



What a Champ! The United Nations embraces "Screaming Mary," the face of the 1979 Iranian hostage-takers

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The United Nations Environment Programme gave out its 2006 "Champion of the Earth" awards on April 21. The awards are intended to honor individuals or groups "for their creativity, vision and leadership, and the potential of their work and ideas for replication across the globe." One of those justified in receiving this award – in the U.N.'s estimation – was Iranian Mas-soumeh Ebtekar. She was vice president of the Islamic Republic of Iran and head of the department of environment there from 1997-2005. But Ebtekar has another name – "Screaming Mary." It was given to her by the American press during the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis. Mary was her *nom de guerre* and Ebtekar was the hostage-takers' spokesperson.

A December 2004 article in *The Atlantic Monthly* provides more details about the U.N.'s latest "Champion": she was especially disliked by many of the hostages...in part because of her endless propagandizing. She would saunter through the captured embassy with a camera crew in tow, urging the hostages to describe their ordeal in upbeat terms. "You have been treated well, haven't you?" was her constant refrain. During one such filming session, in the final days of captivity, Army Sergeant Regis Regan got so fed up with Ebtekar that he let loose with a stream of invective and was dragged into a hallway for a beating.

A 1998 *New York Times* article recounts that she was asked by an ABC News correspondent whether she could see herself picking up a

gun and killing the hostages — to which she responded “Yes. When I’ve seen an American gun being lifted up and killing my brothers and sisters in the streets, of course.”

Screaming Mary has no regrets. *New York Times* journalist Elaine Sciolino elaborated, in her book *Persian Mirrors*, on a conversation she had with Ebtekar in 1998:

I asked Ebtekar about the wisdom of the embassy takeover. She offered no apology; she made no excuses. “I wouldn’t think that it would be logical for any nation to look back and see any part of its revolution or its movement as negative,” she said. “That was the best direction that could have been taken.” She said the embassy was seized to preserve what she called “the values” of the revolution...“The action was a natural consequence of decisions that had been taken by the Americans.”

Capitalizing on her insider’s knowledge of the terrorist mind Ebtekar authored a 2001 book called *Takeover in Tehran*. By contrast, the U.N.’s biography of the winner is silent about her infamous past. Instead,

the U.N.’s announcement of the special prize to be given to Ebtekar boasts, “The annual ceremony will publicize and encourage the worldwide replication of the achievements of the Champions.”

In her acceptance speech last week, Ebtekar thanked the U.N. for the honor and the U.N. Environment Programme’s “generous recognition...[which] gives new impetus for all those who endeavour to protect life on earth.” She then took the opportunity, courtesy of the U.N., to support the current Iranian regime, castigating the “systematic effort to portray Iran as a source of aggression and violence.”

The United Nations honors a person who was vice president and minister of the environment in a government already doing its best to develop the ultimate environmental nightmare, nuclear weapons. It honors a commitment “to protect life on earth” from someone who would exclude Americans. This is the face of a U.N. “Champion.”

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