

**Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
(CERD) on Iran's Efforts in Preserving Cultural Heritage for Linguistic and
Ethnic Minorities**

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Justice Watch is a non-governmental association, founded in Tehran on January 2012, by the collaboration of advocates from academia, teachers, lawyers and other social activists for promotion and protection of social justice. «Justice for All» is what we are committed to by aggregating individual resources and mobilizing collective action.

Justice Watch successfully attained the consultative status of the UN ECOSOC (2019) as it had already won the same position in UNISPAL (2013). To raise awareness and disembed the social structures, policies, and practices that perpetuate injustice, we depend on human capital and community development. 1500 university professors and experts in social and natural sciences, pedagogues and technical engineers are currently collaborating in our national and international projects.

Introduction

Ensuring political freedom for ethnic and linguistic minorities is essential for fostering a just and inclusive society. By empowering minorities to participate in political and social spheres, nations benefit from diverse perspectives and a more equitable governance system. The United Nations emphasizes protecting the rights of minorities through instruments like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities. These frameworks highlight the need for states to ensure that minorities enjoy the same rights as the majority population.

By incorporating these principles into national laws and policies, countries can demonstrate their dedication to human rights standards. Iran's efforts to guarantee political and cultural freedom and representation for its minorities through constitutional provisions and specific legal measures reflect this commitment, reinforcing both national unity and alignment with global human rights norms.

Iran has made significant efforts to recognize and support the active participation of ethnic and linguistic minorities in various societal responsibilities. This commitment is reflected through several initiatives and constitutional guarantees aimed at ensuring equality and representation for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic backgrounds.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran recognizes and respects the country's religious, linguistic, and ethnic diversity. This commitment is reflected in several key constitutional articles that underscore the rights and freedoms of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background. By examining these provisions, it becomes clear that Iran's approach is multifaceted, addressing minority rights through perspectives such as linguistic, racial, civic, and identity-based approaches.

Article 15 of the Constitution, for instance, emphasizes the linguistic approach to minority rights by recognizing the diversity of ethnic groups and allowing the use of local languages in the press, media, and education. This article underscores the importance of mother tongue education and acknowledges the right to learn and teach in one's native language alongside Persian. Despite debates over the implementation of mother tongue instruction in schools, the recognition of linguistic diversity is a significant step toward respecting cultural identities.

Furthermore, Article 19 takes a racial approach, declaring the equality of all Iranian citizens regardless of ethnicity, tribe, color, race, or language. This article explicitly states that all people enjoy equal rights, reinforcing the principle of non-discrimination. The Constitution's broader commitment to justice and equality is evident throughout various articles, including those that guarantee public participation, free education, social security, and protection against discrimination.

Iran's emphasis on ethnic and linguistic rights aligns with international human rights standards, such as those advocated by the United Nations. The country's legal framework aims to ensure that all citizens, irrespective of their background, have equal opportunities and protections, thereby fostering unity and social cohesion. This inclusive approach not only supports national stability but also contributes to the global effort to uphold human rights for all.

These measures and constitutional guarantees underscore Iran's dedication to ensuring that ethnic and linguistic minorities can actively participate in and contribute to various social and cultural aspects. This commitment to inclusion not only fosters a sense of belonging and equality among minority groups but also strengthens the social fabric of the nation.

Iran's efforts in preserving cultural heritage for linguistic and ethnic minorities are reviewed under articles 4 and 5:

Article 4: States Parties condemn all propaganda and all organizations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form, and undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination and, to this end, with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of this Convention.

Article 5: In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights: (a) The right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice; (b) The right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by

government officials or by any individual group or institution; (c) Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections-to vote and to stand for election-on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service;

Iran's Efforts and Initiatives Aimed at Promoting Culture, Customs, and Language of Local and Ethnic Communities

Iran is home to a diverse array of ethnic and linguistic groups, each with unique cultural identities. The Iranian government has made various efforts to ensure that these minorities can preserve their traditions. These efforts include promoting their languages and supporting their customs through newspapers, social media, and television, fostering a sense of inclusion and cultural pride.

The government has focused on using local and ethnic languages in the media by establishing radio stations and television networks that broadcast in regional languages like Kurdish, Azeri, Arabic, and Baluchi. These outlets provide news and cultural programs in native languages, helping to preserve linguistic heritage and cultural narratives.

Additionally, Iran incorporates ethnic languages and cultures into the educational system and public ceremonies. In regions with significant ethnic populations, schools often teach local languages alongside Persian. The government also promotes cultural festivals and traditional ceremonies, highlighting the rich diversity of Iran's ethnic groups and ensuring their traditions and languages continue to thrive. Here there are some of the efforts made in these years:

1. **Cultural Festivals:** One significant effort has been the organization of cultural festivals that celebrate the unique heritage of Iran's nomadic tribes. For example, the Festival of Nomadic Culture in Shah Savan, Ardabil Province, is an annual event that highlights the traditional lifestyles, crafts, and customs of nomadic communities like the Qashqai and Bakhtiari tribes¹. These festivals serve as a platform for tribes to showcase their music, dance, clothing, and handicrafts, thereby fostering a sense of pride and continuity among the younger generations.

¹ <https://www.irna.ir/news/85440324/>

2. **Media Initiatives:** The Iranian government has also supported the creation of specialized media outlets that cater to ethnic minorities. There are local newspapers and radio stations broadcasting in regional languages such as Kurdish, Azeri, and Arabic. For instance, programs in Kurdish on Radio Kurdistan and in Azeri on Radio Tabriz help preserve and promote these languages. Additionally, various TV programs focus on the cultural traditions and contemporary issues facing these communities.

The National Media Festival of Ethnic Groups and Nomads, centered in Fars, will be held by the end of 2024. In radio, 43 programs in 1379 episodes were broadcast; in television, 55 programs in 884 episodes; and in news, 850 reports, with three reports on nomadic book reading winning national awards. The Director General of Fars Radio and Television highlighted the role of ethnic groups and nomads during last year's elections, emphasized through national media and virtual platforms. Four pieces of ethnic music were produced, with one winning a national festival award. Programs such as 'Illyati,' 'My Tribe,' 'Pioneers of Fars Ethnic Groups,' and 'House of Ethnic Groups' are being broadcast, and the documentary 'Ancient Colors' will soon air on Fars TV².

3. **Newspapers and Publications:** Several newspapers and magazines have been launched or expanded to include content in minority languages. Publications such as newspaper and magazine cater specifically to Kurdish-speaking and nomadic communities. These publications cover a wide range of topics, from local news and political issues to cultural events and historical narratives, helping to preserve and promote the linguistic and cultural identity of these groups.
4. **Educational Programs:** In recent years, there has been an emphasis on integrating regional languages and cultures into the national education system. Bilingual education programs have been developed in provinces with significant ethnic populations, allowing children to learn in their native languages alongside Persian. These programs aim to foster linguistic diversity and ensure that cultural heritage is passed down through formal education.

In accordance with Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the government is obligated to develop and implement an educational system for local and

² <https://www.ashayer.ir/index.aspx?siteid=1&pageid=126&newsview=13515>

ethnic languages and literature through the Ministries of Education and Science, Research, and Technology, within the limits of available resources. The plan for teaching local and ethnic languages in schools was approved by the 11th Parliament. This educational system should allow for the teaching of local and ethnic literature in the areas where these communities reside, alongside Persian, in schools and higher education institutions³.

5. **Handicrafts and Artisan Support:** The Iranian government has been actively supporting artisans from various ethnic groups through initiatives that promote traditional crafts. Programs providing training and financial support help artisans improve their skills and market their products more effectively. The Qashqai and Bakhtiari tribes, known for their exquisite carpet weaving and other crafts, have particularly benefited from such initiatives, which have helped preserve their artisanal heritage.

Providing infrastructure and financial support for festivals and exhibitions each year to promote the handicrafts of ethnic groups and nomads, with participants from the provinces of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, Tehran, Kurdistan, Lorestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Semnan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Razavi Khorasan, South Khorasan, Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Isfahan, Fars, Kerman, Gilan, Mazandaran, Hamadan, and Markazi. These events aim to encourage entrepreneurship and small businesses, promote the Iranian Islamic lifestyle, and present local souvenirs, cultural and artistic works, and handicrafts. They also seek to preserve the authentic local values and reduce economic inequalities to curb inflation and foster production growth. During these exhibition, local music groups perform daily, including "Shene Shaho" from Kurdistan, "Daglar" from East Azerbaijan, and "Tala" from Gilan, showcasing the rich heritage of Iranian art⁴.

6. **Broadcasting Traditional Music and Dance:** The development and issuance of the Music Document has been one of the most significant actions of the Thirteenth Government of Iran. This document is particularly important for traditional and local music, as it sets out comprehensive guidelines and policies aimed at preserving and promoting Iran's rich musical heritage. The government's commitment to safeguarding traditional music is

³ <https://www.kurdpress.com/news/21452/>

⁴ <https://www.irna.ir/news/85244272/>

evident through this initiative, which seeks to ensure that the diverse musical expressions of various ethnic groups are maintained and celebrated. By institutionalizing these efforts, the document serves as a strategic framework to support artists, fund music projects, and integrate traditional music into educational curricula and cultural events:

Iran has made significant strides in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of its ethnic minorities through various media and cultural initiatives. By leveraging festivals, broadcasting, publications, social media, educational programs, documentaries, and digital archives, the country has sought to maintain the rich tapestry of its diverse cultural landscape. To further improve the efforts of the Iranian government in promoting, expanding, and preserving the cultures of various ethnic groups within the framework of Iranian culture, here are recommendations:

Recommendations

- 1. Enhanced Language Education Programs:** Iran has initiated efforts to develop and implement comprehensive language education programs in schools and universities, aiming to include the teaching of local and ethnic languages alongside Persian. However, there is a need for further expansion and continuation of these initiatives. Strengthening these programs would ensure that younger generations become proficient in their native languages, thereby contributing to the preservation of linguistic diversity within Iran.
- 2. Cultural Exchange Programs:** Organize cultural exchange programs between different ethnic groups to foster mutual understanding and appreciation. Such initiatives could include student exchanges, cultural tours, and joint cultural festivals, promoting national unity through diversity.
- 3. Digital Archives and Online Platforms:** Create digital archives and online platforms for documenting and sharing the cultural heritage of ethnic groups. This would involve collecting oral histories, traditional music, literature, and art, making them accessible to a wider audience and preserving them for future generations.
- 4. Support for Traditional Arts and Crafts:** Iran has already shown support for traditional arts and crafts by providing financial assistance to artisans and craftsmen. However, it is crucial for Iran to continue and expand these efforts to ensure the ongoing vitality and sustainability of its rich artistic heritage. This could include grants, subsidies, and marketing assistance to help these artisans sustain their livelihoods and keep their cultural

practices alive. This would not only benefit artisans economically but also contribute to the cultural identity and diversity of the country.

- 5. Inclusive Media Representation:** Ensure diverse representation of ethnic cultures in national media, including radio, television, and online platforms. Producing documentaries, shows, and news segments in local languages and about local traditions would help raise awareness and appreciation among the broader population.
- 6. Cultural Research and Documentation:** Invest in research and documentation projects focused on the cultural practices, histories, and traditions of various ethnic groups. Collaborating with universities and cultural institutions can yield valuable insights and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Iran's cultural diversity.
- 7. Festival and Event Funding:** Increase funding for festivals and cultural events that celebrate the heritage of different ethnic groups. Such events should be well-publicized and accessible to encourage wide participation and recognition of these traditions.
- 8. Cultural Policy Development:** Develop and implement policies that specifically address the needs and challenges of preserving ethnic cultures. This could involve setting up advisory councils consisting of representatives from various ethnic communities to ensure their voices are heard in policy-making processes.
- 9. Educational Curriculum Integration:** Integrate the study of ethnic cultures, languages, and histories into the national educational curriculum. This would help all students appreciate the rich cultural mosaic of their country from an early age.
- 10. Support for Local Cultural Institutions:** Strengthen local cultural institutions, such as museums, cultural centers, and libraries, by providing them with the resources needed to preserve and promote local cultures. These institutions can serve as hubs for cultural activities and education, fostering a deeper connection to ethnic heritage.

Iran has undertaken significant efforts to elevate the cultures, customs, and languages of its local and ethnic communities. All mentioned measures are crucial not only for preserving linguistic diversity but also for nurturing a deeper understanding and appreciation of Iran's cultural mosaic. This support helps ethnic communities maintain their livelihoods and ensures the continuation of cultural traditions that are integral to Iran's national identity. Moving forward, it is imperative to continue and expand these efforts to safeguard the cultural and linguistic heritage of Iran's diverse

communities, promoting unity and celebrating the richness of its cultural tapestry for future generations.