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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, 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.

[11 February 2013]

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

Human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran – Discrimination against minorities

The current situation in Iran for non-Persian minority groups and religious faiths other than Shia Muslims remains difficult. Minority groups such as the Azerbaijani, Kurds, Arabs, Baluch, Turkmens or religious minorities such as the Baha'i or Christian Assyrians as well as other smaller ethnic and religious minorities have been suffering government oppression for years in the multicultural state.

Violent assaults, arbitrary arrests and discrimination common occurrences in the lives of many. Particularly politically or socially active members of these population sectors must constantly be wary of falling prey to the despotism of the Iranian secret service. They are being taken captive, tortured, and murdered.

Death penalty

The death penalty exists today in the Islamic republic of Iran. On the contrary, in relationship to the total population, more death penalties are carried out than anywhere worldwide. In the first eight months of 2012, at least 300 people were condemned. Human Rights Watch reports that 23 were sentenced in December 2012 alone.

The death penalty in Iran is applicable in certain crimes, including murder, adultery (rape victims are also adulterers), drug trafficking, repeated alcohol consumption, homosexuality, or converting away from Islam. The death penalty used as a political instrument. Often opposition members and politically active members of Iranian ethnic or religious minorities are sentenced to death. Generally those sentenced suffer an agonizing death by hanging. Other typical methods of execution include stoning, especially in cases of adultery. Before their execution, which is often public, prisoners are often tormented, tortured and raped. Lawyers are prohibited from contacting the prisoners. Neither families nor lawyers are notified about the execution. For example in the case of Hemn Ajend, incarcerated on 20. January 2013 by the Iranian secret service. Ajend, a student, is said to have been brought to the Dezl Abad prison in Kermanshar. Reasons for his detainment have not been released. Probable is his affiliation with the Kurdish minority in Iran.

Kurds

About ten million Kurds live in Iran. Here they are not recognized as an independent people with their own language, culture, and history. Kurdish parties are prohibited in Iran, and even their supporters abroad must fear Iranian terrorists. Kurds in Iran are “only” Iranian. They are denied their Kurdish identity. Kurd activists have been fighting the centralism of the state and the oppression of the Kurdish language since the founding of the Islamic republic Iran. Incarcerated Kurd activists often engage in hunger strikes to draw attention to their situation. One example is the imprisoned student Naser Naseri, who towards the end of January 2013 began a hunger strike after he was tortured and denied of medical care in the Mahabad prison. Naseri was convicted for being a member of the Kurdish opposition party. Qasem Rehimazer was also refused treatment in Mahabad, despite critical illness. Rehimazer, sentenced for four years, is also a member of a Kurdish party from the city of Bikan.

A report from Loghman H. Ahmedi, the Chief of Foreign Affairs for the democratic party Kurdistani-Irans given at a conference held mid-January by Al Jazeera and the Center for Strategic Iraqi Studies (CSIS) in Doha, detailed the current situation for Kurds in Iran. He reiterated that since its foundation, the Iranian government has taken military action against Kurdish movements in favor of independence, democracy and freedom for all citizens.

Kurds are prohibited from participating in politics. Ahmedi calls for the inclusion in congress of all nationalities living in Iran and the creation of a democratic, secular and federal system in Iran.

Bahá'í in Iran

The discrimination is at its worse for the Bahá'í religious minority. At around 300.000 members, the Bahá'í represents Iran's largest religious minority. Yet they are not recognized by the state as a religious community, rather as apostates fallen from Islam. As such they have suffered for some time from discrimination. The ongoing discrimination, denouncement and monitoring began with the induction of Mahmud Ahmadinedschad in 2005 and has continued with regular arrests, incarcerations, and dispossession. Access to higher education is blocked, apartments and businesses burned or compulsorily closed. Graffiti and cemetery vandalism, defamation of the religion in schools, and the spread of anti-Bahá'í propaganda accompany the prosecution by the government. The seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran have been imprisoned since spring 2008. Now the situation has worsened, especially in the Semnan Region in northern Iran, where many of the Bahá'í religious community live.

Incarceration of mothers and children

The state does not spare mothers or children. On 22 September two mothers with their children were taken prisoner in the city of Semnan, which in the last few years has become the center of Bahá'í prosecution. The women, Taraneh Torabi and Zoreh Nik-Aein were convicted for 20 and 23 months, respectively, for practicing their beliefs and supposedly spreading their ethics. The children are 5 and 10 months old, both suffer from health problems due to the catastrophic hygiene conditions in prison.

As in the case of Taraneh Torabis, many mothers feel obligated to take their children with them to prison, since married couples and other family members are often arrested together. The fact that multiple members of a single family are in prison usually has dramatic consequences for their economic situation.

The Arab Ahwazi

The Arab Ahwazi also faces prosecution in Iran. The five million members of this ethnic minority live in the oil rich region of Khuzestan in southwest Iran, independent until 1925. Following the fall of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979 the theocratic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini began, but the situation for the Arab Ahwazi and other minorities in Iran remained static under his rule. As the region was to be "iranized", Khomani seized land and brought in Persian settlers. Starting in 1979, around 200.000 acres of land were confiscated by the government. In addition, Iranian authorities caused extensive environmental damage in the Khuzestan region by polluting and rerouting rivers.

In 2005, police used extreme violence to stop large demonstrations in Khuzestan. At least fifty people were killed, hundreds were injured. Several participating demonstrators called for the creation of a separate state.

Although they live in a region rich in oil and gas, most Ahwazi live in poverty. This is because the Persians and Azerbaijani who have relocated to the region dominate the oil industry. Especially children are affected by poverty. The total number of malnourished children is very high. The illiteracy rate among the Ahwazi is double that of other regions, a third of the Arab population can neither read nor write.

The Ahwazi speak a dialect similar to southern Iraqis and ascribe to Sunni Islam, as opposed to the Shiite majority. Because of this different religion and the fact that they are not ethnic Persians, the Ahwazi continue to face discrimination in Iran. Fundamental

citizens' rights are kept from them, Arab media are prohibited and they are disadvantaged by the job market.

In July 2012, five Arab men were sentenced to death for committing "Muharaba" (war against God and His prophets and the endangerment of national security). In June, three brothers belonging to the Arab minority were hanged for having killed a police officer. Since mid-2011 at least four further members of the Arab minority have been hanged under accusations of state-endangering "terrorism". Many others have been condemned to serve long prison sentences. Details about their sentencing are usually kept quiet, and the accused's right to jury representation is seldom honored. In addition, human rights activists in Iran have reported torture and forced confessions.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to:

- Grant autonomy to the ethnic minorities within the federation;
 - Grant freedom of religion and belief for all citizens;
 - Abolish the death penalty;
 - Uphold international human rights standards.
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