



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2004/NGO/148
9 March 2004

ENGLISH ONLY

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixtieth session
Item 14 (b) of the provisional agenda

**SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS:
MINORITIES**

**Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence
(ODVV), 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.

[1 February 2004]

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

The subject of minorities' rights has turned into one of the most important global challenges. Today we are witness to sometimes extremely violent internal conflicts around the world, the expansion of which bring nothing but pain and suffering of humanity, homelessness of masses of people, and chronic economic and social disorders.

Most of these complaints originate from minorities, complaints to different forms of discrimination, and the legal disregard. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states, "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language." In practice the identity-seeking demands of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities are crushed by governments on the excuse of preservation of unity and sovereignty, and the defense of the national interests.

The disregard of the rightful rights of minorities and the lack of suitable mechanisms for the realization of these rights usually result in the occurrence of violent behaviors and therefore the continuation of violation of human rights.

In a 1992 report by then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali entitled An Agenda for Peace, despite his reassurance of "...Regional and continental associations of States are evolving ways to deepen cooperation and ease some of the contentious characteristics of sovereign and nationalistic rivalries...At the same time, however, fierce new assertions of nationalism and sovereignty spring up, and the cohesion of States is threatened by brutal ethnic, religious, social, cultural or linguistic strife..." He also stresses that one of the necessary conditions for solving these problems is the observation of human rights, particularly the rights of ethnic, religious, social or linguistic minorities.

Over the last two decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken positive steps on religious minorities issues, such as the removal of discriminatory signs on public minorities premises, such as shops; handing over the management (headmaster/mistress) of schools to minorities themselves. Also, recently the Expediency Council voted for the equality of minorities *Dieh* [atonement] with the Muslims. These are all positive steps forward towards the observation of the equal rights of minorities, and it is necessary for this fact to be reflected in the present laws of the land.

At the same time there are several other issues that have remained unresolved. Some of these cases are as follows:

1. One of the fundamental issues of religious minorities in Iran is the inheritance issue. Article 881 (repeated) of the of the Civil Code states, "A 'heathen' shall not inherit from a Muslim if among the heirs of the deceased there is a Muslim., and if one of the inheritors is a Muslim, the 'heathen' inheritor inherits nothing." This means that in many instances when one inheritor converts to Islam, then the rest of the inheritors mentioned in the will get nothing.
- 2, There are discriminatory tones in the Penal Law. Inequalities still exist between Muslims and non-Muslims in the law. For example different punishments are foreseen for Muslims and non-Muslim murderers.

3. Discriminations still exist in the Employment Laws towards religious minorities. In the judiciary employment of minorities is practically impossible. In the armed forces also it is practically impossible for minorities getting promotions as officers. The military academies do not take on religious minorities.

The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence believes that until the culture of religious kindness, which can only be achieved through dialogue, is not established in societies; then the grounds will not be prepared for the protection of the minorities' rights or human rights.

In the hope for the day that we do not see any prejudice and discrimination based on race, religion, and ethnicity and believe.

The Minorities' Committee of the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence.
