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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Joint written statement* submitted by International-Lawyers.Org, Arab Organization for Human Rights, International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, International Educational Development, Inc., World Peace Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.


[02 September 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Al-Ahwaz an ongoing Tragedy

Al Ahwaz tragedy

Since the annexation of Al-Ahwaz by Iran in 1925, the area has seen the worst violations against its citizens who are culturally and ethnically Arabs. The Arab population has been subjected to abuse and discrimination, in the form of arbitrary detention and racial discrimination in the job market and civil societies such as university acceptances. A clear indicator of this disastrous situation is the literacy rate where 80% of Arab women and around 50% of Arab men are illiterate.

Al-Ahwaz provides for up to 80% of Iran's total oil supplies but 35% of the entire population is unemployed due to the authorities heavily favouring employment for ethnic Persians. Al-Ahwaz is not only blessed with huge oil reserves but also with large rivers that provide much needed fresh water, however the area remains one of the driest since the water is diverted to other provinces populated predominantly by Persians in order to water agricultural projects there. This is not mentioning that the poverty gap is characterized strongly along ethnic lines, with Persians making up the wealthier parts of the population and Arabs predominantly the poorer ones.¹

Any attempt at trying to raise awareness on this apartheid like system has been immediately suppressed by the authorities with the most brutal force.²

Widespread discrimination:

Many people in Al-Ahwaz have campaigned for more rights towards their culturally unique identity, which has suffered from decades of widespread discrimination in all spectres of life and society. Widespread testimonies have detailed the discrimination of Arabs in attaining jobs and entries into educational institutions.

The clearest indication of this is the Iranian governments doctoring of demographic statistics that show the total Arab population of Iran as being only around 2-3%, which would indicate that there are around 2.3 million Arab Iranians from the countries total population of 77.45 million. In reality however there are around 12 million ethnic Arabs in Al-Ahwaz alone, with more living along Iran's Gulf coast areas. This would make the percentage of Arabs in Iran well over 10% of the total Iranian population, making them the 2nd largest minority in the country after the Azeri's in north-western Iran.

Prior to 1925 Al-Ahwaz was an independent country. Following the assassination of its leader Sheikh Khazal and a brutal military invasion that coincided with a tragic massacre of many of Al-Ahwaz's inhabitants, the territory was forcefully annexed to Iran. The world has however largely ignored and forgotten the plight of such a high number of people that are living in daily apartheid under the yoke of Tehran's rule. The style of administration that Tehran has over Al-Ahwaz is not like one a government has over a region in a country but more so in the style of a brutal colonial master over its subjects, with the denial of any form of equal and even basic human rights.

Forced Displacement:

The re-directing of river flows from Al-Ahwaz to the more central areas of Isfahan, Yazd and Kerman for irrigation purposes has left many ethnic Arabs in a state of terrible drought without water or with water so polluted that it is unfit for the dignified survival of any human being. Arab villages located in fertile areas of Al-Ahwaz have been demolished

¹ Al-Habtoor, Khalaf Ahmad. "Arab Ahwaz Must Be Liberated from Iran." *Al-Arabiya English*. Al-Arabiya, 29 Mar. 2015. Web. 19 Feb. 2016. <<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2015/03/29/Arab-Ahwaz-must-be-liberated-from-Iran.html>>.

² Al-Habtoor, Khalaf Ahmad. "ibid"

and their populations have undergone forced displacements at the hand of the authorities. These areas soon after would be re-inhabited by ethnic Persian farmers, who would take over the farming activities of their previous Arab inhabitants. There are also instances where the villages are not directly victims of forced displacement but rather fall victim of a fabricated natural disaster. For example, several dams have been constructed on the rivers, with the sole purpose of orchestrating regular flooding of these Arab villages. The authorities then go on to say that the area is flood prone and the people should move elsewhere. However, soon after one finds the same area settled by Persian farmers.

This policy is criminal and constitutes forced displacement along ethnic lines, which is a terrible form of discrimination.

Pollution as a weapon:

At the last Paris meeting Iran was ranked as the 7th most polluted country on earth and it is noteworthy that the majority of this pollution stems from Al-Ahwaz and its heavy industry used for the extraction of oil and gas.

The pollution has contaminated local water sources causing the outbreak of many pollution related diseases in Al-Ahwaz. Smog and air pollution are a daily factor of life and the water in the rivers is highly toxic. In 2013 the WHO ranked Ahwaz city as the most polluted city in the world, with an air quality that is three times worse than Beijing's.³ The low quality of air in Ahwaz is the cause of many illnesses amongst its population such as respiratory illnesses, asthma and even cancer. The poor air is made worse through the prevalence of common place dust storms that carry the harmful particles in the air over large distances.

One should mention that the Iranian government has done absolutely nothing to improve the levels of pollution in the region.

Poverty and denials along Ethnic lines:

The city of Al-Ahwaz has a very clear poverty divide between rich and poor along ethnic lines. The Iranian city planners have designed the city in such a way that the wealthier neighbourhoods are inhabited by predominantly wealthy Persians whilst most of the slums and low-income areas are predominantly Arab. This is no doubt attributable in large part to the access to education that is afforded to the two ethnic groups present. The struggle to enter into schools and to get employed suffered by the Arabs of Al-Ahwaz is one that is sowing the seeds of a future that does not look very positive for the chances of leading a dignified and respectful life. Many people in Al-Ahwaz live on 1-2 dollars a day, with the average salary of the oil rich area being a mere 150-200 dollars a month.

Huge sums of the Iranian oil revenues are not being re-invested into the economy to help the people of Iran as a whole, but are instead invested into the military in order to continue carrying out subversive actions abroad, that violate the sovereignty of other states. Leaving a large part of the population poor and uneducated, not to mention the very poor state of the Iranian civilian infrastructure.

The state of discrimination faced by the Arab population is such that since the oil reserves were found in Al-Ahwaz, Persians from other parts of Iran moved to it to occupy all the highest paying jobs. Leaving the Ahwazi Arabs with the lowest income jobs, and little or no perspectives. One should consider if the state of enforced poverty were not enough the Iranian government also prohibits the Arabs from using Arabic in an official capacity as well as banning the teaching in Arabic within schools in the area. The plight of the people here is the same as that of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Both cases have shown that the international community has done near to nothing to help these people. However, at least the plight of the Palestinians is widely known about and a common feature in the media, the plight of the Arabs of Ahwaz is something that still remains hidden and unknown from the eyes of the global public.⁴

³ Merchant, Brian. "Inside the Iranian City Where the Air Is Three Times Worse Than Beijing's." *Motherboard*. Vice News, 06 Mar. 2013. Web. 3 Mar. 2016. <<http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/in-this-iranian-city-the-air-is-three-times-as-bad-as-beijings>>.

⁴ ""Arabistan Al Ahwaz" and Fight against Iranian Apartheid." *European Ahwazi Human Rights Organization*. EHRO, 07 Oct. 2011. Web. 4 Mar. 2016. <<http://euhwazi.blogspot.ch/2011/10/arabistan-al-ahwaz-and-fight-against.html>>.

International advocacy:

Recently the sanctions targeting the nuclear and oil sectors of Iran as well as its economy have been lifted with much jubilee and surrounding hope. However no mention was made towards any actions that the government in Tehran needs to take to safeguard the rights and dignity of minorities and dissidents. Tragically the international community has shown double standards in its dealings with Iran.

It is in the best interest that Iran's deplorable human rights record still be highlighted and exposed to the world in order to raise awareness, until the country fully takes actions to improve this issue.

Double standards have been shown in the dealings with Iran in regards to its nuclear program as the important issue of human rights violations against its own citizens has been totally ignored. The international community must remind Iran to safeguard the well-being of its citizens and ensure that they receive fair and dignified treatment in the eyes of international law.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The NGOs signatories to this statement, recommend to the Human Rights Council and all UN relevant bodies to:

- Pressure the Iranian authorities to live up to their obligations and, respect the human rights of all its inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief.
- Pressure the Iranian authorities to ensure that steps are taken to improve the environmental situation in the country.
- Dispatch an independent mission of enquiry order to investigate into the crimes committed against the Arab minority of Al Ahwaz.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ) The Arab Lawyers Association- UK The Brussels Tribunal General Arab Women Federation The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, Association of Iraqi Diplomats (AID), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), The International League of Iraqi Academics (ILIA), Women Will Association (WWA), Monitoring Net of Human Rights in Iraq (MHRI), Women Solidarity for an Independent and Unified Iraq, Organization for Widows and Orphans (OWO), International Anti-Occupation Network (IAON), International Society of Iraqi Scientists, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.