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TUCSON REGION

Nobel laureate: Get out of Iraq

By Stephanie Innes

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Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi lived up to her reputation for courage in the face of controversy during a visit to Tucson on Tuesday by firmly stating that the United States needs to get out of Iraq.

Straying from a prepared speech about Islam and democracy that she had sent to organizers from the University of Arizona's Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Tucson-based Iranian Association of Arizona, the first Muslim woman ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize expanded her talk to include not only religion and democracy, but the futility of war.

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"We should not justify a war for which nobody is going to come out honorably," Ebadi told an audience of nearly 1,200 in the ballroom of the UA's Student Union Memorial Center. "Democracy does not happen overnight. It is not a gift to be given to someone."

Ebadi spoke in Persian through translator Kamran Talattof, a UA associate professor of Near Eastern studies who stepped in when it became clear that Ebadi was not speaking the prepared speech that the UA had translated into English text and projected on a screen for the audience.

While democracy and human rights are needed in all societies, Ebadi said military invasions are not the way to achieve those goals.

"We cannot establish a democracy with guns," she said. "Democracy and human rights are not achievable except through people's will."

That Ebadi decided to include the war in Iraq during her talk and criticize the U.S. government for its military invasion is true to her reputation as a woman unafraid of pushing the envelope.

An Islamic reformist from Iran who routinely risks arrest and even death for speaking in favor of religious freedom and against violations of human rights in her country, Ebadi in 2003 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, beating out a record 164 other nominees.

A compact woman with a determined smile, Ebadi came to Tucson as part of a national tour. After her talk at the UA she was scheduled to attend a fund-raising dinner hosted by the Iranian Association of Arizona, which was hoping to present the Nobel winner with a check for \$40,000 to go toward helping children who were orphaned in December's devastating earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam.

UA President Peter Likins praised Ebadi's commitment to social justice and her efforts to bring peace and justice into the world. Ebadi continues to speak out for women's rights in a country where a woman still needs her husband's permission to divorce, travel or even to work.

"She is a beacon of hope and a model of courage," said Toni Massaro, dean of the UA's James E. Rogers College of Law. "She feels the pain of those suffering injustice."

Massaro praised Ebadi for being true to herself and her convictions, and for sharing with the world a belief that without human rights, there will be no lasting peace.

Ebadi, 57, is a lawyer by training who became Iran's first female judge during the 1970s but had to give up the job after the 1979 Islamic revolution barred women from the bench.

The comment that drew the loudest applause and a standing ovation from some, was Ebadi's firm statement that "I wish for the U.S. Army to exit Iraq."

She added that peace is twofold - both internal and external. Internal peace begins in the schools, she said, and then it flows into families and into the veins of society.

Ebadi ended her speech by giving some advice in the tone of a loving yet scolding parent.

"Let us be kind to each other," she said loudly and then paused.

"Kind."

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"Democracy does not happen overnight. It is not a gift to be given to someone." Shirin Ebadi Nobel laureate

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