

Indigenous peoples: conflict, peace and resolution

The Tuareg : an Indigenous People in need of recognition and Human Rights assistance

Distinguished Members of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Distinguished Representatives of Indigenous Peoples of the world, Brothers, Sisters, Friends from every part of the globe ..

I speak to you today on behalf of one particular, very specific indigenous group, an essentially nomadic people found widely distributed around the Sahara desert of Northern Africa for many hundreds if not thousands of years. We are a people usually referred to as 'the Tuareg', although sometimes described in the plural also: as 'the Tuaregs'. Neither term however comes from our own language although for convenience and to be better understood we are forced to use them. More specifically I also speak on behalf of an NGO called The Imouhagh International Organisation for Justice and Transparency.

Our collective concerns derive from 180 years of unspeakable persecution and maltreatment that have occurred at different times right up to the present day, in a wide variety of places around our vast and ancient desert homeland. That homeland has now, alas!, been parcelled out into a number of new states, successors to former French or Italian colonies.

Human Rights violations committed against us have included mass killings, and a great variety of other terrible atrocities. These have included torture as well as destruction & devastation, sometimes in a systematic way, of our very means of subsistence and our temporary or permanent settlements.

As with other indigenous peoples there are numerous stories that I could recount about the Tuareg to do with unprovoked conflicts that have ravaged our lands and communities, and resulted in massacres, rapes and other gross violations of human rights. There are other important stories too of forced conscription into the army and militia

important stories too of forced conscription into the army and militia, as well as of heavy militarization of vast areas, of the destruction of cherished cultural heritage, and of immigrant-settlement of confiscated territories, and of the displacement of peoples through deprivation of their means of livelihood. Many such situations have gone unreported, because they are repeatedly ignored by mainstream media. They have frequently been pushed into political invisibility - or else trivialized - not only by hostile governments but also by different 'non-state actors', including large corporations.

In 2014 and 2015 we witnessed particularly shocking abuses of human rights that violated international humanitarian law, alongside other criminal acts. These were perpetrated by different states against the Tuareg who, I repeat, are the truly original and indigenous peoples of the Sahara. The range of abuses has included arbitrary or false imprisonment, along with genocidal acts and crimes against humanity, all of them directed against Tuareg people. This was particularly the case in Libya and Mali in the very recent past.

The Tuareg situation in Mali 2012- 2015

My people have struggled for freedom and the right to self-governance with the successive governments of Mali ever since the creation of that new and independent State in 1960. The subsequent demarcation of new borders left the Tuareg with no place whatever to call their own. The original inhabitants of the area instead found themselves totally ignored but with their ancient and traditional lands divided randomly between four very artificial newly created 'countries'. I refer to Libya, Algeria, Niger and Mali.

This important fact led on to much conflict and enormous damage to the fabric of Tuareg society. It also put an end to the possibility of peaceful coexistence the indefinite future for that part of the Sahara.

2012 for the Tuareg was one of the worst years ever for war crimes, crimes not only in Mali but throughout the whole region. On February 22nd certain elements of the Malian army wanted to avenge various attacks, war crimes and other abuses. These had been committed by that same Malian Army and its militias, particularly the Gand Okoye. They attacked unarmed nomads and animal herders. Their actions included arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, denial of food and water so as to cause death from hunger or thirst. plus unspeakable tortures

as also summary executions.

Specifically, on 18th April, in Sevaré (Mopti) Malian soldiers summarily executed three unarmed persons and threw their remains into a well. Also in that April of 2012, and again in Sevaré, near the front line, it appears that three other civilians were summarily executed by the Malian army. Three or four years later between May 2015 and March 2016 170 civilians were killed either by the Malian army or by its militias and related terrorist groups. The perpetrators have not as yet been brought to justice.

The case of the Indigenous Tuareg in Libya

The situation of the Tuareg population within Libya took a turn for the worse with the fall of the Qadafi regime. Hundreds of Tuareg were subsequently arrested, tortured and killed and others were imprisoned once recognised and identified. This happened in Tripoli, Misrata, and El Zawiya as well as elsewhere in the country. In Ghadamis, on May 19th 2012, war crimes were committed by militias supported and financed by the Libyan Interior Minister, Nasser Almanaie, himself from Ghadamis. 20 innocent unarmed men were assassinated. Their names were as follows:

1. Fakee Outhman
2. Sadam Cheikh Ibrahim Aghali
3. Ahmed Jebreel Bikhi
4. Issa Mohamed Amma
5. Ali Mohamed Issa Shnkad
6. Mohamed Mossa Chnkad
7. Mohamed Mohammed Farj
8. El Eid Hamida Mohamed
9. Abdulhakeem Salim Oumar
10. Abdullah Abulwahab Bikhe
11. Ismail El saih
12. Khalil El Shibani
13. Mohamed Ahmed Sagala
14. Hamza Oukha Amaa Agnidi
15. Issa Akoni
16. Ali Abdunabi El Eid
17. Ramadan Mohammed Salim
18. Salim Mohammed Salim
19. Ramdan Ibrahim Jablani

As well as demolishing 33 houses belonging to the Tuareg, levelling them to the ground, they burned their animals and demolished ancient cultural heritage buildings or artefacts belonging to the Tuareg in that city. The same scenario occurred again further South on Sep 17, 2015 in Oubari when a union of 'ideologically armed' tribes and militias launched outrageous attacks against the Tuareg killing dozens of innocent unarmed civilians. Hundreds of houses in Oubari and Sebha were destroyed by armed groups who used bulldozers, heavy weapons and grenades to knock them down

bulldozers heavy weapons and grenades to knock them down. These too were Tuareg property.

And yet again 23,000 Tuareg in Libya have been denied Libyan nationality and normal identity documents as a result of which their children have been deprived of schooling due to their lack of a so-called national number and an ID.

The situation of the indigenous peoples of Tuareg extraction in Algeria

The situation of the Tuareg in Algeria can be described as not only very worrying but much worse than that namely quite disastrous. Dozens of them have been arrested and detained without trial entirely because of their ethnic identity. Most of the detainees are nomads, cattle herders in most cases and neither family members nor close friends are allowed to visit them. Prisoners do not have access to legal aid.

On April 4, 2016 the Algerian authorities demolished 100 houses in Tamanrasset in the far South without any prior notice to the population. The Algerian authorities have never provided a copy, or shown evidence that it exists of the decision to knock down the Tuareg houses on the heads of the inhabitants. A consequence of those actions was that 4 women were reported to have suffered aborted pregnancies and 14 peaceful protesters have been put in jail. More than a hundred families were left homeless without any alternative shelter or assistance from the government.

The situation of the Tuareg in Niger

The situation of the Tuareg in Niger is fantastically difficult the state of Niger is not meeting genuine requirements of indigenous peoples rights particularly when it is to do with land and environment this can be seen clearly in the Greenpeace report and other human rights reports.

The Tuareg rebellion of 2009 have ended up in a peace agreement between Tuareg rebels and Nigerian official but only little part of that agreement have seen light (implemented). The Nigerian Government Army had committed massacres and war crimes in 1990s and 2008 but the perpetrators have not been yet brought to justice.

Although the Tuareg rebellion in Niger is generally attributed to Tuareg's demands for a greater and more equitable share of the country's uranium revenues, while centering on grievances associated with marginalisation, indigenous land rights and the exploitation of mineral resources, are far more complex. The associated interests of multinational mining companies; environmental threats also details the human rights abuses inflicted on the civilian population in Niger.

According to Greenpeace report 2010 and other reliable reports, dozens if not hundreds of the Tuareg Nomads have died as a result of **French nuclear giant AREVA** activities specialising in producing Uranium and chemical materials in the region of Arlit and Akokan village. The area have seen for the first time in the history awkward diseases since the arrival of the company in 1970. And while France depends on nuclear power for three-quarters of its electricity, that Areva Company provides making France more reliant on uranium than any country on earth and while Paris enjoys lights and clean water our children and Tuareg Nomads are dying of intense hunger, pollution, radioactivity can cause respiratory problems, birth defects, leukemia and cancer.

In conclusion I wish only to stress the following recommendations:

1. The Malian government must comply with its promises set out in the peace deal agreement which signed in June 2015 with Tuareg rebels.

2. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and

2. THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES RIGHTS and the Working Group of the African Commission for Indigenous Peoples have an important role to play at the level of Africa and at the level of the countries of the Sahel for the protection of the Tuaregs. In implementing the resolutions of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples at the level of Africa, and also advancing the work of the African Court, the Court of the African Union, they can play an important role in the resolution of conflicts.

3. The Permanent Forum can play a role to make proposals to the Governments in the area of conflict resolutions, and above all, to find a binding mechanism that will obligate States binding that will make States implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but above all the resolution of the United Nations on the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples. One must create a binding mechanism that can make the Governments to work towards ..

4. The Governments must comply with international legislation to protect Indigenous Peoples as is stipulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and by the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

5. Countries must no longer be allowed to get away with mayhem without proper punishment.

6. The UN must put more pressure on member states in the Sahara region to end discrimination, marginalisation and persecution of the Tuareg in territory that in all honesty must be recognised as having been essentially theirs for many thousands of years

7. The Tuareg right to a Nationality and the documentation of an identity that accompanies it must be granted to the Tuareg of Libya without delay in full accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

8. The indigenous people of the Sahara, the Tuareg, could happily and usefully play an important role in any attempt to bring peace and stability to the region if only they are given enough trust by the governments of the different states in the region

Akli Sh'kka : Imouhagh International Organisation for the Sake of Justice & Transparency

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