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**THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO
PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN
OCCUPATION**

**Written statement submitted* by Transnational Radical Party,
a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2005]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Over 4.5 million indigenous Ahwazi Arab people live in the territory known as al-Ahwaz or Khuzestan in present-day Islamic Republic of Iran. Prior to its annexation by Iran in 1925, al-Ahwaz used to be an autonomous, and at times, independent territory, inhabited entirely by indigenous Ahwazi Arab tribes. The AHWAZIS believe that the exercise of their right of self-determination would provide them with a suitable means of conflict resolution for the ongoing conflict with the Iranian government. The prospect of the full enjoyment of this right could provide the basis for negotiations and dialogue. For the past 500 years, the region was called Arabistan by Persian rulers (signifying the territory's Arab character). The central government changed the territory's name to Khuzestan in 1936. Currently, Al-Ahwaz or Khuzestan is an area of 69,000 sq kilometres, which lies between South western Iran, bordering also Iraq, Kuwait and the Gulf.

Iran has declared the area a military zone, no international observers, including media, are allowed in the region. The Iranian Government has also tried to close down Al-Jazeera offices in Tehran for reporting on the Ahwazi situation in January 2005. In recent years, Iran has intensified the militarization of the Al-Ahwaz area. According to a Human Rights Watch Report, "Millions of landmines remaining from the Iran-Iraq war in the province of Khuzestan kill and maim indigenous inhabitants of Khuzestan in south-western Iran every day".

The overwhelming majority number of Ahwazis believe in non-violence and in the use of civic means to establish a civil society based on the rule of law and to foster democratic principles and values. However, frustration of the poor and desperate Ahwaz youth is being viewed as the cause of the current violence in Khuzestan, including the destruction of oil installations. Iran, on the other hand, refuses to release thousands of Ahwazi political prisoners, many of whom have been incarcerated for more than 20 years. Among the most known Ahwazi prisoners who faced execution in recent times were: Bornas Sojirat, Aziz Ma'toog, Mohammad Shafigh, Abdolreza Saa'edi and Abhas Jamousi.

The Ahwazis have been subjected to the eradication of their national identity, culture, language, and customs; and are faced with forced assimilation and imposition of Persian language and culture. The Ahwazi children are being deprived of the use and study of their language. Ahwazis cannot wear their national and ethnic dresses and costumes in official centres. Therefore, a dominant Persian minority influences in every respect of life, political, social, cultural and economical of the Ahwazis. As such the legitimate demands of self determination of the Ahwazi people are often labelled as "separatist", "secessionist" or called "stooges of foreign countries" or "danger to security and territorial integrity".

The people of al-Ahwaz believe that the future of Iran as a modern and a progressive state, and a responsible member of the International community, could be guaranteed only through a voluntary association of all national groups constituting Iran; where they will have the legitimate opportunity to develop their respective cultures, languages, histories, economies, under an appropriate manifestation of self-determination and a system of good governance. The Ahwazis have often stated their desire to live in coexistence with all groups in present-day Iran and have advocated the realisation of a genuine democratic reform process to guarantee a form of the right of self-determination that ensures democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Indigenous Ahwazis have been brutalized and deliberately kept backward by the successive regimes of Iran. While their land accounts for over 80% of Iranian oil production, they benefit no revenue in return with half of Ahwazi people in absolute poverty and 80% of Ahwazi children suffering from malnutrition.
