In a meeting with hundreds of educated and politically active women - 4 /Jan/ 2023

This morning (Wednesday), in a meeting with hundreds of educated women who are active in the cultural, social, and scientific fields, the Great Leader of the Islamic Revolution explained Islam's progressive and principled views of "women" with respect to "gender and human issues, rights and responsibilities, individual and family responsibility, and social roles and duties," calling the damage done by the modern Western world to the standing of women as profound and traitorous. He stressed that "women as wives are symbols of love and tranquillity, and as mothers represent the right to life, although it must be noted that homemaking is not the same as being house-bound instead, it means giving priority to the home and family while being socially active in various fields.

Expressing his deep satisfaction at the excellent and outstanding concepts raised in the speeches made by some of the guests, Ayatollah Khamenei added that the suggestion to use the services of cultured, educated, wise, and experienced women in various levels of decision-making in the country is an important issue which has been on my mind for quite some time and god willing we will find ways to implement it. Before delving into how Islam views the role of women in different spheres, he stressed that with respect to women's issues, the Islamic Republic's stance versus the Western hypocrite pretenders is assertive and aggressive because the modern and culturally declining West is the real culprit. It has committed crimes against women's reputation and dignity. I hope cultured and elite women can explain Islam's viewpoints by writing about it and giving speeches, hopefully impacting Western public opinion too.

Citing the verses of the Holy Quran, Ayatollah Khamenei said that from a human and gender perspective, the equality of men and women is self-evident in Islam. He added that from a human and Islamic point of view, there is no difference whatsoever between men and women.

He said that while the rights and responsibilities of men and women are different in Islam, they are balanced. He went on to say that there are differences between the two genders regarding their nature and temperament, which impacts their accountability at home and in society as individuals. It follows that women should not go against their nature.

The Leader of the Revolution stated that men's and women's responsibilities with regards to society and social issues "are the same though their roles when it comes to the defence of Islam are different and if women have not discharged their challenging responsibilities better than men, they have, at the very least, performed as well as their menfolk. To sum up, the Leader of the Revolution stated that "contrary to the highly patriarchal Western capitalism, in Islam men and women with regards to some issues enjoy the same legal, intellectual, theoretical, practical privileges. However, Westerners falsely attribute their own patriarchy to Islam.

Referring to the main principle of the capitalist system, which is the superiority of capital to human beings, he said that "from this perspective, whoever is better at accumulating wealth enjoys greater substantive value. Naturally, given the characteristics of men in terms of accumulation of wealth, the capitalist system is patriarchal.

Ayatollah Khamenei regarded the "question of employment" and a "pleasure-seeking view of women" as two ways in which the West fundamentally exploits women. He said that "the main issue with respect to women's emancipation in the West is dragging women from the home to the factory, using them as cheap labour.

He called the controversy surrounding the abolition of slavery in the American civil war in the nineteenth century

another example of fraud and abuse committed by the capitalist system against essential values. In that episode, he said in the name of liberty, the capitalist class in North American states attracted black Americans from the plantation they worked on in the south to the north and used them as cheap labour.

He called the pleasure-seeking view of women another fundamental blow the West had dealt women. He added that "in that unfortunate episode, the capitalist system used a variety of measures to persuade women that their interest and value lie in behaving in a way that would increase their sexual appeal to men outside the home, and this is the most significant setback for the standing of women.

He said the Western women's efforts to model themselves according to men's wishes is a product of the Western capitalist patriarchal system's male-centred view of women. He underlined that "contrary to this decadent view, God in the Holy Quran makes women a model to be followed by men, stating that the wives of prophets Noah and Lot are role models for unbelievers, male and female, whereas the wife of the Pharaoh and Virgin Mary are role models for believers, both male and female.

Pointing to the statistics and facts provided by official centres in Western countries, he said that Western claims about women's rights are obscene and shameless. He added that "the capitalist system's assertions of supposed women's emancipation in fact refer to 'their captivity and the contempt in which they are held'." One is ashamed of mentioning some of what happens in the West.

Ayatollah Khamenei rejected the view that free mixing between the sexes in the West leads men not to look at women with lust and reduces the latter's problems. He added that this free mixing of men and women compounds Western men's lust in such a way that women not only find themselves subjected to sexual harassment in streets, workplaces, and schools but also increasingly in the armed forces where strong discipline is enforced.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the trade in women and sexual slavery had transcended all ethical, customary, and legal boundaries and homosexuality and other transgressions banned in all divine religions are the result of Western perceptions of women and their culture. Therefore, avoiding looking at women through Western lenses is a practical obligation.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution expressed his satisfaction at the strong presence of cultured, educated, and God-worshipping women in the country. He said it is incumbent on us to explain and expose the West's appalling perceptions of sexuality and women. He said that using cyberspace, we must present Islam's views of men and women in the format of brief and telling propositions and present them to those who are eager to know these facts in the Islamic world. He suggested using initiatives such as hashtag-making for this purpose.

In another part of his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to the family and the role of women in it. He said that family formation is based on a general law in creation: the law of marriage. This view stands in contrast to the Hegelian and Marxist approach, which posits that movement results from contradiction, whereas Islam holds that movement, including sexual reproduction, stems from marriage and accompaniment, which, as a theory, needs a lot of severe and fundamental work. There is a law in Islam and other religions for marriage and the formation of the family to prevent disorder and chaos. He said that observing these laws will result in a healthy family and society because the family is the cell from which society as an organism consists.

The Leader of the Revolution likened women in the family to flowers, pleasant aromas, and the air you breathe at home. He added that if they of their own volition decide to work at home, that is alright, but, according to hadith, they are not servants to be made to work.

He said women play two prominent roles at home, one as mothers and the other as wives. He further added that as wives, they are the symbol of love and tranquillity for their husbands. Some shining examples of this role can be

seen in the autobiographies of martyrs' wives.

Enumerating the characteristics of women's role as mothers, Ayatollah Khamenei said that "as mothers, women have a right to life because they give birth to children and raise them with unmatched love while playing the primary role in imbuing their offspring with a sense of national identity, faith, and morality.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution said that women's primary and most important duty is their role as mothers and wives, that is, their role as housewives. However, he stressed that being a housewife does not mean that they should be housebound and not teach, struggle, and be active politically and socially. Rather it means that they can get involved in any other activities that they are interested in but which do not interfere with their main role as housekeepers.

He emphasised that a family cannot be managed without the presence and a sense of responsibility on the part of women and that some problems cannot be solved except by them. He added that no women would have any doubts about giving priority to saving the lives of their children over doing office work. There is also no doubt about the importance of the moral and religious education of children, and if a woman has to choose between raising children and working outside the home, the family would definitely have to come first.

He said that there were, of course, specific social responsibilities that take precedence over everything else. He added that social responsibility sometimes prioritises saving the lives of children, husbands, and parents.

He stated families in the West had fallen apart. This danger has driven well-meaning thinkers and social reformists to raise the alarm bells. Still, the gradual disintegration of the institution of family in the West has accelerated so much as to become unstoppable and beyond dealing with through reform.

In another segment of his speech, the Leader of the Revolution referred to the question of hijab, saying that it was without a doubt a religious duty beyond any and all reproach, but this must not provide grounds to accuse those whose hijab is not perfect to be accused of irreligion or being considered counter-revolutionaries.

He added that "several years ago, during one of my visits to the provinces, in a speech I gave to a group of local scholars, I asked them why they accused some women part of whose hair was visible or, so to speak, women with poor hijab of not being religious, though they were among the people who had come out to welcome me. They are our wives and daughters who take part in religious and revolutionary ceremonies.

Reminiscing how he had previously praised women with different appearances in praying sessions on the great nights of Ramadan, he said, "I envied them for the tears they shed, and I wish I could weep as those young girls and women did."

The Leader of the Revolution stated that "wearing improper hijab is not right, but it does not allow us to consider such women as being beyond the pale of religion. We all have weaknesses that we have to try as much as possible to overcome."

Ayatollah Khamenei considered the services rendered by Islam to women as important and worthy of being remembered. He pointed out that "before the revolution, there were few cultured and educated women who were into research, but the revolution produced many more such women, so much so that the number of women at universities has in some years surpassed the number of men, and there are lots of women who are working in the fields of science and technology.

He said the remarkable victories of Iranian women in international sporting competitions are another example of the progress made by women. He said the best way to promote hijab is by having our daughters become champions and

their country's flag raised before television cameras while they are standing as such on the platform.

Referring to the many efforts made during the recent disturbance against hijab, he asked, "Who is standing up to these efforts and campaigns? The women themselves. While the enemies had put their bet on these women who were supposedly not wearing their hijab properly, thinking that they would cast their hijab. But they did not and, by refusing to do so, slapped propagandists and those who had launched campaigns against hijab in the face.

Finally, expressing sadness at the injustices towards women in some families, he stated that "sometimes men using their physical strength abuse their women. In such cases, in order to preserve the family, laws pertaining to family affairs must be strong enough to protect the injured party, preventing men from treating their wives poorly." He pointed out that there are cases where the opposite is true, but these are few and far between.

Before Ayatollah Khamenei gave his speech, the following participants took to the podium to express their views.

Atefeh Khademi, researcher and member of the Cultural and Social Council of Iran Parichehr Khanehdar, author and housewife Maryam Naghghashan, a lawyer in the German judicial system Mahdiyeh Sadat Mehvar, winner of national and international awards for producing documentaries Shahrzad Zadehmodarres, Full professor at the Medical School of the University of Shahid Beheshti. Negin Farahani, an activist in the field of young women Sara Talebi, PhD in Communication Sciences and student in advanced studies at a religious seminary

These guest raised issues concerning the need to expand specialised ecosystems for women, preserving and promoting appropriate urban paradigms to develop proper culture, changing existing views of the culture of housekeeping within public organisations especially the education system, presenting a clear picture of Iranian women to the West, the necessity of employing successful women in management positions effectively, opening the way for educated women to participate in supreme councils and other chief decision making bodies, the necessity of explaining the comparative advantage of women of the Islamic Republic, revising how women are presented in mass media, the necessity of reforming the incentives designed to increase fertility based on mothers' real needs, expanding the facilities needed by mothers, including baby rooms at universities and public centers, the necessity of establishing a media headquarters for women, the necessity of rehabilitating and equipping specialised hospitals for women and supporting doctors and nurses who specialise in caring for women, the necessity of creating and promoting female role models for the new generation, government assistance to pave the way for female clerics practicing religious jurisprudence who have graduated from religious seminaries (Hawza Ilmiyya), and the necessity of expanding miossionary activities in religious seminaries attended by women.