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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.

[28 May 2023]

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



The Situation of the Kurds in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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

The Kurds have historically and persistently faced genocide and repression throughout ancient and modern history.

Kurdish Community

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

Economic Conditions

- Kurdish areas have experienced discrimination, hindering their prosperity and development. These areas have suffered economic neglect, leading to entrenched poverty. Forced evictions and home demolitions have limited Kurdish access to affordable housing.
- The Kurdish regions are the poorest compared to the rest of the country, with excessively high unemployment rates. Medium and strategic industrial projects in these areas face restrictions or are prohibited.
- The region's underground resources, such as oil, gold, and other valuable resources, are extensively extracted. However, the revenue generated from resource extraction is not reinvested in the region's development or job creation.
- Residents of border areas resort to illegal transportation of goods across the border to sustain their livelihoods. This illegal profession in the Kurdish language is called "Kolbery." Engaging in this activity puts the lives of Kolbers at risk.

Environment

- Forests in Kurdish areas are deliberately set on fire under the pretext of the presence of Kurdish Peshmerga (Kurdish Defense Forces). Volunteers and environmental activists attempting to extinguish these fires are arrested and imprisoned.

- Water resources are being destroyed, and water is being diverted to the central region of the Islamic Republic of Iran through underground tunnels. This has resulted in the drying up of several rivers and the deterioration of the region's ecology.
- Lakes Urumia and Zerebar, two large lakes in West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan provinces, are experiencing depletion. Currently, the drying up of Lake Urumia, one of the saltiest lakes in the world, has caused a dangerous natural phenomenon. Salt particles mix with the air, posing a threat to the inhabitants living around the lake.

Education

- The lack of educational infrastructure and schools in Kurdish areas hinders children from pursuing their education. In some areas, students have to travel long distances to reach school.
- Children who can study or continue their studies are unable to learn in their mother tongue. This reduces their motivation to study and their academic success rate.
- The Iranian Constitution allows for the use of regional and tribal languages in the press, media, and teaching of regional and tribal literature in schools alongside the Persian language (Art. 15). However, practical measures have not been implemented 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 certain names is strictly prohibited. Each registry office has a list of authorized names, and a birth certificate is only issued if the family agrees to use an authorized name.
- The practice of Kurdish national celebrations is very limited, and many wedding ceremonies are subject to strict conditions.

Religion

- Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, although there is a minority of Shia Kurds. Additionally, there are followers of Ahl al-Haq (Yarsani), Baha'is, Zoroastrians, and adherents of the Qadiri and Naqshbandi schools of Sufism.
- Despite Sunni Islam being recognized as an Islamic sect in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sunni Kurds in the country face discrimination due to their religion, as the official religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran is Shia Islam. Sunnis and Shiites have historical differences and have been in opposition to each other.
- The Iranian constitution does not recognize the Yarsani religion (Ahl al-Haq). Followers of this religion, mostly Kurds, face pressure from Iranian security services, and their rituals are banned and not covered by the media. The majority of followers of this religion live in Kermanshah and Ilam.

Political Rights

- National groups and ethnic minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran have always had tensions with the central government. However, the Kurds have been more active in defending their cultural and political rights in various ways. The Iranian government accuses Kurdish organizations of having separatist tendencies, but political parties have repeatedly denied these 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. As a result, these organizations primarily operate from Iraqi Kurdistan, continuing their organizational and political work there. In response, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently sought to suppress them. In recent years, many members of these parties have been killed in cities in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the bases of Kurdish organizations have been targeted 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 security and intelligence agencies.

Execution of the Death Sentence

- In 2022, 52 Kurdish citizens were executed in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Situation after September 16, 2022

After the murder of Mrs. Mehsa (Zina) Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish girl, by the moral police in Tehran, strikes and protest demonstrations took place in Kurdish areas as well as other areas of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the escalation of the popular uprising and under the orders of the religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran to suppress it, the forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps declared martial law in these areas. They employed various weapons, including ; AK-47, G3, Shotguns(1), DShK(1)(2), W-85 heavy artillery, military vehicles, tanks(3), helicopters(4), and the use of nerve-paralyzing chemical gas (Hexachlorate)(5), to brutally suppress the popular protests.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently pursued a policy of instilling fear and terror among the people and has engaged in mass killings to quell popular uprisings.

From the beginning of the uprising until the end of May 2023, it is reported that 136 Kurdish citizens, including 6 women and 13 children, have been killed by government forces. 11 Kurdish citizens have been killed under the torture of the security forces in detention centers, and several others have reportedly been subjected to sexual assault.

Furthermore, it is claimed that more than 7800 people have been abducted by government forces, and there is limited information available regarding the fate of many of these individuals.

Recommendations

Considering the Iranian government's endorsement or signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as other international declarations and conventions regarding the rights of minorities, the following recommendations should be considered:

- **Respect for International Humanitarian Law:** The Islamic Republic of Iran should adhere to the provisions of international humanitarian law and exercise utmost restraint in the use of force.
- **Implementation of Minority Rights:** The Islamic Republic of Iran should fully implement the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities.
- **Strengthening the Fight against Intolerance and Discrimination:** The Islamic Republic of Iran should enhance the implementation of Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, which addresses combating intolerance, negative stereotypes, stigma, discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against individuals based on their religion or belief.

Alliance for Minority Rights - Association Projet Démocratique du Kurdistan Iranien, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

1- <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/742245/>

2- <https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-63709270>

3- <https://ir.voanews.com/a/iran-majlis-member-defends-military-action-in-kurdish-cities/6847024.html>

4- <https://ir.voanews.com/a/iran-mahabad-protests-forces/6842376.html>

5- alarabiya - <https://vu.fr/ZQAF>