

Centre for Combating Racism and Discrimination against Arabs in Iran
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Intervention by Afnan Azizi from Centre for Combating Racism and Discrimination against Arabs in Iran to the United Nations Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues, the 7th Session, 25 and 26 November 2014 in Geneva.

Thank you Mr/Madam chair for this opportunity.

I am Afnan Azizi from Centre for Combating Racism and Discrimination against Arabs in Iran, and I am speaking on behalf of Ahwazi-Arab ethnic minority of Iran. I would like to submit some manifestations of systematic violence and ethnic cleansing committed against them and to offer some insight into their root causes.

Iran is the most diverse country in the region. A multiethnic state that is comprised of six major nationalities including Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, Persians, Turks, Turkmen and smaller groups of other ethnic, linguistic and tribal origins, and no one ethnic group has a numeric majority. The non-Persian ethnic groups comprise at least half, and by some estimates two thirds of the society. Yet, using decades of Persian language, literature, history, and education, the system has strategically and deliberately privileged one ethnic group over others; thus creating socio-economic inequality, exclusion and oppression, which are potent catalysts for violence. The government has consistently ignored the demands of national groups to implement Articles 15 and 19 of the 1979 Constitution, which guarantee the use of regional languages and equal rights of ethnic groups.

Residing mainly in the southwest of Iran, the Ahwazi Arabs are one of the Middle-East's most disadvantaged and persecuted ethnic groups. The Ahwazi Arab Nation of Iran has not been allowed to participate in running its own affairs, and it lacks genuine local or national representation. Khuzestan's political, military and security commanders, officers, mayors and all high and mid-level government officials have consistently been appointed from non-Arab areas. Even the historical Ahwazi names of the province, cities, neighbourhoods, streets, swamps, rivers, and other geographical landmarks in Arabic have been changed by the various governments of Iran, and, occasionally, these places have been named after anti-Arab individuals.

All practices of the ruling system point to a comprehensive framework of discriminatory actions aimed at cowing the Arab population, assimilating them within the dominant ethnicity, and encouraging their dispersal in other parts of the country. The anti-Arab sentiments, systematically disseminated through public and private channels within the Iranian society, have resulted in a culture of hateful intolerance towards Iranian Arabs and their humanitarian plight. The Ahwazi Arab citizens, without having committed any crimes, are being punished as a result of the historical anti-Arab heritage left by the Shu'ubiyya movement and the geopolitical disputes of the leaders of Iran with the rulers of Arab countries. They are being suffocated under the weight of history and their geopolitical importance.

As the Special Rapporteur on minority issues has noted in her most recent report, "hate speech in public spheres, in mainstream and social media and by influential figures, including religious leaders, public officials or political groups, can lead directly or indirectly to violence against minorities." Indeed, the anti-Arab propaganda, much of which comes as a result of regional geopolitical power struggles, has produced a widening gap between the Arab people of the region and the Centre including all its governmental and non-governmental institutions, which can only lead to more violence against the people of the region. This volatile situation can only be ameliorated through granting ethnic minorities their full rights under the current legal framework, enacting appropriate laws for prevention of racism and hate crimes against Arabs and other minorities, and their inclusion in the political processes that influence their fate.

And thank you.