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Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

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.

[12 August 2024]

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



The Negative Effects of the Treaty of Lausanne on Human Rights and Minorities

Introduction

The Treaty of Lausanne(1), signed on July 24, 1923, represents a historic turning point for the region of Asia Minor(2). This treaty, recognized by the League of Nations on August 26, 1924, aimed to establish peace and stability following the devastation of World War I. The signatories, including the then Turkey, the then “British Empire”, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the then Serb-Croat-Slovene State, committed to upholding provisions that would subsequently have a significant impact on the region's minorities, particularly the Kurds(3), Assyrians(4), Turkmens(5), Alevi(6), Yazidis(7) and Kakais(8).

Historical Impact and Context

The Treaty of Lausanne marked the international recognition of modern Turkish borders and the official end of the Ottoman Empire. However, this recognition had profound consequences for the minority populations living within these territories. Although the treaty aimed to establish lasting peace, it unfortunately did not take into account the specific rights and needs of the various ethnic and religious minorities. This oversight led to systematic marginalization and, in many cases, acts of violence and oppression.

Targeted Violence and Massacres

One of the most concerning aspects of the treaty is the targeted violence and massacres perpetrated against minorities. Over the decades, these groups have been victims of acts of violence, including massacres and genocides, resulting in massive human losses, forced displacements, and deep trauma. Tragic examples include the Dersim Massacre in Türkiye(9)(10), the Anfal Campaign in Iraq(11), the deprivation of citizenship rights for Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic(12), and recent atrocities committed by extremist groups in the Syrian Arab Republic(13) and Iraq(13)(14)(15).

These acts of violence not only caused immeasurable suffering but also led to the destruction of entire communities, the disappearance of millennia-old cultures, and the fragmentation of minority identities. These events are tragic witnesses to the failure of the signatory states to protect the fundamental rights of vulnerable populations.

Effects on the Political and Social Rights of Minorities

Neglect of Political Rights

The provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne led to a severe neglect of the political rights of minorities. These groups were systematically excluded from political processes, deprived of representation and participation in decisions affecting their lives and communities. Political marginalization prevented these minorities from voicing their concerns and defending their interests, thereby reinforcing their vulnerability to discriminatory policies and human rights violations.

Social Marginalization

Social marginalization, exacerbated by the treaty, resulted in significant socio-economic disparities. Access to education, healthcare, employment, and other essential services was limited for these minorities, worsening their exclusion and vulnerability. This marginalization not only reinforced existing inequalities but also created new barriers to the economic and social empowerment of minority groups.

Violations of Cultural and Linguistic Rights

The Treaty of Lausanne had disastrous repercussions on the cultural and linguistic rights of minorities. The policies implemented following the treaty often led to the suppression or restriction of the cultural and linguistic practices of the Kurds, Assyrians, and Turkmens. For instance, forced assimilation policies sought to impose a dominant culture at the expense of minority traditions and languages.

For the Kurds, this cultural suppression manifested in the repression of Kurdish languages, the closure of Kurdish cultural and educational institutions, and the prohibition of distinctive cultural expressions. The Alevis and Kakaïs saw their religious practices marginalized, while the Yazidis faced attempts to destroy their religious and cultural heritage. These violations not only weakened the cultural identities of these communities but also hindered their ability to pass on their traditions to future generations.

Violations of Human Rights

Human rights violations were a direct consequence of the policies implemented following the Treaty of Lausanne. Systematic repression of minorities led to abuses of fundamental rights, including arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial executions. Minorities were often victims of discrimination and persecution based on their ethnicity or religion.

Victim testimonies reveal inhumane living conditions, prolonged detentions without trial, and targeted attacks against entire communities. The international community often failed to intervene effectively, leaving victims without recourse or protection.

Targeted Violence and Systematic Repression

Targeted violence and systematic repression were direct consequences of the policies imposed after the Treaty of Lausanne. Massacres and genocides not only caused significant human losses but also led to massive population displacements. Kurds, Alevis, and Yazidis were victims of military operations, ethnic cleansing, and forced deportation policies.

In Türkiye, military operations in Kurdish areas, attacks on Alevi villages, and the persecution of Yazidi communities in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic reflect the brutality of the repression. This violence had devastating effects on the social fabric of these communities, causing intergenerational trauma and a loss of social cohesion.

Critical Situation of Women in Minorities

Women within these communities have suffered extreme forms of gender-based violence. Sexist violence, including sexual violence and forced marriages, has been exacerbated by impunity and lack of legal recourse. In conflict and repression contexts, minority women have often been targeted due to their dual status as ethnic and gender minorities.

The violence they have endured includes collective rapes, sexual slavery, and genital mutilation. The absence of legal protection and lack of support from authorities have worsened their suffering, leaving these women isolated and defenseless.

Call to Action and Commitments

• Revision of the Treaty of Lausanne

It is imperative to revise the Treaty of Lausanne to incorporate robust guarantees for the political, social, cultural, linguistic, and human rights of minorities. Such a revision should aim to rectify historical injustices and establish a legal framework for the protection and promotion of minority rights. It is essential that the signatory states reassess their commitments and take concrete steps to address the detrimental effects of the treaty.

• Investigation and Accountability Mechanisms

We demand the establishment of independent investigation mechanisms for human rights violations, including political and social rights. These mechanisms should be tasked with ensuring accountability for perpetrators and delivering justice to victims. Such an initiative would require international support and cooperation among the concerned states to be effective.

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- (1)- <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/lon/volume%2028/v28.pdf>
 - (2)- https://utopia.miraheze.org/wiki/Asie_Mineure
 - (3)- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/who-are-kurds>
 - (4)- <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/36247/iraq-exit-strategy-and-the-simele-massacre-of-assyrians>
 - (5)- <https://unpo.org/article/14088>
 - (6)- <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/alevis/>
 - (7)- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yazidi>
 - (8)- <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/07/threat-kakai-community-poses-broader-challenges-iraqs-democracy>
 - (9)- <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/dersim-massacre-1937-1938.html>
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 - (11)- <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/ANFALINT.htm>
 - (12)- OHCHR - <https://urlz.fr/m3Iq>
 - (13)- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2014/08/iraq-immediate-action-needed-protect-human-rights-yazidis-grave-danger-un>
 - (14)- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2016/06/un-commission-inquiry-syria-isis-committing-genocide-against-yazidis>
 - (12)- <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/summaries/s.syria9610.html>