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<i>The Problem of Southern Azerbaijan</i>	
Say (Ref.): 545/ 2011 İlaygün (Date): 30 Aug 2011	
<p>The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva Please circulate this Briefing Note to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Working Group on arbitrary detention (also for Fair Trials);</li><li>• Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression</li><li>• Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance</li><li>• The Independent Expert on Minority Issues</li><li>• Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges;</li></ul> <p>CC To Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the UN General Secretary Also to: Mr. Boehner, Mr. Cantor and Mrs. Pelosi of the US House of Representatives Mr Dyke and Mrs. Harrison, Amnesty International, London Human Rights Watch and Human Rights Server, UN HAbitat</p>	<p>The dwindling Lake Urmu: The battleground for the survival of Azerbaijanis</p>

Dear sir/madam,

**BRIEFING NOTES: THE REVIVAL OF LAKE URMU –NATIONAL MOVEMENT OF SOUTH AZERBAIJAN ENTERS A NEW PHASE**

This Note is a briefing of the historic events on 27 August 2011, the Designated Day of Action for the Revival of Lake Urmu, which took place in Urmu, a provincial capital and the second biggest city of Southern Azerbaijan, as well as in Tebriz, the historic capital of Azerbaijan. The revival of Lake Urmu is a demand of the highest priority, owing to water levels falling at such an alarming rate that its obliteration is inevitable within a few years if no action is taken now. The Islamic Republic of Iran rules over Southern Azerbaijan and exploits its natural resources pitilessly by implementing wholly inappropriate technologies instigating adverse impacts, such as the rapid drop of the water level in Lake Urmu. On 16 August 2011, the Iranian Parliament rejected a Parliamentary Bill for the Revival of Lake Urmu and one Iranian MP **uttered** the words that Azerbaijanis should evacuate the area. Both the rejection and the utterance confirmed suspicions that had arisen in Southern Azerbaijan for a long time. After the fateful day of August the 16<sup>th</sup>, the national conscience in Southern Azerbaijan went through a catastrophic phase shift and 86 years of antiracist struggle and more than a century of democratic struggle culminated in the Designated Day of Environmental Campaign, August the 27<sup>th</sup>. The repressive forces mobilised by the Iranian government were opposed by Southern Azerbaijanis through non-violent means in espousing the environment.

This Briefing Note provides you an outline.

We have informed you of the fate of Lake Urmu, as per our Communications: Ref: 538/2011 on 30 April 2011 and Ref: 526/2010 on 15 May 2010. The latter was accompanied by a technical report providing you with basic information not to be repeated here. As an exercise of maturity, both the activists of the national movement of Southern Azerbaijan and sports fans of Southern Azerbaijan took upon themselves to campaign for the revival of Lake Urmu. The Iranian authorities failed to sympathize with the Azerbaijani nation and instead resorted to their usual brutal and repressive acts. In the meantime they also falsely attributed the cause of the impending disaster of Lake Urmu to climate change and to deliberate seeding and diverting the clouds away from the lake by "Western imperialist and Zionist forces." They also proposed unrealistic and grandiose plans to divert water to Lake Urmu from the River Araz or the Caspian Sea and in any case, when formally discussed in the Iranian parliament, rejected any plan to revive Lake Urmu.



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Southern Azerbaijanis were alarmed by this extremely outrageous inaction of the Iranian Parliament on August the 17<sup>th</sup> and issued waves of communiqués by the activists of the national movement of Southern Azerbaijan, sports-fans and environmentalist. Specially prepared environmental slogans were chanted during the football match between Southern Azerbaijani football teams, one of which was the national team of Southern Azerbaijan. The attendance was from all over Southern Azerbaijan and more than 50,000 despite the Iranian intimations. This event served as the springboard for the launching of the next Phase of the activism in Southern Azerbaijan, where the previous Phase was the antiracist protests of the May 2006 Mass Protest. In the previous Phase, the map of Southern Azerbaijan was drawn to its historic borders despite the Iranian balkanization and defined the character of an oncoming struggle: cool headed alliance of leaders; encourage diversity but act with one voice; mutual exclusion with racism and mutual inclusion within Southern Azerbaijan; waging the war of attrition against the enemies of Azerbaijan; never breaching the Iranian laws but absolute commitment to the full Universal Declaration of Human Right including its conventions on self-determination; giving precedence to antiracist struggle over the Iranian-brand of democracy, who blessed Mir-Hossein Mousavi with democratic credentials, a disguised Hezbollah, and still vivid in the living memory for chain of murders.

Let us recap with the history behind this event. Following the overthrow of the Qajar dynasty in the “Protectorate of the Qajar Countries” by a Persian subordinate Soldier, corporal Reza, he declared himself as Shah in 1925, founded the Pahlavi dynasty, and renamed the country as Iran in 1935. This was a pretext for an explicit racist policy, regarding the so called the *Aryan* race as the legitimate inhabitants of the country and the Azerbaijanis, largest nation then, as well as other ethnic nations, as the “tribes” occupying the “holy Persian soil.” Reza Shah outlawed the national languages; only promoted Farsi; minoritised the Azerbaijanis who were the majority nation then; subjected the culture of the non-Persian ethnic nations to slow death; and promoted a culture of hate and insult against the so called non-*Aryans*. The Islamic Republic of Iran overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty but was a copycat of the past racist policies only with one difference that they accelerated the rate of the imposed decay by a more sophisticated systemic discourse and actions.

As part of this new discourse, the Iranian authorities stepped up their balkanization of Southern Azerbaijan and instigated insulting actions against the so-called non-*Aryan* ethnic nations. An infamous racist cartoon published by the official Daily newspaper, *Iran*, was one such example; for more information, please refer to Amnesty International’s Urgent Action (UA 151/06, MDE 13/055/2006 on 26 May 2006: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde130552006>). This outrageous act was in fact intended to test the waters and verify that the Azerbaijani Turkic identity was dead but it touched upon the national conscience of Azerbaijanis in Southern Azerbaijan, who proved their identity was intact but was marginalized only for tactical reasons. It was in the context of these events that alarm was raised regarding falling water levels in Lake Urmu and the studies by the activists of the national movement of Southern Azerbaijan identified the cause to be inappropriate damming and diversion of the rivers flowing to Lake Urmu.

The campaign for the Revival of Lake Urmu is the culmination of a movement defending the natural rights of Southern Azerbaijan. This movement is not minded with the overthrow of any government but that governance must comply fully with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A focus of the national movement of Southern Azerbaijan is to make impossible for the Iranian authorities to exercise their arbitrary acts and get away from their wrong deeds by collusion among their State machineries, where these define norms of the Iranian governance in Southern Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani mindset regards armed struggle as inappropriate and inferior to open and democratic struggle. Following August the 16<sup>th</sup>, the call for protests by activists reverberated throughout Southern Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani Diaspora but is being subjected to misinformation by the Iranian-centric mass media. The response of the Iranian authorities was brutal, with Tebriz and Urmu militarised by Special Forces with no other intention than a violent crackdown. Eyewitness accounts indicated that civilians were outnumbered by state paramilitary forces and were intimidated in both Tebriz and Urmu to protest. However, just before 6.00 p.m. owing to the leadership of two young females the individuals seeking an opportunity to form protesting groups materialized in Urmu and after that, this process did not cease. The Iranian security agents resorted to burning rubbish bins as a pretext for directly seeding violence. After this, the process of spontaneous protests broke out throughout Urmu. Although telecommunication lines were taken down in Tebriz it later emerged that protesters in Tebriz also had managed to coalesce from individuals to groups just an hour after that in Urmu but the Iranian notorious Special Forces prevented the formation of a city-wide march.



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The events confirmed that the national conscience of Azerbaijan is not limited to Tebriz, which is the renowned vanguard for such protests but that this capacity is intact throughout Azerbaijan and the leadership to defend this homeland is spontaneously cultivated throughout and hence Urmu is now twinned with Tebriz. The racism in Iran deploys every trick in the book to show Urmu as a city of the so called *Aryans* but these so called *Aryans* only show up in acts of terrorism and have no culture of peaceful protests.

The eyewitness accounts differed on the number of participants in both Urmu and Tebriz as this was understandable due to the fact that both Tebriz and Urmu were under the occupation of paramilitary agents. Indeed, all eyewitness accounts in both Azerbaijani websites and GünAzTV, the national TV of Southern Azerbaijan broadcasting from Chicago, confirmed that these units were all non-Azerbaijani and Persians and conversely, the local police have not been seen among the crackdown units, but this is yet to be explained. The reports indicate that the paramilitary agents of the Iranian authorities committed arson, burning down buildings and attacking peaceful protesters. More than 400 individuals were rounded up in each of the cities and three individuals were reportedly killed in Urmu, one of whom is a female but yet to be identified.

According to OyrenciNews, Ruqeyye Hesenzade was arrested in Tebriz near the Emin junction. She was a participant in the protests for the revival of Lake Urmu. She was taken to an undisclosed location.



It is too early to provide you with detailed information. This Briefing Note is to alert you for action and use your mandate to warn the Islamic Republic of Iran of their obligations to International conventions and norms and discontinue their past arbitrary acts in Southern Azerbaijan. The overall demands are emerging and include:

1. Immediately remove their invading forces from Southern Azerbaijan and unconditionally release the victims already detained, bring the officers to justice who murdered the eco-campaigner, mentioned above.
2. Dewater all the impounding dams restricting flow to Lake Urmu and release their water in a controlled manner to the lake.
3. Publish the reports that the Iranian authorities were obliged to produce under Article 3 of the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance as Waterfowl Habitat (registered as The Ramsar Convention of the UN Treaty Series No. 14583 adopted in 1975), to formulate and implement a plan to promote the conservation of this lake and its wise use.
4. The nation of Azerbaijan in Southern Azerbaijan no longer trusts the disingenuous Iranian authorities, Iranian oppositions and Iranian environmental engineering and therefore it is necessary to employ an international consultancy to draw up plans for water management of the wider Urmu basin, for the revival of the lake and wise use of its water.
5. Stop balkanizing Southern Azerbaijan.
6. Release all prisoners of conscience and in particular set up enquiries to scrutinise the Iranian justice system that treats arbitrarily innocent Azerbaijani prisoners of conscience, such as Mr. Seid Metinpur, Mrs. Sima Didar, Mr. Elirza Ferishi, Mr. Seid Mughanli and Mr. Seid Neimi to name but a few.

Southern Azerbaijan needs an international support, else aggressive Iranian authorities will be appeased.

Yours faithfully,  
Boyuk Resuloglu  
The Committee for the Defence of the Rights of World Azerbaijanis

Note: This briefing Note was compiled by scrutinizing the information available on 27 August 2011. However, since then the Iranian authorities have instigated waves of repressions including the renowned activist Mr. Abbas Leysanli (Lisani) in Erdebil.



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One scene Two Photos from Lake Urmu – Location: the Isle of *Osman Yumruğu*

A view now

A view 10 years ago