

POLITICS

How to Save Iran: Day 1

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📷 More than 40 political, social and human rights activists inside and outside Iran, some from inside the Islamic Republic’s prisons, joined a virtual seminar to try to answer the question: How to save Iran?



For the first time, more than 40 political, social and human rights activists inside and outside Iran, some from inside the Islamic Republic’s prisons, joined a virtual seminar to try to answer the question: How to save Iran?

Twenty-three participants live in Iran, and eight of them are in prison.

The symposium was held on the Clubhouse app on April 21-22. It started with statements by journalist and religious scholar Mohammad Javad Akbarin and Ardeshir Amir-Arjomand, a lawyer and advisor to Mir Hossein Mousavi, a former prime minister who has been under house arrest since 2011.

The following is a summary of the first day of this virtual event.

For more than 40 years, the government of the Islamic Republic has created crises that have endangered the lives of Iranian citizens from every walk of life. The issue was prominently mentioned by the participants on the first day of the seminar.



Ardeshir Amir-Arjomand started by pointing out the threats that the Islamic Republic's government has created for Iranian society, especially women. "The only component of the government that works effectively is its oppression apparatus," he said.

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He also mentioned Mousavi's latest message about holding a referendum and electing a constituent assembly that would write a new constitution. He stated that, in the past decades, the Iranian society has been forced to fight for changing its future as a result of the brutal repression of women, men and even children, the spread of poverty and the deepening economic crisis, the fall in the national currency's value and runaway inflation, Tehran's adventurous foreign policy, widespread and systematic corruption, ever-increasing gender discrimination and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities and the environmental crisis.

After decades of efforts to improve the situation through elections and civil society activism, Iranians are now frustrated and are facing the full force of the regime. At the same time, it appears that society has reached a point where it believes the structure of the ruling political system, the inefficient constitution and the unaccountability of those in power has blocked the road to any change and reform.

Desperate people have decided that the only way open to them is to take to the streets across the country to protest and voice their just demands, but they have been faced with an obstinate government that has responded to their demands with repression, prison and executions. Therefore, finding a way to save Iran is now more vital than ever.

Iran Is Ready for a Fundamental Change

The first panel of the seminar, titled "Iran needs and is ready for a fundamental change" was moderated by Reza Alijani. Participants included historian and university professor Hashem Aghajari, political activist Ali Afshari, Mehrdad Khonsari, who was a diplomat under the monarchy, political activist Behzad Karimi and jailed human rights activist Narges Mohammadi.

Dissident journalist Keyvan Samimi was arrested on the eve of the seminar. In a speech he transmitted to the organizers of the seminar before his arrest, he called on Iranians inside the country and abroad to work together in a united front for democracy while accepting their diversity of ideas and beliefs.

Knowing that he might be arrested, he said, "Have no fear because members who are abroad will continue their activities and work with international organizations to secure the release of those who might get arrested."

In her speech from Tehran's Evin prison, Mohammadi described Iranian society as being "on the move." She said that the Islamic Republic is witnessing repeated cycles of protests, which the activist said have spread from group to group, from institution to institution and from city to city.

The Iranian "Rainbow," Civil Society and Justice

"During more than four decades of human rights violations, death and crime have become normalized. What should have shocked us no longer horrifies us and has become part of our normal lives," human rights activist and political prisoner Golrokh Iraee told the second panel.

She said that the silence of international organizations, the resumption of open and secret dealings with the leaders of the Iranian government and the change in how the world treats the Islamic Republic have led to an increase in the regime's military might to such an extent that it has become uncontrollable, unashamedly opening fire on the people and committing massacres.

"Freedom will not be realized in Iran's future unless justice is carried out," was the message of this panel, called "The Iranian Rainbow, Civil Society and Seekers of Justice."

Monireh Baradaran, a writer whose brother was executed during the summer of **1988 mass executions**, pointed out that demands for justice laid the groundwork for the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement and turned it into a revolutionary movement that is demanding the downfall of the regime. "Each and every force that is seeking an alternative [to the Islamic Republic regime] must commit itself to realizing the calls for justice," she said.

The second panel was led by journalist and nationalist-religious activist Taghi Rahmani. The participants included **Mahvash** and Fariba Kamalabadi, two Baha'i civil activists and political prisoners, Iranian-Kurdish journalist Adnan Anpour, Zahra Rahimi, a political activist and a member of the Society of Students Against Poverty, Parvin Fahimi, a

civil rights activist whose son was killed in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election, and teachers' union activist Aziz Ghasemzadeh.

Iran's Future and Contrasting Discourses

The third panel, moderated by Mohammad Javad Akbarin, was called "Iran's Future and Contrasting Discourses." Speakers included sociologist Mehrdad Darvishpour, Abolfazl Ghadyani, a religious political activist and political prisoner, internationally recognized human rights lawyer Mehrangiz Kar, sociologist and political prisoner Saeed Madani, political activist Elaheh Mizani, who is also the wife of Abbas Amir-Entezam, a deputy prime minister in the interim government set up after the 1979 revolution who died in 2018 while serving a life sentence, and jailed political activist Faezeh Hashemi, the daughter of the late President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Madani's speech about the regime's violence was read by political activist Jafar Ghadimkhani since Madani is currently held in Evin prison. Madani concluded that in the past three decades social movements have avoided violence because "violence reproduces violence," and, as a result, "it makes it more costly for nations to achieve a better life."

Madani ended his speech by saying: "Should we put the Mahsa Uprising on the long list of failed resistance movements of the Iranian people against tyranny and injustice?...Should we close its case now that the protests have subsided? The answer is negative."

The last speaker of this panel was Hashemi: "If, under present conditions, we review the slogans of the [1979] revolution, we are overwhelmed by a great sense of loss. Look at what we thought would happen and look at what really happened! How come our Iran has not thrived despite all the revolutions and movements in its history, and each time the situation has become such that we once again regret the past? Now, after losing many opportunities and paying a high price, we are again asking, 'What do we want and what we must do to save Iran?'"

Hashemi said that Iran must have an "independent judiciary," "replace state religion with personal religion," "have relations with all countries in the world," "reconcile human will and divine will," "end all gender, religious and racial discriminations", "abolish death penalty and other inhumane punishments" and "respect freedom of speech, religion and the choice of clothing."

To achieve these goals, civil struggle must continue, all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners must be released and solidarity among the people must be strengthened, Hashemi said. The activist called for referendums that would lead to fundamental changes in the fields of foreign policy, religion, women's situation and the nuclear program. A referendum is also needed to answer this question: Does the country need a Supreme Leader?

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