



A Tribute to Roza Eftekhari from WASL

It is with immense sadness and grief that we in the [Women's Alliance for Security Leadership](#) (WASL) family, express our condolences for the passing of our dear sister, friend and colleague Roza Eftekhari on July 20, 2021, due to ovarian cancer.

Roza was among the founding members of WASL in 2016, enthusiastically supporting our first [collective statement](#) and the vision and values that shaped and have driven our community. A renowned journalist and figure in the Iranian women's movement, as Managing Editor of the famous *Zanan* magazine, she created a space for dialogue and common ground between secular and religious voices addressing critical issues of gender equality and human rights.

In WASL, among a global community of women peacebuilders, she was not only able to share her depth of knowledge and expertise and strategies of dialogue and activism in situations of closed political space, but she thrived on the warmth and richness of the lives and experiences of others in the alliance. She loved listening to the life stories of women peacebuilders around the world.

Farsi, Roza's mother tongue and the language which she loved and spoke eloquently and poetically, helps us cope with this unbearable pain and untimely loss.

Instead of saying "rest in peace," Persian speakers say, "may her spirit be happy." We hope so. In one lifetime Roza lived and endured many lives. At 17 she witnessed the burning of the Cinema Rex in Abadan her hometown that sparked the Iranian revolution. As the Saddam's army invaded Iran in 1980, she was at the frontlines, helping to evacuate people. Roza was the quintessential peacebuilder; the person who ran to the problems to help others, while others ran away.

Years later, like many other national figures, she was forced into exile, but in the US, she rebuilt her life, first as a Nieman Fellow and then attaining her Masters Degree from Harvard's Kennedy School, caring for her family and continuing her work on women's rights and civil society development, always with integrity and kindness. Her illness was yet another struggle that she endured with grace, and strength.

In Persian, instead of saying "we miss her," they say, "her place is empty." That much is true. No one can replace her. It's a strange thing really. Roza was such a reliable, rooted, committed and giving person; life without her was unimaginable. As her closest friends, some of us have known of her cancer for years, yet denial and a persistent belief (or suspension of disbelief) in her indispensable presence, carried us these years. The grief we feel now, is the bottled-up grief of five years.

In these years, she wouldn't let any of us steer our lives any differently because of her illness. Above all she was always happy to talk to and support friends, endless conversations about everything and nothing - as if we had all the time in the world.

In 2017 just prior to the annual ICAN/WASL forum in Morocco, her diagnosis came through and she was unable to join us. But a year later, with the chemotherapy on a pause, she joined us for the inaugural ICAN “Gender Responsive and Inclusive Mediation” in Ottawa and the 2018 annual forum in Sri Lanka.

Every single person who met her recalls a deep, moving and caring conversation. Roza was not only an amazing storyteller, but also a gifted story-catcher to her core, interested in people's lives and making their stories matter, able to emit trust and get trust. Roza loved being connected to everyone around the world.

Finally, in Persian we also say, “del be del rah darad.” It means that the heart finds a path to the heart. Roza's love, her spirit and her very essence lives on in the lives she touched, in her friends, and colleagues, in budding Iranian journalists and the generations of young Iranian and Afghan women who read Zanan and felt encouraged and inspired to pursue their dreams and opportunities.

Roza loved traveling. On Tuesday July 20th as we heard the news of her passing, the sky above the ocean in California, turned rose. The spirit of our Roza was there, heading to the heavens above and to travel the world, keeping us in her sight.

May her soul rest in peace, and her spirit dance among the stars.