

FIRST ANNUAL PRISONERS' JUSTICE FILM FESTIVAL
January 23, 2005

Women Political Prisoners of the Middle East

Introduction and Welcome Remarks

Shahrzad Mojab

The mass participation of women in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, one of the most important anti-imperialist revolutions of the late 20th century, took the world by surprise. The course of this mass-based, largely left, and secular uprising took a sudden shift and the Islamic, conservative clerics took power. As a result, the despotic monarchical regime was replaced by an equally repressive theocracy. In the course of this political turn, women of Iran have paid a heavy toll, not yet fully known nor acknowledged widely.

While she was a student in Britain in the 1970s, Zoe Neirizi was among thousands of Iranian women who joined the World Confederation of Iranian Students; this was one of the most radical, well-organized, anti-imperialist, and internationalist student movements, badly missed today. With the fall of the Iranian monarchy in 1979, she was also among thousands of students who went back to Iran in order to join the struggle for building a democratic, egalitarian, and just society.

Zoe is also among another thousands of Iranian women who were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured because of opposing the Islamic theocracy, and its religious-feudal-patriarchal relations of power. She has survived to tell us her tale, while thousands were executed in obscurity, and it is very recently that we are reading about their resistance among the pages of memoirs of the survivors who were able to leave the country.

Zoe came to Britain in 1993 after serving three years and two months in a prison in Iran. In exile, she has pursued her study in law, and a week ago she passed her last exam to be a qualified solicitor, and she will work on immigration and refugee cases in February.

Zoe is a member of the Write to Life Project at the Medical Foundation and has written short stories about her life. *The Corridor* marks Zoe's debut as a writer, director, and producer for a drama short. She wishes to continue her creative writing and to make short films on social issues relating to women and disadvantaged groups in general.