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# **IRAN: Top cleric decries Iran's discrimination against Sunnis**

Photo: Mowlavi Abdolhamid, the top religious leader of Iran's largely Sunni Baluch population

## **IRAN: Top cleric decries Iran's discrimination against Sunnis**

IranIntl (01.09.2023) – Iran's leading Sunni cleric has criticized the regime for persecuting the religious minority, stating that the President failed to fulfill his campaign

promises.

During his Friday prayer sermon, Mowlavi Abdolhamid criticized the regime for following a set of 'unwritten policies' that discriminate against the Sunni population in political and social spheres.

Sunnis make up at least 10 percent of Iran's 88 million population, and Zahedan, where thousands attend Abdolhamid's Friday prayers every week, is one of the few Sunni-majority cities in a predominantly Shiite country.

He asserted that the authorities of the Islamic Republic intend to entrust the management of Sunni religious schools to Shia Muslims, a policy that has led to the imprisonment of several Sunni individuals who resisted this decision. Mowlavi Fat'hi-Mohammad Naghshbandi, the Friday prayer leader of the city of Rask, was arrested in August, sparking several days of demonstrations and a heavy security presence by regime agents in Sistan-Baluchestan province.

"The government can oversee religious school operations, but management should remain in the hands of Sunnis," he insisted. In areas where the government has imposed its favored Friday Prayer leaders, "the people no longer attend those mosques because they consider them state-owned."

"Sunnis have been demanding justice and equality for the past 44 years, yet their demands have gone unmet," Abdolhamid emphasized, noting that "during the Pahlavi era, Sunnis held

senior positions in the army and the police, and the region was under the control of its people.”

“However, during the Islamic Republic, there hasn’t been a single Sunni minister in the government,” he lamented, adding that Sunnis are excluded from managerial positions even in Sistan-Baluchestan province. “Meritocracy is absent in the Iranian government,” he asserted.

Criticizing inequalities in regions with substantial Sunni populations, he insisted, “In the appointment of managers in provinces such as Kordestan and Sistan-Baluchestan, there should be a balance between Sunnis and Shiites.”

Abdolhamid also criticized the regime for turning every problem into a security issue, urging the authorities to allow minorities to practice their religion without fear of persecution. “Don’t close Sunni mosques. Do not close places of worship for Jews, Christians, and other non-Islamic religions.”

He also mentioned his meetings with President Ebrahim Raisi, stating that “Among the issues I raised were establishing relations with neighboring and Islamic countries, resolving livelihood and economic problems, and addressing the concerns of Sunnis and Iranian ethnic minorities.”

Iran’s top Sunni leader added that the current administration has failed to fulfill any of its promises to the Sunnis made during the election campaigns, such as appointing Sunnis as

governors, deputy ministers, or envoys to other countries. “You have approximately 180 ambassadors. If you let ten of them be Sunnis, nothing would happen. Sunnis are also an integral part of this land and your fellow citizens.”

“Our most crucial demand is that the government does not differentiate between Shiites and Sunnis,” he emphasized, stressing that the rights of all Iranian ethnic and religious minorities should be respected.

While Abdolhamid was delivering his sermon, the regime had shut down the internet in Zahedan and several other cities in the province, disrupting the live streaming of his speech on social media platforms.

After the Friday prayers, the people of Zahedan took to the streets in protest, chanting slogans demanding the release of detained Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Mowlavi Fat’hi-Mohammad Naghshbandi, along with other political prisoners.

These protests marked the forty-eighth consecutive weekly demonstrations in the province, occurring regularly since Bloody Friday on September 30, 2022, when security forces killed over 80 people, including women and children.



Photo: Iran’s top Sunni cleric Mowlavi Abdolhamid (left) and President Ebrahim Raisi during his campaigns for the 2021 presidential election

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