

## Shirin Ebadi - Autobiography

I was born in the city of Hamedan [northwestern Iran] in 1947. My family were academics and practicing Muslims. At the time of my birth my father was the head of Hamedan's Registry Office. My father, Mohammad Ali Ebadi, one of the first lecturers in commercial law, had written several books. He passed away in 1993.

I spent my childhood in a family filled with kindness and affection. My two sisters and one brother were encouraged to pursue our educations. My mother dedicated all her time and devotion to our upbringing.

I came to Tehran with my family when I was a one year old and have since been a resident in the capital. I began my education at Firuzkuhi primary school and went on to Anoshiravn Dadgar and Reza Shah Kabir secondary schools for my higher education. I sat the Tehran University entrance exams and gained a place at the Faculty of Law in 1965. I received my law degree in three-and-a-half years, and immediately sat the entrance exams for the Department of Justice. After a six-month apprenticeship in adjudication, I began to serve officially as a judge in March 1969. While serving as a judge, I continued my education and obtained a doctorate with honors in private law from Tehran University in 1971.

I held a variety of positions in the Justice Department. In 1975, I became the President of Bench 24 of the [Tehran] City Court. I am one of the first women in the history of Iranian justice to have served as a judge. Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution in February 1979, since the belief was that Islam forbids women to serve as judges, I and other female judges were dismissed from our posts and given clerical duties. They made me a clerk in the very court I once presided over. We all protested. As a result, they promoted all former female judges, including myself, to the position of "experts" in the Justice Department. I could not tolerate the situation any longer, and so put in a request for early retirement. My request was accepted. Since the Bar Association had remained closed for some time since the revolution and was being managed by the Judiciary, my application for practicing law was turned down. I was, in effect, housebound for many years. Finally, in 1992 I succeeded in obtaining a lawyer's license and set up my own practice.

I used my time of unemployment to write several books and had many articles published in Iranian journals. After receiving my lawyer's license I defended many cases. Some were national cases. Among them, I represented the families of the serial murders victims (the family of Dariush and Parvaneh Foruhar) and Ezzat Ebrahiminejad, who were killed during the attack on the university dormitory. I also participated in some press-related cases. I took on a large number of social cases, too, including child abuse. In 2003, I agreed to represent the mother of Mrs Zahra Kazemi, a photojournalist killed in Iran.

I am married. My husband is an electrical engineer. We have two daughters. Both are now studying at a university in Canada.

## **Social Activities:**

- Leading several research projects for the UNICEF office in Tehran.
- Cofounder of the Association for Support of Children's Rights, 1995. I was the association's president until 2000, and have continued to assist them as legal adviser. Currently the association has over 500 active members.
- Providing various stages of free tuition in children's rights and human rights.
- Cofounder of the Human Rights Defense Centre with four defense lawyers, 2001. I am the center's president.
- Delivering over 30 lectures to university and academic conferences and seminars on human rights. The lectures have been delivered in Iran, France, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Britain and America.
- Representing several journalists or their families, accused or sentenced in relation to freedom of expression. They include Habibollah Peyman (for writing articles and delivering speeches on freedom of expression); Abbas Marufi, the editor-in-chief of the monthly *Gardoun* (for publishing several interviews and poems); Faraj Sarkuhi (editor-in-chief of *Adineh monthly*).
- Representing families of serial murder victims (the Foruhar family).
- Representing the family of Ezzat Ebrahiminejad, murdered in the 9 July 1999 attack on the university dormitory.
- Representing the mother of Arin Golshani, a child separated from her mother as a consequence of the child custody law. She was found tortured to death at the home of her stepmother.
- Proposing to the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) to ratify a law on prohibiting all forms of violence against children; as a result the law was promptly debated and ratified in the summer of 2002.

## **Prizes and Accolades:**

1. An official Human Rights Watch observer, 1996.
2. The selection of *The Rights of the Child* as Book of the Year by the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry.
3. Recipient of the Rafto Human Rights Foundation prize for human rights activities, Norway 2001.
4. The Nobel Peace Prize, Norway 2003.