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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Conseil International pour le soutien à des procès équitables et aux Droits de l'Homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Discrimination against the Ajam minority in Bahrain

Ajam are an ethnic group in Bahrain composed of Bahrainis from Persian ancestral backgrounds. The word ‘Ajam’ literally means "stranger" or "foreigner". The term is now commonly used to refer to Persian Bahrainis. Historian Ali Bushahri estimates that the Persian population is now about 100,000 or 20% of 550,000 Bahraini citizens. The Ajam people are mostly bilingual, speaking both Arabic and Persian.

It is provided in the Bahraini Constitution, that the Government aims to be democratic, under which sovereignty lies with the people, the source of all powers. The citizens have the right to participate in the public affairs of the State and enjoy political rights, beginning with the right to vote. Article 22 of the Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings, in accordance with the customs observed in the country. However, the Bahraini Government placed serious limitations on the exercise of all these rights.

The Bahraini Government continues to exert control on the Ajam, discriminating against them in certain fields. The Ajam face harsh treatment and violations by the Bahraini Government.

To compound the issue, there is now a growing problem of stateless people of Iranian descent, known as Bedoon, who have lived in Bahrain for many decades. In Bahrain, stateless people are generally denied the right to hold legal residency, are not allowed to travel, purchase houses, or hold government jobs, among many other limitations. There are approximately 5000 stateless Ajam present in Bahrain, who were born and raised in Bahrain along with generations of their ancestors. Recently, the Bahraini Government issued regulations preventing them from sending their children to public schools or to receive free medical care. A stateless individual in Bahrain can be deported at any time, and since the 1980s, the Bahraini Government has deported hundreds of Bedoon to Iran.

After the Iranian revolution, more than 200 Ajam families were forcibly deported from Bahrain. Their Bahraini nationalities were revoked. However, after the current king came to power, he showed some intention to deal with the issue, so the affected families were allowed back in the country and their nationalities returned. This demonstrates that the original decision was baseless, unlawful and contrary to the Bahraini constitution to begin with.

More recently in 2011, prominent figures from the Ajam community were targeted, along with the vast majority of the population after the popular 14 February uprising. On 23 November 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) released its report on its investigation of the events after the popular uprising, finding that the Bahraini authorities had systematically tortured prisoners and committed other human rights violations. It also rejected the Bahraini Government's claims that the protests were “instigated by Iran”.

More broadly, the Bahraini Government sees the Ajam as the lowest rung in Bahraini society. As such, it imposes on them an array of discriminatory and harsh treatments, and excludes them from key sectors of society. One of the restrictions is a blanket prohibition on Ajam from selling or buying properties in the Muharraq area. Clear discrimination against Ajam is seen in employment within the public sector, especially the military, the security apparatus, and the Bahraini judiciary. No employment of Ajam is seen in high-ranking posts of the executive branch, with only one minister of Persian ancestry allowed in Parliament. The International Labor Organisation noted that the Ajam and other foreign workers faced discrimination in the workplace.

Up until today, the Bahraini Government revoked the nationality of more than 200 Bahrainis commencing this line of action from 6 November 2012. 25 of the more from the Ajam community and most are not politically active. The list include prominent figures in the Ajam community, like former Members of Parliament, Jawad and Jalal Fairouz. The list also contains Sheikh Husain Al-Najati, a prominent cleric and representative of Ayatollah Sistani in Bahrain. On 29 September 2011, the National Safety Court, a military court, issued unfair and harsh verdicts against 20 doctors, nurses and paramedics, with sentences ranging from 5 to 15 year imprisonments. One of those sentenced was Ajam physician Dr. Nadir Diwani who was sentenced to 15 years. Many other prominent Ajam have been imprisoned and tortured, such as former Member of Parliament, Jawad Fairouz. One of the most tragic cases was the arrest and subsequent torture of prominent Ajam businessman Karim Fakhrawi. The torture that he was subjected to in prison resulted in his death whilst in custody in April 2011.

Another illustration is the case of Yousef Mowali, who had been medically diagnosed with schizophrenia. He was arrested, tortured and drowned in the sea on 13 January 2012. A Turkish Forensic expert, other forensic doctors and specialists visited Bahrain to examine his body. They concluded that not only had Mowali been electrically tortured, but also found that he had been unconscious when he drowned.

The Bahraini authorities have commenced proceedings to deport Ajam families. Targeted Ajam who are currently subject to this are the families of Karimi, Al-Mosawi, and Darwish.

Further, the media has consistently described Ajam as a disloyal group that are loyal to foreign entities. They have been publically described in derogatory and discriminative terms, such as “enemies of the state”, “Safavids”, and “treacherous people”.

Recommendations

1. For the United Nations Human Rights Council to oblige the Bahraini Government to observe UN legislations, international declarations and covenants on the rights of minorities.
 2. For the Bahraini Government to expeditiously implement BICI and UNHRC UPR recommendations especially in relation to the rights of minorities.
 3. Demand of the Bahraini state media to not encourage hate and discrimination against any community, including the Ajam minority in Bahrain.
 4. For the UN Human Rights Council to request that the Bahraini Government cease its policy of stripping Bahraini citizens of their nationality in general, and Ajam in particular.
 5. For the Bahraini Government to guarantee equal political and legal rights for its citizens, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.
 6. For the Bahraini Government to review its institutions to ensure that the Bahrainis from minority backgrounds are incorporated and represented fairly in the country's systems.
 7. For the Bahraini Government to redraft domestic legislation to ensure that they are within the standards of international agreements on rights of minorities.
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