

3. Human Rights Council, Forum on Minority Issues – 9th session - 24 and 25 November 2016 _ Geneva
Intervention by Dr. Karim Abdian, Executive Director- Ahwaz Education and Human Rights Foundation.
Agenda item 5. : Recovering from a crisis: ensuring durable solutions.

Thank you Mr./Madam chair for this opportunity:

My name is Karim Abdian from, executive director of Ahwaz Education and Human Rights Foundation- an NGO with focus to enhance education of the Ahwazi-Arab minority in southwestern Iran.

- Residing mainly in the southwest of Iran, the Ahwazi -Arabs are one of Iran's most disadvantaged and persecuted ethnic groups. Arabs estimated to be between 5-7 million or about 10% of the population who live in the southwestern region of Iran, in the province of Khuzestan or as called by its indigenous name, eghlim Al-Ahwaz or Arabistan. The Ahwazis are in the midst of identity crisis -The regime changed the Arabic name to Persian one to deny the Ahwazis their Arab identity – a durable solution would be to change to its original name, Arabistan.
- Ahwazis are an ethnic, national and linguistic minority in Iran. Historically, this indigenous Arab community has been marginalized, excluded and discriminated against by successive governments in Iran. The province accounts for up to 90% of Iran's oil GDP. Also 80% of Iranian wealth comes from our land- allocate some portion of the oil revenue to the region through legislation.
- Ahwazi Arabs are subjected to a mixture of Persianisation, forced migration, violent political repression and economic exclusion - establish a quota of 33% (1/3) employment for the local natives.
- The Ahwazi Arab Nation in Iran has not been allowed to participate in running its own affairs. It does not have local or genuine national representation. The Arab minority in Iran is totally deprived of its civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights - a durable solution would be to allow local governance with representation from Ahwazis
- Khuzestan's political, military and security commanders, officers, mayors and all high and mid-level government officials of Khuzestan have consistently been appointed from non-Arab areas – allow local employment in government.
- Among Ahwazis, the illiteracy rate is 4 times the national average. And unemployment is 6 times the national average. Arabic and all other non-Persian languages such as Kurdish, Turkish and Baluchi are banned therefore denying them their linguistic rights and the competitiveness in the job market- Implement Iran articles 15 and 19 by allowing local Arabic mother language to be though in elementary schools. Allow Arabs to study in their own language to reduce the high illiteracy rate among Ahwazis.
- Ahwazi-Arab people have been subjected to a forcible population transfer program. In the past 15 years 1.2 million Ahwazis have been forcefully displaced into central provinces whilst 1.5 million non-Indigenous Persians were relocated into government-funded resettlement towns such as Ramin, 1, 2, 3, and Shirin-Shahr in Arab cities in Khuzestan.
- We are fighting to hold on to their national identity, culture and language while the State has excluded us from the Iranian landscape, politically, economically and socially – implement ICCP.
- The Islamic Republic has consistently ignored the demands of Ahwazi-Arab and other non-Persian minority groups to implement Articles 15 and 19 of the 1979 Constitution, which guarantee the use of regional languages and equal rights of ethnic groups. It does not acknowledge and/or recognize the existence of Ahwazi-Arabs as a people, nationality or a community.
- During the past 8 years, Iran constructed 4 Dams, Masjidsoliman, Dez, Gharoon and Gatvand on Karoon River and diverted its water from Arab province to Persian provinces of Isfahan and Rafsanjan. This is while the region is suffering from a water crisis. Majority of Khuzestan (Arabistan) province. – Stop diversion of Karoon River to Persian provinces.
- According to the Human Rights Watch Report, "Millions of Land mines remaining from the Iran-Iraq war in the province of Khuzestan kill and maim indigenous inhabitants of Khuzestan in south-western Iran every day". Most of these are girls and boys who work in the fields – initiate demining
- Banning of our mother language corresponds to banning our literatures and cultures- inducing and creating unequal, degraded citizenship – respect collective rights of Ahwazis
- The World Health Organization has listed Ahwaz City, the provincial capital of Khuzestan province, the most polluted city on the planet. This is due to man-made desertification caused by the diversion of waters of Khuzestan's two main rivers - the Karoon and Karkeh – Stop building dams on Ahwazi-Arab land irresponsibly
- The ancient and unique Hor Al-Azim marsh is threatened by continuing oil exploitation with utter disregards for the ecosystem that is crucial to regulating moisture and temperatures in an otherwise hot and arid region - Restore Hor-Alzm

Recommendations to respecting minority rights as a means of preventing or mitigating crises:

- That Iran constitutionally and publically recognizes and acknowledges the existence and the group rights of the Ahwazi- Arab
- Facilitate economic participation by allocating a portion of the vast oil revenue for the development of Arab homeland in Khuzestan and employ local and native Ahwazis in the oil and Gas industries to foster political participation.
- The Iranian government allows local self –rule and establishes a local representative Ahwazi parliament in the Arab-Majority Khuzestan province.

- In order to create an inclusive society, we recommend that the Islamic Republic establish a 33% quota to employ local indigenous Ahwazi Arabs in the Oil and Gas industries in the province.
- The Islamic Republic provides us with explanation about my dad, brother and uncle execution.