General Assembly

Human Rights Council
Thirty-fourth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Joint written statement[*] submitted by the Association Burkinabé pour la Survie de l'Enfance, Society for Development and Community Empowerment, Tourner la page, non-governmental organizations 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.

[13 February 2017]

---

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

Please recycle

Discrimination against ethnic, religious minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran

•   Iran has ratified and is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR and The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and is legally bound by their provisions.

•   Iran is far from being a homogeneous Persian nation. Iran is the most diverse country in the Middle East. It is a multinational, multilingual and a multicultural state that is comprised of six major nationalities including Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, Persians, Turks, Turkmen and is also home to Sunnis, Christians, Jews, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Mandeni's and other smaller groups of other ethnic/linguistic and tribal groups. No one ethnic group has a numerical majority.

•   Yet only one of the national constituency, the Persian national group, dominates Iranian society. While the non-dominant, non-Persian national ethnic and religious groups comprise 50-66% f the Iranian population, these groups have not been accorded equal citizenship; their language, ethnicity and/or their religion are not being officially acknowledged. Constitutionally, Persian language is the sole official language. Jafari Shi'ism is the officially sanctioned religion with all others ignored, oppressed, negated or at best marginalized. They are not being officially acknowledged and historically have been excluded from full and effective participation in socio-economic life.

Education and Language Rights:
•   According to Mr. Hajbabaei, former deputy minister of education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, only 30% of Iranian 1st graders entering school speak Farsi.
•   In Shia theology and Persian literature, history, language and education, the Persian ethnic group is culturally and legally the dominant Persian ethnic group. It enjoys privileges over others, thus creating, inequality, exclusion, animosity and factionalism among various ethnic groups. This stifles solidarity, national unity and lessening the chance of democratic transformation.

•   It appears that the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran are based on the elimination of the national identity of Ahwazi-Arabs, Baloch, Kurds, Turks, Kurds, Turkmen and others;
•   There cannot be equal citizenship without equality in the use of languages, religions, cultural and equal human rights of all citizens, and individual and collective rights.
•   Banning or marginalization of non-Persian languages represses their literatures and cultures, inducing and creating unequal citizenry. Denying the rich multinational, multilingual and multicultural character of Iranian society is a violation of the rights of all Iranians. The right to be different needs to be acknowledged.
•   Non-dominant nationalities of Arabs, Baloch, Kurds, Turks and Turkmen who live in peripheral areas of Iran are not allowed to participate in running their regions' local affairs. This exacerbates discrimination, exclusion and ethnic tensions.
•   Aggressive and ultra-national Persian nationalism is promoted by official and semi-official authorities in the education curriculum and in the media in Iran. Formulating Iranian nationalism so it is synonymous with the Persian nation does this. This aggressive nationalism often manifests itself in racism against other non-dominant, non-Persian nationalities.
•   The change of names of cities, towns, provinces, rivers and geographical locations from the local indigenous names to Persian names are perceived as ethnic cleansing and suppression of ethnicity and cultures.

Human Rights under President Rouhani:
•   We see an increase of the violations of human rights of non-dominant nationalities. The situation has deteriorated with increased arrests and execution, mostly in the non-Persian regions. The execution rate increased at least 20% during the presidency of Mr. Hassan Rouhani in comparison to Ahmadinejad's presidency, the highest in 15 years.

• Ahwazi-Arab executions, followed by Kurdish and Baloch executions, lead the political executions. There is a lack of transparency with unannounced executions carried out in prisons and in public and extra judicial executions are on the rise.

Legal and penal codes:

• New judicial policies and the penal code have been recently enacted under President Rouhani to support repression and persecution. The new Penal Code, which was passed the Majlis on May 2013, expands the scope of executions by the judges and the judiciary. Article 279 of this penal code, under the title of "Rebels", allows more executions for charges under the "Mohareb" and "Mofsed fi Alaraz" "Corruptions on Earth". Under this code, political prisoners are executed with no right to appeal.

The Rights to Self Determination:

• In UN literature, right to self-determination is defined as the right of a particular group of people to freely determine and control their political, economic or socio-cultural destinies.

• Article 2 of the UN Resolution 1514 of 1960 states that: "All peoples have the right to self-determination, by virtue of economic, social and cultural development".

• All UN covenants such as International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, the GA resolution of 1970, the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, and the charter of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) adopted in Paris 1994 all refer to People entitled to self-determination. In a report by UN experts during the UN Conference in 1998 in Barcelona on the "Implementation of self-determination as a contribution to crisis", two types of self-determination - internal self-determination and external self-determination – were outlined:

• Internal self-determination means the right to determine the identity and form of the governing body by the whole population of a State, the right of a particular group within the State to participate in decision making at the State level, and the right to exercise cultural, linguistic, religious or (territorial) political autonomy within the boundaries of the existing state.

• The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.

Recommendations:

1. That the Islamic Republic of Iran constitutionally and publically acknowledges that Iran is a multinational state and declares that the existence and group rights of the non-Persian nationalities and ethnic groups will be equally protected.

2. Respects and protect the social rights of all ethno-religious constituencies as stipulated in all UN and international human rights instruments.

3. Encourage participation and non-discrimination and implement constitutional articles 15 and 19, which enshrine the right of non-Persian linguistic minorities to study in their mother language.

4. The right of internal self-determination should be accepted and autonomy granted to Arabs, Baloch, Kurds, Turks and Turkmen run their own internal affairs.

5. Non-Shia sects, such as Sunnis, Baha'i, and other religious, should be recognized as state religions in addition to Shia Islam.

———————

*Centre Zagros pour les Droits de l'Homme, NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.