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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, 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.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Violations of the Rights of Indigenous peoples in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Introduction

Maat Foundation for Peace, Development and Human Rights wishes to draw the attention of the Human Rights Council during the 41st session to the recent development in the Islamic Republic of Iran which affect the indigenous peoples' enjoyment of the right to life and preservation of their identity and their indigenous language, through the practices of the authorities against them. Although the Iranian constitution affirms the denial of discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples, this is not really applied. Maat believes that it is not enough for the constitution to be appropriate only, but also the appropriate implementation of what has been provided for.

Rights of Indigenous Peoples... Intransigence of the Authorities

The Iranian authorities have a number of policies that are intransigent against indigenous peoples, including:

1. The imposition of the Persian language on indigenous peoples

While the Iranian authorities persecute all the opponents, non-Persian indigenous minorities are subject to much greater persecution. In addition to the authoritarian repression practiced by the authorities, non-Persian people are treated as second-class citizens, deprived of the right to education in their own language and the other rights enjoyed by the Persian ethnicity.¹ This occurs despite the presumed constitutional guarantees of the use of other languages in all media and education. In articles 15 and 19, the Iranian Constitution provides for the use of other languages, which explicitly emphasize the need to learn in the mother tongue of indigenous peoples, however, the Iranian authorities impose on the non-Persian minorities in Iran such as Ahawazis, Baluchs, Turkomans, Kurds and others the compulsory teaching in Persian and the denial of the right to education in their native language, which constitutes a great persecution for them, resulting in the low graduation rates among students belonging to the indigenous peoples.

Compulsory teaching of Persian is one of the main tools used by the Iranian authorities to forcibly integrate non-Persian minorities. Indigenous peoples are also prohibited from wearing their traditional clothing in public places such as schools and workplaces.² The use of the indigenous peoples' languages in government offices and schools is prohibited. For instance, in November 2017, coinciding with the National Student Day in Iran, two Ahwazi Arab girls were punished and humiliated by their teacher, for speaking Arabic together in class. The teacher forced the students to write: "We refrain from speaking Arabic in the classroom" 100 times as a punishment.³ In addition, activists struggling for the rights of indigenous peoples face many threats, arrests and imprisonment.

2. Discriminatory practices against the territories inhabited by indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples in Iran continue to be subject to discriminatory laws and practices, including restricted access to basic facilities such as land, housing, water and sanitation, confiscation of property, denial of public services and the right to work in the public, semi-public sectors and, sometimes, the private sector, as a result to the Gozinesh process, a selective process of a complex ideological nature centered around political or religious belief and loyalty to the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the guardianship of the jurist, which forms the basis of the political system.⁴

¹ للمزيد انظر: <https://unpo.org/article/21115>

² للمزيد انظر: <https://iran-hrm.com/index.php/2018/06/13/kurdish-clothes-banned/>

³ للمزيد انظر: <https://unpo.org/article/21115>

⁴ دفاعا عن حقوق الأقليات- عرب الأهواز، تقرير منظمة العفو الدولية، 2006، <http://tinyurl.com/9pt5lnp>.

Iran adopts discriminatory policies against the territories inhabited by indigenous peoples. Iranian regions with non-Persian ethnic minorities-and in particular the Ahwaz region-have witnessed regular protests against the Iranian authorities' racism and insults to Arab ethnicity and the compulsory learning in Persian. The Iranian government has also marginalized Ahwazis through forcible land confiscation; diversion of rivers from Ahwazi areas to Persian ones, thereby reducing the available water for Ahwazi people; and discriminatory employment practices that deny Ahwazis jobs. In the latter case, positions are often reserved for ethnically Persian citizens, who are also offered financial incentives and homes in specially built settlements where Ahwazis are prohibited from living. And after every demonstration against these injustices, police carry out raids on Ahwazi people's homes, arresting hundreds of Ahwazi and sentencing them to long prison sentences⁵.

Individuals from indigenous peoples who do not speak Persian, the official language, suffer from deprivation before the criminal justice system. Indigenous women, especially in rural areas, suffer a double disadvantage in this context. They are often educated less than their urban counterparts. Baloch women and girls, for example, suffer from problems of accessing health services and education. Kurdish women face a double challenge to entrench their rights: Kurds living in a marginalized society and in a society dominated by parental authority. In both cases, they are subject to discriminatory laws. Women human rights defenders in the Kurdish regions often say: "We are both women and Kurds, so in Iran we face double discrimination." This phrase summarizes the suffering of women and girls in Iran, especially those belonging to indigenous peoples.

This deliberate neglect of the indigenous peoples by the Iranian authorities has led to protests of thousands against this marginalization. The year 2018 witnessed several demonstrations in the province of Ahwaz to denounce the Iranian policies aimed at wiping out the Arab presence in the region, raising slogans that show their attachment to their land and their Arab identity. The Iranian authorities arrested many of the demonstrators following their participation in the protests. While the authorities did not announce the list of detainees, the field reports indicate that the number exceeded 1500 people.⁶

3. Lack of basic services and denial of housing

The regions inhabited by indigenous peoples suffer from the lack of basic services such as potable water, causing the spread of epidemics and diseases among the population, especially children and the elderly. Indigenous peoples in the region of Ahwaz are living in a situation of extremely inadequate housing and under the threat of forced evictions from their ancestral lands without free and prior consent. The Iranian authorities have been working since the Islamic revolution to change the demographics of the region and displace the Arabs from it completely by following several policies aimed at changing the demographic nature of the region, due to the fact that about 85% of Iranian oil and gas, and 35% of Water in this region, the Iranian authorities spare no effort to eliminate the culture, language and history and the national entity of the Arabs of Ahwaz and integrate all within the crucible of Persian culture by depriving them of all their legitimate rights, whereas the names of cities and villages and the countrysides and all the places of Ahwaz have been changed from Arabic to Persian.⁷

As a result of deliberate neglect by the Iranian authorities against the people of Ahwaz, floods and torrents contrived by the authorities have swept hundreds of cities and villages

⁵ انظر أيضا: <https://bit.ly/2V0RCpz> الأقيليات القومية في إيران تجد أصواتها الخاصة- مارس 2019- معهد واشنطن، - إيران عشرات القتلى بهجوم استهدف عرضاً عسكرياً بالأهواز- 22 سبتمبر 2018- العربية <https://bit.ly/2IMMazV>

- مع تواصل احتجاجات الأهواز. قضاء إيران يحذر من الفوضى- 27 نوفمبر 2018 - العربية <https://bit.ly/2GOINX9>

⁶ الأهواز في 2018.. غضب وصمود بوجه "التغول الإيراني"، سكاي نيوز عربية، 22 يناير 2019. <http://bit.ly/2UYWwyo>

⁷ - مرتضى الشاذلي، قضية الأحواز المنسية : ماذا يحدث في غرب إيران، موقع نون بوست، 3 أبريل 2018، الرابط، <https://www.noonpost.com/content/22748>

in the region, killing 80 people; leaving nearly 2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance⁸; the destruction of 200 villages and nine towns besieged by floods without humanitarian assistance.⁹ The authorities have built more than 25 dams on the Karun River, 7 dams on the Karkheh River, and 8 dams on the Jarahi River. In addition, the transfer of water by tunnels to the central provinces in Iran has dried the Ahwazi rivers and accelerated the destruction of the environment, agriculture and the drying of the the Ahwazi marshes such as Hor al-Azim and Hor al-Falahiya. As a result of these projects, the two marshes have lost their role to contain floods and torrents.¹⁰ These practices come within a framework of a systematic plan aimed at changing the nature of the population in the region and forcing the the Arabs of Ahwaz to leave their lands.

The clearest evidence of the planned and systematic racist policies of the Iranian authorities to forcibly displace the Ahwazi people from their lands that is the failure of the authorities to repair the massive destruction caused by these floods. The Revolutionary Guards opened fire on the villagers who had built earthen berms, killing one farmer and wounded dozens because they opposed the bombing of the earthen berms.¹¹ On April 11, 2019, the Iranian authorities announced, after a meeting attended by a number of ministries, that the flood-stricken cities and villages of Ahwaz became uninhabitable, and decided to rehouse all the inhabitants of these villages and cities in other places.¹²

These policies aim at bringing Iranian citizens of Persian ethnicity and settling them in the Arab region of Ahwaz to become a majority later. The document which was leaked in 2005 from the office of Mohammed Ali Abtahi, Senior Advisor to the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, confirmed the authorities' plan to displace more than two-thirds of the Arab population of Ahwaz to the Persian areas and replace them with settlers of Persians or non-Persian nationalities, to reach the proportion of non-Arabs in Ahwaz to 70% at least in 10 years, which the Iranian authorities have failed to achieve so far.¹³

Recommendations

- The Iranian authorities should lift the ban and restrictions on the mother tongues of indigenous peoples and allow them to study in their native language.
- To pressure the Iranian authorities to abide by their international commitments to ensure respect for the rights of indigenous peoples, stop their plans to forcibly displace the people of Ahwaz and provide protection for them and to open an international investigation into the violations committed by the Iranian authorities against them.
- The international community should pressure the Iranian authorities to lift the discriminatory practices against indigenous peoples, address the economic and social crisis they face and develop the territories inhabited by indigenous peoples.

⁸ للمزيد انظر: <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3564572>

⁹ للمزيد انظر: <http://bit.ly/2Q4MP0p>

¹⁰ في ذكرى الاحتلال: الاحواز بين القمع والسيول المفتعلة، سكاي نيوز عربية، 14 ابريل 2019. <http://bit.ly/2LLHtsw>

¹¹ انظر: <http://bit.ly/2Q4MP0p>

¹² للمزيد انظر: <http://bit.ly/2Q85sk7>

¹³ انظر: <http://bit.ly/2JKqaWa>