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No to war , no to sanctions!

Support the Iranian women's movement!

Hands Off The People Of Iran is a unique anti-war campaign. We fight against the threat of any war or sanctions against Iran and look to build active, practical solidarity with grass-roots radical secular forces in Iran like militant women's movement. Iraq and Afghanistan proves that the forces of imperialism offer no solutions to these movements - democratic change in Iran must come *from below*.

A severe cultural crisis has embroiled hard-line fundamentalism in Iran. The majority of the youth and women's movements openly reject fundamentalist Islam and campaign for the separation of religion from the state.

This is the background to an increase in political and academic activity, especially of middle class Iranian women. This is an independent women's movement - separate from the factional fighting inside the Iranian regime and its ideological Islamicist core. It is also an unequivocally anti-war movement, intransigent in its opposition to US-style 'women's emancipation' - occupied Iraq and 'liberated' Afghanistan show what that means in practice.

Women have been in constant struggle against the Islamic dictatorship, fighting its pernicious interference in their private and public life. This has started to have some effect.

With the exception of a minority of middle class and upper class women, most Iranian women have traditionally suffered from patriarchal laws and practises both in the family and in wider society. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the plight of women has worsened. The rigid imposition of the veil (*hejab*) has reinforced discrimination and prejudice against women.

According to the laws of Hodud and Qessas (talion and punishment), the life of a woman is worth half that of a man. The logic of this is that a man sentenced to death for murdering a woman may only be executed if the victim's family pay the murderer half of his death dues.

The combination of enforced *hejab* and segregation is used to limit women's access to limited state education and sport facilities. The whole system is geared to institutionalise women's confinement to the house via laws that govern both their private and

public life - effectively a system of sexual apartheid.

Islamic marriage laws as applied in Iran are amongst the most repressive in the world. Men are allowed to marry up to four wives at a time in permanent marriages and an unlimited number of women in what is known as "temporary" marriage (*siqeh*). Women who do not adhere to strict monogamy are "legally" considered criminal. They can be brutally and savagely punished by a public stoning to death. While abortion is formally illegal, the rising number of unofficial abortions is testimony to its use as a hazardous form of contraception.

The divorce law is also designed to punish women, bring poverty and destitution to them and force them to desperate measures to obtain minimum maintenance for their children.

No consent is required for sexual relations inside marriage; wife-rape is common and wife-beating is tolerated as part of the assault. A married man having an affair with unmarried women can always claim that they were "temporarily married": a woman in a similar position has no such defence.



The discriminatory laws relating to women's rights cover marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, as well as anti-women labour laws and social policies. These have had devastating results, causing economic deprivation and social isolation of women and their children. Iranian women have fought hard against these injustices, but have had very limited success in the face of the overwhelming power of the religious state and its many repressive institutions.

Yet the women's movement in Iran has a very militant and brave history. One of the first demonstrations against the Islamic regime was the women's demonstration on March 8 1979. Khomeini's decree that women should cover their hair rallied women of many classes and backgrounds to a major demonstration against the new regime. In the early years of the Islamic regime, Iranian women fought the expulsions, the enforced redundancies and refused to adhere to strict Islamic *hejab*.

There are of course "Islamic Feminist" movements in Iran. Recently, these have taken up a limited defence of some aspects of women's rights. These movements are politically close to former presidents

Khatami and Rafsanjani. They fight for minor reforms, without challenging the medieval laws of *Hodud* and *Qessas*, let alone the supreme rule of the religious guardian of the nation, *Valiy-e Faghih*.

The history of Iran in the 20th century is dominated by a strong secular/progressive non-Islamic culture. It is this tradition that accounts for all of the Iranian women's limited victories against Islamic law, both under the rule of this regime and in the past.

It is true that over the last few years, urban Iranian women have succeeded in asserting themselves and influencing aspects of their lives and the country's politics. But any improvement in the plight of Iranian women is due mainly to their perseverance, traditions of struggle against dictatorships, their courage and won against the opposition of the majority of Islamic clerics in Iran.

If patriarchy is to be abolished, if women's liberation means freedom from economic, social, political and cultural constraints, then the women's movement in Iran will not find the answer in Islamic discourse. This is something that an increasing amount of Iranian women have come to realise, especially over the past two years.

Our campaign demands:

- **No to imperialist war! For the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US/UK troops from Iraq and all the Gulf region!**
- **No to any imperialist intervention. The immediate and unconditional end to sanctions on Iran!**
- **No to the theocratic regime!**
- **Opposition to Israeli expansionism and aggression!**
- **Support to all working class and progressive struggles in Iran against poverty and repression!**
- **Support for socialism, democracy and workers' control in Iran!**
- **For a nuclear-free Middle East as a step towards a nuclear-free world!**

If you oppose the war plans of the imperialists - but support the struggle for an Iran free of the oppressive clerical regime - join us! Individuals: £10 or £5 unwaged (organisations see website).

Name _____

Organisation/union _____

Mobile phone _____

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Supporters include:

- **Diane Abbott** Labour MP
- **John McDonnell** Labour MP
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- **Caroline Lucas** Green Party MEP
- **Tommy Sheridan** Solidarity
- **Ken Loach** filmmaker
- **John Pilger** journalist
- **Naomi Klein** writer and activist
- **Dr Hilary Rose** scientist
- **Haifa Zangana** writer
- Cllr **Rania Khan** Respect
- Cllr **Lufta Begum** Respect
- Iranian Workers Bulletin
- Workers Left Unity - Iran
- Communist Party of Great Britain
- Green Party
- Organization of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar)
- Communist Students