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Drug Addiction as a Human Right Issue in Iran

Advocacy and Mobilization of NGOs and Media in Kurdistan of Iran

Submitted by

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the drug policies of Iran and their effects on the Iranian religious minorities and ethnic nationalities, especially the Kurds. It sets out that a large percentage of death sentences carried out in Iran are of Kurdish persons accused of drug offenses. This dissertation provides some historical perspectives and shows that this situation is a product of the current drug-related policies of the Iranian government of Iran. It posits that the international community, by supporting the official anti-drug efforts in Iran, is actually fostering anti-Kurd measures, including the death sentences of addicts making more harm than 'good'. In describing advocacy initiatives from Iranian and Kurdish NGOs, as well as media mobilization, it shows that activists in and abroad the country are subjected to onerous conditions, severely hampering their ability to both address the drug issues and provide humanitarian assistance to the addicts. It also describes many initiatives undertaken at the national and the international level by individual advocates and advocacy groups to denounce these practices and pressure the regime for changes. It concludes with a call to expose publically this situation, urges for effective measures to help the addicts and the affected minorities, and to end the oppressive drug policies of the Iranian regime.

Key words:

Kurdistan, Iran, minorities, drug, drug addiction, human rights, humanitarian, advocacy, media, NGO

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Acronyms

AI	Amnesty International
AHL	Association of Humanitarian Lawyers
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DCHQ	Drug Control Headquarters
HRC	Human Rights Council
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HRI	Harm Reduction International
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IED	International Educational Development, Inc
INGOs	International non-governmental organizations
KHRO	Kurdistan Human Rights Organization
KMMK-G	Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva
MP	Member of Parliament
MRAP	Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitiés entre les Peuples
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations Peoples Organization

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Introduction

Iran is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country composed mainly of Persians, Kurds, Baluchis, Azerbaijanis, Turkmen and Ahwazi-Arabs (UNPO 2012)¹. However only the Persian-Shiite group holds State power and Article 1 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (here after Iran) declares the Twelver *Shi'a* School of Islam as the formal religion of the State (Nayyeri 2012, 2). The current government maintains the policies of past governments and adheres to a system of governance based on the ideology of one country, one nation, one language and one religion. Both these elements perpetuate systemic discrimination against and repression of all ethnic nationalities and religious minorities in the country. Governmental participation by members of ethnic nationalities or religious minorities such as Kurds, Sunni Baluchs, or Baha'is, is severely restricted and are obstructed from assuming the presidency or occupy any significant governmental position. These restrictions also apply to women, regardless of ethnicity.

As a result of the new government repressive policies and a conflict between the Iranian national army and the Kurdish national movements who fight for the recognition of the Kurdish identity in Kurdistan of Iran, 52'000 Kurdish civilians were killed by government forces in the last three decades (KMMK-G 2013). Moreover, during to eight years Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the Iranian army planted more than twelve millions landmines in Kurdistan that hampers seriously the daily life of Kurdish civilians particularly the farmers, the nomads, the shepherds and traders (Köhli 2008).

In addition to the above elements, the Kurdish people in Iran are facing a humanitarian challenge related to the spread of drug addiction. During the last three decades of the Islamic regime's rule, the phenomenon of drug addiction has spread in Iranian Kurdistan. As stated by Mahdi Badr, an author and expert on drug addicts in Kurdistan: "*The phenomenon of drug addiction affects one out of five families in Kurdistan and is spreading to Kurdish villages that were previously drug-free.*" (Badr 2007, 47).

Arguably, drug addiction in Iran is more of a political nature than a humanitarian one, since much of the humanitarian crisis is the result of political decisions. In this light, it is appropriate to question the extent that the drug addiction is genuinely a humanitarian challenge as well as limits of humanitarian health interventions regarding such repressive

¹ Refer to the appendix 1 to see the map of Iran showing the diverse ethnic groups distribution.

policies. Would it be appropriate for humanitarian actors to support Kurdish population affected by drug addiction? International human rights law and international humanitarian law, despite their differences, share a common ideal “*strive to protect the lives, health and dignity of individuals*” (ICRC 2003). If we compare it to the definition of humanitarian action given by the former president of Doctors Without Borders (MSF), Mr. Rony Brauman, we see that they share a common notion of dignity: “*The Humanitarian action is one that is free of discrimination and aims by peaceful means to preserve life in respect for the dignity, restore the man's ability to choose*” (1995, 9). Life without dignity is mere existence. The principle of dignity in both human rights and humanitarian law is to elevate human beings, recognizing their intellectual capacities. Thus, the principle of dignity is to respect the human beings’ mentation-- that is, the capacity to think and to reason. Accordingly, it’s appropriate for humanitarian actors to assist drug abusers because their dignity has been sorely challenged by their addiction. What is clear however, is that those international humanitarian actors have not been successful in this regard in Iran nor are their efforts been sufficient given the restrictions imposed on them by the Iranian authorities.

Many Iranian Kurdish NGOs and “media²” advocating and promoting the Kurdish cause and human rights in International fora, consider the Iranian policy on drugs, as a repressive instrument against Kurdish people, labeling it as a: “White Genocide” (HRC 2010). For them, drug policies in Kurdistan are a part of other repressive instruments targeted at Kurdish people like land-mining, “Dekurdistanisation³” and language repression. The term “white genocide” is applied to the practice of distribution of addictive drugs such as opium, to the youth in Kurdish provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan. In these regions, the Iranian authorities do not arrest dealers; they rather recruit and provide them with drugs (*Ibid*, 2010, 1-2). According to many Kurdish NGOs, the goal of such practices is twofold: “*keeping the Kurdish youth away from Kurdish political movements and creating a spy system inside the families. Indeed, Ittela’at (the Iranian Intelligence Services) uses this method to obtain information about the active members of Kurdish political and civil movements: it is easier to obtain information from people under addiction – even more when they are provided with drugs*” (*Ibid*, 2010, 2).

² These media refer to Kurdish and international media such as: Hawlati, Kurdpa, Tishktv, BBC, NYT.

³ The term “Dekurdistanisation” refers to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s policy of ignoring economical investment in Kurdistan as a way to push the Kurdish youth to look for job in Persian provinces far away from Kurdistan.

However, rather than defending the term “white genocide”, this thesis will focus on how and why the Kurdish NGOs and the media are using the drug problems to highlight human right abuses in Iran and what methods they and the media have applied to put this issue on the international agenda.

It’s also important to understand why the drug problem is used and framed as it is by Kurdish NGOs. Drug addiction in Kurdistan is perceived as a tragedy for the family and the society and as a State instrument of repression by NGOs and media. The victims of drug addiction have, since 1979, been characterized by the Iranian authority as “deviants”, “criminals”, “danger”, “*significant other to Islamic social order, and as evidence of foreign conspiracies, and as threat to the national security*” (Christensen 2011, 124). According to the Iranian criminal law, possessing five grams of opium is a motive for execution. More than 80% executions and public hangings in Kurdistan are drug-related (HRW 2012).

During President Khatami’s rule (1997-2005), a policy tolerating societal and NGO participation in addressing social and drug issues was permitted. The current president, Mr. Ahmadinezhad, has adopted a much more repressive policy towards NGOs. Under his presidency, NGOs have been deemed as part of foreign enemy’s conspiracy, and have therefore been silenced. Consequently, in Iran and in Kurdistan, many NGOs and newspapers addressing topics of street children, women, human rights and drugs such as: the Kurdistan human rights organizations “Khaneh Sabz”, Khane Shoush” and Khane Reyhane” as well as the “Sirweh” and “the Kurdistan People Message” magazines were shut down (HRW 2012; HRC 2011).

Under the Ahmadinezhad presidency, NGOs are forced either to operate in secret or to adopt new strategies to comply with the new order and official discourse. Thus, NGOs have to adopt a more pragmatic approach using coded language and names to bypass obstacles. In this regard, Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize-winner who set up the Society for protection of Children’s Rights in 1994 and worked inside Iran on human rights for a decade, states: “*In Iran, working with human rights, you are taking a bomb into your hands and walking round the streets with it. I couldn’t really go and start up a human rights NGO, but through children’s rights I believe that you can work for everyone’s rights. Instead of banging my head against a closed door, I’ll become like water and run under the door...*” (Squire 2006). In consequence, examples of NGOs’ “coded” language to offset the official position words such as “NGOs” “gender”, “equity”, “capacity” “building”, “civil society”,

“empowerment” are considered as ‘bad’ words. To cope, NGOs use Iranian and Islamic ‘good’ or accepted words, such as: “*entrepreneur*”, “*micro-credit*”, “*social justice*”, “*poverty*”, “*anti-prostitution*”, “*vulnerable groups*”, “*job-creation*”. Similarly, they refer themselves *sazman* (organization), *anjoman* (association) or “*kheirieh*”, institution normally reserved for religious charities (Christensen 2011, 109).

In sum, the aim of this paper is to evaluate how the drug problem of Iran has evolved in Kurdistan and how it has been framed in the advocacy campaigns of Kurdish and international NGOs and in the media, as a response to a particular national and international context. The research will also review the ways in which the Iranian government and the international community are addressing the drug issue, as well as its humanitarian consequences. Finally, it explores the question of the use of drugs as a tool of repression against Iranian ethnic nationalities and religious minorities, filling a gap in academic studies.

The methodology and presentation of the dissertation

The methodological approach of this research paper is essentially qualitative and analytical. This paper is based on a literature review in of the main academic papers and documents on drug issues published by Iranian universities in Farsi, as well as articles and books in Kurdish, Persian and English. Interviews were also conducted with a lawyer who has worked on drug issue in Iran for five years and a UNDOC officer in Tehran. The aim of these interviews was to have an insider and professional view on drug issues in Iran, to understand this issue from a legal and a humanitarian point of view. Furthermore, the witness statement of a researcher on drug issue in Kurdistan of Iran as well as the views of a Kurdish journalist expert produce insights about the role of the civil society and the Iranian drug’s policy.

This dissertation is divided in three parts. After this presentation, Part I concentrates on a literature review of the available material addressing drugs in Iran. That section presents the context, the extent of the problem, the policies to confront it in the light of the international obligations of the country, and the role of the civil society organizations to address these difficulties and raise international support. Part II analyses these elements based on the testimony of key experts and discusses the main findings of the research. Finally Part III evaluates the effectiveness of the drug management policies in Iran, the response of the international and the humanitarian community, and poses some questions to improve the situation in the future.

1. State of the Art: a review on drugs in Iran

For this chapter, I reviewed a wide variety of sources: historical, political sciences, UN reports, NGOs reports, media reports, and the available books on drugs on Iran. There were sufficient credible experts to formulate Iran's drug policies prior to 1979 revolution. A major problem in studying Iran's current drug situation is that there is heavy censorship by authorities regarding this topic: Iran is actively seeking to mask its drug situation. This is especially true regarding the drug situation of Kurdish ethnic nationality. While there is some research on the overall drug situation in Iran, it is not comprehensive and it does not provide reliable statistics and thus is not of the quality that would support meaningful findings. The only available scholarly work is the *Drugs, Deviancy and Democracy in Iran: The Interaction of State and Civil Society* by Janne Bjerre Christensen. Nonetheless, it does not provide much information on the drug issues related to the situation of people of Kurdish ethnic nationality. I also consulted widely available documents from the UN human rights forums and United Nations specialized agencies. I also reviewed reports from non-governmental organizations regarding, generally, human rights in Iran. Because these sources had little about the drug situation with the Kurdish ethnic nationality, I sought as many original sources as possible from individuals who, although hampered by Iran's policies against them, have spent considerable time and effort studying or acting on this situation. They spoke or communicated with me directly or have managed to get credible information out through alternative media and surreptitious communications. While recognizing that relying on these types of resources is somewhat unusual in this type of paper, the circumstances left few alternatives and I was confident in the information provided.

1.1. Drugs History and the Turn of 1979

Some scholars believe that the spread of drugs in Iran goes back to the era of invasion of Iran by Arabs in the 13th century. According to them, the Arabic influence introduced narcotic drugs into what is now Iran. "*Bent on spreading Islam, Arab warriors used opium to ward off hunger and fatigue during their military campaigns*" (McLaughlin. 1976, 702). It is true that the "*Nomad people, living in a torrid climate, having to cross vast deserts, exposed to suffering of hunger, perceived that the sap of the plant constituted a tonic agent capable of renewing their strength*" (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, some believed that the Iranians tend to consider themselves philosophical and sensitive and smoked opium for physical relaxation and emotional introspection: "*The smoker of opium, tending towards skepticism or*

philosophical speculation, mixed his pastime usually with a quotation from Sadi or Fardowsi, or Omar Khayam” (McLaughlin 1976, 703).

Since the Khomeiny revolution at the end of the 20th century, the Iranian authorities have used drug issues to enforce their rule and repress ethnic nationalities and religious minorities. Whenever it faces escalating crises, internally or externally, new and harsher laws against drugs and addicts are adopted and public hangings of drug users increase dramatically. The following periods of hangings and drug laws illustrate this policy.

In May 1980, Ayatullah Sadegh Khalkhali, the notorious revolutionary “hanging judge” in Tehran, became the head of the anti-narcotics campaign and was put in charge of the “purification” of drug users, leading to hundreds of executions (Babakhsh 1990). These efforts were undertaken simultaneously with the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war (1980) and the “*cultural revolution*⁴” of 1980-83.

After the ceasefire between Iraq and Iran in 1988, there has been also a massive increase of execution of drug users. Punishment for narcotic use and dealing was reinforced in October 1988, when the Assembly for Discerning the Interests of the System of the Islamic Republic issued a decree enforcing the death penalty in case of armed smuggling and/or possession of 30 gr. of heroin and 5 gr. of opium. At the meantime, The National Drug Headquarters, which monitors all drug-related policies, was established. Between January and July 1989, nine hundred drug offenders were executed under the new law. Furthermore, the hangings of drug users followed closely the 1988 wave of executions of political prisoners (Christensen 2011). These crackdowns and repression on drug users as well as opposition activists, especially the members of ethnic minorities, were legitimized with references to both moral depravation and national security.

The period before and after (2008-2011) the contested re-election of Ahmadinezhad, there has also been an increase of public hangings. This was also followed by a reinforcement of the law on drug consumption. As Christensen put it: “*Iran’s drug crises bring together a number of disparate policies, discourses and governmental actors, conducting what Foucault would call a strategic control of the population*” (2011, 120-121). This, of course, has had substantial negative impacts in regards to the affected minority groups.

⁴Closure of cinemas, cultural centers and all westerns symbols in Iran and imposing Islamic codes on women, etc.

There is also a common idea supported by the Islamic clergy that the Western countries are behind the spread of drugs in Iran: “*It’s a common belief in Iran that during the nineteenth century foreign powers – particularly England – disseminated opium throughout the country to further their political ambitions*” (McLaughlin, 703). Furthermore, The Iranian authorities, in their public discourses blame Western countries and, most absurdly, the “Zionists” Jews for their supposed involvement in the spread of drugs in Iran. For instance, in June 25th 2012, during an international and UN anti-drug conference in Tehran, the Iranian Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi stated that the “Talmud”, (a sacred text of Judaism), was responsible for the spread of illegal drugs around the world (Erdbrink 2012). Once again the Iranian authorities use on anti-Semitism to defend themselves and to draw the attention on external factors in order to make others responsible for the problems faced by the country and its population.

However, The Iranian leaders not only use internally the drug issue to repress the political activists and the minorities, but they also use it internationally, to seek collaboration of Western countries and the UN, as they are aware of the potential benefits of this. For instance, it was through the drug discourse that president Khatami launched the “*dialogue between civilizations*” during the opening of an office of UNODC in Tehran in 2008. Furthermore, the “*securitization*” of drug issue has been used as a venue for dialogue with the West by the regime (Christensen 2011, 120-121).

1.2. Statistical Data on Drugs

The Islamic Republic of Iran has seen a sharp increase in the number of drug abusers and addicts, particularly heroin addicts, in the past three decades. According to a variety of NGOs, Iran holds the world record in the use of drug: out of a population of 70 million people between 3.5 and 4 million are allegedly drug users-primarily of opium and heroin (Koring 2012). Recently, Abbas Deylamizade, who runs the largest drug treatment government authorized organization in the country with more than 140 centers and 600,000 clients, estimates that Iran has about five million hard core addicts, and millions more of occasional users (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, Esmail Ahmadi-Moghaddam, the head of Iran's anti-narcotics Agency, declared that every year more than 130, 000 persons become new addicts (Reuters 2009). The UNODC’ estimation of Iran’s drug addicts is about 1,200,000 according to a rapid assessment of the Iranian authorities in 2007 (2011).

Iran does not provide appropriate and accurate statistics about executions and drug addicts and it has been subject to significant human rights criticisms for its lack of accurate and clear data. Despite multiple demands from various UN Treaty Body committees, in particular the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Rights of the Child⁵, Iran refuses to provide statistical data on drug abuse and to carry out a study of the communities of Arab, Azeri, Balochi, Kurdish, Baha'i, and others (CERD 2010). The regime's officials prefer not to reveal all executions according to Judge Fazel, head of the Public Court in Fars province: "*since it is inappropriate to make daily statements to the public about executions (...) and to provide detailed information regarding the cases, court officials prefer that not all of them be reported*" (HRI 2007).

The latest serious comprehensive study on drug abuse, taking into consideration, age, ethnicity, religious and the geographical dimension in Iran, was conducted in 1976 by the National Iranian Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (NISRD), during the former Monarchy regime which showed that virtually "*all of the drug addicts were Shiite Moslems with a significantly larger minority of unregistered abusers being ethnic Turks*" (Agahi & Spencer 1981, 39-46). During that regime, the number of opium addicts was estimated at from 200,000 to 500,000 and the major cause of concern was opium (McLaughlin 1976, 728). Today, Iran has "*the world's worst heroin problem*" according to experts (Reuter 2010). Moreover, 80% of the drug users today are under 30 years old⁶. In contrast, during the monarchy regime, the median age of drug addicts was between 55- 64 (Fazouni 1978).

The drug problem is especially acute in Iranian Kurdistan. For example, on 23 January 2013, the Director of the Drug Head Quarter in Kermanshah, a Kurdish town with one million inhabitants, declared that the number of drug addicts in Kermanshah was 50'000. However, Kurdish NGOs and media estimate this number in about 200'000 (Aweza 2013). It is revealing that the authorities report that 85% of the prison population in Kurdistan province is drug-related. According to Christensen, drug use is the "fourth cause of death in the country" (2011, 122).

⁵ CRC Concluding observations regarding Drug Abuse and Street Children: "the Committee is concerned at reports that drug abuse is on the increase, that the age of addiction has decreased, that there is a lack of statistical data in this regard and that a programme initiated in 1997 does not seem to be effective" (CRC 2005).

⁶ Interview with an UNODC officer in Tehran by Taimoor Aliassi, by skype on March 2013 but for security reason the name of the interviewee is kept anonymous.

The lack of official and accurate statistics about the number of drug addicts and drug-related executions in Iran raises questions among Iranian ethnic nationalities and religious minorities - in particular the Kurds. The Kurdish people, who were not drug addicts three decades ago, but now suffer elevated incidences of drug addiction, question the role of the Iranian regime in this phenomenon. Kurdish NGOs and media sources claim the drug issue constitutes a huge cover for the arrest and execution of Kurdish activists. While it is true that the reliability of data on addiction and executions is in doubt, it is nonetheless clear that the numbers of the most conservative estimates are surprisingly high. For the purpose of this paper, I chose the lowest number of different statistics published by national and international sources.

1.3. The Regime's Drug's Approach vs. the Human Rights Approach

The 1979 Islamic revolution marked a new Islamic social order and a fundamental break in the approach on the use of drug. Ayatollah Khomeini, the father of Iran's 1979 revolution and the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran blamed Iran's drug consumption on the decadence of the West. Consequently, in his first action on drugs, Khomeini ordered the end of all the rehabilitation and the drug maintenance programs, and adopted a new policy and discourse on this issue. Henceforth, the drug users were perceived and framed as "*deviants*", "*danger*", "*significant other*" to the Islamic social order, and as evidence of "*foreign conspiracies*", as well as a threat to the "*national security*" (Christensen 2011, 124). The framing of Iran's drug issue as foreign conspiracy, and the securitization and criminalization of drug offenders have led to the incarceration and execution of thousands of drug users. Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, "*over 10'000 drug users and dealers have been executed; many of them hanged in public in a Foucault display of state sovereignty*" (Christensen 2011, 123-124).

The Kurds of Iran are mostly Sunnis Moslems and the governmental research cited above, showed that only the Shiite Moslems and ethnic Turks were drug addicts during the monarchy rule (Agahi & Spencer 1981, 39-46). Thus, the spread of drug issue in Kurdistan is clearly linked with the implementation of the Islamic regime. It is important to note that the Kurdish people in Kurdistan of Iraq, in Kurdistan of Turkey or in Kurdistan of Syria are also mostly Sunnis Moslems but do not have drug addiction issues (Hawlati 2013). Given the totality of the circumstances addressed here, the Kurdish population in Iran has accesses to drugs facilitated by the authorities, who then imprisons and hang the victims because of their addiction.

Iran's policy to execute drug offenders constitutes an undeniable violation of international law particularly Article 6 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on the right to life to which Iran is a State party. These executions are also in conflict with the fundamental moral principle of humanity: "*all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*" as well as the human rights based approach (or rights-holder approach) seeking long-term and humane solution for drug victims to whom the states are responsible (The Sphere Project 2011, 19). This is even more problematic as Iran is a party to the 1998 United Nation Drug Convention and benefits from the UN and the international mechanisms and instruments to combat drug trafficking.

According to OCDE, the Iranian government has received USD 556.3 million of international financial aid between 2007 and 2011⁷. Under Iran's regulation, financial aid from foreigners is strictly prohibited for civil society, and all foreign aid must be delivered through governmental channels on grounds that this is the only way to prevent acts that "*jeopardize[...] the freedom, independence, and national unity and interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran*" (Squire 2006, 24). Hence, the international community has the obligation to donate its assistance through governmental institutions, which is problematic because much of it doesn't reach the victims. In consequences, the funds from UNODC are delivered through Iran's Foreign Ministry.

In this regard, it should be also pointed out that Iran's financial and institutional management is opaque. For instance, it is the Quds division of the Revolutionary Guard Forces under the control of the Islamic leader Ali Khamenei who controls the money of oil, not the Ministry of finance (Kurdistan Newspaper 2013, 5). It is also not the Ministry of Health nor the Social Welfare Organization who make laws and guidelines about anti-drug initiatives, but the Center for the Fight Against Drugs (*markaz-e mobareeh ba mavad-e mokhader*). This Center makes the policies and decides on the budget allocations to fight drugs trafficking, but it does not to treat the victims. These and more examples show the complexity and risks associated with the international support provided through the public institutions.

⁷ See annex 2

Currently, Iran is benefiting from a program sponsored by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) and the European Union presidency (UNODC 2011)⁸. Despite the criminalization of drug addicts and the multiple programs supported by the international community to fight against drugs, the statistics show that the drug victims have increased dramatically in the last thirty years, since the fall of the Shah.

Some human rights advocates and NGOs consider that the UN and international community's aid to Iran is violating the do no harm principles, because Iran uses these funds for its repressive policies such as the execution and imprisonment of drug addicts. Given that most of the hanging taking place are in the Kurdish areas, the international community would have a responsibility in the deaths and serious abuse against Kurdish people (Human Rights Committee 2011). According to Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Harm Reduction International (HRI), the United Nations and the international community are: *“effectively supporting prosecutions in a judicial and legal system that they themselves regard as unjust. Draconian laws, secret trials, no appeals, and death sentences for possession of small amounts of drugs should warn off any donor that wants to do the right thing”*. Furthermore, *“Iran's judicial and legal system systematically violates the human rights of accused drug offenders, in particular their right to a fair trial, resulting in numerous death sentences in violation of international law”* (HRW 2012).

There are some civil society organizations approved by the government, but they are not interested in the drug issue: *“The religious charities, the kheirieh who are supported by bonyad, a governmental foundation, are not willing to address the drug addicts as they are perceived as deviants and a threat to Islamic social order by the formal discourse”* (Christensen 2011). In addition, the private clinics treating drug addiction are too expensive for the most of victims and their families.

⁸ UNODC is currently working with the Iranian authority on a 3 years (2011-2014) project called Country Programme, divided on a 3 sub-programmes 1) Sub-Programme 1: Illicit Trafficking and Border Management; 2) Sub-Programme2: Drug Addiction, Treatment and HIV/AIDS and 3) Sub-Programme3: Crime, Justice and Corruption. Available in UNODC web page, in <http://www.unodc.org/islamicrepublicofiran/en/country-programme-sub-prog3.html>

1.4. Drugs, NGOs, Media and Advocacy ⁹

The role of civil society in addressing societal problems in any contemporary State is fundamental¹⁰. During the President Khatami's era (1997-2005) and as a result of his rhetoric of citizen's participation and "Dialogue between Civilizations", a relative space of openness for civil society and internal media were created. This led to the creation of numerous NGOs addressing the drug sensitive issue and other social problems. However, the NGOs' agendas had to match with the government's objectives.

The first Iranian NGO to provide support for drug addicts and their families, Aftab, was created by Member of Parliament (MP) Marzieh Sadighi with the support of President Khatami. For some MPs, it was easier to work outside the government to play a better role in the field of drug treatment and social issues. It should be pointed out that the NGOs with close ties to the Khatami's government have played a positive role in pushing progressive programs for addressing Iran's social problems. Consequently, the Khatami's period allowed the development of many NGOs active in the field of children protection, women rights, drug issues and HIV/AIDS.

But this changed under the current Ahmadinezhad government: NGOs are now perceived as a danger of democracy, foreign influence and as "imported" from West (Christensen 2011,

⁹ Among many different definitions of advocacy, this paper adopts the definition given by the UNICEF owing to its human right's based approach which includes the lobbying and campaign dimensions. According to this organization, the term advocacy originates from *advocare*, "call to one's aid" or speak out on behalf of someone, as a legal counselor. Conceptually, advocacy fits into a range of activities that include organizing, lobbying and campaigning. Organizing a broad-based activity designed to ensure that the views represented in advocacy come from those who are actually affected by the issue. Lobbying drives from Latin word *loggia*, a room where one would meet directly with decision-makers to engage in (often private) quality discussions and debate. Compared to organizing, lobbying takes a more targeted approach and reaches out to fewer people. On the other end of the spectrum, the Latin origin for campaigning is *campus*, the wider battlefield. An advocacy campaign publicly promotes an agenda, involving platforms where a wide audience can hear the advocate's message (UNICEF 2010).

¹⁰ According to World Bank: "*the term civil society to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations*".

109). Consequently most of them were closed especially those working in ethnic community areas such as KHRO in Kurdistan were closed. Instead, the religious-military organisations such as “basiji¹¹” and “sepah-e pasdaran¹²” have been endorsed as the “true”, Iranian, non-governmental organisations and the primary weight was put on activities in mosques, religious charities, and the basij (*Ibid*, 100-101).

In order to fulfil its political ambition and control over civil society, the first step taken by Mahmmud Ahmadinezhad when he assumed the presidency in 2005, replacing the Interior Minister with an intelligence officer, Pour-Mohammadi, who had a reputation as being harsh on civil society. Furthermore, a regional Civil Society Forum on the Information Society for the Middle East and West Asia was unexpectedly banned by the new president in August 2005 (Squire 2006, 27). And as Christensen states, the new government decided to reframe the discourse: “*Discursively reframing the keywords, legally restricting the NGOs’ endeavors, and enforcing self-censorship, arrests and clampdowns, the government has radically restructured the NGOs’ possible field of action*” (Christensen 2011, 115). What followed was a systematic clampdown of NGOs and media: “*new regulations especially regarding foreign funding, detailed scrutiny of activities and requirements for re-registration and vetting by security ministry are all pose challenges to work and development of CSOs*” (Squire 2006, 27).

In Kurdistan, meetings and publications were banned and leading activists jailed or prohibited to travel abroad. Some newspapers and weekly magazines such as “Kurdistan people Message” and “Sirweh” authorized under Khatami (both addressing drug issues among other issues of concern) were shut down. Moreover, the NGOs like the Kurdistan Human Rights Organization which addressed and denounced the drug spread in Kurdistan was closed down and its director sentenced to jail. The Kurdish Mukeryan News Agency and the Kurdistan Union were shut down and the director of Mukeryan News Agency, Mr. Kurdpur, and his brother were put in prison-- as were all the members of committee members of the Kurdistan Union (KMMK-G 2013). Of course, NGOs in other areas also suffered: the Iran Civil Society Center, headed by Sohrab Razzaghi; the Rahis Institute, led by Shadi Sadr; and the Women NGO’s Job Training center, headed by Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh were all shut down in Tehran (Christensen 2011, 104). These organizations were supporting mostly women and

¹¹ Basij means volunteer militias

¹² Refers to Revolutionary Guards forces

street children who were victims of drug addictions and prostitution, through legal advising and job training programs.

In this context the NGOs either had to adopt new strategies to survive or to halt their activities. In Kurdistan, following the government's wave of journalist's arrests and NGO crackdowns, many of them left the country to avoid arrest. Others chose to continue working under cover and even underground but networking with the outside world secretly. Globally, the Iranian NGOs had to stop or change their names by adopting and embracing Islamic names and codes to keep on working. For instance, instead of the word methadone, the medical oriented NGOs use the word "*abstinence-based methods*", the abstinence word is more religious but in reality it is the same. Another example is the word 'cover' used instead of the word 'condom', which had to be used by the media to promote HIV prevention among the drug addicts.

Similarly, the media were divided between official discourse and the NGO's one. The official media (television, radio and newspapers) were asked to report positively on Ahmadinezhad's government. In regard to drug issue, the official media adopted an eradicating approach and framed the drug users as a threat to the Islamic order, "Westoxification", "amoral outcasts", proliferating "social corruption" and Western conspiracies (Christensen 2011). In addition, they also portrayed also the drug problem as Western plot to weaken the revolution. The governments' newspapers were often focusing on reporting the success of the law enforcement force. Despite the official recommendations, in many cases, some pro reformist newspapers disobeyed the authorities and supported the NGOs harassed by the new government highlighting the important role and expertise of civil society¹³. Christensen adds: "*Emphasized that civil society can promote domestic harmony and unity and be a countermeasure to the nuclear confrontation*" (Ibid, 110).

In addition to the efforts to change the frame on drug addicts who were considered by the official discourse as "Deviant", "significant other", a "threat to Islamic Order"; some NGOs tried to recognize drug users as citizens attempting to re-establish the "morally good person" through religious values and family. In Iran, "*being socially and normally good person is closely related to protecting family, one of the sacred*" social categories" (Christensen 2011, 184). The following paragraphs illustrate the work of the organizations on the ground.

¹³ Here pro reformist newspapers refer to the media related to the President Khatami's era of rule from 1997 to 2005.

In Kurdistan, as well as in Iran, the family is a “sacred” institution. As mentioned above, the Kurdish media portrays the drug spread as a tragedy for family and society, and it perceives the state’s responsibility for the social crisis. Alarming reports on Iran’s “social Crisis” emphasized how “*drug addiction is destroying one out of every three marriages in Iran*” and that Iran is facing a high increase in divorce (47 percent in 1998-1999), undermining the sanctity of the Islamic family (Moore 2001).

Furthermore, many Kurdish media and NGOs reacted to the drug policy highlighting on the one hand, the drug addicts as a symbol of the revolution’s broken promises to the poor and the post-revolutionary Iran’s social and political problems, and on the other hand, framing it as abandoning, mistreating, posing danger and threats to the families and the society. Moreover, the Kurdish media put the emphasis on the nationalistic discourses and highlighted the drug spread as a threat to the Nation and catalyzed it as *white genocide* (Kurdpa 2013).

The Kurdish civil society also used new technology methods such as films, websites, satellite televisions and internet, to denounce the government’s drug policy in Kurdistan. For example, a Kurdish television, the Tishk TV (a satellite channel based in Paris) has reported and broadcasted reports and interviews on the situation of drug victims in Kurdistan of Iran¹⁴. The aim of these programs is to educate people about the dangers of drugs and rise awareness about the Iranian drug policy (Tishk TV 2013). The Kurdistan journal, a weekly newspaper accessible in internet, regularly airs stories about addicted Kurdish citizens being used by Iranian Ittela’at (intelligence Security services) to spy for authorities in Kurdistan¹⁵. The Kurdish diaspora is now quite organized in Europe, with a number of NGOs working closely with the Kurdish civil society inside Iran, in order to relate and create awareness about drug issue at international level.

The civil society in Iran and in Kurdistan of Iran facing government bureaucracy, unclear laws, restrictions on political participation and fear of clampdown, face perennial problems. However, the role and the resistance of this civil society will be determinant in the shaping of Iran in the future.

¹⁴ To see the Programme “The drug spread in Kurdistan of Iran”, on Tishk tv, it’s available on this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgz1SfHR0b0&list=UUxXNldJzLWsjshBKUIxLKGA&index=2>>, accessed on 27 May 2013.

¹⁵ Published monthly and available in PDF on: www.kurdistanmedia.com in Kurdish.

2. Discussion

This section reviews and analyzes various sources, documents, witness statements, interviews and it illustrates the multiple facets of Iran's drug policy. It also illustrates how the 1979 Islamic revolution marked a new Islamic social order and a fundamental break in the approach of the drug issue in Iran. Now, Iran uses the drug issue as a tool of repression against primarily ethnic nationalities and religious minorities. Transforming the drug issue by the authorities as a security issue has had multiple consequences on the ethnic communities, especially for the Kurds. Based on the review of the sources and on the context set out in the previous chapters, this section discusses these findings utilizing the statement of some key witnesses and experts on drugs in Iran, to understand how this transformation has been crystalized, and the day to day consequences of those affected. It interweaves discussions on the role of the international community and of NGOs working to ameliorate the negative consequences to individuals and to the affected communities. Finally, it proposes measures to improve the situation, or at least, to avoid causing more harm.

As there are no studies on the use of drugs as an instrument of repression in Iranian Kurdistan, I reviewed documents of interviews with relevant NGOs and carried out interviews with a prominent attorney and a journalist who had information's on this topic. I first studied statements of Rebin Rahmani. Mr. Rahmani is a Kurdish student at Iran's Arak University and an editor of *Rojhelat*,¹⁶ whose research on drug addiction, AIDs and prostitution in Kermanshah (one of the four provinces in Kurdistan of Iran) led him to a two years prison term, states: *"In 2006, me and one of my friends who majored in sociology, decided to conduct a study on the causes of drug addiction, AIDS and prostitution in Kermanshah. We worked for about five or six months on the study, interviewing and filming AIDS patients and drug addicts. It became clear to us that these crises in Kermanshah were a systematic trend deliberately programmed by the Islamic Republic itself."*¹⁷

Providing further evidence of the deliberate targeting of the Kurdish people, Mr. Rahmani stated: *"For example, we documented one instance on film: across from Kermanshah's Razi University is a residential area called Bagh Abrisham [Silk Garden]. There was a house there that had a small window similar to a newspaper stand, and some 40 - 50 drug addicts lined*

¹⁶ *Rojhelat* is a quarterly newspaper that was shut down following a complaint from the Intelligence Bureau and the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) in 2006.

¹⁷ Mr. Rahmani was interviewed on 16th January 2012 by Iran Human Rights Documentation Center and here is the link to the integral interview: http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/witness-testimony/100000301-witness-statement-of-rebin-rahmani.html#.UatWifJKT_c

up before it every day as if standing in a bread line; they'd knock [on the door] and be handed drugs. We went and interviewed the neighbors, asking why they had not reported these incidents so as to have the house investigated and its inhabitants arrested? They said, "We've reported it a hundred times, and lodged complaints in person and by phone, but the authorities have not reacted."¹⁸. These observations are consistent with the denounced fact that Iranian government is directly supplying Kurdish addicts.

Further statements from Mr. Rahmani heavily support the fact that it's the Iranian government running the drug operations targeting the Kurdish youth. For example, he claims: *"In our research, we met people who gave us information related to the role of some of the Kermanshah's Intelligence Bureau and the Revolutionary Guard's officers and intelligence agents in the trafficking of drugs from Sistan (Baluchistan) to Kermanshah and Orumiyeh (Kurdistan). They sell half of it in Kermanshah and transfer the other half to Turkey through Orumiyeh and other regions."¹⁹*

During his interrogation before being sentenced to his 2 years of jail term, Mr. Rahmani stated: *"When I was arrested, the interrogator said to me, "What a fool you are to fight for these people! We've made them all drug addicts and they no longer care about what goes on around them." That was exactly what the Intelligence interrogator told me. (...) Twenty-one days after my arrest, a judge named Maleki came to the Intelligence Bureau detention center. He was a prosecutor from the Kermanshah Revolutionary Court. He told me that my charges included acting against national security—and how did I want to plead? I asked, "Why are you making these false accusations against me?" He said, "You wanted to research the addiction and AIDS problem in Kermanshah, and then publish your study saying that the Islamic Republic is behind it"²⁰.*

Media sources regarding events in January 2013 related to drug distribution in Kurdistan, provoked a campaign by Kurdish NGOs and media. The Iranian Itela'at Service (Intelligence Security Service) in Mahabad, the historical capital of Kurdistan of Iran, placed match boxes containing money and opium on city streets in order to spread drugs among Kurdish youth (Kurdpa 2013). Kurdish NGOs and media launched a counter attack campaign by diffusing,

¹⁸ Mr. Rahmani was interviewed on 16th January 2012 by Iran Human Rights Documentation Center and here is the link to the integral interview: http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/witness-testimony/100000301-witness-statement-of-rebin-rahmani.html#.UatWifJKT_c

¹⁹ (*Ibid.*)

²⁰ (*Ibid.*)

through television, newspapers, and Facebook, an image showing a Kurdish young man receiving a drug injection, and others of a match box and photos of drug addicts. The image's message contained the following text: "*Warning to Kurdistan people regarding the regime's new plan and ruse! Be aware that the regime's agents in Mahabad scattered matches boxes containing an amount of money and opium in the streets in order to spread drugs among Kurdish youth*"²¹. This example shows the role media can play in the mobilization. Journalists also became involved in advocating drug issues, though they remain a minority. They even though show through their exemplary investigations the spread of the problem and its political root. Furthermore, this reliable evidence supports the proposition that the Iranian government runs the drug operations in Iranian Kurdistan.

For additional evidence, I also interviewed Leila Alikarami a famous Iranian lawyer. She is not Kurdish but Persian, and a member of the One Million Signatures campaign who received the Anna Politkovskaya Award and who completed her legal training with Iranian Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi. She stated: "*The Iran's drugs policy is similar to landmines policy, it's political. For example, the Iran-Iraq war is over since 1988, why they do not demine Kurdistan? The authority has succeeded in controlling the alcohol market, why not drugs?*" She further states: "*the State has the monopole of drugs, it's like televisions satellites, on one hand, the State's agent confiscate it and on the other hand, they sell it*"²².

Similarly, a famous Kurdish journalist Mr. Rahim Mohammadi who writes in Kurdish and who was also interviewed for this paper argues that: "*Iran's drug policy constitutes a political governmental instrument of control. The authority use the drug pretext to arrest and execute the political and civil activists particularly the members of Kurdish, Baluchis and Ahwazi Arab communities. The idea behind sticking the drug label on civil rights activists is twofold: on one hand, the regime wants to disqualify them before their community and on the other hand, to disseminate fear and terror among the public by hanging the victims in public sphere*"²³.

In this context, the ability of Kurdish civil society to influence Iran's drug policy is highly unlikely, as persons would face persecution and repression for any action. However, it is

²¹ See annex number 4

²² Interview with Leila Alikarami by Taimoor Aliassi on 20th of April 2013, in London.

²³ Interview with Rahim Mohammadi, by Taimoor Aliassi on 31st May 2013 by telephone. It should be noted that in Iran, drug addicts are seen as criminals by the main discourse and the victims are often isolated from their family and society.

important that those in place keep communicating on the situation, both at internally and externally.

Externally, the Kurdish NGOs in the Diaspora have also adopted diverse strategies and methods. One of them is advocacy at the UN and other international and regional fora. For example, in Europe and in the world they have formed lobbying groups working in cooperation with Iranian NGOs and international NGOs, to participate at the UN Human Rights Council, at the Council's Universal Periodic Review, and before the UN treaty bodies. They also present written statements and organize side events²⁴. For instance, at the UN, a coalition of Kurdish, Iranian and international NGOs composed of: International Educational Development (IED), Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP), Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva (KMMK-G) and Unrepresented Nations People Organisation (UNPO) organized a side event on June 2011 at the United Nations in Geneva during the 20th session of Human Rights Council. The side event entitled: "Iran: Human Rights and power-sharing among Iranian nationalities". In this panel diverse aspect of human rights violations including the drug issue was also discussed (KMMK-G 2011).

Kurdish NGOs constantly adopt new strategies for their advocacy efforts to denounce drug and other repressive policies of the regime. One of the methods of Kurdish NGOs and media, which we have already underlined, is to provide information about the events to the Kurdish Diaspora through new communications technologies such as YouTube and Facebook and by posting articles to external websites under pseudonyms.

Now, some Kurdish and Iranian NGOs will participate in the "World Congress on the Death Penalty" to be held in Madrid on June 2013 in panel discussions on Iran. This event is organized by a coalition of more than one hundred organizations with the support of some European countries, such as Norway, which provided Official Development Assistance to fund some of the drug programs in Iran²⁵.

Another example is the international campaign launched on the occasion of "the International Day against the Death Penalty" on 10th day of October 2012 by Together against the Death

²⁴ See annex for the list of NGOs working together on Iran.

²⁵ The World Coalition to Abolish Death Penalty composed of more than 100 NGOs worldwide gather every 3 or 5 year to address the issue of death penalty but also drug issue in Iran. This year it will take place in Madrid on 12th of June, the link: <http://congres.abolition.fr/world-congress-in-madrid/partners/?lang=en>

Penalty (ECPM), Arseh Sevom, Iran Human Rights, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center and Justice for Iran. The campaign was launched through press release, Iranian television channels abroad and Western media. The message was addressed to UN, UNODC, Governments of Norway, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Ireland & Japan and the purpose was to push these countries to halt sponsoring Iran's drug policies. The campaigners "*strongly oppose the continuing use of the death penalty in the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are concerned that Iran's radical policies, which allegedly aim to eradicate drug-trafficking and result in the execution of several hundred prisoners every year, are supported in part by international funding*"²⁶. In less than one year, Denmark responded favorably to these demands and stopped their financial aid to these programs²⁷.

A last significant example is the lobbying groups to the parliamentary bodies of the Western countries. For instance in Europe, the Diaspora has established lobbying groups within EU countries, and maintains continuous advocacy and incidence activities. A recurrent one has been the organization of political meetings between Kurdish civil society and key parliamentarians of other countries. This has been done regularly in the past years with the Parliaments of Sweden and Switzerland, where the issue of drug policies have been one of the matters of discussion. For instance, the NGO KMMK-G organized a seminar about the human rights situation in Kurdistan on 15 of June 2011 through the *Swiss Parliamentarian Group in charge of the relations with the Kurdish People*²⁸.

But what have been the limits and the success of Kurdish NGOs and media outside of the country? The result is not particularly positive in terms of real changes. Since its creation, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been always condemned by the UN and the international community for its violation of human rights that include execution of drug users. Drug offenses are not serious enough crimes for the death penalty under international law. The mandatory execution laws for drug-related offenses by the revolutionary courts that were established during the 1979 Revolution to deal with "*revolutionary cases*" violate international law.

²⁶ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center "Joint Statement on International Day Against the Death Penalty" <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/1000000194-joint-statement-on-international-day-against-the-death-penalty.html>

²⁷ Denmark halts its aid to Iran's Drug programs in: <http://iranhr.net/spip.php?article2744>

²⁸ See the link at : < <http://www.kmmk-ge.org/?p=229&lang=ku> >

On the other hand, the victims should have the right to be protected. Hence, international actors should seek to provide services that the State is unwilling to provide. It may be difficult for such actors to be granted permission from the authorities, but the barriers in this regard should be made public. Further, the disproportionate number of executions of Kurdish drug users should be widely exposed and condemned. Because of all of this, many human rights defenders, including Kurdish, Iranian and international NGOs have been very critical regarding the international community and the UN support to Iran's drug fighting programs, and have questioned their capacity to put real pressure on the country.

It's widely considered that judiciary processes in Iran under the light of international standards relating right to counsel and due process, treatment of prisoners, fair trials or any other rule of the international human rights law, falls far short. For example regarding the trials of drug addicts, Ms. Alikarami states: *"Through the window of the court, I have seen so many people chained like ants. The presences of the drug victims were only for receiving the sentences from the judge without due process, if not how come that a judge can try one hundred persons a day? ²⁹"* She further adds: *"the drug offenders are tried by the revolutionary courts. The revolutionary courts were established during the 1979 revolution to deal with "revolutionary cases", the question is why drug poor victims should be tried by a security tribunal?"(Ibid)*

Any support for Iran's drug programs sends a wrong message to the Iranian authorities, because it ignores the violations against the minorities. As Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the spokesperson for the Norwegian-based Iran Human Rights states: *"the fact that Iranian authorities execute several hundred people every year on drug-related charges, and then proudly announce these executions, shows that the nature of international collaboration in combating the trafficking of illegal drugs through Iran may be sending the wrong signals to the Iranian authorities. Any aid provided to Iran to fight drug trafficking must be contingent*

²⁹ Interview with Leila Alikaraki (*Ibid.*) See also Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Harm Reduction International (HRI), setting out their views on unjust judicial system (Human Rights Watch 2010), in: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/01/21/mohammad-sadegh-kaboudvand-awarded-hellmanhammett-grant>, accessed on May 2013.

on whether the Iranian authorities are willing to abolish the death penalty for drug-related charges” (Press statement 2012)³⁰.

In such context where drug issues are of a political nature rather than of a humanitarian one, and where the victims are not receiving health care, what should be the role of the humanitarian actors?³¹ The experiences of a few international organizations that have been granted permission to develop their activities in the last decades indicate a window of opportunity to access the persons in need. The UNODC and MSF for example, are present in the Iranian capital of Tehran. The ICRC has had presence in Iran since 1980s but their activities are not addressing humanitarian needs unrelated to armed conflicts, whereas their experience in Favela neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro show a peace time dimension of its assistance³². But, in regard to Kurdistan’s drug victims, these humanitarian actors have had their potential humanitarian assistance capabilities severely curtailed by government’s restrictions. According to the UNODC and other international NGOs, they are not allowed to access Kurdistan or other ethnic areas. In addition, the MSF bureau in Baluchistan was closed down by the authorities for “internal security” reasons in 2007³³.

These experiences show that some humanitarians have been able to access and work in the country, although in a limited way. While it would be hoped that some of them would denounce the regime’s drug policies and its violations of human rights, it may be unrealistic to expect them to do so, as they almost certainly be expelled from Iran if they did. Under these circumstances, other international actors should speak out and pressure the government to fulfill its obligations in terms of granting unrestricted access to impartial humanitarian assistance.

³⁰ In this context see also: Shadi Sadr, Executive Director of London-based Justice for Iran, who notes serious violations of human rights regarding due process standards: *“Our research shows how thousands of people, including women who are the single-income providers for their children, have been sentenced to death without minimum standards of due process whilst Iranian judges and other authorities that bear responsibility in these severe violations of human rights violation enjoy absolute impunity”* (Press statement 2012).

³¹ According to the Sphere Project: “The right to receive humanitarian assistance is a necessary element of the right to life with dignity. This encompasses the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and the requirements for good health which are expressly guaranteed in international law.”

³² ICRC annual reports p. 343, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/annual-report/current/icrc-annual-report-europe-and-americas.pdf>. Accessed on May 2013.

³³ According to the UNODC officer interviewed on March 2013 in Tehran by Skype, the UNODC is not allowed to access the minority areas and their movements are restricted by the government.

In the light of the above analysis and due to Iran's repressive policy it is reasonable to conclude that there is a very serious human right situation and that the UN and the International community's aid to Iran supports a policy that violate the humanitarian principle of alleviating suffering and causing more harm. The international community should recognize, react and condemn this situation, which constitutes one of the worst abuses of the human rights law, especially of the death penalty.

Until there is a far broader recognition of the situation in Kurdistan and other ethnic nationalities and minorities almost all the recommendations for providing humanitarian assistance are ephemeral. Initiatives that have been successful in delivering humanitarian assistance in other situations have all occurred because there was government support³⁴. But without a wide spread international acknowledgement and recognition of the situation coupled with considerable international political pressure, practical and cost-effective remedies are unlikely to make any change in the future.

3. Conclusion

This paper presents strong evidence indicating that in Iran, the members of ethnic nationalities and religious minorities, especially the Kurds, constitute the main targets of the regime's repressive drug policies and that most of the executions are taking place in the ethnic minorities' areas. The paper analyzed diverse aspects related to this issue and sustained that the country is in violation of its international obligations. This situation is particularly clear with regards to the use of unfair death penalty against drug offenders, violating provisions of Articles 6 and 9 of the ICCPR, which defend the rights to life of every human being, as well as the right to receive appropriate health care without discrimination.

The research also showed that Iran's drug management policy is more of a political nature than of a humanitarian one. The international community, in particular the UN agencies and the humanitarian actors, should also pay special attention to ethnic nationalities and religious minorities, who are disproportionally affected. The international community needs to condition its aid to the country subject to impartial monitoring mechanisms that take into account the minority situation, ensuring they are not supporting hidden instruments of repression and control.

³⁴ It's true that Médecin Du Monde had clandestine hospitals over the boarder from Pakistan in Afghanistan. These types of programmes have become to dangerous in present times.

In this sense, the research proposes that the international community and the UN agencies that have sponsored the Regime's drug fighting programs need to review their aid to Iran and the strategies to deliver it. In this regard, this paper highlights two strong challenges. On the one hand, the Iranian legislation prevents civil society from receiving international assistance to support the people in need. On the other hand, the official assistance that arrives is delivered through the government and almost never reaches the victims of the minorities.

To comply with its international obligations, Iran needs to review its radical approach of criminalization and isolation of drug-addicted persons. Additionally, the Regime should modify its restrictive laws on the participation of national civil society organizations in the provision of humanitarian aid. The international and humanitarian community should exert pressure on the Government to allow international organizations to enter the country to support local organizations that assist the victims. They should also reconsider their methods to provide humanitarian relief to drug addicts and their families and communities, through innovative strategies.

Various reports from NGOs, the UN Human Rights Committee, and the testimony of witnesses interviewed support these conclusions. Many organizations and human rights activists have developed different strategies in and outside the country to make visible and denounce these practices of the regime and to call for international pressure to push for a change. In order to advocate and denounce the Government's practices, some NGO have even claimed the existence and perpetration of a *white genocide*. Due to practical limitations, this work doesn't explore the veracity of such a claim, but further research should study this phenomenon in the future.

Finally, individual advocates, advocacy groups and the media should strengthen their efforts to bring the attention of the international community to the drug-related human rights violations of the religious minorities and the ethnic nationalities. Practices such as the disproportionate and arbitrary use of the death penalty to address drug addiction among Kurdish people should be a matter of international concern and rejection. So far, the failure of the traditional mechanisms to exert an effective pressure on the Iranian Government to respect its human rights commitment remain a great challenge to the international system, and especially to the victims and the civil society that struggle for justice.

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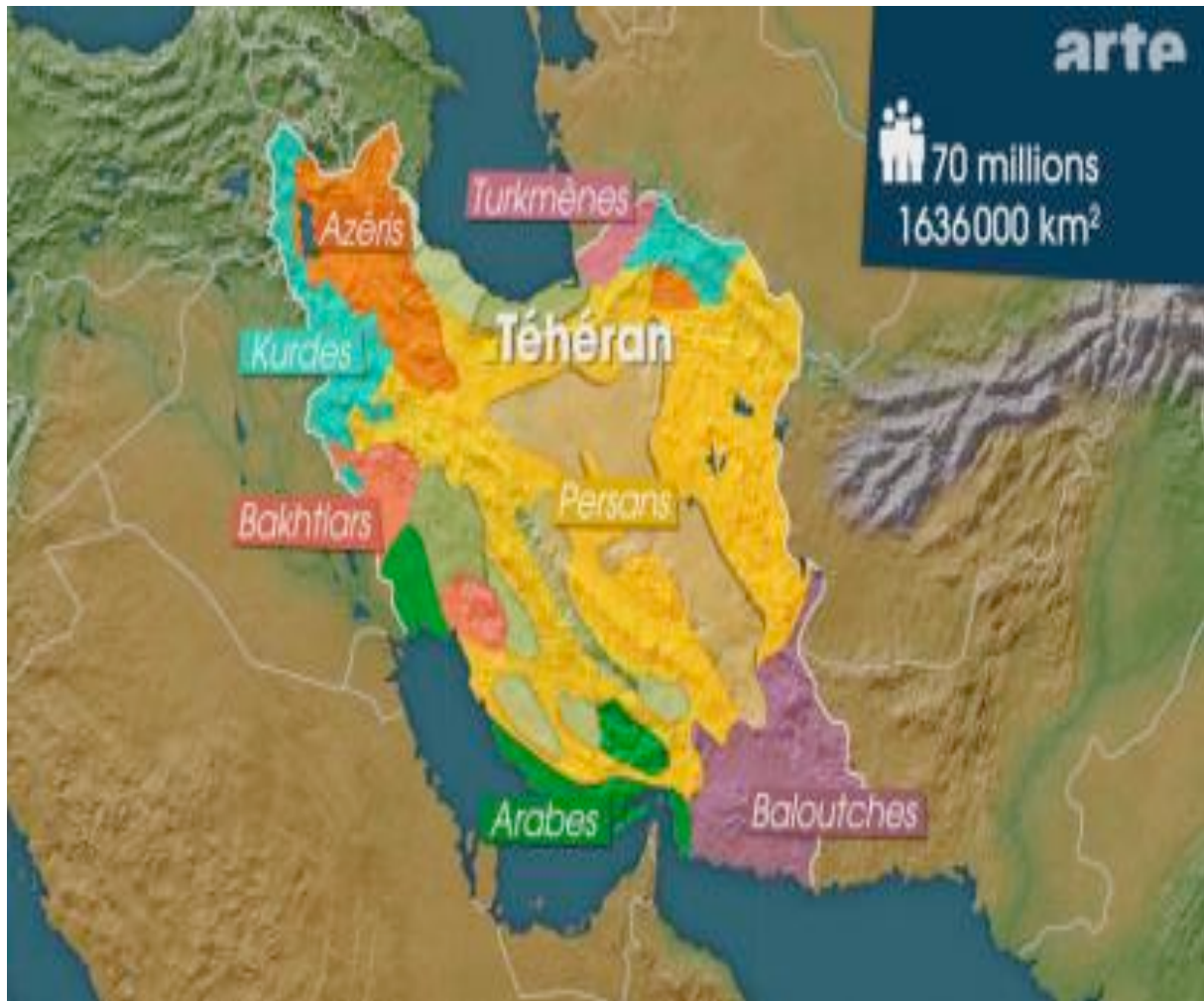
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Annexes

➤ Annex 1: Map of Iran showing ethnic geographical distribution



Sources: Arte tv. *Les Dessous des Cartes*: <http://www.artevod.com/dessousdescartesletatdeliran>, consulted on 17th of April 2013

➤ **Annex 2: Official Development Assistance to Iran 2007-2011**

Official Development Assistance to Iran 2007-2011 Disbursements In million of current USD (Source: OCDE Creditor Reporting System consulted the 24.05.2013)						
Donors	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Germany	42.3	42.7	46.0	45.8	54.3	231.1
France	18.1	15.6	14.6	14.2	14.9	77.3
Japan	7.2	7.3	9.2	21.1	15.8	60.6
Global Fund	2.3	8.5	..	8.2	10.7	29.7
Austria	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.1	6.2	25.3
EU Institutions	10.0	1.8	1.9	3.4	1.0	18.1
Spain	10.7	0.7	4.4	0.2	0.3	16.4
Netherlands	2.2	4.5	4.5	3.4	..	14.7
Norway	0.1	1.3	0.8	7.3	2.3	11.9
UNDP	1.0	2.9	2.0	2.0	1.9	9.7
UNICEF	2.2	1.4	1.7	1.4	2.0	8.8
United States	2.2	2.7	0.7	1.6	1.3	8.5
UNFPA	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.5	7.2
Korea	4.8	0.7	0.1	0.3	0.4	6.3
WFP	..	1.0	1.6	1.3	1.3	5.1
Greece	0.9	1.2	0.8	0.7	0.8	4.3
Canada	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.1	0.5	4.0
United Kingdom	0.5	1.7	0.7	..	0.4	3.3
Finland	0.8	1.9	..	0.0	0.0	2.8
Italy	0.1	1.7	0.3	0.1	0.1	2.4
Switzerland	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	1.8
Sweden	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.5	1.0	1.5
WHO	..	..	..	..	1.5	1.5
Australia	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4	1.2
UNAIDS	..	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	1.1
Belgium	..	0.3	0.3	0.1	..	0.7
Denmark	-0.1	..	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6
CzechRepublic	..	..	..	..	0.3	0.3
United ArabEmirates	..	..	0.1	..	0.0	0.1
Total	112.2	104.7	100.3	118.9	120.2	556.3

Source: OCDE Creditor Reporting System (consulted in may 2013)

➤ **Annex 3: Image of Kurdish NGOs & media Campaign against drug spread in Kurdistan**



ناگاداری سه‌رجه‌م هاووه‌لاتیان ده‌که‌ینه‌وه‌ له‌ شاری مه‌هاباد ماوه‌یه‌که‌ ره‌ژیمی دژی گه‌لی له‌ ناو شه‌مچه‌، شه‌قارته‌ دا به‌ بری که‌میک موادی هوشبهر و بری پاره‌ له‌ ناو کۆچه‌ و کۆلاندای فری ده‌ده‌ن بۆ ئه‌وه‌ی لاه‌وه‌کان زیاتر توشی معتادی بێن. تکایه‌ ناگادار بن ئه‌وه‌ پیلانی دوژمنه‌ .

Source: Kurdpa News Agency

➤ **Annex 4: Coalition of Iranian, Kurdish and International NGO working for Human Rights in Iran**



Source: KMMK-G-G