

**REMARKS OF MR. KARIM BANI-SAID, THE HEAD OF AHWAZI ARAB  
DELAGATION TO THE DANISH PARLIALENT DURING THE SYMPOSIUN  
ON ETHNIC NATIONALITES IN IRAN, ON SATURDAY 24 JANUARY 2004 IN  
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK**

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen and distinguished members of the Danish Parliament, good morning and Greetings.

On behalf of the Ahwazi Arab people and the Ahwazi Arab nation in Iran, I would like to express our sincere thanks and deep gratitude to the Danish people, parliament and all political parties that help orgnaize this even. Also our thanks to the members of European Union parliament who are present here.

Thank you for the invitation. We dearly value the opportunity provided to us to bring to you and to the world the plight of our oppressed nation. To show the International Community the sufferings and the national persecution of Ahwazi Arabs under the Islamic Republic of Iran.

We want to share with you our 78 year history of struggle for freedom, democracy and social justice.

Holding this Symposium on the ethnic nationalities in Iran and inviting the Arab and other delegations, is a reflection of political maturity and the respect for human rights.

Our delegation will try to bring to your attention the injustice that is being carried out by this and previous regimes.

Our nation, the Ahwazi Arab nation lives in the Southwestern part of Iran, which, despite the changing of the name in 1925 to Khuzestan by the Iranian regime, the area is still called Ahwaz or Arabistan by the local Arab inhabitants, as it has been called for the past five centuries.

Our area, Al-Ahwaz or Khuzestan is strategically located on the northern tip of the Gulf and the Shatt-al- Arab waterway- Our region contains and sits atop of a vast mineral resources including a reserve of over 40 billion barrels of oil and 210 billion cubic meters of natural gas, which is the second known oil and gas reserves in the world. Our land produces 3-5---5 million barrels of oil per day, or 20% of OPEC' daily production.

The population is estimated to be between 4 and 6 million. The U.S. State Department 2002 Human Rights Report estimates the Ahwazi Arabs in Iran to be over 4 million.

Prior to its annexation in April 20, 1925, Arabistan enjoyed full autonomy and independence at various times in its history of 5,000 years. Arabic was taught and spoken as the official language prior to annexation.

After the emergence of Reza Shah and by enforcing centralization, he invaded Arabistan with 22,000 soldiers, overthrew the local administration, occupied and destroyed Arabistan's sovereignty, and subordinated the province to Iran, all against the wishes of its Arab inhabitants and without their direct involvement or a referendum. The state adopted Farsi (Persian) as the official language, which is spoken by less than 40% of the total population. The government shut down the schools and banned Arabic education in the province where about 90% of the people were native Arabic speakers. The Iranian government officially changed the name of the province from Arabistan to Khuzestan in 1936.

Our Ahwazi Arab people were put under political, cultural, social and economic subjugation by the past Iranian monarchist and the current clerical regimes for the past 78 years. These regimes stripped Arabs of Ahwaz from their human rights and lowered their status to the ranks of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class citizens.

In the past 78 years, our nation endured one of the most brutal national persecution and ethnic cleansing, by the monarchist regimes of Pahlevis and the clerical regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The policies of the Islamic Republic, like its predecessor, are based on the elimination of the national identity of Arabs, and also to some degree, other nationalities such as the Turks, Kurds, Baluchis and Turkmen. The aim is "Persianization" or "Farsization", where everything must be Persian. This policy is based on a supremacist, and a chauvinist ideology, aimed at the elimination of non-Persian cultures, especially the Arabs.

Our people have been subjected to the eradication of our national identity, our culture, language, and customs; and faced with forced assimilation and imposition of Persian language and culture on an unprecedented level. Our children are being deprived from the use and study of their mother language and our people are being denied their social and political rights.

While our oil resources is being plundered to fund 90% of Iranian economy, Arabs live in abject poverty and do not share the riches of their land- and no part of this oil-zero%- has been allocated to our area or to our people. A common practice between the previous monarchist and the current clerical regimes.

Our demands for basic human rights, including education in our mother tongue, have often been labeled as "separatist", "secessionist" or called "stooges of foreign countries" or "danger to territorial integrity".

The Islamic republic, which is a signatory of the UN Human Rights declaration, does not abide by its international commitment, nor does it respect its own constitution, which under sections 15 and 19, allows for the use of regional and ethnic languages and cultures.

There exist a cultural and a linguistic apartheid in Iran where a dominant minority rules in every respect of life, political, social, cultural economical etc.

The UN human rights and other international laws are very clear in this regards.

The Islamic Republic government continues the forced resettlement policy to force the Arab population out of Khuzestan by providing economic incentives and enticements to re-settle non- Arab population on the expropriated Arab farmlands. This policy is intended to dilute or de-populate the towns and villages of Khuzestan from Arabs.

This is clearly against the basic tents of UN Human Rights declaration which states "...

According to the Human Rights Watch 2003 LANDMINE MONITOR Report "Millions of Land mines remaining from the Iran-Iraq war in the province of Khuzestan, kills and maims Arab inhabitants of Khuzestan in southwestern Iran every day, especially shepards and children....." H.R.Watch Monitor Reports says "Khuzesatn is the most (landmine) infested area" in Iran according to Colonel Amir Mohamadi, Iranian ground forces second-in command.

Note: The UN donor nations contributed \$1.7 billion to Mine Action from 1992-2002 for the elimination of land mines. The Danish government contributed \$73 million during this period and \$10.7 million in 2002 alone. Iran received a large amount through UNDP. Iranian Government must be accountable to the Danish people's generosity. Iran did not accept a ban on landmines, abstained from voting on every mine ban in the UN General Assembly since 1996 and didn't attend any Mine Ban Treaty meetings in 2002 and 2003.

We think the Iranian government deliberately ignores the land-mines problem as it helps its policy of forcing Arabs from their homes and lands.

While the illiteracy rate among the general non-Arab population in Iran is about 30%, this rate among Arab men in Khuzestan is over 60 and among Arab women is even higher.

The number of Arab university students in the University of Chamran in Ahwaz, the provincial capital of Arab Khuzestan, is 2,000 students out of 30,000, or less than 7%, in an area where over 70% are Arabs.

The Arab-populated border cities destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war have largely been untouched, while hundreds of hectares every month in Tehran are being flowered and landscaped for beautifications. Currently, the entire oil revenue flows to Tehran.

The regime dammed and diverted the water of our rivers such as Karun to non-Arab areas, and it is planning to pipe and sell the waters of Karkheh river that passes through 100% Arab areas of Howizeh and Boustan, to Kuwait- and other Gulf countries- while Khuzestan severely suffers from shortage of drinking waters.

The regime does not permit any genuine Arabic newspapers and media in Khuzestan.

Now, as in the previous regime, governor general of Khuzestan, all other province's political, military and security commanders and 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.

Often, the Iranian government authorities in the Khuzestan refuse to register and issue birth identity cards to Arab newborn-babies, who do not assume Persian or Shiite names.

Names of cities, towns, villages, rivers and other geographical landmarks were changed from Arabic to Persian during the previous Pahlavi regimes. These historical Arabic names existed for centuries. The regime refuses to consent to the Ahwazi Arabs' request to change the names of these landmarks back to their historical Arabic names.

This regime, like the previous one in Iran, prevents any public mention of the Ahwazi Arab minority population. It has imposed a silence and news blockades in the national and international media against the existence of Arabs in Iran.

Iranian government in the past 2 years has intensified its campaign of repression against Arab freedom fighters, human rights and political activists and students in Khuzestan. It has executed many and imprisoned thousands of Arabs. In the last 18 months, it executed Fadhil Muqaddam, Rahim Sawari, Amir Sa'idi, Hashem Bawi and Abbas Sherhani. During the past six months, security forces arrested and imprisoned Mr. Kazem Mojadam, the deputy chairman of "Islamic Wafagh Party" in the provincial city of Ahwaz, and arrested members of the "Arab House" in Tehran. Although "Islamic Wafagh" is a legal grassroots party officially registered in Iran. "Arab House" is also a legal social-cultural club and a gathering place for Ahwazi and Khuzestani Arabs living in Tehran.

The regime refuses to release thousands of Arab political prisoners many whom have been in prison for over 20 years, and some are old, ill, frail and over 70 years old. We submit a list of these political prisoners in the Karun prison in Ahwaz to the parliament here.

A systematic campaign of hatreds and misrepresentation of Arabs in the media in Iran- is a common denominator of the previous and the current regime.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Global changes, coupled with the advent of the Internet, and revolution in telecommunications, and emergence of satellite media, brought about a tremendous socio-political reawakening of the Arabs as well as other national and ethnic groups in Iran; and this phenomenon is irreversible.

Guiding, leading and the directing this national awakening and the associated energy, will depend upon the treatments and the response of the dominant regime in Tehran to the legitimate demands of Arabs and other oppressed nationalities; and also, by the degree of sensitivity of the International community vis-a-vi, the struggles for the rights of self determination of these nationalities in Iran.

All members of our delegation, representing a wide cross section of the Ahwazi Arab society, and indeed, the majority of our movement, believe in non-violence and employment of civic means of struggle. We fully adhere to the universal declarations of human rights and all related international laws and protocols.

We are against and reject all forms of terrorism and violence. We struggle for the establishments of a civil society and strengthening the principles of democratic values. We will pursue peaceful resistance, as means and methods of realizing our goals.

Ladies and gentlemen, Iran as a diverse and multinational state is comprised of six major nationalities including Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, Persians, Turks and Turkmen and smaller groups of other ethnic/linguistic and tribal groups.

The 68 million population is roughly 1/3 Turks, 1/3 Persian and 1/3 Kurds, Arabs, Baloch, Turkmen and others. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of all of these nationalities to decide with equal voice the future of Iran and solve the chronic internal crisis brought about by successive monarchist and clerical dictatorships. The future of Iran as a modern and a progressive state, and a good member of the International community, could be guaranteed only through a voluntary association of all national groups constituting Iran; where they will have the opportunity to develop

their respective cultures, languages, histories, economies and homelands, under an appropriate system of political governance, federal, confederal or an equally appropriate system that guarantees and respects the rights of self determination.

We Arabs of Ahwaz, desire coexistence with all nationalities in Iran. We advocate a best system of governance that enables and facilitate democracy and social justice. We do not believe in the imposition of one dominant nationality at the expense of others.

The struggle of Ahwazi Arabs is part of a larger democratic struggle that is happening throughout Iran.

In summery, specific demands of the Ahwazi Arabs of Iran are partially as follows:

- Education and study in the mother tongue.
- Participation and sharing of economic wealth and resources.
- Allocation of some of oil revenues toward the development and progress in Khuzestan.
- Expeditious de-mining of Arab inhabited border areas remaining from the eight year Iran-Iraq war.
- Repair or rebuilding of Arab towns and villages in Khuzestan that were destroyed during the Iran-Iraq War.
- Allow the Arab war refugees to return to their homes in Ahwaz, Abadan, Muhamara (khuramshare) and other cities.
- Allow formation of civil society elements in Khuzestan such as labor unions, formation of Arab political and cultural centers.
- We demand the return of lands or equitable compensation to Arab landowners whose property was forcefully expropriated by the Iranian government.
- We demand safeguarding of the area ecology, and cleaning the drinking water poisoned by run-offs from the “Sugar Cane” project. We demand that the government must stop the proliferation of drugs among Arab youth and combating corruption.
- Release all Arabs and other political prisoners.
- We demand that the Iranian regime reaffirms its commitments and honor its international obligation to protect the human rights of all citizens in accordance with the U.N. and U.E. human rights accords.
- we demand the presence of international lawyers in all political trials against our people especially those charged with so called separatism

Ladies and gentlemen; Dear members of the parliament:

Our delegation represents the widest cross sections of political, cultural and civic organizations and individuals, including the Democratic Solidarity Party of Ahwaz, American and European chapters of Ahwaz Human Rights Organizations, Ahwazi Arabs for Freedom and Democracy, Ahwaz Studies Center in New York, Ahwazi Arab cultural associations in Germany, UK, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, We urge you to help us stop the annihilation of a nation as big as Denmark,

Help us to stop the execution of our people under the guise of “separatists’ and similar bogus charges.

We promise you that we will tirelessly pursue our goals and objectives for human rights and democracy and the rights of self determination in a peaceful, civil, and nonviolent way.

One more time, we thank you very much for your efforts and applaud your concern for human rights and human dignity.