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Statement

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Good Afternoon Madame Chair, distinctive members of the Permanent forum and fellow Indigenous Peoples.

It is a great honor to present for you the case of the Iranian Baloch, one of the most persecuted, oppressed, and neglected peoples of the Middle East. On behalf of over 5 million Baloch people of Iran, I would like to speak of our situation.

Balochistan is divided between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

If the indigenous people in Iran were granted their basic rights as Indigenous Peoples I would not have been here today.

We have our own language Balalochi, which is an indo-European and our own distinctive culture and most Baloch adhere to Sunni Islam

The rights of Baloch and Iranian Sunnis in general are restricted by the provision of Article 115, which excluded Sunnis from holding the office of the Presidency of the Republic, thus reducing Baluch and Sunnis to the status of second-class citizens.

The use of Balochi language, Balochi schools, and Balochi publications have been strictly prohibited even in their own homeland Balochistan. That is also the case with other non-Persian languages.

Only Persian history is taught as "Iranian" history, never the history of Baloch or other national groups. No cultural institutions or activities are tolerated among the Baloch or other non-Persians.

Among many instances of cultural oppression against the Baloch was the arrest of six members of the Voice of Justice of the Young People's Society, a Baloch cultural association registered under Iranian law, in early May 2007. This NGO was primarily involved in organizing concerts, arts exhibitions, and educational courses for young Baloch. Subsequently, the head of the organization, Mr. Ya'qub Mehrnehad, a student, Journalist and civil activist, was tried in secret and convicted to death for an unknown offence in early February 2008. He has allegedly been tortured. He is currently on death row without access to his family members or a lawyer. His brother, Ibrahim Mehrnehad, is also in jail and has been also denied access to his family or to a lawyer.

Iranian Balochistan is one of the poorest, least developed, and neglected provinces in Iran. According to the UN Common Country Assessment, Balochistan has the worst indicators among Iranian provinces for life expectancy, school enrollment, adult literacy, infant mortality, and access to drinking water and sanitation.

The Baloch's lack of control over their resources is the main cause of underdevelopment of Balochistan. As a result, there is a growing economic and social gap between Baloch and Persian-dominated regions of Iran, a fact that makes Iran a prime example of uneven development in the world.,

Most of the development expenditures in the province were and are geared towards the expansion of the military-related infrastructure such as roads, military bases, and facilities serving Persian bureaucrats and settlers, thus hardly benefiting the Baloch masses. In addition, as far as non-military projects are concerned, they are planned behind closed doors in Tehran, due to the highly centralized nature of economic planning in Iran, and implemented through the Persian-controlled provincial bureaucracy. The needs and wants of the Baloch population are not taken into consideration because the Baloch are not represented in economic

and political decisions at the provincial level, let alone at the national level.

Recommendation:

- To release and reconsider the death and imprisonment sentences against the Baloch indigenous activists Yacub Mehrnehad and his 16 year brother Ibrahim
- Send a fact-finding mission to analyze the existence of indigenous population in Iran and their circumstances