

You've selected the U.S. Edition. Would you like to make this your default edition? Yes | No

Close

EDITION: U.S. | INTERNATIONAL | MEXICO

Sign up | Log in

Set edition preference

CNN Opinion

SEARCH

- Home
- Video
- NewsPulse
- U.S.
- World
- Politics
- Justice
- Entertainment
- Tech
- Health
- Living
- Travel
- Opinion
- iReport
- Money
- Sports

Iran steps up assault on female activists

By **Gissou Nia**, Special to CNN
October 11, 2010 2:05 p.m. EDT



Editor's note: Gissou Nia is a researcher and legal analyst at the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. She recently co-wrote a report on the Iranian government's crackdown on women's rights activists. She also worked on war crimes trials at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Women's rights activist Shiva Nazar Ahari serving six years for "waging war against God"

Nia: Women's rights activists are imprisoned for no crime other than fighting for women's rights

Nia believes Iran targets women activists to curb any momentum for larger internal reform

Women activists have been on the front line of reform in Iran for more than a decade

(CNN) -- As Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited the U.N. General Assembly in New York last month, the spotlight was once again on Iran. And true to form, the Iranian president made his fair share of provocative statements for the Western media.

But while Ahmadinejad's mercurial rants captured our media's attention, back in Iran a coordinated strategy against the women's movement continued.

On the eve of Ahmadinejad's arrival to New York, Shiva Nazar Ahari, a prominent young female defender of human rights, received a heavy sentence of six years in prison on charges including the vague crime of "waging war against God" -- a convenient catch-all offense for anyone who criticizes the regime and its human rights record.

There's no denying it -- Iran's women have had a bad year. Nazar Ahari joins a steadily increasing number of other women's rights activists who are in prison for no greater crime than their attempt to fight for the rights of the women.

Since the 2009 disputed elections ... the government has increasingly targeted women activists.

--Gissou Nia

Hengameh Shahidi, Alieh Eghdam Doust, Bahareh Hedayat and Mahdiyeh Golrou have all been sent to Tehran's notorious Evin Prison on trumped-up charges related to their activism. And while Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi, arguably the most internationally recognized Iranian women's rights activist, remains unable to safely return to her country, the government is targeting those affiliated with her for arrest and imprisonment, including her lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and her former aide Jinous Sobhani.

Since the 2009 disputed elections and associated government crackdown on the overall reform movement, the government has increasingly targeted women

Recommend

Eric Heining and 26 others recommend this.



YOUR RIGHT DECISION.VOTE.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR VOTE

GET YOUR AARP VOTERS' GUIDE

LEARN MORE

AARP

ADVERTISEMENT

NewsPulse

Most popular stories right now

Renaissance jock tackles ultimate fighting

Chile mine path reinforcement finished

Crystal Bowersox gets married

Cops: Boyfriend's arrest cracks cold case

Search continues for N.C. girl, 10

Explore the news with NewsPulse >

InterestPlus Online Savings

Get paid. Twice.

1.35% APY + **10% bonus** on interest earned*

with \$1,000 or more

Learn More

Capital One Bank MEMBER FDIC

ADVERTISEMENT

RELATED TOPICS

[Iran](#)
[Women's Issues](#)
[Iranian Politics](#)
[Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#)

the government has increasingly targeted women activists. The reasons behind this go well beyond the misogynist nature of Iran's religious leadership.

Rather, it is more part of a deliberate and calculated strategy of the Iranian authorities to strike at the heart of the regime's greatest vulnerability -- internal legitimacy with its own people.

[See more CNN.com opinion articles](#)

Iran's government recognizes and fears the broader power of the women activists who have been on the front line of reform in Iran for more than a decade. One can roughly draw an analogy between the women's movement in Iran to movements of religious groups in Burma or Tibet, or the labor "solidarity" movements in the former Eastern bloc and associated labor-Roman Catholic solidarity in Poland -- all advocating initially for the freedoms of a specific group but which provoked government fears for their transformative power to promote broader human rights progress.

While the outside world occasionally reacts to the most egregious manifestations of Iran's repression of women -- such as the international condemnation associated with Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, an Iranian widow sentenced to stoning on charges of alleged adultery -- these events are often portrayed simply as a consequence of the regime's archaic viewpoint about gender.

However, the government's direct targeting of women goes beyond chauvinism and is an integral part of a strategy to quell any momentum for larger internal reform.

Women activists in Iran have worked for years at the ground level to promote internal change. Although Iran's women suffered a significant setback with the imposition of discriminatory laws following the 1979 revolution, an ease in restrictions during Mohammad Khatami's presidential term in the late 1990s and early 2000s allowed women to organize around reforms and emerge as a formidable grass-roots force in civil society.

Women-led campaigns to collect signatures in support of reform of gender discriminatory laws and protest the stoning of women formed and grew rapidly, attracting many members and international attention. In the years that followed, women were often at the forefront of staging public protests.

During the presidential election campaign in 2009, women activists, drawing on their grass roots and organizational experience, played a critical role in shaping and influencing the political platforms of the opposition candidates.

So when the government set out to suppress the larger civil unrest that broke out in Iran's major cities after the election, it set its sights on a perceived catalyst for this unrest -- the well-established women's movement.

In the mass indictments issued in August 2009 by Tehran's prosecutor general, women were identified as an element of an alleged "soft" revolution. Women's rights activists report that government interrogators warned them to cease their activities and accused them of supplying the political opposition with organizational and leadership skills and knowledge.

Today the regime continues to systematically target the women's movement, whose leading campaigners are being silenced, imprisoned and exiled in increasing numbers.

It's not sufficient for members of the international community to speak up only occasionally at the most shocking manifestations of the Iranian regime's targeting of women. Rather, a sustained, consistent and broader campaign must be waged that seeks to

Sponsored Links**Mortgage Rates Hit 3.25%**

If you owe less than \$729k you probably qualify for Obamas Refi Program

Penny Stocks to Watch

Get the alerts before anyone else. Gain as much as 625%!

How to Stay Asleep?

Cambridge Researchers have developed an all natural sleep aid just for you.

Shocking Discovery for your Joints

Shocking discovery by Cambridge Researcher's for amazing joint relief

[Buy a link here](#)

promote and give voice to the major catalysts of comprehensive human rights progress in Iran -- its brave women activists.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Gissou Nia.

Recommend

Eric Heininger and 26 others recommend this.



FOLLOW THIS TOPIC +

We recommend

- 2-year-old Emmett Trapp found dead
- Obama-Clinton ticket 'on the table'
- Iranian stoning woman says she was not whipped
- Home invasion victim's ordeal goes on
- CEO Whitman flunks home economics

From around the web

- Woman Accused of Killing Toddler Allowed to Nurse Newborn The Stir By CafeMom
- 8 Messy Supermodel Divorces The Frisky
- Grossest Workplace Lawsuit Ever: You'll Never Look at Water the Same Way The Stir By CafeMom
- Iran unveils human-shaped robot USATODAY.com
- Does 'NBA Jam' Have a Liberal Bias? FOX News Thinks It Might Switched

[what's this]

Sponsored Links

Mortgage Rates Hit 3.25%
If you owe less than \$729k you probably qualify for Obamas Refi Program

Penny Stocks to Watch
Get the alerts before anyone else. Gain as much as 625%!

How to Stay Asleep?
Cambridge Researchers have developed an all natural sleep aid just for you.

Buy a link here

soundoff (3 Comments)

Show: [Newest](#) | [Oldest](#) | [Most liked](#)

Post a comment
[Log in or sign up to comment](#)



[Log in or sign up to comment](#)

MikeyC4L

People who protect the Iranian regime and denounce the actions and "cruelty" of the West, should acknowledge how women and minorities are being treated in Iran. It's scary.

50 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



edandnanette

So What! US Troops just killed a woman aid worker Ho Hum any other news?

51 minutes ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



MikeyC4L

Name me one war in which there haven't been civilian casualties. It's inevitable. And the US Troops actually tried to rescue that aid worker. Start becoming more open-minded, and stop believing what ignorant narrow-minded fools tell you to.

41 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



73° HI 77° LO 51°
Success, MO Weather forecast

SEARCH

POWERED BY Google

[Home](#) | [Video](#) | [NewsPulse](#) | [U.S.](#) | [World](#) | [Politics](#) | [Justice](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Tech](#) | [Health](#) | [Living](#) | [Travel](#) | [Opinion](#) | [iReport](#) | [Money](#) | [Sports](#)
[Tools & widgets](#) | [RSS](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Blogs](#) | [CNN mobile](#) | [My profile](#) | [E-mail alerts](#) | [CNN shop](#) | [Site map](#)

