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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 the Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, 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.

[27 August 2012]

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

Iran's water resources are in danger

During the past 30 years after the Iranian revolution took place; the environment has been constantly damaged due to the irrational policies and bad governance in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The environment damage began during the first decade after the revolution, by the establishment of Jihad-e Sazandegi,¹ a revolutionary institution to improve the rural and farmers' life. The plans of action were drafted regardless of the principles of sustainable development. This along with the eight years of war with Iraq caused irreversible damages to the environment and widespread desertification began.

In the second decade after the revolution, known as the era of construction, abusive policies of the government such as Implementation of exploitation of forest resources led to partly destruction of ancient Caspian forest.² Irregular dam and non-normative settlement constructions, selling of water catchment areas and changing the water catchments usage from feeding the national reserves and parks and constructing freeways in protected areas are some of the non-reparable ecological damages made by bad governance.

Today, with the passage of time the long-term damages of the quick-profit policies are explicit, still the Islamic Republic of Iran continues the violation of its obligations in this regard. IRI is a member state of IMO since 1958 and has ratified many conventions, such as the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (1972) and is a contracting party of the Ramsar convention on wetlands since 1975 and is obliged to prevent water pollution, protect birdlife and waste management.

Instead of planning in the way of relief and reversing the policies that has led to the current crisis, windfall revenue from oil has allowed the Islamic Republic of Iran to plan national projects that will drain even more natural resources and this time cause environmental damage that could threaten the livelihood of millions of its own citizens.

In a country with a largely semi-arid climate like Iran, water resources are of particular significance as they have profound implications for the ecosystem in mountainous areas and prairies. Industrial and chemical pollution on a vast area threatens those ecosystems. The fact that most rural towns and villages do not have access to clean drinking water attests to the government's harmful policies.

Urmia lake

One of the worst ecological disasters in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the gradual drying up of Urmia Lake located at northwest of the country in East and West Azarbaijan provinces.

This lake is the second largest hyper saline lakes in the world and the largest in the Middle East.

The lake's surface area has been reduced from approximately 5000 km² in average to 2000 km² in 2011, mainly due to diversion of water for irrigation on up streams without feasibility studies by Jihad-e Sazandegi; then by companies affiliated to IR Revolutionary Guard to build large dams. This drought left 3000 km² as saline wasteland subject to easily wind-blown salt to urban areas and agricultural farms.

¹ Also known as Jihad of construction.

² Hyrcanian Forest.

Urmia Lake is home to a unique brine shrimp species, *Artemia Urmiana*. Optimal water salinity level for *Artemia Urmiana* appear to be under 200 g/L. Increasing water consumption in catchments basin caused a great reduction of quantity of water in the lake as well as increasing salinity level to 300 g/L or higher which are believed to be fatal for *Artemia*.³ The lake's brine shrimp are the sole link between the primary production of the lake's algae and the diverse migratory bird population, which feeds on these shrimp. Because the brine shrimp occupy this crucial link in the ecosystem their demise would translate into the likely loss of many of Lake Urmia's migratory bird populations and affect the entire ecosystem's sustainability. Around 200 species of birds have been documented on and surrounding the lake including pelicans, egrets, ducks, and flamingos.

This ecological disaster collapses the lake's food chain and ecosystem and wind blown "salt-storms," destroys local agriculture and livelihoods as well as regional population's health.

Blowing salts from the Aral Sea have been linked to vegetation-mortality, reduced vegetation growth, reduced crop yields, ill effects on wild and domestic animals, respiratory illness, eye problems, and throat and esophageal cancer.⁴

Based on the experience of the Aral Sea salt storms, it is likely that people who live in within a few hundred kilometers of the lake, including Tabriz & Urmia ; capital cities of east & west Azarbaijan provinces will be close enough to experience the impact of these salt storms.

Thousands of people in the cities of Tabriz and Urmia in August and September 2011 protested against IRI mismanagement of Urmia Lake watershed basin. IRI arrested many of the peaceful protesters. Some of them are still in jail. Unfortunately the IRI is continuing its false approach to water development and a large dam (Vanyar) on Aji-chay River is under construction and 12 more small dams have been budgeted to be constructed.

According to an expert of an Iranian environmental organization if not act immediately; "Urmia Lake will completely dry up within next 3 years and salt storm will spread all over the region."⁵

Salt blown by wind started over 15 years ago, some farms diverted to saline arid lands and many farmers have immigrated; it will continue and destroy the whole farms and industries around the lake; if the IRI do not stop water control in Urmia Lake's catchment basin.

There are still solutions for preventing the total drought of lake in short run as well as long-term projects to revitalize it.

Lake Urmia is shrinking rapidly; if it dries up, an ecological catastrophe is inevitable not only in cities of Azarbaijan provinces of Iran but also, in neighbouring countries i.e. the Republic of Iraq, the Republic of Turkey, The Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Republic of Armenia.⁶

³ Bruce P. et.al. (Feb. 2012). The Drying of Iran's Lake Urmia and its Environmental Consequences. UNEP Global environmental alert service.

⁴ Micklin, P. (2007). The Aral Sea Disaster. Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences, 35(1), 47-72. doi: 10.1146/annurev.earth.35.031306.140120.

⁵ Ghoreishi K. (2012) Tsunami of Salt close to Capital Tehran. Roozonline.

⁶ Lake Urmia News.

Recommendations

- United Nations member-states should apply pressure on Islamic Republic of Iran to fulfil its' international obligations as expressed in treaties and agreements they are signatories to.
 - The establishment of an international independent group of experts set up and overseen by special representatives from the UN on environmental issues to provide emergency plans as well as long-term projects with the purpose of finding solutions to resolve the current impasse. The intervention of such a body to avert an Environmental Catastrophe is Essential.
 - Immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners arrested in relation to the protests for Urmia Lake and decriminalizing such activities.
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