to easy, unilateral divorce, it is unsurprising that 90 percent of divorce filings originate with husbands and the rest happen by mutual agreement or are uncontested.¹⁰ Divorce appears to be disproportionately prevalent among younger couples. One study says that 35 percent of all divorces occur in the under-22 age group, a number that is no doubt inflated by laws which allow girls as young as 9 to be married.¹¹ Raising the minimum marriage age will play an important role in strengthening and stabilizing families.

In a 2007 press conference, Mr. Sajjadpour, the chief of the Tehran Police Investigation Unit, stated that 40 percent of homicides in Iran take place within the family, and half the victims are women. "Women are murdered by their immediate family members," Sajjadpour said.¹² Professor Shahla E'zazi claims that Iranian men are aware of the advantages the law gives them in cases of domestic violence:

There exists a general perception in the minds of men that the law supports them and gives them higher rights than women. In the Islamic Penal Code, there is a doctrine known as the "Farrash Doctrine" which states that if a man observes his wife committing adultery with another man, he can kill them both. In my opinion, men are vaguely aware of this doctrine, and it is with this vague understanding that in many instances, when a man kills his wife, as an explanation in the aftermath he says that he was suspicious of her. In one such case, a man who had murdered his wife told the investigator that, once while his wife was sleeping, and he was talking with his cousin, it seemed to him that his wife was having an affair with someone and he choked her with a head scarf. I think men have a vague idea that, if they say they are suspicious of their wives, their penalty will

be less severe. And, in reality, in these cases, their penalty is reduced. Therefore, we can find the footprints or the long-term effects of the laws in the minds of men.¹³

In defense of legal inequalities such as those regarding inheritances that harm the economic status of women, some officials claim that receiving *mehriyeh* (the traditional Islamic wedding gift—not necessarily all payable up front—from a groom to his bride) and alimony make up for these inequalities and create at least a semblance of balance. The numbers, however, tell a different story: “Based on the statistics submitted by the National Organization for Civil Registration, 78 percent of divorced women do not receive their *mehriyeh* even at the time of their divorce and 41 percent of divorced women are forced to forego their *mehriyeh* at the time of their divorce. At the same time, more than 89 percent of divorced women never receive their alimony.”¹⁴ Another study of women’s financial rights found that in the city of Qom, the seat of Iran’s Shia Muslim clerical establishment, “91 percent of divorced women do not receive the full amount of their *mehriyeh* at the time of their divorce.”¹⁵

Some lawmakers claim that the conditions agreed to during the Islamic marriage ceremony can guarantee a woman’s rights within the family. Yet at least one study concludes that such conditions “do not provide sufficient security for the duration of married life and unfortunately have turned into a merely meaningless ceremonial detail in the marriage.”¹⁶ Even if one favors the notion that the ceremonial conditions gain some rights for women, should one not wonder how secure such rights can be when they are not enforceable by law but depend solely on the husband’s good will and moral commitment to keeping his word?

If the conditions agreed to during the marriage ceremony exist in order to guarantee the wife’s rights, and these rights contradict no tenet of Islam, why cannot these conditions be made legally actionable? It

is common knowledge that the conditions to be agreed to during the marriage ceremony often prove a complex and troublesome issue for young engaged couples and their families. If these conditions were to assume the status of an actual legal contract, the belief would not exist that a young woman who wants such conditions is seeking “extra” rights or introducing an ill omen by supposedly dwelling on “the right to divorce” at the very beginning of her married life, an ironic charge anyway, given that nearly all divorces in Iran are initiated by husbands.

In practice, conditions agreed to during the marriage ceremony do not bring into being stable and guaranteed rights for the bride. These conditions are merely personal understandings between individuals. Whether considered “excessive” or not, their status is typically that of a “gift,” not a “right” officially recognized by society.

One can speak of “rights” when society recognizes them as such through duly adopted laws. A study of how the courts in the city of Semnan handled divorce cases from 2004 to 2005 sheds light on the gap between marriage-contract rights and rights actually enforceable by law.¹⁷ The study shows how, within the legal context of a divorce action, women occupy a lower position than do men, with the courts routinely brushing marriage contracts aside as legally meaningless personal agreements. This is true even in the atypical cases where the courts allow a woman to file for divorce. Anecdotally, it is well known that many local marriage-registry offices, acting on the discretion of the office supervisor, will not even record such contracts.

The negative effects of the legal system that allows for polygamy in Iran, especially the family laws that treat men and women so differently, make themselves felt well beyond the lives of women. In extreme cases, even men can fall victim to violence at the hands of desperate women: “Based on a study conducted in 15 of Iran’s provinces, adultery by the husband has been the reason for 67 percent of cases in which husbands were murdered by their wives.”¹⁸ This means that

the husband's permanent or temporary polygamous marriage has been recognized as a key reason for women murdering their husbands.

Barred from working outside the home without her husband's permission, barred from being able to inherit property equally, barred from being able to obtain a divorce but subject to *being* divorced at any time, often victimized by domestic violence with no legal remedy, the Iranian woman faces a desperate lot indeed. The remarkable thing may be less that some women become dangers to themselves and others, than that more do not, and simply endure in quiet anguish.

"According to the studies conducted," writes young One Million Signatures Campaign volunteer Maryam Hosseinkhah, "four-fifths of women who have murdered their husbands have been homemakers without economic independence." She continues by noting that "[t]he statistics on violence against women are quite high," and cites a 2003 study, conducted over the course of one month in Tehran, which found that almost 88 percent of the women surveyed had been psychologically or emotionally abused, while nearly 48 percent had suffered physical abuse at the hands of their husbands.

Hosseinkhah goes on to describe the harsh realities of early forced marriages, lack of legal and family protections, isolation, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, and patriarchal brutality that make it easier to comprehend why some women come to feel that their only recourse is to murder their husbands. She concludes by suggesting that granting women the same divorce rights as men can help to dissuade more women from resorting to violence.¹⁹

There is evidence that the antifemale bias of current marriage laws—and particularly their ban on a woman's working outside the home without her husband's permission—is souring young women on the idea of marriage. According to one study, "more than 80 percent of young girls consider employment outside the home more important than being homemakers, 42 percent of mothers consider employment

to be the first priority for their daughters, and 58 percent of these mothers believe in their daughters' employment outside the home."²⁰ Young women's inclination to marry is trending downward. As attorney Zohreh Arzani notes: "In 2004-2005, young girls were less inclined by 1 percent to get married. This is a growing trend because today due to the existing circumstances, which have evolved and which are of course different from the past, young girls consider marriage a limiting factor (i.e., in obtaining and maintaining employment) in their lives."²¹ Things have reached a point, in other words, where Iran's unfair marriage laws are undermining marriage and actually impeding the formation of new families. Lawmakers and other responsible officials should be asking themselves why this needless and destructive situation is tolerated.

The number of Iranian households headed by women is considerable (one estimate says three million²²) and apparently growing by sixty-thousand per year, mostly as a result of women being unilaterally put aside by husbands who no longer want them around.²³ Based on the law, none of these women—indeed, no woman in all of Iran—has a right to custody of her own children. No custody by the ex-wife is possible without the ex-husband's consent. Even if a mother has raised her child alone and without the father's presence, when it comes to making decisions on matters such as her child's surgery, property, or marriage (let us recall that the earliest legal age for marriage is nine) she has no rights: Only the father or the paternal grandfather can make decisions on such matters.

Some families are childless. Under the existing laws, including the 1979 Constitution, women who are not mothers are marginalized, since the law tends to view women through the lens of motherhood. According to a report, "No exact statistics exist about childlessness in Iran. However, based on the available censuses, the statistic for infertility is 10 percent in Tehran."²⁴

Another group of Iranian women—those who have married Afghan immigrants—are no longer citizens of their own country, and suffer a number of other injustices to boot. Such marriages number between 45,000 and 70,000.²⁵ The Iranian Interior Ministry says that all such marriages that occurred after 20 March 2001 are illegal because “in accordance with Iran’s domestic laws, the marriage of an Iranian girl or woman must take place with the knowledge of responsible government officials.”²⁶

Iranian women are a diverse lot. Contrary to the Constitution’s vision, not all are conventional wives and mothers. Some do not plan to marry, some are single mothers, some are childless, and some have married foreigners. Whatever their circumstances, they face multiple problems. Instead of trying to help with these, the existing laws only create more problems, some tragic.

Reviewing all of the above, one may wonder why this senseless situation of unfair, outmoded, and counterproductive laws has not changed. Protests against antifemale discrimination have been going on in Iran for a full century. Yet the cultural and political complexities and obstacles that stand in the way of needed change are staggering, and appear to have created a gigantic and insoluble impasse.²⁷

One huge barrier is the overwhelming influence of the Islamic Republic’s Guardian Council of the Constitution. When it comes to women, the existing legal regime interprets everything on the books in accordance with ideas coming from this twelve-member body of Islamic jurists chosen by the Supreme Leader and the Majlis (parliament). Lacking as they are in resources, women are hardly in a position to compete with the Guardian Council in order to secure legal interpretations more favorable to their cause.

I wish to emphasize that the current collision between the legal system and women’s interests comes about not only because of the problems inherent in the laws, but also because the laws are not

always enforced exactly as intended. They are subject to interpretation and the powers of appointed officials who occupy key posts in powerful institutions and assert themselves in extralegal areas. The more top-down the relationship between the regime's appointed officials and the citizenry becomes, the more women and their rights are pushed to the sidelines, and their task becomes that much harder than the task facing men who desire reform.

Considering how hardened both in structure and attitude our legal system has become, and pondering the complications strewn in our path by history and culture, we cannot deny the sheer difficulty of our mission to make the laws more just and beneficial toward women. To date, very few reforms have been enacted. Clearly, the work of getting them passed is going to take every resource and capacity, however humble or exalted, that society can offer. It will mean reinforcing the discourses of equality and human rights in the realm of religious intellectualism and other elite circles. It will also mean going among the people themselves until, gradually, the call for "equal rights" resonates in the public mind so strongly that the rigid status quo at last bends and opens up room for women to take a fuller role in society. To attain even minimal changes, we will truly need to seize every opportunity.

ANSWERING THE CRITICS

Detractors of the One Million Signatures Campaign claim that changing discriminatory laws is not a priority for the women of Iran. Such critics like to point to a public-opinion poll, conducted by one of the governmental institutions concerned with women's affairs, which found women's top priority to be employment. This criticism misses the mark. The campaign does not claim that its agenda is every woman's highest priority, but only that its plans are of significance to women, and will help them if brought to fruition. Tactically, the campaign understands the value of realism and restraint and does not seek to bite off more than it can chew.

Speaking of all the women in Iran as a single group with one supreme priority is dubious in any case. Women are different, groups of women are different, and priorities change. Aware as it is of the disappointing experiences of many women's groups in other countries, the One Million Signatures Campaign knows better than to claim to represent anyone else's "highest" priority. Instead, the campaign focuses on its own priority of reforming discriminatory laws, for the following reasons:

- First, we are part of a strong "never say die" reformist tradition. Women's efforts to improve bad laws go back more than a century. We founded our campaign during the centennial of Iran's 1906 Constitutional Revolution, which marked the first time our country got a constitution (drafted and ratified by the people's representatives) and an elected parliament to go with it.²⁸ Women's legal-reform efforts began at the same time. It took until the early 1960s for us to gain the right to vote. After that, activists such as Sedigheh Dowlatabadi and groups such as the Association of Patriotic Women (*Jam'iyat-e Neswan-e Vatan khah*), to name just two, kept working. They founded schools for girls and sought official recognition of women's right to an education, a higher minimum marriage age, and other changes to better the female lot. The literary and intellectual legacy of these earlier activists is one of our campaign's most treasured resources.
- Second, although changing unjust and humiliating laws is not necessarily the top priority of every women's group, it is at least a desire that they all share. Therefore it gave us our best possible rallying point, the one that could bring as many groups together as possible.
- Third, an effort to reform discriminatory laws has the potential to mobilize and energize women behind a set of realizable goals at a time when their ability to push for change on other fronts (employment, for example) is small.
- Fourth and lastly is the status of legal reform as a demand that is

neither so limited that it will fail to mobilize many women, nor so large and overwhelming that it will demoralize the movement because of its seeming unattainability.

Among the imperatives for the women's movement today is to reject the attitude, all too common in our society, which says that one must pursue only the best or most important endeavors, or else retreat into passivity. This all or nothing mentality is a dead end. Sometimes it is best to take on what one can with a reasonable chance of success, and not use utopian aspirations as an excuse for giving way to inaction, infighting, and regression. Certainly we need to choose our fights carefully, and to craft specific and logical demands for the long term. This need not always mean, however, selecting one issue that is taken to be of highest importance and priority and ignoring everything else, especially when some goals in the latter category may be more reachable in the short term.

We of the campaign believe that our choice of carefully defined legal reform as a leading issue has been a prudent one, made under difficult conditions. As partial proof of this, we might point to the manner in which even this minimal and allegedly too-limited demand has galvanized such a large cross-section of women activists for three years and counting.

In our society, some have a tendency to reduce any change or transformation in the fabric of the daily lives of women to changing and reforming society's culture. These "culturists," apparently, consider the realization of gender equality to be possible solely through raising the level of knowledge and education of each and every member of society. In other words, they assume that women's struggles to change discriminatory laws and reform the legal system lack depth and roots.

Changing the culture matters, of course. But there is no reason we cannot do this and also pursue legal reform. Moreover, since the law is to some extent a shaper of culture, even as culture reciprocally

influences law, our legal-reform efforts may be viewed under the ambit of cultural education and reform as well. In short, we should not waste time letting ourselves be decoyed into a reductionist or one-track mind attitude, which mistakenly insists that we cannot change the laws until we change the culture. The reality is that we can work on both improving the laws and the tone of our culture when it comes to just treatment for women, and we should be doing both.

Some critics of the “culturist” persuasion have even gone so far as to claim that winning the right to vote in Iran or elsewhere has had little effect on the lives of women. No less than their culturist cousins of the more sober sort, these other “culture-firsters” overlook the significant cultural changes that women in Europe, the United States, and indeed Iran managed to bring about by first pursuing and then building on the right to equal suffrage. In the course of their long and arduous struggle for voting rights, the suffragettes of earlier times shaped a new generation of men and women: That is why today we can breathe in a better atmosphere. Sixty or seventy years ago, when our grandmothers came together to demand the right to vote, they transformed the face of their societies and made the public square a fairer place. In belittling such an achievement, the critics mainly expose their own limited views.

I wish to conclude by saying that every type of positive civil activity and universal endeavor which seeks justice, including the One Million Signatures Campaign, has not only direct but indirect consequences. Sometimes, these tangential achievements affect women’s lives more than the realization of the overt demand itself. If we look at the history of women’s struggles either in Iran or in the world, we must realize that in our own endeavors and actions we may be “making other than we know.”

Understanding the history of our grandmothers’ struggles will open up new horizons on the purpose and meaning of our work today.

The One Million Signatures Campaign is a multidimensional and pluralistic movement that cannot be defined solely by its expressed demands. Rather, it is one that can and should be judged within the context of all its actions and results.

2

THE ONE MILLION SIGNATURES MOVEMENT: TOWARD A NEW ERA IN IRAN

Since before the Constitutional Revolution of 1905/1906, Iranian women have worked hard to enhance their status by learning about the world in which they live and by gaining the right and the ability to participate in decisions that impact that world, especially decisions that ameliorate injustices that pervade their lives in the family, community, and society. Against a predominantly patriarchal culture, enhanced by command-structured leadership styles and lack of basic freedoms, they have struggled to bring about change in their society. This century of activism may be divided into five generations, roughly comprising the Constitutional, Reza Shah, Mohammad Reza Shah, the Iran-Iraq war, and post war periods. Each generation has faced its own advantages and disadvantages as it has striven for rights. Each generation has tried to develop worldviews, strategies, and tactics that it believed suited its historical conditions. Nonetheless, despite the political exigencies of each period, a number of contradictory constants have worked against as well as for women: patriarchy on one hand, education and openness to the world on the other.

In Iran, as everywhere across the globe, the patriarchal foundation of society forced women into a subservient and secondary role. On the other hand, gradual growth and expansion of women's education and access to skills in an ever-increasing number of fields and professions over time led women to employment in jobs that became indispensable to the workings of society. From a handful of mostly home-taught women at the turn of the century—women who led and spoke for the first generation of feminists—we have moved steadily to the fifth generation that comprises sixty percent of university students.

During the Iran-Iraq war and after, a generation of Iranian women, now middle-aged, spent two decades writing, speaking, reporting, complaining, translating, describing calamities, and even serving in parliament—and yet nothing moved an inch. Energy had been sapped, hopefulness curdled into despair, and sadness sharpened by the spectacle of younger women surrendering to nihilism and even drug abuse in desperate bids to forget the pains of loneliness, lack of identity, and dim prospects.

The fifth generation, which is the subject of this narrative, has benefited from the experiences of its predecessors in formulating its own specific strategic vision and building the movement suited to the circumstance of its struggle. Its distinguishing characteristic is its non-ideological, issue-oriented approach. It focuses on the specific problem; it contextualizes the problem; it invites every interested person from any walk of life and any political or ideological persuasion to participate; it leaves every participant room to devise his or her way of communicating with, mobilizing, or recruiting others. In the process it not only gets ever closer to achieving its specific objective; it becomes a dynamic movement and an efficient social vehicle for creating awareness, promoting self-confidence, and laying the ground for communicative, horizontal, dialogical, and egalitarian leadership. It is not after cosmic change. It is non violent and non utopian. It has

the advantage of the new communications technologies that provide an unprecedented opportunity for advocacy, movement building, and sharing of experiences. And, given the youthfulness of its membership, it is confident that it will prevail.

The One Million Signatures Campaign is a response to Iran's present situation but, in principle, it is applicable to any circumstance. Its founders and activists know that reporting alone does not suffice and that elites talking among themselves about how bad things are will help no one and accomplish nothing. The campaign's fresh approach to changing cruel and unfair laws—with the “honor” killings, sexual violence, and debasement they tolerate and even promote—is meant to break out of the paralysis by analysis trap. The campaign's best weapon in this noble fight may be the imagination and creativity that the young female activists who form its biggest presence on the street have shown in approaching their neighbors with the message that all Iranians will benefit if the half of them who happen to be female are treated fairly rather than discriminated against.

One cannot devise a successful strategy for social change, however meritorious such change may be in theory, without considering the unique circumstances of the specific society that one wants to change. For the young activists of the contemporary Iranian women's movement, this question of how to “manage” theories in order to most fruitfully address actual circumstances has become crucial.

Take the case of what to do about violence against women. There are theories about the origin of such violence that focus on the individual sphere (on the psychological profile of the type of man who is likely to become an abuser, for instance). In societies where domestic violence is firmly understood as belonging to the class of public crimes and not just that of possible personal failings or excesses, the individual-cum-psychological approach may be helpful in suggesting innovations such as safe havens or other interventions that will help

to prevent or at least reduce such violence. In Iran, however, domestic violence has long been considered a personal matter rather than a criminal act, and there regrettably exist laws that give credence to this interpretation. Under Iranian circumstances, therefore, reliance on an individualistic theory of violence—a theory that it would be easy to adopt since it accords with preexisting cultural attitudes—will more than likely breed passivity in the face of the problem rather than effective efforts to counter it.

If the special conditions of the society in which we live have shaped our views and conditioned our choice of strategies for moving forward, naturally our theories and strategies must be aimed at resolving the issues of this very same society. Our approach, then, must be fluid enough so that we can update it with every serious change in the structure of our society. Applying outdated theories to novel conditions is a trap to avoid. Theories should be assumed to hold no more than temporary validity, and should be judged according to their usefulness or lack thereof in a specific circumstance.

This is what the One Million Signatures Campaign proposed to do. In a remarkable show of unity and resolve, activists from several generations of the Iranian women's movement came together publicly on 27 August 2006 to pledge their support for the One Million Signatures Campaign and its agenda of legal reform. The activists who gathered that day were setting aside a host of ideological differences in order to coalesce behind broad civil demands for an end to laws that discriminate against all Iranian women.

The campaign that they envisioned would draw its strength from the countless small efforts of individuals all across the length and breadth of Iran. At the campaign's heart lay a petition, calling for an end to discriminatory laws, that the organizers hoped at least a million Iranians would sign. The petition was meant to have a viral quality: any signer could instantly become, if he or she so wished, a freelance,

freeform volunteer seeking to further the campaign's aims by gathering more signatures, distributing booklets outlining the legal disabilities under which women are forced to labor in the Islamic Republic, or just talking to fellow citizens about the campaign's principles and aims. Formal membership in any of the campaign's various committees would be available too, but in no way mandatory.

To make the signature gathering as easy as possible, the organizers adopted a plan calling for a face-to-face approach open to everyone. There were to be no ideological or sectarian litmus tests defining who could join or back the campaign, itself a somewhat revolutionary idea in a society as factionalized as Iran's. Anyone could be a member, and could work to advance the campaign's goals however and to whatever degree they might wish, so long as they remained exclusively committed to peaceful, civil dialogue and stuck to the campaign's only goal: to change discriminatory laws. Members need not answer to any ideological description, be it feminist or otherwise.

Nor would members need to support or oppose any particular government or official, although by the same token, signatories might well choose to affix their names to the petition for just such a reason, among others. Motives, in any case, are inherently private and hard to know. What matters is the set of principles regarding fair treatment laid down openly and publicly in the petition.

The campaign focuses tightly and deliberately on these principles and the demands that spring from them, resolutely prescinding from any considerations of ideology or identity that might serve to divide more than unite. This model for change is based on the conviction that the law belongs to everyone, and hence that everyone has the right to express an opinion about it.

Unlike a more rigid campaign based on ideology or identity, the campaign is more aptly a movement that tries to recruit a variety of citizens from all walks of life to aid its cause. Relations among adherents

to the campaign are meant to be as pluralistic and free as the campaign membership itself, held together by a supple thread of voluntarism and commitment to general principles of fairness and justice.

The One Million Signatures movement's demand-centered model gives activists a chance to represent the ideas behind the petition freely and in keeping with their own leanings. A socialist might take the petition's demands to heart as her own and promote them among her friends, and so might a Shia cleric among his, each for very different reasons. Demand-centered movements such as the One Million Signatures Campaign are good because they create opportunities for individuals of varying views to work together freely toward a single goal. No one need be stigmatized or left out as lacking the "right" ideas or identity.

The campaign's sheer pluralism and multifariousness lend themselves to "spread out" rather than narrowly "stove-piped" decision-making, and help to sustain the movement's nonpartisan, nonfactional essence. As a peripheral but by no means insignificant effect, the experience of being involved in a free yet large-scale undertaking of this kind offers those who immerse themselves in it a sort of lived tutorial in active democracy, even if of a limited kind.

WITHOUT A PLACE: THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN IRAN

In Iran, women are like islands. They generally lack institutional spaces where they can interact with one another. If they want such spaces, they must create them. Perhaps this is why over the past century they have done more than any other group to form societies, private circles, and other traditional and nontraditional gatherings.

But these establishments are in want of a suitable atmosphere in which to move and make themselves heard. Some are largely private extensions of domestic life, and thus possess little public presence

or dynamism. The more modern and public female establishments, by contrast, require for their continued existence the same sort of conducive climate that brought them about in the first place. Modern women's institutions, in other words, need a share in the public sphere if they are not to become ossified and paralyzed.

Women are hard-pressed to find their collective voice amid the raging torrent of patriarchal propaganda that engulfs Iranian society today, but they are out there, waiting to be asked to speak and make their opinions heard. By going out into the streets in a peaceful, civil way, the One Million Signatures Campaign and its volunteers are owning their shares of the public sphere. Contrary to some claims, this is not a revolutionary or disruptive method, but rather works in harmony with the nature of the modern city. It is a method of principled nonviolence that follows a new cultural-behavioral model for establishing direct ties with citizens—those with whom a relationship cannot be established anywhere else but in the public space of the city.

“Street politics” as a strategy to promote the gradual reform of culture can take the form of direct protests such as the one held on 12 June 2006 in Tehran's Haft-Tir Square to mark the National Day of Women's Solidarity. But it can also seek to change unjust laws through more sustained vehicles such as the One Million Signatures Campaign and its method of face-to-face interaction with people on sidewalks, in factories, hair salons, and sports arenas as well as in family or religious gatherings and through door-to-door signature-collection drives.

“Taking it to the streets” has spurred creative thinking. Activists frame and debate new ideas every day in settings related to the campaign. With the help of the campaign and its breakout tactics, Iranian society has developed a women's movement that truly walks the talk as its words and deeds become one.

Getting one's feet planted firmly on the ground in this manner should never be thought of as a small achievement. For if this new and

fruitful process continues, it will raise up an impressive new generation of leaders and activists for the women's movement. Give them ten years, and they will make the movement proud by removing many of the barriers on the path of women in Iran. In doing this, the experience that these young people have been gaining of how to put messages out and get things done via the public sphere and the world of everyday life (as opposed to that of arid theory) will prove of enormous benefit to them and to Iran. In particular, the spontaneity and fluidity of nonviolent street politics will hone a tactical flexibility—an ability to build bridges between people and groups quickly and easily, if you will—that should make the women's movement an even more formidable force for just social change.

DEMOCRACY FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Street politics enables activists to gauge the validity of their own perspectives within the framework of daily life, and to measure the limits of their own abilities. The advocates of the One Million Signatures Campaign have gradually learned how to deal with state-security forces, all the while drawing national attention to the topic of the indubitable yet overlooked rights of Iranians. Perhaps most importantly, the activists have arrived, through all the highs and lows they have enjoyed or endured, at a new level of appreciation for the worth of their own colleagues in this independent movement. In this sense, even apart from its particular aims, the One Million Signatures Campaign has become a model of enhanced civic solidarity and of how to “do” democracy in the streets and squares, from the bottom up.

Does this new method of doing politics in Iran have staying power? In order to answer this question, it is helpful to recall how this movement began. The persistence of the One Million Signatures Campaign thus far is something of a wonder. Even those who started it did not believe that it would endure. It was given life by an act of collective imagination,

and upon that imagination it continues to depend.

In the beginning, the idea of gathering a million signatures seemed fanciful: the dream of a group of delirious women and a handful of naïve students. Perhaps because it appeared so unlikely, the authorities—the overwhelmingly *male* authorities, one might add—failed to take it seriously and wrote it off as unimportant. But in something of a triumph for the cause of feminine imagination, the movement slowly and gradually began to break through and grow legs.

In the beginning, most expected that its face-to-face methods would fail. But the young women and men of the campaign, representing the fifth generation of Iranian feminists, proved these expectations wrong. In a sense, the feminine imagination had come to life and established itself as a new reality in the streets and byways of Iranian cities.

This feminine imagination is unlike the heroic glorification of will that is a staple of revolutionary regimes. Instead, it is modest, and takes the reality of everyday life as its source of inspiration. This inspiration-seeking on the level of the imagination came to the fore precisely when Iranian women seemed to be facing a dead end in their struggle for justice, when the most reactionary and repressive elements of the Islamic Republic were riding high after an interval of stillborn “reformism” under President Mohammad Khatami (in office from 1997 to 2005).

At that very moment, when all seemed darkest, our power to reimagine society along fairer lines became active and began to assert itself in the search for a remedy. The often-searing life experiences of so many women fed this tendency, even if at first as not much more than a way of letting a few rays of hope and joy shine into the shadows of unfairly burdened and restricted lives.

Its vision occluded by the self-imposed blinders of its own patriarchal ideology, the regime could not recognize the great untapped power and capacity for endurance that lay in the imaginations of

Iranian women. This power would prove stronger than all bitterness, defeatism, disappointment, loneliness, and fear. It would enable the women who started the One Million Signatures Campaign to discover new horizons and devise new forms of civil struggle.

Thanks to an outpouring of feminine imagination, living rooms went from being spaces where only family and a few friends were entertained to being cultural salons, with goings-on sometimes broadcast through cyberspace. It was as if Iranian society, so long infected by the lack of trust that autocracy breeds, was turning over a new leaf.

The constant face-to-face interactions that the work of explaining the campaign and soliciting signatures demanded also gave our flights of imagination a concrete, practical bent that kept us tethered to the real world. In this, we of the One Million Signatures Campaign were perhaps a bit like Scheherazade, who also used her imagination to sustain herself and triumph over a situation in which a cruel male authority figure placed terrible dangers and pitfalls in her path. Unlike Scheherazade, however, we told not a thousand and one tales, but essentially just one—a story of needless sorrows unjustly imposed, but also the means to end them, to everyone's betterment—told between the covers of the simple booklet that we handed out to anyone who would take one. We also became not only story-tellers but also story-gatherers. Our thousand and one tales were the accounts of women's difficult and often heartbreaking experiences that our activists took down on their visits to numerous homes.

This work of recording was and remains important because the project of social reimagining naturally is impelled by and draws upon experiences that include the witnessing of injustices, belittlements, dead-ends, female self-immolations, runaway girls, and the rest of the bitter mass of everyday life. The danger of this recording is that it can lead one into the utopian blind alley of obsessively trying to identify and pull up, as if once and for all, the roots of such ills generally. The

petition avoids that trap, and seeks to appeal to as many people as possible, by focusing instead on specific legal changes that will make the life conditions of Iranian women better and fairer.

Among the campaign's greatest accomplishments has been the influence that the face-to-face method has had on the campaign's activists themselves. The transformation has been gradual and remains ongoing. Activists have grown closer to the public even as they introduce a new and audacious way of lobbying on behalf of a "fairer shake" for Iranian women. It may be enough to refer to the experiences documented in the alleyway-to-alleyway section of the *Change for Equality* website. These show, as one campaign member puts it, how "[t]he places, where heretofore we have rested or repeated the same everyday routines, are now used as sites for discussing laws and how they affect our lives."²⁹ She goes on to list "exhibition halls and showrooms, volunteer-work centers and especially tailor shops, hair salons, doctors' waiting rooms, [and] administrative and company offices" as among the "places where the volunteers of the campaign are busy collecting signatures."

Mansureh Shoja'i analyzes the parameters of the campaign thusly:

The effect of the campaign on a society that is being driven to hopelessness and despair by cruel economic, political, cultural, and social pressures can be measured according to the following guidelines:

1. General success in regards to the identity and demands of the campaign without questions and concerns about its founders and members.
2. An active and independent presence of youth in carrying out the programs.
3. A steady rise in the enlistment of volunteers to help out the various taskforce committees.
4. A rise in requests for instructional workshops, especially in the provinces.

5. A rise in the number of websites and weblogs that publish news of the campaign.
6. The appearance of items concerning the campaign alongside official international news in public and official media.
7. A rise in the number of signatories of the various statements of protest against the arrests of members of the campaign.
8. A rise in the number of signatories from outside the circle of acquaintances and usual participants in women's movements.
9. The daily increase in the number of volunteers to duplicate and print booklets of the effects of laws on the lives of women.³⁰

FACE-TO-FACE DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Lately, campaign members have been working on sharing the virtues of their new and highly practical approach with other civil-society activists in order to help make social interactions more open and pluralistic. The harsh experiences of the past thirty years have shown that private debates over theory are not going to be enough to bring about a broad societal opening or a process of concrete reform. Without seeping into the fabric of daily life, philosophical discourses cannot—and for years have not been able to—have a practical influence on the real life circumstances with which Iranian women must deal.

Although Iranian women have been calling for changes in discriminatory laws for a century, rights dialogue had been limited for most of that time to a specialized circle of legal scholars. Organizations devoted to legal change needed to have, and always did have, such a person at the top. Figures such as the late Mehrangiz Manouchehrian³¹ did fine work. Yet by the time the One Million Signatures Campaign came about, the older and more hierarchical model that they had

represented had lost its usefulness and even become something of a problem: It leaned too heavily on experts, and failed to create enough opportunities for ordinary people—meaning especially younger and lower-income women—to become involved in trying to improve unjust laws.

The One Million Signatures Campaign and its face-to-face approach have changed all that. Instead of sterile elitism, it breathes a spirit of broad popular participation with its conviction that since all must live under the laws, all may have a say in pointing out to both the authorities and the general public how these laws may be made better. This is not to say, of course, that the campaign cannot use experts. On the contrary, highly qualified lawyers and scholars such as Narin Sotudeh, Zohreh Arzani, Leila Ali-Karami, Nasim Ghanavi, Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, and a host of others have given the movement invaluable measures of energy and insight.

The campaign is premised on a hard earned awareness that slogans and concepts (secularism, for instance) will not free our society from the supremacy of destructive ideologies. Younger members of the campaign in particular have been able to use it to distance themselves from abstractions, to make their case on the plane of daily life, and to embrace an attitude of confident, pragmatic experimentation to see what really works when it comes to rallying their fellow citizens behind the cause of peaceful social change.

One thing that seems to be working is the conscious avoidance of needless ideological, factional, or religious controversies in favor of a focus on the concrete problems and shared pains inflicted by unfair laws and a discriminatory legal system. The idea is to avoid repeating the old and bankrupt pattern of entrenchment behind various clichéd ideological lines—be they nationalist, leftist, Islamist, or even the ideology of abstract human rights—but instead to move beyond them to speak to Iranians where they live in order to make change

happen peacefully and gradually through the engagement of millions of citizens with the just demands of women.

All this is going on, of course, outside the tight circle of official institutions and channels of power, and yet by that very same token may come to have an enormously broad and beneficial effect on the wider projects of promoting democratization and a firmly institutionalized rule of law in Iran. The promotion of multifarious civil voices and the activation of multiple possibilities for peaceful opposition, even if focused at first on matters primarily of concern to women, bid fair to have positive spillover effects on how public life generally is conducted in a country that has been all too often wracked by long spells of authoritarianism punctuated with spasms of violence. Can lines of battle give way to lines of communication within Iranian society? The One Million Signatures Campaign lives in the hope that this can be so.

The leading symbol of this hope, more than any particular demand or suggestion for legal change, is the campaign's innovative face-to-face approach itself. This method prescinds from taking any side regarding any current government, public figure, or official, and instead asks average citizens to take direct, unmediated responsibility for interpreting their own places in the human project. Instead of backing this or that faction of the elite in hopes that it will bestow justice from on high once it treads its enemies underfoot, the campaign seeks justice for women through the practical presence and cooperation of as many citizens as possible. This is politics not as division, but as addition.

In using the face-to-face approach, activists have learned to tap the potential for promoting communication that lies within such seemingly humble traditional practices as handing out sweets and nuts along with campaign literature. Tradition often emphasizes fate, perhaps filtered through a fatalistic version of divine providence, as the dominant force in women's lives. But tradition's emphasis on building

community, even through as quaint a face-to-face custom as giving out small treats, can promote active civic participation and reflection as distinguished from passive fatalism.

The pains that discriminatory laws inflict on women can only mean something when those harmed realize what has been happening *and* stop running in place. Awareness, in other words, must lead to action. And this action in turn must take on a more sustained form than an occasional outburst of emotion, however strong.

When campaign members meet people face-to-face, the first step is to talk about women's lack of rights under current law. That takes care of awareness. The next step is to request a personal action, that is, the recording of the interlocutor's signature on the petition. This is awareness plus action—and indeed collective action, since one person's signature joins a host of others in calling for the same reforms.

Whether an interlocutor signs or refuses to sign, the campaign considers the encounter a success: Everyone receives what amounts to a short informational briefing on the issues, and even those who refuse to sign will probably begin following the topic with new interest, if only to justify to themselves their decision not to sign. This whole approach—information plus call to action—has been among the shining achievements of the One Million Signatures Campaign.

FEMINISM AND ISLAM

The fifth generation of “circumstantial” feminists we see in Iran today are not, by and large, a group that first asks whether or not something is Islamic before deciding what to make of it. They are not anti-Islamic, but they have distanced themselves from struggles over political and religious authority (the Islamic Republic claims both), and they base their activities on their practical demands rather than on concerns about identity or ideology.

In simple terms: Today's Iranian feminism lives with religion as a part of daily life, and consequently, does not have to reject it. But at the same time, this feminism requires no green light from higher authorities in order to carry out its activities. For the fifth generation of Iran's feminists, having or not having a religion is not a reason for standing apart; this generation's standards neither bring about unity, nor cause disunity. One may be a Muslim or a Christian or secular, but from the point of view of feminism none of these constitutes a primary identity. It is rather like their father and mother or the country they were born in; that is, it is a part of their lives, and it is required that they live with it and according to their needs try to reform it.

Religion seems hardly an obstacle to fifth-generation feminists. They derive their legitimacy from the bottom up and from within their daily lives, not from an official ideology. This sets them apart from the "Islamic feminism" that seeks official blessing from the male ruling elite of the Islamic Republic, and is willing to value ideological correctness over the primary demands of women.

Unlike the third generation, with its concern over what feminists elsewhere in the world were thinking, or the fourth generation, with its identity worries, the young feminists who form the backbone of the One Million Signatures Campaign are not at odds with anyone over ideology, and will not let anything like an identity crisis distract them from pressing their agenda of legal changes that will improve daily life circumstances for all Iranian women.

This generation views issues such as the adaptation of Islam to feminism from a different perspective as well. The reconciliation of Islam and feminism in the One Million Signatures Campaign is the reconciliation of feminism with millions of Muslims who live with their religion, but who do not seek to draw their power, identity, and legitimacy from it. The feminism of daily life is not particularly anxious to devise some theoretical reconciliation of feminism and Islam, but neither is it hostile to anyone who wants to try to do so.

ANOTHER NEW GENERATION: MEN IN THE CAMPAIGN

There is a new generation of Iranian men who believe in the equal rights of citizens and have put that conviction to work on behalf of the One Million Signatures Campaign. Despite the constant and numerous pressures put on them, they have mostly carried on and become a help to the movement.

While previous generations of liberal-minded Iranian men would generally pay attention to women's issues out of some larger concern with advancing the cause of modernity or socialism, this new generation of Iranian men has chosen to make the aspirations of the women's movement its own.

Women have always had to define themselves as women before offering any opinion or finding a place for themselves within patriarchal society, for in such a society, the basic assumption is that the person with an opinion is a man. Today, it appears that the new generation of male Iranian feminists faces much the same problem. In order to find a place within the women's movement, men too must define themselves, and debunk the assumption that the basis for becoming active in the women's movement is being a woman.

This is far from their only worry, of course, for no less than their sisters, these men are made targets of wrath, belittlement, and accusations by the patriarchal system and all its violence. Indeed, the men of the campaign may even have it worse, for the system dislikes male feminists even more than their female counterparts, and views them as traitors to patriarchy.

Nevertheless, the ranks of men in the campaign are growing every day. While among the fifty-four founding members of the campaign only two were men, male numbers steadily increased. Of the eighty-six people who joined the campaign in the following quarter, sixteen were men. And as the campaign's internal report has noted, of the 370

volunteers who participated in the Tehran training workshops, fifty were men.

Without a doubt, the emergence of the phenomenon of male feminists in our country and in the One Million Signatures Campaign, will be recorded in the history of the women's movement and will bring with it important and lasting accomplishments not only for this movement, but also for the men of this generation.

3



INTERNAL CHALLENGES OF THE ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN

For many of us who are founders or members of the One Million Signatures Campaign, being active in the movement is a bit like a busy, eventful life in itself: so full of contradictions, questions, and challenges that there is hardly a dull moment.

At the outset, we didn't even know if we would amount to anything more than a colorful but loose collection of disparate individuals. Many of our younger members didn't particularly identify with the women's movement. Then there was the formidable diversity displayed by the tens of thousands of volunteers who swiftly filled our signature-gathering, pamphlet-distributing ranks. It was all a bit overwhelming, but also life-giving; before any of us knew it, we began to feel ourselves changing and adapting.

Little by little, we learned to live with and support each other despite our wide range of opinions, cultural backgrounds, and ages. During those early months, we learned—and indeed we are still learning—that the era of knowing one's place has come to an end, that there can be many paths to the same goal, and that we do not need to

form an absolute consensus around a perfect grand narrative in order to make progress.

We are also in the process of grasping that our tactics have to change with the circumstances. We must make good decisions every day so that we can gradually find our direction and overcome the many obstacles in our path. All this is exhausting and at times can even tempt us to despair, but we are constantly rejuvenated by the clear justice of our overall goal, which is the reform of discriminatory laws. We know that there are no shortcuts, but whether in season or out, we go about the work of improving women's lot with heads unbowed.

In a country wracked by so many turbulent events, how can one expect a broad-based social-activist movement to have stable tactics? The new form of social behavior used by members of the campaign—the face-to-face method that stems from a “circumstantial” feminist understanding—requires flexibility not merely because of the instability that affects Iran's economy, political world, and society, but also because of an internal commitment to pragmatism and lived realities rather than theoretical beliefs and hypothetical speculations. It is therefore natural that most of the campaign's members are more than willing to look at their tactics with a critical eye, and always seem to be in the process of revising them.

Successfully assuming such flexible and circumstantial positions requires an overhaul of doctrinal positions and inherited moral categories, because for the first time, the aim of social activism is the orienting of the activists themselves, especially women, around their demands rather than around a particular ideology or specific identity.

High-powered activist movements are notoriously prone to inner tensions and factionalism. The One Million Signatures Campaign has certainly faced these threats. From the outset, we activists felt forced to choose between elitism versus populism, nativism versus globalism, means versus ends, hierarchy versus organizational flatness, centralism

versus localism, individualism versus conformity, and so on. And we had to arrive at some semblance of working compromises in order to manage all these contradictions.

Although at times many of us may have felt hopeless and depressed under the weight of all these tensions, we also realize that in the few short years since we began in 2006, we have faced in a compressed form nearly everything that women's movements all over the world have had to face over the last century. What others took years or even decades to deal with, we had to address in mere months.

To a surprisingly large extent, we have succeeded, and have continued on our way despite setbacks. Were it not for the One Million Signatures Campaign and its air of urgency, the whole process would have taken many more years and many more wrong turns than it did. I believe that we should be very thankful for our new movement, which has given us much more than just the capacity to carry out a campaign together. In fact, the speed with which we were able gain such a wealth of experience might well be called a miracle.

We have become as mature and experienced as the first generation women's movement, and as young and dynamic as the fifth. For me, at least, the bridges that have been built between past and present are like objects from a dream—ambiguous and at times disquieting, but also beautiful.

THE GOAL OR THE JOURNEY? MEANS VERSUS ENDS

I have learned through experience that a goal is like a contract. By naming the former or signing the latter, you change nothing. What changes everything is how you go about reaching the goal or fulfilling the contract.

In all my years as an activist, I have always been convinced that the beauties of the world are to be found along the path, and that the means outrank the end. It is the road we travel—and not the place we

eventually reach—that gives life and joy to our journey. One could also say that the goal is the child of the means because means shape ends so deeply. But an idea will not bear fruit simply because one believes it. What is key, rather, is not just formulaic assent but the internalization and existential understanding of ideas at the level of daily social behavior. Therefore, one of the campaign's key challenges is to maintain a balance between means and ends.

On the one hand, the campaign's dedicated activists work tirelessly toward the goal of collecting a million signatures because they fear that failure could harm the women's movement. Given the degree to which our patriarchal society censures and harasses women's movements, this fear is warranted: we need to be seen as winning because patriarchal critics in this absolutist society will seize upon any weakness as a stick to beat us with. So we do need to be mindful of our goal and its significance.

And yet, the process through which the women's movement is currently passing is more important than what the movement will eventually become. Critics who measure us by our ability to reach this or that particular goal (a million signatures on a petition, for example) benefit from the historical tendency of social activists such as ourselves to dwell on the end at the expense of the means. My own insistence that we focus on means is meant in part to counterbalance the tendency, long dominant in our society, to privilege ends unduly. My hope is that a more even balance between the two will win out eventually.

Today, however, we still face the tension between those who stress goals and those who emphasize process. One side wants those one million signatures as soon as possible, while the other insists that having a million activists in our movement will ultimately matter even more. And yet this very tension gives the movement a certain balance.

The active presence of both camps has helped the progress of our activities. I personally think it would be best if the gathering of signatures ends up taking at least five years, that is, till 2011 at the earliest.

This way we will be able to keep learning and show a troubled country how beautiful and humane our methods are. At the same time, I do worry that if we take too long, our activists will lose heart and we will fall short of our goal, at considerable hazard to our face-to-face method's credibility along with much else.

Where do we really want to go, anyway? What happens once we get our million signatures? We'll have the other phases of the campaign to implement to be sure but none of them will have the variety and color of what we are doing now, nor will they be likely to generate as much excitement or draw such large numbers of activists from such a wide variety of social groups. Once we get our magic million names, we will probably find ourselves reduced to a small circle of lawyers, full-time lobbyists, and other "elite" types. If there is a way to escape that fate and keep flourishing on a mass scale, we need to start thinking about and discussing our "what next?" problem right now.

The period of intense working-together through which we are now passing will in all likelihood prove to be the high point of our life as a movement. We should make full use of it by going fearlessly among the people, trying new things and making mistakes, developing our talents, cultivating contacts with our sisters from different countries, getting to know the structure of injustice better based on the experiences of various underprivileged groups of women, improving our teamwork, founding cultural and street-performance troupes in various cities, collaborating to build a vocabulary for our campaign, and in every way we can savoring it all, the bitter along with the sweet.

Perhaps the campaign's greatest achievement so far is to have made itself a national institution. From its founding in Tehran's Haft-Tir Square, it has managed to reach out all over Iran, from alleyways to people's doorsteps, onto the buses and trains, and wherever else people congregate. In doing so, it has set an example that can serve as a model for years to come.

LOBBYING VERSUS INFORMING

Another challenge for the campaign has been to balance its efforts at lobbying the government and other official institutions with its efforts at spreading information and the equal rights message among the people at large. There have been conflicts between those who favor the traditional approach of lobbying with the aim of changing laws from top down, and those who favor the strategy of face-to-face interactions and informing from the bottom up.

Some members of the campaign ask: how far can direct popular discourse about the ills of legal discrimination get us? Are political activists and people who belong to political parties and organizations to be counted among those with whom we should be talking about changing the laws? Is our best approach to talk to the people and to parts of the ruling establishment at the same time? And if we do address that notoriously complex and factionalized establishment—which includes not only the government but also the Shia clergy and various powerful religious bodies—to which parts of it do we speak, and in what order? Must we lobby international NGOs and organizations as well? Others wonder to what extent elites, no matter how good their intentions, have ever brought about change, and how many female grievances they have addressed. Defenders of lobbying on the inside argue that engaging official institutions is essential, for it is ultimately these official institutions that must bring about change.

Some critics of the inside game of lobbying do not reject it as such, but hold instead that lobbying some power sources (the Iranian government itself, for instance) is a waste of time and may accord certain actors a legitimacy they do not deserve, while lobbying outside entities (such as the European Parliament) that can put pressure on the Iranian government may be a good idea. Another group of those who oppose the practice of lobbying Iranian officials often do so out of a worry that it will damage their own personal reputations. Still

others agree with the idea of lobbying Iranian government officials, but disagree with the idea of lobbying international bodies.

But the One Million Signatures Campaign, which does not take issue with any source of power, clearly cannot divide these into good and bad or legitimate or illegitimate. Such categorizations are posited on the basis of how they serve or do not serve various groups and ideologies, and as such unavoidably take on a partisan political character that the campaign must studiously avoid.

At the next remove from the groups that are somewhat skeptical of lobbying and top-down change we find those which reject them altogether. These groups believe that the only lasting change is the one that takes place at the very core of society and its culture. Outside-generated or top-down changes, such as those instituted by the Pahlavi monarchy, can become meaningful only to the extent that social movements institutionalize them through cultural and educational efforts at the grassroots level. The late Shah, these people often note, implemented changes that were to the advantage of women such as granting them the vote, albeit in elections that were hardly democratic, but with so little follow-up that women's rights remained precarious. Change produced by outside pressure, these skeptics fear, will suffer the same flaw—a position they maintain even though some among them welcome international lobbying efforts.

Not everyone in the One Million Signatures Campaign has strong feelings about lobbying. Many members, in fact, do not feel strongly about it one way or the other, and are content to leave it to those with the experience and prowess for it anyway. This group of "indifferents" tends to share the belief that change on the level of the culture is what matters most. It sees lobbying as largely irrelevant because almost by definition it can be sustained only by people who are already insiders in the sense of beginning with enough power that the establishment takes them seriously.

Lobbying has a multilayered logic of its own. Iranian officials and power sources will be receptive to the One Million Signatures Campaign insofar as it makes them feel more powerful, and no farther. Just talking to members of parliament or bureaucrats is not enough; lobbying requires influence over the public exchange of power on the societal level, and cannot be effective otherwise. Lobbying requires an understanding of power relations, and especially a deep appreciation for how specific conditions and circumstances affect the balance of power. The face-to-face method that the movement uses in its “outside game” of public education and awareness-raising seems superficially to be transferable to lobbying (lobbyists talk to officials face-to-face) but the underlying reality is quite different. While engaged in personal conversation, an official might agree with a position that the campaign puts forward. Yet even if such agreement signals a real change of opinion by the official, this does not mean that he will change his policy, since officials’ policies while in office are shaped less by their own personal ideas than by the positions that their party or political bloc has decided to stake out.

A weak movement cannot undertake any serious lobbying, and at the same time, it cannot gain the power that it needs from the act of lobbying. Once a social movement becomes strong enough, its lobbying dimension will fall into place as government officials, observing the shifting balance of power, become receptive to its efforts on this front. The One Million Signatures Campaign, by expanding and improving its “outside game” of public appeals, seeks to back its demands with a segment of public opinion and a popular following powerful enough to make lawmakers take notice and begin discussing the topic of legal reform with representatives from the women’s movement. Working with every extant capacity in society to build such power is what the campaign must keep doing if it wishes to see its goal of legal reform finally realized.

The early stirrings of this process have already begun to make themselves felt. The 7th Majlis, which sat from 2004 to 2008, saw the following proposals introduced on its floor: the equality of inheritance between husband and wife; the equalization of blood-money payments across the genders; the equal weighting of legal testimony (according to Islamic law and Iran's current code, the testimony of a man equals that of two women); and the legal age of punishment for children (Iran executes minors). Reports indicate that legislators cognizant of the One Million Signatures Campaign and its demands worked to gain favorable opinions from religious authorities and took other steps necessary for passage.

INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS CONFORMISM

While the Iranian women's movement has for a century been pressing much the same demand for equality, the turbulent history through which Iran has passed during that interval has meant that the manner of pressing for women's rights has had to change and cope with fresh tensions. In addition to the problems of processes versus goals and "inside" versus "outside" methods, there is one that I call the problem of ambition versus righteousness. It affects more than just the One Million Signatures Campaign, and indeed involves the Iranian women's movement as a whole. The campaign probably feels it more sharply, however, because of the large numbers of younger women present in its ranks.

While the dominant tendency among third generation Iranian feminists glorifies fellowship and conformity, it appears that the dominant tendencies among the fifth generation are individualism together with a sense of distrust toward elites and even a desire to figuratively "kill one's idols." The campaign and the larger women's movement will of course do best by finding some way to steer between the extremes of mindless conformism and aimless individualism.

Since the bulk of our activists are neither extreme conformists nor extreme individualists, this should be easy enough. But still, analyzing the situation may help.

The ambitious self-centeredness of younger activists may be an overreaction to the smothering atmosphere of the closed society in whose midst they have been raised. But the glorification of righteous fellowship that seems more congenial to their elders springs from an era when lofty aspirations and grand narratives seemed worth more than the lives of actual people—a perspective that helped to pave the way for a bloody revolution.

If both tendencies have problems, could it be that together they nonetheless add up to more than the sum of their defects? I believe that if the invaluable experiences of the third generation can be applied to the fast-paced world of the fifth generation, not only the campaign but the entire women's movement may benefit. If, while gathering a million signatures, the campaign continues to attract young volunteers throughout the country and becomes known for its intelligence, determination, and conviction—then will we be able to say that the campaign has taken a step toward attaining enduring equality for women?

After all, what is the real incentive driving the independent women's movement, other than the recognition of the individual identities of its activists? Is not the campaign's aim to show society what strong, unique, and individualistic women can do? Women who can guard the dream of freedom in their hearts and pass it on to their children; women who under the harshest conditions will nonetheless find the individual courage and conviction to stand up against all bullies and not lose themselves? This is the very sort of individualism that women have always been denied.

In group activities where men are involved, the Iranian woman has always been muted and pushed into the shadows. She has never held an important decision making position; has been denied equal

participation in matters of private and public life; and has always been encouraged to keep her thoughts to herself. And now what are we, the inheritors of this patriarchal history, to do in our feminine groups? Is it fair of us to reprise this smothering of the individual and to bar young women from self-assertion? Should we not instead, alongside our group activities, make manifest to society at large the independent identities of female authors, artists, activists, managers, peacemakers, organizers, and social workers? Are we to be forever condemned to go along with the ideological culture of pandering to power and the leveling discourse of false populism that pervades postrevolutionary Iran's public culture? Should women, who have always sacrificed their identities and made do without any recognition for their work, once again melt anonymously into a larger entity such as the One Million Signatures Campaign?

Righteous modesty and the glorification of female quietude and facelessness may have ancient cultural roots, but they are deadly poison for our campaign. It is the ideological institutions—the various parties and regimes—that have long fostered passive conformism, for they have always needed good soldiers and sacrificial lambs to carry out the leaders' grand and dangerous schemes and serve their vaulting ambitions. Our movement partakes of a much different spirit. It is a coming together of individuals who have joined of their own free will in order to seek the satisfaction of minimal legal demands through strictly peaceful means. Our campaign needs no soldiers—let alone of the unknown variety—requires no glorification of conformity, and relies on no procedural hierarchy for direction. The culture that glorifies anonymity is a prop of absolutism. The rise to dominance of such a culture within the One Million Signatures Campaign would surely spell that campaign's death.

This is not to say that the ambitious glorification of the self is much better. It too, would steer the campaign toward a dead end, in this case

a blind alley of fragmentation and ego-fueled factionalism. Experience has shown that the self-centeredness of some young women prevents them from working well with others. Paradoxically, egotism can lead to a draining-away of an activist's independence, for the simple reason that no individual woman can beat the patriarchal system by herself. If she tries to, it will crush her figuratively if not literally, or at best leave her feeling burned out and despondent about the prospects for real change. Either way, what begins in raging egotism ends in defeat at the hands of the absolutist system.

Righteous modesty represses individualism, while egotism undermines it through self-imposed isolation. Meanwhile, the One Million Signatures Campaign needs women who are proud, independent, and yet also scrupulously law-abiding, neither cut off from others by self-centeredness nor unduly subjected to them by needless conformism.

Without the energy and enthusiasm of the young fifth generation activists, there would be no One Million Signatures Campaign. We who are more experienced need to remember this, and to do all we can to make sure that the youth are seen and heard. Our campaign's crucial bonds with youth in this demographically young country can only prove a benefit, as can our movement's own inner pluralism and self-confidence.

The ingenuity, creativity, and determination of our younger colleagues has been evident since the campaign's early days. It is they who have ensured its continuation and brought in growing numbers of new volunteers. They are the ones who have spread the message of fairness and equality throughout the provinces often by means of self-financed trips, and who have created and successfully managed various websites for the campaign. They have established widespread networks, and have continually paid the physical and emotional costs of assaults by the authorities. And they have done it all by trial and error, which is inevitable for an enterprise of such novelty.

Laying the groundwork to help young women carry out their activities should not be hard. We should understand their proud and confident spirits. We should acknowledge their awe-inspiring abilities in creating relationships with people, and in founding and democratically managing newsletters, magazines, websites, and more. We must accept these abilities as superior and criticize them less and not be so sour when they do not pay the advice of us elders enough attention, and not complain that they make decisions without conferring with us first. Their independence should occasion pride, not condemnation.

We must encourage them, by themselves, to manage various seminars and ceremonies of the movement in Tehran and in the provinces. We must make space for them to deliver keynote addresses and present new ideas during conferences. We must enable them to conduct their own reading and research groups. We must help them publish their artistic productions and offer them research and translation assistance for their writing. When we criticize their analyses, we must do so with tact and sensitivity. So far, the number of young women in the campaign who have written publicly about their ideas and experiences is small, but those who have done so have written well, and we should encourage others to join them.

A PERFECT BUT LIMITED OPPORTUNITY

The One Million Signatures Campaign, and above all its younger members, is blazing a trail. It is showing how to take steps not merely *for* women, but *alongside* them. There is now a chance that the campaign's model of women's activism going on outside the shadows cast by official values and ideological factions can spread throughout the women's movement and perhaps Iranian society more generally. Moreover, public opinion is focused on the discourse of nondiscrimination and equality in a way and to a degree not seen before. The more passive elements of the women's movement have moved

to make themselves heard. Certain forces closer to the regime have started thinking about ways to break old legal deadlocks and offer new readings of traditional religious texts. Even parliament, as we have seen, has now begun to dip its toe into these waters.

But the opportunity that all this has created is limited. It will not last forever. It depends heavily on the continued commitment and enthusiasm of the campaign's independent-minded younger members. Sustaining that commitment is important, but what matters even more than how long these young women stay active in the campaign is what they learn while they are with us. If their commitment to justice mixes with their growing knowledge, their hands will always find good work to do even if they leave their formal affiliation with our campaign behind.

In contemporary Iran, efforts to eliminate this or that "other" have often gone together with well-worn denunciations of "abuse" and "abusers." The tendency of this vocabulary of bitter factional conflict to worm its way into the women's movement is one that we must oppose. Fighting words taken up as rhetorical weapons in power struggles should have no place in our speech. Our campaign is not about power and position, but simple fairness. We in the women's movement should be praying to God for others, according to their own consciences, to come forward and join our campaign. If we have a politics, it is the politics of addition, not division.

As for worries that other groups and political parties might seek to take advantage of us by supporting our campaign only out of a desire to curry favor with voters, I say: By all means, let them run and win on our platform! If our appeal becomes that strong, it will not matter if this or that politician really agrees with us, so long as he knows that the voters are with us, and the voters are watching.

In Iran, any movement that aspires to broad influence must contend with yet another tension, this one geographic in nature. I

refer of course to the suspicion and resentment that have long vexed relations between the capital and the provinces. Even in the women's movement, there are bitter memories of how Tehran's dominance has all too often hobbled the development of local talent and squelched the hardworking spirit of local activists.

In this, the women's movement has unfortunately replicated the pattern of overcentralization and excessive emphasis on hierarchy that has long lain at the heart of governance in Iran and undergirded regime after regime. It might be hoped that nongovernmental groups would have learned to break this unhealthy and undemocratic pattern by now, but such appears not to be the case.

Faced with the marginalizing implications for them of the Tehran-centric way of doing things, provincial activists have naturally been bitter. They have the right to show that they can act independently to deal with their own local circumstances. Their sense of initiative must not be choked off, and their self-reliance deserves encouragement. A truly democratic and nationwide campaign can advance in no other way, and as a practical matter will benefit rather than suffer if the free creativity of its members—wherever they happen to live—is respected rather than stultified. In this as in other ways, the One Million Signatures Campaign is called to embody something new in the history of our country.

The campaign's decentralized, pluralistic structure encourages growing independence on the part of its various committees, institutions, and activist circles. Campaign members are well advised to be always on the lookout for new and inventive ways to give activists in both Tehran and the provinces better tools for their own independent activities.

In this spirit, activists from Tehran have urged provincial groups not only to contribute to the campaign's main website, but also to maintain their own independent sites. If budgets are tight, personal

weblogs might serve to relay news of what provincial activists are up to. An increase in the number of such sites and blogs would not only make the campaign more open and varied, but it would also give provincial activists more opportunities to perfect their own skills at management and communications.

As the internal structure of the One Million Signatures Campaign moves toward pluralism and openness, the coordination and unity of its activists is actually improving as they continue to strive for the attainment of their rights. Such freedom and independence among campaign volunteers should add to their satisfaction and peace of mind—something that is in itself no small feat.

Just as activists in Tehran do not aim either to run the international women's movement or be dissolved in it, so do provincial activists consider their local movements equal to the Tehran-based movement. They would refuse a hierarchical organization chart with Tehran at the top on the same ground of the need and right to preserve their own local autonomy.

This campaign is wide and flexible enough to permit all sorts of creativity and volunteer activity. This flexibility, which has not been seen in any other activities relating to the women's movement, is the best thing about the campaign.

In addition to local activists who resent Tehran, there are those who feel unduly dependent on it. These women may even become disappointed when Tehran invites them to join in consultations, for the invitation amounts to an admission that the center does not have all the answers. Activists in Gorgan and Tabriz provinces have addressed this problem by setting up an architecture of communication with Tehran that lets the locals retain their independence while at the same time coordinating their actions with those of Tehran. Other provincial chapters of the campaign might benefit from studying the innovations pioneered in these two.

ORGANIZATION: TIGHT BUT NOT TOO TIGHT

At our campaign's second general meeting, a speaker argued for a tight organizational structure and touched off passionate rebuttals from other attendees who argued that the degree of hierarchy and centralization proposed would be un-feminist. Interestingly, the topic of security weaknesses came up later at the same meeting, and some of those who had attacked the very idea of clear responsibilities as a patriarchal trap rose to ask why no one had foreseen and taken action regarding these problems. How to make decisions in the absence of any hierarchy and coordinate activities in the absence of any defined organization would indeed seem to be a conundrum.

The real challenge here is that when it comes to these issues most of our campaign's activists are thinking less of handling executive tasks, and more of the relations between various groups and persons. Certainly we activists should work to create ways of managing relations within the group that are as free of hierarchy as possible. But how can this be done? How can responsibilities and rights be divided in a way that is horizontal rather than vertical, flat rather than "stove-piped"? The question is also, how can one give to all equal rights and opportunities to decide, while at the same time insisting that some have special levels or types of responsibility (for organizational security, for instance)? How can a movement that is supposed to be actively coordinated, no matter how independently, throughout the country, avoid the emergence of a hierarchical structure? Can a minimum of democratic coordination and internal discipline be defined for volunteer activities? And finally, how can the One Million Signatures Campaign reconcile the principle of group management with personal responsibilities and varying commitments?

Amid all these questions and ambiguities, it appears that the campaign's activists have managed to take some of the edge off these issues by creating multiple nodes where decisions are made. That is,

they have limited decision making authority to executive matters, and even this minimal decision making has been divided among various committees within the campaign in an arrangement that is subject to constant rethinking. Leaving the gates of criticism open like that has its risks, but all in all seems worth it. Other tactics for guarding against a slide toward hierarchy include the proliferation of small groups empowered to make decisions plus the regular swapping of responsibilities among groups and persons so that none may begin claiming a certain area as “her” or “our” domain.

The campaign’s aspirations to be as nonhierarchical as possible and to run itself by democratic means no doubt create one of its crucial and most difficult challenges. Our society is pervaded by hierarchies that enjoy complete legitimacy and a knack for reproducing themselves. We know we cannot completely distance ourselves from the influence of the hierarchical principle, but we do our best to contain it and avoid reproducing it.

Democracy is not something that you can buy down at the bazaar. It is a process that can take years, even generations, of trial and error to learn and master. We can translate democratic writings and bring them into our midst easily, but we cannot do that with democratic behavior and ways of relating. Nevertheless, we must take advantage of whatever experiences we can, and work for the gradual reform of undemocratic and hierarchical relations.

A final issue regarding the One Million Signature Campaign’s inner life with which we have had to deal has to do with the breadth and scope of decision making. The question was whether it is democratic to cancel out the votes of great numbers of dedicated activists through a single voting motion? Those who opposed broad-gauge decision making cited the principle of liberal democracy according to which minorities right down to “a minority of one” (that is, the individual) always retain some rights that a majority, no matter how large, may never cancel out or take away.

The discussion ended on a democratic note. The campaign took it as a principle that it would ask for agreement only on a narrowly drawn set of principles and values, and would not demand that any activist subscribe to anything more than those. This makes the bar for excluding anyone extremely high and consequently places a barrier in the path of factionalism, since factions often want to ban each other. Limited circles within the campaign can make decisions for themselves about how to draw the lines of membership, but cannot expect such decisions to carry any further—to a different city, for example.

In summary, I see our place and role as being like that of a runner in a relay race. This particular race has been going on for a century. Our task is to run toward the goal of equality as best we can consistent with our ability to pass on the baton—which is not ours but which we only hold in trust—to the younger teammates who must carry on with the next leg of this arduous but noble contest.

4

THE ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN AND OTHER MOVEMENTS

The One Million Signatures Campaign does not operate in a vacuum, and must continually ask itself how it can interact with other social movements and political parties (to say nothing of the government) without losing its independence.³² Somewhat connected to this issue is the question of the role of men in the movement.

Of these two matters, the latter is probably the simpler to resolve. Women predominate numerically in the Iranian women's movement as they do in such movements the world over. But in a highly patriarchal society such as Iran's, where men are vastly more likely than women to have managerial and organizational skills and experience, the presence of even a relatively small number of males in the movement for women's legal equality can raise concerns of a "crowding out" effect according to which men come to displace less seasoned females in key leadership posts.

Clearly, the women's movement should on grounds of both principle and practicality want to appeal to as many segments of Iranian society as possible, and that very much includes the half of it that

is male. Men who embrace the struggle for women's equality as a matter of conviction must by no means be discouraged. Yet worries about women losing control of their own movement have a reasonable basis.

In order to balance these considerations, women's organizations should stop now and then to assess the role played by men in their ranks. It may be that at some junctures—early in the history of a women's group, for instance—the presence of men could threaten to stifle the development of women's leadership skills. In a more mature group, however, men might have no such effect. In any case, women must be able to make their own independent history and traditions, and manage their own activities. Once they do these things, the presence of men need no longer be seen as problematic or threatening. Women can and should stand on their own feet and experiment and gain experience without the interference of men, but once a certain amount of experience is gained, they can find among men allies for the cause of equality.

Looking back over the past two decades, we see evidence of just such a growth process. With the idea of equality before the law gaining greater currency and a new generation of equality-affirming men arising, the One Million Signatures Campaign is proud to have drawn the male participation that it has.

Those worried about men as threats to the independence and integrity of the women's movement should pause to reflect that such threats may come from women as well. The female gender of a group's members does not necessarily prove that they work for the advancement of women. Female groups aligned with the government, for instance, typically place the demands of their mostly religious ideologies above the problems of women. There are leftist women's groups who will do likewise when it comes to their own guiding agendas. In both cases, women and their needs take a back seat to some other

notion of what matters. Although there may be times where such groups make common cause with the women's movement and even lend it important new dimensions, their attainment of leadership roles in the movement would threaten its independence gravely.

INTERACTION WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

Far knottier than the problem of what to do about men is that of whether and how to interact with political parties or party-like groups. Iranian political culture is strongly patriarchal, and the ubiquity of patriarchal views within various political movements, factions, and parties makes engaging them difficult for the One Million Signatures Campaign.

In order to gain equal rights for women, the campaign will have to find ways to spread its message of equality and fair treatment among the political class, and that means engaging parties. The key to doing so without becoming dependent on them is first to gain independent legitimacy within Iranian society at large.

Movement members who fear partisan manipulation should beware of falling into a self-pitying "victim" mindset that ends up painting women (whether wittingly or not) as helpless children who may well need men and a male-dominated government to lead them around. Worries about manipulation can be overblown. Even if the government and various other political forces begin to pay attention to women's issues for purely cynical reasons—because women vote, for example—good results may ensue as the discourse of equality gains further public traction. Especially in our society, where all media are state-dominated, we must seize every chance to raise public awareness of women's problems and concerns.

It is true that political groups have in the past "used" women without giving much in return. But instead of bemoaning such situations, we need to learn to turn the tables and "use those who would use us" in order to press our own demands for fairer treatment. The

women who let themselves be mobilized for the revolution against the Shah in 1979 may have harbored hopes for fairer treatment, but they found themselves swept up in what soon became an Islamic revolution that did not, to say the least, have gender equality in mind.

One group, Women's National Unity (founded in 1980 and banned in 1982), found through a survey that 90 percent of those who wanted to join were motivated by loyalty to a leftist political organization and sought solidarity with workers rather than any particular improvement in the lot or status of women.³³ The lesson of that era should be clear: women need to be conscious of their interest in equality as *women*, and must not allow themselves to be diverted into working for someone else's agenda. The One Million Signatures Campaign represents an application of this insight. For the first time in the history of Iran, women have their own independent demands to serve as an impetus for their political efforts.

We also need to change the way we look at history, and stop dwelling on futile complaints about how women's rights have been ignored. Instead, we should look back in order to move ahead, analyzing Iranian history with a view to devising strategies that will lead to success. We should analyze events closely to see how women themselves could have acted differently at various points to achieve better results.

In looking at the so-called reform era from 1997 to 2005, for instance, we can see that women, in effect, went in without a plan, voted for Mohammad Khatami in keeping with the general tide of the times, had no particularly well thought-out ideas about how to press their demands, and wound up with little or nothing to show for their trouble—not even a token woman cabinet minister. And yet they may have learned from all this the new approach that underlies the One Million Signatures Campaign and its success so far.

More than anything else, the campaign needs to maintain its capacity for independent thought, approaches, methodology and analysis

in order to recognize and pursue that which benefits women within the multilayered fabric of our society. This does not mean that we must distance ourselves from any space occupied by political parties, other social movements, or even governments. On the contrary, we should never fear to enter those spaces, but with eyes wide open and in service of our own clear goals.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

A recurrent issue that the One Million Signatures Campaign has faced from the very beginning has been its relationship to other transnational movements and activists. Social movements that focus on protesting certain inequalities have no choice but to publicize and universalize their demands. To do this, they need connections that transcend borders and tap into international channels for the expansion of protests. Yet at the same time, such connections must be continually and critically appraised and fine-tuned if they are not to have negative consequences.

In considering the relationship of the Iranian women's movement to similar multinational ones, we are driven to reflect on the great social power of immigrants—in this case, the millions-strong diaspora of Iranians abroad—who are multilingual and multicultural and form a prominent presence in the arts, the academy, commerce, the media, and the Internet, and who exert significant influence on public and official opinion in the countries of the wealthy global North.

The special circumstances and abilities of immigrant women—women whose roots lie in the less-developed countries of the global South—result from their understanding of the social fabric and culture of their homelands as well their understanding of international norms and discourses. Given their ability to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in progressive societies, these immigrants occupy a special position in the transnational women's movement and have the

potential to introduce the perspectives and aspirations of the global South to global public opinion.

We women in local movements can mobilize the forces of the transnational women's movement, but if we are not careful and do not know what we are doing, we run the risk of winding up followers and parasites of transnational groups. Such groups offer dynamic possibilities that make them very attractive, but in the end, everything depends on the local movements and how they take advantage of these possibilities. If local movements, and here I am of course thinking particularly of the Iranian women's movement, become absolute followers of the values, theories, and discourses that are predominant in transnational women's movements, the locals will likely be doing neither themselves nor anyone else any favor.

Women of "Southern" origin who produce the discourses that are dominant in transnational movements are often seen mistakenly as representing Southern countries in an unmediated way. This imprecise understanding creates the risk that the demands of local movements in the global South will be misidentified as being virtually identical to those of immigrant women in the global North. Local movements can benefit from the larger megaphone that transnational movements can give them, while transnational movements can likewise benefit from a dynamic relationship with local women's rights activists. Nobody benefits if the "locals" simply become hangers-on of the "transnationals."

There can be no doubt that the transnational women's movement has influenced civil society movements throughout the world, including Iran. But the real and problematic knot to be untied is to determine how the relationship can be kept creative and intelligent rather than stultifying and reductive. There is much thinking and writing to be done on this matter. My own very preliminary view begins with the observation that the rise of the Internet and related forms of rapidly

scalable global communications has allowed women within Iran to tell the world—including the Persian-speaking diaspora—about their quest for justice as never before.

With help from the relatively open atmosphere that flourished in Iran during Khatami's presidency, the independent women's movement managed the huge achievement of making "the woman question" a matter of discussion and concern within governmental and paragonmental spheres. There was extensive talk in the press and among political and religious groups as well as more international attention.

With the attention came international funding for women's social projects, international conferences on women-related themes, and various NGOs (many of which were associated with this or that faction within the Iranian government) that suddenly found themselves considered part of the women's movement because of their putatively "nongovernmental" activity in some sphere that could be construed as involving women or touching on their concerns.

There were good things about all the attention and money, especially the way they made the political powers that be sit up and take notice, but they had a downside as well. The quest for justice and the culture of dissent waned as an ethos of charity and donation waxed. The volunteerism that had long been the lifeblood of the Iranian women's movement suffered as NGOs became tempting sources of employment, particularly to younger women trying to make their way in an economy that is chronically unable to produce enough new jobs for the vast numbers of young Iranians who graduate from school each year. Activists became office workers, local initiative drained away, and any tiny group with a good PR team and funding from abroad could gain access to a global communications channel and make the mistake of thinking that this might substitute for the hard, long-term work of finding and training volunteers to make change from the bottom up.

The women's movement became honeycombed with pyramid-shaped groups—each one typically dominated by its founder—that replicated the pattern of narrow hierarchy which has long beset Iranian political culture and society generally. The international donors who were paying for all this hardly noticed or cared, however, since it was easier for them to deal with a single person at the top rather than a band of fractious, unpredictable volunteers anyway.

THE PROBLEM OF THE TRANSNATIONALS

The problem was not that a part of the Iranian women's movement reached out to transnationals; the problem was that too many locals lost their focus on being critical toward power, and let themselves become project-based and service-oriented. The local movement may have looked colorful on the outside, but its lack of true volunteers betrayed its hollowness. The drive to achieve the legal recognition of rights and change opinion was seriously dissipated.

As we have seen, in a country such as Iran, the existence of discriminatory divorce laws and laws that allow men to have several wives has led to horrors for numerous women. These unjust laws are among the reasons why so many abused women run away from their husbands' homes, and so many others remain in thrall to husbands who may be psychologically unstable, fanatics, abusers, and even drug addicts who force their wives into prostitution. From such situations spring a host of further evils, including female self-immolation and husband-murder.

International organizations, unfortunately, tend to focus on sensational cases at the expense of real civic work that addresses the institutional and legal roots of the problem of women's intensely precarious position in Iranian society. These organizations are ill equipped to grasp the intricacies of Third World societies, especially Muslim ones, and consequently encourage a "victim" mentality while at the same time risking counterproductive confrontations with governments and jeopardizing the work that local women's movements are trying to do.

Stoning and the African practice of female circumcision are surely evils, but so are Iran's lopsided divorce laws and legalized polygamy. International attention tends to focus on high-profile cases of the former two while ignoring the need to work against the latter two. Activists of Iranian origin abroad—well meaning but underinformed about realities on the ground—are too often given funding for promising-sounding projects that go nowhere.

High-profile transnational efforts against sensational evils have their place. The problem arises when they so completely and one-sidedly overshadow—as they too often do—lower-key local efforts to advance desperately needed reforms. Then, instead of working together, the “transnationals” and the “locals” wind up working at cross-purposes, or else the locals become hapless followers of freewheeling, well funded, superficially sophisticated, yet essentially clueless outsiders.

Local women's activists should understand such pitfalls and not let themselves become distracted from their own priorities and the basic needs of their own societies. When it comes to such an effort, having clear goals is a source of enormous strength. Here is where the One Million Signatures Campaign has been of great help in keeping the Iranian women's movement true to its calling as a critical and people-centered movement for the realization of equal rights, and also perhaps in pointing a direction for Iranian civil society as a whole.

It is doubtful that without the support of renowned international figures such as Shirin Ebadi, the campaign would find a place among the transnational women's movements, no matter how effective and unique it was inside the country. But at the same time, given what the campaign has so swiftly achieved, it is equally doubtful that any small group with global media access will ever again overshadow justice-seeking local movements that take their appeal into the streets.

Indeed, the One Million Signatures Campaign has changed the game to the degree that small groups must now demonstrate societal

roots and begin recruiting and training activists if they are not to have their legitimacy questioned. Activists who can boast outside money but no social base inside Iran are already noticeably thinner on the ground.

EPILOGUE

The One Million Signatures movement appeared at a specific moment and under specific circumstances. Immediately after its inception, it made numerous significant contributions to the Iranian women's movement both inside and outside the country. First and foremost, the activists and supporters of this groundbreaking phenomenon emphasized their independence on a national level. Perhaps it was this self-confidence that enabled the movement's activists to explore new possibilities for change in our country. These included agreeing to a baseline plan for meeting Iranian women's goal of legal equality with men—a plan that featured a well thought-out and precise strategy, free of cultural peculiarities, and an innovative (by local and regional standards) method of face-to-face dialogue.

As Iran's civil society activists have shown, this fresh method allows for meaningful activism through reliance on fellow activists, the wisdom of feminism, and the imagination and passion of volunteers. Thus there is no need to pursue any kind of official status or formal relationship with any official institution, or to surrender to

any financial enticements that might be dangled by other groups or organizations. This One Million Signatures Campaign underscores the success of creative, homegrown initiatives such as using people's homes for meeting places, and also shows what can be done with generous and spontaneous support from caring and committed Iranians throughout the world.

With their creative yet strictly law-abiding way of doing things, the campaign's mostly young and female activists have succeeded, for the first time in the history of the Iranian women's movement, in crafting a balanced relationship with activists outside Iran. This time, all the hopeful features of a movement united for change—openness to new methods, a reliance on making decisions by consensus, a readiness to forge practical alliances, and more—all arose from the very substance of domestic cultural developments and social needs and hence came to the world's notice as a true home-grown experiment in advocating and organizing for equal justice under law.

The One Million Signatures Campaign has with remarkable courage pulled off the task of opening new horizons not only to Iranian civil society, but also to the international women's movement. While the flow of ideas and theories once ran mostly from abroad into Iran, today the One Million Signatures Campaign is ensuring a more reciprocal process, as it has been able to present theories and solutions born of communal endeavors from within Iran to the world outside. Thus most of those activists and thinkers in the international women's movement who are of Iranian origin offer the campaign their heartfelt support.

Based on the campaign's success so far, one can say that if local activists resist temptation and avoid blind obedience to outside forces in order to pursue liberty, equality, and better lives for women with courage and a firm belief in their own capabilities, they will surely gain support from most of their country's political groups as well as sister movements abroad.

Many activists in other movements both within and outside Iran sincerely say that they want to see a system of equal rights for men and women and, indeed, for all citizens, before the law in Iran. If it becomes clear to these activists that their countrywomen inside Iran are standing on their own feet with hope, resourcefulness, and self-confidence and are actively seeking justice, every assistance possible will be forthcoming. At its most valuable, this assistance may not be material but emotional, spiritual, moral, and intellectual.

I should also pause to note that the presence of the One Million Signatures Campaign itself has provided, both directly and indirectly, reciprocal assistance to groups of Iranian origin that are active in the women's movement internationally. For example, many groups whose cooperation with one another has been sporadic at best are now working hand in glove to defend freedom and equality from outside Iran by backing the One Million Signatures Campaign. These and other positive results allow us to predict that soon independent women's groups will grow in numbers and acceptance.

To put the matter in a nutshell: The campaign has met and mastered the daunting challenge of walking the line between being absorbed in the international women's movement and retreating into self-limiting localism. The choices along the way have been tough. Yet reaching the present balance has enabled the movement to grow toward a new and creative model of interaction between the local and international levels of the women's movement. This represents a remarkable accomplishment of which the campaign's members and supporters should be proud. If somehow the One Million Signatures Campaign stopped today, its deep and enduring influence would remain green in the collective memory of the women's movement, and ready to spring to life and bear fruit again under more propitious skies.

POSTSCRIPT

Ten Days that Shook Iran: The Women's Rights Movement and the 2009 Presidential Election

Immediately following the 12 June 2009 presidential election and the unexpected claim by officials that incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won in an enormous landslide, huge numbers of Iranians took to the streets of Tehran and other cities to demand respect for people's votes. These widespread protests, which contained a demand for the establishment of free elections, permeated all of Iran with stunning speed. In just ten short days, more changed than had changed in the entirety of the ten preceding years.

It is still early days. The forces that were unleashed this past June have not yet revealed their full effects, and the situation is unfolding. Therefore, any analysis must be tentative and infused with guesswork. Keeping that in mind and with much reservation, I will nonetheless offer a preliminary assessment of the June uprising, including its origins as well as its implications for the women's movement, with many challenges that are not currently visible but which are at work beneath the surface.

The story begins with rifts among the Islamic Republic's ruling elite. For at least the last decade and a half, latent cracks and hidden or half-hidden fissures have been dividing various portions of the power structure against one another. Although factional politics at the top assuredly has its own logic, it is also no doubt the case that the women's movement and various other groups in Iranian society at large have been voicing demands and bringing pressures to bear that have gradually helped to make the cleavages within the regime more dynamic, in much the same way that slow-acting pressures within the earth's crust may contribute to rendering a geological fault line suddenly active.

As the growing dynamism of these rifts became more and more evident, a clear majority of civic forces began to grasp just how consequential this year's election might be and decided to jump into the fray. Taking advantage of the relatively open campaign atmosphere, and appealing to a public increasingly hungry for change in the face of economic distress, the civic forces injected their own agendas into the realm of electoral discourse. They were particularly energetic in holding the feet of the self-declared "reformist" candidates (Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hussein Moussavi) to the proverbial fire, insisting that they at least respond to civil society's ideas and appeals in hopes of wringing some concessions, however partial and symbolic, from men whom the Guardian Council had certified as eligible to hold the presidency of Iran. The civic forces, in other words, recognized that even such a small victory would help sustain that hope for change without which no positive transformation of society is possible.

The months leading up to the election saw Iran, like other countries in the Middle East, enjoying a mood of relative hopefulness thanks to the decreased threat of war in the region, the reactivation of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and a relative lessening of international tensions under the new U.S. presidential administration

of Barack Obama. His historic speeches in Turkey on 6 April 2009 and Egypt on 4 June 2009 created doubts and serious rifts within the otherwise united front of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. At the same time, Iranians in particular were feeling discontented and anxious over the incumbent regime's role in running a sclerotic, stagnant national economy that had failed to grow or produce jobs despite years of raking in high prices for Iran's main export, oil.

This mixture of positive and negative trends, together with a firm and cohesive—albeit unwritten—agreement among groups in Iran that included segments of the ruling elite, gave new life to hopes for change. Whatever their shortcomings as de facto “selections” more than “elections,” ballotings in Iran offer civil society a wider field on which to build coalitions and craft common agendas. The hopes for change roused by the 2009 presidential election fed the big campaign rallies and the high turnout at the polls as well as the huge protest wave that surged before the eyes of a transfixed world once the fraudulent results were announced and the regime threw its weight behind Ahmadinejad's continuance in office.

At first glance, this popular uprising, which seems to have stemmed only from the democratic but otherwise not particularly ideological wishes and values of Iran's young, modern middle classes, might seem to have thus come from virtually nowhere, a bolt out of the blue so to speak. But activists for civil rights know that this great, calm popular wave was in fact the result of a protracted process.

The protests of June 13 and after would never have been possible without the persistent and dedicated organizational and educational work in which Iran's demand-centered social movements had long been engaged. These groups of women, students, workers, journalists, artists, teachers, and believers interested in more modern interpretations of Islam shared a civic and reformist (as opposed to a revolutionary) mindset. They stood in a tradition of justice-seeking reformism

that stretches back to the constitutional era of the early twentieth century. Whatever else they may care about, all these movements are as one in caring about free and fair elections for Iran.

After thirty years during which the ballot box had been only a meaningless ornament, this election marked the first time that the people could claim the right to vote as something serious that belonged to them. They did so by drawing upon an awareness of inalienable rights that the social movements had long been promoting, and that portions of the regime deemed threatening enough to warrant violent repression.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AFTER 12 JUNE 2009

In the tumultuous days following the election, when the protest cries of millions greeted each new dawn, we in the women's movement had to ask ourselves again what should be our place in the drive for wider civic rights such as that of voting in free and fair elections. In the months leading up to the vote, activists for women's rights had been working to affect the outcome in ways that would favor women's demands. Secular and religious activists joined in a coalition that they called the Convergence of the Women's Movement for Voicing Their Demands in the Election or the Convergence for short.

This broad alliance focused on pressing the specific legal demands that it had inherited from the One Million Signatures Campaign, eventually rallying more than forty women's- and human-rights groups as well as seven-hundred or more activists from other wings of Iranian civil society. The Convergence not only managed to mobilize many previously inactive young women, but also provided key players such as the student groups with a model of how to execute a "demand-centered" strategy for social and legal change.

The Convergence also enabled the modern Iranian women's movement to define its relationship with the electoral process with an unprecedented degree of independence and self-consciousness.

Thanks to this democratically organized formation with members drawn from many different leanings and outlooks, Iranian women took a giant step toward reclaiming the ballot box and all it represents from the state of official tutelage in which the regime would have preferred to keep it submerged.

With its genial, placard-toting volunteers a ubiquitous presence on the streets before June 12, the Convergence proved itself capable of persuading all the presidential candidates to state their preferred policies and programs concerning women. This in itself was an enormously significant first in Iranian politics and a victory that cannot be overestimated.

Some misguided observers, bemused by facile comparisons with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, have voiced fears that women are once again about to get handed the short end of the stick as their own unique concerns are shoved aside in favor of some larger insurrectionary movement against the powers that be. Therefore, these observers suggest, we should ignore the democratic and unifying demands of the wider protest movement in order to emphasize our particular independent and women-centered demands.

The analogy between 1979 and 2009 overlooks the major changes that have swept Iranian society in the interval, beginning with the differences of outlook and expectation that set today's vast cohort of younger Iranians apart from the revolutionary generation of '79. Contemporary youth has little or none of the penchant for violence, patriarchal thinking, and intense ideological conflict that for better or worse marked its predecessor thirty years ago. To gain a sense of the change, one need only look at all the images from this past June showing long lines of demonstrators in which millions of young men and women freely mix with one another, standing shoulder to shoulder in a way that was hardly in evidence during the last days of the Shah's regime or the first days of Khomeini's.

Another thing that the worried observers miss is the degree to which women, over the last fifteen years, have succeeded in making society in general—including its political elites—keenly aware of issues that particularly concern the female half of Iran. The “full buy-in” that the women’s movement has made regarding the larger civic-movement agenda of free elections and civil rights for all is not a distraction or a divider of effort, but in fact is a massive source of strength.

If women got the short end of the stick after 1979, it was because their demands during that period of societal transformation derived from grand narratives that had to do with toppling the monarchy or venting rage toward America and the West. Women thirty years ago, in other words, let themselves be swept along by a problematic revolution. They lacked a set of independent, gender-centered demands around which they could organize themselves, form coalitions with other progressive forces, influence the choice of new leaders, and impede the clergy from pushing laws and policies hostile to the interests of women.

Today, things are quite different. Since the blossoming of reformist energy under Khatami, the women’s movement has convinced a great portion of civil and political society that no force can claim legitimacy without heeding women’s demands.

Events since June 12 have shown Iran’s urgent need and rich potential for democracy and a government that respects its citizens’ rights. There is a conflict between freedom and oppression but not between religion and irreligion, since in truth religious groups and persons have participated actively in gatherings and demonstrations taking place both before and after the election. It is symbolically significant that those protesting the electoral coup saw no contradiction between shouting “God is great!” from their rooftops and chanting “Death to the dictator!” in the streets below; or that appeals to the Muslim custom of *e’tekaf* (breaking away from worldly business

in order to attend mosque) went together with cries of "Strike!" The government, it should be noted, struck back with its own messages of nationalism and fundamentalism, and even showed images of girls in makeup holding portraits of Ahmadinejad.

What was at stake in this duel of messages was not the Islamic or un-Islamic nature of this or that symbol, but rather the choice between democracy and dictatorship. All human rights and democracy activists agree that religion and the clergy must be separated from the apparatus of the state. And yet difficulty surrounds efforts to define the relationship of religion with the public sphere in a way that places limits on how far militantly religious institutions can intervene in day-to-day governance and life.

The truth is that many from the middle class, which is not necessarily unreligious, are active in this movement. The elites of this class want to participate in deciding their political fate and aim to achieve recognition for rationality as an ingredient in the management of society. As a humorous aside, one can say that if the modern and *secular* middle classes of the Shah's time managed unwittingly to lay the groundwork for a religious system of government, then perhaps the modern and *religious* middle classes of today can turn our current militantly religious regime into a rational and secular government!

The peaceful and civil marches during the first week after the election were consciously based on values that we women have been insisting upon for years, and have long worked to weave into the basic fabric of our country's civic movement. The violence that broke out in the second week after the election showed that we still have a long way to go before nonviolence can be institutionalized in our society. On this basis, it can be argued that the symbols the movement needs most are any that promote nonviolence. This is so whether the symbols are religious or nonreligious in nature. Trying to purge demonstrations of religious symbols, so long as these symbols are peaceful, would be

undemocratic. A peaceful Islamic symbol such as the color green is a help to the movement.

Unfortunately, some political activists consider the use of peaceful methods a mere “tactic” and not a principle. This kind of thinking bears the seeds of disaster. As long as we hold to our goal of institutionalizing principled nonviolence, we can devise a collection of ethical values and help to spread them. But if we fall into the trap of mistaking nonviolence for nothing but a “tool” that might under some circumstances prove useful in neutralizing the opposition, we will continue to dwell in a society that lacks a pacified public sphere, and soon enough this will come back to haunt us. Our movement must not pollute itself by causing bloodshed.

Our movement has, on the whole, been nonviolent. The million-strong crowd that marched on Monday, June 15, and the following three days strode in self-disciplined silence, not even making noise, much less breaking windows or heads. Once the government unleashed repressive violence, however, that all changed. Starting on Saturday, June 20, the day Neda Agha-Soltan was shot, the government’s special antiriot guards appeared and launched a bloody crackdown; some demonstrators retaliated by throwing stones. In doing so, they were acting under the influence of the steady diet of propaganda that the state-run media have been feeding them for decades with its endless documentaries, movies, and TV series on 1979 and its regular news footage of Palestinians throwing stones at Israelis.

In order to lay the foundations for healthy, democratic values in our society in these tumultuous times, we need to make nonviolence an iron principle. Young people who grow angry and ashamed and lash back when the authorities attack them must learn not to feel humiliated. Instead, they should take comfort from knowing that the whole world is watching their tormentors behave like atrocious barbarians. Youth who take a stand for democracy and reform must be

assured that showing patience and not reacting in kind to violence are at the very core of courage and greatness. As Gandhi would remind us, *satyagraha* is not about weakness but rather requires supreme bravery and strength. The real meaning of power is not violence, but upright patience.

We all have important duties to carry out. We must redefine a great number of institutionalized concepts in our political and religious culture, and must even create thousands of new nouns, adjectives, and meanings that do not identify courage with revenge against slights, martyrdom, an eye for an eye, and so on.

THE CRUCIAL NEED TO INTERNALIZE PRINCIPLED NONVIOLENCE

At this juncture, the highest duty of all Iran's civil activists is to spread the word about nonviolent methods of countering official violence and preventing popular counterviolence. Reaching the young supporters of democracy with this message is crucial. We have learned from bitter experience that violent reactions to crackdowns and *Basiji* (militia) mayhem create a backlash of indifference and hopelessness that harms the prodemocracy movement. Learning to stop instinctive and violent reactions before they start may not be easy, but it is the historic and ethical duty of us all. The women's movement can look back on decades of struggle to eliminate violence against women. Our ultimate goal is to create a society that is free not only of that kind of violence, but of *all* violence.

In his famous 1963 *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King wrote that "[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Turning that around in a way that comports well with King's spirit, we might say that fighting one kind of violence (against women, for example) can aid the fight against all kinds of violence. A society where nonviolent values are widespread and firmly rooted is one

whose rulers will learn to expect only shame and loss of legitimacy if they commit violence.

We must with redoubled honesty and directness transmit to our children and juniors the experience of our nonviolent struggles and show them that if they really are after a just and democratic society, its first condition is patience and resistance without violence. We can also remind the youth that we in the One Million Signatures Campaign endured three years of harassment, slander, and imprisonment for doing nothing but petitioning parliament, but patiently endured these repressions and abasements and with fortitude and hope continued on our path with light hearts and clear consciences.

We must remind them that each time we had a peaceful gathering, we were greeted by government forces with batons, pepper spray, and beatings, but never reacted in kind. Instead, we just sat on the ground, covered our faces with our hands, and took the brunt of the batons on our bodies. Even in those difficult situations, moreover, we sang the songs of equality. When we were sent to prisons, we shared our experiences with our jailers and saw them also, much like ourselves, as fellow humans forced to wear figurative balls and chains.

Iran is the shared home of all Iranians, no matter what their religion or ideological persuasion. The spread of the ethos of violence and revenge must be stopped. We must realize that although civil resistance is a humane and ethical posture, hardship comes with it. Progress will take time; no real and enduring victory is going to come overnight. Just as in the era of the Constitutional Revolution, we must be content to advance gradually, and insist at all times on the strengthening of just and democratic values.

It is clear that a long road lies ahead of us; the patriarchal culture and violent political traditions of our old country will change very slowly at best. Lest we be tempted to despair, we should recall how Gandhi and Nehru delivered a mind-numbingly diverse and

impoverished India from a morass of degradation, humiliation, and violent crackdowns with a clear nonviolent method; how Reverend King applied similar principles against deep-seated racial discrimination in the United States; and how Nelson Mandela oversaw the peaceful end of apartheid in South Africa. None of these triumphs came without years and years of face-to-face training and the publication of hundreds of books and thousands of articles—to mention only the easy parts.

If the civil and democratic movement of the Iranian people is also to remain peaceful and nonviolent, its power must come not from blood, clenched fists, bulging veins, and zealous revenge-seeking, but rather from life-affirming endurance, persistence, and thoughtfulness. Upon the rise of such values hinges the fate of our movement and our nation.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

THE PETITION

One Million Signatures Campaign Petition Demanding Changes to Laws That Discriminate Against Women

Sunday, 27 August 2006

Iranian law considers women to be second-class citizens and promotes discrimination against them. It is noteworthy that legal discrimination of this type is being enforced in a society where women comprise more than 60 percent of those being admitted to universities. It is generally believed that laws should promote social moderation by being one step ahead of cultural norms. But in Iran the law lags behind cultural norms and women's social position and status.

According to Iranian penal codes, a girl at nine years of age is considered to be an adult. If she commits a crime that is punishable by execution, the courts can indeed sentence her to death. If a man and a woman become paralyzed as a result of an accident, the punitive damages provided to the woman according to law equal half of those provided to the man. If a man and a woman are both witnesses to a crime, the law does not recognize the woman as a witness, but the man can serve as a witness. The law allows a father who obtains court permission to marry off his daughter even before the age of thirteen—the minimum legal marriage age—to a man as old as seventy. The

law does not allow mothers to serve as the financial guardians of their children; or to make decisions regarding their child's place of residence, foreign travel, or medical care. The law allows men to practice polygamy, and gives them uncontested rights to divorce their wives at whim.

These are only a few examples of the inequities and discriminatory practices against women that can be found in Iranian law. Without a doubt, women of lower socioeconomic status or women from religious and ethnic minority groups suffer disproportionately from legal discrimination. On the other hand, these unjust laws have promoted unhealthy and unbalanced relationships between men and women and as a result have had negative consequences for the lives of men as well. Specifically we can point to the high dowries that many women demand as a condition of marriage, which in essence reflect the sense of insecurity that women feel in the face of legal discrimination and their unequal status under the law.

On the other hand, the Iranian government is a signatory to several international human-rights conventions, and accordingly is required to bring its legal code in line with international standards. The most important international human-rights standard calls for elimination of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and so on.

The undersigned ask for the elimination of all forms of legal discrimination against women in Iranian law, and ask legislators to review and reform existing laws based on the government's commitments to international human-rights conventions.

The Initial Signers:

Shirin Ebadi	Maryam Hosseinkhah
Simin Behbahani	Farnaz Seyfi
Shahla Lahiji	Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani
Shahla E'zazi	Zohreh Arzani
Babak Ahmadi	Rezvan Moghadam
Farzaneh Taheri	Sussan Tahmasebi
Tahmineh Milani	Bitra Tahbaz
Manijeh Hekmat	Mona Mohammadzadeh
Maedeh Tahmasebi	Tala't Taghinia
Narges Mohamadi	Golnaz Malek
Naser Zarafshan	Nahid Jafari
Homa Zarafshan	Setareh Sajadi
Ardeshir Rostami	Mansoureh Shojae
Rakhshan Banietemad	Mahsa Shekarloo
Moniro Ravanipour	Firouzeh Mohajer
Babak Takhti	Taraneh Amir Teymouri
Banafsheh Hejazi	Parvin Zarrabi
Mahvash Sheikh-ol-eslami	Vida Biglari
Fariborz Rais-Dana	Zara Amjadian
Jafar Panahi	Tara Ahmadi
Shiva Dolatabadi	Parisa Kakai'e
Homa Khodaverdi	Nahid Mirhaj
Shahla Sherkat	Maryam Mirza
Farideh Ghairat	Jila Baniyaghoob
Khadijeh Moghadam	Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh
Shahla Entesari	Elnaz Nateghi
Parvin Ardalan	Bahareh Hedayat
Fariba Davoudi Mohajer	Eman Mozafari
Homa Maddah	Fakhri Shadfar
Jelveh Javaheri	Bahareh Baghaie

Mahsa Jazini
Farideh Ghaeb
Niloofer Ensan
Pooyeh Madadi
Faranak Artia
Sonia Ghafari
Nargess Teybat
Hana Darabi
Simin Marashi
Ehteram Shadfar
Delaram Ali
Parvaneh Ale Bouyeh
Fakhri Nami
Negar Rahbar
Nahid Keshavarz
Sahar Sajadi
Kaveh Mozafari
Leila Nazari
Lili Eslami
Masoumeh Hayat-Gheibi
Sara Loghmani
Masoumeh Loghmani
Elnaz Ansari
Parinaz Atabaki
Nasim Soltan-Beighi
Javane Javaheri
Saeed Nour-Mohamadi
Somaye Rashidi
Shima Farzad-Manesh
Farshad Ghare-Daghi
Forugh Ghare-Daghi

Sedighe Nasiri
Sepideh Gilisian
Fazele Khalili-Nejad
FatemeH Nejati
Mahdis Farah-Bakhshi
Azam Heshmat
Elahe Soroush-Nia
Maziar Samiee
Houman Kazemian
Mina Rabiee
Sara Esmi-zade
Farid Hashemi
Nahid Tavassoli
Fariba Vafi
Sima Sayah

APPENDIX II

THE CAMPAIGN PLAN

About “One Million Signatures Demanding Changes to Discriminatory Laws”

Iranian women’s-rights activists are initiating a wide campaign demanding an end to legal discrimination against women in Iranian law. The campaign, “One Million Signatures Demanding Changes to Discriminatory Laws,” which aims to collect one million signatures to demand changes to discriminatory laws against women, is a follow-up effort to the peaceful protest of the same aim, which took place on June 12, 2006 in Haft Tir Square in Tehran. Preparatory activities in support of this campaign commenced in June of 2006 and the campaign will be officially launched on August 27, during a seminar entitled: “The Effect of Laws on Women’s Lives.”

The collection of a million signatures in support of changes to the law is only one of several aims of this campaign. The campaign will also aim to achieve the following:

1. Promotion of Collaboration and Cooperation for Social

Change: This campaign intends to serve as catalyst in promoting cooperation between a wide spectrum of social activists in creating and advocating for positive social change.

2. **Identification of Women's Needs and Priorities:** This collaborative campaign aims to develop connections and linkages with a broad base of women's groups from different backgrounds. Direct contact between equal-rights defenders and other women's and citizens' groups will allow those involved in the campaign to identify the everyday concerns of women, especially their legal needs and problems. On the other hand, this direct contact will increase awareness among the general population about the inequities that exist under current laws.
3. **Amplifying Women's Voices:** Through this campaign, the organizers hope to be able to connect with groups whose demands are left unheard. The campaign, relying on the needs identified by women themselves, aims to amplify the voices of women whose needs are often not addressed at the level of national policy.
4. **Increasing Knowledge, Promoting Democratic Action:** This campaign is committed to increasing and improving knowledge through dialogue, collaboration, and democratic action. The campaign steadfastly adheres to the notion that real and sustainable change can be achieved only if it is community- and needs-driven and reflective of the desires and demands of society at large. Changes to women's status in society need to be based on the belief that legal problems faced by women are not a private matter, but rather are symptomatic of larger social problems faced broadly by women. In other words, this campaign is committed to carrying out bottom-up reform and to creating change through grassroots and civil-society initiatives, and seeks to strengthen public action and empower women.
5. **Paying Our Dues:** The initiators of this campaign recognize that social change and the elimination of injustice are not easily achieved. It is through commitment to collaboration and

hard work that we will be able to build the solidarity necessary to create change. Surely this solidarity and collaboration in pushing forth the objectives of the campaign will have a positive impact on the future of our country. The experiences of women's democratic movements around the globe, and particularly, in countries within the region, have demonstrated that solidarity and commitment to the goals of collective action are key components to the successful elimination of discrimination. The struggle for equal rights in Iran will indeed be a lengthy, difficult and arduous process. The true path to achievement of equality will not be paved through existing power structures or a dialogue solely with men and women in positions of power. Rather, achieving the goals of this campaign will be based largely on a strategy that seeks to raise awareness among individual women and citizens about their identity and their status within society.

6. **The Power of Numbers:** The successful implementation of this campaign will prove once and for all that the demand for changes to discriminatory laws is not limited to a few thousand women, who have supported these types of efforts in the past. In fact, the successful implementation of this campaign will demonstrate that support for legal changes is broad-based and that a large majority of men and women are suffering from the inequities that are promoted by Iranian law. The campaign will strive to demonstrate that women are using, and have consistently employed, a variety of means and venues to voice their objections to the laws, such as the writing of books and articles, the production of films and other forms of artistic expression, and through social activism. Those women with fewer and more limited resources have demonstrated their objections through more difficult channels, such as recourse

to the courts, running away from home, or more destructive means such as suicide, often by self-immolation. In an effort to demonstrate the widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo, the campaign will aim to highlight the many strategies used by women to challenge discrimination in the law.

7. **Power in Plurality:** The successful implementation of this campaign will also shed light on the fact that the demand for changes in the law is being voiced by more than just one group of women. In an effort to silence the voices of women calling for change, critics claim that demands for legal change are expressed by a particular group of women who are out of touch with the realities of ordinary Iranian women. These critics wrongly claim that only elite and socially and economically advantaged women seek changes to laws, in direct opposition to the real needs and sensitivities of the masses of Iranian women. These claims are indeed incorrect, as discriminatory and unjust laws negatively impact the lives of all women, whether they are educated or not, live in upper-class neighborhoods or poor communities, are married or single, live in rural areas or cities, and so on. The campaign will work to address some of these issues.

Timeline: This campaign will be ongoing. The first phase of the campaign will focus on the collection of one million signatures demanding changes to discriminatory laws. It is a fair assessment to claim that the first phase of the campaign will be carried out over one to two years, after which the campaign will move into its next set of phases focused on proposing new laws.

The campaign's demands do not contradict Islamic principles: The demand to reform and change discriminatory laws is not in contradiction with Islamic principles and is in line with Iran's international commitments. Iran is a signatory to the UN Convention on Civil and

Political Rights and as such, is required to eliminate all forms of discrimination. Based on these commitments, the government of Iran needs to take specific action in reforming laws that promote discrimination.

On the other hand, these demands are in no way contradictory to the foundations of Islam. In fact, the changes being demanded by this campaign have been a point of contention and debate among Islamic jurists and scholars for some time. Ayatollah Sanei'i and Ayatollah Bojnurdi, to name a few, have for years called for the revision and reform of laws which are discriminatory against women, and have explicitly stated that such reforms are indeed not contradictory to the basic beliefs of Islam. A million signatures supporting changes to discriminatory laws will demonstrate to decision makers and the public at large that a large segment of the Iranian population supports the idea of revising discriminatory laws against women, and that these demands are not limited to a small segment of society. This campaign will also demonstrate to lawmakers that Iranian women are serious in their demands for change in current laws.

Implementation of the campaign: This campaign will rely largely on face-to-face education and contact to achieve its goals. It will be implemented through the following strategies:

1. Collection of signatures through door-to-door contact and dialogue with individual women.
2. Collection of signatures in places and events in which women gather, and where dialogue and discussions with groups of women can be carried out. Public locations, such as parks, universities, production centers, factories, health centers, religious gatherings, sports centers, and public-transportation centers (metro, buses, etc.), where groups of women can be accessed, will be identified by members of the campaign for the purpose of initiating dialogue about the law and collecting signatures in support of changes to discriminatory laws.

3. Implementation of seminars and conferences with the intent of raising the profile of the campaign, promoting dialogue, identifying supporters and collecting signatures.
4. Collection of signatures through the Internet. The Internet will be utilized to share information about the campaign, including legal educational materials, and those interested in supporting this effort can sign petitions related to the campaign.

Volunteer education: In order to successfully implement the campaign, a large number of volunteers will be recruited. Volunteers will receive legal education as well as information on the campaign. Several committees have been established within the campaign, including an Education Committee which is charged with implementing educational workshops for all volunteers. All those interested in cooperating with the campaign and collecting signatures will be provided with training on legal issues and laws; the aims and strategies of the campaign; face-to-face and door-to-door educational techniques; public educational and outreach techniques, etc. All volunteers interested in becoming involved in face-to-face education must participate in the workshops.

It should be noted that volunteers don't necessarily need to be experts in women's legal issues. These workshops implemented by the Education Committee will provide an overview for the layperson with respect to legal rights of women.

Scope of activities: The activities of this campaign will not be limited to Tehran, and women's-rights activists in the provinces are strongly encouraged to participate in this campaign. Groups and individuals based in the provinces can participate in workshops in Tehran and begin campaign activities in their provinces. Larger numbers of women and women's-rights groups interested in receiving training and/or participating in this campaign can request special

workshops to be held in their respective provinces. Additionally, Iranians based outside Iran can submit signatures in support of the demands of the campaign by mail or email.

Minimum age for signatures: Women and men signing on in support of the demands of the campaign must be at least 18 years of age. Signatures will be collected in special forms developed for this purpose, and will also be published on the web.

Support for the campaign: Participation in this campaign is purely voluntary. Volunteers are asked to support the campaign through a contribution of 5,000 tomans (roughly 6 USD). These funds will be the major source of support for the activities of the campaign. In order to create change, women have often had to rely on their own limited resources, financial or otherwise, such as time and energy. Women have always managed to rely on their capacities and their beliefs to create change. The success of this campaign, too, will benefit from women's immense commitment.

Contact Information: Those interested in supporting or joining this effort should feel free to contact us, through the following means:

Web address: www.we-change.org

Email address: forequality@gmail.com

Address: Iran - Tehran - P.O. Box: 14335-851

Supporters:

Shirin Ebadi (Nobel Laureate)

Simin Behbahani (Poet)

Shahla Lahiji (Publisher)

Shahla Ezazi (Professor)

Babak Ahmadi (Writer and Translator)

Farzaneh Taheri (Translator)

Tahmineh Milani (Director)

Manijeh Hekmat (Director)

Maedeh Tahmasebi (Artist)

Farhad Aish (Artist)

Narges Mohamadi (Activist)

Naser Zarafshan (Attorney)

Ardeshir Rostami (Artist)

Moniro Ravanipour (Novelist)

Babak Takhti (Novelist)

Banafsheh Hejazi (Writer and Researcher)

Mahvash Sheikh-ol-eslami (Director)

Shahla Sherkat (Journalist)

Farideh Ghairat (Attorney)

Omran Salahi (Satirist)
 Fariborz Raees-Dana (Economist)
 Majid Tavalaee (Journalist)
 Nahid Tavassoli
 (Writer and Journalist)

Jafar Panahi (Director)
 Sima Sayah

Campaign Members (*In Alphabetical Order*):

Tara Ahmadi
 Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani
 Parvaneh Ale Bouyeh
 Taraneh Amir Teymouri
 Zara Amjadian
 Elnaz Ansari
 Parvin Ardalan
 Faranak Arta
 Zohre Arzani
 Maryam Bahraman
 Jila Baniyaghoob
 Vida Biglari
 Hana Darabi
 Fariba Davoudi Mohajer
 Shahla Entesari
 Mahdis Farah-bakhshi
 Farideh Ghaeb
 Sepideh Gilasian
 Bahare Hedayat
 Maryam Hosseinkhah
 Mahboubeh Hosseinzadeh
 Nahid Jafari
 Jelveh Javaheri
 Mahsa Jazini
 Parisa Kakai'e
 Pooye Madadi

Homa Maddah
 Golnaz Malek
 Nahid Mirhaji
 Maryam Mirza
 Khadijeh Moghadam
 Rezvan Moghadam
 Firouzeh Mohajer
 Mona Mohammadzadeh
 Iman Mozafari
 Fakhri Nami
 Sedighe Nasiri
 Elnaz Nateghi
 Fatemeh Nejati
 Negar Rahbar
 Setareh Sajadi
 Farnaz Seyfi
 Fakhri Shadfar
 Mahsa Shekarloo
 Mansoureh Shoajee
 Elahe Surush-nia
 Tala't Taghinia
 Bitah Tahbaz
 Sussan Tahmasebi
 Narges Tayebat
 Parvin Zarrabi

APPENDIX III

THE EFFECT OF LAWS ON WOMEN'S LIVES

Translated by Rahma Tohidi

Monday 28 August 2006

WHY DON'T WE THINK THE CURRENT LAWS ARE JUST?

There are many things that we should know, but we don't. There are many things that we don't know and don't even think about. The law is one such thing: Until we run into difficulty with the law, we don't think about it at all; and once we do, we only consider the laws that have challenged and limited us personally, and don't think in terms of how they affect everyone.

For example, consider a family that is about to give their daughter's hand in marriage, and to send her to the house of *bakht*, the house of her fate and destiny. Everything goes according to traditions; the groom's family takes the girl with much respect and dignity. But what future awaits her? Is her fate light and blissful, or dark and gloomy? What if the groom doesn't turn out to be the good person everyone hoped he would be? The very house that once filled her soul with excitement and enthusiasm about her future becomes her own personal hell. She cries day and night. Her daily complaints—and the general look of

sadness that's fixed on her face—are her only release. She expresses her anger toward her family. She is angry with herself, too, for not thinking before agreeing to be married off. Girls like this are not rare in Iran. They might console themselves by saying “marriage is like an unbroken watermelon, no one knows how it's going to turn out”; but after a while, when she and her family are running up and down the steps of the courthouse, even if they might not admit it to others, they will admit to themselves that that is not quite true. If instead of being preoccupied with finding rings and organizing a marriage portion (*mehr*), the girl and her family had been studying the law and trying to find loopholes in the marriage contract (*aqhd*), they wouldn't be as lost and miserable as they are today. If the laws pertaining to marriage and family were written in some other way—justly—and the bride's rights weren't dependent on the signature of the groom, but rather enshrined in law, these problems would not arise.

This is why we believe the law is relevant and important in everyday life for all: for men and women, for children who are born as well as those who have yet to be born. The law is important to any human being who wants to live in peace. There are only two sets of people who aren't interested in the law: those whose wrongdoing is proscribed by it, and those who don't understand how valuable it is.

Let's return to the story of the girl who was wed, and has come back to her father's house in tears. If you were this girl's parents, and had gone to court to solve her problems, and you told the court “Our son-in-law won't let our daughter work, won't let her leave the house, won't even let her come and see us”; if you said “The house that our son-in-law has picked out for my daughter is unbearable to her”; if you told them “He won't let the doctors operate on my sick daughter in hospital”; and other such things, and then you heard “Well, that's the man's right!” in reply, surely you'd ask in astonishment “Who has given a man such rights?” The simple answer is: the law. This is

the predicament into which the law has put your daughter. But it's your fault too. Without much thinking, you have given control of your child to another, to someone who is capable of keeping her caged in the house. Someone, who in the event of illness, can prevent her from getting treatment; a marriage partner who can take her children away, and if he desires, torture and kill her. If he has a psychological problem and suspects that his wife has cheated on him, he can kill her with ease of mind, without fear of just punishment. So, by sending your daughter to her "house of fortune," you have put her into slavery under the hand of someone who has control over whether she lives or dies.

Do you think that the stories we've presented are unusual? Unfortunately, they are not. All the family murders that we read about in the papers have roots in the weakness of the system of family laws, and in our own weakness in not being familiar with them. Unfortunately, instead of relying on the protection of law, we rely on customs and traditions and the integrity of our bridegroom, and demand an extraordinary sum for our daughter's *mehr*. We find it strange to state in the *aghd* contract that our daughter has a right to divorce. Meanwhile, if a husband and wife get into major difficulties in their marriage, the wife, in order to be freed from the hell of family life, will part with her *mehr* very easily—she has to—and then, to get a divorce, must wade so far through the minefields of courts and bureaucracy that she will be willing to forfeit her life.

There is a way to prevent this calamity. All that is needed is that every one of us—women and men, the mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers who care for our loved ones—should stop daydreaming. We must go to the trouble of finding out what the laws that govern the lives of our wives and daughters, and ultimately our families, actually say. We must cover all the gaps in the laws in our marriage contracts. Then we must join the struggle to make the laws fair for all the people who live in our country, so that we all enjoy a better and more peaceful

life. A life where we can enjoy our daughter's wedding, resting assured that she and her husband will live a happy and healthy life, rather than sharing a life in a hell they create together.

SOME OF THE UNJUST LAWS:

1. MARRIAGE¹

In our country, Iran, marriage is an important matter that has a big impact on the lives of women. However, if we flip through the pages of the *Book of Civil Law of Iran*, we can see how marriage, which is supposed to be the “sweetness” of life, sometimes creates mental and physical problems for women, leaving a bitter taste they live with for the rest of their lives.

The first step a woman must take in marriage, according to current law, is to satisfy the “condition of the father's consent”; if a father doesn't want his daughter to marry, she can never do so—even if she is a forty-year-old college professor—unless she obtains the approval of the courts. In fact, for marriage, virgin women must have their father or paternal grandfather's permission. If they do not satisfy this condition, their father or paternal grandfather can annul the marriage through the courts—even after the marriage has occurred. Some relate the philosophy of this act to the respect that is due to a father. However, our question is: must it be only daughters who pay respect to their fathers? And are sons not forced to pay respect to their fathers? More importantly, why is the respect and tribute paid only to the father? Why has the mother's respect been forgotten, with no requirement for her approval?

With the courts' permission, a father can marry his daughter, even before the age of 13, to a 70-year-old man. Through this unjust law, the marriage of young girls in many regions of our country, especially in rural villages, has come about—because the “law” has given the father this right.

That the legal age of marriage for girls in our law is 13 has caused a lot of problems in society. For example, a research study that has taken place in the county of Booshahr has shown that 70 percent of marriages that end in divorce have taken place among couples who married between the ages of 15 and 19.²

2. DIVORCE AND CHILD CUSTODY³

According to the law, divorce is the exclusive right of a man, and a man can divorce his wife whenever he pleases. On the other hand, for a wife to initiate divorce proceedings she must be able to prove that her husband is guilty of misconduct such as refusing to pay her subsistence expenses, addiction, imprisonment, or the like. Most women know that proving such things in a court is difficult. In most cases, the wife can only prove them after many years of running around the court system. Of course, in most cases, women simply forfeit their *mehr*, in order to be freed of the harassment and domestic abuse of their husbands. Research done in the city of Qom found that 91 percent of women who got divorced did not claim their *mehr* in full.⁴ In many cases, where the divorce was agreed upon by both husband and wife, the wife forfeited all her financial entitlements to secure the agreement of her husband. In many cases, the wife even paid all the financial costs of the divorce. From a religious perspective, it is clearly stated that a woman may easily obtain divorce if she agrees to forfeit her *mehr*. Iranian law, however, has added the clause “must obtain husband’s consent” to this. Thus, if an Iranian woman wants to get a divorce, she must not only forfeit her *mehr*, but also obtain the consent of her husband.

A visit to the family court will show that when a man wants a divorce, he will put his wife under immense pressure to forfeit her *mehr*; so that she will request the divorce herself—forefeiting what few rights she had.

3. THE RIGHT TO HAVE CUSTODY OF CHILDREN⁵

In our law, *hezanat* (day-to-day caring) and guardianship of children have two different meanings. The former means to look after a child. The latter means acting as a child's guardian, managing his or her financial affairs, deciding about schooling, place of residence, travel outside the country, supervisory powers as to health and medical care, and so on. In accordance with Iran's civil law, a mother can never be the legal supporter of her child. Also, in a scenario where the father and paternal grandfather are absent, she will not have guardianship; rather, she can never be more than her child's caretaker. And even then, she will be under the direct observation of the child-welfare agency that answers to the attorney general—an agency that can independently decide to sell off the child's property.

A mother cannot open any account except a loans account in her child's name, nor can she buy a house for her child without her husband's signature. If a mother (with her own money) does buy a house for her child with the father's permission, the father can put this house up for sale or rent whenever he wants, and the mother has no right in the matter. Or, if a mother's child is sick in hospital and needs to have surgery, it is the father who has to give permission for the surgery to be done; without the father's signature the mother cannot ask the doctors to do surgery on her child. According to law, guardianship is the "manifest destiny" of the father. This means that even if a father wants to, he cannot cede guardianship over the child to his spouse!

4. NUMBER OF PARTNERS⁶

Among other cases of inequality in the present marriage law is the provision regarding the number of partners. That is, the law permits multiple simultaneous marriages for men, such that a man can have four *aghdi* (permanently married) wives and infinite *sighehi* (temporarily married) wives. Many women imagine that their husbands are such

good men that they would never do such a thing. However, paying a visit to the family courts shows that many husbands even at the expense of hiding it from their first wives unjustly use this “right by law.” This law, along with women’s virtual inability to initiate divorce plus the legal privileges accorded to men, has caused many problems within families. At the extreme, the trouble can even take the form of spouse-killings. Research from fifteen provinces shows that 67 percent of women who kill their husbands do so because their husbands were unfaithful to them, and 33 percent commit the crime in retaliation for violence inflicted by the husband.⁷ Such outbreaks of unhealthy relationships occur as a consequence of current laws that are discriminatory and that do not foster just and humane relations between men and women.

5. AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY⁸

The age of criminal responsibility for girls is 9 lunar years (8 years and nine months). For boys, it is 15 lunar years (14 years and 6 months). Thus if a 9-year-old girl commits a crime, she will be treated just like an adult. All the penal laws up to and including capital punishment will be applicable to her. The only exception is that that child will be jailed or kept in a juvenile institution until she reaches the age of 18 years when the execution verdict can be carried out. It must be asked of lawmakers whether a child of 9 (or even more than that) can be wise and mature enough about her actions to be eligible to forfeit her life.

6. CITIZENSHIP⁹

Citizenship is an important legal issue. In the current state of the world, citizenship has an important place; it determines the relationship between a person and the state, and determines the jurisdiction in which a person may marry, be punished, own property, and so on. According to the laws of Iran, the citizenship of a woman does not transfer to her child. If your father is Iranian, you too are considered Iranian;

but having an Iranian mother does not make you an Iranian citizen. This has caused many problems for women who have married Afghani men, for example. Their children are not considered Iranian, and therefore do not have the right to live in Iran. Research shows that around 20,000 children in Iran are without an identity card. These children do not have the right to live or go to school in Iran. The simple reason for this is that their mothers married their Afghan fathers without seeking the permission of the Interior Ministry, thereby making their children noncitizens ineligible for identity cards. In some cases, a woman who marries a foreign man even loses her own Iranian citizenship.

7. *DIYEH-BLOOD MONEY*¹⁰

Diyeh is the amount of money that a murderer or one who has inflicted grievous bodily harm pays the victim or their family. In Iranian law, a woman's life is considered to be worth half that of a man. For example, if a brother and sister are hit by a car on the street, and both have both their legs broken, the compensation the brother receives is double that of his sister. If they are killed, the money that their family receives for the son is double the money that they get for losing their daughter. If a woman who is five months pregnant with a boy is in an accident and is killed, the amount of money paid for the woman is half that paid for the male fetus inside her.

8. INHERITANCE¹¹

According to civil law, after the death of the father and mother, sons receive twice as much of any inheritance as daughters receive. If a man dies and has a wife and child, the wife inherits an eighth of her husband's wealth. If the husband has no child, the wife inherits a fourth of her husband's wealth. Having said that, women can never inherit land. If a man dies and has more than one wife, that same eighth or fourth is divided between his wives.

Yet if a woman dies and has a husband and child, the husband inherits

a fourth of her wealth; if she has no child, the husband inherits half her wealth. So in fact, a husband inherits twice as much as a wife does.

More painful still, if a woman dies and has no heir other than her husband, her husband inherits all her wealth. However, if a man dies without an heir except his wife, she inherits only a fourth of what he owned. The rest of the wealth goes to the government.

9. LAWS THAT SUPPORT HONOR KILLINGS¹²

Among discriminatory laws, one can note the law that gives a man permission to kill his wife whenever he sees her in bed with another man and the law will not punish this man. This law in the hands of men has allowed men to kill women. As an example, 20 percent of killings in our country are killings with a motive related to unchastity and sexuality. A research study about this has shown that 90 percent of men who kill their wives do it because of mistrust and imagined offenses. When these men were asked whether they were sure of their spouse's infidelity, they all indicated that they were not absolutely certain about this and that they had only suspected their wives.[13] These men can say in court that their wife had been unfaithful to them (and her blood was wasted, so he had the right to kill her) and according to these laws they are exempt from heavy punishment. This means that a man who has only been doubtful of his wife, with the support of these laws, can get away with killing her. Regarding intentional killing of children, according to the law, a father and paternal grandfather will not be held responsible. For example, if a father kills his daughter for suspecting her of sexual impurity or for any other reason, he will be exempt from the standard punishment for murder, and the court can only sentence him to a maximum of ten years in jail.

10. BEARING WITNESS¹³

There are some crimes about which women are barred from testifying. These include sodomy, homosexuality, prostitution, and drinking

alcohol. In cases where a female witness is accepted, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, and usually if women testify to witnessing an incident their testimony will not be accepted unless at least one man also testifies to the same effect.

11. OTHER DISCRIMINATORY LAWS¹⁴

There are many other discriminatory laws in Iran's legal system. Under our constitution, a woman is only recognized as a citizen once she is a mother (married), therefore she has no standing as an independent person in any law derived from our constitution.

1. The condition *Rajal-e siyaasi* ("man of politics") appears in the list of conditions used to determine a person's eligibility for the presidency. This means that a woman cannot become president.
2. Women must wear legally prescribed clothing at all times when in public, regardless of their creed or beliefs. For example, Christian women whose religion does not require them to wear *hijab* will be punished for going without it. If they choose to dress in a way different from what authorities deem fit, they can be jailed or fined.
3. Even though women pay the same amount of money for insurance as men do, their children cannot benefit from their retirement pension or health insurance. This means that a mother cannot provide any sort of comfort for her children after her death.
4. Stoning is the frightening punishment prescribed by our laws for people who commit adultery. This punishment is usually only performed on women, because according to the law, a man can have an infinite number of temporary marriages (*sigheh*) and therefore can claim that the woman with whom he had a relationship (provided that she was single) was his "temporary wife."

WHY DO WE WANT TO COLLECT “ONE MILLION SIGNATURES” TO CHANGE DISCRIMINATORY LAWS?

In the world and people's lives, there is no law that cannot be changed. In the opinion of many jurists, law is likened to clothing—when a person gets fatter or slimmer, their clothes have to change accordingly. In many countries, jurists and lawmakers believe that the law has to be one step ahead of the culture to be able to play a positive role in the lives of individuals in a society and to uplift the level of culture. Meaning when the culture of a society moves one step forward, the law must change and be one step ahead of the culture. In this way, the law becomes a tool of reform. Actually, lawmakers in most of the countries of the world see culture-building as one of the roles of laws and for this reason, believe that law must be relative to the environment and culture of the society. At present, unfortunately, our law relates to our culture in the opposite manner. That is, the law in Iran is a few steps behind the average culture of society. Although women have shown their strength in different social and financial arenas, this backwardness in the area of laws related to women is extremely discriminatory and disadvantageous to women.

Women try to upgrade the living standards of their families and themselves by individually struggling to complete many educational or occupational degrees. Because of the existing discriminatory laws, however, many of these individual struggles meet a dead end. Perhaps it is for this reason that women have not complained more about the laws that are affecting their lives, or if they have complained it has been individually and with complaints that go nowhere. Maybe the reason for this is because we have not realized that advantages for women are inseparable from advantages for men and children. To remove these inequalities, we—a group of women—have started a campaign aimed at collecting “One Million Signatures to Change Discriminatory Laws” in order to show the decision makers that many women and men in

Iran want change, and that this appeal for legal reform is not the work merely of a small female clique. The campaign and its widespread request for revisions to discriminatory laws will show lawmakers that the women of Iran are serious and adamant about their request.

To request the review of discriminatory laws is not to go against Islam or the *Shari'a*. Rather, it is in line with the Iranian government's international responsibilities because that government has made a covenant to implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The first step in these conventions is disallowing all kinds of discrimination. Therefore, in keeping with the international obligations of the Iranian government, discrimination must be abolished.

On the other hand, requesting changes to discriminatory laws in no way means opposing the foundations of Islam, nor is it damaging to the pillars of religion. In truth, the legal changes that we seek lie in an area that is a topic of dispute among clergymen and religious scholars. Many religious scholars including Ayatollah Sanei and Ayatollah Bojnordi have for years endorsed requests to reform discriminatory laws, and do not see such requests or such reforms as contrary to Islam. Their belief is that laws must change to be in harmony with the level of culture and the social role and presence of Iranian women. They believe that in Islam we have "secondary precepts" according to which, even in cases where the Koran gives a clear command, it is possible to suspend rules temporarily if contingent (or "secondary") circumstances (time and place, risk of injury to society, and so on) warrant. In Islam, as long as the secondary circumstances persist or expediencies require, the suspension of primary precepts is sanctioned and acceptable.

Ayatollah Musavi Bojnordi has clearly announced: "Islam in no way differs from human rights and it cannot be said that one gender has eminence and the other doesn't." In his opinion: "Human rights in

an Islamic society have meaning. Rights are for humankind regardless of gender. God has ordained these rights for [all] human beings.”¹⁵

Yet these discriminatory laws and the damage that they do to women's lives will never undergo a change unless people in numbers large enough to command official attention push for that change. We are seeking signers for our petition in order to send this message. By signing the statement of the One Million Signatures Campaign, whether you inscribe the copy shown to you by the person who gave you this booklet or whether you return the form in the back, you are taking a step toward changing laws and improving the lives of Iranian women.

OUR WEBSITE:

Persian: <http://www.we4change.com>

English and others: <http://www.en.we4change.com>

Our email address: forequality@gmail.com

FOOTNOTES:

1. Article 993, 1005, 1041, 1043, 1044, 1048, 1049, 1060, 1075, 1082, 1105, 1106, 1107, 1108, 1114, 1117, 1233 Civil Law; Paragraph 3, Article 18 Passport Law.
2. Capital Newspaper, Thursday 18th Khordad, 1385. Issue 194, Page 8.
3. Article 1120, 1122, 1123, 1129, 1130, 1133, 1145 and 1146 Civil Law.
4. Cited from IRNA News <http://irwomen.com/news.php?id=323>
5. Paragraph 1, Article 18 Passport Law; Article 1167, 1168, 1169, 1170, 1173, 1180, 1181, 1183, 1184, 1185, 1199, 1207, 1218, 1233, 1236, 1241 and 1251 Civil Law.
6. Paragraph 2, Article 900 and Article 901 Civil Law.
7. Newsletter, Tir 1385, Issue 51, Spouse Killings - the crystallization of hidden domestic violence. Page 66-62.

8. Article 1210 Civil Law; Article 49 Islamic Criminal Law; Article 219-213 Criminal Procedure Code.
9. Article 976, 986 and 987 Civil Law.
10. Article 294, 295, 300 and 301 Islamic Criminal Law.
11. Paragraph 1, Article 899, 900, 901, 907 Civil Law.
12. Article 220 and 630 Islamic Criminal Law.
13. Article 74, 75, 118, 119, 128, 137 and 171 Islamic Criminal Law; Article 230 Legal Procedure Code.
14. Article 83 and amendment 638 Islamic Criminal Law; Article 115 of the Constitution.
15. Capital Newspaper, Thursday 5th Mordad 1385, Issue 235, Page 8.

GLOSSARY

- **Mehr** is a “gift” that a husband promises his wife at the time of marriage. It is specified in the *aghd* which is a prenuptial agreement. A wife is entitled to request her husband give her *mehr* at any time after they get married, and he must give it to her at that time. If a man divorces his wife, she is also entitled to her *mehr*. Unlike dowry, mehr is not given to the bride’s parents, but rather to the bride herself, and remains her property for ever. Anything the bride brings into the household and buys during the marriage also belongs to her alone. A husband’s property belongs to the family.
- **Aghd** A prenuptial agreement.
- **Loans Account** This is a special loans account one can open in Iran called a *gharz-ol-hasaneh* loans account. It is a loans account without interest.
- **Rajal-e siyaasi** *Rajal* means man in Arabic. *Siyaasi* means politics.
- **Shari’a** The term *Shari’a* means Islamic law.
- **Secondary Precepts** In traditional Shia Islamic jurisprudence, religious precepts can be generally divided into two groups: primary precepts and secondary precepts. Any subject, regardless of secondary consequences, in the first place belongs to the category of primary precepts. For example, under ordinary circumstances it is religiously prohibited to eat meat that is not prepared according to religious guidelines. But in extenuating circumstances such as hardship and loss, secondary precepts can be implemented. For instance, a starving person may eat such meat. After the formation of the Islamic Republic, in accordance to the late leader’s views, a third kind of law, known as state precepts (*ahkam-e hokoomatee*) was recognized in our legal system. In other words, a religious government acting as religious guardian can issue a law or declare something temporarily necessary or prohibited, according to exigencies and interests of Islamic society. Therefore, in our legal system there exist three religious sources for issuing precepts: the nature of the subject itself regardless of secondary consequences, secondary consequences and emergency, and expedience.

APPENDIX IV

WHICH LAWS ARE WE SEEKING TO CHANGE?

CIVIL CODE

Article 906. If the deceased has left no living children, and no living children's children of whatever degree, either of the parents, if alone, takes the whole estate; and if the father and mother of the deceased are both alive, the mother takes one-third and the father two-thirds. But if the mother comes after someone else, one-sixth of the estate belongs to the mother and the rest to the father.

Article 907. If the deceased leaves no parents, but has one or more children, the estate will be divided as follows: If there are several children, some being sons and some daughters, each son takes twice as much as each daughter.

Article 913. In all the conditions mentioned in this subsection, whichever of the married pair is the survivor takes his or her share, and this share means one-half of the estate for the surviving husband and one-quarter for the surviving wife, provided that the deceased left no children or grandchildren; and it means one-quarter of the estate for the husband and one-eighth for the wife if the deceased left children

or children's children. And the remainder of the estate is to be divided among the other heirs in accordance with the preceding Articles.

Article 920. If the heirs of the deceased consist of several full brothers and sisters, or of several half-brothers and half-sisters on the father's side, the share of a male will be twice that of a female.

Article 945. If a man marries a woman when he is ill, and dies of that disease before consummation of the marriage, the wife does not take inheritance from him; but if he dies after consummation, or after recovery from that disease, the wife takes inheritance from him.

Article 946. The husband takes inheritance from the whole of the effects of the wife; but the wife takes only from the following effects

a - From the movable property, of whatever kind.

b - From building and trees.

Article 947. The wife takes inheritance from the price of the buildings and trees, and not from those things themselves; and the method of valuation is this, that the buildings and trees are valued on the supposition of their being worthy to remain in the ground, but without taking into consideration the labour.

Article 976. Section 2. The following persons are considered to be Iranian subjects: Those born in Iran or outside whose fathers are Iranian.

Article 949. If there be no other heir apart from the husband or wife, the husband takes the whole of the estate of his late wife; but the wife takes only her portion, and the rest of the estate of the husband is considered as the estate of a man without any heir, and will be dealt with in accordance with Article 866.

Article 986. A non-Iranian wife who may have acquired Iranian nationality by marriage, can revert to her former nationality after divorce or the death of her husband, provided that she informs the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs in writing of the facts, but a widow who has children from her former husband cannot take advantage of this right so long as her children have not attained the full age of 18. In any case, a woman who may acquire foreign nationality according to this Article cannot possess properties except within the limits fixed for foreign nationals .

Article 987. Note 2. Iranian women who acquire foreign nationality by marriage have not the right to possess landed properties if this would result in the economic dominance of a foreigner. The provisions of Article 988 so far as they concern going out of Iran do not apply to the women above mentioned.

Article 1083. A duration of time or installments can be fixed for the payment of the marriage portion, as a whole or in parts.

Article 1085. So long as the marriage portion is not delivered to her, the wife can refuse to fulfil the duties which she has to her husband provided, however, that the marriage portion is payable at once. This refusal does not debar her from right of maintenance expenses.

Article 1086. If the wife proceeds to fulfil the duties that she has towards her husband by her own free will, she cannot subsequently avail herself of the provisions of the foregoing Article, but never the less she will not forfeit the right that she has for demanding the payment of the marriage portion due to her.

Article 1088. In the case of the foregoing Article, if one of the marrying parties dies before the fixing of the marriage portion and before the consummation of marriage, the wife will not be entitled to any marriage portion.

Article 1089. Authority for fixing the marriage portion can be entrusted to the husband or a third party, in which case both of them can fix it at any amount they may wish.

Article 1090. If the authority for fixing the marriage portion is vested in the wife, she cannot fix an amount which exceeds reasonable marriage portion.

Article 1092. If the husband divorces his wife before the consummation of marriage, the wife is entitled to half of the marriage portion and if the husband has already paid more than half of the marriage portion he has the right to demand the return of the surplus, in original, in the equivalent, or in value.

Article 1101. If the marriage is cancelled before matrimonial relations for any reason, the wife is not entitled to any marriage portion. If the reason of cancellation is impotency, the wife will be entitled to half the marriage portion notwithstanding the cancellation of the marriage.

Article 1106. The cost of maintenance of the wife is at the charge of the husband in permanent marriages.

Article 1107. Cost of maintenance includes dwelling, clothing, food, furniture in proportion to the situation of the wife, on a reasonable basis, and provision of a servant if the wife is accustomed to have servants or if she needs one because of illness or defects of limbs.

Article 1108. If the wife refuses to fulfil duties of a wife without legitimate excuse, she will not be entitled to the cost of maintenance.

Article 1119. The parties to the marriage can stipulate any condition to the marriage which is not incompatible with the nature of the contract of marriage, either as part of the marriage contract or in another binding contract: for example, it can be stipulated that if the husband marries another wife or absents himself during a certain period, or discontinues the payment of cost of maintenance, or attempts the life of his wife or treats her so harshly that their life together becomes unbearable, the wife has the power, which she can also transfer to a third party by power of attorney, to obtain a divorce herself after

establishing in the court the fact that one of the foregoing alternatives has occurred and after the issue of a final judgment to that effect.

Article 1122. The following defects in man will give the woman the right to cancel the marriage 1 - Castration. 2 - Impotency, provided he has not even once performed the matrimonial act. 3 - Amputation of the sexual organ to the extent that he is unable to perform his marital duty.

Article 1123. The following defects in a wife bring about the right for a man to cancel the marriage: 1 - Protrusion of the womb (*qaran*). 2- Black leprosy (*juzam*). 3 - Leprosy (*baras*). 4 - Connection of the vaginal and anal passages (*ifza*). 5 - Being crippled. 6 - Being blind in both eyes.

Article 1126. Any one of the married couple who was cognisant of the existence of the defects above mentioned in the other party before the marriage was celebrated, has no right after that date to cancel the marriage.

Article 1129. If the husband refuses to pay the cost of maintenance of his wife, and if it is impossible to enforce a judgment of the court and to induce him to pay the expenses, the wife can refer to the judge applying for divorce and the judge will compel the husband to divorce her. The same stipulation will be binding in a case where the husband is unable to provide for the maintenance of the wife.

Article 1130. In the following circumstances, the wife can refer to the Islamic judge and request a divorce. When it is proved to the Court that the continuation of the marriage causes difficult and undesirable conditions, the judge can for the sake of avoiding harm and difficulty compel the husband to divorce his wife. If this cannot be done, then the divorce will be made on the permission of the Islamic judge.

Article 1133. A man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes to do so.³⁴

Article 1141. It is not proper to divorce a wife between two monthly periods during which intercourse has taken place unless the wife is pregnant or is incapable of conception.

Article 1142. The divorce of a wife who, although of child-bearing age, has no monthly period, will be valid only when three months have passed from the date of the last matrimonial relations with her.

Article 1149. Return to the wife after divorce can be effected by any word or deed which may convey the idea, provided that it is based on an intention to do so.

Article 1169. A mother has preference over others for two years from the birth of her child for the custody of the child and after the lapse of this period custody will devolve on the father except in the case of a daughter who will remain under the custody of the mother till 7 years old.

Article 1170. If the mother becomes insane or marries another man during her period of custody, the custody will devolve on the father.

Article 1179. Parents are entitled to punish their children, but they must not abuse this right by punishing their children beyond the limits of correction.

Article 1180. A minor child is under the guardianship of its father or paternal grandfather. Such is also the case with an immature or insane child provided that the immaturity or mental unfitness continues from the age of minority.

Article 1181. Either the father or the paternal grandfather has the right of guardianship over his children.

Article 1183. In all matters pertaining to the estate, and the civil and financial concerns of the ward, the guardian will be his or her legal representative.

Article 1189. Neither the father nor the paternal grandfather can appoint an executor for his ward while the other is still living.

Article 1194. The father, the paternal grandfather, and the guardian appointed by one of them will be called the “special guardian” of the child.

Article 1197. A person is entitled to maintenance expenses if he or she is poor and cannot earn a living by adopting an occupation.

Article 1210. No one, when reaching the age of majority, can be treated as under disability in respect of insanity or immaturity unless his immaturity or insanity is proved.

Note 1: The age of majority for boys is fifteen lunar years and for girls nine lunar years. Note 2: The properties which had belonged to a minor who has now reached the age of majority may be given to him only if it has been proved that he has full legal capacity.

Article 1231. The following persons should not be appointed as guardians: 1 - Those persons who are themselves under guardianship. 2 - Those persons who, by reason of perpetrating a felony or the following misdemeanours have been convicted by a final judgment of theft, abuse of confidence (breach of trust), swindling, embezzlement, rape or immoral acts, offences against children, and fraudulent bankruptcy. 3 - Persons for whom orders of bankruptcy are issued and whose bankruptcy has not yet been settled. 4 - Persons who are notorious for their immoral acts. 5 - A person who either in his own name or in that of his relatives of the first degree has a claim against the person under incapacity.

Article 1233. A woman cannot accept guardianship without the consent of her husband.

Article 1251. If a woman without a husband who is appointed as guardian, even if she be the mother of the person placed under guardianship, remarries, she will have to report the matter within a month from the date of the contract of marriage to the Public Prosecutor of

the district of her residence or to his representative. In such a case the Public Prosecutor or his representative can, while taking into view the new position of that woman, ask for the appointment of a new guardian or the addition of a supervisor.

Article 1252. With regard to the preceding Article, in case the guardian fails to report her marriage to the Public Prosecutor or his representative within the prescribed period, the Public Prosecutor can ask for her dismissal.

PENAL CODE

Article 49. Minors, if committing an offence, are exempted from criminal responsibility. Their correction is the responsibility of their guardians or if the court decides by a center for correction of minors.

Note 1: A minor is a person who has not reached the age of maturity as stipulated by Islamic jurisprudence.

Article 74. Adultery, whether punishable by flogging or stoning, may be proven by the testimony of four just men or that of three just men and two just women.

Article 76. The testimony of women alone or in conjunction with the testimony of only one just man shall not prove adultery, but it shall constitute false accusation, which is a punishable act.³⁵

Article 82. Section 3. The penalty for adultery in the following cases shall be death, regardless of the age or marital status of the culprit: (3) Adultery between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman, in which case the adulterer (non-Muslim man) shall receive the death penalty.

Article 83. Adultery in the following cases shall be punishable by stoning: (1) Adultery by a married man who is wedded to a permanent wife with whom he has had intercourse and may have intercourse when he so desires; (2) Adultery of a married woman with an adult man provided the woman is permanently married and has had

intercourse with her husband and is able to do so again.

Note: Adultery of a married woman with a minor is punishable by flogging.

Article 86. Adultery of a permanently married man or a permanently married woman who does not have access to his or her spouse, due to travel, incarceration or similar impediments, shall not require stoning.

Article 88. The punishment for an unmarried adulterer or adulteress shall be one hundred lashes.

Article 118. If less than four righteous men testify, sodomy is not proved and the witnesses shall be condemned to punishment for *qazf* (malicious accusation).

Article 119. Testimony of women alone or in conjunction with that of a single man shall not prove sodomy.

Article 128. The means of proving lesbianism in court are the same as that for sodomy (testimony of four men).

Article 137. Pimping is proved by the testimony of two righteous men.

Article 209. If a Muslim man commits first-degree murder against a Muslim woman, the penalty of retribution shall apply. The victim's next of kin, however, shall pay to the culprit half of his blood money before the act of retribution is carried out.

Article 220. A father or paternal grandfather who kills his child will not be condemned to retaliation and will be sentenced to *mulct* of murder which should be paid to the heirs of the murdered individual.

Article 294. Blood money (*mulct*) is a property which should be paid to a victim of murder or his/her heirs and to a victim of injury.

Article 300. The blood money for the first- or second-degree murder of a Muslim woman is half of that of a murdered Muslim man.

Article 301. The blood money is the same for men and women except when it reaches a third of full blood money, in which case a woman's blood money shall be half of a man's.

Article 441. Defloration of a virgin by insertion of a finger that results in incontinence shall entitle the victim to her full blood money plus a sum equal to her potential dowry.

Article 459. In case of disagreement between the culprit and the victim, the testimony of two just male experts or that of one male expert and two just female experts asserting unrecoverable loss of sight or loss of sight for an indeterminate period shall entitle the victim to blood money. In the said case, the blood money is due the victim if the eyesight is not recovered at the time predicted by the experts, or if the victim dies before his or her eyesight is restored, or if someone else gouges his or her eye.

Article 478. If a man's reproductive organ is severed from the circumcision line or lower he shall be entitled to his full blood money, otherwise the amount of blood money shall be proportional to the size of the severed part.

Article 479. If a woman's genital is totally severed she shall be entitled to her full blood money and if only half of her genital is severed half of her blood money is due her.

Article 487. Section 6. Blood money for the aborted fetus which has taken in the human spirit shall be paid in full if it is male, one-half if it is female, and three-quarters if its gender is in doubt.

Article 630. Whenever a man finds his wife committing adultery, being aware of her willingness [toward the adulterer], he may kill both his wife and the adulterer at the scene. Should the woman be under duress, he may only kill the man [the adulterer].

THE CONSTITUTION

Article 115. The President must be elected from religious and political dignitaries and must possess the terms and conditions stated as such: Iranian origin, Iranian subject, manager and prudent, experienced, honest, virtuous, and pious man, believer in the fundamentals of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country.³⁶

APPENDIX V

THE FAMILY PROTECTION ACT (1975)

Personal status laws enacted in Iran in 1967 and revised in 1975 ensured women's equal rights in marriage and divorce, enhanced women's rights in child custody, increased the minimum age of marriage to 18 for women and 20 for men, and practically eliminated polygamy. Soon after the revolution of 1979, the 1975 Family Protection Law, reprinted below, was annulled.

Section 1. All civil disputes arising from matrimonial relations or family litigations shall be entertained by the Divisional (*Sharistān*) Courts, or, where the Divisional (*Sharistān*) Courts do not exist, by the District (*Bakhsh*) Courts without observing the legal formalities provided in the Civil Procedure Code.

Section 2. By family litigations is meant the civil litigations taking place between a husband and wife, (or their) children, paternal grandfather, executor or guardian, in respect of the rights and obligations provided in Book Seventh (on Marriage and Divorce), Book Eighth (on Children), Book Ninth (on Family), and Book Tenth (on Legal Disability and Guardianship) of the Civil Code, as well as Sections 1005, 1006, 1028, 1029, and 1030 of the aforesaid Law and the relevant sections of the Non-Litigious Jurisdiction Act.

Section 3. The court shall carry out an investigation or take any steps it deems necessary for the throwing of light on the subject of litigation

and for administrating justice, as making an inquiry through witnesses or persons having knowledge of the facts or inviting the help of social workers and the like, as and how it is required.

Section 4. The court may exempt either of the parties (to a litigation) from the payment of the court fees as well as the fees of the experts and arbitrators and other (relevant) fees after declaring the party destitute, and (while doing so) the court shall also appoint an advocate for providing legal aid to the said party.

In case the party declared destitute by the court is the winning party (in the litigation), the losing party shall be liable to the payment of the aforesaid fees as well as the fees of the aforesaid advocate.

Section 5. The advocates and experts mentioned in the above section shall be bound to obey the orders of the court.

Section 6. Except in the cases relating to the actual subject of marriage and divorce, the court shall refer all complaints by either of the parties in case of (civil) litigation for arbitration by one or three persons, who shall give a decision on the case within the period appointed by the court.

In case the court finds that the said complaint is intended to evade the consideration of the case or to prolong its proceedings, it shall refuse to entertain the complaint.

The arbitration under this Act shall not be governed by the conditions of arbitration provided in the Civil Procedure Code.

Section 7. The arbitrator, or arbitrators, shall endeavour to bring about a reconciliation between the parties, and in case of failure shall give a verdict on the subject matter of the litigation within the period prescribed by the court and submit it to the court.

The verdict of the arbitrator (or arbitrators) shall be communicated by the court to both parties, and the parties may intimate the court about their objection (if any) on the verdict within a period of ten days from the date of receipt thereof.

In case the parties agree to the verdict of the arbitrator (or arbitrators) or fail to intimate the court about their objection on the verdict within the prescribed period, the court shall order the enforcement of the verdict. In case (either of) the parties have an objection on the verdict, the court shall hold a special session and consider the objection and shall give its own decision in the case. This decision of the court shall be final.

In case the court has not received the verdict of the (arbitrator or) arbitrators within the prescribed period, it shall directly take up the consideration of the case and give its consideration thereon.

Section 8. The prescribed words (*Sighah*) of divorce shall be pronounced after the court has considered the relevant case and issued a certificate of non reconciliation between the parties.

A person desirous of obtaining the aforesaid certificate of non reconciliation between the parties shall apply to the court for issuing him or her such certificate.

The applicant should also mention the exact reasons for obtaining the aforesaid certificate.

On receipt of the application, the court shall directly, or, if it deems necessary, through an arbitrator or arbitrators, endeavour to bring about a compromise between the husband and wife, and prevent the occurrence of a divorce.

In case all the efforts of the court to bring about a reconciliation fail to bear the desired result, the court shall issue a certificate of non reconciliation between the parties.

On receipt of the aforesaid certificate, the Divorce (Registration) Office shall take necessary action for the pronouncement of the divorce and its registration.

Section 9. In case an agreement has been reached between the husband and wife over the divorce, the parties shall give a notice of

their agreement to the court, and the court shall issue (them) a certificate of non reconciliation.

In case the spouses in their notice to the court (about their agreement over divorce) fail to propose a satisfactory agreement for the custody of the children and the payment of the expenditure in respect thereof, the court shall act in accordance with Section 13 of this Act.

In case the arrangement for the custody of the children made by the spouses fails to work after the enforcement of the divorce, the court shall act in accordance with Section 13 of this Act on receipt of a notice by either of the parents or any near relative of the child, or the Divisional (*Sharistān*) Public Prosecutor.

Section 10. If a wife intends to divorce herself on behalf of her husband and also in case of Section 4 of the Marriage Act, she shall (first) obtain from the court a certificate of non-reconciliation provided in Section 8 above.

Section 11. In addition to the cases mentioned in the Civil Code, a husband or wife may also apply to the court for issuing him or her a certificate of non reconciliation in the following cases:

1. If the husband or wife has, according to the final judgment of a court of law, been sentenced to an imprisonment for a period of five years or more, or the payment of a fine in case of failure of which a person is liable to undergo an imprisonment for a period of five years (or more), or to an imprisonment and fine jointly resulting in an imprisonment for a period of five years or more, and (further, in case) the judgment for imprisonment or fine is enforceable.
2. If the husband or wife has been addicted to anything harmful which, according to the judgment of the court, is detrimental to the very basis of the family life and renders the continuation of the marital life impossible.

3. If the husband marries another woman without the consent of the first wife.
4. If the husband or wife abandons the family life. The question whether or not a husband or wife has abandoned the family life shall be determined by the court.
5. If a husband or wife has, on account of the commission of a crime repugnant to the position and dignity of the family of the other party, been, according to the final judgment of a court of law, found guilty. The question whether or not the crime is repugnant to the position and dignity of the other party shall be determined by the court after taking into consideration the position and circumstances of both the parties as well as the custom and other (usual) standards.

Section 12. In cases of disputes when a certificate of non reconciliation is issued, the court shall determine and order the method of custody of the children and the amount of maintenance (payable to the wife by the husband after separation) during the *'Iddah* after taking into consideration the moral and financial position of the husband and wife as well as the interest of the children. The court shall mention in the certificate of non reconciliation the arrangement made for the custody of the children after the divorce. In case the children are required to be kept in the custody of the mother or any other person, the arrangement for the custody as well as the total expenditure in respect thereof shall also be determined (by the court).

The expenditure on maintenance of the wife (during *'Iddah*) shall be payable from the income and assets of the husband; while that of the children shall be payable from the income and assets of the husband or wife or both, or even from their pension. The court shall determine the amount which should be defrayed for each child from the income or assets of the husband or wife, or both, and shall order a satisfactory arrangement for payment thereof.

Likewise, the court shall also determine the arrangement for the parties to meet the children. In case of absence or demise of the father or mother, the right of meeting the child (or children) shall be transferred to the near relatives of the first degree of the absent or deceased person.

The provisions of this Act shall also apply to the children whose parents have been separated from each other before the enactment of this Act, provided no satisfactory arrangement had been made for their custody and protection.

Section 13. In every case when the court, in accordance with the notice by either of the parents or any near relatives of the children or the Divisional (*Sharistān*) Public Prosecutor, decides that it is expedient to revise the arrangement for the custody of the children, it shall revise its earlier decision. In such cases the court may transfer the custody of the child (or children) to any person it deems suitable. In any case, the expenditure in respect of the custody shall be borne by the person who has been held responsible for it according to the decision of the court.

Section 14. When a man, already having a wife, desires to marry another women, he shall obtain permission from the court of law. The court shall give the permission only when it has taken the necessary steps, and, if possible, has made an inquiry from the present wife of the man, in order to assure the financial potentiality and (physical) ability of the man for doing justice (to both the wives).

In case the man marries (another woman) without obtaining the due permission from the court, he shall be liable for the punishment provided in Section 5 of the Marriage Act of 1310-1316[iii] (A.H. - 1931-1937 A.D.).

Section 15. A husband may, with the approval of the court, prevent his wife from an occupation which is repugnant to the interests of his or her family or position.

Section 16. The decision of the court shall be final in the following cases:

1. Issue of a non reconciliation certificate;
2. Determination of the (amount of) maintenance for the *'iddah* period (payable by the husband to the wife), and the expenditure in respect of the custody of the children;
3. Custody of the children;
4. Right of the father or mother or the near relatives of first degree of the absent or deceased father or mother or children for meeting the children; and
5. Permission provided in Section 14 above.

Section 17. The provisions contained in Section 11 shall be noted in the Marriage Contract Form as “Conditions Appended to the Contract”. Here (among others), the fact relating to the delegation of an irrevocable power of attorney to the wife for divorcing herself (on behalf of the husband) shall also be explicitly mentioned.

In accordance with the provisions of the Civil Code,[iv] this divorce shall be irrevocable.

Section 18. A husband or wife, or both, may make an application to the court for the immediate consideration of the question of custody of their children, the existing position (of the children), or the expenditure in respect of their custody, and for issuing an order in this connection before entering into the consideration of their actual dispute.

On receipt of the application, the court shall take up its consideration (immediately). The temporary order issued by the court concerning the custody or expenditure (on the custody) of the children shall be final, and shall be enforceable with immediate effect.

Section 19. After the enactment of this Act, the Superintendents of the Divorce (Registration) Offices shall, unless a certificate of non reconciliation or an order of the court is produced, not take any action for

the pronouncement of the *Sighah* (or prescribed words) of divorce, or the registration of the divorce (as the case may be).

Whosoever contravenes the provisions of this section shall be liable to a disciplinary punishment of the fourth degree, or above.

Note - A non reconciliation certificate is valid for three months from the date of its issue.

Section 20. While considering matters relating to family (disputes), the proceedings of the court shall be held *in camera*.

Section 21. The enforcement of the judgments of the court shall be governed by the General Provisions (of the Civil Procedure Code).

Section 22. The Rules for carrying into effect the purposes of this Act shall be formulated by the Ministry of Justice within a period of three months from the date of the passage of this Act, and enforced after approval by the Council of Ministers.

Section 23. The government shall be responsible for the enforcement of this Act.

RULES FOR CARRYING INTO EFFECT THE FAMILY PROTECTION ACT

Section 1. In order to carry into effect the Family Protection Act the Ministry of Justice shall charge one or several branches of the Divisional (or *Sharistān*) Court in every Division (or *Sharistān*) with the duty of entertaining the civil disputes arising from matrimonial relations of family litigations. If necessary, special benches may be set up in the Divisional (or *Sharistān*) Courts for this purpose. The judges appointed for the special courts for entertaining the family disputes should possess suitable qualifications of age, experience, and family position for fulfilling such duties.

Section 2. A suit relating to family disputes may be filed verbally or by submitting an application in writing. The application need not be on a printed form.

Section 3. In every case when a suit is filed verbally, the statement of the plaintiff shall be written in the *procès-verbal* by the copy writer or the office superintendent (or reader) of the court, and duly (signed and) endorsed by the plaintiff, and the court shall issue an order for entertaining the application.

Section 4. The court fee in respect of the suit shall be charged to the plaintiff at the time of submission of the application, except when the plaintiff is known as destitute by the court, in which case he or she shall be exempted from the payment of the relevant fees.

Section 5. After the suit has been filed, the court shall, in any manner it deems fit, call both the parties (to be present), within the specified due time and shall also communicate the contents of the (plaintiff's) application and its appendices to the defendant.

In case either of the parties, or both, fail to appear in the court, it shall not preclude the court from taking necessary action and decision on the (plaintiff's) application.

Section 6. In a case where the dispute is referred for arbitration, the court shall ask each of the parties to nominate his or her arbitrator or arbitrators and in case either or both of the parties fail to appear or do not nominate their arbitrator (arbitrators), the court shall itself appoint an arbitrator or arbitrators from among his or her near relatives or persons having a close contact or friendship with him or her, or any other person.

Section 7. In case an arbitrator, or arbitrators, refuse to accept the duty of arbitration, or resign (after once accepting it), the court shall take necessary action for the appointment of a fresh arbitrator, or arbitrators, and in case the new arbitrator, or arbitrators, are also unwilling

to accept the duty or (after once accepting it) resign, the court shall directly take up the matter.

Section 8. In case several persons have been appointed as arbitrators, and one of them resigns in the second half of the term of arbitration, his or her resignation shall have no effect on the proceeding, the arbitrator being considered as absentee, and the matter shall be determined by majority of votes.

Section 9. At any stage of the proceedings, whenever the parties agree to the verdict of the arbitrator (or arbitrators), and communicate their mutual agreement to the court, the court shall take direct action and give its judgment.

Section 10. The specimen form of the non reconciliation certificate shall be prepared by the Ministry of Justice and supplied to the courts.

The pronouncement of the *Sighah* (or the prescribed words) of divorce shall be performed after the issue of the non reconciliation certificate in accordance with (the provisions of) the Civil Code.

Section 11. Addiction to a harmful thing means addiction to any of the narcotic drugs, alcoholic drinks, gambling, or the like, which if constantly practiced by a person, is expected to cause damage or hygienic, material, or moral harm to the addicted person or his or her spouse.

Section 12. The amount of maintenance (of the divorced wife) or expenditure on the custody or education of the children shall be determined or assessed in consideration of their present and future requirements as well as the position and circumstances of the parents. In case it is difficult to meet the expenditure, firstly, from the income (and assets) of the father alone, or, secondly, from the income (and assets) of the mother alone, it shall be defrayed from the income (and assets) of both parents.

Section 13. The parents shall have the right to meet their children at least once a month.

Section 14. An employer, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, may dispense with the services of a woman only when a court of law has already considered the application of her husband to the effect that the present occupation of the wife is repugnant to the interests and position of the family, and given a judgment in favor of the husband.

Section 15. All Superintendents of the Marriage and Divorce (Registration) Officers shall, before registering a marriage, or calling the parties (for its registration), ask for the preparation of a detailed inventory of the dowry of the wife which shall be signed and endorsed by the husband.

NOTES

(Translations of the relevant extracts of some of the laws referred to are given below.)

[i] In the case of a dispute between a husband and wife over misbehaviour, failure (on the part of the wife) to surrender herself to the embraces of the husband, the maintenance, clothing and residence (of the wife) or expenditure payable by the husband for a child under the custody of the wife, when a suit is filed by either of the spouses, the court may refer the plaint to arbitration.

In case of disagreement between the parties over the appointment of an arbitrator, the court shall appoint (as arbitrators) two persons, from among the near relatives of (each of) the parties, and when they have no near relatives at the place of their residence, from among the persons having a close contact or friendship with them.

The arbitrators shall make all possible endeavour to bring about a reconciliation between the parties. In case of their failure in bringing about a compromise, they shall give their opinion as to which of

the parties is on the right, or in respect of the amount of expenditure on (the maintenance of) the wife or (on the custody of) the child (or children), where the dispute is in respect of the expenditure (on the maintenance of) the wife (or the custody of the child or children).

In the case of disagreement between the arbitrators, they may, by mutual agreement, nominate a person as the third arbitrator. In case, however, they disagree on the appointment of the third arbitrator, the court shall appoint one by lot. Thereupon, the matter shall be decided by majority of votes of the arbitrators. At the time of the appointment of the arbitrators, the court shall take into consideration that the persons appointed as arbitrators bear a good moral character.

In case either of the parties has an objection against the verdict of the (arbitrator, or) arbitrators, he or she shall submit to the court his or her objection within one month of the receipt of the notice of the verdict. If in the opinion of the court the objection is reasonable, the court shall consider the matter and give its (own) judgment.

A suit in respect of the aforesaid cases shall be filed in the Divisional (*Sharistān*) court in the District (*Bakhsh*) court. (The Civil Procedure Code of Iran, § 676).

The parties to a contract of marriage may (by mutual agreement) provide any stipulation as appended to the contracts of marriage or to any other binding contract, provided the stipulation is not contrary to the very purpose of the contract. They may stipulate, for example, that whenever the husband has been missing, has failed to maintain his wife for a specified period, has made an attempt on her life, or maltreats her in a way that renders (the continuation of) the marital life intolerable (for her), the wife shall, after the establishment of the cause in a court of law and the issue of a final judgment (by the court), be authorized to divorce herself irrevocably (on behalf of the husband) or to delegate such authority to some other person.

Note. All the cases of dispute between a husband and wife falling under this section shall be tried by the courts of first instance in accordance with the Civil Procedure Code. The judgment of the aforementioned courts shall be appealable and revisable. A person may file a suit within six months of the occurrence of the cause (stipulated for), after which the stipulation shall be considered as time-barred.

(The Marriage Act of Iran, § 4).

[iii] A husband or wife who, at the time of contracting a marriage, defrauds the other party in a way that in the absence of that fraud the marriage could not have been contracted, shall be liable to a correctional imprisonment for (a period ranging from) six months to two years. (Ibid.. § 5)

[iv] In fact, according to the provisions of section 4 of the Marriage Act of Iran (quoted above), the wife is already authorized to divorce herself irrevocably, provided the stipulation to this effect had been made in the contract of marriage. It seems that the present act intends to include such cases of divorce among the cases provided under Section 1145 of the Civil Code of Iran which reads as follows:

Section 1145. A Divorce Shall be Irrevocable in the Following Cases:

1. When it is given before the consummation of marriage.
2. When it is given to a *yā'isah* (i.e., a woman who has passed the child bearing age).
3. When it is a *khul'* divorce (i.e., one given on the demand of the wife) or a *mubārāt* divorce (i.e., one given on the mutual agreement of the parties), as long as the woman does not demand the return of the compensation (paid to the husband for obtaining such divorce from him).
4. When it is a third divorce given (by the same husband to the same wife) after three consecutive matrimonial connections, no matter whether the matrimonial connections

have been the result of a recall (of the wife by the husband before the expiry of the *'Iddah*) or a fresh contract of marriage.

Section 7 of the Iranian Penal Code has divided an offense into the following four kinds (or degrees) according to the severity or mildness of the act:

1. A crime;
2. A big offense;
3. A minor offense; and
4. A contravention.

Further, Section 11 of the Iranian Penal Code provides the following punishment for a contravention (i.e., an offense of the fourth degree):

1. An imprisonment for a period of two to ten days.
2. A fine up to two hundred rials.

APPENDIX VI

ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

The One Million Signatures Campaign arose from a series of peaceful gatherings, workshops, and efforts at raising awareness online, all of which began in 2006. As the campaign forged ahead, restrictions on its members' travel, censorship of their online activities, penalties for arrested activists (who now number more than seventy), and general governmental harassment all escalated. Below is a nonexhaustive chronology that lists both the campaign's activities and the increasingly severe official repression that they have had to face, including prosecutions of campaign members that came as part of the clamp-down following Iran's disputed 2009 presidential election.

JUNE 12, 2006

At Haft Tir Square in Tehran, a gathering of peaceful demonstrators comes together in support of equal rights for women. The meeting is forcibly broken up, and 70 men and women are arrested, including many who would become actively involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign:

- As a result of her participation in the June 2006 demonstration, campaign member Jila Baniyaghoob is charged on January 5, 2007 with “acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering.” The charges are subsequently dropped.
- Activists Fariba Davoodi Mohajer, Parvin Ardalan, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, and Sussan Tahmasebi receive prison sentences in April 2007 on charges of “actions against the state” and “threatening national security” as a result of their involvement in the June 2006 demonstration. All the activists are tried in *absentia*.
- In July 2007, student and campaign member Delaram Ali is found guilty of “propaganda against the state,” “acting against national security,” and “disruption of public order.” She is sentenced to 34 months in prison and 10 lashes for her participation in the protest.
- Alieh Eghdam Doust is sentenced to 40 months in prison and 20 lashes on July 4, 2007. The first campaign activist to have her prison sentence implemented, Alieh is now serving a three year prison term.
- Bahareh Hedayat, a student organizer in the women’s movement, receives a 24-month suspended sentence for her part in the gathering.

AUGUST 27, 2006

Official launch of the One Million Signatures Campaign to change discriminatory laws.

SEPTEMBER 15, 2006

Launch of campaign in city of Tabriz.

OCTOBER 20, 2006

Launch of campaign in city of Isfahan.

NOVEMBER 4, 2006

Launch of campaign in city of Hamedan with a women's rights awareness workshop.

NOVEMBER 5, 2006

Launch of campaign in Gorgan following grassroots workshop.

NOVEMBER 9, 2006

Launch of campaign in city of Zanjan during an open meeting for more than 100 equal-rights defenders.

NOVEMBER 14, 2006

Launch of campaign in Karaj following a seminar for nearly 60 activists.

DECEMBER 2, 2006

Launch of campaign in Yazd.

DECEMBER 14, 2006

First general meeting of campaign members and activists in Tehran.

DECEMBER 15, 2006

First arrest and imprisonment of a campaign member, Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh, for collecting signatures while on the Tehran subway. She is detained for five days, interrogated, and charged with "acting against national security" before being released on December 19.

DECEMBER 29, 2006

Launch of campaign in Kermanshah during a training workshop for 30 equal-rights defenders.

JANUARY 10, 2007

Campaign members Nasim Sarabandi and Fatemeh Dehdashti are arrested for collecting signatures on the Tehran subway and transferred to prison. They are held for a day, and are again summoned to court in April 2007 for the same act and charged with "acting against national security through propaganda against the state." They post bail and are tried in August 2007, after which they are issued 6-month suspended sentences for a period of two years.

JANUARY 27, 2007

Campaign member Talat Taghi is barred from leaving the country.

FEBRUARY 22, 2007

Training workshop and launch of the One Million Signatures Campaign in Mashhad.

FEBRUARY 24, 2007

First meeting of the Mothers' Committee in Tehran.

FEBRUARY 29, 2007

Training workshop and launch of campaign in Rasht.

MARCH 4, 2007

Thirty-three women's rights activists are arrested while silently protesting the prosecution of 4 women for their participation in the June 12, 2006 gathering. All the women are released by March 19. The arrested campaign members include those below.

- Shadi Sadr and Mahboubeh Abasgholizadeh, with bail set at 200 million tomans.
- Shahla Entesari is brought to trial on February 26, 2008.
- Nahid Jafari is beaten during arrest. She is subsequently found guilty of "illegal gathering and collusion intended to disrupt national security" and receives a suspended sentence of 6 months and 10 lashes on April 23, 2008.
- Maryam Hosseinkhah is summoned to the Revolutionary Court on May 13, 2008, and scheduled to appear for trial on May 26. When the prosecutor is unable to appear on that date, the trial is rescheduled for July 2008.
- On May 8, 2007, Zeinab Peyghambarzadeh undergoes arrest and 9 days' detention for her participation in the March 4 protest. On April 19, 2008, Zeinab is found guilty of "illegal gathering and collusion intended to disrupt national security" and receives a suspended sentence of 24 months. On November 5, 2008, Zeinab is issued a 12-month suspended sentence over a period of 3 years in connection with the arrest.

- In April 2009, Parvin Ardalan is issued a reduced sentence of a year, suspended over a period of three years.
- Nahid Keshavaraz is brought before Branch 1049 of the Shahid Ghodosi Courthouse on August 30, 2009 on charges of “disruption of public order.”

MARCH 4, 2007

Seminar in support of campaign held in Soleymaniyeh, Iraq.

MARCH 5, 2007

Campaign member Mansoureh Shojaee barred from leaving Iran.

MARCH 6, 2007

Launch of campaign by Kurdish activists in city of Sanandaj.

MARCH 8, 2007

International Women’s Day: At least 8 women are arrested at a peaceful protest in Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan province. Most are released shortly afterwards, except for journalist Aso Saleh, who remains in detention. In Tehran, authorities use force to disperse hundreds of people gathered before the parliament building.

MARCH 14, 2007

Second public meeting of One Million Signatures Campaign held in Tehran.

MARCH 15, 2007

Authorities shutter the Iranian NGOs Training Center, founded by campaign activist Mahboubeh Abasgholizadeh, and RAAHI: Women’s Center for Legal Training, directed by activist Shadi Sadr. The Iranian CSOs Training and Research Center (*Koneshgaran Davtaleb*), which played a critical role in defending those arrested after the March 4 protest, is also shut down.

APRIL 2, 2007

While collecting signatures in central Tehran’s Laleh Park, five campaign members are arrested. They are Saeedeh Amin, Sara Imanian, Nahid

Keshavarz, Homayoun Nami, and Mahbouhen Hossein Zadeh. Despite having been told that they would be freed after posting bail, Nahid Keshavarz and Mahbouhen Hossein Zadeh are transferred to Evin Prison in northwest Tehran and held for 13 days. They are charged with “acting against national security through propaganda against the Order,” and released on 20 million tomans bail on April 15.

APRIL 11, 2007

Azadeh Forghani is sentenced to 2 years in prison for “acting against national security by participating in an illegal gathering.”

APRIL 16, 2007

According to the Iranian News Agency, ILNA, Information Minister Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejeie declares the women’s and students’ movements to be “elements of soft subversion” against the regime.

APRIL 18, 2007

Campaign members Fariba Davoodi Mohajer and Sussan Tahmassebi are sentenced for “gathering and collusion with intent to threaten national security” and “acting against national security.” Mohajer receives 12 months with a 36-month suspended sentence, while Tahmassebi gets 6 months. Both are freed on bail pending appeal.

APRIL 26, 2007

In Tehran, the campaign holds its third public meeting, this one on the theme of “The Relationship Between the Campaign, Political Parties, and Social Movements.”

JUNE 10, 2007

Ehterah Shadfar, Mothers’ Committee member and founding member of Women’s Cultural Center, and her neighbor are arrested for collecting signatures. There is no warrant. They are at the Vozara detention center. After their release by the Revolutionary Court, the neighbor’s case is declared closed, but on February 19, 2008, Ehterah is sentenced to 6 months’ suspended sentence for a period of 2 years.

JUNE 12, 2007

First anniversary of the National Day of Solidarity for Iranian Women.

JULY 9, 2007

Student leader and campaign member Bahareh Hedayat is arrested for her participation in a sit-in protesting the arrest of her fellow students. Her house is searched and some of her personal belongings confiscated. She gets out on bail on August 10, 2007.

JULY 11, 2007

Amir Yaghoub-Ali becomes the first male campaigner to be arrested for collecting signatures when authorities pick him up in Tehran's Andisheh Park. After 28 days in solitary confinement, he is released on bail. He is tried on February 26, 2008. On May 25, he is sentenced to 12 months for "endangering national security," among ten other charges pending against him.

AUGUST 13, 2007

First official sentences issued by Revolutionary Court against campaign members Nasin Sarabandi and Fatemeh Dehdashti.

AUGUST 25, 2007

Campaign seminar held in Kermanshah for activists from Tehran, Rasht, and Hamedan.

SEPTEMBER 3, 2007

Campaign members and women's-movement activists meet to discuss and mobilize against a proposed "Family Protection Bill" that they believe includes regressive, gender-discriminatory provisions.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2007

Twenty-five campaign members are beaten and arrested during a training workshop in Khorramabad. Reza Dowlatshah, Bahman Azadi, and Khosrow are held until September 16.

OCTOBER 9, 2007

Arrest of Ronak Safarzadeh, marking increase in arrests of campaign members and reach into Kurdish region. Campaign petitions and educational literature are confiscated from Ronak's house. In April 2009, Ronak is issued a six year mandatory prison term on charges of "spreading propaganda against the state" and her support for a local women's NGO.

OCTOBER 13, 2007

Launch of website of Men for Equality.

OCTOBER 23, 2007

Launch of campaign in Zahedan.

OCTOBER 30, 2007

Student activist and campaign member Maziar Samiee is arrested along with seven others during protests at Allameh Tabataba'i University. While five are released within several hours, three remain in detention on the orders of the Information and Security Ministry. Samiee is released on bail on November 8.

NOVEMBER 4, 2007

Campaign member Hana Abdi is arrested in Iranian Kurdistan. She had been gathering signatures together with fellow campaign member Ronak Safarzadeh on October 8. Their homes are searched on the same day. Abdi's computer and campaign literature are confiscated. Both women are accused of crimes relating to national security. On June 18, 2008, Hana is sentenced in West Azerbaijan province to 60 months on charges of "gathering and collusion with intent to threaten national security."

NOVEMBER 15, 2007

Launch of website by campaign activists in California.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2007

Clampdowns on campaign bloggers and journalists intensify as of late 2007:

- On November 17, 2007, Maryam Housseinkhah is charged with “acting against national security, publication of lies, and disturbing public opinion” for her contributions to the *Change for Equality* and *Zanestan* (Women’s Cultural Center) websites, which had been shut down days earlier. Following two days of interrogation and her family’s inability to post bail, she is moved to Evin prison on November 18.
- Jelveh Javaheri is arrested on December 1, 2007 and charged with “disturbing public opinion, propaganda against the state, publication of lies for writing for the site of the Campaign (*Change for Equality*).” Her family is unable to post bail, and after 30 days the amount is reduced and she is released.
- In September 2008, Housseinkhah, Javaheri, and two other campaign activists, Parvin Ardalan and Nahhid Keshavarz, receive six month mandatory sentences in connection with their online campaign activities.

JANUARY 23, 2008

First training workshop on women’s rights held for campaign members.

FEBRUARY 1, 2008

Campaign website established by German activists.

FEBRUARY 1, 2008

Iranian authorities shut down the women’s magazine *Zanan*.

FEBRUARY 14, 2008

Raheleh Asgarizadeh and Nasim Khosravi are arrested for collecting signatures in Tehran’s Daneshjoo Park, following an educational street performance about polygamy. The two are charged with “propaganda against the state” and detained for two nights at the Vozara detention center. Unable to make bail, the two are transferred to Evin Prison and released on February 26 under a third-party guaranty. On June 28, 2008, they received a summons to appear before the Revolutionary Courts in July 2008. They are later acquitted.

MARCH 3, 2008

Campaign member Parvin Ardalan is stopped from leaving the country as she attempts to travel to Stockholm, Sweden, to accept the 2007 Olaf Palme Award for her work in support of Iranian women's equality.

MARCH 7, 2008

Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mansoureh Shojaee are barred from travel as they attempt to leave for Dubai to take part in International Women's Day celebrations and hold a training workshop.

APRIL 8, 2008

Campaign Mothers' Committee member Khadijeh Moghadam, who had hosted several campaign-related meetings in her home, is arrested. She is released on April 16 after spending nine days in detention, and on November 3, 2008, appears before the Revolutionary Court to face charges of "propaganda against the state, gathering and collusion with the intent of disrupting national security, and refusal to obey the orders of the police." Her husband, Akbar Khosrowshahi, is also charged in relation to press interviews that he gave in support of his wife following her arrest.

APRIL 16, 2008

Launch of campaign activities in Cyprus.

APRIL 22, 2008

Launch of campaign in Kuwait.

MAY 4, 2008

Launch of campaign in city of Ilam.

MAY 8, 2008

Launch of campaign in city of Amol.

MAY 15, 2008

Two-day meeting for campaign members in Rasht.

JUNE 12, 2008

Nine activists are arrested prior to a peaceful assembly in commemoration of the second anniversary of National Day of Solidarity of Iranian

Women: Nafiseh Azad, Jila Baniyaghoob, Alieh Eghdam Doust, Farideh Ghaeb, Jelveh Javaheri, Sarah Loghmani, Nahid Mirhaj, Aida Saadat, and Nasrin Sotoudeh. They are released eight hours later under a third-party guaranty. In September, five are summoned before the Revolutionary Court to answer charges relating to disruption of public order and refusal to obey police orders. In October 2009, Jelveh is issued a six month sentence in connection with this arrest.

JUNE 13, 2008

Campaign member Mahboubeh Karami is arrested. She had been riding a bus that passed a demonstration in Tehran's Mellat Park, even though she had no connection to the event. During her detention, she and nine other detainees stage a hunger strike to protest the conditions of their detention. In July, her bail is set at 100 million tomans. She is released on August 25, 2008.

JULY 9, 2008

Campaign member Zeinab Bayzeydi is arrested. In August, she is sentenced to serve 4 years' internal exile in West Azerbaijan province. She denies all charges against her except for her cooperation with the One Million Signatures Campaign.

JULY 12, 2008

Women's rights defenders Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mansoureh Shojaee are summoned to appear before the Revolutionary Court. In violation of legal requirements, neither court summons includes information about the charges against the activists. They appear before the court on July 14 and are charged with taking actions against Iran's national security via their unauthorized relations with "Iranians outside the country."

AUGUST 31, 2008

Following a meeting convened by a coalition of women's rights activists, the Iranian government backs down on controversial provisions in a proposed "Family Protection Bill." The bill, which had been first introduced in August 2007, would remove requirements to register temporary

marriages, authorize polygamous marriages based on the financial capacity of the husband, and impose a tax on the wife's dowry.

SEPTEMBER 19, 2008

Nasrin Sotoudeh, an attorney with the One Million Signatures Campaign, wins the first Human Rights International Prize in Merano, Italy.

OCTOBER 1, 2008

Campaign member Esha Momeni is barred from leaving the country. Esha, a student from California who has been in Tehran visiting her family, is arrested on October 15. She is released in November, when her family posts the deed to their house as bail.

OCTOBER 5, 2008

Campaign member Negin Sheikholeslami is arrested in Tehran.

OCTOBER 22, 2008

Home of campaign activist Parastoo Allahyari is searched.

OCTOBER 26, 2008

Campaign member Sussan Tahmasebi is barred from leaving the country and summoned to court.

OCTOBER 16, 2008

Launch of campaign in Kerman.

NOVEMBER 5, 2008

Launch of campaign weblog for working group on equal inheritance.

NOVEMBER 13, 2008

In a victory for the women's movement, parliament passes legislation equalizing blood-money amounts for men and women involved in car accidents.

NOVEMBER 28, 2008

Campaign website *Change for Equality* receives Reporters Without Borders Jury Prize.

DECEMBER 6, 2008

One Million Signatures campaign is named among ten nominees for OneWorld People of 2008 Award.

DECEMBER 8, 2008

Iranian government blocks campaign website *Change for Equality* for the eighteenth time.

DECEMBER 10, 2008

Campaign member Nasrin Sotoudeh's passport is confiscated as she is prevented from leaving the country to receive the Human Rights International Prize in Italy.

DECEMBER 21, 2008

The offices of Defenders of Human Rights Center, an NGO headed by Shirin Ebadi, Nobel laureate and women's rights defender, are forcibly closed by authorities. There follows a period of intense harrassment against Ebadi, including charges that she has failed to pay taxes. There is a staged demonstration and vandalism at her home. Jinus Sobhani, administrative assistant of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, is arrested during an early-morning raid on her home on January 14, 2009.

JANUARY 30, 2009

Nafiseh Azad is among three activists arrested while collecting signatures in the Tochal Mountains north of Tehran. While the other activists are released within a day on a third-party guaranty, Nafiseh is interrogated and detained for six days after she asks police to release her colleagues.

MARCH 4, 2009

Five members of the One Million Signatures campaign, Parvin Ardalan, Issa Saharkheiz, Mansooreh Shojaie, Nasrin Sotoudeh, and Talat Taghinia, lodge an official complaint in response to travel bans on women's rights activists.

MARCH 26, 2009

Twelve women's rights activists are arrested while preparing to make Nowruz (Persian New Year) visits to families of imprisoned social and political activists. Following the March 29 release of ten of the activists,

Khadijeh Moghaddam and Mahboubeh Karami remain in custody until an arraignment held on April 7. At the arraignment, Mahboubeh is released on bail, but Khadijeh is not released until the following day because she faces additional charges. Her prosecution continues.

APRIL 25, 2009

Campaign member and writer Maryam Malek is arrested after her home is forcibly searched and she is summoned for interrogation and charged in the Revolutionary Courts. She is charged with “propaganda against the state” and “membership in the One Million Signatures Campaign,” the first time that campaign membership itself is designated as a criminal activity.

MAY 1, 2009

On International Workers’ Day, 150 activists are arrested for taking part in a demonstration marking the event, including campaign members Nikzad Zanganeh, Amir Yaghoub-Ali, Taha Valizadeh, Pouria Poshtareh, Kaveh Mozaffari and Jelveh Javaheri. Javaheri spends sixteen days in solitary confinement, and is released on June 7, 2009 under a third-party guaranty. She is charged with actions against the state through participation in One Million Signatures Campaign, as well as with unlawful gathering and collusion.

MAY 7, 2009

Campaign members Fatemeh Masjedi and Maryam Bigdeli are arrested in Qom and released on May 19.

JUNE 12, 2009

Disputed presidential-election results spark widespread protests and harsh clampdowns on opposition and women’s rights activists. Numerous activists are arrested under violent circumstances and detained without communication with their families. Among those detained during postelection unrest are:

- Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh, who is arrested during a sit-in in Laleh Park. The sit-in is part of a weekly organized effort coordinated by

the “Mourning Mothers” to mourn the loss of life during postelection protests and to call upon authorities to end violence.

- Journalists Jila Baniyaghoob and her husband, Bahman Ahmadi Amoui, are arrested in their home on June 22, 2009, and released in August 2009.
- Kaveh Mozaffari is arrested by plain-clothes officers as he attempts to accompany his mother to a nearby hospital.
- Shadi Sadr, on July 17, 2009, is beaten and abducted by plain-clothes security officers. She is released from Evin Prison, along with 140 other detainees, after being held for eleven days, at least three of these in solitary confinement. She is charged with “acting against the national security of the state.”

SEPTEMBER 1, 2009

Fereshteh Shirazi a campaign member in Amol, is summoned to the local office of the Ministry of Intelligence, and threatened and interrogated along with her son. This, her third summons, followed an invasive search of her home and workplace on August 12-13.

SEPTEMBER 2009

Campaign website *Change for Equality* is blocked for twenty-first time.

APPENDIX VII

STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE JUNE 2009 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN IRAN

Thursday 30 April 2009

THE COALITION OF THE IRANIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR VOICING THEIR DEMANDS IN THE ELECTION

Over the years, we, as part of the Iranian women's movement and civil rights advocates with diverse backgrounds—NGOs, political parties, various campaigns, media, trade unions, and individuals—had tried various methods and, when necessary, had walked in unison to pursue our demands.

On the occasion of the forthcoming presidential elections in Iran, we are determined to form another broad coalition in order once again to put forward these essential demands. Our goal is to present our demands to the candidates. We neither support any specific candidate, nor interfere with the rights of citizens to participate or reject the elections.

The coalition of the women's movement aims:

- To divert the dominant state-machismo discourse towards a more conciliatory tone in order to address the needs of civil society, especially women's demands.

- To attract the attention of the authorities to their responsibilities to the public, especially the most underprivileged and marginalised sectors.
- To notify the presidential candidates that if they require the votes of women, students, teachers, and other social groups, the candidates' platforms must include their needs and demands.
- To show that even under harshest social and political conditions it is possible to be an effective and responsible citizen and press for a better and just society.
- To achieve these goals, we women must prove that we have the ability and the courage to seek all peaceful and civil avenues. Our past experiences demonstrated that whenever a window of opportunity has opened for women, misogynists have interfered and women have faced further discrimination, limitations, and inhumane violence.

WHAT DO WE WOMEN WANT?

Equal rights and the elimination of all forms of gender, ethnic, religious, and class discrimination are the essence of women's collective demands. Iranian women of all social backgrounds share this common belief that social strata construct and affect gender relations. Hence, to achieve democracy, civil liberties, and citizens' rights, women have long fought shoulder to shoulder with men. Today, as in the past and along with other social groups, and aside from our specific demands as women, we demand:

- The recognition of people's freedoms as specified in the Constitution, including freedom of speech and assembly, among others.
- To end pressures on women, students, teachers, workers, ethnic and religious minorities, and individuals.

We are well aware that gender equality is a pre-condition to democracy, sustainable development and the creation of a society which is void of violence, poverty, and injustice. Hence, we urge the presidential candidates to include our two main demands which we summarise as follows:

- 1) To actively pursue the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

We are aware that this proposal was submitted to the Sixth parliament in the Seventh government (the first cabinet of Mohammad Khatami) and ratified by the members, but was rejected by the Council of Guardians. This proposal was later presented to the Expediency Council, of which the president was a member. We urge the presidential candidates to put this proposal at the top of their priorities with respect to the principles of equality and non-discrimination of citizens.

- 2) We endeavour to eliminate discriminatory laws against women, specifically Articles 19, 20, 21, and 115 of the Constitution with respect to the principle of unconditional gender equality. We are aware that the president has no power to change laws, but we are also aware that if the government is committed to the principle of equality and views it as its responsibility, it is able to utilise its capabilities to encourage the parliament to include the principle of equality in the Constitution.

WHAT WILL WE DO IN THE FUTURE?

In order to explain and expand our demand, we will take whatever action is necessary to reach the three levels: general public, civil society, and the presidential candidates. The forthcoming elections have offered an opportunity for us to promote our demands in favour of women.

HOW CAN WE DO THAT?

Through our peaceful and collective actions, we will determine the future of this broad coalition and will invite and encourage groups and individuals to join us and to shape the future of this coalition.

The Statement has Been Signed by the Following Groups:

Women's Field

The Feminist School

Focus on Iranian Women

Women's Commission of Tahkim Vahdat (Strengthening Unity)

Committee of Human Rights Reporters

Farasoo Association in Tabriz

Pars Women's Association

Change for Equality in Isfahan

Campaign for One Million Signatures in Qom

The National Association of Women Entrepreneurs

Defenders of Women's Human Rights

Mothers for Peace

Network of Volunteer Lawyers

Association of Women Entrepreneurs

Women's Committee of Islamic Associations in East of Iran

Women's Committee of Ahoorayi's Children of Iran

Women's Department of Islamic Association of Sharif University

Committee of Women and Children's Supporters

Campaign in Azerbaijan

Association in Support of Citizenship Rights

Campaign for One Million Signatures in Italy

Women's Committee in Support of Human Rights in Germany

Art and Culture Center

Rahavard Association

Human Rights Committee of Islamic Associations in East of Iran

Iranian Refugees Council in Bremen

Independent Society of Iranian Women in Austria

Campaign for One Million Signatures in Austria

Network of Iran human rights defenders in Germany

Iranian Women's Association in Montreal

Shirin Ebadi
Simin Behbahani
Mehrangiz Kar
Shahla Lahiji
Shahla Sherkat
Azam Taleghani
Elahe Koolaee
Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani
Mansoureh Shojaee
Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh
Shadi Sadr
Farzaneh Taheri
Shahla E'zazi
Banafsheh Hejazi
Rezvan Moghadam
Jila Baniyaghoub
Nayereh Tohidi
Minoos Mortazi
Parvin Bakhtiar-nejad
Fateme Farhang-khah
Asieh Amini
Nahid Tavasoli
Haideh Mogheisi
Parto Nouriala
Nasrin Sotoudeh
Narges Mohamadi
and 700 other women signed the statement.

To join in or sign this statement, please contact:

Email: activistwomenforum@gmail.com

ENDNOTES

¹ Two weeks before holding the assembly of June 12th, 2006 at the 7-Tir Square, more than 5,000 copies of the “The Effect of Laws on Women’s Lives” booklets were distributed among the people. Also, after the assembly, in meetings held by various groups for the purpose of preparing *the campaign plan*, this booklet was reviewed and completed by a number of the campaign’s legal experts, such as Shirin Ebadi, as well as by its educational team, until its text evolved into its current form.

² A part of the findings of “The National Plan for Study of the Phenomenon of Domestic Violence against Women in 28 Provincial Capitals of the Country,” presented by Dr. Mahmoud Ghazi Tabataba’i (who conducted the study), at Tehran University (reported in the 3 Dey 1385 [December 23, 2006] issue of *Kargozaran* newspaper).

³ This study is available at the Library of the Management and Planning Organization.

⁴ Asgari, Saamiyeh. “Women, the Main Victims of Suicide in Iran,” *Culture of Development*, dedicated to women, Esfand 1376 [February 21 - March 20, 1997] and *The Country’s Statistical Yearbook*.

⁵ This study, carried out in 1379 [2000] by Shahla Taheri with the

cooperation of the Governorate of Zanjan, took place in the town of Zanjan and only with the participation of those who went to the Office of the Medical Coroner of the town of Khodabandeh.
<http://www.irwomen.net/first.php?id=140>.

- ⁶Oliyayi Zand, Shahin. "Unsuitable Marriage as a Ground for Prostitution," *Social Welfare Quarterly*, Volume II, Fifth Issue, Fall 1381 [2002].
- ⁷E'zazi, Shahla. *Khoshunat-e Khanevadegi: Zanan-e Kotak-Khordeh* [Domestic Violence: The Beaten Women] Sali Publishers, 1381 [2002].
- ⁸Farrahi, Mehdi. *Surat-bandi-ye hoviyat-e jadid va taghyir-e negaresh-e zanan nesbat beh ahkam-e resale'i* [Formation of a New Identity and Change in Women's Reception of Laws Revealed (to the Prophet).] Master's Thesis in Sociology. Submitted to the faculty of Social Science, Tehran University, 1381 [2000]; Also See: Farrahi, Mehdi and Abbas Kazemi: *Barresi-e hoviyat-e zananeh va vaz'iyat-e dindari* [An Analysis of Female Identity and the State of Religiosity], Seda Research and Development Office, 1381 [2002]. These research projects were conducted using the method of cluster sampling and incorporate 350 cases.
- ⁹"Ravaj-e chand-hamsari dar nowshahr amareh talaq ra afzayesh داده ast." [The Prevalence of Polygamy Has Resulted in An Increase in Number of Divorces in Nowshahr], Website of Iranian Women's Association, 6 Tir, 1384 [June 28, 2005].
<http://www.irwomen.net/news.php?id=88>.
- ¹⁰These statistics were submitted by the Deputy Chairman of the Legal and Judicial Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly during an interview with Fars News Agency.
- ¹¹"35 darsad-e tallaq-ha dar miyan-e goruh-e senni-ye zir-e 22 salegi" [Thirty-Five Percent of Divorces Happen in the Under-22 Age Group] Website of Iranian Women's Association, January 23, 2006.
<http://www.irwomen.net/news.php?id=1263>.
- ¹²ISNA, July 23-August 22, 2007.
- ¹³E'zazi, Shahla. "Society at Large Views Our Laws as Regressive". Interview. 3 Tir 1386 [June 25, 2007].
<http://wechange.info/spip.php?article729>.

- ¹⁴ ISNA, 16 Mordad 1386 [August 7, 2007]
- ¹⁵ IRNA, 25 Mordad 1384 [August 16, 2005]
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Fars News Agency, 26 Mordad 1384 [August 17, 2005]. This study, conducted in a Marriage Registry Office in the city of Semnan, analyzed the judicial opinions related to divorce in the Family Judicial Complex, especially in cases in which the law gave the women the right to file for divorce.
- ¹⁸ *Iran* newspaper, 18 Bahman 1381 [February 8, 2003], results of the plan entitled, “Barresi-ye hamsar-koshi dar 15 ostan-e keshvar” [The Study of Maritricide in Fifteen Provinces in the country].
- ¹⁹ “Shohar-koshi, toghyan-e zanan dar barabareh khoshunat va nabarabari” [Maritricide: Women’s Revolt Against Violence and Inequality], *Zanestan* website. Also see Shahla Mo’azzami, “Maritricide, a Collection of Articles on the Social Ills of Iranian Society,” Association of Iranian Sociologists, Tehran, Aagah Publishers, 1383 [2004].
- ²⁰ IRNA, 24 Ordibehesht 1385 [May 16, 2006]
- ²¹ ISNA, 6 Shahrivar 1385 [August 28, 2006]
- ²² “Se million zan sarparast-e khanevadeh dar Iran” [Three Million Women Are Heads of Households in Iran] website of Iranian Women’s Association, 8 Esfand 1385 [February 28, 2007]
- ²³ ISNA News Agency, August 7, 2007.
- ²⁴ Fars News Agency, 14 Shahrivar 1384 [September 5, 2005]
- ²⁵ “Bazkhani tab’izhayeh qanuni ezdevaj zanan-e irani ba mardaan-e afghani” [A Review of the Legal Prejudices against Marriage of Iranian Women with Afghani Men] website of Iranian Women’s Association.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ It should be noted that on the basis of the Family Protection Law of 1347 [1967], and then on the basis of the amendment[s] thereto in 1354 [1975], the number of wives a man could marry was limited, divorce was based on the permission of the court, and the minimum age at the time of marriage was raised to 18 for women

and 20 for men. There were also some reforms regarding women's employment (for more information on the details of the legal changes in the last 100 years, see "Mehrangiz Manouchehrian's Activities in the Legal Struggle of Women in Iran," by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani and Parvin Ardalan, Towse'eh Publishers, 1382 [2003]).

²⁸ This is not to say that women's efforts to change discriminatory laws, especially unfair family laws, have not had their ups and downs, as indeed they have. But through thick and thin, women have never quit. For fifty years leading up to the ratification of the Family Protection Law in 1967 (and its amendment seven years later) women worked through groups inside and outside the political infrastructure to make their case for fairer treatment. For more information on the broad and far-reaching nature of Iranian women's legal struggles, see *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*, written by Eliz Sanasarian, translated by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Akhtaran Publishers, 2005.

²⁹ Javaheri, Jelveh. "Places that we recreate" in *Nameh-ye Zan* [Woman's Dispatch] (the newsletter of Women's Cultural Center), no. 6, Esfand 1385 [February-March 2004]

³⁰ Shoja'i, Mansoureh. "The One Million Signatures Campaign as a Unified Manifestation of the Legal Demands of Women" in the website of *Change for Equality*.
<http://wechange.info/spip.php?article698>.

³¹ Translator's note: Mehrangiz Manouchehrian (1906-2000) was one of the first women in Iran to graduate with a doctorate from Tehran University's law school. She was a senator in the Iranian Senate from 1963 until 1972. After the 1979 revolution her certificate to practice law was annulled. She won UN Human Rights Peace Prize in 1968.

³² At the same time, the interviews that Nahid Keshavarz has conducted with activists of the One Million Signatures Campaign, about the independence of the women's movement, shows clearly, that in this matter, activists give importance to holding distance from the government and political forces. For a review of the

definition of independence for these activists, see: Keshavarz, Nahid. "Mafhum-e esteqlal dar negaah-e koneshgaran-e jonbesh-e zanan-e Iran" [The definition of independence according to the activists of Iran's women's movement] in *Nameh Zan*, Women's Cultural Center's newsletter, No. 5, Esfand 1385 [February-March 2006]

³³ Matin, Mehnaz. *Reevaluation of the Experience of Women's National Unity*. (Noqteh Publications, United States, 1387 [1999]). P. 48.

³⁴ The wife can refer to the court only under conditions stipulated in articles 1119, 1129, and 1130.

³⁵ Penance for false accusation for a female accuser is eighty lashes if she goes alone or with a man (instead of four men).

³⁶ In this article, the term "dignitaries" is not explicitly defined to mean political and religious men, but has nevertheless been interpreted in such a manner that women in Iran have been denied access to this process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WLP would like to thank members of the Women's Learning Partnership Translation Advisory Committee for their assistance in the process that culminated in the choice of this publication on the One Million Signatures Campaign as the second volume of the series. We wish to express our appreciation to Amir Irani-Tehrani and Navid Azadi for their careful work of rendering the Persian text into English. Phil Costopoulos has our deepest gratitude for his thoughtful and precise work in editing the English text. Hormoz Hekmat read the text and provided excellent advice and feedback for which we are grateful. Farhud Batmanglich's creative eye has been invaluable. Jennifer Pendleton managed the entire process with good grace and efficiency. Most importantly, we would like to express our solidarity and admiration to the countless activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign who risk their freedom and safety in order to speak out for women's rights and equality.

ABOUT WOMEN'S LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Women's Learning Partnership (WLP), a partnership of twenty autonomous organizations, trains and supports women primarily in Muslim-majority countries to become leaders and advocates for a just, peaceful world. WLP creates culturally-specific leadership trainings on democratic participation and partners with local organizations to help women gain the skills they need to fulfill greater leadership roles at the family, community, and national level. Over the past decade, WLP's programs and training materials, which have been published in twenty languages, have reached tens of thousands of women in over forty countries, strengthening local organizations to become self-sustaining and to power women's movements across the globe.

www.learningpartnership.org

Advance praise for *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story*

"Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani's book is a moving account of the Iranian women's courageous struggle for rights. The story is both inspirational and instructive. It provides a wonderfully readable guide to movement building in the 21st century."

— MARY ROBINSON, President of Ireland 1990–1997, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1997–2002

"This book offers a comprehensive account of Iranian women activists' successful awareness-raising efforts on a grassroots level, and their achievement of a higher level of consciousness in the process. It is a testament to the commitment of these women, whose consistent use of non-violent methods to bring about change has, by the time of this book's publication, led to the indictment and imminent imprisonment of more than fifty of the Campaign's advocates, including the book's author."

— SHIRIN EBADI, Nobel Peace Laureate, 2003

"Offers invaluable insights into an important movement."

— LEILA AHMED, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School

"This story is a must-read for all those who cherish democracy and freedom... it testifies to the vitality, dynamism, and irrepressible spirit of the women [of Iran] who risked their lives and livelihoods for freedom."

— AZAR NAFISI, Author of Best-selling Memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

"*Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story* is an inspiring narrative about ordinary women doing extraordinary things in their quest for justice. A tale that is unique to the circumstances of today's Iran, yet applicable to the struggle for equality anywhere in the world."

— YAKIN ERTÜRK, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, 2003–2009



NOUSHIN AHMADI KHORASANI is one of Iran's leading women's rights activists. She is a founding member of the One Million Signatures Campaign and Women's Cultural Center, editor of the journals *Second Sex*, and *Women's Quarterly*, as well as founding editor of the websites, *Feminist School* and *Zanestan*. She is a prolific writer, translator, film maker, and thinker.