

**Alternative Report submitted to the
UN Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the
consideration of the Second Report of Iran
during the 50th session.**



Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

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Section A: Introduction to the Report

This alternative report was submitted by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) on the occasion of the 50th Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (henceforth, “the Committee”).

The framework of this report will comment upon relevant articles of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights sequentially. The final section of the report raises questions and introduces recommendations intended to inform the discussions taking place within the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (henceforth, “ICESCR” or “the Covenant”) and between the Committee and the Iranian delegation at the 50th Session.

This alternative report will focus on the situation of four minority communities in Iran, namely the Baloch, Kurds, Azeri and Ahwazi Arabs and the Iranian government’s compliance to the implementation of the provisions in the International Covenant, as it affects these particular groups. Iran’s cultural diversity remains in danger as minority community members continue to be harassed on daily basis. Human rights activists, liberal intellectuals and journalists speaking out against these abuses are also targeted. And while Iran insists that it is willing to cooperate with the Human Rights Council, this report will show the country’s failure to comply with several articles of the Covenant.

Furthermore, although abuses against Persians take place on daily basis, the rate in which minorities are harassed and persecuted is still much higher. Illegal imprisonment and summary executions face greater impunity in the regions with greater minority populations due to the lack of reporting and government interest. International NGOs and Human Rights organizations also tend to grant less public attention to the pervasiveness and significance of violence committed against these communities.

This report will be organized in the following fashion. It will primarily introduce the situation of UNPO members in Iran, describing the main issues they are each confronting with regard to the policies adopted by the Iranian government. It will then outline each article of the ICESCR, which the Iranian government is believed to have violated, and address them with a brief description. Finally, the report will present a series of recommendations to be addressed during the 50th Session.

Section B: Introduction to Iran

This report will focus on the situation of four UNPO members, which are non-Persian ethnic groups, the Ahwazi Arabs, Azeri Turks, Kurds and Baloch. These minority groups share a history of political repression and denial of the most basic cultural rights. In order to better understand the context in which this report should be read, a short summary of each group's situation shall be presented.

Ahwazi Arabs

The Ahwazi Arabs are an indigenous people of the Al-Ahwaz province, also known as Khuzestan or Arabistan. An autonomous emirate in the past, the region has experienced on-and-off recognition of autonomy and independence. One of their main issues of concern has to do with the government policies used to destabilize the community and change the ethnic composition of the region. Practices such as cultural repression, land grabbing and forced migration have been a constant source of fear in the region. Ahwazi Arabs have also found themselves marginalized by discriminatory practices such as 'gozinesh' and removed from decision making regarding natural resources on their ancestral land, which is rich in oil reserves.

Southern Azerbaijan

Lying south of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the region has historically attracted nomadic tribes, including Azerbaijanis' main ancestors. Persians arrived later and soon incorporated their territory to the empire. Upon being split between what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan and Southern Azerbaijan, in Iran, ethnic Azeris continued to face retaliation for a brief experiment with independence after World War II. Azerbaijani Turkish languages have since been banned in schools and activists persecuted under unfair charges, while being deprived of legal representation.

Iranian Kurdistan

Iranian Kurdistan is located in the northwest region of Iran and holds a majority Kurdish population. One of their main issues of concern is political persecution and marginalization. Kurdish regions are often neglected by the Iranian government and the increasing levels of poverty have been accompanied by growing inequality. Forced evictions and lack of access to housing have led many to resort to living in precarious and unsafe conditions. And while political persecution remains a dominant factor in current domestic affairs, Kurds currently 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 have experienced vast marginalization since the division of their nation by the British and Persian Empires. Successive government demographic manipulations have aimed at reducing the Baloch community to a minority in their own region. Through this process, non Baloch people are encouraged to move to West Balochistan, acquire property and set up businesses. The main outcome of this has been that in some areas, Baloch communities are losing their identity, effectively becoming a minority in their homeland. Baloch are also repeatedly subjected to persecution, imprisonment, torture and executions.

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.”*

Non Persians continue to face different degrees of restriction and discrimination in Iran. This is particularly the case with religious minorities, who are often deprived of the freedom to pursue their own religious beliefs; and ethnic minorities, whose rights to teach and promote their communal languages are also curtailed. The Iranian government also refuses to recognize Ahwazi Arabs, Azeris, Balochis, and Iranian Kurds as indigenous peoples, despite strong historical evidence that they are respectively first peoples in what is now Iran. These communities are instead referred to as minorities, although most of them constitute majorities in their respective regions.

In regards to the “right to freely determine their political status”, the Iranian Constitution, in its Article 59, states that “[i]n extremely important economic, political, social, and cultural matters, the functions of the legislature may be exercised through direct recourse to popular vote through a referendum [...]”. However, Article 56 adds to that by providing that God has absolute rule over the people and that, consequently, regulations pertaining to civil, political and cultural spheres must be based on Islamic criteria¹. Accordingly, minority groups who do not follow these exact precepts remain politically, economically and socially marginalized.

Article 2 – Non-discrimination

Article 2.2 requires the States Parties to the Covenant to undertake steps to *“guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”*

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

¹ Kharrazi, Fardin. *Basic Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Iran Spectrum. Web. July 2012. Available at [http://www.iranreview.org/content/Iran_Spectrum/Basic-Rights-in-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran.htm]

minerals, including gas, oil, gold and marine resources, it remains the most underdeveloped and poorest region in Iran. Likewise, in terms of resources, the Ahwazi homeland is the richest region in the country. It produces up to 90% of the Iranian oil², and provides further in terms of agriculture, as the land contains highly fertile soil. Given the fact that the province is a keystone of the Iranian economy, it should come as a surprise that the Ahwazi currently live in very unstable and poor conditions. This is not, however, the case for all residents of these provinces, but it is notably the situation in most minority dominant areas. Illiteracy rates are high, and access to basic services, such as plumbing, electricity, pavements, public transport, waste water collection, is precarious. They are denied equal access to education and healthcare, despite being the largest ethnic group in the province.

The denial of basic human rights and the ongoing discriminatory practices have increased collective grievances, precipitating a series of demonstrations in Khuzestan, in 2011. Hundreds of Ahwazi protesters were arrested and convicted during flawed trials, while many were summarily executed.³ Prior to the unrest, human rights lawyer and Nobel laureate, Shirin Ebadi, expressed her concern over the situation in Khuzestan through a letter to the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, which stated “Considering the geographic importance of the Khuzestan Province, and bearing in mind that Arab Iranians in the region have suffered from undue discrimination and currently live under unfavorable conditions, a widespread unrest in this region of Iran is probable”.⁴ However, no immediate action was taken by the international community and the situation escalated to violence only a month following her appeal.

Other minorities face similar individual or systemic discrimination. Kurdish regions have been economically neglected, and parents have been banned from registering their children with certain Kurdish names. In Southern Azerbaijan, chauvinism as a practice has led to the targeting of Azeri’s national culture and language. Azerbaijani Turkish language has been removed from official use, and not been allowed to be taught in schools.

Furthermore, non-Shi’a Muslims are doubly affected by the government’s discriminatory policies in Iran. A few subgroups within the Arab, Baloch, Kurd and Azeri communities are Sunni Muslims and even fewer are Christians. The majority of Baloch are Hanafi Sunnis, and their religious leaders are a frequent target of intimidation. Baloch are generally pressured to convert to Shi’a Islam in order to find employment and ensure better access to education.

Discrimination also occurs in the professional sphere, as the practice of *Gozinesh*⁵ has further marginalized these communities. *Gozinesh* is a selection procedure which requires prospective state officials and employees to demonstrate, *inter alia*, allegiance to the state religion. The practice is

² Ahwazi Arab Solidarity Network. *Ahwaz Human Rights Review 2012*. 2012. p.5

³ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. *Only One Month to Find, Sentence and Execute Suspects, Says Ahwazi Activist*. Web. May 2011. Available at: [<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2011/05/ahwaz-suspects-execute/>].

⁴ Ahwazi Arab Solidarity Network. *Nobel Prize Winner Shirin Ebadi's appeal on Ahwazi Arabs*. Web. April 2011. Available at: [<http://ahwazsolidarity.org/1/post/2011/4/nobel-prize-winner-shirin-ebadis-appeal-on-ahwazi-arabs.html>]

⁵ International Labour Conference, 100th Session, 2011. Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. Available at: [http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/reports-submitted/WCMS_151556/lang-en/index.htm].

known to have also been employed in the private sector to the detriment of minorities. There is, therefore, a deliberate pattern of refusal to employ members of ethnic minorities, especially in medium to high government positions. For instance, in Balochistan, no Baloch community member has ever served as an ambassador or a minister, and in the armed forces they have only been appointed to lower ranks⁶. Generally, the unemployment rate among minorities and vulnerable groups is much higher than that of Persians.⁷ This is particularly the case in the southern provinces of Balochistan and Khuzestan (Al-Ahwaz), where the rates are the highest of the country.

Article 3 – Right of women’s equal status

Article 3 states that *“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.”*

According to a report developed by the UNDP in 2011, Iran ranks 98 out of 187 in gender inequality, which includes inequality over women’s rights under Iranian law. Several Iranian NGOs have been working to guarantee a better legal scenario for women, as discriminatory laws continue to create conditions for the emergence of gender inequality in the country. These include laws on marriage, divorce, the number of partners, the age of criminal responsibility, inheritance, bearing witness and social security. The government does not seem to support the work done by activists on this subject, as many have been sentenced to prison, especially in 2012, under the charge of acting against national security. Moreover, Iran has yet to develop mechanisms to guarantee gender equality under the law, as cases of discriminatory condemnations still persist.

The Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, following a mission to Iran in 2005, has raised concerns about the worrisome gaps in guaranteeing gender equality.⁸ Other issues presented in the report have to do with State-promoted institutional structures of power based on gender and ethnicity, which have made it difficult for women to escape public and private violence. Iran did not accept the request made by the Special Rapporteur for a visit to the country, in 2011. Despite showing previous interest in cooperating with the United Nations, the government has not allowed visits concerning thematic mandates since 2005.

⁶ UNPO. *UNPO Co-Hosts "Minority Rights In Iran" Event At United Nations*. Web. March 2012. Available at [<http://www.unpo.org/article/14039>].

⁷ Minority Rights Group International. *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 – Iran*. Web. June 2012. Available at [<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,MRGI,,IRN,,4fedb3fcc,0.html>].

⁸ Commission on Human Rights. *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and a Gender Perspective: Violence against Women, mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Web. January 2006. E/CN.4/2006/61/Add.3. Available at: [

Articles 6, 7 – Right to work

Article 6.1 requests States Parties to “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 appropriate steps to safeguard this right.”

Article 7 requests State Parties to “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;”

As previously mentioned, the *Gozinesh* practice, which requires individuals to pass an ideological test demonstrating their allegiance to Shi’a Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran, has led to the exclusion of non-Persians and religious minorities from various positions, both in the public and private sectors.

Article 28 of the Iranian constitution provides that “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 the rights of others. The government has the duty, with due consideration of the need of society for different kinds of work, to provide every citizen with the opportunity to work, and to create equal conditions for obtaining it.” The article clearly protects the right to work, and yet regional ethnicities are still being blocked from employment for reasons relating to their non-Persian ethnicity and religious beliefs. Therefore, although in theory their right is guaranteed, in practice it has not yet achieved its full realization.

Iran’s Second periodic report⁹, reinforced once again its commitment to guaranteeing the right to work, by naming domestic regulations pertaining to the safeguard of employees, employment and the right to form their own associations. The report enumerates several legal resources, including articles from the Iranian constitution, the 3rd and 4th Development Plan, the Twenty Year Vision and other programs. Nonetheless, despite presenting all of these provisions, the government did not address the situation of ethnic minorities.

Article 8 - Right to form unions

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.”

⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. *Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Second periodic reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant*. November 2009. E/C.12/IRN/2. Available at: [http://www.bayefsky.com/reports/iran_e_c12_irn_2_2009_adv.pdf].

Iran continues to arrest individuals for their participation in independent trade unions or advocacy for labor rights. Independent trade unions are essential to regional ethnicities that experience disproportionately high unemployment rates. Human Rights Watch recently documented the arrest of several peaceful labor activists and members of independent trade unions in Iran's Southern Azerbaijan and Kurdistan provinces who were indicted on charges of "participating in the organization of an unlawful group opposing the state", "disrupting national security by way of workers' strikes and armed rebellion," "assembly and collusion to further illegal activities," and "propaganda against the regime".¹⁰

Article 11 – Right to adequate standard of living

Article 11.1 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. Adding to this, according to the International Federation for Human rights, over 15,000 Ahwazi Arabs have been displaced because their lands have not been properly demined. Many refugees from the Iran-Iraq war, which took place over two decades ago, have still not been able to come back home¹¹. Land mines are also claiming many lives in the region. Explosions are often reported, while local Arabs continue to be employed in mine-sweeping missions along border areas. Iran is ranked second in terms of number of abandoned mines on its lands.¹² They are mostly concentrated in Khuzestan, West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, and represent another legacy of Iran's previous warfare.

In Kurdistan, residents face similar challenges, as many Kurdish villages have not yet been fully rebuilt following the Iran-Iraq War. This shows that post-war reconstruction efforts have been disproportionately slow and insufficient in minority dominated regions. Baloch communities also face high rates of forced evictions. In 2005, an unspecified number of Balochs were forcibly evicted and had their huts demolished by security forces in the port city of Chabahar. The Iranian Ministry of

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch. *Iran: New Arrests of Labor Activists*. Web. January 2012. Available at: [<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/30/iran-new-arrests-labor-activists>].

¹¹ International Federation for Human rights. *The Hidden Side of Iran: Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities*. Web. 2010. Available at: [<http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/IrandiscrimLDDHI545a.pdf>].

¹² AhwaziMic. *Ahwazi Arabs employed to clear landmines continue to face serious risk as an estimated 16 million landmines remain from the Iran-Iraq War, which ended in 1988*. Web. December 2012. Available at: [<http://ahwazmic.weebly.com/1/post/2012/12/ahwazi-arabs-employed-to-clear-landmines-continue-to-face-serious-risk-as-an-estimated-16-million-landmines-remain-from-the-iran-iraq-war-which-ended-in-1988.html>].

Housing and Urban Development had apparently allocated the land for housing security forces while neglecting to offer alternative housing to those forcibly evicted.¹³

Article 31 of the Iranian Constitution states that “It is the right of every Iranian individual and family to possess housing commensurate with his needs. The government must make land available for the implementation of this article, according priority to those whose need is greatest, in particular the rural population and the workers.” Despite this provision, adequate housing is still constrained by the government’s failure to guarantee basic living conditions for some of the country’s ethnic minority communities. The UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing reported from his visit to the country in 2005 that the living conditions of regional minorities remain unsatisfactory, noting that there are still high numbers of alleged cases of land confiscation and forced eviction taking place¹⁴. The Special Rapporteur has not been allowed a second visit to the country, despite the government’s alleged interest in cooperation with the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

Article 12 – Right to health

Article 12 *requires State Parties to recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene.*

Under Iranian law, there are a few national regulations that safeguard the right to health. The Iranian constitution, in its article 29 guarantees all citizens the right to health care. Food security is also mentioned as a basic priority for the welfare of the citizens. Yet, despite these regulations, industrial projects promoted by the Iranian government have typically ignored the health and environmental consequences faced by the people 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 Mongolia¹⁵. 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%.¹⁶

The province of Sistan-Balochistan remains the most underdeveloped region in Iran, with the worst indicators for life expectancy, infant and child mortality, access to improved water and sanitation. The nine year gap between overall life expectancies in Tehran (over 70 years in 1996) and Sistan-

¹³ Amnesty International. *Iran: Human Rights Abuses Against the Baluchi Minority*. Web. 2007. Available at: [<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/104/2007/en/1463de4f-d370-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/mde131042007en.pdf>]

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ World Health Organization. *Database: outdoor air pollution in cities*. Web. 2012. Available at: [http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/en/index.html].

¹⁶ 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.

Balochistan (61 years) reflects a “lack of investment in health clinics and other facilities in remote rural areas.”¹⁷

Complete lack of basic services in areas where Iranian Kurds reside has further contributed to their overall poor health status. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing noted that as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, basic infrastructure should also be taken into consideration. In poor neighborhoods where regional ethnicities, such as Kurds, resided “an open-air sewage was sometimes observed and uncollected garbage blocked streets, obstructing traffic and access from the outside in case of emergencies.”¹⁸

In the East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan regions in Iran, development policies of the Iranian government have caused Lake Urmia to lose over 60% of its water flow. 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, the livestock, farming opportunities and the fifteen million ethnic Azeris in the region.¹⁹

Peaceful demonstrations aimed at raising awareness of the situation of the Lake have been arbitrarily detained. Several people were reportedly arrested since mid-2011.²⁰ 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 died while in the hands of Iranian state forces. The Iranian police was known to have “used brutal force, [fired] rubber and metal bullets, and [used] tear gas and batons,” to end the peaceful demonstrations.²¹

In August 2012, yet another calamitous event struck Southern Azerbaijan. Twin earthquakes hit the mountainous region leaving over 300 people dead and thousands injured. In a surprising response, Iran rejected offers of outside help from a number of countries, including Germany, Turkey, Russia and the United States. Alleging it could cope with the disaster on its own, Iranian authorities not only neglected the population, as thousands remained homeless for months following the event, but also persecuted activists seeking to collect aid for the victims.²² These policies not only violate the Convention’s intent but also demonstrate Iran’s unwillingness to cooperate with other States even to protect its own citizens.

¹⁷ United Nations Country Team in Iran. *Common Country Assessment for Iran*. Web. 2003. Available at: [<http://www.undp.org.ir/DocCenter/reports/npd/CCA.pdf>].

¹⁸ Kothari, M. United Nations Commission on Human Rights. *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*. 2005. E/CN.4/2006/41/Add.2. para.77

¹⁹ UNEP. *The drying of Iran's Lake Urmia and its environmental consequences*. Web. February 2012. Available at: [http://www.unep.org/pdf/GEAS_Feb2012.pdf].

²⁰ Human Rights Watch. *Iran: Allow Peaceful Protests Over Lake's Destruction*. Web. September 2011: Available at: [<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/10/iran-allow-peaceful-protests-over-lake-s-destruction>]

²¹ Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran. ADAPP appeals to the international community to assist with fight for the preservation of Lake Urmia, Azerbaijan, Iran. Web. 2012. Available at: [<http://www.unpo.org/downloads/327.pdf>].

²² UNPO. *Southern Azerbaijan: Human Rights Activists Imprisoned*. Web. January 2013. Available at: [<http://www.unpo.org/article/15326>].

Article 13 – Right to education

Article 13 requests State Parties to “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 understanding, 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.”

Iran has a good history of promoting innovative programs to eradicate illiteracy. Nearly 80%²³ of the country’s population can write and read. These figures represent a great development when compared to the situation 20 years ago. The only issue that still remains unaddressed is the denial of education to some of Iranian’s minorities. Every child is required to study Farsi, the national language, before they are able to learn their own communal languages. Also, schools in minority regions often receive less government funding and dropout and illiteracy rates tend to be higher than the national average.²⁴

According to the Iranian Constitution, in its article 15, the official language and script of Iran is Persian. This essentially means that official documents and text books must be written in this language. Regional and tribal languages may be used for local press and theoretically taught in schools. However, no government measures have been taken to facilitate the use and teaching of these languages in the Iranian educational system. On the contrary, government’s restriction of minority languages remains an issue of concern.²⁵

The International Federation for Human Rights has reported that in Southern Azerbaijan continuous disregard for Azeri’s culture and language has led to the publication of controversial cartoons in the government newspaper. The drawings, which were published in 2006, depicted cockroaches speaking Azeri Turkish²⁶. Demonstrations soon led to very aggressive reaction from government forces. Hundreds were arrested and four people were killed.

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. Furthermore, Azeri activists have found it difficult to advocate for their mother tongue to be taught in schools. Several of them have been arrested and imprisoned, charged with “acting against the national security of the Islamic Republic and its territorial integrity.”

In its Second Periodic Report to the ICESCR, submitted in 2009, Iran claims that there were at the time 216 Azeri language publications, including 10 periodicals²⁷. Yet, ethnic Azeris say that in

²³ Index Mundi. *Literacy in Iran*. Web. 2012. Available at: [<http://www.indexmundi.com/iran/literacy.html>].

²⁴ European Parliament. *Situation of ethnic minorities in Iran*. June 2012. 2012/2682(RSP). Available at: [<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201206/20120628ATT47832/20120628ATT47832E N.pdf>].

²⁵ UNPO. *Iranian Kurdistan: Restriction On Use Of Minority Languages*. Web. January 2013. Available at: [<http://www.unpo.org/article/15402>].

²⁶ International Federation for Human Rights. *The Hidden Side of Iran: Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities*. Web. 2011. Available at: [<http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/IrandiscrimLDDHI545a.pdf>].

²⁷ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. *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*. 2009. E/C/12/IRN/2. para. 500.

practice, the Iranian government frequently closes down Azeri language publications and harasses Azeri publishing companies. Nearly 30 Azeri language journals were reportedly shut down between 2007 and 2009.²⁸

Kurdish communities also report the lack of 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.²⁹

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.³⁰

Also, in Sistan-Balochistan, Baloch communities face additional problems due to the lack of or the deteriorating conditions of the schools. Buildings are reportedly not very well maintained and the number of teachers is also not considered sufficient. Some classes are multi-grade and take place outside.³¹ Beyond providing an inappropriate learning environment, some of the buildings may in fact endanger students because of their structural weakness. The subject of female education in this region has also remained controversial. Some families are reluctant to let girls attend school as the premises are far and often taught by men on military services.³²

²⁸ Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran. *Azerbaijanis in Iran: A Human Rights Approach*. 2009. Available at:

[http://adapp.info/en/index.php?view=article&catid=36%3Aadapp&id=139%3Aazerbaijanis-in-iran-a-human-rights-approach&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=72]

²⁹ Amnesty International. *Iran: Human Rights Abuses Against the Kurdish Minority*. Web. 2008. Available at: [<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/088/2008/en/d140767b-5e45-11dd-a592-c739f9b70de8/mde130882008eng.pdf>].

³⁰ Association for the Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran. *Azerbaijanis in Iran: A Human Rights Approach*. Web. 2009. Available at:

[http://adapp.info/en/index.php?view=article&catid=36%3Aadapp&id=139%3Aazerbaijanis-in-iran-a-human-rights-approach&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=72].

³¹ Amnesty International. *Iran: Human Rights Abuses Against the Baluchi Minority*. Web. 2007. Available at: [<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/104/2007/en/1463de4f-d370-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/mde131042007en.pdf>]

³² Idem.

Section D: Recommendations

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization strongly urges the Islamic Republic of Iran to consider the following recommendations:

- 1. 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;*
- 2. Endorse and ratify the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169;*
- 3. Engage regional ethnic communities affected by resource extraction under the principles of free, prior and informed consent.*
- 4. Accept a visit to the country by the Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, on the situation of human rights defenders, and on freedom of expression;*
- 5. Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservation and bring national laws into conformity;*
- 6. Stop the use of screening, such as the Gozinesh practice, that denies equal employment opportunities to certain categories of Iranians, including regional ethnicities and religious minorities. End the practice of refusing minorities the right to work on high and medium government jobs;*
- 7. Immediately release labor and independent trade union activists imprisoned for peacefully advocating workers' rights;*
- 8. Allow labor activists and trade unions to operate freely as outlined in Iranian law;*
- 9. Provide information on poverty-alleviation programs specifically targeting regions and communities where regional ethnicities reside;*
- 10. Ensure that profits from natural resources are reinvested in their respective communities;*
- 11. Address the significant disparity in health and environmental standards between regions populated by regional ethnicities and ethnic Persians;*
- 12. 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;*
- 13. End persecution of citizens peacefully advocating for improved health and environmental standards;*

14. *Guarantee education in minority languages, in accordance with Article 51 of the Iranian constitution;*
15. *Address the lack and poor quality of schools in regions where non-Persian minorities reside.*
16. *Take the necessary steps to provide safer conditions for female students to attend class.*



The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) is an international, nonviolent, and democratic membership organization founded in 1991. Its Members are indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognized or occupied territories who have joined together to protect and promote their human and cultural rights, to preserve their environments, and to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts which affect them.