



Barbarity is not Inevitable

The war of terrorists can be the beginning of one of the bloodiest eras of contemporary history. Already, hundreds of millions of people are bracing themselves. But this prospect is not inevitable. The scene is not restricted to the two sides of this conflict. There is a third

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**Mansoor Hekmat**

force, a sleeping giant who can turn the situation around. If this giant awakes, this era can be the beginning of positive changes and the realisation of ideals in the world which humanity had given up on during the final decades of the last century. Bush, Blair, Khamenei, USA, NATO and political Islam do not know that there really *is* a civilised humanity, a civilised world, which could rise up and defend itself against the war of terrorists. Despite

the darkness and terror that they have placed before us people, the 21st century does not have to be the century of capitalist barbarity. These are decisive days.

The media does not reflect the real intellectual and ideological makeup of the world. They give their own version, the dominant version, the version of the ruling class. A version that suits *them*. Militarism, terrorism, racism,

ethnicism, religious fanaticism and profit worship are headline news but do not have a firm place deep down in the minds of the majority of the people of our times. Even a cursory look at the world shows that the vast masses of the people are more to the left, more altruistic, more peace loving, more egalitarian, more free and more freedom-loving

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## Afghan Refugees Must be Given Refuge

Kharazi, the Iranian foreign minister, and other leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran have stated that they will not allow a single Afghan refugee to cross the Iranian border and enter Iran. The Islamic regime has begun amassing thousands of

troops, digging trenches, setting up barbed wire and electronic detection devices to prevent the entry of nearly half a million Afghan refugees.

The people of Afghanistan have suffered long enough at

the hands of the Taliban, regional governments like Iran and Pakistan as well as at the hands of the US government and NATO. The Islamic regime's inhumane and racist propaganda against the Afghan people must immediately stop. The regimes of Iran and Pakistan have no right to deny those fleeing entry. Borders must be opened to all Afghans

refugees.

IFIR holds the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Pakistani regime directly responsible for the safety and lives of Afghan refugees and calls on groups and individuals to place pressure on the two regimes to give refuge to those fleeing the Taliban and war.

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# Stop Schily's Racist Law

The German government is planning to pass racist legislation further attacking asylum rights in Germany. The intended legislation was due to be passed by German Parliament on September 26 but has been postponed. The September 11 tragedy is being used to introduce harsher anti asylum legislation. The legislation reduces appeals and grounds for applying for asylum and bans political expression by asylum seekers among other repressive measures.

Progressive people and forces in Germany are taking a strong stand against the government. Widespread support around the right to asylum is gaining momentum and has led to the formation of the Campaign in Defence of Asylum Rights. IFIR-Germany is a member of the campaign's coordinating

committee.

On September 26, representatives of the

elaborating on the aims and objectives of the campaign and criticising and exposing the German government's

protest organised by the campaign in a show of solidarity and defiance against the German government's racist legislation. Nasrin Ramzanali, the IFIR-German Branch Director, Maryam



Campaign held a press conference to condemn the legislation and defend asylum rights. Nasrin Ramzanali, IFIR German Branch Director, began the press conference by

attack of asylum rights. Representatives of several other refugee organisations were also present. On September 29, thousands of people took to the streets in a

Namazie, the IFIR Executive Director and Farshad Hosseini, the IFIR Deputy Director also spoke at the rally and were warmly received by protestors.

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# Racism, Cultural Relativism and Women's Rights

Maryam Namazie

Many times you hear that the discussion around cultural relativism versus the universality of women's rights is a theoretical and unnecessary debate, which is a waste of time. Often one finds many, some of who consider themselves women's rights activists, who strongly defend the concept. For me though, this debate is not only a theoretical one; it is more importantly a practical one that affects the real lives of countless women and girls.

Let us be clear about what cultural relativism is. It is a profoundly racist phenomenon, which values and respects all cultural and religious practices, irrespective of their consequences for women. It asserts that the rights of people, women and girls are relative to where they are born, "their" cultures and religions. There is no right or wrong according to cultural relativists. As a result, cultural relativism supports and maintains sexual apartheid and violence against women in Islam-stricken societies like Iran because it is "their culture and religion" and it creates ghettoized, regressive "minority" communities in the West where women and girls continue to face apartheid and Islamic laws and customs.

Cultural relativism doesn't merely ignore violations; it actually legitimizes them. Moreover, it never opposes any cultural or religious practices. Cultural relativism not only makes it unnecessary to oppose violations and lack of women's rights, but also makes it racist and against freedom of choice to do so! I want to give examples of cultural relativism applied to the status of women living in Iran and Iranian women asylum seekers living in the West to show how it legitimizes women's lack of rights and silences opposition.

There are innumerable examples of its promotion in the heart of the secular West where different laws and customs apply to women who have fled Islam stricken societies. As a result of this racism, the veiling of girls becomes acceptable in the heart of Europe and men who kill women in the name of honour are given reduced sentences. The German government forcibly veils women asylum seekers it wants to deport to allow the Iranian embassy to prepare their travel documents. When a woman like Roya Mosayebi refuses to be veiled, she is beaten and forcibly veiled. When she complains to a German court, the court rules that the police acted in accordance with the law.

Holland is another good example. In 1997, when the

Dutch government wanted to deport 1300 Iranian asylum seekers back to Iran, it produced a report to justify the deportations, which made numerous assertions on women that reveal how far cultural relativists will go to deny women's rights. [The IFIR along with other progressive groups managed to push back the government's assault but its justifications are telling nonetheless.] On stoning the Dutch Foreign Ministry said: "as at least four witnesses are required in order to prosecute for adultery, there are not in practice any actual prosecutions brought. We are not aware of any cases of stoning to death for adultery." They further stated: "while the legal and practical disabilities faced by women in Iran have been well documented, it is now clear that some change has been effected in recent years and that there are a number of signs that further and substantive improvements may be on the way." They also said that: "the presence of women is more visible on the streets and than in surrounding Islamic countries," and that "While the dress code is mandatory, there are hardly any women voluntarily covering their face with a veil or wearing the traditional burqah... unlike Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia." On the fact that women have only temporary child custody they said: "This system stems from Sharia law and is applicable

in most Islamic countries."

This is one example of how outrageous acts of brutality and repression by the Iranian government are denied and excused. This is how a system of sexual apartheid and lack of rights become mere disabilities. This is how they credit women's own resistance to the abuser. In Iran, women not only don't cover their faces but they continuously transgress mandatory veiling. The fact that women are 'improperly veiled' every day on the streets has nothing to do with the regime or Khatami; it just shows that women are protesting and opposing compulsory veiling despite its risks. Hundreds of thousands of women have been flogged, imprisoned, had their bodies slashed with razors, and had acid thrown in their faces so that they could walk down the streets with their veils pushed back. Moreover, when they need to, cultural relativists always compare the situation of women with the worst possible example. Why not compare the situation of women in Iran with the best possible example? When all else fails, they state that a discriminatory law is applicable in most so-called Islamic countries and that's that, which basically means women are well off enough, this is their Islamic culture, at least they don't cover their

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than governments and the media. The people on both sides of this appalling conflict have no desire to dance to the tune of the leaders of the bourgeoisie. The gunslinging American administration immediately realises that despite one of the most horrendous terrorist crimes, despite the live broadcast of the perishing of thousands of people in an instant, despite the sorrow and rage which takes hold of anyone who has not sold their conscience to some material interest, still this same horrified western society, these very people who are daily brainwashed, these very people who are from dawn to dusk 'educated' by the ruling ideology of racism and xenophobia, call for "caution, fairness, justice and a measured response". The people of the Middle East who are conceived as zealous Moslems and members of the 'Islamic civilization' - be it in the sick minds of clerical rulers in Iran and Afghanistan and the assorted sheikhs of the Islamic movement or in the deluxe studios of the CNN and BBC - are mourning with the people of America and rising in the condemnation of the genocide of September 11. It does not take a genius to realise that the majority of the people of the Middle East despise political Islam, that huge segments of the people of Western Europe and America are fed up with Israel's injustices and sympathise with the deprived people of Palestine, that the majority of western people want an end to the economic sanc-

tions against Iraq and can put themselves in the shoes of heartbroken Iraqi parents who are losing their children to shortage of medicine, that the vast masses of the world's decent and honourable people are on neither side of the war between Bush and Bin Laden - old friends and present-day rivals. This civilised humanity has been silenced under the barrage of propaganda, brainwashing and intimidation in the West and East, but it has clearly not accepted the garbage. This is a massive force. It can come to the fore. For the future of humanity, it *must* come to the fore.

And here lies all the difficulty - to bring to the fore this massive force. In the war of terrorists the battle lines are drawn, camps are defined, resources and forces are mobilised; this is a vast military, political and diplomatic confrontation. Despite all the ambiguities, the intellectual and political framework of this war, for leaders of both camps, are clear. In our camp, however, in the camp of humanity, which must confront this terrifying prospect, all is ambiguous.

Undoubtedly, resistance against the war of terrorists is now growing in various countries. But as much as the Islamists and USA need a clear strategy and theory and a unitary and workable outlook, this popular movement also needs an intellectual and political banner and a series of practical strate-

gic principals. Various political movements, particularly those on the Left will strive to guide and lead this resistance. The question is what outlook will lead this 'Left' itself.

In Part I of this article, I wrote that alongside the hawks in both poles - American militarism and Islamic fascists - there are indeed two more sophisticated, refined and 'respectable' set of arguments defending the two sides of the conflict. Alongside US militarism, and supporting it, there are those who promote the formula of the war of 'the civilised world against terrorism'. Alongside the murderers in the Islamic movement, there are those who justify Islamic terrorism with the familiar 1970's religious-nationalist and Third World-ist 'anti-imperialism.' But none of these rationalisations will have any serious influence in the people's resistance movement. Centre-right parties and groups in the West on the one hand and the remains of the traditional left student-intellectuals of the previous decades in East and West on the other will be the main customers of these crafty formulations in the propaganda war on both sides. What could politically and conceptually derail the potentially powerful movement of the world's progressive people is, in my opinion, the pacifist and futile liberalist outlook and efforts to maintain the *status quo* (merely trying to prevent a US attack on Afghanistan) or *status quo*

*ante* (returning to pre-September 11).

The September 11 incident was not an isolated act of psychotic individuals cut off from society; neither is the USA's impending military action. The world prior to September 11 was not in equilibrium, but rather was proceeding on a deteriorating path. There are important economic, social and political problem behind these events. These problems have pushed the world in this direction. These problems and issues must be addressed. September 11 is how political Islam is addressing these issues. The same way that bringing the Taliban to power, destroying Baghdad, starving the people of Iraq, suppressing the people of Palestine, bombing Belgrade and now the 'long war with terrorism' are how the leader of capitalism in the USA and Europe have dealt with these underlying contradictions. Today's events are moments in an on-going and dynamic situation. The people's movement against this developing reality cannot be a movement calling for calm and demanding 'Hands Off Afghanistan!.' Calling for peace and keeping the status quo is not only unrealistic, not only utopian, but also not just, not progressive and not useful. The popular resistance movement against the war of terrorists can only be organised around positive solutions to the critical political and economic problems of our times and around an active position - not for maintaining the status quo but

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rather for changing it. We have had our own independent agenda and solutions for all the problems that have been pushed to the fore, such as the North-South question, the Palestinian question, the question of Iraq, the question of political Islam, the question of Afghanistan and Iran, the question of militarism and USA and NATO's hegemonism in the new world order, the question of racism and fortress Europe, etc. These must form the agenda and the banner of the popular resistance movement against the war of terrorists. This is the difference between us and the peace campaigners and pacifists, who do not see or are indifferent to the divisions, contradictions and instability of the world prior to September 11. If we had an agenda to change the world prior to this incident, then a principled position in the current situation means following the same agenda in the new situation. We do not intend to leave Afghanistan under the yoke of the murderous gang of Taliban, we do not intend to live under the rule of a trigger-happy USA, we do not intend to tolerate political Islam or Islamic governments in the Middle East, we do not intend to accept the statelessness of Palestinians and their everyday suppression. We did not want terrorism, be it Islamic and suicidal or military and uniformed and high-tech; we do not accept the poverty of half the world; we do not want fortresses and barracks around Europe, we will not

succumb to racism and ethnicism. Neither the September 11 crime nor the imminent heroics of NATO in the Hindu Kush, should turn an active movement for changing the world into uncritical and aimless retiring lot calling for peace and quiet and a return to the day before.

The 'humanitarian' and 'peace' movement is not the right response to today's situation. But the influence of this movement, particularly among ordinary people in western society - because of people's belief in non-violence, humanism and their spontaneous sense of caution - is extremely widespread. This position condemns USA's intervention in Afghanistan, but shirks its responsibility to fight Taliban's rule. It condemns racism and incitement against Moslems but does not see any reason to put pressure on the USA and Israel in defence of the people of Palestine. This position wishes Jack Straw success in his trip to Iran so that hopefully this pole of Islamic terrorism can be tamed and pacified, despite the fact that this policy strengthens the rule of these wolves over the people in Iran. This position defends the civil rights of Moslems in European countries, but in order to prevent 'tension' rejects and opposes criticism of the Islamic veil and lack of rights of women in Islam and Islamic communities. This position appeals to all to back off and to leave the situation as it

was before. If this movement goes to dominate the minds and actions of discontented people, then civilised humanity will leave the stage to Western and Eastern terrorists. If there is to be a future, it is in the formation of an active, progressive and freedom-loving policy at the forefront of the people's ranks. This is the duty of communists. New communists. Marx's communists. This is our task.

In part III, I will deal with the fundamentals of an active policy against the war of terrorists. But it is necessary to briefly address the most pressing issue of the day, which is the USA's imminent attack on Afghanistan. 99 percent of the people of the world know and can clearly explain why USA's military attack on Afghanistan and even the arrest and or killing of Bin Laden which is the declared aim of this operation and seems technically very improbable, not only doesn't diminish the danger of Islamic terrorism against America and Britain but rather greatly increases it. It is very clear that the US and British governments are themselves aware of this fact. But they seem to regard a Hollywood or James Bond adventure easier to feed to the people. A mad lone millionaire or gangster in a remote part of the world - Saddam, Milosevic, Bin Laden etc. - intends to destroy the civilization and American heroes are sent off to save the world. But their own analyses shows that

political Islam and Islamic terrorism does not have a central headquarters, unified command and an hierarchical organisation; it is an international movement made up of government agencies and circles, various organisations, networks and circles, which are weaved together in a series of official and unofficial relations, as an underground movement, with extensive degree of initiative at the local level. For the West, entering Afghanistan is the start of a wider military and political campaign. Capturing or killing Bin Laden and the accomplishment of some kind of US revenge would naturally reduce the urgency of further military operations for the US administration and calm the American domestic scene until and only until the next Islamic terrorist attack. But this is a small step in a wider, military and political move in the Middle East, whose eventual extent is not yet revealed. In the final analysis, this is a show down with political Islam, that is the reactionary movement that the West itself found in the peripherals of Middle Eastern society and brought to the fore to confront the emerging Left in the developing capitalisms of these countries as well as to pressurise the Eastern bloc. This power struggle could remain limited, but due to the un-centralised and extremist nature of political Islam and Islamic terrorism, it is more likely that it will lead to a more fundamental and total confrontation. However, political Islam cannot survive in the Middle East without Western

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*support*, let alone in a confrontation with the West. So far, the intensification of the battle between secularists and Islamists in Pakistan and the revival of Khatamites and the resumption and escalation of factional infighting within the Iran's Islamic rulers is an indication that the battle between the West and political Islam could act as a detonator for serious changes in the balance of power within the bourgeois factions in Middle East to the disadvantage of Islamists.

What could be said about the America's attack on Afghanistan? Is 'Hands Off Afghanistan!' a progressive and principled position? The people of Afghanistan and its opposition will tell you otherwise. The prospect of

Taliban's downfall, a gang of murderers and drug dealers, has spurred political forces in Afghanistan. The demand for the overthrow of the Taliban is a humane and progressive demand. We must not allow the legitimate and just opposition to American militarism to be interpreted as leaving Afghanistan in the hands of Taliban. This is one living example of the incorrectness and insufficiency of the call for calm and the defence of the status quo. The people of Afghanistan have been waiting for a lifetime for Taliban's downfall. No doubt, the US will not enter Afghanistan for the liberation of that country. They brought the Taliban to power. This time they may weaken it but *de facto* accept its existence. They have promised

(the Pakistan ruler) Gen. Musharraf that the next government of Afghanistan will be to Pakistan's liking. They are to remove these beasts and replace them with others from the same breed. The principled position is the participate in overthrowing the Taliban shoulder to shoulder with the people of Afghanistan and the progressive opposition, and fighting for the establishment of a government elected by the people of that country. This must be imposed on the West, USA and the United Nations. Any attack by the US forces and its allies against civilians in Afghanistan and the destruction of cities, villages, infrastructures and people's livelihood must be condemned. Any attempt to impose another

gang on the people of Afghanistan through wheeling and dealings between USA, Pakistan, Iran and any other state is condemned. But the overthrow of Taliban by foreign armies is not in itself condemnable. Taliban is not a legitimate government in Afghanistan. It must be overthrown. The question is the government that is to replace it and the guarantee that the people of Afghanistan must have regarding their right and opportunity to decide the political system in their country.

*This is the second part of an article by Mansoor Hekmat entitled The World after September 11, Part Two: Where is the 'Civilised World?' To see part one of this article, go to [www.wpibriefing.com](http://www.wpibriefing.com).*

## Another Deportation Overturned

With the support of progressive people, the IFIR branch in Malmo, Sweden overturned the deportation order of Nasrin Khoshbin and her two young children. Nasrin and her children were in detention and were due to be deported to Iran on

Monday 24th September.

As soon as the IFIR branch received news of the deportation order, they began a comprehensive campaign to stop the deportation, including picketing the detention centre, mobilising

public opinion, lobbying and seeking legal and medical assistance. Their efforts finally paid off and the authorities were forced to overturn the deportation order and release Nasrin and her children.

This victory is further evidence that solidarity and unity can be an effective weapon against anti asylum policies. The IFIR- Malmo branch extends its congratulations to all who lent their support and made this victory possible.

## Defend Asylum Rights

**Hands Around the UK Home Office - Defend Asylum Rights, Tuesday 16th October, 5.30 - 7pm Outside the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1**

European governments are meeting in a special summit

in Brussels on 16th and 17th October to discuss changing the 1951 Geneva Convention's definition of a refugee. The aim is to rule out more people from the protection of international agreements on refugees and tighten asylum laws. This protest at the Home Office

will draw attention to the summit and defend the right of refugees to seek asylum in the UK and throughout the EU, and oppose attempts to dilute the convention. **Speakers include:** Fazil Kawani Asylum Rights Campaign, Tony Young Deputy General Secretary, CWU, Andy Gilchrist General Secretary FBU,

Simon Hughes MP, Maryam Namazie International Federation of Iranian Refugees, Roger Sainsbury Bishop of Barking, Wilf Sullivan UNISON, Sherman Carroll Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, Owain James NUS President, Lee Jasper Speak Out Against Racism - Defend Asylum Seekers campaign.

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faces like in Saudi Arabia, so don't oppose, leave it be, stay silent...

Western governments, the media and cultural relativists say that Iranian society is Islamic, implying that people choose to live the way they are forced to. Just as in Canada, however, there are people with various beliefs in Iran as well. The difference is that in Iran Islam is in power, enforcing its culture on every one. 25 years ago when the Shah's dictatorial regime was in power, no one called Iran a Muslim country. If Iranian society were truly Islamic, 150,000 people would not have been executed for opposing the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic regime would not need such extensive tools for repression, and the regime would not need to control people's private lives - from their sexual activities, to what they wear. If the entire society is Muslim, why did Maryam

Ayoobi enter a voluntary sexual relationship for which she was buried in a ditch and stoned to death? Why are thousands of women rounded up in the streets for "improper" veiling if it's their culture and religion? In fact, these prove that this is not people's culture but the regime's culture, the ruling class's culture imposed on women and people.

Cultural relativism maintains the Islamic regime in Iran, justifies its violations, defends the abuser and even goes so far as to credit the abuser for any gains made through people's own resistance. It also aims to silence any opposition by making it seem racist to do so. It further implies that if women "choose" to live without rights then to defend their rights means that you are against their freedom of choice!

Clearly, civil rights, freedom and equality are universal

concepts that have been fought for by progressive social movements and the working class in various countries. They belong to every one irrespective of where they were born and where that struggle took place. We still see the positive effects of a Bolshevik revolution, a Paris Commune, even the Iranian revolution, before it was brutally suppressed and expropriated by the Islamic regime, in various parts of the world today. That people and women worldwide, including in Iran, continue to struggle for equality and freedom and to overcome their lack of rights and repressive regimes is a confirmation of this universality.

Time and time again, we have seen that reaction has been pushed back not by respecting, legitimizing and justifying it but by struggling against and eradicating it. Progressive norms today are

the result of enlightenment and just struggles by real people like us; real people who defended humanity and human standards.

The issue at stake is important. Where we each stand is important. Supporters of women's rights must strongly and unconditionally oppose cultural relativism, reactionary religious and cultural beliefs and practices, governments like the Islamic regime of Iran, Political Islam and the racist policy of ghettoization in order to make advances in women's rights. Secularism and universal rights must become a minimum norm.

*The above was a speech given at a panel discussion organized by the Action Committee on Women's Rights in Iran and Amnesty International's Women's Action Network in Toronto, Canada, August 14, 2001.*

[www.hambastegi.org](http://www.hambastegi.org)

## Festival for Peace, Justice and Human Rights

The National Civil Rights Movement announces its annual general meeting and an International Festival for Peace, Justice and Human Rights: 'State and violent racism: the struggle for fundamental change' on Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 November 2001.

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