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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

**Written statement* submitted by Association pour la défense
des droits de l'homme et des revendications
démocratiques/culturelles du peuple Azerbaidjanais-Iran - «
ARC », a non-governmental organization in special
consultative status**

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

[22 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Case of Lake Urmia Drying up: An Outcome of Deliberate Acts by the Iranian Authorities

Ever since 2010, Association pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des revendications démocratiques/culturelles du peuple Azerbaïdjanais-Iran - « ARC » has been informing the UN HRC that the disaster of Lake Urmia is not an outcome of the hydrometeorological-geophysical causations but of the effective cutting of the minimum amount of water that is required to meet its ecological and environmental functions. This process of slow death is likely to come to its conclusion, this year, as 2023 is at the confluence of a number of coincidences, as follows:

- In 2023, the UN adopted the Resolution on “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.”
- In 2023, the Rouhani government, according to their predictions should have restored the Lake completely.
- In 2023, Sharif University in Tehran was widely quoted to have stated the obvious that Lake Urmia would cease to exist by the autumn of 2023, although the university has not formally published any statement to this end.
- In 2023, former Iranian Ministers (Dr Ebtekar and Dr Kalantari) are acting as the ambassadors of the Iranian authority and warning Azerbaijanis of the inevitability of migration of the population of Azerbaijanis from the region as Lake Urmia disappears. This form of communicating risk instigates psychological and social panic.
- In 2023, as ever, the nation of Azerbaijan is protesting; led by Azerbaijani women the authorities have threatened, through various means, to repress their voice..
- In 2023, Azerbaijanis are deeply concerned about their future. Although they resort to protests under the militarized atmosphere in Azerbaijani cities, we hope the world community will not stay silent.

The Truth, the Myth and Myth-busting

The Iranian authority saturates the discourse on Lake Urmia by hiding the cause for the lake's demise with a multitude of myths and false information. Thus:

True Cause for the Disaster of Lake Urmia: Iranian authorities have effectively cut off any flow from rivers to the lake in the last 10-20 years.

Myths: There are numerous myths covering this truth; below are some examples:

- Climate Change and Droughts. These are seemingly true but are myths sponsored by Iranian misinformation and some shallow or sponsored research. These are not impacting the neighbouring countries and even if they exist, the problem can be resolved by good planning and management systems.
- The Gaining of International Sympathy: Successful campaigns were run to seek attention to the believable causes of climate change and droughts, with the double benefit of masking the cut-off of flows to the lake and bringing a reported figure of as much as \$100m.
- The Myth of Tabriz-Urmia Causeway: This is not true, as for the last 10 years water levels fell sufficiently low but the lake carried on shrinking. This is because Iranian authorities have cut off all water flowing to the lake.
- The Myth of Mining Salt/Lithium/Uranium from Residual Saltpans/Geological Formations. Seemingly true but the myth is highly effective in sweeping the truth (cutoff of water) under the carpet.
- The Myth of ‘Don't politicize the problem’: This myth pacifies those who claim to be rationalists, as if politics is irrational, and aims to silence activists.

- Rights of Water Shareholders. Iranian authorities promoted self-sufficiency and promised free water to industrialists and farmers in the late 1990s, see below for more background.

Recapping the Background

Our stakeholders' analysis in our statement (A/HRC/51/NGO/6) presented the situation since 1988. Some of its key issues include:

- Boom: All of the 6 governments since 1988 accelerated their dam-construction programs and amplified their disinformation – a unique continuity even by Iranian standards.
- And Bust: Each of the 6 governments since 1988 came up with its own plan to so-call restore the lake and completely put aside the previous plans – a unique discontinuity by world standards.
- The Azerbaijani Turks have been outspoken by staging 10 popular protests.

Clues To the Deliberate Forced Drying-up of Lake Urmia

Clues to the myths purported by the Iranian authorities expose the deliberate nature of the disaster of Lake Urmia. A prima facie account of some of these clues is as follows:

- Water resource planning in Azerbaijani provinces go back to 1960 using international consultancies including a few dams. As a result, water resource engineers would have known that each year whilst some 5,000 million cubic meters (MCM) of water would flow to Lake Urmia but more than 50% would be necessary to maintain the lake system. So only about 1,000-2,000 MCM water is available for other uses.

A wise use of water would have required a carefully planned approach and a great deal of efficient water distribution and usage with appropriate social campaigns for saving water. None of these campaigns have happened. Instead, the Iranian authority's approach to water resources, has been as outlined below:

- More than 40 dams have been built in less than 2 decades.
- All the available water has been turned into cashable assets.
- Initially industrialists and farmers were given water free of charge; apparently, they are charged a certain fee now, although there is little officially published data.
- New water users were created at the expense of the environment under the pretext of self-sufficiency but the Azerbaijani provinces were largely self-sufficient from the beginning. Besides, there is no sector in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which could be considered self-sufficient.

Agents were activated who are engaged in:

- Normalizing the use of all the water for industry and farming.
- Trivializing the ecological needs of the lake and the rivers.
- Defending fiercely the water rights of the new water-controlling bodies
- Defending fiercely the need for economic self-sufficiency.

However, the problem is that:

- The Iranian self-sufficiency program has failed miserably.
- Self-sufficient Azerbaijani farming has become drastically impoverished.
- The sustainability of the Lake Urmia basin is on the brink of collapse.

- None of the past 6 governments implemented any single project from their proposals for restoring Lake Urmia. The most sophisticated attempt was during the administration of Hassan Rouhani, forming Urmia Lake Restoration Program, and ostensibly designing hundreds of proposals but implementing no single project. When Rouhani left the office, he claimed to have restored Lake Urmia.

To summarise, Iranian authorities think they have transformed 5,000 MCM natural water of Lake Urmia into a cashable asset. They have now no intention of releasing it back to the ecological needs. Thus, Iranian authorities think they have created a mindset (as intended by Shahriyari, the appointed governor of West Azerbaijan, where:

- The water rights of the ‘so-called’ farmers over-ride the ecological needs.
- The new water controlling bodies drive Azerbaijanis and their environmentalists to a defensive position.
- There is no justification for environmental needs when the country gives priority to self-sufficiency.

Thus, Iranian authorities are not minded with the restoration of Lake Urmia:

- If there was any problem with meeting the water demands due to population rise, this could have been met through a good planning system, as there was enough water in the Azerbaijani provinces.
- The Iranian authority has been deliberate and conscious throughout the years since 1988 to use all available water resources from Lake Urmia without regard to its transformation into a saltpan and have misled the public and the donors by showing that this was the outcome of a natural disaster(s).

Concluding Remarks:

The disaster of Lake Urmia is not due to hydrometeorological-geophysical causations.

- The required annual water inflow to Lake Urmia is cut off but concealed by various myths.
- The water available to Lake Urmia has been turned into a cashable asset by more than 40 dams forcefully built by Iranian authorities.

At the juncture of 2023, the harsh reality learned by the people of Azerbaijan in the Azerbaijani provinces in the Islamic Republic of Iran appears to be that the Iranian authority will do anything to prevent the restoration of Lake Urmia.

As an NGO Special Consultee to the ECOSOC, Association pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des revendications démocratiques/culturelles du peuple Azerbaïdjanais-Iran - « ARC » is not sufficiently resourced to lodge a formal complaint against the Iranian authority. However, it reflects the voice of a victimized nation pushed to the brink of extinction and appeals to the UN HRC to form a fact-finding mission about the disaster of Lake Urmia on the death of Lake Urmia.

(<https://www.ulrp.ir/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Presentation-red.pdf> Page: 46)
(<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/issa-kalantari-on-ormyeh-lake/31991224.html>).
(for some details, see: <https://iranwire.com/en/provinces/119613>)
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(ULRP <https://www.ulrp.ir/en/>)
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