Thank you for the opportunity: I am here to speak about the Ahwazi-Arab ethnic minority in Iran. Ahwazi-Arabs are an ethnic, national and a linguistic minority in Iran estimated to be 5-7 million who live in South-western Iran in the province of Khuzestan or Ahwaz or Arabistan as called by its native Arab population.

Madam chair, the best practical use and implementation of the declaration would be for the states to at least acknowledge the existence and the identity of its minorities and provide credible statistics on their situations. While the declaration has had some successes in some countries, unfortunately, after 20 years we have not seen any improvements in its implementation by the Islamic Republic of Iran. As you know, Dr. Ahmad Shaheed, special Rapporteur for HR has not been allowed to visit Iran.

Ahwazi-Arab ethnic minority have continued to be viewed with suspicion and hostility by the central government in Tehran. They have been subjected to a sustained program of land confiscation, forced assimilation, ethnic restructuring or *Persianization*, and unemployment at higher rates than the national average.

The Islamic Republic has consistently ignored the demands of non-Persian minority groups, Arabs, Kurds, Baloch, Azeri-Turks and Turkmen to implement Articles 15 and 19 of the Constitution, which guarantee the use of regional languages and a degree of autonomy. Iranian government does not recognize or acknowledge the existence or identity of Ahwazi-Arabs and other minorities as a people, nationality or a community. Any demands for minority protection is considered secessionist.

A positive measure would be to allocate certain job quotas in the areas where minorities live - Arabs are faced with discrimination in the Iranian civil service. The 70% of Arab populations of Khuzestan hold less than 5% of key and important governmental positions. With inadequate political representation, the Ahwazi Arabs are unable to address the injustices faced by their people in the economic, cultural, political and judicial sphere.

Although ancestral Ahwazi-Arab land produces 90% of Iran’s oil resources, its people have been viewed, at best, as an inconvenience, or, at worst, a threat. Oil revenues from the province are largely spent elsewhere. The Iranian government has consistently refused to allocate just 1.5% of oil revenues to Khuzestan, (as requested by the province’s representatives in the Majlis

**Despite the clear stipulation by the declaration on the protection of minorities**, there is strong evidence that the Iranian authorities are orchestrating a policy of land confiscation and forced migration in line with the "ethnic restructuring" program outlined in a top-secret letters written by Sayed Mohammad-Ali Abtahi

The other positive measure to protect the rights of minorities would be for the states to report on the state of education in the areas where minorities live:

Most Arab villages have no schools and lack basic services, according to Mr. Miloon Kothari, the former special rapporteur of adequate housing during his visit to Khuzestan in 2005.

While the illiteracy rate in Iran is reported to be about 10%-18%, it is over 50% among Arab men in Khuzestan and even higher for Ahwazi women. In non-industrial rural areas such as Fallahieh (Shadegan), illiteracy among women is close to 100%. Indigenous Ahwazi students drop out of schools at a rate of 30% at elementary level, 50% at secondary and 70% at high school because they are forced to study the “official language”, Farsi, a language which is not their’s. Ahwazi Arabs are often semi-literate in their native language, but struggle with learning in a language that is foreign to them.

**Access to health care in the minority areas is another positive measure to indicate the seriousness and commitment of the states in implementation of the declaration.** In most Ahwazi-Arab towns in the province – Bostan, Hovazeh and Dashte Azadegan – the local population has little or no access to hospitals or doctors.

According to the *Islamic Republic* newspaper, the Governor of Dashte-Azadegan in Khuzestan declared that his region has the country’s highest incidence of child malnutrition. Dr Balali, director of the Dashte-Azadegan Health Network, claimed that 80% of children in the district suffered from malnutrition.¹

Karoon River, the largest river in Iran that flows through Ahwazi lands have been diverted to central Persian provinces of Isfahan, Rafsanjan, Yazd and Kerman while the province suffer from inadequate drinking water.

**Recommendations:** Allow Dr. Ahmad Shaheed, the special rapporteur for human rights in Iran to visit Iran and especially where Arabs are.