

Marginalisation of the Kurdish Youth

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In essence when assessing the situation of the youth in any country, their development and progress can be measured by the level of access to and the quality of the education system. This is no different in Iran and its Kurdish region.

In the first instance, the cultural and linguistic discriminatory practices hinder the progress of the Kurdish child. Many children attending the first year of school would be hearing Farsi for the first time and prohibition of speaking their mother tongues provides a big obstacle to their learning and developmental abilities from the outset. Second, access to education - even primary education - for those in small or remote villages is very limited. Little children have to travel long distances to attend over populated classes with poor provisions.

Without a doubt, the enforcement or imposition of a language other than the mother tongue or in other words studying in a language other than the mother tongue coupled with the economic, political and other social discriminations that child experiences while growing up have reduced the participation of the Kurds in the national political discourse as has been evident over the last 33 years.

Human Rights Watch summarised the situation eloquently in 2003 when in its report it stated, 'Iran's religious and ethnic minorities remained subject to discrimination and persecution. Representatives of the predominantly Sunni Muslim Kurdish minority protested the appointment of a new governor of Kurdistan province from the Shi'a majority. The authorities overlooked Sunni candidates for the post put forward by Kurdish parliamentarians. The lack of public school education in Kurdish language remained a perennial source of Kurdish frustration.'⁴²

Furthermore, the approach to the region is one of security. The instability and security concerns colour economic development or investment both by the state and the private investor creating high unemployment rates – second to that of Baluchistan – and lack of opportunities for the young Kurd. The main problem in the region is one of politics. In other words, segregating Iran and Iranians in erroneous policies has created national divisions. The Kurds have always been active in their efforts to secure equal rights and this has been met with bloodshed and violence by the Islamic regime. The fatwa against the Kurds issued by Ayatollah Khomeini on 19 August 1979⁴³ and the murder of many at the hands of Sepah Pasdaran and Khalkhali, the Revolutionary Judge. In elections, the Kurds have either supported candidates who were not favoured by the regime or showed low turnout. They see little or no point in engaging with a system that only discriminates against them.

In a statement, Komala, a Kurdish dissident group, says, 'we have witnessed in recent years, a new growth and formation of political and cultural consciousness among the Kurdish people all over Kurdistan. A broad section of the youth, who are fed up with the repression of their national rights, the growing problems of mass poverty and unemployment, have started a new political dynamics in Iranian Kurdistan. Young people, who do not see any future for themselves under the tyranny and military occupation in Iranian Kurdistan, are considering more and more the necessity of organizing resistance against the Islamic Republic. Thus, we are witnessing a changing balance in the relationship of the forces in Iranian Kurdistan. These changes have manifested themselves in dozens of popular uprisings in Kurdish cities and towns in the last few years.'⁴⁴

⁴² Human Rights Watch World Report 2003, p. 446

⁴³ On 27 Mordad 1358/19 August 1979 Khomeini issued a fatwa ordering the military to dispatch its forces to Paveh, a central Kurdish city, and use whatever military means to end the clashes. The fatwa was announced through national radio and television as well as published in various newspapers, including page 2 of Kayhan Nr. 10784 on Saturday 27 Mordad 1358.

⁴⁴ The 30 July 2010 statement is available on-line at: <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/48533954/THE-KURDS-IN-IRAN>

In 2003, with the so-called 'liberation' of Iraq by the Coalition forces the Kurds are seen as a major threat for the Islamic Republic. In Iran both in April and June 2005 the celebrating crowds were met with violence, arrests and detentions. They had gathered to celebrate the success of Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, as the first elected president of free Iraq and Massoud Barazani of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq heading the autonomous government in the Iraqi Kurdistan. This has given further reason for increasing the already heavy military presence and the presence of numerous parallel security forces each with their own agenda and acting extra-judicially.

The threat of the Kurds forcing the disintegration of Iran is an unfair and unjust excuse for withholding investment and development opportunities from the region. None of the Kurdish political groups advocate separating from Iran and in fact have repeatedly stated that they look for a solution in a democratic, representative and decentralised Iran where all Iranians can benefit from the country's vast resources equally and equitably. The reason for the disenfranchisement and marginalisation of the Kurdish youth must be sought in the systematic discrimination and unjust policies of the regime.

Coupled with high unemployment, economic hardship and failure to provide real solutions, this is another reason why voter participation remains low in Kurdish regions. Following the June 2009 presidential elections it is no surprise that the 'Green Movement' failed to capture the popular imagination in Kurdish regions, since Green or not, so long as the present system is in power the youth of the region see no hope of change for the future. The developments in the Green Movement during the last three years, and the fact that the movement is no longer in the monopoly of those who support the present regime and argue over the presidency is interesting. It is noteworthy that the self-appointed self-exiled representatives of Moussavi and Karoubi (defeated presidential candidates presently under house arrest in Iran) have not been able to centralise the Green Movement under their leadership, despite benefiting from the support of certain groups outside Iran. This demonstrates that the Green Movement neither provides a cohesive and united voice for change in Iran nor does it speak for the marginalised youth of Iran's diverse make up. The Green Movement that some young Iranian Kurdish activists support has very different aims and objectives.

If cultural, social and economic rights of the Kurds are observed, without a doubt civil and political participation in the national discourse would follow. Sadly, under the present policies the few who have participated nationally are paying the price behind bars.