

Madam President,

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, race, cultural, economic and political discrimination of the non-Persian population in Iran has increased. The discrimination in Azerbaijan has evolved into a social conflict between the I.R. Regime and the Azerbaijani people.

Nearly half of the 30 million Azeri population is represented by women, who face all kinds of discrimination: economic, social, political, cultural, ethnic and religious.

Since 1925, when the Persian language was recognised as the official language, education in the Azeri language has been forbidden. Currently, Persian is obligatory in all schools from the age 5-6 years.

Without even mentioning psychological damages caused by the sudden and bitter rupture with their mother tongue, we have noticed that assimilation of children through the Persian language reduces family values and the solidarity between members of the same community.

Furthermore, the obligatory education in Persian which not everyone understands, leads to horrendous situations like the one experienced by Ms Ashtiani Sakieh that was revealed to the global public after demonstrations in her support.

This Azeri woman did not understand the language spoken by the Tribunal in her trial, and thus signed her own sentence without understanding the meaning of the document. In fact, she had officially approved the sentence of death by stoning, without even knowing it.

The Azeri women get imprisoned only because of publicly affirming to defend the environment. For example: Faranek Farid, Seideh Islami and Rogaeh Hassanzadeh, who was condemned to 20 lashes and 91 days in prison. These women demonstrated in defence of the Urmia lake, second largest salt lake in the world, listed by UNESCO as a 'biosphere reserve'. The lake is progressively drying out. Currently, Urmia has disappeared by over 65%, which causes a real danger to the lives of 14 million women, children and men who live nearby.

In Iran first girls to attend schools were the Azerbaijanis, and it was Azerbaijan that founded the modern Iranian educational system. The Azerbaijanis were at the forefront of democracy and modernity in Iran. Deprived of their fundamental rights, such as to study in their mother tongue, the Azerbaijanis actually became second-class citizens.

According to the International Committee Against Stoning, for the last 33 years, more than 150 people were stoned to death, the majority of them being ethnic minority women.

Forced to obtain their husband's permission to work, divorce, keep the children, travel alone, inherit, defend herself, fight for their rights, the Azeri women and all other Iranian women regardless their ethnic background are also subject to the rules of the Islamic law that reinforced even more the existing inequalities between men and women.

Forced marriages, allowed by the Islamic law, incite many women to commit suicide or to assassinate their husbands.

In some villages the situation of girls is monstrous. In fact, they start to work in the fields or in carpet manufactures already at the age of 5. Instead of enjoying the fundamental right to free education, these little girls will eventually suffer from spinal deformities or blindness after weaving the famous “Persian rugs” in Azerbaijani villages.

Interdiction of Azeri women to create their own NGOs

Despite the courage to defend their rights, the Azeri women are forbidden to assemble, self-organise and to be heard. Moreover, the answer to any kind of claims made by intellectuals is ‘imprisonment and torture’.

Today, because they belong to different ethnic groups, women face difficulties in coordinating their defence in front of the oppression of the Islamic Republic and its traditions.

It is thus imperative, without denying their ethnic identity and their claims, to give them the right to self-organise in order to fight against all abuses they experience.

The Azerbaijani women from Iran fight for their fundamental rights, for human rights and for democracy.

Today, Azerbaijani women are victims of several violations of their human rights by the Islamic Republic that forbids them to protect their ethnic identity, mother tongue and environment.

Steps must be taken in order to eliminate discrimination against Azeri women and men in Iran.

- Respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Apply the international decision on culture and education in the mother tongue.
- Put an end to race, economic and political discrimination of this population.
- Give access to the judicial system in everyone’s mothertongue so that everyone is able to understand it.
- End the racist propaganda done by the education system and the mass media.
- Release all the Azeri political prisoners.

Considering the seriousness of the environmental situation in Azerbaijan, we urge the United Nations for an immediate intervention in the Islamic Republic in Iran. The authorities must take prompt actions in order to resolve the problem of the Urmia lake affecting the existence of 14 million people – women, men and children – in the region.

Ms Chair, I would like to thank you for your attention.

Jaleh RAZMI

Azerbaijani Association - ARC CULTURE - France

