

Jury of the Human Right Tulip Award,
Your Excellency Foreign Minister of Holland
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured that the jury of the Human Rights Tulip Award has found me worth of receiving this year's award and given me the opportunity to speak about the situation of women's rights in Iran, the dire needs of people in Iran and also their expectations from the international community. You have all seen pictures and videos of people's protests in the aftermath of this year's presidential elections. You have seen how women, particularly young girls, have been at the forefront of all protests. They challenged the stereotype image of Iranian woman which was often imagined in veil or passive around the world. Neda, the young girl who was shot and murdered in demonstrations, quickly became a symbol for the struggles of Iranian people for freedom and democracy. To me, however, the active and determining role of women was not shaped only through images and videos. I had seen the leadership of women on the streets and the most lasting images I have in mind go back to the 9th of July this year.

On this day, large crowds of people took to the streets of Tehran on the 10th anniversary of the suppression of student protests of 1989. Demonstrations were about to end and as usual, violence and attacks were increasing by the minute. Along with a number of the demonstrators, to get away from pepper gas which was thrown into the crowd by security forces, I had to run into a city bus, while I was badly coughing from the effects of tear gas. A few stops away from there, when coughs were less disturbing, a political debate began among the people on the bus. Young women, who had broken the gender segregation rule on public buses and had found seats in the male area of the bus, were leading the debate. I asked loudly and with surprise, "Anyone from the gentlemen? They are all quiet!" Instead of someone from among men, a young girl who was dressed in black said, "Men had better be quiet now. Thirty years ago, they made this revolution and we have now seen its result. They had better be quiet now and let us do our job! This revolution is our revolution, women's revolution!"

Here, I would like to pose this question: who are these women, who simply speak about a revolution of women, those whose images you have seen and I hope you have not forgotten? Who are they? And why do they fight so bravely for freedom and democracy?

Many of these young women have been born after the 1979 revolution or they have been young kids in the early days of the revolutions; they are completely products of an ideological system, which has had the monopoly of power in Iran for thirty years. Apart from having to suffer the lack of political freedoms and democracy like men, they also have to accept rules of compulsory veil, live with family laws which put them under the guardianship of men, seek the consent of their fathers for marriage, the right of getting a divorce and they are often deprived of the guardianship of their children. These are the same women who will be flogged in they have relationships other than in a marriage and if they are married women, an extra-marital relationship may lead to being stoned. These are the same women that Ahmadinejad's government wants to minimise their role in universities and the labour market and make them stay at home and be isolated with fundamentalist policies which is now even more restrictive than the past 30 years.

In the past thirty years, Iranian women have gone through the highest level of suppression and pressure in their personal and social lives and have sustained the most damage of all from the ruling system. Under such circumstances, it is obvious that they are the unhappiest and the angriest citizens who do not have much to lose. If they are arrested today because of attending demonstrations for democracy, they have been arrested before for attending gatherings in defence of women's rights and they have gone to prison for it. If they are raped today by security forces, they have felt this rape on their body and their soul for thirty years in the violation of their rights and their human dignity. Given all these facts, do we still have to ask why, today, women are at the forefront of the struggles of Iranian people?

At the beginning of my talk, I said I hope you have not forgotten the images of the protests of Iranian people against the violation of human rights and the absence of freedom and democracy.

However, let me be honest and tell you that I am concerned. I am concerned that these images and these struggles may be forgotten. Yes, if violation of human rights in Iran does not face any resistance or repercussions and if these struggles are not defended in a concrete way, the Iranian people have the right to tell us you have forgotten us. My concern becomes even much deeper when I see that the western media is becoming less and less concerned about the violation of human rights in Iran and even politicians are not better than the media.

Unfortunately, forgetting the thousands who were arrested and tortured in prisons, the hundreds who were killed and the unknown number of prisoners who were raped are killed in detention is a real concern. The fact is that in Iran, while on the one hand people's struggles and protests are still powerful and living and on the other hand, violation of human rights continues in a systematic way in all spheres, from women's rights to freedom of gatherings, from rights of prisoners to freedom of speech, it appears that European nations and states are beginning to forget what they witness in Iran this summer. It is my conviction that by forgetting these realities, western governments not only forget their own responsibility which has been defined as countries who uphold human rights, but they are also putting in jeopardy the interests of their own state and their own citizens by forgetting these events.

They sit at the same table of negotiations with Ahmadinejad in the capacity of a legitimate president and the only item on the agenda of these negotiations is the issue of nuclear energy, as if none of these events had happened in Iran and as if none of the disasters which we see today keep occurring in Iran. On the level of international politics, everything is business as usual with the Islamic Republic like before the events of this summer. Even when there is talk of sanctions against Iran, sanctions are considered in the face of Iran's advancements in the area of nuclear technology, as if no one sees the day to day violation of the basic rights of Iranian citizens by the Iranian government. Human rights is a universal issue and if one state claims to be supporting human rights, this claim brings about responsibilities with it. Ignoring these responsibilities, not only subjects Iranian people to further and wider suppression, but it also has long term repercussion for the citizens of countries who consider themselves defenders of human rights, because just in the same way that human rights is universal,

fundamentalism as one of the greatest enemies of human rights has also become universal and global. Silence, toleration and recognition of a fundamentalist government that violates the rights of women, dissidents and minorities result in the enhancement and the export of global fundamentalism. We can already see symptoms of it even on this side of the borders: Holland is one of the societies which is now dealing with the issue of religious fundamentalism as a social and political problem..

In the latest demonstration of the Iranian people against the government which was held last week, a large number of people and this time, women more than before, were attacked, beaten up and abused by security guards. Women were wounded, arrested and among them were a large number of political activists such as Vahideh Mowlavi, a women's rights activist, were violently arrested. In these demonstrations, people were chanting the slogan: "Obama! Obama! You are either with us or with them!" The slogan clearly implies that right before the eyes of the people who are now fighting for freedom, democracy and human rights in Iran, one cannot sit at a negotiation table with a dictatorial government to speak about nuclear energy or economic contracts and talk about concrete conditions and at the same time, criticise the state of human rights in Iran through political statements which have no actual guarantee to be put into action. Demonstrators are overtly challenging Obama to clarify his position towards the struggles of the Iranian people and they have the same expectation from European governments.

As a women's rights activist who comes from the heart of the struggles of the people, I am here in The Hague, in Holland – the city which is the seat of the International Criminal Court for addressing crimes against humanity – to speak of two dire needs of the movement of the Iranian people. These needs and necessities will not be realised unless western governments take responsibility. First, it is necessary that the issue of human rights in Iran remains on the table of negotiations alongside the issue of nuclear energy with equal significance. As long as the issue of human rights is not raised at least in a parallel way to the nuclear issue at all levels of political and economic negotiations with the Iranian government and sanctions and other possible guarantees of action do not include both areas, one cannot accept that some real effort has been made to stop the violation of the rights of Iranian citizens.

The second necessity is that all those involved and all those who have ordered the widespread and systematic violation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran should be prosecuted and tried. It is true that Iran, like many other violators of human rights, has not ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, but western governments, including the Dutch government, as the host of the International Criminal Court, can ask the UN Security Council to pursue the issue of crimes against humanity through setting up an international court for Iran. Let us not forget that a global issue can only be dealt with through a global action.

Today, is my daughter's birthday. She becomes ten and I want to have a wish for her and her generation. I wish a free and democrat Iran for all of them.

Thank you.