Speech of the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, in the Gathering of Thousands of People from Khuzestan and Kerman Provinces, Iran - 24 /Feb/ 2024

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds, and Allah's blessings be bestowed upon the Prophet Mohammad and his exalted family, especially Imam Mahdi (May his advent be quickened).

A warm welcome to our dear brothers and sisters, the people of Khuzestan, and the people of Kerman. This meeting is an utterly cordial gathering and subject to God's grace. It is a great honour to meet with a group of people from these two important provinces. I welcome all of you, one by one, especially the families of dear martyrs and dear battle-scarred veterans.

I will take advantage of this warm and friendly gathering to say a few words about these two provinces first. Our young generation, our new generation, must become familiar with their generational, historical, and hereditary distinctions. It is necessary for today and the future. [Clarifying] the historical continuity of the precious heritages of different parts of the country should be one of the aims of all those who genuinely care for Iran and the revolution. I will offer a few words about Khuzestan and a few words about Kerman, and then I will mention an important national issue, which is the election (1) we have ahead of us; later, I will say a few words about a critical international Islamic issue, the situation in Gaza. This outlines what I intend to discuss today with you, dear brothers, and sisters.

And now about Khuzestan. It can be said that in the last one hundred and twenty years of our country's history, Khuzestan has been a major important centre of the Iranian resistance, and the symbol of the Iranian nation's resistance during this period was the people of Khuzestan. If our youth are familiar with history, they will know that somewhat more than one hundred years ago, the British came to this region following World War I and attacked Iran and Iraq. It was the resistance of the people of Khuzestan that repelled the British. The valiant people of Khuzestan took the "fatwa" [i.e., religious edict] of the scholars of Najaf as a directive, flew the flag, and stood against the British. [It is common for Muslims to choose a specific flag as the symbol of the cause in their movements until they gain victory.] At that stage, the British had brought their army and military potentials—the issue of propaganda and the like [such as the media] had not yet been raised [or become popular] at that time. They had gained control over Iraq and wanted to overwhelm this part of Iran [i.e., Khuzestan] as well. The people of Khuzestan stood against the British based on the "fatwa" of the scholars in Najaf, including the late Amirza Mohammad-Taghi Shirazi. On a journey to Khuzestan some years ago (2), I was given the flag of that great struggle and passed it to Astan Quds Razavi as a gift. That flag belongs to the people of Khuzestan; it is available now. These [events] are essential in history [and] truly valuable. [The people of] Khuzestan stood [firmly] against the British to defend not only Khuzestan, [but also] Iran.

During the National Oil Movement in the 1940s, Khuzestan was the site of a physical conflict between Iran and England. [The people of Khuzestan] took back the Abadan refinery, which was under British control, and other regions and centres the British had taken for themselves. The people of Khuzestan were also on the frontlines of the battlefield here.

Most important of all was the resistance of the people of Khuzestan against the invasion of Saddam in 1980. The first group to present a defence were the people of Khuzestan themselves. Saddam erroneously estimated that if he attacked the cities of Khuzestan province — Abadan, Khorramshahr, Ahwaz, and others — the Arabs living in those regions would side with him and collaborate against their own country. Saddam made this great mistake. He had the illusion that Khuzestan would be put into his hands and the Iranian-Arab people of Khuzestan would aid him. The first people who stood against him were those he had hoped would help him. The dear martyr, General Ali Hashemi (May he be placed in Heaven), is one example. At the beginning of the war, Saddam had heard of his fame and searched for him for some years. Whoever was taken as hostage was asked where Ali Hashemi was. They were searching for Ali Hashemi. His mother was alive until recently. The tribes of Khuzestan—Arabs, non-Arabs, Lors, Bakhtiaris, and others—were the first to join hands and stand against Saddam. This is a great honour and virtue; it cannot be belittled.

Khuzestan is also a prominent province from another perspective: the blood of martyrs from all other provinces in Iran has been spilt on the soil of Khuzestan. What does this mean? It means that Khuzestan symbolises solidarity and cohesion in the entire Iranian nation. The youth, the forerunners, and the devoted came from all over Iran to Khuzestan; they fought with faith and motivation, sacrificing themselves for Islam, Iran, and the Islamic Republic. Khuzestan became a symbol of Iranian solidarity. Whatever we had heard of Iranian heroism throughout history—devotedness, sacrifice, and resistance—we witnessed in Khuzestan during the “sacred defense” [i.e., the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, 1980-1988]. Therefore, Khuzestan manifested the outstanding features of the Iranian nation. This was about Khuzestan. Our youth should take these few words about the merits of this vital part of Iran as a given, along with tens or hundreds more cases.

And now Kerman. Through years of acquaintance with Kerman and the people of Kerman, I have observed and witnessed brilliant traits in this province and its people—remarkable features which are not simply to be heard of, [but to be] seen and perceived. If one were to put the most important ones in a few sentences, I would name, first of all, the profound cultural identity of Kerman; next, the training of elites in Kerman; the moral decency and honest faith of the people of Kerman; and the people of Kerman as frontrunners in joining the Islamic and revolutionary movement. I will never forget how the youth and teenagers of Kerman—just like a chain—came to the Masoumiyeh School of Kerman—if I remember correctly—in 1963. They met with the revolutionary clergy and elites who were there (they [all] went to this school regularly); they exchanged proclamations, received messages, had lessons, and [then] spread [all they had gained] throughout the province. Such circumstances lead to identifying great characters, such as Haj Ghasem Soleimani. Training elites, connecting with outstanding Islamic thoughts, and struggling to achieve are prominent features I have witnessed in the people of Kerman.

Yes. Just one Ghasem Soleimani is enough, not only for Kerman province but for all Iranians to be proud of and boast about. Meanwhile, the vital issue is what cultural background educated and trained Ghasem Soleimani? Such a cultural background should back up one. Cultural backgrounds consist of honest faith, sacrifices, mental health, and divine guidance that the Almighty bestows upon a nation. The base always exists; however, these potentialities would not have been realised without the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic. When an Islamic republic is formed, such characters appear one by one and are recognised. Consider Martyr Hussain Alamalhoda, Martyr Ali Hashemi, Martyr Hemmat, and Martyr Haj Ghasem Soleimani.

I want to ask you, dear youth, the youth of Khuzestan and Kerman, to be proud of these features and boast [about them]. Appreciate this generational and historical heritage, and use these features to build up the future of your country. This country should be built up; we have a lot of deficiencies and fallen behind a lot. During decades, even hundreds of years, of tyrannical reign, our country has been held back in many areas. Considering our historical records, we should be trailblazers in knowledge today, but we are not. We should be overtly practising the Islamic rules and education in all parts of life in our country today. We should have used the support and abilities [provided by] Islam in managing the country. We could not and [thus] have fallen behind. It should be corrected. You, the youth, can do it; the Iranian nation can do it (3). May Allah protect you all and increase your preparations in these

fields to take action in various sections. These were a few points about Khuzestan and Kerman.

And now the vital issue of elections, decisive elections. We will have two essential elections in about two months. I called attention to these elections at the beginning of the year (4). [At that time] we had a lot [of time] ahead, but now they are close. The Iranian nation should be truly and appropriately prepared for these two elections. One election is that of the Assembly of Leadership Experts. The importance of this assembly is that, when necessary, it can choose a suitable leader for the country; meanwhile, it can and should supervise the conditions an existing leader should maintain. This is the importance of the Assembly of Leadership Experts, which our nation, [all] provinces, should take care of and [for which it should] try to hold the election in the best way. Then there is the election of the Islamic Consultative Parliament, which is also very important—these two elections are held together. According to the Constitution, the Islamic Consultative Parliament paves the way for the country's future. To solve the country's problems, we need the legislation and prudent presence of the Islamic Consultative Parliament. This signifies the importance of this election. These two elections should be held splendidly.

At the beginning of the year, I pointed out four characteristics of these elections for our nation: first, strong participation; second, real competition; third, soundness in its true meaning; and fourth, the security of the election. These four features should indeed be observed in the elections. Before going into detail about these four features, I will elaborate a little today and talk about them again with our dear people in the next two months if I have the opportunity, God willing. We should clarify the logic behind [holding] elections in the Islamic Republic. Why do we hold elections? The terms "Republic" and "Islamic" depend on the elections. "Republic" means democracy; it is the nation's governance of the country. Well, how do people participate in governance?

There is no way other than through elections. Some individuals question the necessity of elections [by practising obstructionism]; they dissuade people [from voting]; they do not realize that dictatorship, chaos, and insecurity will rule the country if elections do not occur. There should be elections in order to avoid a dictatorship in a country. To avoid turmoil, commotion, and insecurity, there should be elections. Holding elections is the correct path by which people can secure national governance, democracy, [and] the republic in the country. This is the issue of "Republic." Elections can provide and choose "Vali-Faghih" [i.e., religious leadership] in the country, which means securing the "Islamic" [concept of governance]. Elections can place individuals who will enact legislation to govern the country based on Islamic rules and teachings in the Islamic Consultative Parliament. Thus, both "Republic" and "Islamic" rely on elections. Therefore, in the governance of the Islamic Republic, elections are essential.

Surely, the four features mentioned [above] are [all] important in the [upcoming] elections. First is participation, which means people's active and passionate presence in the elections. The active and passionate presence of people in the elections portrays national unity and the motivation of the Iranian nation to be present and active. The Iranian nation's motivation and national unity create national power. National power leads to security in the country. When a country is safe and secure, knowledge increases, the economy blossoms, and various cultural, economic, and political issues can be resolved. This is the miracle of participation. Elections create transformation in the country. Some speak of transformation [and] pretend to support it, but in practice, they neglect the obligatory prerequisite of transformation: elections. It is through elections that transformation can take place in the country. Those with diverse political, economic, and cultural viewpoints want to have transformation in favour of their own political, cultural, or economic perspective; that is ok, but how? This can be achieved through elections—whether parliament, expert assembly, presidential, or [city] council elections. They can bring those with the same political viewpoints into power and believe in their political, economic, or cultural orientations. This is [the so-called] transformation. Thus, the basis of transformation is elections.

All those who have addressees are obligated to invite people to participate in the elections: acknowledged "olama" [i.e., religious scholars], university professors, "howzeh" [i.e., seminary] professors, broadcasting [media], the press, the youth, members within the family—all can be election summoners and invite their addressees to the elections. It is then that the election will be spirited and passionate. If participation is weak, the Parliament will be weak, and a

weak parliament will not be capable of wholly resolving problems. To solve the problems [in our country], we should increase [people's] participation. This is everyone's duty. Whoever wants to solve the country's problems, this is how to do it. This was [an explanation of] the issue of participation. I will talk [about this issue] again if I have the opportunity.

And now, the issue of [political] competition. What does competition mean [here]? It means that political parties compete to participate in the elections. In elections, various political and economic orientations compete. Competing opportunities should be open for political, economic, and cultural wings, perspectives, and opinions. This is what competition means. Competition means the youth who want to enter the elections compete with the long-serving and experienced individuals. The youth do their best, and so do the others. A good and strong parliament is one composed of these youth, the experienced, and those long-serving individuals. This is competition. One of the essential aspects of elections is competing [with others]. Competition means everyone should be able to advertise correctly [i.e., soundly, and reasonably]. I will also elaborate on advertising if I have the opportunity, God willing. Ethics and integrity should rule advertising. Advertising is not slandering, telling lies, or giving false promises. Advertising means that one should tell the public their opinions. This is [true] advertising and should be allowed for every candidate. A lot can be said on this issue. God willing, I will talk about the soundness and security of the elections later if I have the opportunity.

Therefore, keep in mind the issue of elections. Some [individuals] dissuade people from [participating in] the elections. This does not seem right; this is improper; this harms the country. This **harms the country** [i.e., Iran]. It does not harm one person or another [i.e., any specific person]; it harms the country. To discourage people from [participating in] the elections, some [individuals] continuously shine a light on [and talk about] the problems of the country. If there are problems, what are the solutions? The solution is elections. To solve the problems, one should participate in the elections. This was [all] about elections.

Now, about the international and Islamic issue of Gaza. Two and a half months have passed since the beginning of the Gaza event. This event is a unique phenomenon in the recent history of the Islamic world. There has been no other event similar to this in recent history—maybe in the recent century. It is a phenomenal event, a unique event. How is it unique? It is unique in two aspects and from two perspectives. From the Zionist regime's side, it is unique. Why? Never in the historical period that I mentioned has there been such brutality, murder, and blood-thirstiness. Never has such infanticide been observed, such strong-hold breaker bombs have been thrown on patients in hospitals, nor has such atrocity and mischief been seen. It is unique. From another side, that of the Palestinian nation and Palestinian fighters, such persistence, patience, resistance, and maddening of the enemy has not been seen. The people of Gaza, the Gaza warriors, have stood up like rocks, like a mountain. This is very significant. There is no water, no food, no medicine, no fuel—**no water**—[but] they have stood up, and they do not surrender. This is very important. Not surrendering leads to victory, and we can see evidence of the victory today. "For sure, Allah is with those who are patient" (5). The Zionist regime, despite its large amount of equipment and facilities, has become incapable against the Palestinian fighters, whose equipment is incomparable to that of the Zionists. As you have heard, the Zionists have pulled back important and active sections of their army from the battlefield (6) because they have realized they can do nothing and are only subject to casualties. These are important [facts]; they are unique phenomena.

The critical point is that the defeat of the Zionist regime in this event is not just their defeat; it is the defeat of America. Today, no one differentiates between the Zionist regime and America or England. Everyone knows they are all one. America shamelessly vetoes the [United Nations] Security Council's resolution for stopping the bombardment [of Gaza] and [enacting] a cease-fire (7)! They [i.e., the Zionist regime, America, and England] are not different. They are the same. **It vetoes [resolutions]!** What does this mean? It means it is collaborating in the bombardment of kids, women, patients, the elderly, and defenceless people. America was disgraced in this event; Western civilization has been unveiled. The victory of the great Palestinian nation is that they have disgraced Western [countries], America, and false claims of human rights. Today, everyone knows the [hidden] meaning of

pretence, human rights, humankind, and the like. The ugly face of the inauspicious monster—America and England—has been revealed; it was revealed for all people around the world. Israel could not carry out this brutality without America. If America had not consented, Israel would not have dared [to do so]. The Zionist regime committed all these crimes in two and a half months with the support of America. Everyone knows this, worldwide. America has been humiliated; this is the most significant and enormous success for the principled forces [i.e., forces discriminating between right and wrong] and the resistant forces. Today, the signs of these criminals' defeat on the battlefield appear one by one; the [criminals] are also being defeated in the realm of humanity. This is the reality of this [battle] scene. The nature of the White House has been revealed; the [hidden] reality of American and British governments has become apparent.

Well! What is our duty today? [It is to] help the resistance. Everyone should help the resistance in any way they can. Helping the resistance is a duty. Helping the Zionist regime is a crime and a betrayal. Unfortunately, some Islamic governments are committing this crime; they should know that the Muslim nations will not forget. Today, it is the duty of Islamic governments not to allow goods, oil, fuel, and the like to be delivered to the Zionist regime, just as it [i.e., the Zionist regime] does not allow the people of Gaza access to water. It is the duty of Islamic governments, of Muslim nations, to demand their governments cut off all help [to the Zionist regime], or even more, to cut all their ties. If they cannot cut their ties permanently, they should at least stop them temporarily [and] put this malignant, cruel, bloodthirsty, brutal object under pressure.

As you can see, the conscience of the world is hurting today. It feels pain [it is touched]. People come into the streets in America and in European countries. This is no joke! Some political characters in these governments and countries have resigned because of their governments' help; heads of universities have resigned; scientists [and] well-known individuals are criticizing and protesting. The world's conscience is hurting; however, some [countries] are still giving aid to this cruel and brutal regime.

I claim that, without any doubt, those who distinguish between right and wrong will win. Do not doubt that one day, the Zionist regime will be completely removed from the Earth, and God willing, this is a certainty of the future. "Through Allah's aid and His power and through Allah's permission and His respect," this will take place, and I hope you, the youth, witness that day, God willing.

May Allah bless you all.

Footnotes:

1) Elections for the twelfth Islamic Consultative Parliament and sixth Assembly of Leadership Experts will be held on March 1, 2024.

2) Eight-day journey to Khuzestan province, March 8, 1996.

3) Slogan of the audience: "O, Free Leader! We are fully ready [for your commands], ready!

4) Lecture in the meeting with government authorities and executives (4/4/2023).

5) The Holy Quran, Surah Baghareh, Verse 153.

6) Pointing to the retreat of the "Golani" Brigade from the Gaza Strip.

7) The suggested resolution of the United Nations Security Council for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip vetoed by America (8/12/2023).