



Iranian Groups to address 2nd UN Forum on Minority Issues

Utilising UN platforms to promote the effective participation of minorities

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The **Iranian elections** in June 2009 have pushed civilian uprising and protest within Iran onto the front pages worldwide. Most media outlets have failed to notice however that a substantial proportion of the Iranian population had *already* made their political statement before the ballot boxes opened. Many communities boycotted the election process once their preferred candidates were officially excluded or forced to withdraw their candidature.

On **12 and 13 November 2009**, UNPO will facilitate the attendance of five Iranian groups to the **Second Session of the Forum on Minority Issues** - the **Ahwazi-Arabs, the Kurds, the Baloch, the Azeri-Turks and the Lur**. These groups are united by the difficulties they face in their access to adequate representation in domestic political processes and the subsequent challenges of discrimination and marginalisation. The Forum on Minority Issues was established specifically to provide an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Various groups are invited to highlight issues within a thematic framework and contribute to the work of the independent expert on minority issues.

The thematic focus of the upcoming session is “**Minorities and Effective Political Participation.**” In light of a history of repression and exacerbated recently in the aftermath of the election in Iran, representatives from four different groups will identify how their experiences and challenges apply to the general theme. Abdollah Hejab of the **Democratic party of Iranian Kurdistan PDKI** will argue that unelected institutions and bodies with unlimited political power in Iran are ‘an obvious violation of the rights of the people of this multicultural and multiethnic country to be part of a democratic system’ and call for basic structural changes in the political system and the constitution of Iran.

The speakers will offer **constructive recommendations** regarding steps forward for their state, identifying what they believe to be the priorities and strategies for increasing the involvement of minorities in the political system. Monireh Sulemani of the **Balochistan Peoples Party** will suggest that the fundamental challenge is to create a **participatory structure** where minorities enjoy the same rights as the majority group. In support, Karim Abdian of the **Ahwaz Human Rights Organization** is expected to recommend that the Iranian government should ‘put in place a policy of **devolution of power** and establish a local representative Ahwaz government, preferably, constitutionally in a federal system of governance with free and fair elections allowing the involvement of Arab-constituted political parties.’ Dr. Alireza Nazmi Afshar, Director of the **Iranian Turks Studies Center** will stress the need for Iran to have **more than one national language** and campaign for greater autonomy for ethnic groups where all ethnicities have right to introduce their own candidates without government interference. The forum space will allow for contributions to be made applicable to other minority groups. Representatives from these Iranian groups will wear traditional dress as a visible symbol of the diversity of culture, religion, ethnicity, politics and tradition within Iran’s borders.

UNPO will produce a full report which will be made available next week on the achievements of the Forum and comment on the Forum’s recommendations.

For more information please contact the UNPO International Secretariat:

Tel.: +31(0)70 3646504 **Email:** unpo@unpo.org

www.unpo.org