

**International
Conference in
Gothenburg/Sweden on
the occasion of 8 March
2009**

**Why is
secularism
essential?**



L O N G L I V E I N T E R N A T I O N A L W O M E N ' S D A Y

*The Future Developments in Iran
A Window to a Freer, More Just and a Secular
Middle East*

Azar Majedi

October 2008

When I said yes to writing about humanist movements in the Middle East, I thought I had the whole idea in my head. But when I sat to write, I felt confused, "how do we define humanism?" The question came to my mind. I started searching, browsing and reading. I realized that it was not only me; the concept is too broad, too undefined. I decided to go back to my original idea, write about what I consider humanism to mean.

I always considered humanism to mean the outlook which begins with human's well being, happiness and prosperity. Humanist is the one who cares about human's sufferings, who is touched and moved by injustices, inequality and oppression; an outlook that has human beings at its core. This definition might sound very arbitrary, and it perhaps is. But on the basis of my research, I think this interpretation is actually valid and applicable.

The Middle East is socio-politically a volatile region. The long standing Israel-Palestine war has definitely left a deep

mark in the region. Moreover, the whole Middle East is under official or de facto dictatorships. Struggles of people against the state of affairs are an inevitable part of life in the Middle East. Religion has always played an important role in the Middle East, but particularly in the past 30 years, it has come to occupy a much more prominent position. Different factors contributed to this. Rise of political Islam as a powerful political movement, the loss of credibility by Arab nationalism, due to its weaker military position vis a vis Israel, and absence of any other ideological alternatives, due to the dominant dictatorships, were the main contributing factors. More than ever the institution of religion has acquired a political and ideological prominence.

All over the Middle East secularism has been pushed back to the margins, struggling to find a voice in the society. However, there is one very different case in the Middle East, that is, Iran. Iran, because of its very different socio-political development in the past three, four decades presents a totally different

picture, and its future development would have significant impact on the whole region. The subject of this writing is to try and expound the socio-political situation in Iran and in doing so talk about social movements there, which, to my opinion, have a very strong humanist characteristic.

Historical Background

In order to understand the current state of affairs and its regional significance, we need to look at the recent socio-political history of Iran. Iran, except for very brief periods, has been under dictatorship. Two revolutions and one rather long and important political upheaval mark its history in the twentieth century. Up to the 1979 revolution that resulted in coming to power of an Islamic regime, there have been open and hidden conflicts between religious establishments and secularist forces, which included basically left and communist groups and some sections of intellectuals. The state and religion, despite some conflicts and clashes have on the whole worked hand in hand.



Capitalism became the dominant mode of production in Iran in the sixties. A land reform took place which resulted in migration of a great part of rural population into cities, a source of cheap labour, and some measures towards integration of women into social and economic life were taken by the monarchist state. Both of these policies came under fierce attack by a section of religious hierarchy led by Khomeini. Religious establishment was one of the biggest land owners in the country and extremely reactionary and misogynist. A small uprising was organized by the religious establishment and followed by traditional section of merchants, i.e. Bazaar. This uprising was swiftly quashed. Khomeini was sent to exile to Iraq.

The Sixties and seventies were the era of change. Capitalism grew rather rapidly, thanks to oil money which provided the capital for investment in infra structure and heavy industry. Socially, changes took place as well. More female students joined the universities, and more women began to work. In big cities the traits of Western culture, in music, film, fashion and life style were quite apparent. However, the economic exploitation and injustices, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the political oppressive system which led to many young people being arrested and tortured, and the wide spread corruption led to the formation of a revolution. The first signs of a political upheaval became apparent in 1977 and eventually led to military take over of the streets by the army. In summer-Autumn 1978 a full blown revolution took over the whole country, calling for overthrow of the monarchy. Up until this time there was no sign of the Islamic leadership. The slogans were anti-monarchist, anti-dictatorship and basically left-wing. However, a swift change became apparent. In autumn 1978 Khomeini was deported by Saddam Hussein, Iraqi president to France, seemingly for his political activities against the Iranian

government. Once Khomeini arrived in Paris and was placed in a glamorous chateau in Paris, owned by a rich Iranian business man, socio-political changes took place very rapidly. Foreign media interviewed Khomeini every day and read his commands and press releases from their short wave radios every night. Thanks to tight censorship of the national media, every one listened to the foreign media, which included BBC Persian service, Radio Israel, American Voice of Liberty and Moscow radio, for information. This is how a leader was born. Mind engineering of the masses was achieved. Public opinion was formed.

Over a short period of time the revolution for justice and freedom and against poverty and corruption, and one which ironically gave rise to various women's organisations, was called an Islamic revolution. Protests by the youth were violently crushed, but demonstrations organised by the religious establishment and with Islamic slogans were calmly tolerated. Gradually more veiled women turned up at the demonstrations. An overnight transformation took place. A small piece of news around this time gave hints as to how this masterpiece was created: The Guadalupe summit by the industrialized countries designed and executed this plan. The western powers, from the fear of the left coming to power in Iran, neighbor of the Soviet Union, an important geo-political country for the West and a very close ally of the USA, made an instrumental role in bringing an Islamic regime into Iran.

Islamic republic vs. secularism

The left was taken by surprise. The women's organizations which were being formed in Tehran and big cities had mixed feelings, Islam and women's rights are antonymous, but anti monarchist/anti-imperialist emotions were running high. The irony was that these organizations were being formed to promote women's rights and equality in the new atmosphere. But, suddenly they were faced by the Islamic offensive. Secularism was not

formulated as a demand, but the nervousness of the great section of the left, women's movement and non-religious people was apparent. In order to calm this socio-political anxiety, a campaign of misinformation was launched by the Islamists: "Women are equal under Islam" "Khomeini's wife plays the piano and speaks French and English." (This was to neutralize the fear of banning music by Islam and anti western characteristic of Islamists.) This proved to be a clever propaganda campaign.

The clash between the women's rights movement and the Islamic regime, less than a month after its coming to power, was one of the first signs of a long and hard battle between freedom and equality seeking movements, the left and secularists with the regime, which resulted in more than 100,000 political executions, from communists to different opposition groups, including other religious tendencies.

Opposition was crushed and suppressed brutally, particularly during 1981-19990. However, the nineties witnessed the rise of a wave of social movements for women's rights, freedom of expression and association, cultural emancipation from strict religious rules by the youth. The young generation which was the main actor of these movements had not experienced the relative freedom of culture and life style in the sixties and seventies. It had not experienced the coup d'état like the crushing of the opposition, notorious prisons and torture and summary executions. They were born to Islamic regime, obligatory veiling and gender apartheid, the banning of western music, culture and life style in the era of increasing globalization and internet. The regime was faced with mission impossible.

These social movements have developed over the time. The regime has done its utmost to crush them; arrests, persecution, torture, abduction, and killing of activists have not been able to subdue these deeply rooted movements. Iran is in great socio-political and cultural turmoil with a deep

economic crisis. Aspirations for a better, freer and more egalitarian life runs high among the people, particularly the young generation that composes the majority of the population. The constant battle between women and the vice police over the veil, clothing, make-up and supposedly “improper” and un-Islamic behavior of the former, the fight between the youth on the streets and at the universities with the security forces over gender apartheid, dress code, freedom of speech and cutting the hands of security forces from the university, the every day battle of the workers over pay and dismissals with the police form distinct features of the socio-political portray of Iran today.

Social movements

There are four distinct and important social movements which are deeply rooted in the society, who have mass backing and contradict all the fundamental characteristics of the Islamic Republic. By their nature these movements are secular, even if they do not openly formulate this demand, and humanist, according to the definition this paper ascribes to.

1- The women’s rights movement

One of the most powerful movements in Iran with mass backing is the women’s rights movement. Ever since the coming to power of the Islamic regime this movement has been in existence. It was active and organized



Women defying the veil and being told off for it!

protests for couple of years and then it was suppressed. However, women’s resistance continued in individual forms.

Around a decade later it started to voice its demands. Women’s journals, be it in a very moderate or conservative format, were published. Eventually women succeeded in changing the balance of power in the national scale. The veil became less restrict, clothing became

more fashionable, their attitude more confident and outspoken. The number of women’s entries to university rose consistently. Last year around 65 per cent of university admissions were girls. Resistance both in individual form and en masse is strong, despite the regime’s harsh suppression. Despite the fact that part of the legal leadership of the women’s rights movement claims there is no contradiction between Islam and women’s rights, this movement is the most secularist movement in the country. It should be noted that this positive portrayal of Islam is by no means shared by the majority. Women’s equality by its nature is against Islamic laws and traditions. The women’s right movement has great potential to challenge Islam, its rule, traditions and the Islamic regime. The effects of this movement are wide reaching. This movement by the nature of its root is secularist and a staunch enemy of political Islam. This movement is capable of affecting the whole Middle East.

2- Political freedom

The fight against political oppression is very large and mass movement in Iran. Islamic republic came to power as the result of the defeat of 1979 revolution. Therefore, from the beginning it provoked political opposition. In the past decade, political demonstrations and protests have become an inseparable part of the country’s social landscape. Freedom of expression, association, demonstration and beliefs, scraping of censorship of the medial, films, books and cultural events, and creation of a free political system are high in its agenda. As this movement fights with a religious state, the demand for separation of religion from the state is recognized as a necessity to reach these demands.

3- Economic justice

The country has plunged into a deep economic crisis. In this oil rich country the majority live under the poverty line by conservative official estimates. Homelessness, the phenomenon of street children, widespread prostitution, child prostitution and child labour are

some of the symptoms of this economic crisis. Workers’ strikes, sit-ins and protests are an ongoing event in the country. Workers are some times not paid for 3-6 months. The minimum wage is well under the poverty line. The lack of social benefits, universal health care and unemployment benefits have devastated the lives of millions. This condition has led the workers’ movement to try and mobilize and organize protests. It should be noted that workers are deprived of right to organise, mobilize and strike. This movement seeks a deep rooted change to the socio-economic and political system. Having lived under a theocratic regime, it is very much against the religious system and for a secularist one. This movement has the widespread backing of the population.

4- Cultural Emancipation

Last but not least, this new phenomenon is in an ironic way the product of a religious regime. The three decades of total domination of an Islamic state, restricting and interfering in any and every aspect of people’s lives, even their bed rooms, has given rise to a cultural revolt. The youth has revolted against all Islamic codes of behavior and life styles, aspiring to live like the youth in the west. Their taste for music, cinema, fashion and life style in general goes against what the entire regime and old traditions stand for. This I call cultural emancipation movement. This is much stronger than the cultural movement of the 70s in the west as far as its political impact is concerned. The youth in Iran do not want to live under an Islamic regime, or any religious system, for that matter. They aspire to a secularist and free society, in which they can live free from political and cultural restrictions and in prosperity. This is the root of these great social movements in Iran which threaten the Islamic regime and political Islam in general and creates a window to freedom, equality and prosperity in the Middle East.

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Konstantina Kouneva



28 /12/ 2008

Acid Thrown at a Labour Union leader in Greece

Konstantina Kouneva, the general secretary of the Attica Union of Cleaners and Domestic Workers (AUCDW) in Greece, was brutally attacked on 22 December, at midnight by her home in Athens. According to the brief news released, unknown persons threw acid at her face, head and shoulder.

The workers covered by AUCDW work under very harsh conditions. The biggest employer in this branch has contract with big companies, sadly such as Hellenic Vehicles Industry known for its fraudulent activities regarding insurance stamps. AUCDW has repeatedly complained to official authorities, however, no action has been taken by the government or the public companies.

European Feminist Initiative EFE-IFE strongly and loudly condemns this act of extreme violence. Acid attacks and throwing are used all over the planet against women fighting for their rights and their freedoms! Acid attacks and throwing are acts of gender based violence causing disfigurement for life and aiming at terrorizing women physically, psychologically and socially. Konstantinova was in critical condition; doctors saved her life, but she has lost sight of one eye while there is still hope to save the other.

In the background of repeated terrorization of the union's leadership, AUCDW's leadership has denounced the employers as responsible for this attack on their general secretary. In the light of deepening world capitalist crisis, we are witnessing more brutal attacks on human's rights activists. We must act swiftly and strongly against any such crimes.

As feminists we raise our voice today and join the other progressive, women and human rights activists in the condemnation of this horrible attack and in solidarity with Konstantina and her colleagues. We send her our deepest and most sincere feminist support for her bravery in the fight for a decent life.

International solidarity movement is an appropriate response to such criminal actions!

**8 March 2009
 International Women's Day**

Shahla Noori



101 years ago textile workers in New York went on strike demanding better working condition. During the strike, 129 women workers were burned alive under the locked factory doors. To mark such tragic but heroic struggle and highlight the situation of women, 12 years later in August 1910 the conference of socialist women in Copenhagen accepted Clara Zetkin's resolution to declare 8th March as the International Women's Day. The first time 8th March was celebrated was in Russia after the October revolution. Later other countries followed suit. Eventually, United Nations recognized this day in 1977.

According to United Nations women who constitute half the world's population, do two thirds of working hours only gain one tenth of the wealth of the world! Economically women are still paid fewer wages than men. They are the ones who mainly undertake part time and temporary work with no job security or perks.

Politically, there are still under represented and in some country do not even have the vote like Saudi Arabia. Socially, housework is still considered the job of women in all countries.

Violence against women is the tragedy that is happening in all countries of the world irrespective of how developed or underdeveloped it is. In countries under the influence of Islam

violence against women is justified by religion. In fact there are laws specifically for penalising women. In these countries about 40% of murders of women and young girls are committed by boyfriends, fathers, husbands or brothers.

In Iran, where Islamic Republic has power, women are under state violence. Women are 3rd class citizens. Sexual apartheid rules. Women are banned from a wide range of social, economic and political activities; Islamic veil is compulsory. Women are separated from men in buses, universities, and many public places. Husbands and fathers are their guardians, at home and outside. Women cannot travel, even within the country, without permission from their male guardians. They have no right to divorce, or custody of their children. The list is endless.

Despite all the suppression and discrimination women's liberation movement in Iran has never seized to oppose the reactionary Islamic rules and values. Even the so called reformist forces in Iran have not managed to divert the attention of women's movement to achieve their universal rights. Avoiding the Islamic veil, continuing further education, insisting on entering the job market, staging demonstrations, especially on 8th March are all a section of this resilience. Islam wants women not to be seen or heard. However, women in Iran do their utmost to be seen and heard!

Women in Iran hate Islamic regime and values. They demand equality, freedom and a secular state. More than 30 years of Islamic rule has not deterred women's movement from struggling for their universal rights. It has, in fact made them more determined.



Maryam Kousha

What are the challenges facing women's liberation movement?

Surly many women's activists and even academics are busy answering this question. All contributions are welcomed. Every year, especially on 8th March we all organise meetings, conferences, write articles, pass resolutions and take part in marches against the unjust system and for women's liberation and equality. Women workers in New York did it, Klara Zetkin did it, the suffragettes did it, the October revolution did it, the mass women's movement of the 60's and 70's did it.... The list is endless.

The pessimist would say they tried but we are still facing inequality and oppression of women. The optimist would say thanks to these radical and socialist movements on the one hand and the general social awareness movements of the 20th century we have gained certain rights but have a long way to go. One important factor in the history of women's liberation on a world scale is that it has kept 8th March alive. It has not given in to the status quo. What is missing is unity of organisation and perspective internationally. We live in a global village. Women's rights are universal. What are these rights? This is the challenge! We must achieve uniformity in our definition of women's rights in accordance with 21st century values and progress. If the beginning of 20th century the main challenge was the right to vote for women and it united the mass women's and other social movements of the time, what is the main liberating challenge of today? Some claim that women entering the army show equality with men! Some claim that if women choose to wear

Message of Organisation for Women's Liberation - Iran On the occasion of 8th March 2009, International Women's Day

28/02/2009

Let's Make History!

8th March, International Women's Day is here. It is a century that freedom fighters, those demanding equality and the socialist movement have raised the banner of 8th March against oppression. 8th March is symbol of freedom and equality in history. It is a day when male chauvinist and misogynous system is challenged.

30 years ago women in Iran staged a heroic and massive protest against the Islamic regime's first offensive. They succeeded to show their force and push back the regime. This victory is recorded in the world history of women's liberation movement as an important event. They came to streets in their thousands on 8th March 1979 against Islamic regime. Hence they set precedence in the struggle against Islamic regime and political Islam. This movement has been alive during the past 30 years. Women's liberation movement in Iran is waging a courageous war against one of the most brutal regimes in the history.

On 8th March the world looks at Iran as though the struggle and resistance of women in Iran give them strength. On the other hand the leaders of political Islamic movement become worried. Women's liberation movement in Iran and its strength is a measure of liberation against an oppressive system. By introducing innovative fashionable head covers, The young girls are mocking the Islamic veil and this method of resistance has invoked a great deal of admiration worldwide. On this day we must show our brave resistance in a unified fashion. This day must be turned into a day against women's oppression, gender apartheid and violation of women's rights.

Women!

Women's liberation movement in Iran not only is in the forefront of liberation movement against Islamic regime, but is also the staunchest enemy of political Islam in the region and a hope for women's liberation there. Misogyny is the inherent character of political Islam. Hence women's liberation must do away with this system. So long as this system exists women will not be able to taste freedom and equality. We must be aware of any effort that might limit the perspective of our movement or the scope of our demands. This system can not be sugar coated, and can not be reformed. The Islamic regime can not exist without misogyny, gender apartheid or Islamic veil. We must condemn those who introduce illusions in our movement and hence extend the life of this system. We must stand firm and united against them and say "no" to misogyny, violation of women's rights and gender apartheid. 8th March is an important day. We must try to show the strength of our movement on this day. We must break the walls of gender apartheid and chant our slogans:

No to women's oppression, No to women's suppression, No to gender apartheid, No to Islamic veil, Long live women's liberation, Long live International solidarity, Long live 8th March.

the veil they have achieved independence and freedom of choice! These can NOT be our definition of women's rights. True women's rights by definition mean an end to cruelty, war, poverty, discrimination, oppression and

inequality in every sense of the word. There is no double standard. One can not be against suppression and still join the army or accept the veil!

Long live 8th March!



Azar Majedi

Portrayal of Religion in the Media: Religion is Political

I was doing some research on the topic of this article on the Internet. There were many complaints about the Western media's presentation of Islam, lamenting the wrong image of Islam being portrayed in the media. I agree that the media is not true to the real issue and portrays a designed image of not only Islam but religion in general. However, I look at the problem from a different angle. After spending some time on web searches but I did not find any protests or complaints about how the media glorifies religion and religious institutions and hierarchy. As an atheist, secularist and one who sees many wrongs with religion, I was disappointed. I would like to state here my view of how the media help cover up the evils of religion and helps maintain this outdated value system as part and parcel of the dominant ideology.

Proponents of Islam complain that the Western media portray Islam as a source of aggression, that it stereotypes Muslims as terrorists. They maintain that this is a political agenda by the Western powers who feel threatened by Islam presenting itself as an alternative civilization. There are some assumptions here, with some of which I agree and some with which I disagree.

Political Agenda

Religion is political. We are made to believe that religion is merely about

faith, spirituality and morality, without which humanity will lack any sense of ethics, goodness and humanity. This is the dominant and official view of religion, espoused by the state and education system. A lot of work and money is used to make this image of religion the accepted dominant view. Religion is one of the main ingredients of the dominant ideology. Religion belongs to the political realm as the British monarchy, the Labour or Conservative parties do. Moreover there is a great deal of money involved. Religious institutions have a great deal of wealth at their disposal and constantly struggle to get their hands on more. Perhaps to some extent the Church has lost its power over public opinion in the West. But it is still an inseparable part of the political system, except in France. In Britain the Church and the monarchy are two important pillars of the political system. Religion plays a major part in the education system. Therefore, any presentation of religion in the media, including Islam, is a political act with a political agenda.

In my opinion there is a macro agenda behind religious portrayal. That is, whatever the agenda of every single programme, overall, the role and influence of religion and religious institutions must be maintained and upheld. Religion is not generally questioned nor criticised. A critical programme of religion will in general

criticise a certain interpretation of a particular faith. This is true about all religions, including Islam. Therefore, all the complaints and laments about "injustices" done to Islam by the media, is nothing but political pressure to consume even more time and receive a less critical approach.

Wrong Image

Let's move to the complaint that the media portray a wrong image of Islam. I agree. But, I do not see it quite the same way as the proponents of Islam. In my opinion, the media does not come even close to exposing the vile teachings of the real Islam. The view we receive is that an extremist interpretation of Islam is to blame; otherwise, Islam is a nice and peaceful religion. This is total nonsense. There are definitely different interpretations of Islam, some softer and more peaceful than others. In the past three decades we have witnessed the rise of a very violent political force into power in the Middle East and North Africa, which is ideologically based on Islam and uses any measure of terror to gain power, i.e. political Islam, the so-called extremists. If we are only concerned about bombs in our trains, buses and neighbourhoods in the West, then we can blame political Islam and forget about what Islam and Islamists are capable of doing to the society upon which they rule.

Islam, like any other religion, is deeply misogynistic. Women are not considered whole human beings, they are the property of their male relations, and have no rights to move about, to work and to take part in society without their male owner's permission. Even with the man's permission, they are not allowed to occupy some professions; they cannot become judges or political leaders, for example. Gender apartheid is an important pillar of society under Islam.

The penal code in Islam is extremely harsh, violent and inhuman. Muslims are by their faith deprived of music, happiness and fun. To sum it up Islam is a very morbid, dull and violent religion. There are Muslims who live as per the tenets of modern society, but they cannot claim that this is another interpretation of Islam. Islam, as a religion, does not allow for these things, period.

Fairness and Balance

The complaints against the media address the issue of fairness and balance, as well. They claim that the media is neither fair nor balanced vis-à-vis Islam. I agree with the statement, but again from the opposite angle. We talked about presenting different interpretations of Islam. However, the question is whose interpretation? How do we decide whose interpretations must be voiced? At present, the media voices two groups: one, the self-appointed Muslim leaders; two, those who express a moderate and nice interpretation of Islam. This, to my opinion, is neither fair nor balanced. Hardly any harsh, critical views of Islam or any other religion for that matter are presented by the media. By carrying out this practice, the media plays an important role in the dynamics of power struggle in favour of the so-called religious leaders.

Abuse and hypocrisy are two basic ingredients of religion and religious establishments. Historically many people have been killed under the name of god and religion. The most violent abuses have been carried out by men of god. And still in this day religion continues to kill, maim, abuse and terrorise. But the media is mainly concerned with presenting a game of holy and spiritual make-believe.

What is it about religion that makes it *untouchable*? Even when gruesome scandals are revealed, such as child abuse by the Catholic Church both in Ireland and the USA, the state and the mainstream media tend not to concern themselves as they should. We heard much more about the child abuse case against Michael Jackson, a case which was disproved in the court of law, than the Catholic Church with a few hundred cases of child abuse against the whole establishment which cost the church millions of dollars. Why is the media so reluctant to expose the religious hierarchy? Why do men of God get a free ride?

The public is becoming increasingly disenchanted with religion and religious establishments in the West. The media does not reflect this important fact. Atheists are becoming more outspoken but this, too, is ignored by the mainstream media.

Instead the media continues to aid the mystification of religion as an untouchable institution. The most banal and backward teachings are treated as the absolute truth, a given fact, hardly questioned and rarely criticised. The media is an important instrument in upholding the myth of God.

Azar Majedi is the chair of Organisation for Women's Liberation-Iran and a veteran campaigner for women's rights and against political Islam.

Azar Majedi online and in media:

* Can Imperialism liberate women?
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4039250920804043889>

* Speech on secularism and fight against political Islam, speech in opening of Centre for Inquiry's office in Netherland and Belgium:
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3226156325684204961&hl=en>

* Speech on women's movement in Iran vs political Islam and how the so-called "war on terror" which is indeed war of terrorists has reinforced political Islam.
www.women'sliberation.net

* BBC Radio 4 and BBC World Service, World Today, interviewed Azar Majedi, president of OWL and a leader of WUP-Iran on the occasion of 30th anniversary of Iranian revolution. Azar was active at the time of the revolution both as a women's right activist and Marxist political activist. Azar stated that the revolution, contrary to common belief, was not an Islamic revolution, but one demanding, more freedom and equality, a more just society and a less corrupt system. She reiterated that the people of Iran were fed up with the dictatorship, political oppression and economic injustice. They rose against such conditions, but the Islamic movement with the help of the West gained leadership of people's movement.

BBC Radio 4 programme entitled "Flight from Tehran" ran for a week in January and the World Today was broadcast on 9 and 10 February 2009. The latter can be heard on:
www.wupiran.com/etelaeyeha/azar_BBC.html

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International Conference in Gothenburg/Sweden on the occasion of 8 March 2009 Why is secularism essential?

Organization for Women's Liberation is organizing a one day conference in commemoration of 8 March, International women's day on the impact of religion on the situation and status of women. Why is secularism essential? In this conference veteran women's right activists and scholars are coming together to analyze the devastating effects of rise of religious movements and religion's influence in the running of state in many countries on the situation of women: the effect of catholic church, orthodox church, Judaism and political Islam will be discussed. We are pleased to announce that following organisations have supported our conference: *Centre for Inquiry; European Feminist Initiative; International Network against Honour Crimes; Women for Peace (Sweden)*

Programme

Doors open & registration	11.30
Opening speech, Azar Majedi	12.30
 1st session: Culture/Personal Rights.....	12.40
Imma Barbarossa	
Soad Baba Aissa	
Hugo Esterla	
Leila el Ali	
Panel discussion	13.10
 Break	13.40
 2nd session: Secularism, a means to prevent violence against women	13.55
Maria Hagberg	
Karim N. Noori	
Parvin Kaboli	
Khanum R. Lateef	
Panel discussion	14.25
 Break	14.55
 3rd session: Obstacles & Challenges for Secularism	15.25
Layla Naffa Hamarneh	
Lia Nadaraia	
Susana Tampieri	
Azar Majedi	
Panel discussion	16.00
 Break	16.30
 4th session: Secularism & Patriarchy	16.45
Frances Raday	
Boriana Jonsson	
Malene Busk	
Lilian Halls French	
Panel discussion	17.15
 Resolution, Messages & closing	17.45
Film (Maria's Grotto) by Buthina Canaan Khoury	19.30-20.45

www.womensliberation.net/
 projektet har finansierats också av Brottsofferfonden.



Maria's Grotto, 52 min film highlighting a taboo issue: "honor killing"



www.womeninstruggle.com

Date: 7 March 2009

Time: 19.30

**Venue: Folkets Hus Göteborg
Olof Palmes Plats, Järntorget**

**Discussions with Buthina
follows the showing**

Admission: 50 Skr