

From Below: Iranian Civil Society Against War and Tyranny

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In the shadow of sirens and smoke, where Tehran's skyline is once again marked by fire and fear, a different kind of voice is emerging from within Iran—one that rejects both the bombs falling from foreign skies and the violence of the regime that claims to defend the homeland. While Israel's attack on Iranian cities have intensified regional chaos and the Islamic Republic responds to the attack, an unprecedented wave of domestic dissent is rising from below. It is not the state, nor its generals or clerics, but workers, teachers, feminists, and writers—many of them imprisoned—who are speaking the clearest truths about war, justice, and survival.

In the past two days, six distinct but politically aligned statements have been issued by various sectors of Iranian civil society. These statements come from labor unions, educational syndicates, imprisoned women's rights activists, and the Iranian Writers' Association. They do not echo the calls for vengeance or nationalist pride. Instead, they condemn all sides of the conflict—from Israeli occupation and imperial violence to the Islamic Republic's repressive and militarized rule. Together, these voices form a unified rejection of militarism and authoritarianism, and they call for peace, democracy, and dignity—not as slogans, but as survival strategies in a collapsing region.

This article presents and weaves together those six statements—not as isolated expressions, but as one collective resistance. It is a snapshot of Iran’s living, breathing civil society: battered, besieged, but still refusing to choose between two versions of death. The war may be fought by states, but the price is paid by the people. And the people are saying: not in our name.

Voices from the Educational Sector

Among the earliest and clearest voices to speak out were Iranian teachers—those who spend their days nurturing children and whose commitment to peace is grounded in classrooms, not parliaments. Two key organizations, the **Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers’ Trade Associations** and the **Tehran Teachers’ Union**, released separate but deeply connected statements that challenge both external aggression and internal repression.

The Coordinating Council condemned the Israeli attack on Iranian soil as a violation of international law and a threat to civilian life. But their statement went beyond national borders. They rejected the militarism of all regional actors, including the Islamic Republic, and held Iran’s rulers responsible for escalating tensions through secrecy, exclusion, and military adventurism. “War is neither a blessing nor an opportunity,” they declared, “it is a disaster whose main victims are ordinary people, children, women, and civilians.”

The Tehran Teachers’ Union echoed this message, focusing on the emotional toll of violence on the next generation. “We work with children every day,” they wrote, “children who are trying to understand a world that should be about learning, friendship, and dreams—not bombs and destruction.” The statement sharply criticized Israel’s military campaign, calling it a crime, but also insisted that “no country can build peace with a clenched fist.”

Both statements reject neutrality in the face of suffering. To remain silent, they argue, is to normalize violence. Instead, they urge all civil and cultural organizations—inside and outside Iran—to resist war, defend human solidarity, and replace the language of power with that of education, dignity, and peace.

The teachers do not side with states. They side with students, with workers, with the future. In their voices, there is a clear message: when regimes prepare for war, the people must prepare for justice.

The Feminists: Behind Bars but Not Silent

From inside the walls of Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison, seven Iranian feminist and labor activists issued two powerful statements that cut through the propaganda of both war and nationalism. These women—jailed for their role in organizing protests and defending basic rights—have become some of the clearest voices against the violence engulfing the region.

In one statement, **Reyhaneh Ansari, Sakineh Parvaneh, Varisheh Moradi, and Golrokh Iraee** speak directly to the Iranian people and international left-wing movements. Their words reject all hope in foreign salvation. “The path to freedom for Iran,” they write, “lies with mass resistance and the power of social movements.” They warn against the illusion that foreign states—whether Western powers or regional actors—can liberate oppressed people. All they bring, the statement argues, are new chains.

The women describe Israel as a regime built on occupation and genocide, a militarized outpost of U.S. imperialism responsible for decades of war across Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and now Gaza. But their condemnation is not one-sided. They sharply criticize the Islamic Republic’s repression and manipulation of war for internal control, saying it is laying the groundwork for “another 1988”—a reference to the mass executions of political prisoners. For them, war is a tool used by all ruling powers to silence dissent.

In a second statement, **Anisha Asadollahi, Nahid Khodajo, and Nasrin KhezrJavadi** describe themselves as “hostages” of a government that wages war abroad while crushing its citizens at home. They call on the people to resist the imposed war through collective presence and solidarity. “Wars will not benefit the people in any way,” they write. “It is the people—who played no role in starting these wars—who will always pay the price.”

From behind iron doors, these women assert a truth that few outside prison walls dare to say: that liberation cannot be imported, and that the struggle against occupation and dictatorship must be led by those who live its consequences. Their words are both a warning and a call to action. The real resistance, they insist, lies not in missiles or slogans, but in solidarity from below.

While these voices rise from behind prison walls, another declaration has emerged from outside: **a statement signed by more than 340 feminist and equality-seeking activists** in Iran. Issued in response to the Israeli military attack and the Islamic Republic’s reaction, this statement places the blame on both patriarchal and militarist regimes, and calls for civil society to resist destruction with collective action:

“At a time when two warmongering and patriarchal governments have taken countless civilian lives hostage—especially women and children—we, a group of Iranian women’s rights activists, call on all our fellow citizens to unite in continuing the path of *Woman, Life, Freedom*. War brings nothing but destruction. It leads to killings and widespread economic and social harm. War will result in further weakening and repression of political and civil activists. We see it as our duty to nurture the seeds of Iran’s women’s movement alongside other popular movements, and now more than ever, to reaffirm our commitment to the goals of *Woman, Life, Freedom* against patriarchal powers, militarism, destruction, and repression.”

This public appeal situates the feminist struggle not as a side issue, but as a central force in Iran’s democratic and anti-authoritarian movement. It names both the Israeli state and the Islamic Republic as war-making, patriarchal regimes that use fear and death to

dominate women and civilians. And it insists that the slogan “**Woman, Life, Freedom**” is not just a chant from the past—it is a living project for collective emancipation in the present.

From prison cells to the streets, the feminist position is unwavering: **there will be no freedom through war, and no justice under dictatorship.**

The Labor Movement and Social Resistance: No to War, No to Fascism

While the Islamic Republic rallies its war rhetoric under the banner of “defending sovereignty,” Iran’s labor movement and allied social organizations are offering a radically different vision—one grounded in class struggle, not nationalist slogans. From bus drivers to nurses, from sugarcane workers to children’s rights defenders, a powerful front of resistance has emerged, declaring with clarity: **this is not our war.**

In a joint statement issued by the **Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company**, the **Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers’ Syndicate**, and the **Retirees’ Alliance**, some of Iran’s most resilient labor bodies categorically rejected the military escalation between Israel and the Islamic Republic. “We, the working people of Iran,” they wrote, “gain nothing from war, militarism, bombings, or imperialist policies.” Instead, workers are already paying the price—in poverty, repression, hunger, and death.

The statement sharply denounced Israel’s bombing of civilian areas, oil refineries, and workplaces, calling such actions war crimes. But it just as firmly rejected Israeli claims of goodwill toward the Iranian people, citing them as transparent propaganda—particularly in light of incendiary threats like the Israeli Defense Minister’s call to “burn Tehran.”

At the same time, these labor organizations turned their critique inward. They named the Islamic Republic for what it is: “**repressive, adventurous, and anti-worker.**” They listed decades of crackdowns on labor protests, denial of union rights, and the persecution of labor activists. The workers’ message was unmistakable: they are not pawns of the state—they are fighting it.

This position was echoed and deepened in a broader **Joint Statement of Labor and Social Organizations Against War and the Current Dangerous Crisis**, signed by a diverse alliance of groups: **truck drivers, oil contract workers, nurses, educators, children’s rights defenders, retirees, and women’s movements.** Together, they described the current war as a deadly confrontation between “**two fascist regimes**”: the Israeli state and the Islamic Republic.

Their framing is uncompromising. The war, they argue, is not accidental. It is the inevitable result of decades of militarism, repression, and imperial alignment. It has pushed Iranian society to the brink—displacing people, traumatizing communities, and deepening hunger and fear, especially among children and the poor.

These groups oppose not just military aggression, but the entire logic of war: weapons of mass destruction, nuclear brinkmanship, and the silencing of dissent under the pretext of national defense. “They want to silence our protests by calling us spies,” the statement warns, “by using war as an excuse for more repression.”

What distinguishes these declarations is their **explicitly revolutionary stance**. They do not stop at denouncing war—they demand an end to all military projects and call for the **renewal of popular protest**. “The answer to this disaster is continued revolution,” they declare, asserting that liberation will not come from armies or governments, but from the streets, the unions, and the struggle for bread and freedom.

Among the signatories are the **Kermanshah Electricity and Metal Workers Association**, the “**Don’t Execute**” Campaign, the **Women’s Voice of Iran**, and various grassroots protest councils—evidence of a growing political convergence from below.

The Iranian Writers’ Association: Against the Death Machines

Amid the roar of missiles and state propaganda, the **Iranian Writers’ Association (Kanoon Nevisandegane Iran)** has issued a stark and unflinching statement. Long a target of censorship and repression, the Association situates the current war not as a rupture, but as a continuation of two authoritarian projects—one rooted in occupation, the other in internal massacre.

They describe the confrontation as a war “between a fascist regime built on occupation and genocide, and a government founded on spilling the blood of dissidents and freedom-seekers.” In this framing, war does not merely destroy lives—it **threatens to erase the historical memory of struggle**, including the achievements of Iran’s 2022 uprising. The danger, they warn, is that what grows from the scorched earth of war may not be peace or justice, but **racial extremism, nationalism, and new forms of fascism**.

The Writers’ Association spares no side. Israel, they argue, with the help of its media allies, frames its military campaigns as defense while killing civilians and silencing outrage. The Islamic Republic, in parallel, uses war to expand its grip on power, justifying arrests, censorship, and the threat of renewed massacres by invoking national security. “Spill blood so that our life may endure”—they remind us—was the founding logic of the regime, and it still shapes its strategy today.

The statement also draws attention to the **global media order**, where “two poles” dominate the narrative. One turns a war-crime-ridden state into a heroic savior; the other hides authoritarianism behind the language of homeland defense. In both cases, **independent voices are devoured**. The Writers’ Association insists that genuine resistance must break through this binary.

Their call is directed not only at Iranians but at **writers, intellectuals, and cultural workers everywhere**. They demand that these actors amplify the independent voices of the people and stand against both state propaganda and intellectual complicity. The role of literature, they remind us, is not to polish power, but to speak truth from the margins.

The pen, in their view, remains a weapon—**not for the state, but for the people.**

Solidarity with Palestine

One of the clearest points of political and ethical alignment across these statements is the **explicit solidarity with the Palestinian people**. While rejecting the Islamic Republic's instrumental use of Palestine for its own repression, the voices from Iran's civil society draw a sharp line between false state alliances and real human solidarity. They leave no room for ambiguity: **the Palestinian cause is just, but it cannot be used to justify internal oppression or regional war.**

The imprisoned women's rights activists refer to Israel as "a regime built through massacre" and denounce it as "the American military base in the Middle East," responsible not only for the occupation of Palestine, but for devastation across Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen. The description of Gaza is not filtered through geopolitical calculation—it is spoken as a human and historical catastrophe, part of the same global logic that underpins state violence in Iran.

The Iranian Writers' Association similarly calls out the use of Gaza's suffering to justify a new wave of executions, arrests, and ideological policing at home. They emphasize that "the joy people feel when seeing the death of their killers should never be mistaken for welcoming the invasion of their land and lives." The writers place **Palestine and Iran within a shared structure of repression**—not as enemies or saviors of each other, but as peoples crushed under authoritarian war machines.

Labor organizations echo this perspective. In their statement, they condemn **Israel's war crimes in Gaza** alongside the attacks on Iranian infrastructure. But they do not adopt the regime's rhetoric. Instead, they point to the suffering of ordinary people in both places. **Solidarity, for them, is not about slogans—it is about refusing to let any state speak in the name of the oppressed while silencing them at home.**

What emerges is not a rhetorical nod to Palestine, but a grounded position: **the liberation of Palestine and the liberation of Iran are interconnected, but neither can come through militarism or state violence.** True solidarity must come from the people themselves—from below, not above.

From the Margins to the Majority

What these statements collectively reveal is something the world's media, states, and even many international movements continue to overlook: **Iranian civil society is not inactive or silent, and it is not confused.** In the face of bombs, arrests, economic collapse, and censorship, workers, teachers, prisoners, feminists, and writers are articulating a clear political position—one that neither apologizes for the Islamic Republic nor justifies Israeli militarism.

This is not a fringe perspective. These are not isolated voices. These statements represent the most organized and consistent sectors of Iranian society—the ones who have weathered decades of repression and yet remain committed to justice. Their refusal to fall in line behind either state is not naïveté. It is political clarity born of struggle.

While governments trade missiles and narratives, these voices speak of food, classrooms, unions, language, and survival. They remind us that the real battlefield is not just in the skies but in the streets, the prisons, the workplaces, and the schools. They remind us that **solidarity is not a slogan but a responsibility**—to listen, to amplify, and to organize.

If the international left, human rights institutions, and peace movements are serious about justice in the Middle East, they must stop framing the region through the choices imposed by states and empires. The choice is not between Tel Aviv and Tehran. The real choice is between domination and liberation, between war and life, between silence and solidarity.

And in Iran, the people have already made that choice.

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