

Alternative Report submitted to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the consideration of the Second Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 49th Pre-Sessional Working Group

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**SUBMITTED BY:**

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

**FOCUS ON:**

Ahwazi Arabs  
Iranian Kurdistan  
Southern Azerbaijan  
West Balochistan





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## Section A: Introduction to the Report

This alternative report submitted by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) on the occasion of the 49<sup>th</sup> Pre-Sessional Working Group of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (henceforth, “the Committee”) during which the Second Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be considered.

The framework of this report will comment upon relevant articles of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights sequentially (henceforth “ICESCR” or “the Covenant”). The final section of the report raises questions that should be posed and recommendations that should be made to Iran regarding concerns which are intended to inform the discussions taking place between the Committee and the Iranian delegation at the 49<sup>th</sup> Pre-Session.

This alternative report will focus on the situation of non-Persian ethnic groups located in the peripheries of Iran, namely the Ahwazi Arabs, Azeri Turks, Baloch, and Kurdish peoples, and the Iranian government’s compliance with and implementation of the provisions in the International Covenant as it affects these particular groups. Though Iran is commonly thought of as a Persian state, its population includes a large number of ethnic, and linguistic minorities. These groups are highly diverse, but share common experiences of economic marginalization, political repression and denial of even the most basic of cultural rights. While abuses against activists, journalists, and members of the political opposition have been widely documented and discussed, the relative severity and pervasiveness of abuses against Iran’s minority populations, though well documented by international NGOs and United Nations human rights bodies, tend to receive significantly less public attention. For example, one of the more striking elements of the government’s recent crackdown is the six-fold increase in executions in Iran over the last year. While this is a situation that affects Iran’s population as a whole, minorities are executed at much higher rates than Persians, and are often arrested, imprisoned and killed with even greater impunity due to the lack of reporting on these regions.

### *Census Data*

For the purposes of this report, one significant missing piece of information is accurate official data, including accurate census information as well as any data disaggregated by ethnicity or language. In its 2011 Briefing on Iran, Minority Rights Group provides an in-depth assessment of this issue, noting that the state’s censuses haven’t collected linguistic or ethnic population data for more than three decades. The last time statistics were collected (1976), Persians were listed as 51% of the population. However, these statistics were collected under a nationalistic regime that had a “vested ideological interest” in painting a picture of a country with a homogenous, largely Persian population, so it is likely that Persians constituted a minority of the population at that time.<sup>1</sup> Though these statistics were never independently verified, many sources continue to circulate them without comment.<sup>2</sup> Other sources circulate their own statistics, also unverified and with no information on how the numbers were calculated:

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<sup>1</sup> Minority Rights Group International (2011). “Seeking Justice and an End to Neglect: Iran’s Minorities Today.” p 2. February 2011, London.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*



*The Federal Research Division of the US Library of Congress has its own estimates, published in 2008, putting Persians at 65 per cent, Azeris at 16 per cent, Kurds at 7 per cent, and so on, with no mention, however, of how these numbers were calculated. Other US government statistics, meanwhile, differ from those of the Library of Congress and also include no notes on how the figures were calculated.<sup>8</sup> In short, any statistical report on Iran’s ethnic makeup ought to be read cautiously. Verifiable and independently assessed disaggregated data on minorities in Iran would require a political climate and systematic machinery which is currently far out of reach.<sup>3</sup>*

Due to the lack of accurate census information, and a total lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity, this report uses census data and economic indicators by province. The provinces where ethnic minorities reside are, at least for the time being, populated predominantly by ethnic minorities. While population transfer policies undertaken by the Iranian government may make the nationalities into minorities in their own regions within the next decade, it is currently still useful to look at provincial data in order to extrapolate the overall situation for a particular ethnic nationality group.

For the purposes of this report, the Ahwazi Arabs, Azeri Turks, Baloch and Kurds will be discussed as ethnic groups, as they have distinct cultures, languages, and identities from the Persian majority. For the most part, these groups can also be considered as religious minorities due to their majority adherence to Sunni Islam rather than Shia Islam, which is the official state religion. While Iran identifies these groups as ethnic minorities, it is important to note that these ethnic groups do not form a demographic minority in their respective regions in Iran. Most independent figures today show that collectively non-Persian groups comprise around or at least half of the Iranian population, but exact numbers continue to be disputed.<sup>4</sup> This report will use the terms ‘regional ethnicities’, ‘regional language rights’ and ‘non-Persian groups’ during the discussion of Iranian policies that prohibit these peoples from exercising rights protected under the Covenant.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Ghanea, N. & Hass, B. (2011) Briefing: Seeking justice and an end to neglect: Iran’s minorities today. *Minority Rights Group International*



## **Section B: Introduction to the Ahwazi Arab, Azeri, Baloch, and Kurdish peoples**

### *Ahwazi Arabs*

The Ahwazi Arabs are indigenous to the Al-Ahwaz province, also known as Arabistan or Khuzestan, located in the southwestern part of Iran. Ahwazi Arabs have lived in Khuzestan since the Parthian era, 4,000 years ago and experienced on-and-off recognition of autonomy and independence. Mostly adhering to Sunni Islam and having their homeland rich in oil reserves, Ahwaz Arabs in Iran currently find themselves marginalized by discriminatory practices such as ‘gozinesh’ and removed from decision making regarding natural resources on their ancestral land.

### *Southern Azerbaijan*

Azerbaijani Turks have settled in what is today northwestern Iran before the arrival of Persian tribes during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. After being split between what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan and Southern Azerbaijan in Iran, ethnic Azeris continue to face retaliation for a brief experiment with independence after World War 2 where the Iranian government prohibits Azerbaijani Turkish-language schools and persecutes activists by charging them with crimes against national security.

### *Iranian Kurdistan*

Indigenous to the western areas of Iran, the Kurdish people are traditionally nomadic but have historically faced policies specifically designed to marginalize them. Iranian Kurds having originally opposed the Pahlavi government have frequently been targeting for violence, especially after a jihad was declared on them by Ayatollah Khomeini. Discrimination and violence against Kurds continues today as they make up the majority of Iran’s political prisoners of conscience.

### *West Balochistan*

The indigenous Baloch people, the majority of whom reside in the Sistan-Balochistan province in southeast Iran, are descendants of some of the earliest human civilizations. After existing as semi-independent tribal confederacies, the Baloch people have experienced vast marginalization since the division of their nation by the British and Persian Empires and after the creation of the Islamic republic of Iran in 1979. The Baloch people are subjected to persecution, imprisonment, torture, executions and assassinations while Iranian policies prohibit the exercise of their rights to political organization and dissemination of the Baloch culture and identity. In addition to this systematic repression, the Sistan-Balochistan province is the most underdeveloped region in Iran, resulting in the highest national poverty rate along with lowest scores on UN indicators regarding life expectancy, literacy, access to clean water, sanitation, and infant and child mortality rates.



## Section C: Compliance with ICESCR

### Article 1 – Right to self-determination

Article 1.1 states that, *“All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”*

Article 1.2 states that, *“All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.”*

The Second Report submitted to the Committee by the government of Iran does not make clear the extent to which regional ethnicities are consulted regarding policies that may infringe on their right to self-determination and exploitation of natural resources in areas in which they reside. While Article 56 of the Iranian constitution states that “[a]bsolute sovereignty over the world and man belongs to God, and it is He who has made man master of his own social destiny. No one can deprive man of this divine right, nor subordinate it to the vested interests of a particular individual or group,” non-Persian ethnicities find themselves politically, economically, and socially marginalized as a result of discriminatory policies that prohibit their involvement in decisions that affect them.

The Iranian government refuses to recognize Ahwaz Arabs, Azeris, Balochis, and Iranian Kurds as indigenous people despite strong historical evidence that they respectively are first peoples in what is now Iran and more importantly, self-identify as indigenous peoples with distinct cultures and identities. Instead, Iran refers to these peoples as minorities, though most of them constitute majorities in their respective regions. However, attempts to freely practice and transmit their respective unique cultures, including their native languages and religious beliefs, are blocked by state policies that the Iranian government justifies as necessary to address what it perceives as threats to national security. For example, Iran has charged Azeri activists with “moharebeh” after peaceful demonstrations calling for action to preserve Lake Urmia.<sup>5</sup> “Moharebeh” is punishable by death according to the Iranian Penal Code and includes vaguely worded acts such as “antirevolutionary behavior,” “moral corruption,” “siding with global arrogance,” and “crimes against Islam.”<sup>6</sup>

Regional ethnicities are systematically excluded from many benefits of investment and development related to natural resource wealth. For example, while the region of Sistan-Balochistan is rich in minerals, including gas, oil, gold and marine resources, it remains the most underdeveloped and poorest region in Iran.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Al-Ahwaz province, also known as Khuzestan, where the Al-Ahwazi people originated, is rich in oil reserves and provides roughly 90% of Iran’s oil. Each year nearly 700,000 barrels of crude oil are produced in this region for a profit of approximately US\$26 billion

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<sup>5</sup> Association for Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (2011) Azerbaijanies Arrested in Lake Protests. Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/038/2011/en>

<sup>6</sup> United States State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2010) 2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iran.

<sup>7</sup> Balochistan Peoples Party (2008) West Balochistan: Baloch Human Rights Flaunted. Retrieved from <http://www.unpo.org/article/7462>



per year.<sup>8</sup> Despite this abundance of natural wealth, the region's Arab population remains completely excluded from the benefits, including employment on the projects, and Khuzestan's rate of poverty is second only to that of Sistan-Balochistan. The Kurdistan province is abundant in water resources with 15 dams within the region to facilitate irrigation, hydro-electricity and drinking water.<sup>9</sup> Yet the Kurds experience disproportionately poor housing and living conditions which, as with other regional ethnicities, are attributed to forced resettlement (in the situation of the Kurds, they were forced to settle after a traditionally nomadic lifestyle) and confiscation without compensation of rural land for large-scale projects such as agricultural plantation and petrochemical plants.<sup>10</sup>

*Recommendation: Formally endorse and ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169.*

*Recommendation: Formally recognize the Ahwazi Arabs, South Azerbaijani, Baloch, and Kurds as indigenous peoples, and respect the distinct rights to self-governance afforded to them by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

*Recommendation: Engage regional ethnic communities affected by resource extraction under the principles of free, prior and informed consent.*

*Recommendation: Ensure that profits from natural resources are reinvested in their respective communities.*

### **Article 3 – Right of women's equal status**

Article 3 states, "The State Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant."

Women's rights in Iran are tenuous at best when considering that the government has demonstrated a propensity to invoke customary and internal norms as justification for failure to fulfill its obligations under Covenants containing specific articles for the protection and advancement of women.<sup>11</sup> The Special Rapporteur on violence against women noted after a 2005 mission to Iran, "There are worrisome gaps in guaranteeing gender equality. Discriminatory provisions in both the Civil and Penal Codes, and flaws in the administration of justice disempower women and aggravate their vulnerability. Furthermore, domestic application of the standards in place falls short of ensuring that women enjoy de jure and de facto equality."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ahwazi Arab Solidarity Network (2012) Ahwaz Human Rights Review 2012: Events and issues affecting Ahwazi Arabs during 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.ahwazsolidarity.org>

<sup>9</sup> Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Interior. *Economic potentials of Kurdistan Province in the Fields of Water, Agriculture and Natural Resources*. Retrieved from <http://en.ostan-kd.ir/Default.aspx?TabId=62#3-7>

<sup>10</sup> Kothari, M. United Nations Commission on Human Rights (2005) *Report of the special rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living – Mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (E/CN.4/2006/41/Add.2)

<sup>11</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (2011) Consideration of reports submitted by State parties under article 40 of the Covenant: Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/IRN/CO/3) para.5

<sup>12</sup> Ertürk, Y. (2006) *Integration of the human rights of women and a gender perspective: Violence against women – Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: Mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (E/CN.4/2006/61/Add.3)



Non-Persian women face double discrimination as members of marginalized communities and as women in Iran, where laws specifically limit their rights. For example, women belonging to regional ethnicities are more likely to receive less legal assistance in an already corrupt and defunct judicial system. In March 2012 during a Side Event on Minority Rights in Iran at the UN Human Rights Council, Ms. Fakhteh Luna Zamani, founder and director of the Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran, shared specific incidents where ethnic minority women have been disadvantaged twice.

*Members of the Azerbaijani community, particularly women, also face difficulties in the criminal justice system because of their inability to speak and understand Farsi, the sole official language of Iran. An example of this is the case of Sakine Muhammadi Ashtiani, an Azerbaijani woman who was convicted of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning. Her son and lawyer believed that she did not receive a fair trial. They claim that her confession was acquired under pressure and, because she spoke only Azerbaijani-Turkish, she was unable to effectively communicate her case to her Farsi-speaking interrogators in court.<sup>13</sup>*

During the plenary session of the Human Rights Council's 19<sup>th</sup> Session where stakeholders participated in an interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur Dr. Ahmed Shaheed following his report on the situation of human rights in Iran, Ms. Monireh Sulemani, a representative of the Balochistan Peoples Party, stated that,

*Three elements in my identity – being a woman, ethnically Baloch, and a Sunni – deprive me from having access to political participation, including standing as candidate for presidency in Iran. As persons of national minorities, we are doomed to face many kinds of discrimination from the day of our birth.<sup>14</sup>*

*Recommendation: Bring Iranian the Penal and Civil Codes into conformity with Article 3 of ICESCR.*

*Recommendation: Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservation and bring national laws into conformity.*

*Recommendation: End practice of stoning and other methods of execution for crimes committed on moral or sexual grounds.*

## **Article 6, 7, 8 – Right to employment and to form and participate in trade unions**

Article 6.1 states that, *“The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take the appropriate steps to safeguard this right.”*

Article 7 states that, *“The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work which ensure, in particular... (a)(ii) A decent living for themselves and their families in accordance with the provisions of the present Covenant; ... (c) Equal opportunity for everyone to be promoted in his employment to an appropriate higher level, subject to no considerations other than those of seniority and competence;”*

<sup>13</sup> Savalan (2012) Fakhteh Luna Zamani's Speech in Iran's Minority Event: Geneva – 14 March 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.iranian.com/main/blog/savalan/fakhteh-luna-zamanis-speech-irans-minority-rights-event-geneva-14-march-2012>

<sup>14</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (2012) All Eyes on Iran During UN Human Rights Council. Retrieved from <http://www.unpo.org/article/14017>





Article 8.1 (a) states that, *The right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, for the promotion and protection of his economic and social interests. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public order or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.*"

Though Article 28 of the Iranian constitution protects the right to work in any occupation<sup>15</sup>, regional ethnicities are blocked from employment for reasons relating to their non-Persian ethnicity and their religious beliefs. A practice known as ‘gozinesh’ requires individuals to pass an ideological test demonstrating their allegiance to Shia Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran before being considered for employment at “the totality of ministries, state organizations, firms and companies; the national companies for oil and gas and petrochemicals; the Organization for Propagation and Rebuilding of Industry; the Red Crescent Society; municipalities; the social security organization; [...] firms and companies for which all or a portion of their budget is secured by public [state] funds.”<sup>16</sup>

This ‘gozinesh’ practice effectively prohibits many Ahwazi Arabs, Kurds, and Balochis from seeking employment within the agencies listed above because they are largely adherents of Sunni Islam. Consequently, regional ethnicities see disproportionately higher unemployment figures which are unfortunately not measured in detail since regional unemployment rates and income per capita figures based on ethnicity are not made available in Iran’s report to the Committee. The Sistan-Balochistan province, where the majority of the Baloch population resides, experiences nearly five times the national unemployment rate, putting the figure over 50%.<sup>17</sup> This near 50% figure is also shared by Iranian Kurds as well as Arabs within the Khuzestan province.<sup>18</sup>

According to the Second report submitted by the State, all workers and employers are free to form their own associations independent of the state without the need for permits.<sup>19</sup> Yet Iran actively arrests individuals for their participation in independent trade unions or active advocacy for labor rights. Independent trade unions to assist in guaranteeing access to jobs and fair wages can be vital to regional ethnicities that experience disproportionately high poverty rates. Human Rights Watch recently documented the arrest of several peaceful labor activists and members of independent trade unions in Iran’s East Azerbaijan and Kurdistan provinces who were indicted on charges of “participating in the organization of an unlawful group opposing the state... with the aim of

<sup>15</sup> Article 28 of the Iranian constitution states, “Everyone has the right to choose any occupation he wishes, if it is not contrary to Islam and the public interests, and does not infringe upon the rights of others.”

<sup>16</sup> International Labor Organization (2003) *Amnesty International’s concerns relevant to the 91<sup>st</sup> session of the International Labor Conference, 3 to 9 June 2003*. p.14.

<sup>17</sup> International Federation for Human Rights (2010) *The Hidden Side of Iran: Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities*. Retrieved from: <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/IrandiscrimLDDH1545a.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (2011) *Briefing Note: Ethnic Nationalities of Iran, A Struggle for Universal Rights*. Retrieved from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-ir/dv/unpo\\_briefingno/unpo\\_briefingnote.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-ir/dv/unpo_briefingno/unpo_briefingnote.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2012) *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Second Periodic Report submitted by States parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, Islamic Republic of Iran*. (E/C.12/IRN/2) para. 89



disrupting national security by way of workers' strikes and armed rebellion," "assembly and collusion to further illegal activities," and "propaganda against the regime."<sup>20</sup>

*Recommendation: Stop the use of screening that denies equal employment opportunities to certain categories of Iranians, including regional ethnicities and religious minorities.*

*Recommendation: Provide information on poverty-alleviation programs specifically targeting regions and communities where regional ethnicities reside.*

*Recommendation: Improve infrastructure in areas where it lags behind the rest of Iran, including regions populated by regional ethnicities, to assist their sustainable growth and development in an environmentally sensitive manner.*

*Recommendation: Immediately release labor and independent trade union activists imprisoned for peacefully advocating workers' rights. Allow labor activists and trade unions to operate freely as outlined in Iranian law.*

## **Article 11 – Right to adequate housing**

Article 11 states that *"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent."*

Regional minorities experience disproportionately poor housing and living conditions in Iran. Over a million Ahwazi Arabs in Khuzestan live in shanty towns which are cut off from non-Arab settlements with separation walls. These areas lack everyday necessities such as plumbing, electricity, telephone, pavements, street lighting, public transport, sewage systems, schools, clinics, hospitals, shops, and parks.<sup>21</sup> A 2006 UN Mission to Iran by Mr. Miloon Kothari, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, noted the apparent discrimination against these regional minorities when he observed high numbers of alleged cases of land confiscation and forced eviction, and the poor state of basic services, or lack thereof, provided to informal settlements and poor neighborhoods.<sup>22</sup>

In an interview with IRIN, Special Rapporteur Mr. Kothari talked about his visit to Ahwaz City.

*For example, when you visit Ahwaz in terms of the very adverse conditions in the neighborhoods, there are thousands of people living with open sewers, no sanitation, no regular access to water, electricity and no gas connections. I think that the kind of question*

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<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch (2012) Iran: New Arrests of Labor Activists. Retrieved from: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/30/iran-new-arrests-labor-activists>

<sup>21</sup> Ahwaz Human Rights Organization (2010) Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Universal Periodic Review: 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group, February 2010. Retrieved from [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/AHRO\\_UPR\\_IRN\\_S07\\_2010\\_AhwazHumanRightsOrganization.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/AHRO_UPR_IRN_S07_2010_AhwazHumanRightsOrganization.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Kothari, M. United Nations Commission on Human Rights (2005) *Report of the special rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living – Mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (E/CN.4/2006/41/Add.2)



*that arises is, why is that? Why have certain groups not benefited? In addition to this there are a couple of other problems that come up. Again in Khuzestan, you notice that we drove outside the city about 20 km and we visited the areas where large development projects are coming up - sugar cane plantations and other projects along the river - and the estimate we received is that between 200,000 - 250,000 Arab people are being displaced from their villages because of these projects. And the question that comes up in my mind is, why is it that these projects are placed directly on the lands that have been homes for these people for generations? I asked the officials, I asked the people we were with. And there is other land in Khuzestan where projects could have been placed which would have minimized the displacement.<sup>23</sup>*

The Kurdish communities, such as in the Ilam province, have also reported to the Special Rapporteur during his visit about the high rate of forced evictions and the lack of progress in reconstruction efforts in their neighborhoods since the Iran-Iraq war over twenty years ago.<sup>24</sup> Baloch communities also face high rates of forced evictions. In 2005, an unspecified number of Baloch were forcibly evicted and had their huts demolished by security forces in the port city of Chabahar. The Iranian Ministry of Housing and Urban Development had apparently allocated the land for housing security forces while neglecting to offer alternative housing to those forcibly evicted.<sup>25</sup>

*Recommendation: Fully implement Constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination in providing adequate housing and equal access of development resources for all citizens.*

## **Article 12 – Right to high health standards and improvements of environmental and industrial hygiene**

Article 12.1 states that *“The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, [additionally achieved through] (12.2 (b)) the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene.”*

Industrial projects promoted by the State have typically ignored the health and environmental consequences faced by peoples living in their respective regions. In 2011, the World Health Organization declared that Ahwaz City was the most polluted place in the world due to its annual average of 372mg of suspended particles per cubic meter, a third more than the world’s second most polluted city in Mongolia.<sup>26</sup> The effect of this pollution is made clear when considering the prevalence of respiratory diseases such as asthma among Ahwazi children. A study published in 2010 found that an average of 9.8% of Ahwaz children aged 13-14 years old has experienced asthma compared to the regional averages in the Middle East of 5.8%. Rates within other Iranian cities range from 2.1% to 7.1%.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> IRIN (2005) Iran-Iran: Interview with Human Rights Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari. Retrieved from <http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=25364>

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International (2008) Iran: Human Rights Abuses Against the Kurdish Minority

<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International (2007) Iran: Human Rights Abuses Against the Baluchi Minority

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organization (2012) Database: outdoor air pollution in cities. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/phe/health\\_topics/outdoorair/databases/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/en/index.html)

<sup>27</sup> Afra, M., Assar, S., Latifi, M., & Shakurnia, A.H. (2010) Prevalence of asthma among schoolchildren in Ahwaz, Islamic Republic of Iran. *La Revue de Santé de la Méditerranée orientale*. 16 (6): 651-656.



Sistan-Balochistan province is the most underdeveloped region in Iran, with the worst indicators for life expectancy, access to improved water and sanitation, and infant and child mortality. The nine year gap between overall life expectancies in Tehran (over 70 years in 1996) and Sistan-Balochistan (61 years) reflects a “lack of investment in health clinics and other facilities in remote rural areas.”<sup>28</sup>

Variable	Iran Value	Best value	Worst value	Best province	Worst province
Life expectancy (years)	69.2	70.5	61.1	Tehran	Sistan and Balochistan
No access to sanitation	35.7	14.7	58.9	Tehran	Sistan and Balochistan
Under 1 mortality	28.6	26	70	Tehran	Sistan and Balochistan
Under 5 mortality	38.6	32.3	89.7	Tehran	Sistan and Balochistan

*Excerpt from UN Common Country Assessment for Iran (2003), page 26*

Complete lack of basic services in areas where Iranian Kurds reside also contributes to their overall poor health status. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living noted that in poor neighborhoods where regional ethnicities like the Kurds resided, “open-air sewage was sometimes observed and uncollected garbage blocked streets, obstructing traffic and access from the outside in case of emergencies.”<sup>29</sup>

The development policies of the Iranian government have caused Lake Urmia, located between the East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan regions in Iran, to lose more than 60% of its water. Dams have been built on more than 20 tributaries feeding Lake Urmia, reducing the depth of the lake by 7 meters. The dry lakebed, which is covered with a thick crust of salt, has the potential to create a salt desert, endangering both the environment, livestock, farming opportunities and the fifteen million ethnic Azeris in the region.<sup>30</sup> During peaceful demonstrations calling for negotiations and cooperation from the Iranian government to help find ways to address the disappearance of the lake, Azerbaijani activists stated,

*Most of our people will be forced to move to central and southern Iran. It will devastate our homeland and displace our people. The Iranian government claims that this problem has natural causes, but the experts think that it was caused by artificial problems rather than natural. The government has not taken any measure for the prevention of this problem so far, which strengthens the above-mentioned version.*<sup>31</sup>

The peaceful demonstrations were met with police brutality and arrests. The Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (ADAPP) reported that on September 3, 2011, many activists were injured and at least one death at the hands of Iranian state forces was confirmed. The

<sup>28</sup> UN Country Team in Iran (2003) Common Country Assessment for Iran. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org.ir/DocCenter/reports/npd/CCA.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Kothari, M. United Nations Commission on Human Rights (2005) *Report of the special rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living – Mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (E/CN.4/2006/41/Add.2) para.77

<sup>30</sup> Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (2012) The condition of Lake Orumiye is alarming. Retrieved from <http://gamoh.biz/en/habergoster.asp?id=460>

<sup>31</sup> APA (2012) Iranian Azerbaijanis address the President of Azerbaijan. Retrieved from <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=159478>



Iranian police reportedly, “used brutal force, [fired] rubber and metal bullets, and [used] tear gas and batons,” to end the peaceful demonstrations.<sup>32</sup>

*Recommendation: Address the significant disparity in health and environmental standards between regions populated by regional ethnicities and ethnic Persians.*

*Recommendation: Collaborate with non-Persian community leaders to ensure the development of the regions in which they reside.*

*Recommendation: Take immediate action to end the deterioration of Lake Urmia and invite international and local stakeholders to offer solutions and assist in the coordination of relief efforts to natural disasters and other circumstances.*

*Recommendation: End persecution of citizens peacefully advocating for improved health and environmental standards.*

### **Article 13 – Right to education**

Article 13.1 states that “The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understand, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

Article 51 of the Iranian constitution states that “The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of the people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.” In practice, the attainment of education is a challenge for all non-Persian speaking communities.

Many ethnic Azeris in Iran report that education in their mother language is severely restricted in practice despite policies protecting the use of non-Persian languages. Compounded with the lack of schools and educational programs in Azeri-Turkish or courses offering to teach the language, many ethnic Azeris are unable to read and write their Turkic Azeri language. Prominent writers, such as Ali Reza Sarrafi and Shahnaz Gholami have been arrested and imprisoned simply for advocating the right to education in Azeri Turkish. They were both charged with “acting against the national security of the Islamic Republic and its territorial integrity.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (2012) ADAPP appeals to the international community to assist with fight for the preservation of Lake Urmia, Azerbaijan, Iran. Retrieved from <http://www.unpo.org/downloads/327.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Djavadi, A. (2009) Restricting Iran’s Second Mother Tongue. *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*. Retrieved from [http://www.rferl.org/Content/Restricting\\_Irans\\_Second\\_Mother\\_Tongue/1497983.html](http://www.rferl.org/Content/Restricting_Irans_Second_Mother_Tongue/1497983.html)



In its Second Report to the Committee, Iran notes that there are 216 Azeri language publications, including 10 periodicals.<sup>34</sup> Yet ethnic Azeris say that in practice, the Iranian government frequently shuts down Azeri language publications. One report documented nearly 30 Azeri language journals that were shut down by the state between 2007 and 2009.<sup>35</sup>

Kurdish communities also report that there are no opportunities to study their mother language in Iranian schools. In 2007, Kurdish students at an event calling for the teaching of the Kurdish language stated, “As everyone knows, language is one of the most fundamental aspects of a nation’s being. [...] In today’s multicultural climate in the world, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other humanitarian principles, every nation should have the right to develop and advance its language. Everyone agrees that every language could play a part in the process of human civilization.” Organizers and participants of this event were arrested and subjected to long-term detention by Iranian police officials.<sup>36</sup>

Ahwazi Arab communities experience high drop-out rates specifically due to lack of education in their mother language. Ahwazi students drop out of schools at a rate of 30% at elementary level, 50% at secondary and 70% at high school. During the 2000-01 academic year, Arabs only represented 7% of 30,000 students at the University of Shaheed Chamran in Ahwaz City, even though Arabs are the majority population in the provincial capital.<sup>37</sup> According to Mr. Alireza Sarafi, an educational researcher, non-Farsi speaker admissions drops significantly with increasing levels of educational compared to native Farsi-speakers.

Non-Farsi speakers	Native Farsi-speakers	Enrollment in higher education
42%	58%	College Degree
36%	64%	Undergraduate
12%	88%	Post-Graduate
10%	90%	Ph.D. and doctorate

*Table from Mr. Alireza Sarafi’s study conducted in 1997-1998. Translated from Farsi to English by N. Boladai (see footnote 33).*

Because of the lack of development in Sistan-Balochistan, Baloch communities face additional problems due to the lack of or the poor conditions of schools. Many school buildings are reportedly mud huts that beyond providing an inappropriate learning environment may endanger students because of their structural weakness. Transportation costs also prohibit Baloch families from

<sup>34</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2012) Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Second Periodic Report submitted by States parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, Islamic Republic of Iran. (E/C.12/IRN/2) para. 500

<sup>35</sup> Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (2009) Azerbaijanis in Iran: A Human Rights Approach. Retrieved from [http://adapp.info/en/index.php?view=article&catid=36%3Adapp&id=139%3Aazerbaijanis-in-iran-a-human-rights-approach&format=pdf&option=com\\_content&Itemid=72](http://adapp.info/en/index.php?view=article&catid=36%3Adapp&id=139%3Aazerbaijanis-in-iran-a-human-rights-approach&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=72)

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International (2008) Iran: Human Rights Abuses Against the Kurdish Minority.

<sup>37</sup> Ahwaz Human Rights Organization (2010) Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Universal Periodic Review: 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group, February 2010. Retrieved from [http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/AHRO\\_UPR\\_IRN\\_S07\\_2010\\_AhwazHumanRightsOrganization.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/AHRO_UPR_IRN_S07_2010_AhwazHumanRightsOrganization.pdf)



sending their children to few and far-between schools. As a result, around 60% of girls drop out of school by fifth grade.<sup>38</sup>

*Recommendation: Take meaningful steps to implement Article 51 of the Iranian constitution protecting the use of non-Persian languages in media and schools to ensure that ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities are able to enjoy their own culture and use their own language in media and schools.*

*Recommendation: Address the lack and poor quality of schools in regions where non-Persian minorities reside.*

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<sup>38</sup> Boladai, N. (2012) Baloch: Suppression and Discrimination





## **SECTION D: Summary of Recommendations**

### **Article 1 – Right to self-determination**

*Recommendation: Formally endorse and ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169.*

*Recommendation: Formally recognize the Ahwazi Arabs, South Azerbaijani, Baloch, and Kurds as indigenous peoples, and respect the distinct rights to self-governance afforded to them by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

*Recommendation: Engage regional ethnic communities affected by resource extraction under the principles of free, prior and informed consent.*

*Recommendation: Ensure that profits from natural resources are reinvested in their respective communities.*

### **Article 3 – Right of women’s equal status**

*Recommendation: Bring Iranian the Penal and Civil Codes into conformity with Article 3 of ICESCR.*

*Recommendation: Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservation and bring national laws into conformity.*

*Recommendation: End practice of stoning and other methods of execution for crimes committed on moral or sexual grounds.*

### **Article 6, 7, 8 – Right to employment and to form and participate in trade unions**

*Recommendation: Stop the use of screening that denies equal employment opportunities to certain categories of Iranians, including regional ethnicities and religious minorities.*

*Recommendation: Provide information on poverty-alleviation programs specifically targeting regions and communities where regional ethnicities reside.*

*Recommendation: Improve infrastructure in areas where it lags behind the rest of Iran, including regions populated by regional ethnicities, to assist their sustainable growth and development in an environmentally sensitive manner.*

*Recommendation: Immediately release labor and independent trade union activists imprisoned for peacefully advocating workers’ rights. Allow labor activists and trade unions to operate freely as outlined in Iranian law.*

### **Article 11 – Right to adequate housing**

*Recommendation: Fully implement Constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination in providing adequate housing and equal access of development resources for all citizens.*

### **Article 12 – Right to high health standards and improvements of environmental and industrial hygiene**





*Recommendation: Address the significant disparity in health and environmental standards between regions populated by regional ethnicities and ethnic Persians.*

*Recommendation: Collaborate with non-Persian community leaders to ensure the development of the regions in which they reside.*

*Recommendation: Take immediate action to end the deterioration of Lake Urmia and invite international and local stakeholders to offer solutions and assist in the coordination of relief efforts to natural disasters and other circumstances.*

*Recommendation: End persecution of citizens peacefully advocating for improved health and environmental standards.*

### **Article 13 – Right to education**

*Recommendation: Take meaningful steps to implement Article 51 of the Iranian constitution protecting the use of non-Persian languages in media and schools to ensure that ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities are able to enjoy their own culture and use their own language in media and schools.*

*Recommendation: Address the lack and poor quality of schools in regions where non-Persian minorities reside.*