

Film Exposes Human Rights Abuses in Iran

✖ Although protests over Iran's disputed presidential elections have died down, a new film by the Christian filmmaker who helped produce *The Passion of the Christ* is again drawing attention to human rights abuses in the predominantly Muslim nation.

The Stoning of Soraya M., which premieres Friday, tells the true story of a Muslim woman who is stoned to death after her husband falsely accuses her of infidelity in order to dispose of her and marry another woman.

Based on a 1994 book by Paris-based journalist Freidoune Sahebjam, the film stars Jim Caviezel (*The Passion of the Christ*) as Sahebjam and Shohreh Aghdashloo (*The House of Sand and Fog*) as Soraya's aunt Zahra, who tells him her niece's story. **(View a trailer below.)**

Cyrus Nowrasteh, who wrote screenplay for the controversial TV movie *The Path to 9/11*, co-wrote and directed the film.

"It's a movie that you will never forget, and there's very few films like that that just stick with you and have an effect on your life," said producer Stephen McEveety, who was also one of the producers of *The Passion of the Christ*. "I didn't make this film to have an effect on Iran. What really attracted me to the piece is that it causes you to search your soul. It's about victims. The woman in this movie is the ultimate victim."

But he admits that the timing for the film's release couldn't be better, as Iranian citizens decry attempts to stifle free speech.

"The people in Iran are looking for reform; they're trying to find the luxuries that we have here in the United States, which is freedom," he said. "I think it's women who are leading the charge now in Iran right now. So this is a movie that gives them a little more credibility, I think. It should encourage them."

Critics have largely praised the film-which is rated R for extreme violence and profanity-calling it "gripping" and "passionate." Christian reviewer Ted Baehr, founder of *Movieguide*, called it a film "every adult with faith and values should see."

"While there have been many articles, news reports and documentaries about the treatment of women in Islamic countries, this is the most powerful dramatic movie that has ever been produced," he said.

Although the characters in the film are Muslim and remain so, McEveety said the film has something to offer Christians in the U.S.

"I think we have an obligation to our own country to understand what's going on [in the rest of the world], and I think this sheds a light on the kind of culture that is being dolt in certain parts of the Middle East, which is a bit archaic," McEveety said. "We may not be suffering persecution, but we all suffer. Part of our existence is to suffer, and [suffering] bring us closer to God if we allow it to. And I think this movie helps illustrate that."

The film releases in select markets Friday and will broaden to additional cities July 10.

View the trailer of *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

