## Iran’s Human Rights Record ‘Worse Under Rouhani’

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UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Iranian Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi said Tuesday that Iran’s human rights situation has not improved despite President Hassan Rouhani’s promises of change. She urged the UN General Assembly to approve a resolution criticizing the country’s abuses.  
  
In an interview with the Associated Press, Ebadi said Iran’s rights record remains as bad as it was under hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad — and in some cases, it is worse.  
  
She said the difference is that Ahmadinejad supported severe limitations on human rights while Rouhani has vowed to ease restrictions on freedom of expression and eliminate discrimination against women and minorities.

But Rouhani “can’t do much” amid stiff resistance from hard-liners in the government, Ebadi said.

“This is why many journalists, many well-known feminists, many students and many members of civil society are in prison now,” she said.

She also pointed to an increase in executions, averaging three a day. While some are criminals, she said, a number are political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

Ebadi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her efforts to promote democracy, is campaigning for support for a UN General Assembly resolution that expresses deep concern at the “serious ongoing and recurring human rights violations” in Iran. The draft resolution criticizes “the alarming high frequency” of the death penalty, including against minors.

The resolution’s approval would let the Iranian people know “that the international community is paying attention to them” and not just to the negotiations to limit Iran’s nuclear program, Ebadi said. Assembly resolutions are non-binding but carry moral weight.

A man answering the press office extension at Iran’s mission to the UN said they had no comment at the moment.

Ebadi, the first Iranian and first Muslim woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, urged the international community and Iran’s civil society to keep pressuring the government to improve human rights.

“The world is scared that if Iran put its hand on an atomic bomb that that would threaten the peace of Europe and the rest of the world,” Ebadi said. “But what we’re talking about is … (that) the people of Iran count as well, the way they are being taken to prison, the way they are being killed.”

She said a democratic government in Iran will come up with a better foreign policy, but a non-democratic, closed government, “even if it promises, one cannot count on those promises.”

Ebadi left Iran just before the disputed 2009 presidential election. She said all her property has been confiscated and auctioned off, her NGOs have been closed down, her office has been raided and she would be arrested if she returns.

Ebadi said she isn’t afraid of going to prison but outside Iran, “I can be the voice of my people and go around and talk about the situation in Iran.”