

# Khomeini Makes Offer to Minority Sect: Proposal Would Give Sunnis Equal Status With Shias

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### Proposal Would Give Sunnis Equal Status With Shias

From the London Daily Telegraph

TEHRAN—In one of his most conciliatory gestures since the Iranian revolution, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, endorsed Sunday a proposed change in the constitution that would give Sunni Muslims equal status with the country's majority Shia community.

But there was mixed reaction from Sunni leaders to Khomeini's offer to have the constitution amended by a referendum.

Mowlavi Abdulaziz, religious leader of 500,000 members of the Sunni Baluchis sect in Balchistan province withdrew an earlier threat that his followers would boycott the nation's first presidential election on Friday unless his demands for constitutional and other changes were met. There are an estimated 1 million Baluchis in Iran.

But there was a much cooler response from Sheik Ezzedin Hussein, political and religious leader of between 3 million and 5 million Sunni Kurds, who are demanding autonomy from the central authorities in Tehran and the shrine city of Qom.

"The changes proposed by the iman (Khomeini) are cosmetic," Hussein said. They are not basic changes. In any case, the changes proposed are not mine. I do not agree with them."

The amendment to the Islamic constitution would allow Sunni Muslims to have their own courts and tribunals in regions where they predominate over members of the Shia sect.

The guarantee of Sunni minority rights was dropped from the original draft of the constitution. That deletion has been a major cause of unrest among the Kurdish, Turkoman and Baluchi minorities.

Before Khomeini's approval of a constitutional amendment, Hussein had declared that the Kurds would not participate the presidential election.

Asked Sunday whether the Kurds would boycott the presidential election, Hussein replied: "The imam said that those who have not voted positively for the constitution have no right to be elected president. Therefore, we take this to mean that those who have not voted for the constitution have no right to vote in the presidential election either. The implication, I agree, is that we will boycott the polls." He said a formal statement would be issued today.

The first call for a boycott was made after Massud Rajavi, candidate of the left-wing Mujahedeen organization and the favorite candidate of Sunnis, was disqualified by Khomeini ruled Saturday that candidates who had not voted for the ratification of the constitution in last month's referendum had no right to be elected president. This was a clear reference to Rajavi, whose group boycotted the referendum.

In an unexpectedly conciliatory statement Sunday, the Mujahedeen

organization urged its supporters, especially in Kurdistan, to show restraint.

The proposed constitutional amendment follows a visit by Ibrahim Yazdi, former foreign minister, to the Baluchi capital of Zahedan last month, after an outbreak of Shia-Sunni fighting in which at least 20 people were killed and scores injured.

Yazdi was recently sent by Khomeini to the gulf port of Bandar Lengeh, where Shia-Sunni fighting left at least 50 dead and 160 injured.

In a letter to Khomeini, Yazdi said, "As you are aware, the Sunnis are unhappy about many aspects of the constitution."

One of them, Article 12, which makes Shia Islam the official religion of Iran, says, "The official religion of Iran is Islam. This principle is eternal and unchangeable."

Yazdi said Sunni leaders, notably Abdulaziz, had suggested that an addition be made to Article 12, "Other Islamic religious minorities . . . should have legal status in areas where they are in a majority. Also, the law and criminal courts in these areas should be based on the religious beliefs of these minorities, although the rights of other religious minorities should be guaranteed."

Yazdi said that Khomeini had given his agreement in principle to the amendment and that it had also been approved by the Revolutionary Council.

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