

Political Statement by Iranian Cultural and Political Activists On the Anniversary of the Constitutional Revolution and the 1953 Coup

19 August 2003(28 mordad 1382)

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Contemporary Iranian history has been marked by the efforts of its people to establish the rule of law, the accountability of political leadership, democracy, and independence from external domination. In pursuit of these aims it was inevitable that our nation would face two fundamental obstacles. The first one was despotic government/dictatorship (power that was not restricted by law or any societal agreement or simply the rule of the minority) which was the predominant form of rule whereby popular sovereignty was negated. The second obstacle were various foreign powers who desired a subservient population so that they could access our natural resources, our markets, and as a result they placed limits on our ability to govern ourselves.

The month of *Mordad* (July/August) is remembered by our nation for two events, one sweet the other bitter. Both are to be understood in the context of the pursuit of the aforementioned political goals. August 5th (*Mordad* 14) is remembered as the day of victory for the Constitutional Revolution [1905-1911]. A movement which as survived for close to a century and for which August 19 (28 *Mordad*) is recalled as the day that the national movement of Iran was defeated due to a coup d'etat that united the forces of internal and external dictatorship. Fifty years have passed since this momentous event.

After the Tobacco Revolt [1891-92], the Muslim people of Iran, were able for the first time to demonstrate not only that they could resist a dictator and his despotic rule but that they could also break his stranglehold on society. Based on this self-confidence and under the leadership of the enlightened clergy and intellectuals who were resisting political despotism, as a result of the victory of the Constitutional Revolution, this nation was able to establish the foundations of parliamentary democracy in Iran.

Prior to the Constitutional Revolution the political rulers in Iran felt no responsibility or commitment toward the people and they exercised their rule without a commitment to the law or any moral principles whatsoever. During this despotic period of governance the regulations that affected people's lives were a function of the personal whim of the Shah which could change at a moment's notice. During the Constitutional Revolution the supporters of freedom in Iran in pursuit of a "House of Justice" and "The Rule of Law" revolted. They did so to establish the rule of law over society and to prevent the personal whims of the Shah from reigning supreme. These goals of the Constitutional Revolution of Iran continue to be held in high esteem by our people.

The success of the Constitutional Revolution also has been educational for our nation's political development. It has taught us that when we are united, notwithstanding the machinations of foreign powers, we can turn external threats into opportunities to

advance our political development. Furthermore, the Constitutional Revolution has demonstrated that Islam has the capacity, under the guidance of independent and knowledgeable religious experts, to challenge arrogant authority, promote legal equality among citizens, along with pluralism, a vibrant intellectual culture, minority rights and also to give constitutional legitimacy to these ideas. This is a lesson to all Iranian freedom seekers that instead of quarreling with religion and following the interpretation of Islam of the powerful, they should extract and refine a progressive interpretation of Islam. This is the best way for intellectuals and political activists to connect with the aspirations of the masses.

In the ensuing years the clash between the democratic forces in Iran continued following the coup d'état of 22 February 1921 (3 *Esfand* 1299) and the establishment of the Pahlavi monarchy in 1925. The experience of constitutionalism, however, that was derived from the Constitutional Revolution, remain a guide and a source of reference for Iranian freedom seekers in the mid-decades of the 20th century.

The symbolic defeat of despotism in August 1941 (*Shahrivar* 1320) provided an opportunity to establish a quasi-democratic process in Iran. The national movement of Iran took full advantage of the opportunity, despite the difficult social conditions at the time, to promote independence, national unity and further democratization. However due to the activities of both foreign and domestic enemies and certain weakness and mistakes of some political actors at the time, this resulted in the coup d'état of 19 August 1953 (28 *Mordad* 1332) and the re-imposition of dictatorial rule in Iran. Similarly, the experience of the August 19, 1953 coup has produced valuable lessons for our people.

Our people remember how two global powers collaborated to orchestrate the 1953 coup against the national and legitimate government of Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh in open contempt for the United Nations Charter and other international agreements. In its place they imposed on us an oppressive, corrupt and puppet regime. Iranians will not forget how their cries for freedom and democracy were sacrificed by the powers that coveted our natural resources.

The other bitter lesson that our people have learned is how violence and illegal political behaviour have been detrimental to our national interest. The net result of street disturbances, disappearances and executions – whether under guise of socialism, anti-imperialism, Islamic fundamentalism or nationalism – has weakened the rule of law and popular sovereignty in our country.

The lesson of our national struggle to date has also demonstrated that our people value politicians who while being both practical and flexible according to changing circumstances are also firmly committed to upholding certain national principles that will not be sacrificed or negotiated away. Such politicians who stand the test of time and are held in high esteem are both connected to political realities and committed to defending certain principles. Only this type of political leaders can gain the confidence of the people and be trusted to lead the nation in pursuit of its lofty goals. Genuine political leaders such as this will never compromise or negotiate away their moral and ethical

convictions. By contrast, certain political forces who are implicated in the August 1953 coup and who in order exonerate themselves from their complicity have allied themselves with Iran's enemies. Such people are forever condemned in the collective consciousness of our nation.

Our nation, therefore, has inherited a century of political history that is bittersweet. The future generations will not accept us ignoring the lessons of this history. Only by basing our political decisions today on the lessons of the past can we Iranians get beyond the current political deadlock in our country while simultaneously preserving our immediate and long-term national interests.

The signatories of this document who are both cognizant of the lessons of our history and the numerous sacrifices and precious lives that have lost along the way; and in the hope that our citizens will continue to pursue the lofty goals mentioned above sign this political statement whose demands are as follows:

1. The accountability of leadership and placing limits on the power of the state has been a central demand of the Iranian people for the past 100 years. Our people have been striving for the implementation of the rule of law and the peaceful transfer of political power. Implicit in the notion of legitimate rule of any authority is the accountability of the ruler toward to the ruled. In order to assure that accountability exists in any political system there must be effective mechanisms, relevant institutions and a political process that is geared toward reaching this goal. Both the constitution that was created during the Constitutional Revolution and the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran were premised on the idea of political accountability. However in today's political climate accountability, which is the essence of democracy, is nowhere to be found. For example, a great deal of power in today's Iran belongs to the Supreme Clerical Leader and other state institutions that are appointed by this same person. In reality, due to the inattention of certain relevant institutions (The Council of Experts), there is no effective democratic control or monitoring of the people in power. Therefore in recent years it has been evident that there is no effective way to protest the behaviour of the top political leaders in Iran and resist their policies that are widely opposed by the population at large. The net consequences of these policies are that rather than strengthening and stabilizing our political system it is being driven toward instability and violence.
2. In the same way that the people of Iran do not need a guardian to dictate their internal affairs, they also do not need an external guardian. The bitter experience that our people have derived from the behaviour of great powers (in particular the United States and Britain) – whether as a result of the August 19, 1953 coup (28 *Mordad*), the rule of the corrupt Pahlavi regime, or the war that was imposed on us by Iraq – has demonstrated that we should never welcome superficial slogans or place the salvation of our nation in the hands of foreign powers. We are proud to be the offspring of this mature and brave people who in the last century have launched to glorious revolutions and two great political movements for reform. Therefore we are hoping that by procuring the participation of all our citizens from various walks of life we

can eventually obtain our historic goals as outlined above. We desire to live under the rule of our own people not those of foreigners. The only people who desire to be ruled by outsiders are those who have turned a blind eye to the lessons of our political history.

3. In the view of the signatories of this statement the wishes of any nation required it to pass through various stages of political development. At each stage of development certain themes need to be explored that have a connection with themes that have preceded it. Therefore, we consider the abrogation of freedom, human rights, democracy and republicanism – which are our cherished ideals – to be an insult to our people. The people of Iran have proven for the past century that they desire the right to self-determination and are political prepared for its realization. In this regard they have rejected the unreformable, corrupt and oppressive nature of a monarchical system and have chosen republicanism as the best system for realizing its aims and preserving its political deals.

4. During these difficult times, more than ever, the people of Iran need to engage in a national dialogue in order to promote mutual understanding. However because there seems to be no possibility of reaching their desired goals, political apathy and disbelief at the prospects for reform have sunk deep roots in our society and has alienated people from the public sphere. As we pass through this sensitive period of time, the signatories of this statement openly declare that by laying the groundwork for the participation of the people in the governing of their affairs can bridge the current chasm between the government and the people as well as deter any foreign powers from interfering in our country. Thus we believe that it is the responsibility of all the wielders of power in Iran to allow the widest possible participation and political competition to take place among those individuals and groups who respect the constitution and agree to operate within the framework of the law. These same political leaders should also guarantee the personal security of all Iranian citizens and allow the people to determine their own policies and plans vis-à-vis the pressing issues of our day. If they do not voluntarily allow this process to take place – which was occurring in the May 1997 president election where millions of citizens were brought to the ballot box – the involuntary and forced imposition of change on the political leadership will be the likely result.

Efforts at promoting the rule of the people should include: freedom for all political activists, students, lawyers, journalists, artists and cultural critics, the removal of the ban on publications, the ending of the supervisory role of the Guardian Council and reforming the composition and functioning of the many state appointed institutions. Furthermore, the violators of the rights of citizens should be removed from office, the laws passed by the parliament be respected and at a minimum steps should be taken to demonstrate that the ruling authorities have decided to give attention to the pressing issues of the people who are demanding answers to the myriad of problems that confront Iranian society.

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