

# The Initiative for Inclusive Security

A Program of Hunt Alternatives Fund

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## Women in Iran Stay the Democratic Course *The Initiative for Inclusive Security Releases Report on How Advancing Women's Rights in Iran is Key to Democratic Reform*

WASHINGTON, DC – Iranian women have influenced elections in Iran in significant ways over the past 10 years. At times, their support for candidates has been decisive. This year, women have staged several major demonstrations voicing their message of reform; for example, hundreds of women gathered in downtown Tehran to protest institutionalized sex discrimination.

In a report released last week in collaboration with the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, The Initiative for Inclusive Security argues that the struggle for women's rights in Iran is fully intertwined with the larger struggle for democracy and this movement is mirrored throughout the Middle East. The report, entitled *Women's Rights and Democracy: Peaceful Transformation in Iran* can be found at: [http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/101\\_iran\\_report\\_final09\\_29\\_06.pdf](http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/101_iran_report_final09_29_06.pdf).

“Women consistently play an important role in Iranians' struggle for a more open, democratic society: as women push their agendas in theocratic and political discourse, they open a broader space for debate and foster reform,” said **Carla Koppell, director of The Initiative for Inclusive Security**.

“This report highlights women's contributions to Iran's transformation. Neither reformists nor conservatives can ignore them any longer,” added **Dr. Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, an Iranian fellow at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government**.

Unfortunately, the gains made by women are under threat from theocratic conservatives. Women are increasingly arrested for violating Islamic dress codes. The new parliament has rejected expanding women's inheritance rights and has called for segregating men and women at universities.

Inclusive Security's report offers recommendations to the United States and the international community to increase opportunities for women who are helping drive the Iranian democratic movement.

“Women in Iran are at the forefront of social currents that are moving the country in the direction of reform,” the report states. “With women making up to 70 percent of university students, they are poised to participate extensively in the economic and political sectors. As the international community struggles to devise strategies to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, win the war against global terrorism, and build democracy throughout the Middle East, it will be vital for policymakers to offer continuing encouragement, support, and protection to women who are working inside Iran to press for lasting change.”

In order to raise their voices and profiles to policymakers worldwide, The Initiative for Inclusive Security will host a delegation of Iranian women at its annual colloquium in January, 2007. In addition to Iranians, women from Nepal, Uganda, and Sudan will share strategies and develop recommendations to elevate women's participation in government.

**The Initiative for Inclusive Security**, a program of Hunt Alternatives Fund, advocates for the full participation of all stakeholders, especially women, in peace processes. Creating sustainable peace is achieved best by a diverse, citizen-driven approach. Of the many sectors of society currently excluded from peace processes, none is larger—or more critical to success—than women. Since 1999, Inclusive Security has connected more than 450 women experts with over 3,000 policy shapers to collaborate on fresh, workable solutions to long-standing conflicts across the globe. For more information visit [www.HuntAlternatives.org](http://www.HuntAlternatives.org).

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