Iran bans women from 77 university degree courses

Thirty-six universities in Iran have announced that a number of their courses will be "single gender" this year.

Talia Ralph  August 20, 2012 16:05

Iran has banned women from 77 university courses, labeling classes in everything from English literature to biology as "single gender."

Thirty-six Iranian universities are participating in the ban, which will make many higher-education classes exclusive to men as of next academic year, the Telegraph reported.

Iranian human rights activist and Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi has written a letter of complaint about the ban to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay.

"[It] is part of the recent policy of the Islamic Republic, which tries to return women to the private domain inside the home as it cannot tolerate their passionate presence in the public arena," Ebadi wrote in the letter, which was also sent to Ahmad Shaheed, the UN's special rapporteur for human rights in Iran.

"The aim is that women will give up their opposition and demands for their own rights," she continued.

Iran's senior clerics support the ban over concerns that increased education for women are causing social side effects such as declining birth and marriage rates, the International Herald Tribune reported.

Iranian high school students sit for their university entrance examination in Tehran. (Mona Hoobehfekr/AFP/Getty Images)

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The new laws come as female students in Iran have been outperforming men at the academic level: three women passed this year's university entrance exams for every two men who passed, Ynetnews reported.

Women currently make up about 60 percent of university students in the country, the New York Times reported.

The courses that are closed off to women are incredibly varied, according to Iranian news site Rooz Online:

Urban development engineering, urban development with a major in surveillance at 15 universities had the largest number of students reserved only for men. Following that came...
management and mining engineering programs in 12 universities which only admitted men to them.

But academic subjects that are denied to women are not restricted to these and others such as accounting, education fields, restoration of historic buildings, pure chemistry etc are also shut to women.

"Some fields are not very suitable for women’s nature," said Abolfazl Hasani, a senior Iranian education official, according to Rooz Online.

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This is insane. In this day and age, women should not be banned from completing their studies. Regardless of genders, all human being have equal level of intellect. Of what they do with it, it is entirely up to them. Stopping women from obtaining tertiary education is just wrong.

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