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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the floor. My name is Jian Badrakhan from YASA, Kurdish Centre for Legal Studies & Consultancy, which is an Organization advocating the rights of Kurdish People in Syria which have been estimated to be about 2 million.

Last year we received good news from the representative of the Syrian Government to the eleventh session of working group on minorities, as he told us all, that the Syrian government is going in the following months to give the stateless Kurds their citizenship back, which was taken away by the Syrian Government before four decades ago. At the same time the Syrian authorities promised the Kurds in Syria to end their suffering by giving them and their children their citizenship back, as their number raised up to approximately 350,000 People. Mrs Dr. Najah Al Attar, the vice president of Syria for Syrian affairs, met two months before, in June 2006, with the leaders of Kurdish political parties and promised them to solve the problem of the stateless Kurds. Although the promises are until now only promises and we don't see any practical steps in this issue, the Syrian government moves in the right direction by giving the Kurds their citizenship back.

On the other levels the government did not show any positive actions to improve the situation of Kurds and their rights in Syria. We called upon the Syrian government to set up an investigation into the apparently disproportionate response of the security forces to the 12 March 2004 massacre in Kurdish area and investigate the unlawful killings and deaths as a result of torture, but until now nothing was done except mass arresting of peaceful demonstrators including children from 9 years old, torturing and keeping Kurds in prisons with out any litigations, expelling Kurdish students were and pupils from the universities and schools. A new kind of banning was introduced by the Syrian authorities this year as they banned colours in the Kurdish area and cities; Before the March 21, 2006 the Syrian authorities banned the sale of Kurds' stuff with the following colours: red, white, green and yellow. Kurds carry clothes with these colours on "Newroz" the national day of all Kurds, in all parts of Kurdistan, in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Kurdish names are still banned, Kurdish language is forbidden, Kurdish political parties are acting without any permission, Kurdish names are still replaced by Arabic names, and the Arabic belt is still drown deep inside the Kurdish area.

The Arabic belt is as it name shows, a line of villages which were built by the Syrian government at the border between Syria and Turkey in the seventeenth on Kurdish land. This land was seized from the original owners, the Kurds, and given to Arabs, who were brought from the banks of Euphrates and settled in the Kurdish area to change the demography of this area. The people who were brought by the government belong to Arabic tribes as: Tai, al Jabour, Al Bagara. Some of people who belong to these tribes loosed their lands as the Euphrates dam was built, and the government brought them to build the Arabic belt. Another Arabic tribe, which called Shamar, refused to be settled in the Kurdish area because they respected the historical good relationship between the Kurds and Arabs, which should be developed and not damaged.

The settlements of the Arabic belt, which were built between 1972 – 1974 are:

- Tal Al Hadara, Tal Al Arqam, Tal Al Haffara, Al Qunaitra, Al Qairawan, Dhar Al Arab, Al Asadia, Al Raqa, Al Qoura, Al Hatimia, Um Al Rabeei, Baseera, Al Jabiria, Tal Tishreen, Um Al Fursan, Al Tanouria, Hilwa, Al Qahtania, Mizgeft, Al Naftia, Maeshouq, Tawakul, Shabak, Al

Jawadia, Tal Aauar, Moustafawia, Al Sahia, Al Hamra, Ain Al Khadraa, Tal Alo, Zihêriyê.

Further measures taken by the Syrian government with the apparent effect of changing the demography of the area is to recognize the Arabic big villages as cities but not the Kurdish ones and let the Kurdish villages administrative belong to the Arabic cities. This bars the Kurds to benefit from the public services (and leaves them as villagers and enables the Arabs to be urban, who have more access to public services and have better chance and possibilities to development.

With respect to development, the Kurds should benefit from the development policy in place in Syria. The basic step to develop the society is to improve access to education. My own experience as a teacher in a Kurdish village has shown me that it is impossible to teach children with a foreign language. From the Kurdish pupils who live in Kurdish areas, Afrîn, Kobanî or Cezîrê, less than 5% achieve to the university. Kurds have no chance to get any scholarship to continue their studies.

After finishing their studies and going through all these difficulties, Kurds who do not have a Syrian citizenship, arrive to the end of their career and turn back to their villages with bachelor or diploma degree to continue their life as a worker on the land, because they do not possess a permit to work.

Other Kurdish academics face discrimination on the work market. They face discrimination because of two reasons: the first one as a citizen of Syria who does not belong to the Baath Arabic socialistic party and the second is because of belonging to a national minority namely the Kurdish minority. There is no Kurdish minister in Syria, no mayor of any province or city, no Kurdish pilot and no democratic elected Kurdish member of parliament. Typical work and posts for Kurds are waiter, taxi driver and policeman.

We recall the requests made during our presentation at the Working Group last year in calling upon the Syrian authorities to:

- Recognize the existence of the Kurdish minority in Syria, and guarantee Kurdish people political and cultural rights by the Syrian Constitution.
- Guarantee the Kurds the Right to participation and development without any discrimination.
- Remove the Arabic belt and the Arabic settlements from the Kurdish area, and give the Kurdish Villagers back their land.
- Legislate a law to allow the Kurdish political parties to act in official and public capacities.
- End the prohibitions on the use of the Kurdish language in education, the workplace, official establishments, and at private celebrations, and to allow children to be registered with Kurdish names as well as in public services.
- Give the stateless Kurds back their citizenship and compensate them adequately.
- Set up an investigation into the apparently disproportionate response of the security forces to the 12 March 2004 massacre in Kurdish area and investigate the unlawful killings and deaths as a result of torture.

Thank you very much.

Jian Badrakhan

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