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Non-Citizenship Persian Racism Towards Ahvaz Arabs

Ahvaz Arabism is one of the key files that indicate Iranian regime's racism, whether in the era of the Shah or the era of the Supreme Leader towards the Arabs, in general, and the Arab minority in Iran, represented by Arabs of Ahvaz, in particular.

In 1925, Iran seized Ahvaz in a treacherous operation and exiled its Emir, Sheikh Khazal, to Tehran and there are stories that he was secretly killed in his exile. Not only Iran's Shahanism has annexed Ahvaz thereto, but it also sought to obliterate Arab identity of that region. Perhaps the clearest example to that was replacing Arabic names with Persian ones, which is one of the methods of cultural racism, the most important of which is Iranian authorities' changing the historical Arabic name of the region, "Ahvaz", into a Persian name "Khuzestan", in addition to replacing the Arabic names of cities with Persian names, thus imposing the Persian language on that Arab region.

The truth is that Iran seized this Arab region, not only to relieve its anger from the Arab conquest of Persia and hundreds of years of Arab rule, but also for the richness of this region and its economic importance. It is known that most of Iran's oil, which is the backbone of its economy, comes from Ahvaz region. Also, the most important oil refinery and port for exporting oil in Iran is the port of Abadan, which is one of the main regions of Ahvaz. This is sheerly evident in the famous saying of Iranian President Khatami: "Iran lives in Khuzestan", referring to the contribution of Ahvaz oil to the backbone of the Iranian economy.

However, Iranian authorities did not return the favor of Ahvaz people and pursued policies that aimed at impoverishing, humiliating and even starving that Arab people; for example, by diverting the waters of Ahvaz rivers to serve Persian cities, which led to a state of water poverty in Ahvaz region, which prompted many protests by the people of Ahvaz, the most recent and important of which happened in 2021, in response to unjust Iranian water policies.

Iranian authorities have also resorted to a policy of divide and rule, in addition to igniting division among ethnic minorities in Iran. Tehran authorities took advantage of the geographical proximity of tBakhtiari tribes to Ahvaz to carry out an ethnic cleansing process and to replace the population by transferring many Bakhtiaris to Ahvaz. This was reflected in the political representation of Ahvaz region in Iranian administration and councils, where they appointed a Bakhtiar chief to run the SAVAK, which is the secret security service in Ahvaz, in order to suppress any reaction on the part of Ahvaz people. They also installed a Bakhtiari person at the head of the Abadan Municipal Council and a Bakhtiari delegate was elected to the city in the Parliament, despite the fact that majority of Abadan are Arabs.

As a matter of fact, Ahvaz Arabs rejected the racist Persian rule from the beginning and expressed that rejection in many ways. Perhaps the most important of these attempts was in 1956, i.e., during the reign of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, when Ahvaz Arabs formed Ahvaz Liberation Front "Arabistan". Sources indicate that SAVAK cooperated with the Israeli Mossad to face that front. Unfortunately, that cooperation resulted in revealing the names of the front's leaders and they were murdered in cold blood.

When the popular Iranian revolution took place against the Shah in 1979, and before Khomeini movement jumped thereon, Ahvaz Arabs participated in the revolution against the Shah, hoping for independence and the right to self-determination, or even to obtain autonomy. However, the Arabs were subjected to the famous and painful Muhammarah by Persian elements, so as to eliminate any chance of deciding the fate of Ahvaz.

At that point, the struggle of Ahvaz Arabs renewed against the rule of the unjust Murshid, who destroyed the hopes of Ahvaz people and their right to self-determination, in addition to the continuation of the racial discrimination policies and the impoverishment of Ahvaz people. One of the key Arab uprisings took place in 2005 and spread throughout Ahvaz, rejecting the policies of displacing and expelling many Arab elements from the region and replacing them with Persian elements.

In 2012, Amnesty International monitored the exposure of some Ahvaz persons to unfair trials that did not comply with the rules of law and the Declaration of Human Rights. The unjust accusation against them was their work for "Ahvaz Arab minority", as mentioned in the Amnesty International report. The report indicates that Iranian authorities have leveled many unfair charges against these Arabs, such as: "enmity to God and corruption on earth", which were serious charges punishable by death.

In May 2022, protests escalated in Ahvaz against Tehran's policies of impoverishing the region and against the rise in prices. People's voices raised in response to the deteriorating economic situation, with the plundering of the economic wealth of Ahvaz in favor of Tehran. In June of the same year, protests took place in Abadan following the collapse of a ten-storey building, killing and injuring many persons, and voices raised about corruption, non-compliance with building safety rules and sacrificing the souls of Ahvaz residents. The Iranian Murshid responded, as usual, to these protests by saying that they are motivated by the West and that there are Western hands behind it.

The latest report issued in 2022 by Amnesty International on freedoms and the situation of minorities is one of the most important slaps on the face of the Iranian regime in this regard, stating that "People belonging to ethnic minorities, such as Ahvaz Arabs and others, have been subjected to unfair discrimination that limits their opportunities for education, work and political office. Despite repeated calls for linguistic diversity, the Persian language has remained the only language for learning at the primary and secondary levels".

This is the case of the Ahvaz Arabs under Persian domination, whether it was Shahani or Khomeini.