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# Iranians stop Swiss Actresses

*Ministry of Culture in Tehran vetoes a feature film with Swiss participation*

Iranian director Mehdi Naderi's next film project featuring two Swiss actresses was shut down by Iranian authorities. The two performers are left unimpressed.

*Andreas Schmid*



*Tehran shrouded in mystery – and so too the decisions of its government.*

For actresses Jacqueline Frischi-Cornaz from Oberrieden and Eleanor Buechler from Zürich, it should have been the experience of a lifetime. Iranian director Mehdi Naderi, married to a Swiss citizen and member of the Swiss Filmmakers Association ARF/FDS, wanted to produce a film about two Swiss tourists starring Frischi-Cornaz and Buechler. According to the script of *Welcome to Tehran*, a mother and daughter travel to Iran, but are unable to access hard cash due to sanctions. They turn instead to the people of Iran and in doing so, are able to find the help they need. Granted an insight into an unfamiliar culture, the duo sees the suffering caused by the boycotts first-hand. Against this background, friendships develop and the relationship between mother and daughter changes dramatically.

## Not Welcome in Tehran



**Mehdi Naderi**  
Director

Writer/Director Naderi – nominated for the Oscars for his 2011 film *Farewell Baghdad* – planned a seven-week long shoot through May and June in Tehran with Fritschi-Cornaz and Beuchler. The shooting was supposed to have been completed shortly before Iranian parliamentary elections, slated to begin on Friday. After four years of preparatory work, financing and obtaining requisite permits, the Embassy of Iran in Berne issued a business visa to both Swiss actresses. Despite all this, mere days before Fritschi-Cornaz and Beuchler's departure, the Ministry of Culture in Tehran shut down the project. The officials responsible insisted Naderi cast Iranian actresses in the role of foreign tourists instead.

Reasserting his vision, the director refused to comply. What remains unclear is whether the powers that be and upcoming elections triggered the intervention of the Ministry of Culture. Although the Iranian Embassy in Berne attempted to mediate, no immediate solutions were concluded.



**Jacqueline Fritschi-Cornaz**



**Eleanor Beuchler**  
Actresses

To the great disappointment of the director and actresses, this resulted in the production company, incidentally chosen by Mehdi Naderi, going forward with a different director and two Iranian performers in the main roles. Jacqueline Fritschi-Cornaz commented that both she and her film colleague cancelled all existing professional commitments that conflicted with the filming period. "In addition to that," she stated, "We had fully prepared for the role." Aside from the trouble, she most regrets missing a challenging part and the chance to experience a new culture.

## Unwilling to Break the Stereotype

The film was supposed to depict how the people of Iran suffered blamelessly under Western sanctions, and yet, against all odds, remained open to foreign visitors and welcomed them to their country. Ironically, by circumventing filming, the Iranian government has only managed to reinforce the stereotype of an undemocratic and unwelcoming country.

Naderi has stated his desire to work with the two Swiss actresses on future projects.