

Remark from the Ahwaz Human Rights Organisation - Jaber Ahmad

Thank you, Mr. President!

I speak to you as an activist in the Ahwaz Human Rights Organisation, and director of the Ahwaz Studies Center. I have been working with my colleagues for many years on the issue of oppressed minorities in Iran.

In my intervention, I would like to focus on [the topic] stated in the Agenda of this session, and talk about the role of the justice system and the police in violating the rights of people belonging to minorities in Iran, and especially activists demanding national rights for the indigenous people of non-Persian minorities, which make up about half of the inhabitants of Iran.

The problem, which national and religious minorities [living] under the regime of the Iranian Islamic Republic face, is the lack of independence of the judicial system and its submission to the control of the security apparatus. This is what led to the issuance of mass death sentences against activists of national minorities, such as Ahwazi Arabs, Kurds, Baluchis, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, over flimsy charges such as threatening the national sovereignty, destabilise national security, fighting against God and the Prophet, spoiling the land, and similar charges all aimed at the elimination of the political movement demanding basic rights for Iranian minorities.

The judiciary system in Iran is unfortunately complicit with the police and the security apparatus in a campaign of oppression against the Ahwazi Arab national minority, which lives in Southwest Iran, and which is subjected to an operation of deliberate ethnic cleansing by the regime of the Iranian Republic. This is a policy [that has been] pursued by the subsequent Iranian governments in power in Iran since the end of the semi-autonomous Arab rule of our people by Reza Shah Al-Pahlavi in 1925 and until our days.

I also want to stress an important point; it is not possible for there to be justice in the Iranian justice system with regards to national minorities, if they are not allowed to speak in their mother tongue in front of the courts or the police, because the only official language in the country is Persian and is imposed on all citizens. Therefore, the availability of such matters as [being able to] speak their language in the courts, with the police and in the official facilities of the country, or the availability of translation, are basic conditions for equality among citizens.

I would also like to tell you that I was part of the Ahwazi Arab delegation, which went to Tehran to negotiate with the transitional government after the triumph of the revolution in 1979 to demand

autonomous rule for the Arab region in Iran. There was a paragraph in our demands, which stipulated the necessity to create Arab courts in the region to resolve the people's issues and problems.

Many of the sons of the minorities are subjected to mockery and disdain, because of their lack of proficiency in the official language, Persian, in municipal offices, courts and governmental institutions, which leads to them abstaining from presenting their cases, issues and demands in front of state institutions.

As I was born in the Arab region in which Persian is not spoken, learning Persian was imposed on me and my peers since [we were young]. Despite this, I still speak Persian with much difficulty and a heavy Arab accent which raises ridicule from others. A fact that leaves a deep impact in my psyche, which makes me abstain from speaking Persian and doesn't allow me to compete with my peers, who speak Persian, in education or in the job market. I am seen as a third class citizen and this applies to many of the sons of my people and the sons of the non-Persian people in Iran.

I would also like to point out that the police and the guards use excessive violence when confronting any peaceful protests demanding civil rights for minorities, whether in Ahwaz or in other national regions. The police make random arrests and get depositions from the arrested by using torture and forced confessions. Often trials are conducted behind closed doors and without any lawyer present. The judicial system also does not take into account the conditions of the political prisoners and [those] of conscience from a health standpoint.

Mr. President,

Given the importance of this Forum to which oppressed minorities and peoples attach big hopes, and our belief for the necessity of positive and humane work to address these issues and the oppression, which minorities are subjected to, we demand that the Forum on Minority Issues of the United Nations in its 8th session pay attention to the issues of minorities and the discriminatory practices [aimed] towards them by the police and the judges. We recommend the following:

- Pressure the Iranian authorities in regards to the independence of the judiciary, the creation of fair courts for activists [belonging to] minorities and dropping the frivolous accusations against them, such as [being a] threat to national security and similar, and [finally] repealing all the death sentences issued against them.
- Stop the programs of systematic ethnic cleansing against our Ahwazi Arab people.

- Remind the Iranian regime to fulfil its international commitments and obligations, urge it to enforce the articles of the Iranian constitution, especially those articles linked to the rights of non-Persian minorities.
- Provide fair Arab courts allowing Arab citizens, who do not speak the Persian language, to appear in front of them by appointing Arab judges.
- We demand the prioritization of the judicial investigation into the security [forces'] interrogation, which the judicial courts comply with in dealing with the Ahwazi Arab issues.
- Forbid the police to use excessive violence in confronting peaceful protests of Ahwazi Arab citizens.

Thank you.