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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Centre Zagros pour les 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.

[6 February 2023]

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



Discrimination Against The Kurds In The Islamic Republic Of Iran

The Kurds are an indigenous and ancient people who have lived in their lands for more than 10,000 years. Kurdish-dominated territories have been divided between several countries that now share common borders. The majority of the Kurdish population lives in the following countries: Türkiye, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Armenia. Due to the special policies of these countries, there are no official statistics on the number of Kurds. However, various sources estimate the number of Kurds at 35 to 40 million.

Kurds have been constantly subjected to genocide and repression in ancient and modern history.

Kurdish Community

- There are about 14-15 million Kurds in the Islamic Republic of Iran or about 16-17% of the country's total population. They live mainly in the northwest and west of the country, in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah (in Kurdish; Kermashan), Ilam, Lorestan and Hamadan. Some of them, who were previously forcibly displaced, also live in North Khorasan and Razavi Khorasan provinces. A number of them have settled in the northern and southern provinces and in the capital, Tehran.
- Religiously, the majority of the Kurdish population is Muslim (66% Sunni and 27% Shiite). Others follow other religions such as Ahl al-Haq (Yarsani), Baha'i, Zoroastrian, or follow the Qadiri and Naqshbandi schools of Sufism.
- Although the constitution provides equal rights for "all Iranians", in practice, this does not extend to ethnic minorities. Kurds in the Islamic Republic of Iran face systematic discrimination and barriers that affect their access to basic services such as housing, political office, employment, and education. The provinces in which Iranian Kurds are concentrated have some of the highest unemployment rates in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Kurdish language instruction is not taught in public schools, although it may be provided privately by volunteer teachers or cultural associations.

Economic conditions

- Kurdish areas have been discriminated against and their prosperity and development have been prevented. These areas have been neglected economically, resulting in entrenched poverty. Forced evictions and destruction of homes have limited Kurdish access to affordable housing.
- The Kurdish regions are the poorest regions compared to the rest of the country. The unemployment rate is too high. Medium and strategic industrial projects in these areas are restricted or prohibited.
- The region's underground resources, such as oil, gold, and other resources, are widely extracted. But the income generated by resource extraction is not spent on the development and job creation in the region.
- Residents of border areas resort to illegal transport of goods across the border for their livelihood and subsistence. This illegal profession in Kurdish language is called 'Kolbery.' This puts Kolber's life in danger of dying.

Environment

- Forests in Kurdish areas are being set on fire under the pretext of the presence of Kurdish Peshmerga (Kurdish Defense Forces). Volunteers and environmental activists who intend to put out the fire are arrested and imprisoned.

- Water resources are being destroyed, and water is flowing into the centre of the Islamic Republic of Iran through underground tunnels. This has led to the drying up of several rivers and the deterioration of the ecology of the region.
- Lakes Urumia and Zerebar, two large lakes in West Azerbaijan province and Kurdistan province, are drying up. Currently, the drying up of Lake Urumia, one of the saltiest lakes in the world, has caused a dangerous natural phenomenon. The salt particles mix with the air and pose a threat to the inhabitants around the lake.

Education

- The lack of educational infrastructure and schools in the Kurdish areas prevents children from continuing their education. In some areas, students have to travel a long way to school.
- Children who can study or continue their studies cannot study in their mother tongue. This reduces the desire to study and the percentage of academic success of students.
- The Iranian Constitution stipulates that the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and media, as well as for the teaching of regional and tribal literature in schools, is permitted alongside the Persian language (Art. 15). However, no practical measures have been introduced in the Iranian education system to facilitate teaching in minority languages or to teach these languages as a second language.

Culture

- Kurdish parents do not have the right to choose Kurdish names for their children, and the use of several names is strictly prohibited. Each registry office has a list of authorized names; a birth certificate is issued only if the family agrees to use an authorized name.
- The practice of Kurdish national celebrations is very limited, and many wedding ceremonies are possible only under strict conditions.

Religion

- Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, although a minority are Shia. Some of them are Ahl al-Haq (Yarsani), Baha'is, Zoroastrians, and followers of the Qadiri and Naqshbandi schools of Sufism.
- Although Sunni Islam is a recognized Islamic sect in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sunni Kurds in the Islamic Republic of Iran face discrimination because of their religion, as the official religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran is Shia Islam. Sunnis and Shiites have historical differences and have always opposed each other.
- The Iranian constitution does not recognize the Yarsani religion (Ahl al-Haq). Followers of the religion, mostly Kurds, are under pressure from Iranian security services, and their rituals are banned and not covered by the media. Most followers of this religion live in Kermanshah and Ilam.

Political rights

- National groups and ethnic minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran have always been in tension with the central government. However, the Kurds have defended their cultural and political rights more actively than others in various ways. The Iranian government accuses Kurdish organizations of separatist tendencies. But political parties have repeatedly denied the accusations and called for autonomy or a federal system within the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- Kurdish political parties are banned by the Iranian authorities. Their members and supporters in the Islamic Republic of Iran are arrested, tortured, imprisoned, or executed. Therefore, the main base of these organizations is in Iraqi Kurdistan, and continues their organizational and political work there. In response, the Islamic Republic of Iran has constantly tried to oppress them. In recent years, many members of these parties have been killed in Iraqi Kurdistan cities. The bases of Kurdish organizations have also been hit by missiles or drones.
- Unfortunately, the families of the members of these organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran are under surveillance and pressure from the security and intelligence agencies.

The situation after September 16, 2022

Since the start of the demonstrations in Kurdistan province following the murder of Jina-Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022, many Kurds have been murdered, injured, or taken captive by Iranian security forces and Revolutionary Guards. As of today, 124 people have died, including at least 17 children and teenagers, and seven women. Most of the fatalities were caused by gunshots.

In the cities of Baneh and Jawanrood, protesters were shot at with heavy machine guns, while in other cities, shotguns, paintball guns (to mark and identify protesters), and machine guns (mainly AK-47 kalashnikovs) were used.

The exact number of those injured is not known because they fear detection and imprisonment if they seek medical treatment. Nevertheless, at least 45 people have sought medical attention.

In total, 386 people (including 50 women) have been incarcerated (110 in the Kurdistan province, 28 in the West Azerbaijan province, 25 in the Kermanshah province, 21 in the Ilam province, and 18 in other Iranian cities). 15 Kurdish Sunni scholars and religious authorities, namely Sayed Jamaladeen Waji, Junes Nawkhah, and Sayed Suleiman Ahmedi, have been arrested according to the Kurdish human rights organization "Kurdpa." Their current whereabouts are unknown. Mohammad Haji Rasooli died three days after his arrest.

In addition to these scholars, many Kurdish artists, athletes, environmental activists, and others have also been arrested. Most of those who were incarcerated were subjected to torture, leading to the death or suicide upon release of many.

The ongoing violence and human rights violations in Kurdistan province have not only led to loss of life and freedom, but also to a deep sense of fear and uncertainty among the Kurdish population. Despite these challenges, the demonstrations continue as the Kurds strive for justice and equality in their country.

Recommendations

Since the Iranian government has endorsed or signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and several other international declarations and conventions relating to the rights of minorities, it is necessary to implement these recommendations:

- The Islamic Republic of Iran should respect the provisions of international humanitarian law and exercise maximum restraint in the use of force.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran should fully implement the Declaration of the Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities.
- They should design and put in place normative frameworks that recognize, support, and promote minority languages.
- They should strengthen the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, which addresses the fight against intolerance, negative stereotypes, stigma, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against certain people because of their religion or belief.

Kurdistan Tribunal, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.