



March 2014

## Campaign for Equality & Women's Rights in Iran!

On the eve of 8th March, International Women's Day, CODIR calls on the labour and trade union movement internationally to support its campaign for equal rights, for an end to gender-based discrimination, for the abolition of all oppressive and anti-women policies and for the release of women's rights activists from prisons in Iran!



One of the most vicious aspects of the Iranian regime's policies since it came to power in 1979 is its total disregard for women's equality. Women are discriminated against in education, employment, health, inheritance, politics, public life and even regarding the custody of their own children. Despite the major role women have played in the contemporary

history of Iran, they continue to be marginalized and excluded. Women, however, are courageously standing up to this oppression and, despite continuous suppression, their struggle continues to grow. What is absolutely essential now is that we raise our voices in support of our sisters in Iran and mobilize the widest possible campaign in solidarity with them.



## Urgent call for solidarity with the trade unionists and campaigners for social justice in Iran!

The Iranian people face massive challenges. Decades of theocratic dictatorship and mismanagement of the economy, combined with the international sanctions of recent years, have brought the economy to its knees.

As was forecast, the presidential election in June 2014 was heavily manipulated to produce the outcome Islamists most desired.

The government is preoccupied with normalising relations with the US and EU rather than offering a way out of social and economic crisis.

Unemployment is reaching catastrophic levels. Inflation is sky high. Official statistics show that more than 20% of people live under the poverty line.

CODIR will support campaigns to win the widest possible solidarity with the Iranian people engaged in the struggle for social justice.

We call on all trades unions to join its campaigns for change in Iran. **Affiliate to CODIR!**

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CODIR launches its 2014 International campaign:

# ***Free Bahareh Hedayat!***

## ***Women's Rights Campaigner, Student Leader***



met with one of the harshest punishments ordered against the student activist movement over recent years. She was sentenced for participating in legal, peaceful and civil society activities and for challenging the existing discriminatory laws against women. The injustices and oppression inflicted upon Hedayat are retaliation for her activism as a university stu-

Bahareh Hedayat, who will be 32 years old in just under a month, looks likely to mark that birthday in prison. She is one of the leaders of the powerful student movement in Iran and a woman's rights activist. She was a member of the Executive Committee and spokesperson for Iran's pro-democracy student movement, the Daftar-e Takhim-Vahdat (Office for Consolidating Unity). She was also active in the One Million Signatures Campaign that seeks to end legal discrimination against women in Iran.

Hedayat has been sentenced to nine and a half years in prison and is serving that time in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. Around midnight on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009, she was arrested by the Intelligence Ministry of Iran for the fifth time in four years and taken to unit 209 of Evin Prison. Hedayat

dent. The sentence imposed upon Hedayat, by a Tehran court, comprised two years for "insulting the Supreme Leader"; six months for "insulting the President"; and five years for "acting against national security and publishing falsehoods." She was also sentenced to an additional two years in prison for "acting against national security through holding a protest gathering for women", currently suspended.

Hedayat is suffering from serious health issues that require urgent medical attention, without which her life could be in danger.

Since his election as president in August 2013, Hassan Rouhani has been trying to present a more liberal face to the West, to give the impression that conditions for the opposition in Iran

***We have been pressured and pum-melled but have neither broken nor bent. We have stood firmly, but with anxious and broken hearts, we have witnessed the plunder and despotic destruction of a flower pot for which our predecessors and us have toiled and laboured to see its growth and flourishing.*** (Message from Bahareh Hedayat in prison, on the occasion of 7<sup>th</sup> December 2010, National Student Day in Iran).

are not as harsh as solidarity movements suggest. Some political prisoners have been freed as a result.

The continued incarceration of Bahareh Hedayat however gives the lie to Rouhani's claims of liberalisation. On the occasion of International Women's Day 2014 CODIR renews its call for the release of Bahareh Hedayat; renews its call for the Islamic Republic of Iran to grant equal status in law to its female citizens; and reaffirms its solidarity with the women in particular, and the people of Iran in general, in their struggle to achieve true peace and democracy.

## **AFFILIATE TO CODIR**



**Solidarity with  
the struggle of the  
Iranian people for  
peace, equality  
and human rights  
STARTS HERE!**

*CODIR supports the campaign for peace, human and democratic rights in Iran. We campaign for release of all political prisoners and for trade unions to have freedom to organise and campaign effectively. We supply news and analysis of events in Iran and related issues from the world.*

### **Affiliation fees:**

*Local organisations £20 -£50,  
Regional organisations £50,  
National orgs: negotiable.*

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*Voices from the scenes of the struggle for change:*

# What Iranian Women Want!

**In advance of the Iranian presidential election, in June 2013, a consultation forum was convened to find out the opinions of the women of Iran. The views of Iranian women range across the wide spectrum of issues which face the people of Iran as a whole. Below are some of the responses.**

**Minoo Mortazi:**



Eight years ago we decided to use the election atmosphere to raise women's demands.

We were beaten, but we raised our voice. We remember our fellow activists who are now either in prison or on the run. Our first and foremost demand is that these women, who have done nothing wrong but being free-thinkers and freedom-fighters, return to our community.

**Masoumeh Ebtekar:**



Achieving the most important demand of women depends on achieving the main demand of the Iranian society.

Today, Iranian women side by side with men are the driving force of the Iranian community's desire for change. The people of Iran do not deserve the current situation.

**Azar Tashakkor:**



Women should voice their demands NOW, in the hope that Mr. Rouhani's view will change. This is what women did during the previous government, i.e. it was women who took the first steps in raising demands.

**Narges Mohammadi:**



Today, after four years of keeping our distance and being scattered, we are getting together. We have gathered at a time when government policies during the past eight years, in areas of management, education, employment, skills learning and competency were planned in order to isolate women and send them back

to their homes. Today they promote the main role of women, as mothers!

In any country, the Ministry of Higher Education should prepare the ground for anyone, boy or girl, to enter higher education to achieve competence in science and technology. However, we must not forget that by implementing gender segregation plans they intended to deprive women of this right. They even went as far as banning women from entering some programmes and fields. In some cases, even when women had qualifications, they could not enter some of the management positions.

**Shahla Lahiji:**



The reason we could not achieve many of our demands was that we did not form our own civil organizations.

**Fakhrosadat Mohtashami-Poor:**



The most important political demands that we can have are related to civil society. Where in the world does a civil organisation for not-for-profit and voluntary and popular activity, for social issues, need to get license?

Where is such activity controlled and monitored like this and is looked at as a security matter? Yes, we were under a tremendous security pressure for our activities but I believe that women's activities have not stopped.

**Minoo Mortazi:** The most demeaning and discriminating bills were introduced during this [past] government [of Ahmadinejad]. These included the notorious bill of "Family Protection"; the bill to deny passports to women younger than 40; state regulations that sanction gender segregation and discrimination and quotas in society; scrapping the beneficial and suitable bill of family control and planning; introducing "working from home" for women, marginalizing women; the list goes on.

Although one female was appointed Minister, she did not have a place in the power structure and was reprimanded as soon as she took her first opposition stance. She left the same way she had arrived, and she was silenced, as the clergy pleased. That is why it seems that the political power is after gaining women's votes rather than willing to listen to their demands. That is why I believe we cannot offer our votes easily. In my opinion, the first and foremost demand of women in Iran is a human and decent life. Hence, their participation in the power structure is necessary. Gender allocation in the power structure, I believe, is a demand that makes us get closer to a human and decent life. Women want peace and the lifting of sanctions by taking a route of non-violence, avoiding war-mongering language and rhetoric in the power structure; because if there is no security and peace, life is meaningless.

## International campaign for the release of detained trade unionists in Iran!

# Free Reza Shahabi from Prison Now!

**CODIR calls for an international campaign to force the theocratic regime to release imprisoned trade union leader to seek urgent medical attention!**

CODIR is making a special appeal to all trade union organisations internationally to appeal to Hassan Rouhani, Iran's president, to urge him to release Reza Shahabi from prison so that he can receive essential medical attention for ongoing conditions.

After 91 days of freedom last April, Reza Shahabi returned to his cell in Tehran's Evin prison to complete a six-year sentence for "colluding against state security" and "spreading propaganda

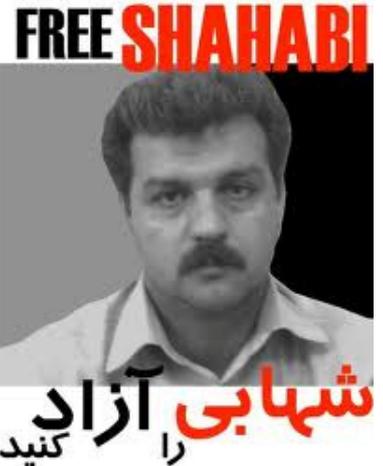
against the system." The treasurer of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Drivers Union (SWTSBC) was temporarily released after going on hunger strike for 23 days to protest against ill-treatment by prison guards and to demand medical leave for injuries, sustained while in custody, to vertebrae in his neck and back.

The appeal is part of the wider campaign of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) to urge the labour and trade movement internationally to take urgent action in defence of Iranian workers and trade unionists. CODIR regards it as vital that effective pressure is placed upon the government

of President Hassan Rouhani, who was elected last year on a promise of reform inside Iran. Since his election Rouhani has tried to show a different face internationally.

However, CODIR is keen to make sure that Rouhani's declared willingness to reform is tested on the domestic front, where there has been insignificant movement on the question of human rights, respect for basic trade union rights and the freeing of political prisoners.

Nine months after the presidential election, nothing has changed noticeably for the people of Iran. The economy continues to struggle under the weight of economic sanctions. The regime's economic policy has brought



more factory closures, unemployment, unpaid wages and poverty pay. CODIR urges the Iranian government to ratify and enact ILO conventions 87 (Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize) and 98 (Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining).

## WOMEN MAYOR- ONE STEP FORWARD!



Women's rights in Iran appeared to take a step forward in November 2013 when Samiyeh Balochzahi was elected Mayor of the town of Kalat (pop 12,000) in Baluchistan. Baluchistan is Iran's largest province and one of the most conservative regions in the country. Violence against women is common and there is a particularly high rate of female illiteracy. The region has

more married women aged under 15 years old than any other in Iran. The population is 65% Sunni (90% of Iran's population is Shia) and speaks Baluchi. These factors, along with Samiyeh's youth, she is 26 years old, make her victory particularly surprising.

Baluchi women are rarely allowed to go to university but Samiyeh is from a privileged background and she has had the support of her wealthy father who has a great deal of influence locally. She returned to her ho-

me town after gaining a master's degree as an engineer in natural resource management at the private Azad University in Tehran. She has said that she went back to Kalat because she wants to serve her town and to fight to improve the deplorable conditions there.

Samiyeh's victory was not reported in the national press. Her election platform included provision of sporting and cultural facilities, unheard of in a region which has long suffered economic deprivation. Determined to improve the quality of life for women and children, Samiyeh's project can be seen as groundbreaking. Her aims are simple: "a town full of parks and blue sky."

The fact that the regime have not opposed Samiyeh's election is interesting however. Baluchistan is on the major drug trade route from Pakistan and Afghanistan and is historically regarded as a tough area to govern. The fact that the population are 65% Sunni will not endear the region to the regime. Men looking for an easy career in the Islamic Republic will not be queuing up to govern the area.

Feminist may be a forbidden word in Iran but there is no doubt that it applies in all the best sense to Samiyeh Balochzahi. We wish her every success and will watch her progress with interest.