



## Spotlight on Iran



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### Stadium for men only: demands voiced once again to allow women into football (soccer) stadiums

A decision made by the Iranian Football Federation to prevent women from entering Tehran's Azadi Stadium to take part in a welcoming party for the Iranian football team, which made the World Cup this week, has rekindled the debate on whether women should be allowed into football stadiums.

During the welcoming ceremony, several dozen women demonstrated outside the stadium gates in protest of the decision to ban them from entering. The Football Federation's decision also provoked heated reactions on social networks, especially from women calling to end the discrimination against them.

Since the late 1990s the issue of allowing women into football stadiums has become part of the discourse on women's rights in Iran. In April 2006 President Ahmadinejad announced his decision to let women attend football matches; however, he was forced to rescind the decision due to opposition from the Supreme Leader and top clerics.

The debate has resurfaced only days after Hassan Rowhani's victory in the Iranian presidential election, which has given human rights activists and supporters of the reformist camp a new hope that the civilian rights policy will change for the better and the discrimination against women will end.

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On June 19, a welcoming ceremony was held at Azadi Stadium for the Iranian football team, which came back to Tehran after a victory over South Korea that qualified it for next year's World Cup in Brazil. Shortly prior to the welcoming party for the team, Iran's national Football Federation announced that only men would be allowed to attend, and that women would not be allowed into the stadium. Several dozen female football fans

who gathered outside the stadium gates during the ceremony confronted with the internal security forces, which prevented them from entering the stadium. The fans chanted slogans against the decision to ban their entry and for equality between men and women. The protesting women were joined by several men.



**“If my sister isn’t allowed into Azadi, I’m turning my back on Azadi, too”**

The decision to prevent women from entering the stadium provoked heated reactions on social networks, especially from women calling to change the policy that does not allow women into football stadiums and end the discrimination against them. Exiled journalist and blogger Masih Alinejad strongly criticized the authorities’ decision to prevent women from taking part in the welcoming party for the Iranian team. In a post on her personal blog, Alinejad wrote that there is no reason for women not to demand their rights and wait for years before they are allowed to exercise those rights, which include going into stadiums, not being forced to wear a veil, and being allowed to sing. She said that it’s no longer possible to accept the regular answers given to women who have been asking permission to enter stadiums for years: are there no more social problems left and the only one remaining is women going to stadiums? Do women believe that the atmosphere in the stadiums is ready for them? Cannot women patiently wait out the crisis that is currently gripping Iran? (<http://masihalinejad.com>)



“A national celebration without women is not national”



All photos taken from <https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-feminist-school--مدرسه-فمینیستی/تجمع-زنان-->  
ایرانی-در-پشت-درهای-بسته-آزادی-بهر-روایت-تصویر

Since the late 1990s, the issue of allowing women into football stadiums has become part of the discourse on women's rights in Iran. Organizations for human and women's rights occasionally bring up the demand to allow women into stadiums. Among other things, there have been a number of Facebook pages launched in the past several years intended to raise public awareness of the discrimination against women in stadiums and to change the policy on the issue.



**A Facebook page titled “Women’s presence at the stadium”  
(<https://www.facebook.com/hoozoorzanan.stadium>)**

In November 1997 female football fans broke into the Azadi Stadium to take part in the celebrations after the Iranian football team defeated Australia and qualified for the 1998 World Cup. In April 2006 President Ahmadinejad announced his decision to allow women into football stadiums. The decision, which apparently had not been cleared with the Supreme Leader, soon provoked the anger of the clerics and eventually Ahmadinejad was forced to back down on it.

In January 2009 the Iranian association of football fans sent an official letter to Mohammad Ali Abadi, the then vice president and chairman of the Association of Physical Education, asking that an organized group of women be allowed to attend a World Cup 2010 qualifying match between Iran and South Korea, which was to take place in February 2009 at the Azadi Stadium. In its letter, the association asked that 100 women, including football players and their family members, be allowed to enter the stadium, promising that they would dress appropriately in full compliance with the Islamic dress code (Roaz Online, January 12, 2009). However, the policy on allowing women into stadiums remained unchanged despite consultations held by Iran’s Football Federation on the possibility of letting women attend international matches held at the Azadi Stadium and despite requests from the International Football Association.

The debate on whether women should be allowed to attend football matches at stadiums has resurfaced only days after Hassan Rowhani’s victory in the Iranian presidential election, which has given human rights activists and supporters of the

reformist camp a new hope that the civilian rights policy will change for the better and the discrimination against women will end.

