

Madam Chairperson,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am giving my speech today on behalf of PADMAZ. I will focus on the environmental crisis happening in Ahwaz as a consequence of the Iranian Government's policies. These have become a serious threat to the existence of the indigenous Ahwazi people.

The Iranian regime violates the rights of the Ahwazi people with its policy of dam- and tunnel-building to divert the region's rivers. The building of over 100 of these structures has resulted in the drying-up of the rivers and marshland. This is a violation of international laws with respect to water rights and legislation. Please refer to the Convention No (51/229 -dated 8/July/1997) on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Water Courses, and the United Nation's declaration No. (61/295 - dated 13/Sep/2007) on safeguarding indigenous people's rights.

As a result of these policies, the level of water-flow in The Karoun River has decreased from 500 cubic metres per second to 50; a situation in which the flow of dust-laden drainage-water exceeds the flow of clean water.

The Iranian policy has led to the drying-up of the Ahwazi Marshland. The HOR AL-ADIM territory has decreased from 3,500 square kilometres in the 1970's to 200 in 2016. In spite of being protected by The Ramsar Convention, the HOR AL-FALAHIA (Shadegan) has now been placed in the 'Red List', highlighting the Iranian Government's disregard for International Law.

The people of Ahwaz suffer 200 days of dust-storms per year caused by the drying of the rivers and marshland and resulting soil erosion.

The level of dangerous substances in the air has reached 767 milligrams per cubic meter. The normal level is 150 milligrams per cubic meter.

According to the Iranian Statistics Centre, five thousand people are killed through environmental pollution per year. These deaths are directly attributable to the Iranian Government's policies.

Thousands of farmers have left their villages because of the drying-up of the rivers and wetlands.

In 2014, 50,000 Ahwazi were hospitalised because of respiratory problems due to the high levels of dust contained in the rain.

The number of people suffering from cancers and other life-threatening diseases has increased from 50% to 800% since the start of the Iranian Security Project.

According to Shafa Hospital in Ahwaz, the number of children born with birth-defects has also increased as a result of environmental pollution.

Lady President,

This critical situation afflicting our people brings us here today to ask the International Community to stop the slow death of thousands of innocent people, and to help put an end to Ahwaz's environmental crisis before it reaches and spreads beyond neighbouring countries.

We ask the United Nations to:

Firstly, force Iran to allow the rivers of Ahwaz to flow freely and at full capacity.

Secondly, prevent the dam- and tunnel-building projects conducted by Iran until they can be monitored by the International Community.

Thirdly, guarantee the quantity and consistent flow of water reaching the (Hor al-Adim, Hor al-Falahia, and Hor Shawoor) to ensure that they regenerate to their original levels.

Fourthly, put an immediate stop to the drainage of industrial- and agricultural wastes into the Ahwazi rivers.

Fifthly, to hold Iran accountable for using water as weapon in order to enforce discriminatory demographic changes in Ahwaz.

Sixthly, force Tehran to compensate the victims of environmental pollution for loss of human life, land, and resources. Payment of medical bills for those suffering from pollution-related illnesses is also necessary.

Lady Chairman,

What the Iranian Government is doing, and what I have presented here today, is just a small fraction of what amounts to a systematic policy to eradicate the Ahwazi nation. This requires urgent action from the International Community. We strongly suggest the appointment of an investigative- and monitoring committee by the United Nations.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to raise part of Ahwazi people issues

Abdulrahman Heidari (PADMAZ Representative)