

would like to thank all the participants of VOICES

teachers. We were forced to learn to speak Farsi in school and the use of our native tongue was a serious offense. Our history textbooks completely distorted events in favor of the glory of the Persian race. None of us had access to textbooks written in our mother tongue. Persian culture was regarded as the common identity of all Iranians. The important role of Azerbaijani Turks in Iranian history was downplayed.

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Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis on both borders share a common language and culture, but while “North Azerbaijanis”, have had independence since 1991 and have been able to flourish culturally and linguistically, “South Azerbaijanis” have been forced to be Persianized for the past 80 years, which has threatened their language and culture. Azerbaijanis have no choice but to assimilate; if not, they are marginalized and prevented from societal advancement. Those who dare to speak out against the system of racism are arrested, tortured and sometimes killed.

This became abundantly clear after the publication of a political cartoon in May 2006 depicting miscommunication between a Persian boy and a cockroach, which represented the Azerbaijani people. In the aftermath, Azerbaijani residents in Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Zanzan, Khoy the

Raising awareness of this issue is the first step. Together we can turn a small spark into a raging fire that burns down the walls of the institution of racism. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “in the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” Therefore, we must make the entire world aware of the socially limiting problem of racism that exists within Iranian society and hopefully one day see it erased.

Thank you very much for your time.”