

## **Armageddon Cultural Institute (ACI)**

### **Executive Summary:**

1. This report studies the situation of religious minorities in Iran and the subject of dialogue among civilizations and religions. Through its researches this Institute has reached the conclusion that the subject of religious minorities in Iran is not an issue and only officially recognised religions such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity have certain rights in Iran as religious minorities. The overall conclusion of this research is that despite all the efforts taken place in Iran, the social and civil participation of religious minorities has dropped in comparison with the past, and this is while the population of religious minorities has seen a growth. Also despite the initial recommendations given regarding dialogue among civilizations from Iran, due to a number of problems, within the organizational structure, this proposal has not been able to achieve the results that it should have.

2. This report deals with the existing challenges and problems and ultimately recommendations for the removal of problems and also answering the recommendations from the first round of the UPR on Iran:

- Increasing educational, propaganda and cultural programmes of governmental, nongovernmental and people's manpower regarding religious minorities.
- Request from the Iranian government for the creation of further space for the activities of NGOs that work in the field specifically
- Creation of suitable organizational mechanism by the government in the governmental sector.
- Request from other governments to share their international experiences with this problem.
- Cooperation of international organizations and governments and NGOs for the removal of problems and challenges.

### **Keywords:**

Political participation, social participation, religious minorities, cultural dialogue, dialogue among civilizations.

### **About us:**

3. Armageddon Cultural Institute began its activities in 2006 with a review of and combating Islamophobia and defending the rights of Muslim minorities in the world, and also efforts for interaction between religions and cultures and combating racism and defending human rights. Some of the activities of this Institute include: launching of a website, compilation of a technical bulletin, holding and participation in conferences, exhibitions and national and international programmes, technical sittings and education workshops. Also the executive director of the Institute has for the second back to back time been elected by Iranian NGOs as the representative of the NGOs Supreme Monitoring Group of the Interior Ministry.

**Pivotal Recommendations:**

4. This report is prepared on the basis of the below recommendations which were made in Iran's first round of the UPR in 2010:

- Promotion and protection of the rights of officially recognized religious minorities (Armenia).
- Continuation of efforts for dialogue among cultures (China and Syria).

**The situation of recommendations in the past and present:**

5. In Iran the subject of religious minorities is not an issue and all Islamic sects, both Shia and Sunni, despite the official Islamic sect of Iran in the Constitution is stated as Shia, enjoy equal, civil, social, economic and cultural rights. With this definition the official recognized religions of the country, Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians are deemed as religious minorities who have specific legal rights.

6. Following the recommendation of the Iranian president for naming 2001 in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly (September 1998) as the year of "Dialogue among Civilizations" as a theory contrasting the "Clash of Civilizations" theory, the Dialogue among Nations International Centre was founded in Iran in 1998, and in 2007 it was merged with the National Centre for Globalization Studies by the then president and under his own supervision.

**Data Collection Method:**

7. For the presentation of a factual situation of religious minorities and efforts for dialogue among cultures in Iran, this Institute has considered a practical method based on personal research findings, political and legal monitoring and also media monitoring regarding the activities and measures taken in the relevant field.

**Advancements:**

8. Legislative area: In article 5 of the First Chapter of the Fifth Development Plan Act (5 January 2011) government and executive bodies were obligated to take necessary measures to encourage Islamic sects and strengthening of dialogue and conformity between followers of religions and the philosophical and scientific intellectuals of the world and expansion of their communication and cooperation with Iranian Cultural Relations centres.

9. Executive area: In paragraph 6 of the objectives of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which has been issued to the ministry in an executive package (3 March, 2013) it states: "expansion of cultural relations with different nations and races particularly Muslims and the oppressed of the world).

10. NGOs area: Over the last few years, with the formation of numerous NGOs in this subject, a better atmosphere of understanding of the people and society towards the subject of dialogue among cultures and religious minorities has come about, and this Institute has made several towards information dissemination and encouraging people participation, and the formation and active presence of NGOs in the field.

**Challenges:**

11. Despite the existence of the defined freedoms in the Constitution and other laws in line with the mentioned recommendations, it has been observed that the participation of Iranian religious minorities in the last Islamic Parliamentary elections did not increase in proportion with their population growth. In 2008, the participation of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians in the eighth parliamentary elections was 15.91% of their population, while nationwide participation was at 51.1%. For the next parliamentary elections in 2012 the participation of religious minorities was 14.15% which in view of 4.21% population growth of religious minorities, there was a 1.76% drop in their participation for the current parliament. In the same year the nationwide participation was at 64.2%. It seems the attempts of government officials and active NGOs in this regard must be to increase the participation levels of religious minorities in their and their country's destiny so that their participation levels in electing their representatives reaches the national level.

12. Also creating of divisions by the opposition through propaganda by satellite networks, causes disheartening and mistrust and as a result causes the failure to participate in social matters, particularly elections.

13. Another of the challenges is the lack of active and effective people and NGOs participation in various arenas which de to lack of introduction of the people and NGOs of existing solutions and lack of necessary education in this regard.

14. The merging of the Dialogue among Culture Centre with the National Centre for Globalization Studies and lack of technical and independent activities in the subject of dialogue among civilizations.

**Recommendations:**

15. To share experiences regarding the legislation of the rights of religious minorities particularly in the social and civil subjects with other countries.

16. To share experiences regarding dialogue among cultures with other countries.

17. Follow up of international organizations, governments and NGOs in the prevention of the creation of divisions among Iranian religious minorities.

18 - Efforts to make the subject of dialogue among cultures universal at the international level and confront violence seeking notions such as the clash of civilizations.

19. Recommendation to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for further encouragement of the people and NGOs to further participate for the removal of existing problems.

20. Recommendation to the government of the Islamic Republic for education of the people and NGOs for the removal of existing problems.

21. Creation of a suitable organizational mechanism from the government in the governmental field particularly on the subject of dialogue among religions and cultures.

22. Creating coordination between NGOs and relevant GOs.

23. Increase government allocated budgets, and increase the share of Iranian NGOs from allocated programmes and allocated budgets by the UN in this regard

24. Request the Iranian government to create more space for the activities of NGOs to work technically on the subject.