

Madam Chairperson. Ladies and Gentlemen. Dear forum participants.

This is well-known fact by now that education in the mother-tongue is very central to intellectual emotional, spiritual and educational development of students. It is an should be an undeniable right of all ethnic groups to study, read and write in their mother tongue. This right however has been denied to Iran's non-Persian ethnic groups: Azerbaijani Turks, Kurds, Baluchis, Turkmen, Arab, Lurs and others. These ethnic groups constitute a numerical majority in the country, yet they are forced to study in Farsi, which is the language of the Persian ethnic group.

The Persian language has been imposed on the majority non-Persian population since 1925 the year of Reza Shah political take-over of establishment of Pahlavi dynasty. Ever since then, Farsi has been elevated to the status of Iran's only official language. It is the only language of instruction in education and government in a country, which is one of the most diverse, multicultural and multi-lingual countries of the world. Ever since 1925, Iran's diverse ethnic and national communities have been struggling for the right in education in their own national mother tongue.

The Azerbaijani Turks, for example, comes up to 32 per cent of the total population in Iran. And have been demanding the right to education in their language since 1925. The Pahlavi regime brutally suppressed these demands and so does the current Islamic republic. While the Constitution of the current Islamic regime allow for studying, reading and writing of non-Persian languages along with Farsi the government does not honour its own constitution and keeps arresting, abusing and persecuting those who demand implementation of this constitutional right. The Azerbaijani Turks have been demanding the right to education in their own language through peaceful means from writing collective letters to Iranian authorities, through staging peaceful non-violent demonstrations.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to conclude by sharing with you two famous mottos of Azerbaijani community regarding their language and its use in educational centres: My mother tongue would not die nor will it be supplanted by other languages. Education in mother tongue is a must for everyone. Thank you very much.