Supreme Leader's Speech in Meeting with Outstanding Women - 19 /Apr/ 2014

The following is the full text of the speech delivered on April 19, 2014 by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a meeting with outstanding women. The meeting was held on the occasion of the auspicious birthday anniversary of Hazrat Fatima Zahra (God's greetings be upon her).

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

First of all, I would like to welcome the ladies in this meeting and I congratulate you on the occasion of the auspicious birthday anniversary of Fatima Zahra (God's greetings be upon her) and Women's Day and Mother's Day. As was pointed out in this meeting, the coincidence of this important social occasion of the country with the birthday anniversary of Fatima Zahra (God's greetings be upon her) - particularly this year when our people remembered that great personality and held ceremonies for her two times in the beginning and at the end of the year - is an opportunity for understanding and learning lessons from the life of that great person.

First, the spiritual positions of Fatima Zahra (God's greetings be upon her) are among the best spiritual positions which belong only to a few individuals. She was infallible. Infallibility is particular to a few individuals who are chosen by God and that great Hazrat - Fatima Zahra (God's greetings be upon her) - is one of these few individuals. We should consider the fact that that Muslim woman and that mujahide in the way of God lived only to the age of 20. Of course, different narrations say that her age was from 18 to 25 years at the time of her martyrdom.

She was a young woman who enjoyed such a lofty position of spirituality which was equal to saints, prophets and the like and she was called the mistress of all women by divine messengers. Besides this spiritual position, each outstanding characteristic and each important role in the personal life of this great lady is a lesson.

Her piety, her modesty and purity, her jihad, her care for her husband, her way of raising children, her understanding of politics and her presence in the most important arenas of the life of an individual of those times - whether during her childhood and teenage years or after her marriage - are each a lesson. They are a lesson not only for you ladies but also for the entire humanity.

Therefore, this coincidence is a lesson for us. We should pay careful attention to the life of Fatima Zahra (s.a.), we should understand her life with a new outlook and we should make it a model for ourselves in the real sense of the word.

As for the issue of women in the Islamic Republic and in our country and society, first I would tell you that whenever I meet with Muslim, religious and educated women on such occasions, I deeply thank God. The fact that there are so many knowledgeable, educated, broad-minded and outstanding women - in intellectual and practical areas - in our society is really one of the greatest glories of the Islamic Republic. This is a very great blessing and a source of honor.

Today, only one honorable lady delivered a speech, but we have had numerous meetings with ladies in which many of them delivered a speech. When each of them made certain statements, this opened the door in our minds to new outlooks and new thoughts. Building such a large number of lofty, outstanding and broad-minded individuals is one of the greatest glories of the Islamic Republic. Today, when we take a look, we see that the name of our women have been written on many books including scientific, research-based, historical, literature, political and artistic

books. The writings of our women - whether articles or books - are among the best writings in the Islamic Republic today. This is really a source of honor and it is unprecedented in our history.

We have witnessed previous eras and we have been familiar with the cultural environment of the country. We had never had such a large number of outstanding individuals in different areas, whether in seminary or academic areas. Besides, the emergence of the completely outstanding identity and the independent character of Iranian women in the arena of jihadi activities - such as the Sacred Defense Era and its aftermath until today - makes everyone humble. We have had so many wives of martyrs and disabled war veterans, so many mothers of martyrs and so many relatives of those people who laid down their lives in the way of God.

The strong willpower, firm determination and patience of these women make everyone humble. I really have a sense of humility whenever I meet with these outstanding women. I have many meetings with the mothers and wives of martyrs and disabled war veterans. When a self-sacrificing lady spends her entire life managing and improving the life of a disabled war veteran for the sake of God, this is not a minor achievement.

It is easy to say this, but it is very difficult to do it. A mother who has offered two, three, four martyrs in the way of God and who has stood firm despite this, advises us to stand firm as well. One really feels humility in the face of such greatness. These are the realities about the women of our society which are very glorious and important realities. Well, this is thankfully the bright and shining part of the issue of women in our country.

As for the issue of women in today's world and in our country, this is one of the issues which requires follow-up, deliberation and deep thinking because of different reasons. First, women form half the population of countries. How can countries - including ours - benefit from this capacity and this great resource in a healthy way? Second, how can the issue of gender - which is one of the most sensitive and delicate issues in creation - be at the service of the transcendence of humanity, not at the service of its moral decadence? Third, considering the natural differences between women and men, how can we establish and institute an unchanging pattern of behavior - whether in social environments or inside the family - through which women cannot be oppressed? These are very important issues.

If we make these two, three issues the pivot of thought, discussion and research, this will bring about a set of research-based and practical efforts. No one should think that the issue of oppressing women is particular to backward or, say, savage societies. This is not the case. If today's so-called civilized societies do not oppress women more than other societies, they do not definitely oppress them less. Well, these are important issues which should be attended to and worked on.

There were good points in the statements of the lady who delivered a speech. She pointed out the main issues that exist in our minds about this matter. Quoting from what I said before, she said that the country needs a supreme supra-governmental center for discussing and working on this important issue. These issues are our main issues.

The issue of women and the issue of family are our main issues. Of course, the issue of women is not separable from the issue of family. I would like to add that if someone wants to discuss the issue of women by separating it from the issue of family, they will face certain problems in understanding and finding the cure. These two issues should be studied together although they are two single issues.

Well, such a center is necessary. Of course, it has not been formed until now although we brought it up. We do not have a center which can study, follow up and implement a proper and comprehensive plan about the issue of women - all those issues which were pointed out in this meeting and a number of other issues. This center should be formed. Of course, this has certain requirements.

What I would like to discuss with you today is two, three points. One is that if we want to think and act in the right way about the issue of women - whether in the center which was pointed out or in any other center and organization

- and if we do not want to make a mistake in this regard, we should completely clear our minds of the clichés of western products.

Westerners misunderstood the issue of women. They acted in the wrong way and they promoted this misunderstanding and these wrong, deviant and deadly actions throughout the world like common currency in a country. Besides, their propaganda apparatus, which is very broad in scope, does not allow those individuals who have different opinions from theirs to express them. If you want to find a correct solution on the issue of women and accompany it with its major requirements and if you want to move forward and achieve results in the long run, you should clear your minds of western thoughts about the issue of women.

I am not saying that we should be uninformed about their ideas. This is not what I am saying. We are not advocates of ignorance. I myself am an advocate of knowledge and familiarity, but we should completely reject the authority of these thoughts and ideas. Western thoughts and opinions on the issue of women cannot be a source of happiness and guidance for human societies at all.

First, their thoughts are based on materialistic and non-divine epistemology. Well, this is wrong. Any knowledge-based and intellectual school of thought which is based on materialistic understanding and belief is naturally wrong. The outlook towards the truths of creation should be known, understood and followed up together with the outlook towards divine epistemology, belief in the existence and power of God and divine presence and authority. Therefore, because the basis and root of western thoughts are materialistic, they are wrong. This is the first reason.

The second reason is that a businesslike, profit-based and economic view has influenced the western outlook on the issue of women. This can clearly be seen in the history of the industrial revolution. In Europe, women did not have the right to own something. Women's property belonged to men and their husbands. They did not have the right to possess something in their name. And when democracy was promoted in the west, women did not have suffrage.

In such a world, investors suddenly thought of the issue of the industrial revolution, factories and the efficient presence of women in factories with low costs. Then, they granted women suffrage so that they could draw them to factories and give them lower wages. Naturally, the entrance of women to the arena of employment had its own requirements and results which have continued until today. Therefore, besides the fact that the western outlook towards women is a non-divine and materialistic outlook, the policies which have brought about the current conditions in the western world - particularly in Europe - have been accompanied by a businesslike, profit-based and economic outlook.

Another reason why we should avoid the western outlook on the issue of women is that in this outlook, women are a means for satisfying lust. This is undeniable. If someone makes this claim, some people may create uproar. They may say, "No, this is not the case". However, when one takes a look at their lives, one sees that this is the dominant outlook. In social environments, the more women appear in an immodest way, the more appropriate it will be.

They do not have the same opinion about men. In official meetings, men should dress up. They should wear ties and suits. They should dress formally on such occasions. But in these formal meetings, women should appear in a different way. This has no other philosophy and reason except that women should entertain men's lustful eyes. Today, the western world is like this. It is practically the greatest oppression which the western world shows towards women.

I am not after finding newspaper clippings. But it was yesterday or the day before yesterday that I found something in a newspaper. I found it to be a very important writing. I have brought it to this meeting to read it for you. A book written by Jimmy Carter - the former president of America - has been published which is named "A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, And Power". Jimmy Carter says in this book, "Every year, 100,000 girls are sold as slaves in America where the owner of a brothel can buy girls - who are usually Latin American or African - at only

1000 dollars".

He also refers to the rapes which occur in colleges where only one case out of 25 cases is reported. He goes on to say that only one percent of rapists are put to trial in the army. One cries when one reads such things. We can see many such writings in newspapers. I see such writings as well, but I never base my opinions on them. However, these are realities.

Jimmy Carter is a well-known personality after all and this is his book. What kind of situation is this? What kind of respect - towards women - is this? A well-known and famous western writer writes a novel for dignifying prostitution. This novel has been translated in Persian as well. This book points out how sex dealers go to Latin-American countries and take girls with them to sell them in such centers. They do this by giving the girls empty promises. Of course, this is related to Europe, not America. This book and this novel tries to pretend that prostitution is a dignified job. This is the western culture towards women. This is their respect towards women.

If we want our outlook towards the issue of women to be healthy, reasonable and precise, the first condition is that we should completely clear our minds of the statements that westerners make about women - about their employment, management and sexual equality.

One of the greatest mistakes of western thoughts about the issues of women is this sexual equality. Justice is a legitimate concept, but equality is sometimes legitimate and sometimes illegitimate. Why should we separate an individual who has been built for a particular domain - in terms of one's natural make up, whether physical or emotional - from that particular domain and drag her towards another domain which Allah the Exalted has built for another make-up? Why should we do this? What reason do we have for doing so? What kind of sympathy is this? Why should women be entrusted with carrying out male tasks? What kind of honor is to have women carry out male tasks?

I am sorry that sometimes women and ladies themselves show sensitivity over this issue. They ask, "What is our difference with men?" Well, there is no difference between men and women on many issues. Islam looks at men and women as human beings. There is no difference between men and women on the issue of humanity, spiritual positions and the many intellectual and scientific talents that they have. But they have two different molds. Each of these molds is shaped for a particular task. Of course, there are certain common tasks among them. Is it a service if we separate either of these two molds from their domain and put it in another domain? This is what westerners are doing. Many of their international conventions result from this outlook.

They have destroyed their own lives because of this wrong thought. They want to destroy other people's lives as well. Thankfully, you ladies are knowledgeable, well-informed and outstanding and I respect you. Whenever ladies deliver a speech in our meetings, I benefit from what they say. There was a meeting of strategic thoughts about the issue of women in this place. In that meeting, a number of ladies delivered a speech and I tell you honestly that I really benefitted from what they said.

In my opinion, if you want to think about the major issues and problems that the community of women everywhere in the world - including our country - is faced with, the first condition is that you should free yourselves and your minds of western thoughts which are a set of clichéd, wrong, fossilized and pseudo-progressive thoughts. On the face of it, these thoughts are new, but they are fossilized in actuality. On the face of it, they are helpful, but they are treacherous in actuality. You should think independently of western thoughts.

The second requirement is that you should refer to Islamic texts. You should derive the main principles and bases from the Holy Quran, the Sunnah, hadith, duas, Islamic texts and the words and behavior of the Imams (a.s.). This is revelation and revelation belongs to God. God is the Creator of you and me.

I am not saying that we should accept whatever people say in the name of religion. This is not what I want to say. Rather, we should benefit from proper religion. This can be done by employing proper methods of deduction and this is a task which can only be carried out by experts in this area. We should really benefit from God's book, the Holy Prophet's (s.w.a.) Sunnah and the infallible Imam's (a.s.) methods and words so that we can see what outlook we should adopt on the issue of women. We should derive the main guidelines from these sources.

In my opinion, these are the two main tasks. There is a third task as well which is: we should really attend to the main issues, not those issues which are of secondary importance, when working on the issues of women. Paying attention to the issue of family - particularly the issue of women's health, security, tranquility and respect in the family environment - is one of the main issues. We have a number of main issues. This is one of them.

You should see what factors take away women's tranquility and peace of mind inside the family. You should try to remove these factors with legal ways and with promotional and different other methods. This is the basis of the issue. Women are a source of tranquility at home. They are a source of tranquility for men and children including girls and boys. If women themselves do not enjoy psychological tranquility, they cannot share their tranquility with their family. A woman who is humiliated, insulted and pressured because of her job cannot be the lady of the house. She cannot be the manager of the family. This is while women are, in fact, managers of the family. This is the main issue. This is one of the main issues which has not received enough attention in our living environments - whether in the past or in the present time. This issue should receive enough attention.

The typical image of women at home is the image of a creature of secondary importance who is responsible for rendering services to others. This image is shared by many people. Some people openly express it and some people do not, although they believe it in their hearts. This is the exact opposite of what Islam has mentioned.

I have repeatedly quoted this well-known hadith: "Women are like flowers. They are not servants" [Nahjul Balaghah, Letter 31]. The Arabic word "ghahraman" means one's employee or servant. One example is: "He said to his ghahraman to do such and such a task" [Speaking in Arabic]. Another example is that a person who has many properties and lands orders his ghahraman to carry out such and such a task. This is the meaning of ghahraman. This hadith says that we should not think women are the servants of the house and that they should only do household chores. This is not the case.

Well, notice that this is one of the several chapters about women: the issue of respecting women's work at home. They are not obligated to do household chores and their work can be bought. That is to say, they can receive money for the work that they do at home. These are the things which exist in Islam and Islamic fiqh. As the lady who delivered a speech in this meeting pointed out, our fiqh is really advanced and outstanding. Some people highlight some aspects of it and forget about the rest. Besides, they completely distort certain aspects of it in order to make it compatible with western deceitful and fallacious thoughts. We have witnessed this as well.

Some people distort a number of Islamic obligations and truths so that westerners do not become annoyed. The Holy Quran says, "And if you obey most of those in the earth, they will lead you astray from Allah's way. They follow nothing but conjecture. They do nothing but lie" [The Holy Quran, 6: 116]. We should not be the followers of common thoughts in the world of ignorance and superstition. Rather, we should find and follow Islamic thoughts although some people speak ill of us. This is another issue.

Therefore, we should find the main issue. In my opinion, the main issue - or let us say, one of the main issues - is the issue of home and family. The basis of the issue is women's security and opportunities in the family environment and their home-making is for cultivating their talents. Nothing should prevent them from studying, reading, learning and writing. Of course, this is related to those women who are interested in such things. The ground should be prepared for them to carry out these tasks.

The issue of women's employment is not among the main issues. Of course, we are not at all opposed to women's employment. I myself am not at all opposed to their employment and their management as long as it does not clash with these main issues. If there is a clash, then the main issues have a priority. Naturally, one of the tasks that should be carried out in this third area is that we should see what jobs are suitable for women's characteristics. There are some jobs which are not suitable for women's make-up. Therefore, women should not pursue such jobs.

One of the tasks is that we should not impose on women those fields of study which lead to these jobs. Some people want to create uproar by saying that there is discrimination against women over the issue of universities, education and other such issues. Well, such discrimination is not bad in some areas. Discrimination is bad when it is against justice. Imagine that in a football team, you tell one player to play in attack, you tell another to play in defense and another to keep goal. Well, this is discrimination. If the player whose duty is to defend plays in attack, the team will naturally lose. If the forward is entrusted with goalkeeping - which is a task he does not know how to carry out - then, the team will naturally lose.

This is discrimination, but it is justice-based. In such discrimination, you entrust different tasks to individuals. Therefore, we should see what fields of study are suitable for women by paying attention to the lofty goals that have been specified for them. We should prepare the ground for women to study such fields. We should not force them to study certain fields just because of their performance and their grade in the entrance exam. Such fields may neither be compatible with their womanly nature nor with their lofty goals. Besides, the job that is given to them with respect to their field of study may not be compatible with their make-up. In my opinion, these things should receive attention when it comes to the issue of women's employment.

In sum, the fact that women cannot do all the jobs which men do should not be considered to be a disgrace or a flaw because this is not the case. Only those things which are not compatible with the divine nature are bad. This was what I wanted to discuss. Of course, I have written down some other points as well, but I think that this is enough.

The issue of women is an important issue. The best people who can follow up and solve this issue are women themselves. We do not suffer from a lack of educated, broad-minded, talented, literary and artistic women. Thankfully today, there are many such women in our country. As I mentioned before, we had never had such a large number of educated, knowledgeable and outstanding women in the history of our country, neither in seminary nor in academic environments. We had never had so many woman writers, poets and researchers in different fields of study.

Fortunately today, we have such women thanks to the Islamic Republic. These things have been achieved in the shade of Islam, the Islamic Republic and Imam's (r.a.) enlightening outlook towards the issue of women. This was pointed out in the statements of the lady who delivered a speech as well. We had never enjoyed such a condition in our country.

We should thank God for His blessings and we should ask Him to increase these blessings. We should thank Him for these blessings and the way to thank Him is what I pointed out in this meeting. We should look at the divine guidance and forget about the materialistic views which are promoted today by westerners and the Americans. They are very vile and they make extravagant claims. Besides, they have a propagandist outlook. If someone speaks against them, they launch a propagandist attack. But you should not pay attention to their propaganda and, by Allah's favor, you should move forward.

Greetings be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings