

# Letter from 9 political prisoners in Iran: Our Responsibility Regarding Gaza



*The following letter from 9 prisoners at the notorious Evin Prison in Iran has been circulating widely on social media since its release, including by the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) Burn the Cage/Free the Birds movement in Europe, and the IEC. It is translated from Farsi by IEC volunteers. Some minor edits, bracketed words and footnotes are by translators for clarity. The full text was published on the official Telegram channel of the Syndicate of Workers at Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (<https://t.me/vahedsyndica>).*

Here in prison, among political prisoners, there are some who risked their lives last year to demand freedom and an end to discrimination. But now, in the face of the genocide of Palestinians in a completely unjust war by the Israeli government, they say [things like]: “I wish [Israel] would kill more of them,” and “Hopefully [Israel] will finish them off with an atomic bomb, so the world can breathe a sigh of relief.” Some are even saying: “I hope they hit head of the snake in Tehran, as well.” How pitiful for those fighting their own imprisonment to end up fighting for their own destruction.<sup>1</sup>

War is a blessing to reactionary rulers. Just as the 8-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s helped stabilize [Iran’s] government and paved the way for executing thousands of political prisoners. This regime, which murdered thousands of children and teenagers in previous years and last year [during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement], is now trying to hide its reactionary nature by posing as the defender of the Palestinian people.

If this war widens, it could give [the regime] a pretext to use even more violence to suppress protesters, political prisoners, workers’ movements, women, students, religious minorities such as the Bahá’í community, and even to extend their attacks against the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement.

In addition to the ruling regime, there have always been extreme right-wing [fascist] movements that want to use military attacks and bombardment to “export democracy” [into Iran]. These people are mainly looking to get a share [of the spoils] after the infrastructure of society has been destroyed by a military attack of the West — as though they learned nothing from the experience of the last two decades in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the height of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement, these people pinned their hopes on getting support from Israel and the West, and are trying to placate them in the current war.

But indifference towards the war and genocide in Palestine —and perhaps wishing for a military attack on Iran— is far more widespread than just among these extremist forces.

Our message is this: We simply cannot cover over this complex and unequal war being waged against the Palestinian people, with the justification of our resentment against the government [of Iran] and its destructive policies and wars [in the region]. We cannot close our eyes to what is genocide, in the full sense of the word: “the intention to completely or partially annihilate a national, an ethnic, a racial or a religious group, simply because of their very nature.” Nor can it get glossed over by [the propaganda of] the media-monopoly.

The dichotomy presented to us — Hamas or Israel, military intervention or the current situation going on and on— offer only a choice between bad and worse. As long as we look only at options the rulers give us, rather than creating our own way forward, the result can only be bad or worse. The reality is that we [in Iran] have had a weak history of anti-war protest movements. Although egalitarian trends and movements with slogans like “Bread, Work, Freedom” have taken clear anti-war positions, we have not been able to connect the struggle against oppression, exploitation and discrimination with the fight against war and warmongering.

In previous years, the slogan “No Gaza, No Lebanon” was heard from some forces<sup>2</sup>. These people had concluded that their own state of misery resulted from the government’s [spending resources] on interventions in the region. But in fact, the [regime] funded these interventions to prop up these reactionary regimes in the region only to stabilize and maintain its own interests, not to benefit the people in these countries that they interfere with or dominate. Consequently, these interventions have reduced the rich history of social and political struggle by the masses of people in Palestine to some rocket-throwing by Hamas, and the part played by other Palestinian progressive popular forces has been downplayed or erased.

But this reactionary shell has incubated a monster within it, the monster of indifference to other people's suffering — as if war-mongering and slaughtering are only bad when the bombs fall on me [with thinking of]: “I don't care what happens to Gaza!” “I don't care what is happening to Baluchistan and Kurdistan!” “Whatever happens to the immigrants from Afghanistan, to women, to workers and the semi-unemployed, to the people who live in the slums and shanty towns!... I only protest when I and people in my own circle get attacked.”

This monster will be the Achilles heel of our revolutionary movement. In a land with a multitude of languages, religions, all kinds of fault lines, a convergence of oppressions, and in close connection with other laboring and oppressed people in the region, an indifference to the suffering of others will strengthen the dominance of [reactionary] ruling forces and become an obstacle to any possibility of change [for a better world].

Currently, this monster's most powerful enemy is the public awareness and determination of the people in the Middle East, manifested in the “Woman, Life, Freedom” slogan, interpreted to encompass supporting human dignity and combating discrimination and apartheid in any form.

By relying on this slogan, we can combat religious fundamentalism in whatever form, be it Hamas or Israel. We can define the lines of demarcation in such a way that both Hamas and Israel, along with the imperialist forces supporting them are on one side, with the progressive social, labor, women’s movements ... and the fight for freedom and equality on the other side.

Governments are indifferent to the suffering of the people, and wars can divert and become an obstacle to popular and revolutionary movements. Therefore, our approach is to actively bring forward an antiwar wing in the heart of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” revolutionary movement — while simultaneously condemning Israel's genocide and dehumanization of the Palestinian people, condemning the reactionary nature of Hamas and how it treats these very same people [as tools to achieve its goals], condemning the regional governments that support [Hamas], and condemning the imperialist sponsors that benefit from this brutal war.

Historically, the transformation of reactionary wars into a fight of the oppressed masses against the ruling classes under the slogan “bread, peace, freedom” has been effective, yielding positive outcomes. This [present] historical moment will test whether the progressive movement for “Woman, Life, Freedom” will align itself with the struggle against discrimination and otherization or become a [mere] footnote to history.



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Evin prison, November 2023**

#### Footnotes

1 This letter is sharply struggling against a harmful, narrow, and nationalist view in Iran towards the Palestinian people in these comments they cite by some other political prisoners who had stood up against Iran’s theocratic regime during the “Women, Life, Freedom” uprising, but now are supporting genocide in Gaza by standing with Israel/US even in wishing Iran and its capital Tehran would get attacked, even nuked, which is against their own interest and that of humanity as a whole.

2 This narrow/selfish outlook of “my nation first” or “me first” is expressed in “I will only sacrifice for Iran”, i.e. not for people in Gaza or Lebanon.