

Reza Pahlavi : Leadership for Democracy in Iran

For almost three decades, Reza Pahlavi has been a strong voice for freedom and democracy the world over. Now, with the support of freedom seekers around the world, he is ready to lead an international effort for a new era in his native country.

A letter to the World

The recent parliamentary election in Iran, and, for that matter, all previous elections, have been a travesty, a sad farce, with the ruling government again making promises it cannot fulfill. During 28 years of involvement as a secular democrat, I have watched with sorrow the political and economic catastrophes that have destroyed the hopes and lives of the Iranian people. I have been fortunate through these years to be living in freedom; but still, my heart and my roots are in Iran.

Others have not been so fortunate. More than two-thirds of the population of Iran are under the age of 30. That means they have spent all their lives, so far, under the oppressive rule that began in 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic extremists seized control. They have not known the prosperity and security enjoyed by many children living in the free world; instead, they have endured poverty and fear.

Iran's youth demand a new vision

This is a generation that is longing for change. The youth of Iran grow increasingly frustrated and rebellious under an antiquated clerical system that invades every aspect of their lives. They are denied opportunity while the government funds murderous terrorist activities and squanders billions on issues that have no relevance to the interests and prosperity of the Iranian people. Furthermore, in today's era of globalization, they are increasingly alarmed at the isolation of Iran from the international community.

Young Iranians are not alone in their demand for fundamental change. Joining them are human rights crusaders, women who have lost their freedom under the ruling cleric, religious minorities and ethnic communities treated as second-class citizens or worse, academics denied intellectual freedom, labor leaders unable to speak for workers' rights as they should, and news media muzzled or shut down.

This frustration, this anger, can be harnessed as a positive, unstoppable force, a wave that brings about change in Iran. With the support of the international community, a new era can begin in this ancient, much loved country-a country full of promise and great potential.

I am not talking about a violent revolution; I am talking about a collective will of the people, similar to what we have witnessed in India, Poland, South Africa, Ukraine, and many of the former USSR states. Call it a velvet revolution or an orange revolution-Whatever the term, the goal is for a peaceful democratic conversion.

Longing to see freedom thrive

When I left Iran in 1978, I had the opportunity of completing my pilot's training in the United States Air Force, completing my education at the University of Southern California, and forming and raising a family in the United States. My experiences of life in America and other democratic nations have given me a deep appreciation for and dedication to the values of freedom and democracy. But my emotions, like those of many Iranians around the globe, remain tied to our ancient homeland. We long to see freedom thrive there again and dream of the day we can finally return home.

Our goal is nothing less than respect and dignity for all Iranians, observance of human rights for all citizens, programs to address critical social and economic problems, and harmonious, peaceful relations with Middle Eastern neighbors, the West, and the broader international community.

A symbol of this will be the restoration of the true colors of Iran-the flag bearing the lion and the sun-a visual declaration for the world that Iran is once and for all a free, open and secular society, with a government truly representing the hopes and aspirations of Iranians today and for future generations.

Therefore, I invite you to join me alongside committed groups in Iran and around the world who share this vision.

Change must come. Change will come. And, as always, I dedicate myself to a future democratic Iran.

Reza Pahlavi

Persian translation is attached.

RP Secretariat

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