

## Second Session of the Forum on Minority Issues 12-13 November 2009, United Nations, Geneva

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*Joint statement submitted by:*



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Thank you Madame Chair.

I am speaking on behalf of the Balochistan region of Iran.

We thank the secretariat for the opportunity to participate in this forum, a forum which provides silenced voices with an opportunity to share experience and look for solutions to problems we face on a daily basis.

Despite the initiatives mentioned by the Iranian delegation to improve the situation of minorities within Sistan-Balochistan, it continues to be the poorest and most underdeveloped region of Iran. According to a UN assessment in 2003, Balochistan has the worst indicators for life **expectancy**, adult literacy, primary school enrollment, access to clean water and sanitation and infant and child mortality in all of Iran. The Baloch language is forbidden in formal and public places, and Baloch children are deprived of using their mother tongue which inhibits full participation in public life for Baloch people.

So what can be done to improve the situation for **every** group, **without** discrimination, in Iran?

The challenge is to create a participatory political structure where minorities enjoy the same rights as the majority group, recognizing the diverse cultures and histories of the Iranian population.

The structure of the state needs to be changed from the current centralized government to a federal system, which would provide the opportunity for the ethnic groups to participate.

Therefore, the Baloch nation and other brother and sister nations in Iran must be recognized within its boundaries, as a people that - whilst distinct from each other, is equal in collective rights and duties.

Federalism in Iran should take a two-**fold** approach.

**First** it should devolve power to the constituent units, based on national diversities in Iran, shared sovereignty plus self-rule,

**Second** through the establishment of common institutions at the federal level, which guarantees that no national group is privileged, as is guaranteed in Article 19 of the Iranian Constitution.

Within the Federal system, minorities should have financial autonomy, a guarantee that the tax collection power should be divided between the federal government and the national republics, in a way that makes the national republics financially autonomous of the federal government. In this way the Baloch nation has a chance to share some of the resources that can be found in Balochistan. This gives us greater opportunity to become more involved as equal partners in the running of our country.

International arenas, such as this space, are very important for minority groups because they are free to challenge the status quo. In most states the voices of the minorities are silenced with coercion.

So we the Baloch people thank you for this opportunity and once again.