

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Forum on Minority Issues
Geneva, 15 – 16 December 2008



YAŞA e.V.

Kurdish Centre for Legal
Studies & Consultancy

Kurdisches Zentrum für
juristische Studien und
Beratungen

Navenda kurdî
ji bo lêkolîn û rawêjkarîya
yasayî

تاسا اردل ل یدرکلا ز کرملا
هینون اقل تاراش تسال او

YASA e.V.
Postfach 7624
53076 Bonn
Germany

www.yasa-online.org

Mr. Chairman
Ladies and gentlemen in attendance:

My name is Aref Gabeau, representative of the Kurdish Centre for Legal Studies and Consultancy –YASA in Germany...

I would like to begin by extending a sincere thank you to all those who contributed in organizing this conference and working for its success. Providing us the opportunity to highlight the difficulties and problems experiences by minorities in the areas of education and culture.

Ladies and gentlemen....

Kurds make up about 15% of Syria's population of 20 million people, that is to say that the number of Kurds in Syria is equal to about three million people.

Since this conference is dedicated to discussing the issue of education and culture, I will address only this aspect without touching upon the other aspects of suffering the Kurds face in Syria. The discussion about the discrimination of the Kurdish people by the Syrian government on the basis of their national identity, in the area of education and culture using their mother tongue Kurdish language.

We all know that language is the basis of education. Regarding the Kurdish language, it is banned in Syria given it is not allowed to teach in or publish in Kurdish. Accordingly, the Kurdish media is forbidden in Syria whether it is in writing, a recording or a video, even the Kurdish websites are blocked in Syria.

Nor is the teaching of the Kurdish language allowed in public schools, it is also not allowed to open a private school to teach the Kurdish language as is the case for other minorities in Syria such as Armenian schools and Christian communities that teach other languages such as Armenian and Syriac, this is not mentioning the teaching of foreign languages such as English and French in public and private schools and universities, also other languages are taught in private institutions excluding Kurdish, which is also not allowed in these institutions. The Syrian government has issued several resolutions and decrees providing the prevention of circulating and teaching the Kurdish language.

Discrimination against the Kurds in Syria is not limited to the prevention of the Kurdish language but also Kurdish student are dismissed from schools and universities because of engaging in cultural and student activities, additionally those who teach the Kurdish language in private and secret courses and seminars are arrested.

Also, it is prohibited to speak the Kurdish language in workplaces and public institutions. In 1992, the Interior Ministry issued a decree banning the registration of children with Kurdish names in the records of the province of Al-Hasakah.

As stateless Kurds, there are several obstacles placed before them in order to prevent them from going attending schools and universities to learn, and if they were allowed to succeed and complete their studies by graduating, they are not given the documents and certificates proving this completion, but the children deprived of a nationality are not allowed to study further than middle school to ninth grade only.

Ladies and gentlemen

The deprivation of Kurds from education in their mother tongue, denying them to circulate their language in any form is a breach and violation of international laws, conventions and resolutions on human rights, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the world celebrated its sixth anniversary just a few days ago and was also signed by the Syrian government, although, unfortunately, it does not adhere to it.

Therefore, we call on the Syrian government to cease their discriminatory practices towards the Kurdish citizens as equals amongst the Syrian citizens, to allow the circulation of the Kurdish

language in schools in universities, and that the Kurdish language becomes one of the languages taught in schools as other languages are taught in Syria.

We are waiting for help with advocacy and are asking for the support of human rights defenders and participants of this conference.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank the organizers of this conference and thank you all very much for your kind attention.

Aref Gabeau

YASA e.V. – Kurdish Centre for Legal Studies & Consultancy