

***The Universal Periodic Review of Iran
March 2010***

***The Preliminary Report of Iran Modern Civil Defence Society (NGO) to
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on:
Religious Minorities Human Rights Situation in Iran***

Summary:

- 1- Following issuance of repeated resolutions of the 3rd Committee of UN General Assembly, which has accused Iran for violation of human rights of religious minorities in Iran, the Human Rights Center, Iran Modern Civil Defense Society, has decided to perform a survey on human rights situation of religious minorities in Iran aiming remove of the existing problems and clarify the truthfulness of the arguments and to notify the results to the relevant internal and international authorities
- 2- Iran Modern Civil Defence Society is a NGO and non-profit institute, which has been established on the basis of permit given by the Ministry of the Interior for civil defense and safety of the cities and the residents against the disasters. In line with its mission, the Society has focused on prevention from occurrence of any kind of war and support of the human rights and democracy for establishment of a sustainable peace, which all have been included in Society's Articles of Association as its objects. The Society is trying to enter into an arrangement to provide the Department of Human Rights, Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the consulting services on human rights. The Society has allotted the majority of its activities to peace and also investigation of human rights situation of Iranian religious minorities has been among other activities of the Society.

Iran Modern Civil Defense Society's Background in Cooperation with Iranian Religious Minorities

- 3- In all its national projects, the Society has tried to take into consideration all Iranian religious minorities along with the majority of Muslim people and has several times invited them to take part in different discussions arranged by the Society.

Definitions

- 4- The Minority: Shall mean a group of nationals of a country, who have a nationality, race, language or religion different from the majority of nationals of that country; their number is less and they have no governing power.
Officially Recognized Religions in Iran: Four religions are official recognized in Iran namely Islam, Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian.

Methodology

- 5- The Human Rights Center, Iran Modern Civil Defense Society, for the purpose of survey and finding the reasons of the religious minorities' human rights violation by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has had some correspondence with the religious minorities in Iran and asked them a

comprehensive report on the existing problems. Up to now, they have not dispatched us any written response and this forced us to arrange several face to face visits and interviews with the officials and centers relating to the Iranian religious minorities; the details of such interviews and negotiations are summarized below:

- 6- In connection with Armenian Christians' problems in Iran, Dr. Biglarian, MP, representative to South Armenians in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, told us:

“Armenians have a good situation in Iran and they have not any significant problem. The Armenians' relation with the government of I. R. Iran is just like Jewish people's relation with Shah. He relates the problems of Armenians and their migration from Iran to the general problems of the country everyone is facing with which is, unfortunately, is related to the religious minorities' problems by an Islamic regime.” According to him, the investigation of inheritance and retribution problems, forms the major efforts of minority MP's which, according to him, has not had a final outcome so far. According to Mr. Biglarian, the more attention to the Muslim party of the cases in comparison with nationals with other religions is another problem that is the source of dissatisfaction of Armenians. He says that this is the mission of minority MP's to send a written report to the human rights institutions but none of the MP's agreed on dispatch of such a report.

- 7- Mr. Pour Rostami, MP, representative of Zoroastrians in Iranian parliament told us: Tehran Zoroastrians have not significant problem and our problems are just like the problems that other nationals are facing with including price raise, unemployment, etc. We are free to do all our religious ceremonies and we can store wine in our homes and no Zoroastrian is punished for maintaining wine in his room. But Dr. Ardeshir Khorshidian, Head of Tehran Mubedan Society (the religious society of Zoroastrians) told us that Zoroastrians are facing with several problems in Iran. He added that our most important request from Iranian government is due observation of the Iranian Constitution.

- 8- Alfred Christophy, Deputy of Prelacy of Catholic Ashouri Kaldani in Tehran, in connection with problems of Ashouri Christians of Iran told us: we are fully free in doing our religious prayers and ceremonies. One of our problems is that the officials of this prelacy, despite more than their 30 year residence in Iran, could not get Iranian nationality. According to him, the number of Christians, who argue they are facing with problems and send correspondence and report to foreign and international authorities is few and he says their action does not relate to Church and the church officials have good relation with Iranian officials. He said that the churches and schools of Christians annually receive considerable money from the Iranian government. He knows the arguments of human rights problems of religious minorities as political intrigue used by some NGO's. He says that the assignment of some works to churches and use of churches for resolving the problems of the minorities is an action which disturbs the church officials and names the human rights dealing persons as disturbing agents.

- 9- Mr. Haroon Yashasae, the former head of Tehran Jewish people told us in connection with problem of Iranian Jewish people: “as a religious minority,

we are leaving in peace with Muslims and have no problem and difference with them to seek any solution. The majority of human rights problems of minorities Relates to Baha'ies and the officially recognized religions have not outstanding problems. He said that the Jewish students have to go a long way to access to the Jewish school. Despite the fact that he has lost his position as Head of Tehran Jewish Society after 15 year ruling over due to debate with the President Ahmadinejad in connection with Holocaust, he does not complain. He says: "we have good situation in Iran and have an active MP in the parliament."

- 10- Our negotiations with the experts of Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the I. R. Iran, lead us to the fact that they are not in agreement with the resolutions of 3rd Committee of UN General Assembly in connection with human rights violation in Iran. According to them, the human rights issue is used as a tool by the superpowers to represent the I. R. Iran to the international community in a way they wish and use it to attain to their targets.
- 11- Also, Mr. Taghavi, Head of the Department of Religious Minorities in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance told us: "the government annually allocates the sum of 20 b rials to religious minorities to be expended in their schools and religious centers and this has been increased in the current year. He also said that the publication issues of the religious minorities in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is ongoing well. He added that the Christians are allowed to do their new-year ceremonies despite the fact that it was simultaneous with Ashoura ceremonies. We added that the religious minorities have to receive permit for each activity that they planned to do. On the basis of internal instructions, the religious minorities shall avoid accepting the Muslim people in their religious centers. He assessed the general situation of religious minorities good.

Conclusion:

- 12- The refraining of religious minorities from effective participation in human rights issues in Iran puts this question forward: are the religious minorities facing with several and unsolved problems or not? If they have real problems, why they don't take part in finding a solution for them? If their problems are the same that other Iranian people, including the majority of Muslims, are facing with, why somebody try to affect the I. R. Iran for migration of religious minorities? On the other hand, why some people send their reports to foreign human rights center despite the existence of similar centers in Iran? On the other hand, can we say that the refraining of the religious minorities in promotion of their affairs is a proven reason for lack of such a problem? The finding clear responses to these questions need extensive opportunity and more investigation. We believe that the issuance of several resolutions by international human rights center against Iran is general political-motivated not a real fact.

Challenges and Limitations:

- 13- The illegal use of human rights problems in Iran as a tool by western countries for forcing the I. R. Iran and its negative effect on human rights situation in Iran.

- Lack of a serious participation on the part of religious minorities for clarification of their problems.
- The religious minorities refrain from submission of a written and documented report on their situation.
- The religious minorities do not recognize the activities of NGO's.
- Lack of a comprehensive list of religious, scientific and cultural centers belonging to the religious minorities.
- Difficulty in access to the religious minorities.
- The lack of interest and serious effort of religious minorities for finding a solution for their problems.
- The religious minorities do not pay attention to the resolutions of the international human right centers and UN affiliates and their effect on economic and political situation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iranian people.
- The internal human right centers do not pay attention to the requests of the civil institutions

Suggestions:

14- We have the following suggestions in line with promotion of situation of officially recognized religious minorities in Iran and overcoming to their existing problems:

Their problems have to be resolved by the local institutions as much as possible and, through promotion of the local civil institutions, the pressure of the international human right authorities will be decreased.

The religious minorities have to pay more attention to find a resolution for their own problem.

Some scientific conferences have to be convened to find some solutions for problems of religious minorities.

The more cooperation of the governmental authorities dealing with religious minorities' issues with local institutions and their supports will have important outcomes.

We suggest the government to establish some centers for investigation of religious minorities' problems with participation of NGO that are active in religious minorities' issues.

Reference:

15-The references for quotations and other issues set forth in this report are accessible at the office of this Society.

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