*This excerpt*—*which has been modified for the classroom*—*is from Shirin Ebadi’s May 1, 2006 talk at Carnegie Council about her book* Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope. *Ebadi was one of Iran's first female judges from 1975-1979, but was forced to resign after the 1979 revolution. She has been imprisoned on numerous occasions because of her human rights work. In 2003 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her sustained fight for human rights and democracy, the first Muslim woman and the first Iranian to receive this award.***Gender Discrimination in Iran (2006)**

…the government of Iran has adhered to most conventions in the field of human rights. But, unfortunately, our laws do not reflect these commitments taken by the government, by the country, and there are many, many cases of violations of human rights. For example, there is discrimination on the basis of gender. I can give you several examples of our laws in this field.

One example is the value that the laws give to the life of a woman and to the life of a man. For example, if there is an accident in the street and a man is injured or a woman is injured…the price that you would attribute to the life of a woman is not the same as the value that you would give to a man. The value of the life of a woman is half that of a man. In matters of testimony, when people go and give testimony in courts, the testimony of one man is equal to the testimony of two women.

The age for contracting marriage is also different and very low in Iran. For girls it’s thirteen and for boys it’s fifteen. We are talking about laws that were adopted after the revolution in Iran.

What you should know is that the women in Iran acquired the right to vote [in 1963], well before many women in the world—for example, well before women in Switzerland. And they could sit in parliament.

Another feature which is characteristic of Iran is that women are, on the whole, more educated than men, and this is reflected by the number of women who are in university. Sixty-five percent of the students are girls. That is probably one of the main reasons why women in Iran talk against the government, because they cannot accept the discriminatory laws against them.

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**Religious Discrimination in Iran (2006)**

We [in Iran] also have in our laws discrimination on religious grounds. There is, of course, discrimination between Muslims and people who have other religions. It [laws] also goes as far as creating discrimination between Sunnis and Shias, who are both Muslims…The example in this field is that in Tehran, which is a huge city, with 14 million inhabitants, the Sunnis have not had the right yet to open a mosque. It is only in some cities that are close to the borders of Iran, where the concentration of the Sunni population is very high, that they have had the possibility to open Sunni mosques.

Not only do we see discrimination between Sunnis and Shias, we can also see discrimination amongst Muslims who are, I would say, pro-government and those who are not with the government. About two months ago [February 2006], the Sufis, which are a religious group, were having a ceremony, a celebration in the city of [Qum,](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qum) which is a very sacred city in Iran…. But the Sufis, although being Shias, are people who do not sympathize with the government. That is why they were attacked by the forces of police and by some pressure groups. I must stress that these, what I call pressure groups, usually come and disrupt congregations and assemblies. Very often, when the government wants to disrupt a group, it does it through these pressure groups, because it’s very easy afterwards to dissociate oneself from them, saying, “We don’t know who these people are.”