

# RIGHTS OF MINORITIES IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN



KMMK-G

UPR Info Pre-sessions

# Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Iran

- Iran is a **multi-ethnic** and **multi-religious** country with a population of over 80 million mainly composed of Persians, Baluchis, Kurds, Azerbaijani-Turks, Turkmen, and Ahwazi Arabs.
- There are **no official and reliable statistics** on the exact number of the members of ethnic & religious minorities in Iran

# Recommendations – Issue 1

We encourage States to echo the recent recommendation from the CERD and the Human Rights Committee for Iran:

- **to collect and provide reliable, updated and comprehensive statistics and disaggregated data on the demographic composition of the population, based on the principle of self-identification, including on ethnic and ethno-religious minorities and on their socioeconomic situation**

# Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Iran – 2

- The CERD concluded in August 2024 that Iranian law results in “**systemic and structural discrimination**” against ethnic and ethno-religious minorities
- The FFMI concluded that ethnic and ethno-religious minorities face **persecution** in Iran
  - Unemployment rates is over 60% in Kurdistan, Baluchistan & Turkmen Sahra
  - Over 1/3 of the total number of prisoners in 2024 are Kurdish and Balochi citizens
  - 65% of political prisoners executed are Kurds, 25% Balochis and 10% Arabs.

# Recommendations – Issue 2

- **Amend the Constitution to ensure recognition, equal rights and protection for all ethnic and religious minorities in Iran; (FFMI, August 2024)**
- **Take effective measures to combat structural discrimination against members of ethnic and ethno-religious minorities and to remove all restrictions that prevent members of these groups from fully enjoying their human rights (CERD, September 2024)**

# Education in Mother Tongue and Cultural Rights

- Under Article 15 of Iran's Constitution, Persian is designated as the sole official language of the country. While this article permits the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, it limits the presence of these languages in educational settings to literature classes only.
- Kurdish, Azerbaijani-Turks and Baloch language activists are facing arbitrary detention for teaching their respective mother tongues. In April 2024, four members of Kurdish Nojin Cultural Association in Kurdistan have been arrested and sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for teaching the Kurdish language.

# Recommendations – Issue 3

- **ensure the availability of education in the mother tongue of ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups as a language of instruction in public education. and strengthen its efforts to ensure access to education for children belonging to ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups and to tackle school dropout rates among them. (CERD Concluding Observations, September 2024)**

# Summary killings of border couriers

- Due to high rates of unemployment and contamination caused by landmines and explosive remnants of the Iran-Iraq war, border couriers, known as “**kolbaran**” and Balochi fuel porters known as “**Soukhtbars**” operate in economically marginalized border provinces of Iranian Kurdistan and Baluchistan.
- These couriers often fall victim to **extrajudicial killings** by Iran’s border officials. Their situation has been extensively reported about by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran.
- According to our data, 650 Kurdish and Balochi border couriers had been **summarily shot at and killed or injured by law-enforcement agents** this year, as of mid-November.



# Recommendations – Issue 4

- **Ensure that provisions governing the use of force are in line with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement, and the Committee’s general comment No. 36 (2018), which requires that the use of lethal force by law enforcement be resorted to only when strictly necessary in order to protect life or prevent serious injury from an imminent threat; and provide training based on these principles and guidelines. (HRCttee, October 2023)**

# Landmines affecting Kurdish and Arab citizens

- According to Iran's official statistics, in the west and southwest of Iran, during to Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), **more than 20 million landmines** have been planted in Iranian Kurdistan four provinces and Ahwaz.
- **Many of them have not been cleared**, which seriously hamper the daily life of civilians living around the border, particularly the farmers, the nomads, the shepherds and traders.
- Almost 40 years after the end of the war, huge areas are still today contaminated by mines and explosive materials.

# Recommendations – Issue 5

- **Clear its entire territory from landmines and all remnants of the war with the support of international organizations and to Commit to Complete Mine Ban Treaty obligations by ratifying the Ottawa Convention. (CRC, Concluding Observations on Iran, 2016)**

# Thank you

Take our factsheet available on the table at the back!



Universal Periodic Review (UPR)- 47<sup>th</sup> Session (January 2025)

## Factsheet on the Situation of ethnic and religious minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran

### BACKGROUND

The Islamic Republic of Iran is home to a wide variety of ethnic and ethno-religious minorities including Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs and Azerbaijani Turks, who constitute most of the population in border provinces. Religious or belief minorities in the country include [Baha'is](#), Christians, and Sunni Muslims amongst other groups. Despite this diversity, Iran exercises a centralist and ethnocentric nation-building model in its politics, laws and practices, rooted in Persian hegemony and Shi'a Islam. The state's centralising impulse is manifested in the systemic discrimination, marginalisation and persecution of minority communities.

The Iranian authorities continue to disproportionately prosecute minority citizens, in particular Kurds, Baluchis and Arabs, on national security charges without due process. The security apparatus disproportionately resorts to arbitrary arrests, torture, death penalty and indiscriminate killings, including in the context of suppressing freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and protest. Communities face restrictions on free exercise of religion and culture, access to justice, employment, education, political and public participation, while ethnic and ethno-religious minorities in border regions of Western and Eastern Iran grapple with pervasive economic neglect and poverty.

The Human Rights Committee (HRCtee) reviewed Iran in October 2023, while the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) conducted its review in August 2024. The HRCtee expressed concern over 'restrictions on and discrimination against members of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities,' while the CERD highlighted the 'systemic and structural' nature of this discrimination. **We call on states to leverage the UPR to echo recommendations arising from these treaty body reviews**, including those outlined in this document.

### VIOLENT REPRESSION OF PROTESTS AND DISSENT

Iran maintains a track record of securitization in Iran's border provinces, predominantly inhabited by ethnic and ethno-religious minorities, and [patterns of violence](#) against minorities expressing dissent. Waves of protests, most recently in 2017, 2019 and 2021, prompted by economic, environmental and political grievances, have been particularly violently repressed in these regions. Since the start of the **'Woman, Life, Freedom'** nationwide demonstrations, sparked by the custodial death of 22-year-old Kurdish woman Jina Amini in September 2022, the Islamic Republic has used violent methods to suppress activism and reinstate 'order'. The independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran (FFMI) has found such violence to be **'particularly brutal and militarized' in Kurdish and Baluch-populated areas**. The Islamic Republic has increased its military and security presence in border territories, creating environments conducive to mass arrests, detention, use of force, and extra-judicial killings. According to the FFMI, between September 2022 and April 2023, at least [551 people](#) were killed by security forces during the demonstrations, with a 'disproportionately high number' of those casualties occurring among 'protesters in regions predominantly populated by minorities'.

State security apparatuses have widely harassed and intimidated human rights defenders, journalists and the families of victims through threats, arrests, and violence. Media [reports](#) suggest that authorities have also 'stopped issuing birth certificates' in protest hotspots, putting minority children at risk of statelessness. Internet shutdowns aimed at suppressing unrest have also disproportionately affected ethnic minorities, exacerbating existing marginalization in Kurdish and Baluchi regions.

*'Conduct effective, thorough and impartial investigations into allegations of violations and abuses of human rights committed in the context of the November 2019, July 2021 and September 2022 [protests](#).'* (CERD concluding observations on Iran, August 2024, para. 29)