

The Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva (KMMK-G) statement to the
Sixth session of the Forum on Minority Issues on "Beyond freedom of religion or belief:
Guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities"

Madam Chair,

On behalf of the Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva (KMMK-G), I would like to draw your attention on the situation of religious minorities in Kurdistan of Iran.

Iran is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country composed mainly of Persians, Kurds, Baluchis, Azerbaijanis, Turkmens and Ahwazi-Arabs. However only the Persian-Shiite group holds State power and Article 1 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares the Twelve *Shia* school of Islam as the formal religion of the State. The current government maintains the policies of past governments and adheres to a system of governance based on the ideology of one country, one nation, one language and one religion. Both these elements perpetuate systemic discrimination against and repression of all ethnic nationalities and religious minorities in the country. Governmental participation by members of ethnic nationalities- or religious minorities _such as Kurds, Sunni Baluchs, or Bahal is severely restricted and are obstructed from assuming the presidency or occupy any significant governmentall position. These restrictions also apply to women, regardless of ethnicity.

Kurdistan the land of God/Good practices

Kurdistan of Iran known as the land of God for its religious mosaic, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, is hosting various religious communities such as Yazidis, Yarsan, Zoroastrians, Jews, Bahal, Christians, Sunni and Shia Muslim for hundreds of years without any major problems.

But since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 and it's new constitution based on Islamic principle especially Article 1 that declares the Twelve *Shi'a* School of Islam as the formal religion of the State, the members of above mentioned religious minorities are subjected to systematic discriminations in law and practice". According to the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Iran which was released on October 23rd, the members of Iranian religious and ethnic minorities are facing increasing forms of arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment despite the change of the government in June this year. For instance, in the last past months, three Kurdish citizens of Yarsan faith, (Mr. Mohammad Nazari, Mr. Mohammad Qanbari and Mr. Nimkard Taheri) ended their life through self-emollition to protest government officials' insulting against followers of the -Yarsan faith. Indeed, the State police and ,security forces routinely and forcibly shave the mustache of male followers of Yarsan publicly. Growing moustache is part of the religious identity of male followers of this faith.

Legal barriers

As mentioned above, the main barrier to a peaceful space for the promotion and the protection of members of religious and ethnic groups in Iran, is Article 1 of the Constitution and also the non respect of article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Iran is party to.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The KMMK-G maintains that substantive measures need to be taken in both laws and practice by the new government to promote human rights of the members of religious and ethnic minorities in the country.

The Iranian state should protect the Kurdistan religious space of tolerance and co-existence and abandon it's religious and ethnic chauvinism that favor the Persian-Shia group over others communities.

Finally, we urge the Iranian government of president Rouhani to respect, on the one hand, his electoral pledges for more rights to religious and ethnic minorities and, on the other hand, to fully respect Iran's national and international obligations.