

Ahwaz Studies Centre
Hamed Aljebari

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted that I find myself among you at this conference to discuss the issue of the systematic violation of human rights in Iran and in particular, the rights of oppressed nationalities in Iran. I am highly grateful to the conference organisers for giving me the opportunity to be able to discuss this important topic. I hope that the conference will be successful in its work programme. I also want to extend my thanks to all the participants at the conference who are interested in human rights discussions relating to those who feel they have been forgotten.

Dear colleagues!

Iran is a multi-national, multi-religion and multi-linguist territorial geography. During the era of the Pahlavi monarchy in Iran, these differences were ignored by the government, and systematic and planned efforts were made to assimilate all nationalities of Iran into the Persian nationality, Persian language and Shiaa religion. The rise of the Islamic Republic's policy of assimilation brought a religious aspect to the political agenda. This time, activists in the legal arena against nationalities, based on religious law, charges such as opposition to the revolution, waging war against God, separatism and other aspects were subjected to long-term imprisonment and suffered the most brutal torture, violence and execution . Currently many of these activists remain within the prisons of the regime.

Discrimination in the legal aspects is legitimised in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A few such areas are mentioned below:

On the basis of Article 13 of the constitution, only the Iranian Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians are recognised as religious minorities; other religions are not recognised and are not free in their religious ceremonies.

According to Article 15 of this Act, the common official language and script of the Iranian people is Persian. Accordingly, the language and script is not entitled to legal recognition of non-Persian nationalities.

In 2012 Iran executed 360 people. Among those executed, at least three defendants were under the age of 18 years old at the time of their execution. Although the reason for issuing and enforcing such sentences on charges included drug trafficking, smuggling, murder, crime and espionage. Many of those executed were Iranian political activists who were put to death as a result of such accusations.

The cohorts of the Baha'i faith, along with the cohorts of the Yarsan religion, even as residents, are not allowed to promote their religions or their languages, or to hold their ritual ceremonies. There are in excess of one million Sunni Muslims in the capital city, Tehran, but they are not allowed to build a mosque, even if this is done with their own money.

Meanwhile, in all Kurdish cities and other areas of the non-Shiaa cohort religions, substantial funds are spent on the construction of special Shiaa occasional worship (known as Hossainie), libraries and places for special education. A Shiaa Mullah has also been appointed as the representative of the Supreme Leader and the highest positions of power in these areas have been delegated to them.

In the provinces where non-Persian nationalities live, like the four provinces of Kurdistan, Arabs in the Ahwaz provinces, Baluchistan and Turkmens location, the lowest share of national income and public funding are allocated to them and they are considered the most backward nationality according to the Iranian Standard in terms of development and urbanisation while the oil wells, the main source of Iran's income, are predominantly in the Arab areas.

Since March 2011 to 15 May 2012, ninety five members of the goods-carrying couriers (Best known as Kulbars), a poor and indigent people, were shot dead on the Kurdistan / Iran border by government border guards simply for trying to obtain the basic necessities for their families and children. In addition, a further 97 citizens were wounded. However, there was no investigation or follow-up by government authorities of the crimes committed by the border guards.

The UN Organised Crime and Drug Prevention organisation in 2011 declared that Iran has the highest number of drug addicts in proportion to its population. In addition, The Defence of the Desirable Life, which is a governmental organisation, stated that the numbers of those affected by drug addiction increased by eight per cent in 2011.

Thus, while the Iranian people have been deprived of their basic rights and while the pressure and crackdown by the regime has grown on a day-to-day basis, along with a sharp increase in social problems, what is drawing the attention of the international community more than anything is Iran's nuclear project. However, merely issuing statements condemning the aggression of the Iranian regime against the rights of people has satisfied those concerned that there is a lack of any credibility and enforcement; therefore the Islamic Republic has ignored these statements.

The situation for the people of Iran, especially the issue of freedom in this country, is a source of frustration and concern. To protect the rights of Iranian people living who have long desired a democratic government is a pivotal issue that they have fought for 34 years. The desire is to create a government in Iran that is in favour of the West, and Iran's neighbours. Iran's nuclear capacity under the current government is considered a threat by its neighbours, and other countries around the world, while a democratic government would remove the emphasis on the acquisition of nuclear capabilities.

Advanced countries of the world, especially Western countries, should support the Iranian people in their work in this direction and support a democratic government through their free votes. The results of fundamental changes in the public interest will ultimately lead to the enjoyment of human rights in Iran. Subsequently, the results of fundamental changes in Iran will benefit all parties, particularly human rights defenders.

In our view, such changes will be possible only with a democratic form of government where central government authority and power in the country is divided among each geographic area in their own, democratic, federal and secular states, in which each regional government and local parliament runs its own internal affairs, and where the handling of the country based on a democratic constitution is shared at national level.

In this regard a number of organisations affiliated to the Iranian nation in 2005 formed a union called the Congress of Iranian Nationalities Federal. Currently, 16 political organisations and the cultural associations of Kurds, Azerbaijani Turks, Arabs, Baluchies and Turkmen nations are represented in the Congress and are working collectively towards change.

It is clear that, based on the situation of most Western countries, as well as Asian countries like India, this kind of democratic and federal government is the best form of governance for multinational states.

I hope that someday the rights of all peoples throughout the world, and Iran, will be respected.

Many thanks