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Information on Ahwaz Arabs; their treatment by State and non-State agents

In February 2014 the *United States Department of State* reported that there are an estimated two million Ahwazi Arabs in Iran.¹ In July 2014 Minority Rights Group International stated that Arabs constitute 2% of Iran's population of approximately 76 million people.² In March 2013 the *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*³ reported that Ahwaz Arabs are negatively affected by government policies used to "destabilise the community,"

"The Ahwazi Arabs are an indigenous people of the Al-Ahwaz province, also known

¹ United States Department of State, *2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Iran*, 27 February 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53284ac9b.html>, accessed 11 December 2014

² Minority Rights Group International, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Iran : Overview*, July 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce53c.html>, accessed 12 December 2014

³ The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) is an international, nonviolent, and democratic membership organisation. Its members are indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognised or occupied territories who have joined together to protect and promote their human and cultural rights, to preserve their environments, and to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts which affect them. For further information see: <http://unpo.org/section/2>

as Khuzestan or Arabistan. An autonomous emirate in the past, the region has experienced on-and-off recognition of autonomy and independence. One of their main issues of concern has to do with the government policies used to destabilize the community and change the ethnic composition of the region. Practices such as cultural repression, land grabbing and forced migration have been a constant source of fear in the region. Ahwazi Arabs have also found themselves marginalized by discriminatory practices such as 'gozinesh' and removed from decision making regarding natural resources on their ancestral land, which is rich in oil reserves."⁴

In May 2013 the *UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* expressed concern at the environmental impact of farming and industrial pollution in Khuzestan province and the negative impact on the rights of Ahwazi Arabs,

"The Committee is concerned about the adverse environmental effects of the river diversion programme, sugar-cane farming and industrial pollution in Khuzestan province and the negative impact this has on the enjoyment by Ahwazi Arabs of their rights to an adequate standard of living and health."⁵

In May 2013 the *UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* expressed concern at the high drop-out rates of Arab children and high illiteracy rates among Ahwazi Arabs,

The Committee is concerned about: (a) the high drop-out rates of girls in rural schools upon reaching puberty and of indigenous Arab children; (b) the high illiteracy rates among Ahwazi Arabs as well as Azeris"⁶

In January 2014 *Amnesty International* urged the Iranian government to end human rights violations against Iran's Ahwazi Arab minority,

"President Rouhani's first official visit to Khuzestan province must signal a clear policy shift in Iran's treatment of ethnic and religious minorities rather than be a mere measure of appeasement while human rights violations against the Ahwazi

⁴ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, Alternative Report submitted to the UN Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the consideration of the Second Report of Iran during the 50th session, March 2013, <http://unpo.org/downloads/618.pdf>, accessed 27 October 2014

⁵ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the 2nd periodic report of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted by the Committee at its 50th session, 29 April-17 May 2013 : Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 10 June 2013, E/C.12/IRN/CO/2, Paras 26-27,

⁶ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the 2nd periodic report of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted by the Committee at its 50th session, 29 April-17 May 2013 : Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 10 June 2013, E/C.12/IRN/CO/2, Paras 26-27, <http://www.refworld.org/country,,CESCR,,IRN,,52d547e54,0.html>, accessed 26 October 2014

Arabs and other minorities in Iran continue unabated, warned Amnesty International.⁷

In January 2014 *Amnesty International* expressed its concern that despite the President's commitments to no toleration of ethnic discrimination and constitutional safeguards, Arabs *inter alia* are subject to discriminatory laws and practices,

“The organization welcomes President Rouhani's speech in Khuzestan on 15 January 2014 in which he stated that discrimination against ethnic communities must not be tolerated. The organization, however, remains gravely concerned that despite constitutional guarantees of equality, members of religious and ethnic minorities, including Arabs, are subject to discriminatory laws and practices such as undue restrictions on social, cultural, linguistic and religious rights. For instance, minority communities often have restricted access to economic, social and cultural rights such as housing, water and sanitation, and face measures such as land and property confiscation and denial of state and para-statal employment under discriminatory selection criteria.”⁸

In January 2014 *Amnesty International* reported it has documented numerous cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment, grossly unfair trials of political prisoners, and use of the death penalty which disproportionately affects minorities, as well as restrictions on movement experienced by members of the Ahwazi Arab minority.⁹

Amnesty International further reported,

“Iranian authorities have become increasingly suspicious of Ahwazi Arabs following the unrest that broke out in 2005 in the province of Khuzestan in protest at an alleged plan by the government to disperse the Arab population or to force them to relinquish their Arab identity. In 2011, the authorities arrested and detained scores, if not hundreds, of Ahwazi Arabs in relation to the demonstrations organized to mark the sixth anniversary of the 2005 protests. Many of those arrested were allegedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated and subsequently sentenced in unfair trials.”¹⁰

⁷ Amnesty International, Public Statement: Iran: End Human Rights Violations Against Iran's Ahwazi Arab Minority, 16 January 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/005/2014/en/41f45df2-0d84-463e-a99e-e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html>, accessed 27 October 2014

⁸ Amnesty International, Public Statement: Iran: End Human Rights Violations Against Iran's Ahwazi Arab Minority, 16 January 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/005/2014/en/41f45df2-0d84-463e-a99e-e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html>, accessed 27 October 2014

⁹ Amnesty International, Public Statement: Iran: End Human Rights Violations Against Iran's Ahwazi Arab Minority, 16 January 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/005/2014/en/41f45df2-0d84-463e-a99e-e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html>, accessed 27 October 2014

¹⁰ Amnesty International, Public Statement: Iran: End Human Rights Violations Against Iran's Ahwazi Arab Minority, 16 January 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/005/2014/en/41f45df2-0d84-463e-a99e-e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html>

In January 2014 *Amnesty International* reported the cases of five death row prisoners, all Ahwazi Arabs,

“Of particular concern to Amnesty International are the cases of death row prisoners, Hadi Rashedi, Hashem Sha’bani Amouri, Mohammad Ali Amouri, Sayed Jaber Alboshoka and his brother Sayed Mokhtar Alboshoka, all members of the Ahwazi Arab minority. All five men were arrested at their homes in early 2011, ahead of the sixth anniversary of the 2005 protests, apparently in connection with their cultural activities, such as organizing events in the Arabic language, conferences, educational courses, art classes, and poetry recital gatherings. They were sentenced to death on 7 July 2012 by a Revolutionary Court, after being convicted of charges including “enmity against God”, “corruption on earth”, “gathering and colluding against state security” and “spreading propaganda against the system”. Prior to their trial, Hadi Rashedi and Hashem Sha’bani Amouri were shown “confessing” on a state television channel, in violation of international standards for fair trial. Their death sentences were upheld by the Supreme Court in January 2013.”¹¹

In January 2014 the *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center* reported on the execution of Hadi Rashedi and Hashem Sha’baninejad,

“The Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC) has learned further details concerning the executions of two Ahwazi Arab prisoners, Hadi Rashedi and Hashem Sha’baninejad, in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). On Wednesday, January 29, reports emerged that Mr. Rashedi and Mr. Sha’baninejad—two of five members of al-Hiwar, an Ahwazi Arab cultural organization, who were sentenced to death in July 2012—were executed. IHRDC has since learned that IRI authorities executed the two men without notifying their attorneys or their families.

According to an IHRDC source, intelligence officials called the homes of these two individuals on January 29 and informed their families that they have been executed. The second branch of the Ahvaz Islamic Revolutionary Court had sentenced them to death on charges of muharibih (or “waging war on God”), sowing corruption on earth, propaganda against the Islamic Republic and acting against national security. Mr. Rashedi and Mr. Sha’baninejad were teachers from the town of Ramshir in

[e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/005/2014/en/41f45df2-0d84-463e-a99e-e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html), accessed 27 October 2014

¹¹ Amnesty International, Public Statement: Iran: End Human Rights Violations Against Iran’s Ahwazi Arab Minority, 16 January 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/005/2014/en/41f45df2-0d84-463e-a99e-e093175868f8/mde130052014en.html>, accessed 27 October 2014

Khuzestan Province.”¹²

In February 2014 *Al Jazeera* further reported the execution Hadi Rashedi and Hashem Sha’baninejad,

“An Arab-Iranian poet and human rights activist, Hashem Shaabani, has been executed for being an "enemy of God" and threatening national security, according to local human rights groups.

Shaabani and a man named Hadi Rashedi were hanged in unidentified prison on January 27, rights groups have said.

Shaabani, who spoke out against the treatment of ethnic Arabs in the province of Khuzestan, had been in prison since February or March 2011 after being arrested for being a Mohareb, or "enemy of God".”¹³

In May 2014 *Amnesty International* called for the halt of the hanging of two Ahwazi Arab men, on the charge of “enmity against God,

“The planned execution, on 22 May, of two members of the Ahwazi Arab minority who were forced to “confess” on TV and are being held in an unknown location is an absolute mockery of justice which must be stopped immediately, Amnesty International said.¹⁴

Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi were sentenced to death on 9 September 2013 by a Revolutionary Court in Ahvaz on the charge of “enmity against God” (moharebeh). They were forced to “confess” on TV in relation to the explosion of a natural gas pipeline close to their native village.

“The harrowing stories of Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi show how justice in Iran is seriously flawed. People are routinely forced to ‘confess’ to crimes they didn’t commit and face deeply unfair trials before being marched to the gallows,” said Hassiba Hadj-Sahraoui, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

“The Iranian authorities are violating every rule in the book, including failing to give

¹² Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, RI Executes Two Ahwazi Arab Men, 31 January 2014, <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/press-statements/1000000428-iri-executes-two-ahwazi-arab-men.html#.Uvfg8WLVjms>, accessed 27 October 2014

¹³ Al Jazeera, Iranian poet executed for 'waging war on God', 10 February 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/02/iranian-poet-executed-waging-war-god-201421043119959262.html>, accessed 27 October 2014

¹⁴ Amnesty International, Iran must halt hanging of Ahwazi Arab men after forced TV ‘confessions’, 21 May 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iran-must-halt-hanging-ahwazi-arab-men-after-forced-tv-confessions-2014-05-21>, accessed 27 October 2014

defendants a fair trial, presume their innocence or even share with them the verdict sentencing them to death. These executions must be halted.”¹⁵

In May 2014 *Amnesty International* reported the two men were arrested without a warrant and were held in solitary confinement with no access to the external world for seven months. In May 2014 *Amnesty International* further reported that the men were told if they agreed to confess, the authorities would consider reducing their punishments,

“Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi were arrested in November 2012 without an arrest warrant. They were held in solitary confinement in a Ministry of Intelligence detention centre with no access to the external world for over seven months. They are believed to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated. In court, the two men denied all the charges brought against them and their allegations of torture or other ill-treatment are not known to have been investigated.

In mid-2013, Ministry of Intelligence officials told the men’s families that they could meet with the detainees in a mosque in the village of Jarieh. When they arrived, they were told that if they agreed to be filmed while watching their relatives’ recorded “confessions”, the authorities would consider reducing their punishments.

Footage showing Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi “confessing” to their role in the explosion of a natural gas pipeline close to their native village was aired on Iran’s state-controlled Press TV and Channel 3 of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting in November 2013.

Their “confession” was used despite the fact that the director of the state-owned Khuzestan Gas Company had described the explosion as an accident.¹⁶

In May 2014 *Amnesty International* reported that in March 2014 that the men, who are cultural rights activists, were taken to an unknown location, without access to a lawyer or their families, and held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance,

“In March 2014 officers of the Ministry of Intelligence took the two men to an unknown location, away from lawyers and their families, where they would be held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance.

Their families had no information about Ali Chebieshat and Sayed Khaled

¹⁵ Amnesty International, Iran must halt hanging of Ahwazi Arab men after forced TV ‘confessions’, 21 May 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iran-must-halt-hanging-ahwazi-arab-men-after-forced-tv-confessions-2014-05-21>, accessed 27 October 2014

¹⁶ Amnesty International, Iran must halt hanging of Ahwazi Arab men after forced TV ‘confessions,’ 21 May 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iran-must-halt-hanging-ahwazi-arab-men-after-forced-tv-confessions-2014-05-21>, accessed 4 November 2014

Mousawi's whereabouts until they received information that the Supreme Court had upheld the men's death sentences and scheduled their execution.

Although under Iranian law lawyers must receive 48 hours' notice of their client's execution, the two men have not been permitted to have any contact with the outside world since March 2014 and their lawyer's request for information has been denied.

Ali Chebeshat and Sayed Khaled Mousawi are cultural rights activists who advocated for cultural and linguistic rights of Ahwazi Arabs, one of Iran's many minorities who live mainly in the oil-rich south-western province of Khuzestan. Ahwazis are commonly marginalized and discriminated against in access to education, employment, adequate housing political participation and cultural rights."¹⁷

In 2010, the *International Federation for Human Rights* reported that over a million Ahwazi Arabs live in poor conditions in shanty towns,

"Regional minorities experience disproportionately poor housing and living conditions in Iran. Over a million Ahwazi Arabs in Khuzestan live in shanty towns which are cut off from non-Arab settlements with separation walls. These areas lack everyday necessities such as plumbing, electricity, telephone, pavements, street lighting, public transport, sewage systems, schools, clinics, hospitals, shops, and parks. Adding to this, according to the International Federation for Human rights, over 15,000 Ahwazi Arabs have been displaced because their lands have not been properly demined."¹⁸

In September 2013 *Minority Rights Group International* reported that dozens of Ahwazi Arabs have been detained, tortured and executed since demonstrations broke out in April 2011,

"Dozens of Ahwazi Arabs have been detained, tortured and executed since demonstrations broke out in Khuzestan province in April 2011. The year began with security round-ups in the region, leading to the arrest of at least 65 people. Twenty-seven Ahwazi Arab residents of Shush in Khuzestan were arrested because of their alleged involvement in a campaign to boycott the March parliamentary elections and expressing support for the 'Arab Spring'. In June four Ahwazi Arabs, including three brothers, were executed on charges of 'enmity against God', after having been accused of killing a law enforcement official. Family members disputed the charges.

¹⁷ Amnesty International, Iran must halt hanging of Ahwazi Arab men after forced TV 'confessions', 21 May 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iran-must-halt-hanging-ahwazi-arab-men-after-forced-tv-confessions-2014-05-21>, accessed 27 October 2014

¹⁸ International Federation for Human rights. The Hidden Side of Iran: Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, 2010, <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/IrandiscrimLDDHI545a.pdf>, accessed 27 October 2014

They had been arrested during demonstrations in the province of Khuzestan. In July 2012, five Ahwazi Arabs were sentenced to death and a sixth received a 20-year prison sentence. International human rights groups contested the charges and argued that they were arrested because of their connection to demonstrations in February and March 2011 ahead of the sixth anniversary of protests by Ahwazi Arabs in 2005 calling for a better life for their people. According to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), a total of nine Ahwazi Arabs were awaiting execution by October, after further capital convictions later in the year.”¹⁹

In February 2012 *Human Rights Watch* reported that Iranian security forces had conducted rounds of arrests targeting Arab residents,

“A local Khuzestan activist told Human Rights Watch that the latest round of arrests in Hamidiyeh began when security forces arrested nine Iranian Arabs on January 10 and four more on January 26 and 30. Most are between ages 20 and 28, and some had previously been detained for participating in demonstrations demanding more rights for Iran’s ethnic Arab minority. At least one has been released on bail, the local activist said, and several others have since been arrested.”²⁰

¹⁹ Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013 - Iran*, 24 September 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/526fb746b.html>, accessed 27 October 2014

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Iran: Arrest Sweeps Target Arab Minority*, 07 February 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/07/iran-arrest-sweeps-target-arab-minority>, accessed 27 October 2014