



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

The Right to Housing for Indigenous People in Iran

Submitted to: Special Rapporteur on adequate housing

Submitted by: Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (In a consultative status with UN ECOSOC)

Submitted about: Iran

Date: May 2019

• Preface

However, the Islamic Republic of Iran is composed of different ethnic groups, in general, minorities in Iran suffer from persecution. The Kurds, Turkmen, Azerbaijanis and Arabs suffer from various forms of overt racism towards them. The Iranian Constitution provides for respect for minorities and for the right of each category of the Iranian people to preserve its culture, identity and language, however, the Iranian authorities impose their culture and their Persian language on everyone by force as well as the violation of the human rights of these national and religious minorities. Even the Shiite clerics who oppose their policies are arrested and abused by them. The authorities exercise their repressive policies against all those who demand their national and human rights, especially, the Kurdish people who are struggling to their just rights.¹

¹ - استراتيجية التطويق نهج إيران في التعامل مع الاكراد، البوابة نيوز، 23 فبراير 2019، الرابط، <https://www.albawabhnews.com/3497417>

المنظمة حاصلة على المركز الاستشاري الخاص في المجلس الاقتصادي والاجتماعي منذ 2016

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However, Article 19 of Chapter 3 of the Iranian Constitution provides for non-discrimination between Iranians on an ethnic basis, Article 12 ignores the right to ethnic diversity and religious freedom, whereas it states that the Twelver Ja'fari school of [shi'ī] religion is the official school of the state. Also, Article 121 obliges the president to protect this school by all means. The constitution also stipulates that the president of the state must be of Iranian origin and possess Iranian citizenship and be a believer in the principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official doctrine of the country, which deprive the Sunni Muslims of Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs and others of this right.

Furthermore, ethnic minorities in Iran suffer from restrictions on the exercise of their cultural rights, although the Iranian Constitution in Articles 15 and 19 provides for the right of minorities to use their languages in educational and cultural areas, the authorities prohibit the building of any Sunni mosque in the capital Tehran despite the presence of churches, Jewish synagogues and even places of worship for followers of other religions such as Zoroastrianism. With regard to development, these minorities complain of the marginalization and shortening of the authorities of Tehran in the development of the regions in which they live. It also acts violently and arrogantly with its population, especially after the authorities has assigned the security of the border area to the Revolutionary Guards.²

• Denial of the Right to Adequate Housing for Minorities in Iran

Indigenous peoples in the region of Ahwaz in Iran face substandard living conditions or the threat of forced evictions from their ancestral lands without free and prior consent. Exclusion and social discrimination have also led to the people living in a situation of extremely inadequate housing and homelessness, undermining their enjoyment of their rights such as the right to health, safe drinking water and sanitation.

The Iranian authorities have been working since the Islamic revolution to change the demographics of the region and displace the Arabs from it completely by following several policies aimed at changing the demographic nature of the region, due to the fact that about 85% of Iranian oil and gas, and 35% of Water in this region, the Iranian authorities spare no effort to eliminate the culture, language and history and the national entity of the Arabs of Ahwaz and integrate all within the crucible of Persian culture by depriving them of all their legitimate rights, whereas the names of cities and villages and the countryside and all the places of Ahwaz have been changed from Arabic to Persian.³

The deliberate change of the nature of the demographic for a particular region by following displacement policies or forcible transfer of population or forced displacement is one of the most prominent violations punishable by international law, whereas the four Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 define war crimes as grave breaches of the rules set if it comes to forced displacement, whereas Article 49 of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 bans the collective or individual forcible transfer of persons or exile from their areas of residence to other lands, unless it is in their interest to avoid them the risks of armed conflicts.

² - بشير عبد الفتاح و روشن قاسم، 6 أقليات كبرى في إيران تقض مضجع النظام، شبكة اورينت، 19 مايو 2015، الرابط، https://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/87577

³ - مرتضى الشاذلي، قضية الاحواز المنسية : ماذا يحدث في غرب ايران، موقع نون بوست، 3 ابريل 2018، الرابط، <https://www.noonpost.com/content/22748>

In Addition, Article 7 (1) (d) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court criminalizes forced deportations or transfers where it states that the deportation of populations or forcible transfer of populations when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population constitutes Crime against humanity ". Under Articles 2, 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute, unlawful deportation or transfer constitutes a war crime and the article on the prohibition of the transfer of population from their territory is considered as part of customary international humanitarian law.

By application on the situation in the region of Ahwaz, it is found that the Iranian authorities are acting deliberately through a systematic policy to change the nature of the population in the region, either by forcing them to abandon their land or through repressive and discriminatory practices against them. Whereas the people of the region of Ahwaz in Iran, as a minority of the state, suffer from additional burden because of the anti-Arab offensive, which is widespread in the Iranian media. In addition, there are other problems that are more serious and deeper in that region, where a large proportion of the Arab minority resides in Iran, whereas the people of the Arab region suffer from fundamental problems related to identity, culture and language.

In addition to the language persecution, Iran practices various forms of discriminatory practices against minorities in general and people of Ahwaz in particular, where Tehran detains Ahwazi activists who refuse to leave their land in a brutal manner after they are abducted and transferred to secret detention facilities under strict guard, in order to obtain information that can be modified to be used against them to carry out executions and long prison sentences, or they are threatened by the Iranian intelligence service to arrest their families and put them in prison. This threat often has a significant impact on the morale of the Ahwazi prisoners and often leads to the acceptance of fabricated charges in order to protect their families and not to endanger them.⁴

• Iranian Policies to Change the Demographic Nature of Ahwaz

Maat believes that the rights of citizenship and social justice in Iran are mere piece of paper, whereas there is no evidence on the ground. The Iranian authorities are targeting the Ahwaz entity with all its national and cultural components. It has been erasing the Arab features and sovereignty from the region. And then pursued arbitrary policies that exceeded the moral limits against the Arab people of Ahwaz. Also, Tehran's policies have targeted the Arab national identity through methods based on hostile reprisals against the Arabs in general, including abuse, impoverishment, ignorance, displacement, and Persianization.⁵

In addition, the authorities have used the right to safe drinking water as a weapon to fight the Ahwazi people who have five freshwater rivers. Iran uses water as one of the systematic projects and policies to displace the people of Ahwaz, in order to change the population structure and to build projects that have been planned or are being planned. There is no doubt that the objective is to eliminate the people of Ahwaz and its source of livelihood of agriculture, the destruction of crops and livestock, the destruction of its territory and the displacement from its cities and villages⁶

⁴ - عرب الاحواز لا يزالون يعانون من الاضطهاد في إيران، موقع نون بوست، 2 مارس 2015، الرابط، <https://www.noonpost.com/content/5655>

⁵ - الاحواز ملف عن الهوية المنتهكة، سكاى نيوز عربية، 17 يناير 2016، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/2Pydi9q>

⁶ - يونس سليمان الكعبي، سياسة ايرانية متعمدة لفتح السدود على الاحوازين، حركة النضال العربي لتحرير الاحواز، 2 ابريل 2019، الرابط،

<http://ahwazona.net/art/s/71/سياسة-ايرانية-متعمدة-لفتح-السدود-على-الاحواز-بين%21>

The Iranian authorities consider that everything that ends the Arab presence in Ahwaz is permissible. The Iranian government does not consider starvation as long as it is a way to change it. Many of the agricultural lands of Ahwaz had been expropriated from the Arab owners and were given to citizens of other ethnicities who arrived in the region as part of a project of the Iranian government called: the housing of the tribes⁷, resulting in the resettlement of more than 10 thousand and 500 families of immigrants from nomadic tribes in the region in the framework of changing the nature of the population in Ahwaz. Also, the government, after the resettlement of immigrants, is building new cities for them, giving them agricultural lands robbed from the Arab farmers of Ahwaz and providing them with different jobs in return of the unemployment among the Arab citizens who are the original inhabitants of the region.⁸

Iranian policies aimed at emptying the Ahwaz area of its Arab population in favor of the Persian, also the Iranian authorities have opened dams and flooded a lot of lands and people in Ahwaz. The Iranian authorities have been working since 2005 in accordance with the document, which is known as the Abtahi document, which includes instructions aimed at destroying the population fabric in Ahwaz, whereas the Persians are resettling the original inhabitants of the Ahwaz region by displacing half of the population living in the Arab areas in order to change the demographic nature of the region. Also, It is conducting operations to dry the marshes in search of oil, in an attempt to prove to the people that the region is a danger to them, whereas the environmental life is cut off and the livelihoods of the Ahwazi people are cut, which resulted in mass exodus of Ahwaz residents in search of water.⁹

There are many Iranian violations against the inhabitants of Ahwaz in terms of the prevention of drinking water to many villages in the region. For instance, the Iranian authorities have refused to connect the village Shovayye Atij of the city of Shush, north of Ahwaz to the drinking water network because of the refusal of its inhabitants to abandon it two decades ago, the village is inhabited by more than 40 Arab families who have been subjected to displacement and land confiscation for years, however, they have resisted all these policies of displacement and stuck to their villages, also they continue to purchase drinking water from the city of Shush on a daily basis. Residents have demanded the authorities many times to connect the village to the drinking water network, but the authorities ignore their demands.¹⁰

The manifestations of the displacement steps appear in the neglect of all the necessities of life in Ahwaz, such as neglect of health and education, and neglect of roads that cause accidents which are the highest in Iran, all of the aforementioned are clear indicators of pushing the Ahwazi people towards migration and displacement from their land and homes as a prelude to the full takeover after taking over its oil and rivers.¹¹

Furthermore, Iran is, in order to change the demographic nature of the Ahwaz region, drying the Karun River, however, the serious environmental and health consequences for the people of the region and increasing rates of desertification and pollution. That policy aims to displace the citizens of the region

7 - الاحواز ملف عن الهوية المنتهكة، سكاى نيوز عربية، 17 يناير 2016، الرابط، <https://bit.ly/2Pydi9q>

8 - صالح حميد، ايران تنفذ خطة جديد للتغيير الديمجرافي في الاحواز، العربية نت، 18 يوليو 2015، الرابط،

<https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/iran/18/06/2015/https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/iran>

9 - مشروع إفراغ الاحواز من أهلها الاصليين، حركة النضال العربي لتحرير الاحواز، 2 فبراير 2019، الرابط،

<https://www.ahwazna.org/ar/article/12230>

10 - قرية احوازية تتمسك بأرضها وتقاوم سياسة التهجير، حركة النضال العربي لتحرير الاحواز، 28 ابريل 2019، الرابط،

<http://ahwazona.net/new/s/1958/قرية-أحوازية-تتمسك-بأرضها-وتقاوم-سياسة-التهجير>

11 - مشروع إفراغ الاحواز من أهلها الاصليين، حركة النضال العربي لتحرير الاحواز، 2 فبراير 2019، الرابط،

<https://www.ahwazna.org/ar/article/12230>

of Ahwaz, whereas the Iranian government is trying to dry the lands through the transfer of the water of Karun and other rivers of Ahwaz, which led to the destruction of the environment and high rate of desertification. Also, it was the main factor behind the migration of the Ahwazi farmers to the cities and leaving their villages because of the scarcity of water needed for agriculture which means changing the climate in that area to be a desert area that is difficult to live in.

Increased levels of dust and pollution in the region have led to an increase in the proportion of chest diseases among the population. Some reports indicate that more than 378 people were admitted to health centers in Ahwaz during February 2018 due to respiratory problems caused by dust. The Iranian authorities are deliberately ignoring the development of these medical centers as part of their plan to displace the population.¹²

One of the most prominent environmental disasters in Ahwaz is the drying of the Ahwazi marshes, especially Hor al-Azim and Hor al-Falahiya, which are considered the most important natural factors in air purification in Ahwaz and are considered the main source of livelihood for many Ahwazi. The marshes are the home to a wide range of living organisms, which have a significant contribution to biodiversity and contribute to supporting the migration of continental birds to the region. The Ahwazi marshes slowly turned into drought-stricken moor, as a result of the policy of draining the rivers and creating industrial installations in the marshes. Other environmental factors that threaten the lives of Ahwaz residents is a high percentage of sewage in the Karun River. According to Iranian officials, sewage flows into the Karun River at about 90 cubic meters per second, which consists of 30 percent water and the rest is household waste, and factory waste, especially the waste of the sugar cane project, these wastes have made the Karun River a river with sewage.¹³

❖ **Building dams is one of the policies practiced by Iran to change the demographic nature of Ahwaz:**

Ahwaz is one of the richest regions in the world with oil and gas resources. It is considered one of the richest areas in freshwater and agriculture, but its Arab people live in absolute poverty as a result of the racist policies practiced by the Iranian authorities towards the population of the region began in the time of President Hashemi more than 30 years ago and rose during the time of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has built more than 35 dams in the estuary of the Ahwazi rivers and transformed the course of rivers such as Karun and Karkheh.¹⁴

The Iranian authorities are building dams of different sizes in order to store water as prelude to transfer it from Ahwaz to cities with a majority of Persian such as Qom, Kerman, Isfahan and other cities with a majority of non-Arab, which affects the proportion of potable water for Ahwazis. Thus, the Iranian

12 - هشام رشاد، سياسة إيرانية خبيثة لتهجير سكان الاحواز، موقع العين الاخبارية، 20 فبراير 2018، الرابط، <https://al-ain.com/article/iran-residents-of-ahwaz-pollution-dust0>

13 - تجفيف نهر كارون الاحوازي من اجل احياء زابنده رود الايراني، التيار الوطني العربي الديمقراطي في الاحواز، 8 نوفمبر 2014، الرابط، <http://www.padmaz.org/تجفيف-كارون-الاحوازي-من-اجل-احياء-زاي/>

14 - هشام رشاد، سياسة إيرانية خبيثة لتهجير سكان الاحواز، موقع العين الاخبارية، 20 فبراير 2018، الرابط، <https://al-ain.com/article/iran-residents-of-ahwaz-pollution-dust0>

authorities prevent Ahwazi farmers from agriculture, the only livelihood of the population in the region, resulting in long-term displacement and abandonment of their land.¹⁵

Iran's violation of the right to adequate housing against the Ahwaz population has arguably accelerated in recent years in an attempt by the Iranian government to destroy the demographic fabric of Ahwaz and undermine its other rights such as the right to health, safe drinking water and sanitation, whereas any popular movement or protest led by the politicians of Ahwaz has been suppressed through tightening the screws on the demonstrators, mass arrests and the execution of the majority of prominent political figures.

• Recommendations

- The international community shall take legal steps to uncover the crimes committed by the Iranian authorities in the region of Ahwaz, and to hold those responsible accountable without regard to their official status
- The need for international cooperation in order to put an end to the governmental violations committed by Iran against the Ahwazi people.
- To necessarily pressure the Iranian authorities to abide by their international commitments to ensure respect for the rights of minorities.
- To put an end to this campaign, which will lead to slowly and systematic ethnic cleansing through the displacement, settlement and dispossession of the land of the Arab citizens in Ahwaz.

¹⁵ - لمزيد من المعلومات حول السدود التي يتم بنائها من اجل حرمان شعب الاحواز من المياه يرجى الاطلاع على الدراسة المتعلقة بالموضوع والمنشورة على موقع المنظمة الاحوازية لحقوق الانسان في 31 مارس 2019 على الرابط التالي، <http://www.alahwaz-hro.com/index.php> تقارير - بيئية/651/item-إعادة-النشر-التقرير-الأول-دراسة-حول-عدد-السدود-في-الأحواز-المحافظة-الشمالية.