



## Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G)

### Statement on the UPR Pre-session for the Islamic Republic of Iran

20<sup>th</sup> November 2024, Palais des Nations, Geneva

This statement is delivered by the Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G), a founding member of Impact Iran Coalition and as well as a member of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty. Our focus is the situation of minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country with a population of over 80 million composed mainly of Persians, Kurds, Baluchis, Azerbaijani-Turks, Turkmens, and Ahwaz-Arabs.

There are no official and reliable statistics on the exact number of the members of ethnic & religious minorities in Iran. However, according to the former Minister of Education, over 70 per cent of Iran's pupils are bilingual, with Persian still not used as the primary language by children even after first grade.

Despite forming large segments of Iran's society, non-Shia Muslims and non-Persians are largely excluded from political life. They suffer from marginalization and economic neglect, and obstacles in access to economic, social and cultural rights.

The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also both concluded earlier this year that Iran is severely depriving minorities of their fundamental rights, and that this severe deprivation amounts to **persecution** under human rights law.

This persecution of minorities must end immediately, just like the persecution of women and girls in the country must end, and we need states to be vocal about the situation of minorities and women during this UPR.

I will make 4 points.

**Firstly, because we need data and transparency, we encourage you to echo the recent recommendations 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**

Secondly, various UN mechanisms such as CERD and the FFM concluded in their reports in 2024 that discrimination, marginalisation and violence against ethnic and ethno-religious minorities is systemic and structural in Iran.

A disproportionate number of persons belonging to ethnic minorities, in particular Ahwazi Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmens live below the poverty line. The provinces populated by Turkmens, Arabs and Kurds have the highest rates of unemployment. In some parts of Baluchistan, the unemployment rate is as high as 60 percent. Baluchistan also has the highest recorded illiteracy and infant mortality rates in the country. And the list goes on.

This long-standing marginalization and economic neglect of minorities is echoed by a policy of oppression. The FFM and the CERD, both reported that ethnic and religious minorities in Iran, in particular Kurd and Baluch minorities, have been disproportionately impacted by the Government's crackdown during the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement since 2022. Both the FFM and the CERD came to the conclusion that the severe deprivation of minority's rights amount to persecution.

### **Recommendation N° 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 Language**

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 imprisoned for teaching the Kurdish language.

*In April 2024, four Kurdish human rights defenders were each sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in relation to their peaceful efforts to advance socio-cultural rights, highlighting the severe challenges faced by advocates of minority education in Iran.*

### **Recommendation N. 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)**

**I want to share with you two situations of particular concern to my organisation.**

#### **The first is related to the situation 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, 60 border couriers had been summarily shot at and killed by law-enforcement agents this year, as of mid-August. Meanwhile, over 240 had been injured due to incidents such as direct shootings of border officials and landmine explosions among

other things. This brings the total number of incidents reported regarding shootings and discriminatory killings of *Kolbaran* to over three hundreds during that period.

**In this regard, we call you to echo the recent recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee for Iran to**

**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.**

### **The second situation is related to landmines**

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 Kurdistan and Khuzestan. 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. Since January, we have registered 29 casualties in Iranian Kurdistan four provinces. According to a UN report, over 40% of landmines victims are children under 13 years old.

**We reiterate the Committee on<sup>1</sup> the Rights of the Child's recommendation from 2016 and call on you to urge Iran to 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.**

Five minutes is obviously not enough to do justice to the many challenges facing minorities in Iran, and I invite you to have a look at the UPR factsheet on minority issues in Iran that you will find at the bottom of the room.

I thank you.

**Taimoor Aliassi**

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**The Kurdistan Human Rights Association - Geneva (KMMK-G)**

**President of Impact Iran Coalition (19 International NGOs)**

**Former member of Geneva City Council**



*The Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva (KMMK-G) aims to promote democracy, respect for human rights and social development in and beyond Kurdistan of Iran.*

*To that end, the Association commits itself to work against any form of discrimination towards ethnic and religious minorities within the region, to defend political prisoners, to work for the abolition of the death penalty, and to promote women's and children's rights.*

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, 2015: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/795162?v=pdf>

*Established in Geneva in 2006, the KMMK-G constitutes a bridge between the Kurdish civil society, the United Nations Agencies and NGOs. The KMMK-G participates actively in all the sessions of the Human Rights Council, the ESCR, the CPR Committee, the UPR and the UN Forum on minority issues, and presents them with reports on the situation of human rights in Kurdistan of Iran ([www.kmmk-ge.org](http://www.kmmk-ge.org)). Moreover, the Association submits these reports to various United Nations organs, with which it is in frequent contact.*

*The KMMK-G is, therefore, a recognized source of information. Its reports are published on the website of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner of Human Rights. The Association also frequently publishes articles in Kurdish and Iranian media.*

*The KMMK-G is also active within the EU Parliament and in EU capitals, and regularly organizes conferences on the situation of ethnic and religious minorities in Iran.*

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