



The House of Eternal Culture

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The role of the observation of Iranian ethnic groups in national unity

Summary

1. The House of Eternal Culture (HEC) is a nongovernmental organization established in 2005 with the objective of creating cultural links among Iranian ethnic groups and the provision of their rights. HEC has also conducted various activities such as the introduction and identification of ethnic Iranian cultures and also continuous communication and exchange of ideas with NGOs in various parts of the country. In view of the geographical changes to Iran over the last 200 years most of which was due to invasions and interference of other countries (such as Tsarist Russia and the British Empire) and the annexation of vast parts of Iran resulted in Iranian ethnic groups finding themselves within and without the present day borders of the country and the existence of exchanges between these groups during the previous regime created the separatist tendencies to appear among some of these ethnic groups, resulting in them being put under pressure. Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, efforts were made for the rights of these groups to be realised, but due to the Iraq-Iran 8 year war (Enforced War) and social and economic gaps among ethnic groups living near the Iranian borders with the rest of the country and some foreign provocations, separatist tendencies have appeared among some ethnic groups which at times breaks out into acts of violence between them and the security forces.

2. In view of the high capacity of the Iranian Constitution and also the government being signatory and committed to international human rights laws and conventions, by making a number of reforms and amendments such as the teaching of mother tongues from elementary school levels, the broadcasting of local language programmes via national and local TV and radio channels, increasing of local individuals participation in running their own affairs and the country, and also fair distribution of national wealth in various regions, can all provide the needs of Iranian ethnic groups and also create national unity and therefore further stability and security. Also by strengthening and provision of technical assistance to local and national nongovernmental institutions the United Nations and international organizations can help increase the awareness levels among various ethnic groups in Iran.

Keywords: Human Rights, Ethnic Rights, National Unity, Ethnic Traditions, Local Language, Multi-ethnic Country, Iranian ethnic groups, Azeri, Kurd, Baluch, Arab, Turkmenis

About HEC

3. The House of Eternal Culture is a nongovernmental, non-political and non-profit organization founded in 2005. Since Iran is a country made up of various ethnic groups who have at times spread beyond Iranian national borders and due to some historical reasons a number of these groups want independence from the central government. With a look towards the bringing closer together of ethnic groups to each other and provision of their rights with the aim of reviewing solutions to cultural exchanges between Iranian ethnic groups in Iran with other parts of the world and in identification and review of cultural problems and the promotion of the cultural levels of all ethnic groups of the Iranian society, the HEC conducts its activities.

To this aim HEC holds photo galleries in cultural festivals and exhibits, holds various meetings with local and regional NGOs for the purpose of exchange of ideas and conducting of joint cultural programmes with the aim of recognition of local cultural characteristics and the introduction of local traditions, introduction of ethnic groups' cultural characteristics on various occasions such as International Museum Day, and Cultural Heritage Week, and arranging visits for its members to various parts of the country for the purpose of their introduction to Iranian local cultures. Also educational committee of HEC has conducted some training workshops for empowering NGOs and their members and for increasing public awareness about various ethnics and their cultural characteristics. The HEC has also attended the first and only Iranian National Youth Council course at the National Cultural Heritage and Tourism Federation.

Methodology

4. In writing this report the HEC has tried to conduct interviews with social activists from different ethnic groups, the names of whom are kept confidential. Also according to governmental records and statistics and also credible national and international reports, efforts have been made to show a pattern of the existing situation and Iran's capacities towards the further realisation of the rights of ethnic groups. Of course some figures for the past four years are not available to the public due to security reasons.

Background

5. Iran is a country that historically has had different ethnic groups living within its territories distributed in various regions. Over the last 200 years, following the invasion of Tsarist Russia through Iran's northern borders during the Qajar rule and the annexation of parts of Iran, also the independence of Afghanistan through the interference and pressure of Britain, and the creation of Pakistan thereafter on the east of Iran, the homelands of these groups were separated by political borders.

6. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and appearance of new countries, the establishment of the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq following the US-led attack on Iraq, and the bringing about of major political changes, all changed the geopolitical map surrounding Iran. In some countries some Iranian ethnic groups became the majority population (such as Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan) and in some countries these groups became an important part of their new political systems (Iraq and Afghanistan for example).

7. The attempts of the Pahlavi rule in Iran following several hundred years of the Qajar rule that had no control within its borders, gave rise to suspicions of separatist moves by ethnic groups situated near the borders. This resulted in immense pressure

being put on these groups and at times led to their blood crackdowns. Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, some of the historical misunderstandings between the ethnic groups and central government did not go away. The economic, social and cultural gap of these regions with Iran's central regions, and the slowness of the development process due to war in most of these regions and or in neighbouring countries and also changes in neighbouring countries' geopolitics and also some of the agitation committed by these countries, at times have further increased the existing misunderstandings.

8. Also the slowness of the implementation of some laws regarding Iranian ethnic groups and also carelessness in being faced with their needs in some regions, did not bring about conditions for the removal of these misunderstandings, and resulted in the formation of groups with separatist tendencies. By pursuing the rights of ethnic groups and highlighting of alleged cases of violation of ethnic groups' rights and creating social tensions in their own regions, and at the same time making use of foreign factors, these [separatist] groups cause the confrontation of ethnic groups and the nations police and security forces against each other. Therefore the continuation and repetition of these clashes between these forces as well as increasing the wish to separatism result in creating insecurity in those regions and the creation of an insecurity cycle between the central government and the said ethnic groups.

Existing conditions

9. Iranian ethnic groups such as Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs and Turkmenis believe that some of the rights regarding ethnic groups which have been defined in the Iranian Constitution have not fully and properly been implemented.

10. The right to teach mother tongue is one of the cases that is clearly stated in article 15 of the Constitution. Local language and literature result in the strengthening of the cultural identity of ethnic groups and its respect increases the feeling of national unity increase among different ethnic groups. The implementation of this article is an effective factor in the preservation of national unity. Interviews conducted with a number of social activists of various ethnic groups showed that practically all ethnic groups complained about their local language and literature not being taught at their local schools.

11. The interviewees say that most ethnic groups are unhappy about TV and radio programmes in their local languages, and on the basis of local cultural and ethnic traditions of provincial and nationwide networks. They also feel there are not enough journals and newspapers printed in their local languages. The social activists of the majority of the ethnic groups see the failure in using local individuals in top managerial positions in the provinces and provincial towns, and lack of fair distribution of national wealth in their regions as a failure to observe articles 48 and 100 of the Constitution of Iran.

12. Some ethnic groups such as the Azeris believe that some media outlets and publications insult them such as the publication of a cartoon in the Iran Jomeh weekly journal which is under the auspices of Iran Daily Newspaper that resulted in protests taking place in The Turkish East and West Azerbaijan, Ardebil and Zanjan provinces.

13. Local Kurdish and Baluch social activists, see the low turnout of these regions in past presidential elections as a sign of protest and dissatisfaction of these ethnic groups towards their own conditions. Although with local town and village councils, and also the Islamic Parliament's elections with having local candidates, this participation has increased, which can be a cause for a feeling of determining the fate of their own towns and provinces, and want further rights in these regions. The

increase in turning to smuggling and trafficking in the Sistan and Baluchistan, and Kerman provinces is put down to poverty and unemployment of a section of the population of the regions which is as a result of no suitable economic development happening.

14. Also Arab speaking social activists in Khuzistan province see the migration of the Arab population to neighbouring countries, and the existing poverty in the region and insults against Arabs in some papers and media outlets all show the violation of the rights of Iranian Arabs.

Strong points in the observation of Iranian ethnic groups

15. Due to its principles, the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to create conditions where the rights of all Iranian ethnic groups are provided. Some of these measures are as follows:

16. All the provinces in Iran have local TV and radio networks, and most of these provinces also have local newspapers and magazines, and by producing local programmes with local language and culture, and the papers publishing local news, have created the capacities for the realisation of the cultural and social rights of ethnic groups and promotion of existing local cultures.

17. All Iranian citizens have a right to vote, and all towns and regions in Iran have representatives in the Islamic Parliament and the Council of Experts, who can pursue the rightful demands of Iranian ethnic groups. Also all towns and villages in Iran have town and or village councils.

18. The ratification of the teaching of two units of local languages in Iran at higher education centres law by the Cultural Supreme Council and the order for its implementation to the Sciences and Technology Ministry will result in the continued existence of local languages and dialects. Also each year in some parts of the country various festivals take place which introduce and show local and ethnic characteristics of the regions in Iran.

19. There are provinces in Iran that despite the wide diversity of ethnic groups, the majority of these groups live comfortably and peacefully with each other, and enjoy most of their legal rights. One of these provinces is Fars province which consists of Fars, Lor, Ghashghae Turk and a number of Arab tribes, who while having good cultural and social connections to each other, see themselves as having equal rights as each other.

Laws

20. The observation of the rights of ethnic groups and races has clearly been specified in articles 15, 19, 48 and 100 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Also article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 27 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, all stress on the observation of ethnic groups, all of which Iran is a signatory member to. The existing national and international laws, provide suitable mechanisms for the promotion of the rights of Iranian ethnic groups at the disposal of the government and relevant authorities, so that better cultural, social and economic conditions are provided for different ethnic groups.

Recommendations and solutions

21. Towards further realisation of the rights of ethnic groups in Iran, the following solutions are recommended to the Iranian government for the fuller implementation and observation of the Constitution:

- Teaching of local languages at primary school levels
- Increase in TV, radio, movie and theatre productions in local languages with consideration of ethnic characteristics based on local cultures in different provinces and also the broadcasting of programmes in different Iranian languages and dialects by IRIB nationwide channels.
- Encouragement for the publication of books and journals in different ethnic languages.
- Prioritisation of local individuals when appointing local managers and the application of ethnic diversity in different regions.
- Expansion of the influence sphere of mass communication equipment and technology such as telephone, mobile phone and internet in deprived regions of ethnic groups.
- Facilitation of investment and increasing the employment rates in more deprived regions for the eradication of poverty.

22. By providing technical assistance to local organizations the UN and its associated agencies can be very effective towards furthering awareness and access of ethnic groups to justice and expansion of the concepts of the rights of ethnic groups. By furthering communication among ethnic groups for the recognition of Iranian local cultures and strengthening of respect of the rights of others, local and national active NGOs can prevent tensions and unrest occurring among the ethnic groups.

Conclusion

23. Since the creation of each nation is the manifestation of the deep historic solidarity of the people of each land, all its constituting ethnic groups and tribes in other words, which in their evolution process, have successfully established a united government. Therefore to have a national consensus and unity, it is necessary to pay attention to the rightful demands of ethnic groups and to have equal opportunities regardless of race and ethnicity. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has high capacities for the provision of the rights of all Iranian ethnic groups, therefore the full application and observation of its principles alongside legislation of proportionate laws can safeguard the rights of all Iranian ethnic groups.

Sources

Iran Jomeh weekly magazine, child and juvenile page, Friday 12 May 2006

<http://www.iran-newspaper.com/1385/850222/html/children1.htm>

<http://amar.sci.org.ir>

Annex

Domestic Laws	
Article 15 of the Constitution	The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.
Article 19 of the Constitution	All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.
Article 48 of the Constitution	There must be no discrimination among the various provinces with regard to the exploitation of natural resources, utilization of public revenues, and distribution of economic activities among the various provinces and regions of the country, thereby ensuring that every region has access to the necessary capital and facilities in accordance with its needs and capacity for growth.
Article 100 of the Constitution	In order to expedite social, economic, development, public health, cultural, and educational programs and facilitate other affairs relating to public welfare with the cooperation of the people according to local needs, the administration of each village, division, city, municipality, and province will be supervised by a council to be named the Village, Division, City, Municipality, or Provincial Council. Members of each of these councils will be elected by the people of the locality in question. Qualifications for the eligibility of electors and candidates for these councils, as well as their functions and powers, the mode of election, the jurisdiction of these councils, the hierarchy of their authority, will be determined by law, in such a way as to preserve national unity, territorial integrity, the system of the Islamic Republic, and the sovereignty of the central government.

Cultural Revolution Supreme Council legislation regarding ethnic languages	The possibility of teaching of 2 units of language and literature of local ethnic languages and dialects as optional in higher education centres of Iran with a responsibility of recognition of languages and dialects and the adoption of curricula for the Farsi Language and Literature Academy and the Iran and Islam Culture and Civilisation Committee
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International Laws	
Article 2 of UDHR	Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.
Article 27 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.
Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities	
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	