

AZOH; A new wave of mass demonstrations to save Lake Urmia was violently suppressed by Iranian security forces and riot police in streets of Azerbaijani cities of Iran such as Tabriz, Urmia, Marand, Marageh and Miyaneh. The riot police and security forces used tear-gas and batons to disperse the crowd, arresting scores of protesters. In the city of Urmia, capital of West Azerbaijan province, tens of detainees were led to the police cars and paddy-wagons and transferred to unknown locations, eyewitnesses said.

Protesters were chanting slogans in Azerbaijani-Turkish like “Long live Azerbaijan”, “Lake Urmia is dying; the Majlis [Iranian Parliament] ordered its execution” and, “Let us cry, so that with our tears we replenish Lake Urmia.”

According to the ADAPP sources, Afsane Toghiri, the secretary of Association of Azerbaijani Studies in Tabriz University and Azerbaijani civil rights activists Akbar Muhajir, Hasan Mirzakhani and Muhammad Iskandarzade were among those arrested. A number of Azerbaijani activists such as Hussein Ahmadian and journalist Ali Hamed Iman were arrested a day before the protests.

The mass protests to save Lake Urmia took place on the sixth anniversary of May 2006 demonstrations in Azerbaijan, in which tens of protesters were killed and thousands were arrested.

The predominantly Azerbaijani-populated cities of Iran are being confronted by a pending environmental catastrophe that will result in the drying-out of Lake Urmia, which is situated between West Azerbaijan and East Azerbaijan provinces, and is one of the largest salt lakes in the world.

In recent years, the Iranian government has built dams on more than 20 tributaries feeding into the lake. Environmental organizations and experts claim that this damming, coupled with an environmentally damaging bridge linking the cities of Urmia and Tabriz, has reduced the flow of water into and within Lake Urmia, causing the majority of the lake to evaporate.

The deterioration of Lake Urmia impacts 13 million local inhabitants, as well as the nations of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq, and Armenia. According to Esmail Kahrom, a professor of environmental sciences at the University of Tehran, if Lake Urmia dries up, “six to eight cities will be totally destroyed, covered by layers and layers of salt.”

Over the past three years, peaceful protests against the government’s policy over Lake Urmia crisis have been harshly cracked down by Iranian forces.

YouTube Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bvsMQYPJ1w>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmUUBVZuCck>

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