

Intervention by Sheyma/Wejdan from The Democratic Solidarity Party of al-Ahwaz submitted
to the **6th Session of the FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES**
26-27 November 2013

Room XX Palais des Nations- Geneva, Switzerland

Agenda: "Beyond freedom of religion or belief: guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities"

Agenda Item #

Madam Chair, Thank you for the opportunity; , I am here to speak about the religious minorities belonging to ethnic Ahwazi nation in southwest of Iran.

Support of religious minorities and effective participation requires that that states- in this case Iran- acknowledge the existence of the minorities- it is also required that the Iranian state collect and disseminate credible data about the Ahwazi-Arab ethnic minority and other ethnic and religious minorities in Iran.

The fact is that Ahwazi ethnic Arabs in Iran have been subjected to the eradication of their national identity, culture, language, religion and customs; and are faced with forced assimilation and imposition of the country's official language, Persian which is native to only 1/3 of the population, according to Mr. Hamid Reza Hajibabai, Iran's minister of Education.

Persecution of Ahwazi Sunni Muslim have had many victims: Shaykh Abdolhameed Nazari, an originally Shia mullah and the head of a mosque in Ahwaz was sentenced to 8 years imprisonment and has been tortured- almost to death - for converting from Shia to Sunni. Mr. Nazari is over 70 years old, old and frail - after 8-year imprisonment had to the country. He currently lives in the US.

Ahwazis in Iran cannot wear their national and ethnic dress and costume in official centres. The legitimate demands of political participation are often labelled as "separatist", "secessionist" or called "stooges of foreign countries" or "danger to security and territorial integrity".

The Iranian regime does not permit any genuine Arabic newspapers or any other types of media in al-Ahwaz or Khuzestan for the Ahwazis. Ahwazis are excluded from the scene in the press and mass media. They are not allowed to pray in public or in mosques. Instead, we see a systematic campaign of hatred and misrepresentation of ethnic Ahwazi Arabs in general and Ahwazi-Arab Sunnis in particular - this does not foster political participation.

In school textbooks in Iran, both history and literature, and in many Friday night Shia sermons, one encounters many instances of offensive language against other nationalities and ethnic groups and Sunnis in particular anti-Arab Sunnis. This kind of language only breeds contempt and discourages socio-political participation.

The current regime in Iran prevents any public mention of hundreds of thousands Ahwazi Arab who have converted Sunnis - it has imposed a silence and a news blockade in the national and international media against the existence of Sunnis in Iran.

Ahwazi-Arab minority, as well as other Sunnis in Iran can not realize their economics, social and cultural rights until and unless the Iranian state respects their religious and ethnic rights - the State must allow for cultural, linguistic and religious rights, Sunni and Mandai minorities, with an opportunity to develop their respective religions, cultures, languages, histories and economies.

Political participation in the administration of Arab majority province is minimal as all the province's political, military and security commanders, officers, mayors and other all high high-mid-level government officials of Khuzestan, have consistently been from selected from non-Ahwazi appointed from Tehran.

We recommend that the Council add to the mandates that Human Rights Special Rappourur to Iran, the honourable Dr. Ahmad Saheed, looks into and investigate the case of Ahwazi-Arab converted Sunnis [persecutions. We request that the Islamic Republic of Iran to immediately receive the Special Rapporteur on human rights on an official mission to Iran, including to Khuzestan province.

Thank You