

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

**Green Party MEP
for the South East of England**

Commissioner Ferrero Waldner
Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
Bruxelles, 1040

Dear Commissioner Ferrero Waldner,

Re: Persecution of Ahwazi Arabs

I am writing to you regarding severe human rights abuses currently being committed against Iran's ethnic Ahwazi Arabs.

As you will be aware, the Ahwazi Arabs reside predominantly in the south western province of Khuzestan and are believed to make up approximately 3 per cent of Iran's population. They represent a majority in Al-Ahwaz, an area which is home to most of Iran's oilfields.

A series of very alarming accusations have been made against the Iranian Government, which I would urge you to investigate. According to the Ahwaz Human Rights Organization, over the course of the past year 25,000 Ahwazis have been arrested; 131 have been executed, and a further 150 have disappeared. Reports in the Iranian media have stated that sixteen Arab rights activists have been sentenced to death, most of them being convicted after making confessions extracted under torture. In addition to this, two of those sentenced to death were in prison when they were alleged to have been involved in bomb attacks. Amnesty International has recently reported that Tehran has been imprisoning Ahwazi children along with their mothers in an attempt to force their political activist fathers to surrender to the police.

A policy of "ethnic restructuring" has also been widely reported, with accusations that Tehran have developed a strategy aimed at making the Ahwazi Arabs a minority in their own homeland. The construction of new townships to house 500,000 non-Arabs is allegedly planned with Ahwazi Arabs to be displaced to shanty towns on the outskirts of Ahwaz city and others relocated by force to impoverished northern regions of Iran. The central government has also been offering financial incentives such as zero interest loans to encourage ethnic Persians to settle in Ahwaz.

Al-Ahwaz is Iran's third poorest region despite the fact that it produces 90 per cent of Iran's oil. Eighty per cent of children in the region suffer from malnutrition and the unemployment rate among Arabs is five times that of Persians. Illiteracy rates are at

least four times as high amongst Arabs as amongst non-Arabs, and Arabic language newspapers have been banned in an attempt to crush Arab identity even further.

I hereby call upon the Commission/ Foreign Office to take action on these issues as a matter of urgency in order to ensure the protection and basic rights of the Ahwazi Arabs, and to send a message to Tehran that their actions are not going unnoticed. Failure to do so will only lead to a deterioration of the situation, and very possibly the capture and death of even more of this repressed group.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Lucas'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Caroline Lucas MEP

European Parliament, Office 8G103, Rue Wiertz, B-1047 Brussels, BELGIUM
Tel: +32 2 2845153 Fax: +32 2 2849153 E-Mail: caroline.lucas@europarl.europa.eu
Web: www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk