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Joint statement submitted by:

**Ahwaz Human Rights Organization
Indigenous Ahwazi Arabs for Democracy and Justice in Iran
Ahwaz Education and Human Rights Foundation
Democratic Solidarity Party of al-Ahwaz**

United Nations Economics and Social Development:
Seventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, New York, April 21-2 May, 2008,
Agenda Items 4 and 5:

We would like to thank the chair for the opportunity.

More than five million indigenous Ahwazi Arabs live in the south-western region of Iran, near the southern border of Iraq , in the province of Khuzestan or as called by its indigenous name, Al-Ahwaz or Arabistan. Ahwazis constitute an indigenous, ethnic, national and linguistic minority in Iran. Historically, this indigenous Arab community has been marginalized and discriminated against by successive governments in Iran.

Prior to its annexation and occupation by the Iranian government in 1925, the region enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and independence and indigenous nomadic tribes lived on this land for thousands of years.

While Ahwazi ancestral lands produces 90% of Iran's vast oil revenue, none of this is allocated to the Ahwazis or to their region. They are kept backward, poor and illiterate. The illiteracy rate is 4 times and unemployment is 6 times the national average.

Persian language (which is spoken by only 1/3 of the Iranian population) is forced upon the indigenous Ahwazis and other non-Persian ethnic minorities. Only one out of 4 Ahwazi graduates from high school. According to government's own data, 80% of the Arab children suffer from malnutrition.

In the past ten years, as directed by the highest levels of government of the Islamic republic of Iran, , over 500,000 hectares of indigenous Ahwazi farmers land have been confiscated and given to non-indigenous Persian settlers, a scheme designed to break up and change the ethnic structure and racial mix of the province. According to Mr. Milon Kothari, UNOHCHR Special Rapporteur on Housing after a visit to the region in the summer of 2005 "when you visit AhwazThere are thousands of people living with open sewers, no sanitation, no regular access to water, electricity and no gas connections" or "In Khuzestan, that there is an attempt being made by the government to build new towns and bring in new people from other provinces." Or ... "the estimate we received is that between 200,000 - 250,000 Arab people are being displaced from their villages": <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=48518>

Immediately after the end of Iran-Iraq war in 1988 , the Islamic Republic of Iran has embarked on a systematic ethnic cleansing policy called "Hemayesh Sarzamini" (Land Experimentations),. Since 1999 alone, 1.2 million Ahwazis were forcefully displaced to central provinces and 1.5 million non-Indigenous Persian have been resettled in government-paid resettlement towns such as Ramin, 1, 2, 3 and Shirin-Shahr in Arab cities and towns of Khuzestan.

There is a systematic effort by the Islamic Republic of Iran to strip indigenous Arabs of Ahwaz from their national identity, culture, language, and customs and they are faced with assimilation and a lowered status to the ranks of 2nd and 3rd class citizens

Any Ahwazi demands for basic human rights, including education in their mother tongue, sharing of wealth and rights of employment or to protest ethnic cleansing, have often been labeled as "separatist", "secessionist", "Wahabis" or called "stooges of foreign countries" or "danger to security and territorial integrity".

50% of the Ahwazi population suffers from absolute poverty and 80% of the children suffer from malnutrition. Indigenous Ahwazi Arab students drop out of schools at 30% during elementary, 50% during secondary and 70% during high school.

The regime erected dams and diverted the waters of Karoon and Karkheh rivers to non-Arab central provinces of Isfahan and Yazd while Khuzestan severely suffers from the shortage of drinking water.

All Khuzestan's political, military and security commanders, officers, mayors and all high and mid-level government officials of Khuzestan have consistently been appointed from non-Arabs outside of the native Arab population. The Iranian government authorities in Khuzestan refuse to register and issue birth identity cards to indigenous Arab newborn-babies, who do not assume Persian or Shiite names.

Names of cities, towns, villages, rivers and other geographical landmarks are being changed from Arabic to Persian by the Islamic Republic government. These historical Arabic names existed for centuries.

Since the Uprising (Intefada) 15 April 2005 in the provincial city of Ahwaz where security forces opened fire on thousands of peaceful demonstrators killing at least 151 men, women and children, injuring over 1800,- disappearance of 160 people (believed killed) and 28,000 were detained.

On January 30, 2008 **Mr. Zamel Bawi**, 29 years old, married with one child, resident of Ahwaz, a small business owner and the son of Ahwazi Arab tribal leader Hajj Salem Bawi was executed. This execution took place in Karoon prison in Ahwaz where Zamel's 4 brothers remain in jail. This has come after the execution of four other Ahwazis on 12/30/2007: **Ahmad Marmazi, Abdolhussein Harabii, Hussein Asakereh, and Mehdi Haidari.**

In the past 12 months alone, at least 21 Ahwazi human rights and political activists were publicly hanged (three were executed just days after UN Human Rights Commissioner, Ms. Arbour, visited Tehran in September 2007) despite the appeal by the European Union Commission, international Human Rights Organization and in a blatant defiance to an appeal by the independent experts Mr. Philip Alston, Mr. Leandro Despouy, and Mr. Manfred Nowak who issued a statement urging the Iranian Government to "stop the imminent execution of seven men belonging to the Ahwazi Arab minority and grant them a fair and public hearing.

EU Parliament, UN General Assembly, 48 British MPs, the EU Parliament, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Mr. Emadedin Baghi, a prominent Iran human rights activist, have all condemned the death sentence and the trials against 39 indigenous Ahwazis as unjust and unfair, and appealed for a halt to further execution.^{[5] [6] [7] [8] [9]}

Also last year 5 Ahwazi human rights activists were extradited by the Syrian government to Iran. All 5 men are registered UNHCR as political refugee and were awaiting settlement to a 3rd country.

On the 3rd anniversary of Ahwazi Intifada, we request and appeal to the Special Rapporteur to organize a fact finding trip to the province of Khuzestan (al-Ahwaz) to investigate land confiscation, ethnic cleansing and especially the killing of 151 indigenous Ahwazi-Arabs by Iranian security forces in on April 15, 2005.

We urge authorities in Iran to implement measures to promote and protect the rights of indigenous Ahwazis.

Thank You

^[5] http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/92611.pdf

^[6] <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMD130052007?open&of=ENG-IRN>

^[7] <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMD130852006?open&of=ENG-392>

^[8] <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/11/11/iran14560.htm>

^[9] <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/06/26/iran13609.htm>