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Statement of Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women
8th March, the day of solidarity with the struggle
of women the world over, for freedom from
sexual and class exploitation

Mass Layoff of Working Women in Iran

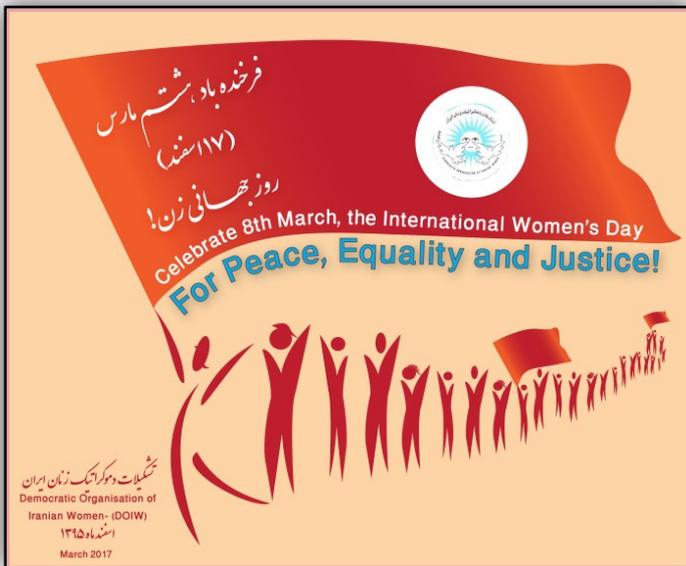
Based on the official stats, 43 thousand women have been laid off recently while on maternity leave. The mass layoff of 43 thousand women has been officially ratified and confirmed, and because of it, the job security of women has been put at risk. As such, and by waving their right, many working women would hesitate to take maternity leave.

The mass termination of women is happening at a time when, according to the CEO of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization, there are 88 thousand licensed industries in Iran, about 90 percent of which are considered small-size enterprises with less than 50 employees, and 4 thousand and 350 hundred are considered medium-size, which employ 50 to 100 employees. At least 10 to 20 percent of the workforce of these workplaces and another 2 million and 800 thousand commercial enterprises across the country are women.

Discrimination, lawlessness, and violation of the rights of the working women could be better appreciated when the official layoff of 43 thousand women during maternity leave is compared to the total rate of women's employment. This way it becomes clearer how the anti-women and anti-labour policies and measures of the Iranian regime make life and livelihood of the working women harder and deteriorate their situation and deepen poverty.

While maternity leave is one of the indispensable rights of working women, some of their other demands include: equal pay for equal work, no employment sexism and gender discrimination, the right and freedom of choice of what to wear, recognition of women's right for paid maternity leave before and after childbirth.

To win these demands, working women should join labor unions. Working women have been, and are, an inseparable part of the labour-union movement in the struggle to regain their union rights.



women workers in USA who had been gunned down by the police to protect the interests of capitalism. In the following year, in 1911, the second international women's day has been commemorated by progressive women, in different countries, as their conditions allow. The 8th March is not

merely a day of celebration, it is the day of renewal of our resolve to uphold the values for which the world's communists and progressives, and women at their helm have fought – freedom from sexual and class exploitation.

Today, more than 150 years after its inception, this struggle of women worldwide has had immense achievements such as the raising awareness about the role of women in society, it has succeeded in bringing about the preliminary conditions for ending sexual inequality, such as the breaking down of numerous misogynistic laws in patriarchal societies, and the realisation of the social, economic and political rights of women in many countries in the world.

In addition, the effective role of women in the anti-war movement, against poverty and violence and for the environment, has turned women's movement into an effective force in political developments in the world. Just as the 4th Women's Congress in Peking

The Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women, greets all hard-working women, on the occasion of 8th March, the day of solidarity with the struggle of women the world over, for freedom from sexual and class exploitation, for a better world, free from poverty, violence, war and exploitation, a world of equal rights.

The 8th of March is not only a reminder of the relentless struggle of workers for their rights against discrimination and inequality, but also an occasion to honour a century and a half of women's movement with its successes and setbacks – a movement whose achievements have changed the face of the world in the interest of working and deprived people, especially women.

This day is also irrevocably linked with the name and memory of its founder, Clara Zetkin, one of the renowned leaders of the German communist and working class movement. For the first time, in the conference of socialist women in 1910, she proposed this day as the day of commemoration of the

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(1995) asserted, gender inequality remains a major obstacle in the path of improvements in the living conditions of all humanity across the world. However, governments' attention to women's rights and its effect on social, economic, cultural and political issues, has been one of the indisputable achievements of the international women's movement.

Some of these achievements are: Regulating and limiting working hours, improvements in women's working conditions, reduction in the inequality between men and women's rights, lowering the rate of illiteracy among women and the growth of women's studies, women reaching important social, economic and political positions, the strengthening of solidarity among women the world through congresses and international gatherings, strategic planning for the empowerment of women, making the debate about violence against women public and condemning it in all its forms, from physical abuse to sexual abuse or degrading treatment of women in the family or workplace, organizing widespread demonstrations and marches against neoliberal policies, poverty, misogyny and reactionary attitudes – a clear example of these was the massive demonstration of women following the inauguration of Donald Trump, protesting against an assault on the achievements of women's movement, against racism and fascism – the increasing role of women in peace movements and the trade unions and non-governmental organisations which defend women's rights, not only women's but also the rights of children and all minorities – based on sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion and others.

These are all significant achievements which pave the way towards creating a better world. One of the most remarkable aspects of women's struggle in the last century is their steadfast struggle for the right to vote. According to historical records, New Zealand was the first country to recognize women's right to vote in 1883, besides the former socialist countries where women had the right of vote, women gained suffrage in England in 1928, in Italy in 1948, Canada in 1950, Norway in 1913, Sweden and Germany in 1918, USA in 1920 (excluding the indigenous women and native Americans), Japan in 1945.

Women of Iran celebrated 8th of March for the first time in 1922 in the port city of Anzali. The celebration was organized by the women organized in the Women's Association. After years of struggle, especially by the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women, during its open and semiclandestine periods of activity in the years 1920-32, finally the despotic regime of the Mohammad Reza Shah was forced to relent to women's suffrage in 1963. Women know very well that 100 years since the commemoration of 8th March, the lack of rights, class and gender discrimination and deprivation still exists in many countries in the world to varying degrees, being most intense in despotic states. Whereas in capitalist countries women's demands centre on equal pay for equal work, equal career prospects, the right to one's body, and the like, in despotic countries these demands are around more basic human rights such as the right to work, divorce, monogamy, custody of children, freedom to travel without the need for the permission of the husband, or even the right to choose how to dress, an end to discrimination and segregation



**International Women's day demonstrators
Tehran, March 8, 1979**

in public places, and universities.

Women are still fighting for these rights, as the women of Iran do, today. Iranian women have demonstrated their effective participation in the most critical political developments of the last century, such as the Constitution Revolution (1905), the great popular 1979 Revolution, the movement for peace and end to the Iran-Iraq war that lasted for 8 years. Following the end of the war, progressive women activists used various initiatives to broaden the debate around gender, they participated in massive numbers in the popular movement of 2009 (the Green Movement).

However, as the Revolution was defeated by the medieval clergy and an extremely reactionary and misogynistic state was established, women's achievements of the previous decades were clawed back, namely many rights enshrined in the civil and constitutional law of the country; the oppression of women started from the outset with the enforcement of the Hejab (driving the customs back by half a century) and the brutal violation of women's rights continues to date. Opposition to women's presence in the economic arena has been facilitated by passing laws such as the reduction of Ladies' working hours, premature retirements (after 20 years, according to the latest bill), discriminatory laws such as quotas for women, segregation of women with the aim of limiting the entry of young women to universities, banning or restricting employment opportunities for single women.

The aim of these measures is to obstruct the return of women to the scientific, social, cultural and political arenas. According to official statistics, on average, every year 100,000 women are removed from the sphere of employment and economic activity. According to official reports only 12% of those in employment in Iran are women. The rate of unemployment among young women in many of the country's provinces reaches 47.3%, and in the Province of Char Mahal Bhakhtiari it stands at 73.7%. Iran ranks 139th out of 144 countries in terms of gender related progress. According to the United Nations, the Islamic Republic of Iran has the lowest level of women's participation in the workforce and the lowest income for women. The General Secretary of UN has asked Iran to adopt policies and laws in order to promote greater role for women in the political, public, economic and professional life of the country.

The report has also found Iran to be one of the most unequal countries in the world, in terms of political empowerment indicators. Only 3% of the national parliament's seats are taken up by women. Even women who are present in the Parliament do not enjoy personal independence and political will in order to end gender discrimination and inequality, because 'general family law' is determined by the Supreme Religious Leader and

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his aides and based on their reactionary world view. According to the regime's worldview women are to be housebound and to bear children. It believes that the 'natural and logical' way of life for women is to remain outside social activity, employment and education, and according to the Supreme Leader, Khamene'i "we must keep our distance from Western ideas about employment and gender equality".

Those who take the helm of government are mindful of having to stay within this strategy and not to challenge it. Hassan Rouhani (the current president) who came to power in 2013 in the course of engineered elections, on the platform of promises to improve the condition of women, has not only failed to act on those promises, but has continued to exert the same pressures on women activists, and in some cases intensified their persecution.

Financial necessity is the main reason why women try to enter the labour market. Women, whether poor or middle class, are driven from the formal labour market to the informal sector, where zero hour contracts and low pay predominate. With no legal control, they are forced to give in to intense exploitation. In addition, the neo-liberal economic policies of the regime have substantially increased the number of the unemployed in the country. As usual, women of the working class and deprived are the first victims of this condition. Class discrimination in addition to severe gender discrimination and deregulation in favour of employers has led to the brutal exploitation. Children also suffer as a result of this exploitation directly and indirectly. The exponential rise in the number of children in work, street children, homelessness, grave-dwellers, carriers (men and women), and the increase in problems such as drug addiction, prostitution, and the increase in the number of Aids sufferers are the direct results of the regime's destructive policies. The women of Iran are denied the right to form civil and political organisations, and their efforts in this route are suppressed.

The Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women had a short period of open activity following the 1979 Revolution. After this period the organization was brutally suppressed, many of its members and supporters, including DOIW leader Mariam Firooz, were arrested and sent to the torture chambers of the Islamic Republic. As far as the regime is concerned the organization was guilty of the unforgivable crime of raising women's consciousness and organizing them. The misogynist regime has always feared the potential awareness, organization and struggle of women. Not only does the regime refuse permission for civil organisations being formed but it also bans internet sites or independent women's publications. At present the pressure on women's rights and human rights activists and other civil and student organisations continues unabated.

Many women activists, among them Narges Mohammadi, human rights activist, and dozens of other dissenters are perishing in the dungeons of the Islamic Republic. The families of the martyrs of the people's movement, especially the mothers and wives of political prisoners are denied the right to mourn

Iranian human rights defender Narges Mohammadi faces trial on 3 May for peaceful activism.



their loved ones in the Khavaran cemetery – the place of burial of the martyrs of the mass executions in 1988. Shahnaz Akmal, the mother of Mostafa Karim Beigi – member of the Green Movement – whose son was shot dead by the regime, has been freed from prison only recently.

Many of these mothers including Mansooreh Behkish - five members of her family were executed by the regime – has been denied permission to leave the country. The celebration of 8 th March has always been tied to the state of political oppression in the country. During the despotic regime of the Shah, women were deprived of the right to celebrate the International Women's day officially or extensively. Only during brief period when the political conditions allowed, namely in the decade before the 1953 coup), the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women celebrated this historic day, when thousands of women would celebrate this day in Tehran and the major cities.

The largest 8th March celebration was held in 1979 after the Revolution, where the DOIW and other women's organisations celebrated this day magnificently. In the years of Islamic Republic's oppression that followed and after the onslaught on the political parties and organisations, the celebration of this day was moved into the homes and in modest gatherings. One the exception being the short period of relatively free activity after the 1997 movement in Iran, women activists started celebrating this day openly in street demonstrations and public speeches.

During this period many initiatives and campaigns were initiated such as the 1 million signatures campaign, the campaign against stoning, and the like, campaigns that helped raise people's awareness. The Bill for Iran joining the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination was passed through the parliament during this period, only to be rejected by the misogynist regime and thwarted in the Expediency Assembly.

The women of Iran, despite all the oppression they face and all attempts at their removal from the civil, social, cultural and economic spheres, have resisted in any way possible. They have proved over and again that they can play their historical role. They recognise the route to realising their demands lies in collaborating with workers, especially women. Just as they succeeded in toppling the despotic regime of the Shah, together with other popular forces, today too they will deploy their initiatives and organisational skills to direct and link their struggle with our people's broader movement for freedom, democracy, social justice and an end to gender and class exploitation.

Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women

5 th March 2017

Statistics on Violence against Women, national and International Trends



According to official statistics, it is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and /or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.

According to a UN report, women who have been physically or sexually abused by their partners are more than twice as likely to have an abortion, almost twice as likely to experience depression, and in some regions, 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV, as compared to women who have not experienced partner violence.

In 2012, a study conducted in New Delhi found that 92 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces in their lifetime, and 88 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures) in their lifetime.

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age). Of those women, more than 1 in 3 were married before 15.

Around 120 million girls worldwide have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. By far the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends

Adult women account for almost half of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together account for about 70 per cent, with girls representing two out of every three child trafficking victims

In the majority of countries with available data, less than 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort. Among women who do, most look to family and friends and very few look to



Ameneh Bahrami Victim of Acid Attack

formal institutions and mechanisms, such as police and health services. Less than 10 per cent of those women seeking help for experience of violence sought help by appealing to the police

At least 119 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, 125 have laws on sexual harassment and 52 have laws on marital rape. However, even when laws exist, this does not mean they are always compliant with international standards and recommendations or implemented

Also, 34 per cent of women with a health problem or disability reported having experienced any physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime, compared to 19 per cent of women without a health problem or disability, also based on data from the European Union

Availability of data on violence against women has increased significantly in recent years. Since 1995, more than 100 countries have conducted at least one survey addressing the issue. Forty-four countries undertook a survey in the period between 1995 and 2004, and 89 countries did so in the period between 2005 and 2014, suggesting growing interest in this issue. More than 40 countries conducted at least two surveys in the period between 1995 and 2014, which means that, depending on the comparability of the surveys, changes over time could be analysed.

There are no official reliable national statistics on the level of violence in general, or against women in particular, in Iran. However, research carried out by the Centre for Medical-Legal Affairs (Coroner's Office) in 2002 showed that more than half a million women who visited the Centre, had been victims of domestic violence in the preceding two and a half years beforehand. According to a national survey conducted in 82 provincial centres of the country in 2004; 66 per cent of women, had been at least once, subjected to violence during their married life.

Violence against women in the Islamic Republic of Iran within the wider spectre of gender inequality, itself fostered and perpetuated by two interrelated factors: (a) widely held patriarchal values and attitudes based on male supremacy, and (b) state-promoted institutional structures based on gender-biased, hard-line interpretations of religious principles, which serve to reinforce the former. While the former is a universal and historically rooted phenomenon, the latter is specific to the gender politics of the theocratic system that has governed Iran over the last 38 years. Both factors represent male-empowering values, practices and their enshrinement within law, making it difficult for women to escape violence whether in the public or private sphere.