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The future movement of ethnic and religious minorities in Iran in the light of regional and international changes

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The modern Iranian nation-state dates back to the early sixteenth century AD, specifically to the establishment of the Safavid state by Shah Ismail Safavid in 1501. The state at that time was not based on nationality, but was composed of different regions and ethnic groups that were heterogeneous, independent of each other, and lived without any organic association¹

In addition to the different peoples who lived in this region, there were different religions and sects, including Manichaeism, Muzikid, Maitra, and Zoroastrianism, which preceded Islam. They lived in this region even after the Islamic conquest and the defeat of Sassanids by Arab Muslims in the battle of Qadisiyah.² These peoples and their ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural components were heterogeneous groups.³ At no stage, even before the advent of the Safavids, did harmony exist among them—not historically nor politically.⁴

Demographic composition of Iran in modern and contemporary history

In the course of its modern and contemporary history, Iran has witnessed two eras in which its rulers have attempted to dissolve the various ethnic and national identities of the Iranian peoples within the wider Persian ethnic group, namely the Safavid (1501–1736) and the Pahlavi states (1925–1979).

In the era of the Safavid state

The Safavids did not allow the participation of minorities or different ethnicities in the system of government. Their oppressive theocratic system did not even allow the participation of minorities from fellow Shiite sects such as the Musha'sha'iyyah Ahwazi Arabs, a Shiite sect who ruled over the Howeyzeh area in the province of Ahwaz, which the Safavids called "Arabistan." Instead, the Musha'sha'iyyah, like other Arabs and members of other minorities, were subject to persecution and ethnocide in order to seize their land, after which the Safavids were able to control large areas stretching from Mesopotamia to the Arabian Gulf in the south and India to the east.

In the Pahlavi state

After the British-backed 1921 coup d'état by Reza Pahlavi and his subsequent dissolution of the constitutional movement, he ended the system of provinces and states that had prevailed for centuries in the country; the Pahlavi dynasty introduced the modern persecution of non-Persian ethnicities and nationalities in Iran.

Reza Shah sought to eliminate these nationalities and unify Iran at all costs based on Persian ethnocentrism as completely and rapidly as possible. To impose his rule and establish his authority, he relied on three main institutions: the army, the institution of the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, and the institution of the monarchy. Through these three institutions, Reza Khan implemented an ambitious program permeating Iran's economic, social, and cultural spheres, in line with proposals put forward by the profoundly racist eugenicist Persian theorists of that time⁵.

The period between 1941 and 1946 witnessed three major events: the establishment of the national government of Azerbaijan or the self-governing Republic of Azerbaijan, the establishment of the Kurdistan National Government

or the Republic of Mahabad, and the demand for autonomy by Ahwazi Arabs in “Arabistan.”

Conditions of nationalities under the Shah Reza Pahlavi and his son from 1925 until 1979

The reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi began with the implementation of an initiative nurtured by racial supremacist Persians, the ‘State Nation Project’, which was a distorted version of the 19th century European nation-state concept, creating a new political entity in Iran and a new identity for this entity radically different to the situation that existed before the coup.

The Pahlavi state-nation project was completely contradictory to the European concept of the nation-state, which was based on democracy. In pursuit of this project, the Shah’s regime adopted a number of decisions, including amending some provisions of the Constitution, which were the outcome of the constitutional movement (the conditional revolution) and excising others.

Ultimately, this resulted in emptying Iran’s Constitution of its core content—and greatly limiting the role of Parliament in the ratification of decisions issued by the rulers—in preparation for the establishment of a strong central state based on tyranny.

Aryan Race Theory

The theory of Iranian racial, national, and cultural supremacy, which has been based on a false historical assumption that the civilization within the territories of Iran is a creation of the Aryans alone, emphasizes key fascist concepts like the unity of blood and race. This theory excludes Ahwazi Arabs and Turks in Iran due to their “inferior” non-Aryan status, although Kurds and Baluchis are accepted as Aryan peoples. As with all such supremacist ideologies, there is no historical or other evidence to support these theories, or indeed to support the idea that Persians and those groups which supposedly share these “superior” Aryan characteristics are, in fact, Aryan in the sense of ethnicity⁶.

Constitution against nationalities

On October 10, 1937, the administrative divisions were radically revised, with the ancient historical names of the Iranian territories being omitted from the new maps and Iran being divided under this law into six provinces: North, West, North, South, Makran, and Northeast. In December of the same year, these geographical divisions were once again revised, and the country was divided into 10 governorates, 49 counties, and 29 districts.

The Islamic republic's regime's treatment of other nationalities

The long-oppressed peoples of non-Persian ethnicity actively and enthusiastically participated in the Iranian people's uprising against the Shah's regime, which ended in 1979. These nationalities hoped that they would gain their rights under a new regime that calls for the values of Islam based on justice, equality, and rights for all peoples regardless of race, ethnicity, or origin. But what happened is the opposite; the regime of the nascent Islamic Republic launched an extensive campaign of repression against the defeated Ahwaz Arabs in Muhammarah, the Turkmen in the desert of Turkmenistan, and the Kurds in western Iran. Their demands for self-rule, self-autonomy, and equal rights were met with the mass execution of the Turkoman leaders, the gunning down of protesters in the Muhammarah neighbourhood of Ahwaz city, the eponymously named Ahwazi capital, and a military invasion of Kurdistan ordered via a fatwa from Khomeini, the leader of the revolution and the founder of the Islamic Republic.

In recent years, mass protests in the territory of Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran denouncing racist slanders against Turkish people on regime-run Iranian state TV have returned, once again bringing the issue of oppression of ethnic minorities in Iran to the forefront. This oppression has also generated protests among the people of Ahwaz, with an uprising on April 15, 2005, that subsequently became known as the 'April Intifada.' The uprising was prompted by public outrage about a leaked regime document, the "Abtahi Document," written by an aide to Mohammad Khatami, concerning the regime's plan to change the demographic fabric of Ahwaz via population and transfer and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Arab people.

The increasing protests by the non-Persian minorities in Iran, who make up more than half the country's population, against the regime's endemic racism, oppression, and injustice have resulted in unease among the regime leadership, with many experts warning that the country in its current form could ultimately disintegrate if these minorities are not granted their basic rights.

The Islamic Republic's regime, however, continued to follow the racist doctrines of Shah Reza Pahlavi and his son, simply wedding fundamentalist Shiite theocracy to their Persian nationalism. Thus the ruling junta, which believed in a "national-religious" ideology, continues to rule Iran and to deprive the country's religious and ethnic minorities of the most basic rights, with the people's ethnic, religious, and cultural identities being forcibly denied as the regime attempts to impose enforced homogeneity, while denying the people their identity or the most basic of rights.⁷

A security perspective on national issues

Tehran's centralist state rulers view the demands of the country's ethnic and religious minorities with contempt as being a threat to their own power, accordingly treating them as a state security threat and routinely proposing and implementing brutally repressive policies, which further limit the movements and already restricted freedoms of these groups. Lawyer Hussein Rashi said that the security-centered political environment, coupled with the severe repression of all ethnic and religious minorities, has made the daily life of these groups a constant series of problems and injustices, condemning the regime's "unjustified discrimination against minorities, with the support of the constitution and across the law" and suggesting that this systematic persecution has "led to the establishment of a culture of discrimination and violence against all minorities in Iran."⁸

Discrimination against minorities in the Constitution

Discrimination by the current regime against religious and ethnic minorities began with the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. Iranian lawyer and human rights activist Hossein Razi points out that Article 107 of the Constitution expressly prohibits any minority member or adherent of religions and sects other than the regime's Twelver Shiism, including Sunnis, from running for the post of leader or membership of the Council of Experts in Iran. This article allows only a few Shi'a clerics, and in special circumstances, possibly other regime officials, to serve in these powerful positions.

The constitution also prohibits religious and ethnic minorities from holding any political, judicial, and presidential positions—for example, the President of the Republic must be chosen from among the Shiite clerics approved by the Supreme Leader. Article 115, paragraph 5 of the Constitution stipulates that the President of the Republic shall be a believer in the principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and an adherent of the country's official Shiite faith.

Meanwhile, a passage in a section of Article 121 of the Constitution concerning the performance of the President of the Islamic Republic asserts the official's position as "being the guardian of the official doctrine" only.⁹

Discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Constitution even extends to denying these groups to speak their mother tongue in schools and universities or even in publishing and media. Another inevitable result of the enforced dominance of the Persian language and the suppression of local languages is the destruction and deterioration in terms of the identity, literature, culture, and music of these non-Persian ethnic groups.¹⁰

Future of non-Persian ethnic minorities' mobility

Although Iran is among the most diverse countries in the Middle East in terms of ethnic diversity, successive Iranian governments have deliberately concealed this fact, particularly through the Shah's intelligence apparatus, which has worked tirelessly to obscure this fact. Persian racial supremacists also attempt to deny this inconvenient reality, preventing any serious study on the percentages and variety of ethnic minorities in the country¹¹.

However, with the growing information revolution, the advent of globalization and increasing levels of political awareness among the marginalized non-Persian peoples excluded from participating in political decision-making, hiding the mobility of these minority groups is impossible.

Despite the passage of 38 years since the foundation of the Islamic Republic and despite the repeated efforts of the opposition to overthrow the regime of the rule of the jurist, it remains clear that without the participation of all parts of society, more especially the oppressed ethnic and religious minorities, no single ethnic group can change the regime on its own, no matter how great its efforts or capacity.¹²

There have been a number of attempts to oust the regime in this period of almost 40 years. Here we must mention two examples of these attempts:

First, the 1988 "Faruq Jawaidan" initiative, a battle planned by the Mujahedeen Khalq or MEK (People's Mujahedeen Organization of Iran), the leftist opposition-in-exile. This began with a large-scale attack by MEK members across the western border with Iraq. Despite the severe weakness of the Iranian army, then at the tail end of its eight-year war with Iraq, the MEK was defeated after several days of intense fighting, losing the battle, with many of its members killed and the plan thwarted.

Second, the June 2009 spontaneous uprising, known as the "Green Movement," when more than three million citizens protested in Tehran following hotly debated election results. The regime responded with its customary brutality, and the uprising was quickly crushed, with many protesters killed or imprisoned.

In spite of all the sacrifices and courage shown by the fighters of the People's Mujahedeen and the protesters involved in the Green Movement, they did not point out in their subsequent analyses the reasons for the failure of the project to overthrow or change the regime. The main reason—in my view—that led to the failure of these attempts was the lack of any organized and effective participation by the country's ethnic minorities in these two events since the leaders of both movements did not care about the roles of these groups and about the wider range of confrontation with the regime in the regions inhabited by the non-Persian minorities.

The fact that the Green Movement's Intifada was not widespread and was concentrated in the capital, Tehran, allowed the regime to gather its forces and quickly crush them, while the MEK focused on its own strengths and did not involve the oppressed nationalities in the movement against the regime. Therefore, we see that the only way to win any movement in the future is through coordinated and widespread civil disobedience amongst all groups in all of the country's major cities such as Tehran and Tabriz, together with the minority regions from the Kurdistan region, "Arabistan" (Al-Ahwaz) and Baluchistan, and the deserts of the Turkmen province¹³⁻¹⁴.

The future of non-Persian minorities as a force of change

The mobility of ethnic minorities is one of the most important forces of change in Iran, due to their widespread and expanding nature in recent years, particularly the last 15 years or so. This force comes not from the limited military operations carried out by some national organizations dubbed resisting the occupation, but from soft power and strong popular movements on the ground, which defy oppression and suppression. This movement has begun to resemble, to a great extent, the uprisings seen in the Eastern Bloc countries in the last decades of the 20th century such as the Velvet Revolution in then-Czechoslovakia in 1989¹⁵.

The Iranian regime has a lengthy, systemic, and damning record of violations against the various ethnic and religious minorities within Iranian society, which are even more severe against the ethnic and religious minorities; violations that should be high on the agenda of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

These grave violations, well documented by international organizations, have unfortunately been neglected since Iranian regime, its intelligence agencies, lobbyists, and foreign allies have devoted great energy to suppressing any efforts to present the case to the UN Security Council, while the Arab nations have been remarkable only for their inaction, allowing the regime to continue to escape any serious collective international condemnation or censure.¹⁶

For example, the extensive evidence of the extremely well-documented phenomenon of the regime's ethnic cleansing against the Arab people of Ahwaz includes a report prepared by the so-called "Human Rights Commission of the Iranian Judiciary" on nationalities and minorities, which was documented in the proceedings of the ninth session of the UN's Forum on Minority Issues held on November 24 and 25, 2016 at the UNHRC headquarters in Geneva.¹⁷

Movement of non-Persian nationalities and the Iranian opposition

Most Iranian opposition parties and groups still ignore non-Persian ethnic minority movements, sadly failing, despite their beliefs in freedom and human rights, to rid themselves of the Persian supremacist rhetoric against non-Persian ethnic groups within Iran.

Although the participation of the Persian forces in the struggle to oust the dictatorial regime is clearly crucial, the main weakness of these opposition forces lies in their division, dispersal, and inconsistency on the one hand, and their lack of confidence in large part in the abilities of their ethnically non-Persian counterparts, leading to a reluctance to enter into an alliance with them in order to create a comprehensive anti-regime coalition. Another factor weakening opposition is the intervention of the mullahs, who have succeeded in either dividing or paying off many opposition movements by material or doctrinal reasons.

Meanwhile, the movements of the ethnic minorities themselves, although they continue to grow, are also vulnerable to certain weaknesses, especially in relation to the issues of the progressive demands of the right to self-determination. The nationalist movements are divided in strategy and tactics on achieving demands and restoring their violated rights between the idea of secession and the formation of independent states, with those who believe that federal rule, self-rule should be based on the destruction of the mullahs' regime, arguing that it is essential to prioritize the right to self-determination.

By examining the realities of these minority movements, we can sum up the strengths and weaknesses of the various groups of non-Persian peoples in Iran as follows:

1: The Azerbaijani Turks (Azerbaijanis): The strength of this group lies in their large numbers as the largest ethnic minority in Iran, which gives them control of trading, the market economy, and significant influence in the army, the Revolutionary Guards, and the state institutions. Their demands remain constitutional up till the present time.¹⁸ However, the weakness of the Turks in Iran lies in the loss of any strong central organization and factionalism among the various groups, along with the absence of any coherent political leadership. They are also, in comparison to other ethnic minorities, living in relative economic and social well-being. Since many of them have influence over the market economy, the fear of losing these privileges leads some to be wary of considering any demand for separation or independence or even for a greater share of power and wealth. The regime also makes efforts to retain their loyalty in various ways, such as allowing them to form a bloc in the Shura (Parliament) which has around 100 deputies from the Turkish regions in Iran.

The other point weakening the struggle of the Turkmen people against the Iranian regime lies in their historical differences with Kurds over the administrative borders of the regions of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, with the two sides having longstanding disagreements over control of some ethnically mixed areas of Turks and Kurds and some Kurdish towns and villages in the provinces of the province of Azerbaijan, as well as some areas inhabited by Turks. These results in some administrative chaos, and any escalation of these differences would lead to civil war, weakening any hope for a united front against the regime.

2: The Kurds: The Kurdish people are among the most organizationally experienced minorities in Iran, with a long history of struggle, in addition to the existence of organizational harmony and relatively strong leadership, although they are distributed across a number of parties. The vast majority of the Kurdish people identify strongly with one of five main opposition parties. Some of these parties, led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) (the organizational ‘mother’ of all the Kurdish parties), have now entered into direct armed conflict with the regime, and their movement has international support.

Another important point that distinguishes the Kurdish people in Iran is that the vast majority are Sunnis, with this distinction distinguishing them culturally and religiously from the Shiite Persians.

The weakness of Iran’s Kurds, however, lies in their interconnectedness and their ethnic and linguistic proximity with the Persians, since most Persian and Kurdish intellectuals consider themselves Aryans, placing themselves in a position of superiority over other (non-Aryan) peoples, especially Arabs and Turks. In this respect, the Persians have always been trying to woo the Kurds and build alliances with them on the basis of a racist discourse that prioritizes their racial superiority as Aryan races over the other peoples of the region.

3: The Arabs of Ahwaz: It has been widely acknowledged, even among some Persian historians, that the Ahwazi Arab people settled in the land of Ahwaz many thousands of years ago long before the advent of Islam, although the Persian supremacist narrative claims that the Ahwazi people’s history in the region dates back only to the arrival of Islam in Iran.¹⁹

The Ahwazis’ strengths lie first in their national and cultural depth and the increasing regional support on the Arab street for their struggle, despite the continued disregard of the official Arab regimes towards the Ahwaz cause.

Ahwazis were also the original inhabitants of the Ahwaz region, which was a semi-autonomous and autonomous emirate in different historical periods, being

autonomous at the time of the Persian Shah's annexation in 1925 when he overthrew its last ruler, Sheikh Khazal ibn Jabir al-Kaabi.

The Ahwazis' strong national awareness is the biggest factor in the continuation of their struggle, in addition to the expansion of their activities internally, regionally, and internationally. Ahwazis have now begun to raise awareness of their cause regionally and globally more than ever before, especially with regard to the brutally repressive practices of successive Iranian governments which attempted to end the Arab presence in the region through ethnic cleansing and plans for systematic demographic change, marginalization, and eradication of the Ahwazi Arab people's great heritage, identity, and culture. One of the main weaknesses that have hampered their efforts to attain freedom for almost a century now is the international response to the presence of oil in the region, which the Ahwazi people call a curse rather than a blessing on their freedom, with the world's nations turning a blind eye to the Iranian regime's heinous abuses and vast racism towards Ahwazis in exchange for oil deals; more than 95 percent of the oil and gas claimed by the Iranian regime are situated on Ahwazis' land.

In 1908, when oil was first discovered in Ahwaz, then known to non-Ahwazis as 'Arabistan', 98 percent of the regional population of the region was Arab; despite the relentless subsequent efforts of successive regimes to ethnically cleanse and displace the Arab population, they have not managed, to date, to change the demographic reality of the region's predominantly Arab character, although large-scale dispossession, along with organized immigration of settlers from ethnically Persian areas, has raised the percentage of non-Arab immigrants and settlers in the region to around 30 percent.

Among the reasons behind the failure of Arab society in Ahwaz are disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy, due to successive regimes' policies of discrimination and marginalization, which led invariably in response to an escalation of rhetoric calling for armed resistance and prioritizing the need for armed confrontation towards the Iranian regime; this understandable militant response to the brutal oppression weakened the peaceful democratic popular movement, which languished up until its revival in the past two decades.

The Ahwazis are also disorganized politically and lack a long-term strategy. Some researchers argue that the Shiite belief system shared by the majority of the Ahwazi population with Persians is one of the primary obstacles facing the Ahwazi people's struggle against the Iranian regime,²⁰ although there is a significant and rapidly increasing Sunni minority in Ahwaz, with a steady rise in the numbers converting from Shiism to Sunnism in recent years.

4. Baluch: Baluchis in Iran suffer a dual sectarian and ethnic persecution by the regime due to their being majority Sunni, suffering the highest rates of poverty, deprivation, underdevelopment, and lack of any development amongst all Iran's minorities. What strengthens the struggle of Iran's Baluchi peoples is their ethnic affiliation and close ties with their Baluchi brothers in Pakistan, where they enjoy federalism, as well as in Afghanistan, where there is a strategic and logistical depth among their movement. Baluchis also have a significant presence in the Gulf countries where many are senior officials, businessmen, and prominent figures.

The weakness of Iran's Baluchi minority lies in the high rates of cultural and social backwardness, illiteracy in this group due to decades of deliberate oppression and neglect, along with the lack of any organized political opposition (except for some parties in exile), and the associated lack of a future strategy to frame their struggles.

There is also an active presence of some Salafist movements which emphasize a reactionary religious identity, which the Iranian regime has exploited as an excuse to launch a broad and powerful media war against the struggle of the Baluch people for freedom.

Despite the claims of Persian intellectuals that the Baluch belong to the same supposedly Aryan race as themselves, Baluchis differ in doctrine and language.

5: Turkmen: Although the Iranian Turkmen's numbers are very low compared to other minorities in Iran, their close association with the Republic of Turkmenistan means that they have a high degree of cultural awareness. They are also associated with Turkmen, as well as with the Uighur minority in China. There is a strategic and logistical depth in the Turkoman people's struggle and a strong disposition towards self-sufficiency.

The weakness of the Turkoman minority lies in their being scattered across several Persian provinces, in addition to losing the experience of political organization, having been at the forefront of the struggle against the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the victory of the revolution. Other factors distinguishing the Turkoman people, so-named due to their mother language being Turkish, are that they are not associated with the Persian language of the Iranian majority or the Shiite sect, with most being Sunni.

6: Lor and Bakhtiari: Due to their historical presence in Iran's mountainous and isolated areas, the tribes of the Lor and Bakhtiari have maintained their strong ethnic and cultural identity, with many prominent intellectuals coming from this group, which has prioritized education. During the rule of Sheikh Khazal, the last ruler of Ahwaz, the Ahwazis maintained excellent links and close ties with them.²¹

Unfortunately, a weakness of the Lor and Bakhtiari is widespread corruption, with many taking bribes from the regime which has settled a large number of the previously nomadic people in Ahwaz where they are widely considered to be a 'fifth column' of the regime due to their influence in its security institutions, as well in the army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The regime grants the Lor and Bakhtiari tribes many material and political privileges, considering them to be Aryans and therefore racially superior to the Arab and other minorities, using them as part of its demographic change plan in Ahwaz. General Mohsen Rezai, the secretary of the regime's Expediency Council and the former IRGC commander of the Bakhtiari, evicted a large number of Lor and Bakhtiaris from their own areas, settling them in the middle of Ahwazi Arab neighborhoods and cities and handing over Arab agricultural and residential areas to their control in exchange for privileges.

The regime's cynical exploitation of the Lor and Bakhtiari tribes as a tool to implement the regime's demographic change strategy in Ahwaz is also a typically imperialist tool of division and rule, potentially pitting the Ahwazis peoples against the Lor and Bakhtiari tribes in a civil war in the future over the Ahwazis' homelands.

Regional and international changes and their impact on national issues in Iran

A desire for access to Iran's massive oil and gas reserves, primarily concentrated in Ahwaz, is among the primary reasons for Western nations' continuing disregard for the demands of non-Persian minorities in Iran. Historically, the major oil companies preferred to deal with one strong central government for economic reasons and to maintain Iran as a consumer market, rather than dealing with a number of states.²² For this reason, the Western countries have firmly maintained the need for the continuing territorial integrity of Iran and rejected any break-up of the nation, solely based on economic considerations. The potential for instability and security chaos triggered by any movement towards freedom by its peoples due to the country's geopolitically strategic location leads these nations to oppose any calls to dismantle the country or oust the regime, solely to preserve these nations' own economic interests.

In meetings attended by the author of this study with representatives of the relevant US government bodies, particularly the State Department, we found that the presidents of the United States, whether under Clinton, Bush, or Obama, are opposed to any call by Iran's peoples for autonomy or division of Iran.

During his meetings with the leaders of the European Parliament in Brussels, the author noted that the heads of State of the European Union support the rights

of minorities and their struggles for partial autonomy but will not support any movement for secession or independence from Iran.

Meanwhile, the nations of the region, due to the fear of tensions among their own ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities, are also unwilling to publicly support the rights of the brutally oppressed minorities in Iran.

Conclusions

On the basis of all the above, we believe that the only feasible way to win support for freedom in Iran, which should be a priority of all groups, is for the various groups to unite and prove to the international community that in the event of any change of power in Iran, they can peacefully coexist and that they will quickly and effectively quell any form of instability. At the same time, these groups must offer an alternative to decentralization; that is, through the distribution of power between the center and the various parties to prevent future dictatorial or totalitarian rule in Iran. This would eliminate the dreams of the Jurist Leadership regime in continuing its brutal rule or building a regional Shiite empire no less brutal.

Indeed, the experience of the coexistence of the various peoples in India can be a model for the peoples of Iran, as well as helping to resolve the chronic problems plaguing the nation, helping to put an end to the regional tensions and the regional adventurism of the expansionist Islamic Republic.

In addition, non-Persian peoples should demand a constitutional guarantee to establish a semi-independent, semi-autonomous federal system to address the political, economic, social, and cultural inequalities in Iran and jointly declare their unwillingness to negate this demand since it comes within the framework of measures to ensure the continuity of democracy and peaceful coexistence among all ethnic and religious groups in the country, including the main Persian ethnic group.

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