

October 28, 2015 12:25PM EDT

## **Women's Rights in Iran**

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Women's rights are severely restricted in Iran, to the point where women are even forbidden from watching men's sports in stadiums. That ban includes Iran's national obsession – volleyball.

Human Rights Watch is launching a new campaign, #Watch4Women, to support Iranian women fighting this ugly discrimination. What we're asking is simple: that the International Volleyball Federation, known as the FIVB, uphold its own rules and agree not to allow Iran to host future tournaments – unless it allows Iranian women to attend.

The ban on women in sports stadiums is emblematic of the repression of women across the country. Women confront serious discrimination on issues such as marriage, divorce, and child custody. Women have been sent to jail for publicly speaking out in favor of equal rights for women. Because the government wants Iran's population to grow, it's even moving to ban voluntary medical procedures women can undergo to avoid becoming pregnant. And that's just the beginning.

It's not just women who are repressed in Iran. Anyone who openly criticizes the government risks being thrown in jail. The government also discriminates against ethnic communities like the Kurds and Balochs, as well as people belonging to the Baha'i faith.

### **How else are women's rights restricted in Iran?**

Iran holds regular elections, and its president, Hassan Rouhani, says he wants reforms, as do many Iranians. But much of the country's power lies with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader. Khamenei's office oversees Iran's military, judicial courts, and the media. A conservative newspaper that has often supported the Ayatollah described the notion of "gender equality" as "unacceptable to the Islamic Republic."

You see this played out across women's lives. Women in Iran are forced to wear the hijab, the headscarf worn by some Muslim women, in public. This even applies to young schoolgirls, who are required to wear the head covering to attend elementary school.

Moreover, married women can't even leave the country without their husband's permission. In fact, in September the captain of Iran's female football (soccer) team, Niloufar Ardalan, couldn't play in an international tournament in Malaysia because her husband forbade her from traveling.

Iran does allow women to play sports, like football and volleyball. But none of these women are allowed to do something as simple as watch men play volleyball, even if their brothers, sons, or husbands are playing. In fact, Ghoncheh Ghavami, 25, a dual Iranian-British national, was arrested when she tried to attend a volleyball game in Tehran. Police are often posted around stadiums, in part to keep women out.

Convincing Iran to allow women to watch sports would be an important initial step toward ensuring that women – and others – enjoy the freedom they're entitled to.

Iran isn't the only country that discriminates against women when it comes to sports. Saudi Arabia doesn't even let girls in state-funded schools take gym class, and the country stops Saudi women from watching men play football in stadiums. For those pushing for change in the Middle East region, there is much work to be done to improve the lives of women.

### **What other human rights abuses happen in Iran?**

Across the board, Iran's human rights situation is dire. It's hard to say what tops the list of abuses, but there are severe restrictions on free speech in Iran. Iran is one of the world's biggest jailers of journalists, bloggers and social media activists, says Reporters Without Borders. It's the kind of place where even a Facebook post could land someone in jail. Iran has unfairly imprisoned the Washington Post correspondent, Jason Rezaian, who is still behind bars. In Iran, people go to jail for "insulting" the supreme leader, president, or other government officials – something that should never be a crime.

In May, 2014, police arrested four young men and three women who created a video of themselves dancing together to Pharrell Williams' hit song, "Happy," which went viral on YouTube. The charges against them included engaging in "illicit relations."

### **How does the Iran nuclear deal play into human rights?**

You may have heard in the news that over the summer, Iran signed a nuclear deal with other world powers. This means that Iran has agreed to limit its nuclear program in exchange for other countries lifting sanctions, which limit Iran's trade and hurt its economy.

Now that the nuclear deal is done, Human Rights Watch believes the rest of the world should pressure Iran to reform and treat all of its citizens with dignity.