

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0483/06
by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL)
to the Council

Subject: The 'Arvand Free Zone' project in south-western Iran, adjoining Iraq, and violence by the State against the predominantly Arab population with the aim of driving residents away

1. Is the Council aware that Iran is inhabited not only by Iranians (Persians) but also by large groups of people with different ethnic origins, such as regional majorities of Baluchis in the south-east, Turkmens in the north, Azeris in the north-west, Kurds in the west and Arabs in the south-western province of Khuzestan, and that tolerance of these groups has steadily dwindled during the period of more than a quarter of a century during which a strict theocratic regime has been in power which imposes severe punishments and radically restricts personal liberty, so that non-Iranian population groups - including 4½ million Arabs - are now suffering from the twofold affliction of dictatorship and discrimination on ethnic grounds?
2. Is the Council aware that in June, September and October 2005, clashes occurred between the Iranian authorities and the Arab population in Khuzestan, which is passively resisting attempts to drive most of its members away from this oil-rich area close to Iraq and Kuwait by means of expropriation of agricultural land, particularly around Mohammarah (Khorammshar) and Abadan, where the military-industrial project 'Arvand Free Zone' and a nuclear power station are planned?
3. Is the Council aware that a scheduled visit by the new radical President of Iran, Ahmadinejad, to the city of Ahwaz on 24 January was first cancelled because of bad weather, although the weather was good, and that then - following the explosion of a number of bombs, possibly organised by the regime itself (the Revolutionary Guard) - violence was used against the city's Arab population, resulting in deaths, injuries and arrests? Is the Council also aware that the regime is doing everything in its power to make this area inaccessible for outsiders and to prevent such news from reaching the outside world?
4. How will the European Union try to ensure that the Arab population in south-western Iran does not suffer additional disadvantage due to the involvement of European Union Member States in the military presence in the neighbouring south of Iraq, the country which in the 1980s tried to seize Khuzestan from Iran, and to avoid giving the Iranian regime the opportunity to interpret the current tensions in Khuzestan as reflecting a renewed intention to invade Iran?
5. How will the European Union seek to help the Arab population of south-western Iran to survive, without discrimination, forced resettlement, conscription of students into the army or pressure to change their language and culture?

Source: Website www.ahwaz.org.uk of the British Ahwazi Friendship Society (BAFS).