



## DEF041 - MASIH ALINEJAD INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

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### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

**Peter McCormack 02:27:**  
Hello, Masih, how are you?

**Masih Alinejad 02:28:**  
Thank you so much. I'm good.

**Peter McCormack 02:31:**  
No, thank you. I've seen you present a couple of times now, you're always energetic. I always love your approach. And I had you down here as journalists, activist, and I had troublemaker.

**Masih Alinejad 02:44:**  
Yeah. I would love to be a troublemaker for the oppressors. That actually scares the government, and we have so many badass in Iran. I'm just one of them.

**Peter McCormack 02:56:**

A professional troublemaker. Let me ask you first, how's your brother doing? And do you have any contact with him?

**Masih Alinejad 03:04:**

The only news that I have from my brother, it's from his lawyer, which mentioned on his Instagram and Twitter about the first court hearing. That my brother was questioned by a notorious judge, just about my activities. Which is not fair, you know? I live outside Iran and I fight against the Islamic Republic, the religious dictatorship, compulsory hijab. And they have to punish me. They shouldn't go after my family. So they interrogated my mother for two hours. My 70 year old mother who has nothing to do with my campaign or my activities. And they were trying to bring my mother on Iranian national television to disown me publicly. So my mother refused and that's why they arrested my brother. And now my brother is in prison. It has been eight month.

**Masih Alinejad 04:07:**

But I have to be strong because the reason that they do that, they want to break me. Most important than this, they want to take my focus away from what I have been doing. And they want me to stop giving voice to voiceless people, to do what I do as a journalist and women's rights activist. And so that is why I look at to the mothers of those people who got killed in Iran protest, in Iran prison. They never kept silent. I look at those women of white Wednesdays who removed their hijab, now they receive jail sentence, some of them 16 years, some of them nine years, 10 years. They don't give up. They never said that they regret. So they keep fighting the religious dictatorship. So I look at them and I keep going.

**Peter McCormack 04:58:**

Right. So for people who don't understand, and a lot of people will know various bits about Iran. But the people who tend to listen to my show might not know as much as, certainly not know as much as yourself. Can you give an understanding of what the regime is like in Iran and how they managed to hold onto power?

**Masih Alinejad 05:14:**

To make it easy for people to understand, I have to say that the Islamic Republic of Iran, it's like ISIS in power. Believe me, I'm going to now prove that and give you some example. In Iran first news agency, one of the official news agency, they were like a known thing that look, ISIS forced women to wear hijab from the age of 13. Let me tell you, the Islamic Republic forced girls to where hijab from the age of seven. If you don't cover your hair from the age of seven, you won't be able to go to school. You won't be able to get an

education. You won't be able to get a job. You won't be able to get any kind of documents. You won't be able to live in your own country. And apart from all these, if you're unveiled in public then you get lashes.

**Masih Alinejad 06:15:**

So you see, this is what kind of things ISIS has been doing. But Islamic Republic of Iran made these laws. And then if anyone protest that, they said, this is a law and you have to respect the law. So my argument is this, Islamic Republic is an official ISIS. And another example, women are not allowed to enter a stadium. Singing solo is forbidden for women. Can you believe that? Women are not allowed to dance. You cannot practice your own religious properly in the street the way that you want. It doesn't matter, you're Jewish, you're Baha'i. You're not even having a religion, but you have to dress as a Muslim. If not, you won't be able to get anything like job or education or living in Iran. So that is why I call them ISIS. Because as a citizen, you don't get any kind of rights, like basic rights.

**Masih Alinejad 07:26:**

Not just women, like men. Religious minority, the rights of religious minorities, it's just unbelievable. If you're a Baha'i you won't be able to go to school, to university, you have to deny your identity. So that is why, in my opinion, Islamic Republic is like ISIS. And Iran is different. So in the map we have one country called Iran, but in reality, it's not that. It's two Iran. One is Islamic Republic of Iran. The other one, which is Iran has been taking hostage for 40 years by the Islamic Republic. If you want to live as a normal person, you want to live like a normal person, then you have to do whatever you want underground. You want to drink alcohol? Underground. Today's Ramadan, if you go in public and drink water, not alcohol, not red wine, water, you will be sentenced to 70 lashes.

**Masih Alinejad 08:30:**

So this is the reality that the Western media do not want to understand because they see our smiley president, our smiley foreign minister in the United Nation and they think that's all. They have election. But that's a fake election. As a woman, I don't have the right to choose what I want to wear. I don't have the right to sing. I don't have the right to dance. I don't have the right to go to stadium. I don't have the right to be a judge. I don't have the right to whatever I want to do. But I am given a right to vote for my oppressors. So that's not election. That is the truth of Iran.

**Peter McCormack 09:14:**

This oppression of, especially females, you talk about 40 years. Is this something that's getting worse? Is it something that's just like a rollercoaster,

sometimes it gets better sometimes it get worse? Is there any change over time?

**Masih Alinejad 09:27:**

I mean, that's true sometimes. Let me just give you an example. A lot of people say that when reform is in power in Iran, then the situation is better. Yeah, of course. We can show a little bit more of our hair. That's all. But we are talking about our dignity. Come on. This is 21st century. We want to live like a proper... Like we want to carry our own identity. That's all. Yeah, the situation can change. Like when Khatami was in power women were a little bit more free to show a little bit more of their hair. But it's still, as a girl from the age of seven if you don't wear compulsory hijab, the Islamic dress code, you will be kicked out from school.

**Masih Alinejad 10:16:**

Political freedom, you won't be allowed to criticise the Supreme Leader of Iran. You won't be allowed to criticise the religion in Iran. So for me, I don't see any change because this is 21st century and I want to enjoy my true self. As far as the Islamic Republic is in power, doesn't matter. Reformist, conservative, fundamentalist, when it comes to human rights, rights of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of women's rights, they're all the same.

**Peter McCormack 10:48:**

Is this a religious dictatorship or is it a dictatorship that is using religion as a shield?

**Masih Alinejad 10:55:**

I have to say, this is a religious dictatorship.

**Peter McCormack 10:57:**

Okay.

**Masih Alinejad 11:00:**

40 years ago, right after the revolution, all the clerics, when they came in power the first thing that they do to control the whole society was mixing religion with politics. And using, like actually Sharia law to control the whole society through women. And the first step was compulsory hijab. So that is why I always say that we are not fighting against the small piece of cloth. To me and millions of other women in Iran, compulsory hijab, it's like the main pillar of the religious dictatorship. You know what I mean? It's like compulsory hijab is the main... It's the most visible symbol of oppression. So it's a tool that the government use to control the whole society. So to make a long story short, all the Sharia laws in Iran, like compulsory hijab and other things, it's like

Berlin wall. If you bring this wall down, then the religious dictatorship won't exist anymore.

**Peter McCormack 12:13:**

So how effectively can you create change within Iran in the situation? You obviously have quite strong views about the regime, but how can change come about?

**Masih Alinejad 12:25:**

I strongly believe that change comes within the society. For 40 years people in Iran had the fear inside them. Now people overcome their fear. Like in 2009 when there was a demonstration, the people managed to kill more than 100 people. But it's still, people knew about the brutality of the regime. They came to the street again two years ago, the government managed to kill more than 30 people. But it still people are fed up with the regime, so they came out in the street more than 100 cities across Iran last November. So people want change, they want an end for the Islamic Republic.

**Masih Alinejad 13:15:**

But what actually, how the regime to be stable or kind of stable. In my opinion, the regime oppressed its own people and filter social media for people, kill people in the street, put them in prison. And they use the same social media to mislead the rest of the world. Why? Because they are suffering from a serious crisis inside Iran. So what can help them, it's international community. It's the European government. So that is why actually the regime trying to get a deal and look for the EU to help them to be stable, because they can oppress more people inside Iran when they are sure that the rest of the world do not pay attention to these people who got killed and risked their lives to overthrow your regime.

**Peter McCormack 14:17:**

So I was following the protests back in November last year, and also the ability the regime had to essentially switch off the internet. The internet appeared to go dark for about a week. And it was very hard to get accurate reports on how many people were killed in the protest. But I've read various reports, maybe up to around 1,500 people. If each time there is an uprising that the regime brutally goes out and murders people, does that not put the fear into people that if there is an uprising that they risk dying? Have they not managed to put out the flame of uprisings with this?

**Masih Alinejad 15:00:**

Look, that's actually a good question. Because this is actually what I want the rest of the world to understand, the international community, the journalists,

the media, especially the liberals. I want them to understand, people know the risk. People know that they might get killed if they participate in any kind of protest in public. People even know that if they remove their hijab, they will receive long prison sentence. So they're aware of the risk. So what is the message? You're sending a message to the rest of the world that this regime does not represent Iran. We don't want this regime. So some of the media might say that, yeah, but still they have election. I mentioned about the election. The election is not a fair election. Two of those reformist presidential challenger are still under house arrest.

**Masih Alinejad 15:56:**

Imagine Obama was under house arrest in America. Imagine none of the former president in America have the right to go on TV and talk about their opinion. This is the reality of Iran. They have an election, and then the year after when they have another election, I mean, they have another president. Then you won't see the face of the other presidents because they're all banned from going on TV or they are in jail. Or they are forbidden from having a party. We don't have free political parties in Iran.

**Peter McCormack 16:33:**

So is there any way of building effective opposition politically in Iran?

**Masih Alinejad 16:39:**

I don't think that we can have a political opposition inside of Iran who can freely participate in any kind of election or who can freely participate to challenge the regime in the media exist in Iran. So that is why actually people choose to take to the street to protest. And none of the political parties in Iran support the Iran protest, which happened last November. So you see, when ordinary people became the leaders and take to the street to challenge a regime, the reformist attacked them. Instead of supporting the rights of the people, the rights of the workers, the rights of the women who joined the protest, they attacked them. The reformist part only support Iran protest when the people do not chant against the whole regime.

**Masih Alinejad 17:48:**

So right now the main slogan in the street has changed. It's nothing to do with reform. People are fed up with voting every year and seeing no change. That is why they're looking for a secular Democrat country. They don't want religious to interfere in politics. Even those people who are practicing Islam and they are religious, women wearing hijab, they are now part of the protest. In joining Iran protest or campaign against the Supreme Leader of Iran and the Islamic Republic.

**Peter McCormack 18:34:**

It sounds to me like you believe that Western media is not doing a good enough job reporting and investigating on the reality of life inside Iran.

**Masih Alinejad 18:44:**

No, because if you see Western media, you only hear the voice of those reformers who believe in reform, who believe in Javad Zarif and President Rouhani. But if you go in public in the streets, there are a lot of people who actually think that reform is not working anymore. But you don't have these voice on the Western media. Let me tell you something, presently there was a huge campaign actually echoing the voice of Javad Zarif about sanction in saying that people in Iran are dying because of sanction. So I am not saying that sanction does not hurt people, of course. Of course sanction hurts people. But why we don't hear any voice in the Western media about people, ordinary people saying that. When there was no sanction, people were dying because of corruption, because of mismanagement, because of religious dictatorship. We don't hear any voice on Western media actually getting a better picture of the situation in Iran. Saying that, while people in Iran are suffering from sanction, the regime proudly sends money to Syria, to Lebanon, to Yemen, to Iraq.

**Masih Alinejad 20:19:**

And there is a video of Hassan Rouhani saying that, although we were in a very hard economic situation in Iran, we didn't have money, we were suffering from sanction, but proudly we sent guns and money to Iraq. There is another video of actually Hassan Nasrallah saying that until Iran has money, the Islamic Republic has money, then we, the Hezbollah have money as well. We have video from Javad Zarif, the foreign minister saying that, I am proud that the people in Iran are under pressure because of helping Lebanon, Syria, Iraq. These are the videos that in Persian we hear them. But we never, never hear them in Western media. And another thing, another example, if people are suffering from sanction, and which is true, then why did regime in Iran do not cut the budget of more than 40 religious institutions? So you see, this is the corruption of religion, religion interfere in politics. The budget of two website of two...

**Masih Alinejad 21:41:**

Ayatollah as they call themselves, Khamenei and Khomeini. The budget of these websites increased while the government said that we don't have money, and they increase their price of gasoline in Iran. So you see, the poor get poorer and the rich get richer under the Islamic Republic because of the corruption of these Mollahs. So we don't hear that. Another thing is right now, 50 women are in prison. And 10 of them, part of their position is just removing

their compulsory hijab and protesting compulsory hijab. I mean, they receive long prison sentence because of bravely protesting compulsory hijab. So guess what happened? In the Western media we don't see any solidarity, especially from female politicians. They go to my country, they only care about having commercial contract business with Islamic Republic.

**Masih Alinejad 22:47:**

They obey compulsory hijab law without saying a single word. The high representative of the European parliament, Catherine Ashton, before getting Iran deal she said to the Islamic Republic that if I want to come to Iran, there is a condition. That I have to meet with the human rights activist. So she did, it was before Iran deal. But right after the deal, the higher representative of EU, Federica Mogherini went to Iran. She didn't care to meet with those human rights activists because they used human rights as a tool to get the deal. And then after getting the deal they buried human rights. That's the problem.

**Peter McCormack 23:31:**

There's another thing I'd like you just to talk about a little bit, because I first became aware of it with your presentation at CovidCon. Where, just correct me if I've got this wrong, but I think you refer to the Ayatollah's sons having an investment company, and the corruption which surrounds this. Am I correct in this, is my memory right?

**Masih Alinejad 23:53:**

No. I said, the Ayatollah's sons, they have their own... Yeah, they have their own institutions and they get budgets from the parliament. Can you believe that? And then the regime says that we don't have money to help people for medical supplies. That's actually what has been missing in the Western media. Then the people inside Iran get frustrated because they know that the Revolutionary Guards actually took the whole, it's not me saying that, but the people inside Iran were actually chanting against the Revolutionary Guard because they took the economy hostage. And people were saying that our version of ISIS is the Revolutionary Guard. Because they are not even took the economy hostage, they actually took the people hostage as well. The Revolutionary Guard is the one actually beating up people, arresting the activists, and torturing people, killing people in the streets while they protest peacefully. But the Western media call them a hero.

**Masih Alinejad 25:15:**

So this is like the hypocrisy that we are suffering. That the West cares about human rights, but when it comes to Islamic Republic they keep silence because they want to have a deal. And sometimes even I don't trust the American government. While President Trump abandoned the Kurds in Syria. I



was like, if President Trump get a deal with Iran, then does he really care about human rights in Iran? That worries Iranian people. You know, that's the main concern that people getting killed, risking their lives. 1,500 people got killed in last November. 7,000 people got arrested. Women are in jail for their basic rights. So imagine if the American government have a deal, then what's going to happen to human rights? That's the main course. And as a human rights activist, this is my goal.

**Masih Alinejad 26:25:**

I want all the international community to understand that human rights should go first. Nobody should bury human rights under any kind of political agenda. That's old. If the American people enjoying first amendment, if the Western countries enjoying freedom of religion, freedom of expression, then this is what the people of Iran deserve to have it. And that's why they're fighting for it. So instead of, if you look for stability in the region, then you cannot go and have a negotiation with an unstable regime. Instead, the West should recognise, the civil society. And the struggle of citizens in Iran who are fighting against a better country, a better freedom and secular democratic regime.

**Peter McCormack 27:18:**

What is the general feeling towards the US in Iran? And I know there'll be a range of feelings. But I saw a video a while back, I think it was outside a college where there is flags of the Israel and the US flags outside that are put on the floor as a waiter. And so people walk over them. But I saw a video of people and they would walk around them was that real?

**Masih Alinejad 27:43:**

No, the general feeling is the one that you can see at university, you can see in the streets. You can see among students when they are not forced to do something, they are not going to step on the flags of any countries. The people inside Iran want to have a normal relation with the rest of the world. They don't want to be isolated. This is the regime. Because they are suffering from economic crisis in Iran, because they are suffering from the regime actually cannot handle Iran protest. They don't know how to control the young generation in Iran. So they need a foreign enemy. And America is this. They can use America as an enemy to get the people united. You know? So that is why. I have to say that this is just a regime trying to encourage their supporter to burn the flag of American, Israel, or step on the flag.

**Masih Alinejad 28:45:**

But this is not the reality of Iranian people. Yeah, some of the supporters of the Islamic Republic might do that because of the brainwash. But this is not the true face of Iran. Some, as I said to you, some of the people are worried. And

the general feeling is this, that the American government, the Western government might help the regime to actually save itself from Iran protest, from the struggle within the society. Because people, now after 40 years, they're brave enough. They're saying no to Islamic Republic. And people are worried that here is a time that the regime can rely on the West to survive.

**Peter McCormack 29:35:**

Are you optimistic at all? Do you believe you can see a change to the regime? Do you believe it can be brought down?

**Masih Alinejad 29:44:**

Of course. Look, I lost everything in my life. I left my homeland behind and I lost my relation with my family, with my mother. I haven't hugged my mother for 10 years. My brother's in jail. I lost a lot of things, but not hope. Because I strongly believe that the whole process that we are building up democracy is important. Of course the goal is get rid of the religious dictatorship. But the way that we are going together is important as well. The process itself is important as well. The society actually educating itself every day by these challenges.

**Masih Alinejad 30:35:**

And people learn from each protest and that is why I never lose hope. And I'm very hopeful. I see the future bright. I see the day when men and women are equal, we don't have religion interfering in our personal life. You know, it's not just interfering in politics. It's like, how many baby that we can have, this is religion making decision for us. What kind of lifestyle we want to have, this is religion making decision about us. So I see the day that religion is a personal issue for every single person and has nothing to do with my life aside, with my opinion, with my belief, and my freedom in Iran.

**Peter McCormack 31:25:**

Right. This is very, very powerful stuff. If people are interested to know more, if they want to find out more Masih, what do you want people to do?

**Masih Alinejad 31:38:**

I want people to actually... Oh my God. Do not sacrifice human rights for political agenda. This is, I always want to tell the people around the world. Even here in America, democracy is far as right. It's not something given by God and it can be there forever. We need active citizens. We need to look after democracy. And what happened to Iran, it's horrible. Because when we had the revolution 40 years ago, we lost all our social freedom overnight. So you see, that's why I strongly believe that people can take a lesson by looking at

us, instead of putting step forward. The revolution just was a very backward revolution. When the revolution itself became a revolution against women, against people. So I want people to know, if you are asking me, people should look after democracy, should feel responsible about each other.

**Masih Alinejad 32:56:**

Do not say that human rights it's an internal matter, it's about Iran, it's about Middle East, I don't want to interfere. Take a lesson from what's happened to the whole world because of coronavirus. When coronavirus enter Iran, it didn't stay there. Or coronavirus didn't stay in China. It's infected the rest of the world because of mismanagement, because of the corruption of the Chinese government and the Islamic Republic. So my believe is that, religious dictatorship is like a virus, much deadlier than coronavirus. So that is why if the rest of the world do not take an action or keep silent about it, then this religious dictatorship can infect the rest of the world like coronavirus did.

**Peter McCormack 33:57:**

Yeah. I did spend some time looking into coronavirus in Iran, and I do find the numbers themselves very suspicious. But we won't cover that now, that could be a show on its own. I will refer people in the show notes instead to go and watch your presentation for CovidCon that you did for the HRF. Okay Masih, look, I really appreciate your time. If people want to follow you, follow your work, see what you're up to, where should they follow you?

**Masih Alinejad 34:23:**

They can follow me on Instagram, which now 3.5 million followers. And on Twitter or Facebook. So you see Iranian government kicked me out from my homeland, from Iran, but they couldn't take Iran out of me. And I am there every day. So people are sending me videos of the reality what's going on in Iran. And I publish them on my Instagram. You can see that some of the videos, video of ordinary people, get five million views, two million views. And that shows the power of ordinary people who try to break the censorship and make awareness about the real Iran.

**Peter McCormack 35:07:**

You have 3.5 Million followers on Instagram?

**Masih Alinejad 35:10:**

Yes. So I'm not an actress. I'm not a model. I'm just a normal... I'm just a voice, a platform for those women and men who want to express themselves, but they don't have any media inside Iran. So that's why I offered them to use their camera as weapon. So under hashtag my camera is my weapon. You can see that, women, instead of being victims they became warriors. They're using

their camera and they expose the corruption, the violence, and they trying to take their rights back. Because you know when you use camera and film the oppressors, then you feel more powerful. And when you share it with other people, with the rest of the world, you even feel more powerful. So that scares the government. That is why actually the government in Iran, the regime in Iran, went after my family. First they faked my rape on Iranian national television. Did you know that?

**Peter McCormack 36:19:**

No, I didn't.

**Masih Alinejad 36:21:**

Yeah. They said on Iranian national television, that Masih Alinejad was raped by three men. They were not even ashamed to get my son, my teenager son involved in my fake raping. Saying that Masih's son was watching his mother, while the mother being raped by three men. And guess what was the reason in their fake story? They said that because Masih started to undress herself, then men raped her. So then she deserved it. So this is the mindset of this regime. So then that didn't work. They couldn't stop me from doing my activities against the regime.

**Masih Alinejad 37:04:**

So then they went after my family, they brought my sister on TV to disown me publicly, which she did. My mother refused to go on TV. And then they arrested my brother. You see, sometimes in my heart, I don't know how to describe somebody can... It's like, I cannot breathe when I think about my family are being hostage in the hands of Iranian government. But what gives me hope is, they're scared of me. You know? They're scared of me and millions of other women like me. And that's why they are miserable. So then I have two options, to feel miserable every day, or to make my oppressors miserable. I choose second one.

**Peter McCormack 37:55:**

Well, then you need to keep up the good fight Masih. And then hopefully when this lockdown ends and the next HRF happens, perhaps Oslo or New York, I'll actually come and say hello to you this time. And we'll catch up in person. I want to say thank you -

**Masih Alinejad 38:11:**

Together we are stronger. Yes, thank you so much for giving me a platform. Thank you.

**Peter McCormack 38:16:**

No, thank you. And keep doing everything you're doing. And hopefully we'll see you again soon. Take care.

**Masih Alinejad 38:23:**

Sure. Thank you so much. And bye