

The Role of Women in World Peace

(نقش زن در صلح جامعه)

Shirin Ebadi
2003 Nobel Peace Laureate

(Transcribed by Elhum Haghighat)

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خانم‌ها و آقایان، بسیار خوشحالم که امروز شانس حضور در این جلسه را پیدا کردم و امکان گفت و شنود با شما را دارم. ضرب المثلی در زبان فارسی می‌گوید که دو دنیا وجود دارد: دنیای درون، دنیای بیرون را درک می‌کند و ارتباط برقرار می‌سازد. نغمه‌ای به گوش او خوش می‌آید، موسیقی ساخته می‌شود، طبیعت را می‌بیند، رنگ‌ها را تجربه می‌کند، زیبایی‌ها را حس می‌کند. اگر انسان بدون حس شنوایی خلق می‌شد آیا موسیقی ساخته می‌شد؟ اگر انسان بدون حس بینایی مانند برخی از جانداران بدون چشم آفریده می‌شد، آیا نقاشی ابداع می‌شد؟

با این مقدمه می‌خواهم به مسئله‌ای اشاره کنم، چگونه می‌توانیم از صلح در جامعه صحبت کنیم بی‌آنکه آن را در درون خود احساس کنیم؟ صلح درون است که صلح بیرونی را سبب می‌شود. طبیعت این نعمت را به زنان ارزانی داشته که آنان بتوانند بنیان و اساس صلح درون باشند. به یاد داشته باشیم که هر فردی درون زنی شکل می‌گیرد، زاده می‌شود و پرورش می‌یابد. امروزه پیشرفت علم به ما این

امکان را داده است که بدانیم حتی حالات روحی مادر، حس ناامنی و ترس، اضطراب و تحقیر شدن وی، یا برعکس احساس آرامش، احساس امنیت در تمام وجود آن یعنی امنیت عاطفی، روانی، اجتماعی و اقتصادی چه تأثیرات تعیین کننده ای را در جهت منفی یا مثبت بر نوزاد به دنیا نیامده بر جا خواهد گذاشت.

از روی دیگر می دانیم شکل گیری شخصیت قطعی هر انسانی در همان سالهای آغازین تا هفت سالگی اتفاق می افتد. و یک مادر می تواند در شکل گیری خصلت های اساسی یک کودک نقش تعیین کننده ای داشته باشد. و یک کودک می تواند همان سیاست مدار آتی، همان دانشمند، یا اقتصاددان و سرمایه دار تاجر آینده باشد، یا یک معلم و یک کارگر و یک پرستار. خلاصه هر کدام از انسانهایی که در ساختن جامعه خود نقشی ایفا می کنند.

صلح یک دستور و آئین نامه نیست که مثلاً در فردی در سن چهل سالگی موقعی که در منصب و مقامی قرار دارد که می تواند بر سرنوشت بسیاری از انسانها و حتی یک انسان مؤثر باشد. این انسان در نخستین سالهای شکل گیری شخصیتش و در دامن مادرش باید یاد گرفته باشد که به حقوق دیگران احترام بگذارد، از خشونت در ساده ترین شکل آن پرهیز کند، حق خود را بشناسد و طالب آن باشد، آرامش را بشناسد و آنرا گرانبهارترین گوهر زندگی بداند.

چنین کودکی از اعتماد به نفس درونی بالایی برخوردار است و بیش از هر چیزی و مهم تر از هر چیز خودش را دوست دارد. به خود احترام می گذارد و این سنگ بنای

احترام و دوست داشتن دیگران است. انسان تحقیر شده، انسان فاقد اعتماد به نفس، انسانی که همواره در موقعیت دفاعی قرار دارد، بعدها وقتی وارد عرصه اجتماع شود و به مقامات تأثیرگذار در حیطة مشغل خود، خانواده خود، شهر خود و یا محدوده بزرگتری مانند کشور خود و یا جهان برسد، با هزاران بخش نامه و دستورالعمل نمی تواند عمیقاً طالب صلح باشد. او نمی تواند همه آدمها را دوست داشته باشد، انسانها را نه با عدد و آمار، بلکه با هویت فردی آنان را دریابد و حقوق يك انسان برایش همان اندازه مهم باشد که حقوق يك ملت. و به راستی برای رسیدن به جهانی بهتر و انسانی تر راهی جز فراهم آوردن امکانات حیات بهتر و انسانی تر برای همه افراد جامعه بتساوی با زن و مرد با اتکاء به توانائی های هر کدام وجود ندارد.

و اما واقعیت زندگی زنان در جهان امروز. کمتر کشوری را می توان یافت که وضعیت زنان، تبعیضات ناروا، سوء استفاده های جنسی، نادیده گرفتن لیاقت ها، لیاقت های شخصی، در موقعیتی مناسب قرار گرفته باشند. در اینکه زنان تحت ستم هستند شکی نیست؛ منتهی گاهی ستم مخفی است و گاهی آشکار.

در برخی اوقات، قانون بر این ستم صحنه می گذارد و باره ای اوقات هر چند قانون تأکید بر برابری دارد، اما در عمل قانون اجرا نمی شود.

آنچه که تردیدناپذیر است وضعیت نابرابر زنان و مردان است در سراسر جهان فقط برحسب کشوری که در آن قرار دارند و

تمدني که به آن تعلق دارند شدت و ضعف مي يابند. در آمريکا و اغلب کشورهاي اروپايي، زنان از عدم تساوي در برخورداري از فرصت هاي اجتماعي گله مند هستند.

در اين گونه ممالک، قانون بر ضد زن عمل نمي کند. به زن و مرد حقوق برابري عطا مي کند، اما زنان به علت وظائف دوگانه اي که در منزل و در اجتماع دارند امکان استفاده از حقوق را کمتر مي يابند. به عبارت بهتر، نمي توانند از فرصت هاي خود استفاده کنند. به همين علت است که مي بينيم در اغلب کشورهاي اروپايي و در آمريکا، تعداد زنانی که به پارلمان راه يافته يا به مشاغل حساس اجتماعي نائل مي گردند، بسيار کمتر از مردان است.

در راستاي کمک به زنان، پارلمان اروپا چندي قبل قانوني تصويب کرد و به نوعي افراد سياسي را مجبور ساخت که به تعداد مساوي زنان و مردان را جهت کاندیداتوري معرفي نمايند. اما زنان هنوز هم در استفاده از فرصت هاي اجتماعي برابر مردان نيستند. کافي است نگاهی به پارلمان کشورهای اروپايي بکنيم. اگر نگاهی به پارلمان کشورهای اروپايي که در حقيقت پيشتر از تمدن کشورهای غربي هستند بپردازيم، آن هنگام است که متوجه مي شويم که تا چه ميزان زنان توانسته اند از فرصت هاي خود استفاده کنند. کمتر کشوري است که تعداد زنان و مردان در پارلمان مساوي است. تقريباً در تمامی کشورهای اروپايي و همچنين در کشور آمريکا، تعداد وزراي مرد بيش از زنان است. مشاغل حساس اقتصادي در يد انحصاري مردان است. کمتر

زني را مي توان در اينگونه مشاغل مصدر امور ديد.

استفاده ابزاري از بدن زن يكي ديگر از مسائل جهان غرب است. براي تبليغ اجناسي كه بايد به فروش رود، زنان مجبورند در ازاي مزي ناچيز لخت شوند و با عرضه تن و بدن خويش توليدكنندگان را ياري رسانند تا جنسي به فروش رود.

اما وضعيت زنان در كشورهاي اسلامي به گونه اي ديگر نامناسب است. و البته بر حسب نوع كشور نيز شدت و ضعف مي گيرد. در عربستان سعودي زنان تا چند سال قبل حتي شناسنامه نداشتند يعني اصلاً شهروند تلقي نمي شدند. و اکنون كه شهروند به شمار مي آيند از بسياري از حقوق خود محروم هستند. آنها نه تنها حق شركت در پارلمان را ندارند حتي حق رانندگي اتومبيل خود را هم ندارند.

در بحرین و يمن و بسياري از كشورهاي اسلامي، زنان هر چند شهروند شمرده مي شوند اما شهروند درجه دوم به حساب مي آيند و هرگونه حقوقي را كه يك مرد دارد براي آنان در نظر نمي گيرند. تعدد زوجات امري است رايج. رأي و عقیده پدران هنگام ازدواج دخترانشان لازم الاجرا و غيرقابل سربيجي است. احترام زنان در اغلب كشورهاي اسلامي به تعداد پسراني است كه به دنيا آورده اند. و حتي در برخي از نقاط، زنان را نه به نام اصلي خودشان بلكه به نام پسرانشان صدا مي زنند.

در ايران با وجود آنكه 63% دانشجويان دانشگاهها دختر هستند، به عبارتي تعداد زنان تحصيل کرده بيش از مردان تحصيل کرده است، اما متأسفانه، ميزان بيكاري در

زنان سه برابر مردان گزارش می‌شود. در ایران، زنان از دستیابی به مشاغل مهم سیاسی و اجتماعی محروم مانده‌اند. تعداد اندک زنان در پارلمان موجب می‌شود که تغییرات اساسی در قوانین امکان‌پذیر نباشد. از تبعیض‌های بر زنان ایران در قوانین نیز یادآور می‌شود. از جمله، طبق قانون مجازات ارزش جان زن نیمی از جان مرد است. شهادت دو زن معادل شهادت یک مرد در دادگاه ارزیابی می‌شود. تعدد زوجات در قانون به رسمیت شناخته شده. زنان ایران از قوانین نامناسبی که مغایر با فرهنگ و ارزش‌های آنان است در رنج هستند. اما سؤال اصلی این است که منشأ قوانین نامناسب برای زنان در کشورهای اسلامی چیست؟ اسلام دینی است که برابری زن و مرد را قبول دارد. اما آنچه که به ضدیت با حقوق زن در کشورهای اسلامی منجر می‌شود فرهنگ مردسالاری است که در این جوامع پُرنسنگ‌تر از ممالک غربی است. فرهنگ مردسالاری نه تنها بر زن ستم می‌کند و او را جنس درجه دوم می‌داند بلکه بر مردان نیز ستم می‌کند. دموکراسی را بر نمی‌تابد، برابری انسانها را قبول ندارد. این فرهنگ، فرهنگ قبیله‌ای است. نگاهی به شیوه حکومت‌کشورها گویای این نکته است که در هر کشوری که زنان در وضعیت حقوقی نامناسبی به سر می‌برند، دموکراسی نیز در آنجا رعایت نمی‌شود. به عبارت بهتر، بهبود وضعیت زنان با دموکراسی نسبت مستقیم دارد. و دموکراسی اولین گام برای بهبود وضعیت زنان است. دموکراسی یعنی حکومت توسط مردم و به عبارتی حکومت مردم بر مردم.

اما دموکراسی معایبی دارد که باید از آن جلوگیری شود. فراموش نکنیم هیتلر با رأی اکثریت به قدرت رسید. لنین با رأی مردم حکومت را به دست گرفت. بسیاری از دیکتاتورهای جهان در ابتدای کار با رأی اکثریت انتخاب شدند. رأی اکثریت نمی تواند تنها شاخص و ملاک حکومت باشد. دموکراسی باید در چهارچوب حقوق بشر اعمال شود. یعنی عقیده اکثریت جامعه البته ملاک عمل است اما اکثریت حق ندارد به هر گونه که مایل است عمل کند بلکه قدرت اکثریت محدود است به چهارچوب قواعد حقوق بشر. و در آن صورت است که جامعه به سوی آرامش می رود.

در اینجا یادآور می شوم که از حقوق بشر نباید سوءاستفاده شود. به بهانه استقرار دموکراسی و حقوق بشر نمی توان به کشوری حمله کرد. حقوق بشر را همراه با مجب های خوشه ای نمی توان بر سر ملتی ریخت. با اسلحه نمی توان دموکراسی صادر کرد. دموکراسی و حقوق بشر جز با خواست مردم تحقق نمی یابد. اگر کشوری مدعی دلسوزی برای دموکراسی است، حق تجاوز نظامی به کشور دیگر را به بهانه استقرار دموکراسی ندارد. دموکراسی یک پروسه تاریخی است که باید سیر تکاملی آن طی شود. حمله نظامی روند دموکراسی را به تأخیر می اندازد. کشورهای که قصد حمایت از دموکراسی را دارند باید به افراد آزادی خواه و نهادهای دموکراتیک و NGO های فعال در زمینه حقوق بشر کمک کنند نه اینکه تهاجم نظامی کنند.

و در این صورت است که مردم هر کشوری و جامعه مدنی هر کشوری می توانند خود

رأساً به دمکراسي و حقوق بشر دست یابند. در ایران خوشبختانه چندین NGO برای پیشرفت حقوق بشر فعالیت می کنند. من در تأسیس دو NGO نقش داشته ام. یکی انجمن حمایت از حقوق کودکان و دیگری کانون مدافعان حقوق بشر که فعالیت اصلی آن دفاع از زندانیان سیاسی و همچنین حمایت از خانواده آنها است. NGO های ما با NGO های بین المللی همکاری دارد و عضو فدراسیون بین المللی حقوق بشر است. فدراسیون بین المللی حقوق بشر یک NGO بین المللی است که 115 عضو از کشورهای مختلف دارد و در چهار کشور مختلف جهان شعبه دارد و مرکز آن در پاریس است. نایب رئیس این فدراسیون خوشبختانه در اینجا حضور دارند، آقای دکتر لاهیجی. بله می گفتیم که به بهانه دمکراسی نمی شود به کشوری حمله کرد. من از کشته شدن سربازان آمریکایی، فرزندان خوب شما در عراق متأسف هستم و با خانواده افرادی که به قتل رسیده اند همدردی می کنم. اما متأسفانه رفتار نظامیان آمریکایی با زندانیان عراقی نیز شرم آور است و باعث تأسف بیشتر، بعضی از این اعمال توسط زنان انجام شده است. و باعث تعجب بیشتر که یک زن در مقام تصمیم گیری بالا با حمله نظامی به عراق موافق بوده. این برادرگشی تا کجا باید ادامه پیدا کند؟ آیا وقت آن نرسیده که به جنگ پایان دهیم؟ و جنگ نه تنها در میدان جنگ است، نه تنها در خاورمیانه است، جنگ دیگری به صورت مخفیانه البته متأسفانه در شرف تکوین است و آن این است که تمدن ها را و

ادیان را با یکدیگر به ستیز انداخته اند.

خطای افراد را از مذهب و تمدنی که به آن تعلق دارند جدا کنید. اگر فرد یا گروهی به نام اسلام مرتکب خطا، مرتکب ترور شدند، گناه آنان، خطای آنان را به نام اسلام ننویسید. اسلام با ترور و خشونت مخالف است. خطای افراد به خود آنان تعلق دارد نه به مذهب یا کشوری که از آن آمده اند. همچنان که ما خطای تی چند در جنگ بوسنی (Bosnia) را به حساب مسیحیت ننوشتیم، که مسیح پیامبر خدا است. نادیده گرفتن قطع نامه های سازمان ملل متحد از سوی دولت اسرائیل و وقایعی که در این منطقه از جهان اتفاق می افتد هرگز بای دین یهود نوشته نخواهد شد، که موسی برگزیده خدا و منادی حق و عدالت است. و سئوال ما این است که چرا خطای چند نفر یا گروهی از مسلمانان را به نام اسلام بنویسیم؟ و چرا از لغت تروریسم اسلامی استفاده می شود؟ به یاد داشته باشیم ادیان و تمدن ها با یکدیگر در ستیز نیستند بلکه نقاط مشترک بسیاری نیز دارند. از نقاط مشترک بگوئیم نه از وجوه افتراء. مروج جنگ و خشونت نباشیم. من سخنان خود را با آرزوی صلح برای شما و جهان خاتمه می دهم و امیدوارم هر چه زودتر فرزندان شما صحیح و سالم به خانه برگردند. مادران آمریکایی می توانند نقش بسیار مؤثری داشته باشند. جنگ را شروع کردند و اکنون شما اعلام کنید زنده باد صلح!

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2003 Nobel Peace Laureate

(Translation by Elhum Haghightat)

Distinguished Faculty Members, Students, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you today and to have the opportunity to speak to you about some important issues. There is a saying in the Persian language, "There are two worlds: the world within and the world beyond us. It is through the world within that one can comprehend the world beyond." We hear songs we love, music is composed, nature is observed, colors are experienced and beauty is felt. Would music be composed if human beings did not possess the ability to hear? Would paintings be created if human beings were not able to see?

I would like to begin with a question: How can a society discuss peace without understanding the feelings [of peace] from within. It is internal peace within people that creates external and societal peace. Nature has bestowed upon women the ability to become the foundation for creating peace. Let us recall that every human being is created within a woman and is nurtured by her.

Scientific and psychological developments increase our understanding of a woman's feelings of insecurity and anxiety. At the same time, such developments give us the ability to comprehend what creates feelings of peace, a sense of emotional, psychological and social security, and the impact that these feelings and characteristics can have on the unborn embryo growing within her. We are also aware that the human personality is formed in the early stages of life. A parent plays a large part in influencing the formation of a child's character, and has the ability to nurture a child to become a healthy and productive member of the society. Thus, a parent has the potential power to infuse compassion for other human beings into his or her child.

Let me turn to the topic of peace again and say that peace is not just about a doctrine or a bylaw. A person at the age of forty [for instance] cannot be indoctrinated with the concept of peace and be expected to understand what it means to respect other people's rights if he or she never learned it in his or her formative years. A child who is raised with an understanding of basic human rights, recognizes peace and understands its significance. This is a person with confidence, who more than anything else is able to love him or herself, love and respect others equally. What I am referring to is the foundation for respect and love for others. A person who has been belittled, a person lacking confidence or one who is constantly on the defensive cannot inherently seek peace no matter how many bylaws, doctrines, declarations are in place. This person is unable to love others and to see people in terms of their individual identities. Rather, he or she sees people as objects and figures [statistics]. Such a person *cannot* participate in the promotion of human rights and peace for a nation. Indeed, there is no way to attain a better and humane world except to provide the means for better ways of living for each and every individual in this world and, in turn, to rely on their abilities to promote peace in their own lives and in their everyday interactions.

I will now turn to issues pertaining to women. There is hardly any country in the world in which the cold and unwanted discrimination against women has not occurred. Women are often victims of sexual abuse and harassment; they often experience violence in their daily lives and have to deal with discrimination and prejudice against them at all times. There is no doubt that women [compared to men] in general have been oppressed in the past and still suffer from different forms of oppression and inequality. Oppression can occur in a manifested form [institutional discrimination]. At times, the law endorses this oppression and discrimination. At other times, it is covert in the form of latent discrimination. Even with seemingly legal protection, women still experience inequality in their everyday lives. There is no doubt that there is inequality between men and women in different parts of the world. It is only the variation of inequality that differs from one nation to another.

In the U.S. and in many European countries, women often complain about inequality between men and women in social opportunities. In these cases, the law does not act against women. It gives men and

women equal rights. But since women often end up with more of the responsibilities in the “private domain,” they are less able to use opportunities made available to them. It is for this reason that we see in most of these countries the number of women entering social and political institutions, such as the parliament, is far less than that of men. To further the rights of women, the European parliament recently passed a law in the form of a quota and called on political parties to name candidates in equal numbers for both men and women. Nonetheless, women still do not possess equal rights when it comes to access to available social opportunities. In fact, there are hardly any or very few countries in which the number of men and women in parliament is equal. In most of the Western world, there are more men ministers in power than women. Key economic posts are in the exclusive hands of men, and there are rarely women in charge of such positions.

Another form of women’s exploitation that exists in the Western world is the use of their bodies for the purpose of commercialization and profit making. Women’s bodies are objectified to sell products. Other than men promoting and perpetuating this exploitative system, many women help maintain it by not resisting it. They actually help this exploitative system by being employed for these profit-making corporations and being loyal consumers of the products.

Let me turn to Islamic countries in which the status of women is also unforgiving in other respects. I would like to discuss how women’s plight varies from one country to another depending on the culture of the region. For instance, until recently, women did not possess identification cards [birth certificates] in Saudi Arabia. In other words, they lacked national citizenship. Saudi women lack equal rights to men in many aspects of their lives. They are not allowed to participate in the political arena, such as the parliament, but even worse, they are not even allowed to drive their own vehicles. In other Gulf States such as Bahrain and Yemen, women are recognized as citizens but as second-class citizens. In many of these countries, men and women are far removed from equal societal and institutional rights. Polygamy is pervasive. Fathers coerce and pressure their daughters in matters relating to the selection of their marriage partners, and it is almost impossible for their daughters to disobey. In most Islamic countries women gain respect based on the number of sons that they give birth

to. And, in fact, in many parts women are called not by their own names but by the name of their sons [usually their oldest son]. In other words, the way for a woman to gain status in those societies is to give birth to sons.

Let me turn to today's Iran again and say that 63% of college students are women. In other words, there are more college-educated women than there are college-educated men. Paradoxically, the unemployment rate for women is three times higher than that for men. Women are unable to attain key political and social positions. Since there are very few women in the parliament, it is impossible to bring about major changes affecting women. Collective discrimination against women is enforced through laws in my country. For example, according to the penal court, the value of a woman's life is half that of a man. Before the court, it is the testimony of two women that is required in exchange for the testimony of one man. The law recognizes polygamy. Clearly, women suffer from overt violation of their rights as human beings.

So the key question is what is the origin of these discriminatory laws against women in Islamic countries? Islam is a religion that recognizes equality between men and women; however, what leads to discrimination of women and gender inequality is the patriarchal culture that is more pervasive in these societies than in the Western world. Patriarchal culture not only oppresses women but is also oppressive to different groups of men, such as younger men. It is an unequal system in which not all people benefit in the same way. In fact, the majority of people do not benefit at all.

What about Democracy? Democracy is governance by people. In other words, democracy is governance of the people by the people; however, democracy has its own shortcomings and must be protected from certain elements. Let us not forget Hitler attained power with the vote of the majority. It was through popular vote and support that Lenin took power. Many dictators assumed power by majority vote. Therefore, vote of the majority does not necessarily reflect the basic criteria for fair governance. Democracy must be practiced within the basic framework of human rights. It is the only way that a society can move toward peace.

I would like to take this opportune moment and remind all of us that we cannot neglect human rights. One cannot attack a country in the name of democracy and human rights. Human rights cannot be thrown over a nation with cluster bombs. You cannot export democracy with guns. Democracy and human rights cannot be realized unless it is through the will of the people.

If a country claims to care for democracy, it cannot invade another country militarily in the name of democracy. Democracy is a historical process that needs time to mature and reach fruition. Military invasion will delay the process of democracy. Countries that claim they are promoting democracy should refrain from military invasions. Instead, they should provide support to freedom-seeking people of a country, to democratic institutions and to progressive non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Iran, there are a number of NGOs that are active in the field of human rights. If a society does not induce democracy nor recognize the equality of human beings, it is what I call a society with a tribal culture in place. A look into the practice of various countries tells us that when legal rights are unfavorable toward women, democracy also lacks. In other words, democracy is the first step toward improving the status of women.

I was active in the formation of two NGOs. One was the Association for the Support of the Rights of a Child and the second was the Association of Human Rights Activists. For the human rights advocates, the most important responsibility is to support and protect the rights of political prisoners and their families. Our NGOs work in consultation with international NGOs and are also members of the Federation of Human Rights. The International Federation of Human Rights is an international non-governmental institution that has 15 members from different countries around the world. It has branches in four countries and has its headquarters in Paris. The Vice President of this federation is here with us today, Dr. Laaheegie.

As I said earlier, one cannot attack a country in the name of democracy. I deeply sympathize with you for the killings of U.S. soldiers in Iraq. At the same time, the actions of U.S. military soldiers and militants against Iraqi prisoners is indeed shameful, and most regretfully some of these acts have been perpetuated by women. And most surprisingly, one woman was in a position to decide on the war

against Iraq. For how long will this fraternal killing continue? Isn't it time to end the war? War is not limited to the battlefield and is not limited to the Middle East. There is a covert and hidden war that is about to unfold; a war that positions religions and civilizations against each other. Let us separate the wrongs of the individuals from religions and civilizations to which they belong. If an individual or a group perpetrated a wrongful act or terror in the name of Islam, let us not blame Islam; Islam opposes terror and violence!

The wrongful deeds of individuals are theirs alone and do not belong to their religion or to their country. We did not say that the wrongful acts of a number of people during the war in Bosnia were the wrongful act of Christianity, since Christ was the messenger of God. Defiance on the part of Israel of numerous United Nations resolutions and the overlooking of the events that are happening in that part of the world do not constitute the acts of the people who are Jews and should not be blamed on Judaism, since Moses was chosen by God and he was the messenger of peace and justice!

So my question to you is why should the wrongful deeds of a number of individuals or a group of Islamic people be written in the name of Islam? Why do we even use concepts and phrases like "Islamic terrorism?" Remember that religions and civilizations do not clash. They share many commonalities. So let us talk about commonalities and not about differences. Let us not promote violence and war!

I end my remarks by wishing peace for you and for the world, and I hope your children will return home safe and healthy very soon! And for this to happen, American mothers can play a very important role. Men started the war, and now you women can declare peace and let peace live forever!

Following her address, Mrs. Ebadi held a question-and-answer session with the audience.

What is the role of the media in revealing and concealing human rights abuses?

There are two modes of censorship. One is official censorship exerted and endorsed by governments. I doubt that this kind of censorship would exist in the United States. There is also a second mode of censorship, one that is hidden and far more powerful. In this form of censorship, big media are in the hands of a few individuals or limited groups of people with great power. They are able to shape public opinion in directions that they please. Therefore, small, independent media outlets cannot compete with multi-conglomerate media corporations. And since they are very powerful, smaller and more independent media cannot compete with them.

Let me give you an example of the performance by the media that relates to what occurred a few years ago. After the tragic events of September 11, there was one important issue that all television networks (radio and other media outlets) spoke about. And that was the problem of the possibility of spreading anthrax bacteria through mail envelopes. For over a month, America was obsessed with this concern of whether the mail they received was contaminated with anthrax or not. Whenever you turned on the media networks, you would see people with security masks on, inspecting mail. Now that several years have passed and we look back, the question is, 'Was there really an anthrax scare that we should have been so concerned about?' Don't you think that perhaps the anxiety and fear were created to create a more pervasive feeling of insecurity in the American people—to convince people that it is for the protection of the security of the United States and, therefore, it is necessary to attack Afghanistan? In other words, it was a tactic to justify war somehow!

In many developing countries, women are deprived of their rights politically; however, if we can change women's political status around the world, how would we be able to help those who are victims of violence and dehumanization because of cultural and religious customs? How would we be able to change centuries of fundamental ideals among thousands of families around the world?

It is only through awareness, knowledge and education that one can start changes in deep-rooted and wrongful traditions. Therefore, I have emphasized the need to promote literacy, particularly for women.

Also, women should have equal access (compared to men) to educational opportunities. Since women most often end up as primary caretakers and “socializers” of children, educating women converts to educating the future generation. As we see in traditional societies, however, education for men is emphasized more than it is for women. This is a huge mistake. With every girl’s school established, we are taking one step toward higher and more democratic civilizations.

What do you think are the major misconceptions in Western societies regarding women and Muslim women in the Middle East?

There are many misconceptions in the Western world about women’s status and societal role in the Middle East. It is not a secret that Middle Eastern societies, in general, carry their own patriarchal legacies. Therefore, where patriarchy is more pervasive, democracy is obviously more weakened. When I refer to patriarchal cultures, I am not just addressing men. I am talking about women also. Although women are victims of this culture, they also perpetuate and reproduce gender inequality.

Allow me to turn to a couple of misconceptions that the West has regarding women in Iran and Islamic countries in general. People ask me whether Iranian women can go out and work in offices. The answer is certainly yes. As I indicated earlier, 63% of Iran’s college students are women. For the past 40 years, Iran has had women representatives in the parliament and other highly visible and powerful positions. Of course, everything is relative. There is no doubt that the number of women in the parliament is far less than that of men and not nearly equal to the case of European parliaments.

As a result of a well-established patriarchal culture, certain laws have been formulated that are against the rights of women in Iran. Iranian women have stood up to fight against these laws and, in fact, have been able to reform some of them, including divorce and children’s custody laws. What can help to better understand Iranian women and Iranian culture is to follow the news in its actuality. To have a better understanding of the culture of the region, I strongly recommend an exchange of Iranian and American academic and non-academic scholars and students. They will have a different view of the region if they actually travel and study in the Middle East, learn

about the incredibly rich culture of the region and see for themselves people's everyday reality, struggles and challenges.

There is a sense of powerlessness among young people as they confront the world where terrorism has become a daily threat. What can we do to aid the cause of world peace, and how can they get over the feeling of powerlessness in their daily life?

Fighting terrorism is obviously a logical and legitimate fight. Also arresting terrorists and taking them before the court of justice is necessary, but most important is the need to fight the roots of terrorism in the world. It has been years since terrorists have been arrested and put on trial. But has that led to fewer occurrences of the phenomenon of terrorism? The answer is unfortunately not. Terrorism is becoming more prevalent, and the reason is we have not approached the problem fundamentally in order to deal with its roots and sources. Terrorism has two sources: prejudice and injustice. Prejudice arises from ignorance and lack of awareness. Therefore, education and literacy are the most important and fundamental ways of fighting terrorism across the world. And equally we must make every effort to get rid of injustice in the world.

What would you suggest the role of the U.S. should be in achieving peace in the Middle East?

The first step that the U.S. can take toward achieving peace in the Middle East is to leave the administration of Iraq to Iraqi people under the supervision of the United Nations. The U.S. should also understand that when it benefits from a nation, it should also give benefits back to that nation. The U.S. government should not support undemocratic countries. Supporting undemocratic nations is like taking the gun and shooting it on one's face. Let us recall that the biggest supporter of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq was the United States. And, unfortunately, the tragic event of September 11th occurred. Let us learn lessons from history and not support undemocratic countries.