

# The Bahrain Uprising, Seven Years Later

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In 2011, Bahraini citizens joined the regional fight for freedom. Thousands of Bahraini nationals came together, protesting the nation's unequal distributions of jobs, housing, and political power. They asked for a new constitution that would allow people to be more involved in their nation-state. Initially, the uprising consisted of Shia and non-Shia Bahrainis. The conflict in Bahrain was not religious at its core- it was a demand for equal human rights.

However, unlike other uprisings in the area, Bahraini dissent received no international support. Moreover, protesters were met with the utmost violence. Within months, 1,500 Saudi Arabian and Emirati troops flooded the country. Furthermore, Pakistani and British intelligence services were recruited to assist torture in prisons. Protesters, their families, doctors who treated them, lawyers who represented them, a journalist who reported their stories and even members of the parliament that hinted support for them were detained. Shia towns were isolated and restricted in the passage.

Soon it became apparent that the Bahraini folks were on their own in the fight for human rights. Although they had a lot to lose, Bahraini activists stood steadfast in their demand for change- what was once a call for equality became a campaign for identity recognition.

Since its inception, the struggle in Bahrain has led to cases of human rights violations. Violations are in the form of citizenship revocations, lack of due process, denial of freedom of expression and religion.

### **Systematic Discrimination**

Once the spark of revolution spread through the kingdom, the Bahraini

government took active steps to limit the citizenship of Shia Muslims. Not only was the Bahraini Constitution and recognized United Nations treaties ignored, but amendments were also made to justify the brutal denial of human rights in response to dissent.

Within the first years of the uprising, the Bahraini Parliament added 22 amendments to the “Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts” of 2006. The 2006 law defined “obstructing the public authorities [...] from doing their work” and “harm[ing] National Unity” as terrorism. The law further increased the power of the public prosecution, allowing them to detain and question without due-process.

The amendments, made in 2013, allowed “the security bodies all required and appropriate powers to protect society from terrorist incidents and prevent spreading them.” The changes allowed authorities the liberty of defining “terrorist crimes” and instigation of such activities even harsher than the original law. Protests against government injustice became identified as civil disobedience and were met with the utmost violence. With aims of limiting room for obloquy, trials were held behind closed doors without legal defense representation.

In 2013 alone, the government handed approximately 2450 years worth of prison sentences under the new laws.

So-called, “anti-terror” efforts became even more questionable when a royal decree amended juvenile delinquency to include participation in public gatherings and sit-ins, justifying the arrest of minors. Shia Rights Watch approximates over 450 minors were detained calling into question Bahrain’s ratification of the Convention of Rights of a child in 1992.

The changes in the government’s constitution after the Arab Spring systematically criminalized Shia Muslims. The anti-congregation laws fueled already existing anti-Shia sentiment and were used to limit Shia religious processions and congregations. Thus, what began as an aim to suppress dissent became an active targeting of Shia Muslims religious identity.

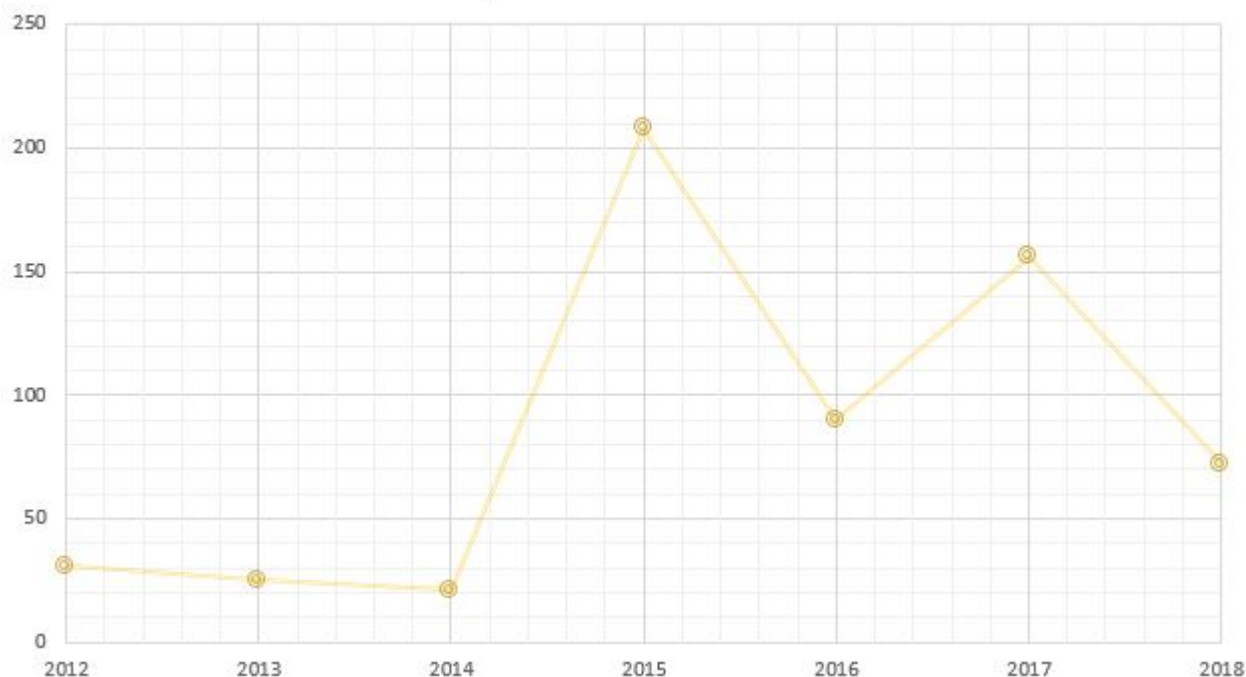
## **Citizenship Revocation**

Article 15 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to a nationality... no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality.” Nationality is critical in defining one’s identity. Recognized nationality in the form

of citizenship is a gateway for a diverse range of privileges. Such privileges can be as simple as the power to open bank accounts or as significant as healthcare.

Nationality by birth, to a certain degree, is hereditary. The national citizenship of a parent can influence the range of opportunities available to future generations.

Citizenship Revocation: 2012-2018



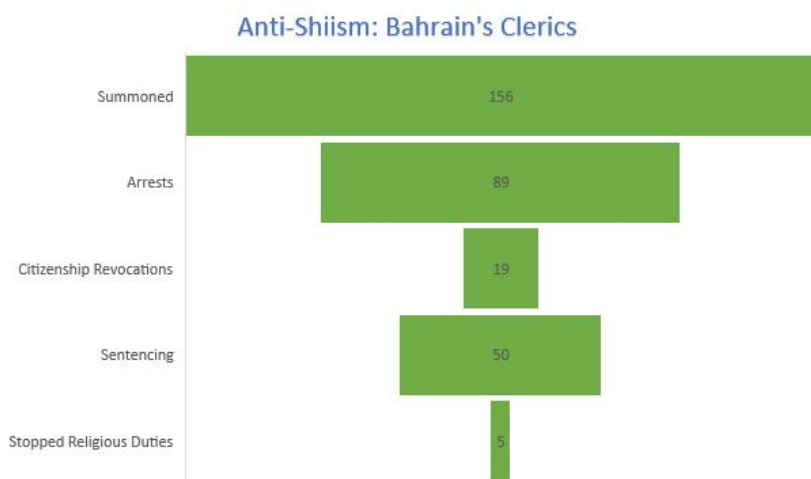
Despite it being recognized as a human right, citizenship is determined by State authorities. To limit dissent, the Bahraini government forced a total of 578 Shia citizens into statelessness by revoking their citizenship. The decision was justified by the Terrorism Act and a 2014 amendment to Article 10 of the Bahraini Citizenship law which grants the power to revoke citizenship to the Ministry of Interior on charges of “causing damage to the interests of the state,” “undermining state security,” and disloyalty. It must be mentioned that said changes in governance themselves undermine the Bahraini Constitution which states, “Bahraini nationality shall be determined by law. A person inherently enjoying his Bahraini nationality cannot be stripped of his nationality except in cases of treason and other cases as prescribed by law.”

Those stripped of their citizenship are ordered to turn in their legal identification such as passports to legal authorities. The lack of documentation dramatically affects the lives of these individuals and their families. Within the country, they cannot buy property, obtain jobs, or even apply for social services for their children. On the other hand, they are also restricted from moving out of the

country. They do not have a nationality to base visa applications upon, nor do they have documentation to travel with.

Despite efforts, revoking citizenship has not silenced criticism of Bahrain's government. Not only has revocations increased momentum for humanitarian advocacy, but it has also created a spotlight for international attention.

## Lack of Due Process



Sources report, citizenship revocations are merely announced on state news. Those charged under alleged actions of "terrorism" or "disloyalty" are denied opportunities to refute or repeal such decisions. One such source states, "I do not even know

which of my activities led to such charges." Ambiguity in laws about citizenship and terrorism allow for a great deal of power for the government. Because revocations are mainly under the power of the Ministry of Interior, they are not "under judicial control," thus they cannot even be repealed.

The lack of due process is real for those who are arrested and detained. A significant portion of arrested occurs through unwarranted community raids. Those taken are detained unlawfully for long periods of times in which they undergo extensive torture. The Bahraini Constitution states "no persons shall be subjected to physical or mental torture or inducement, or undignified treatment..." and "any statement or confession proved to have been made under torture, inducement, or such treatment, or the threat thereof, shall be null and void." However, countless Shia Muslims have been charged with confessions made under extensive torture. Numerous detainees have died as a result of said tortures.

A systematic review of Bahrain's dissent cases shows high-level police brutality towards Shia protesters. Those arrested are met with great violence. One example of harsher than the usual due process is the trying of Shia civilians in

military courts. In early to mid-2017, a law was ratified allowing military tribunals to try and convict civilians charges with threatening of the Kingdoms safety.

Such conditions are void of age and gender restrictions. Time and time again have Bahraini officials arrested, detained and tortured minors on allegations of political involvement. In addition to physical violence, sources report incidents of sexual assault to male, female and minor detainees.

## Restriction of Basic Freedoms

While the conflict in Bahrain began in response to the demand for equality, ongoing violence sheds light on extensive anti-Shia sentiment within the Bahraini government. What started as a crackdown on dissent has advanced to restrictions

on the religious expression of religion. SRW reports over 320 incidents of anti-Shiism against Shia clerics or religious leaders. Incidents are inclusive of summonings,

arrests, citizenship revocations, life and death sentences and restrictions in religious duties. When summoned, numerous clerics report being questioned on the content of their speeches, ideological tendencies, political views.

Major religious leaders such as Shiekh Isa Qasim and Sheikh Hussein Najati have been subject to direct violence by authorities. Shiekh Qasim remains under house arrest despite deteriorating health.

## Bahrain: A Priority

One of the most prolonged Arab Spring revolutions, Bahrain has reached its 7th anniversary. Ongoing violence and the lack of international attention has shed light on the dissonance between humanitarian action and humanitarian belief. Nations who have stood for democracy in countries such as Libya, Tunisia, and Syria have ignored the struggle of Shia Muslims in the Gulf. It must be recognized



that the conflict in Bahrain has led to regional unrest that could have been prevented had the Shia Muslims of Bahrain been given a safe venue for self-expression. Instead, the lack of international support and the crackdown of the Bahraini government has riled conflict secondary to the original movement.

Shia Rights Watch calls for a spotlight on anti-Shiism in Bahrain. Pro-democracy initiatives in the nation must be empowered, and avenues of communication between the Bahraini government and Bahraini Shia must be bolstered. Reports from previous meetings between the government and its critics show a lack of legitimacy given to such efforts. Critics state low government participation and even lower levels of change post-dialogue. Increased international attention on peace-building endeavors hold parties accountable and drive palpable change.

Further, international organizations must establish a cohesive definition of terrorism that serves to protect all walks of life as opposed to being used to quell freedom of speech and target a determined few.

Reform in Bahrain must become a multi-industry, international dialogue. Bahrain's lack of stability reduces prosperity in regional business efforts. Deportations and citizenship revocations create changes in regional demographics and can even influence immigration statistics in the international community. Many of those under abuse in Bahrain are holders of dual-citizenships, yet they are detained and prevented from travel. In order to reduce the pervasion of conflict repercussions out of Bahrain, international entities must be actively engaged in monitoring ongoing violence in the nation.

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# Muharram 2017 Advisory

Muharram Advisory

Dear Fellow Shia Muslims,

As a human rights NGO dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of Shia Muslims globally, we are writing to bring to your attention the veneration and

importance of practicing safety in your community in the month of Muharram.

Since Muharram is the time Shia Muslims openly campaign against the terrors of their time, they are subject to Shia rights violations. Every year thousands of Shia Muslims are either killed or wounded or their centers closed.

To prevent such violations and to insure safety of Shia community, SRW presents following tips with the aim of creating a united platform for expression that not only meets religious guidelines but also lends to international and domestic regulations.

We encourage you to pay attention to following advisory tips:

### **Know your rights as knowledge is key to rights,**

- As constituents your nation, you have civil liberties. Familiarize yourself and your community with the nation's defined human rights and freedom of religion.

### **Build a relationship with your community law enforcement**

- Approach your community law enforcement and communicate your observations for the month of Muharram.
- Seek consultation from your local police department on the placement of security measures such as camera systems and alarms.
- Ask for increased security. In many communities, police provide special security for your institution given your coordination. Keep in mind increased security measures must be requested in advance.
- If needed, obtain the necessary congregation permits in advance.

### **Reach out to Government Representative:**

- Meet with the governor and mayor of your town. Have a conversation of your concerns. Reach out and open a line of communication.

### **Be cognisant of your non-practicing community**

- Recognize that you are a part of a larger community that may or may not commemorate Muharram.
- Respect local regulations.
- Reach out and communicate an increase in activity to neighbors and

surrounding institutions.

- Prepare and provide brochure or pamphlets educating others on the significance and relevance of Muharram.

### **In case of a human rights violation, Know Your Resources!**

- In case of emergency, contact your local police immediately.
  - Contact Shia Rights Watch to inquire rights based counseling and broadcast.
  - Use [#Muharram2017](#) to update the international Shia community as well as media outlets of recent anti-Shia incidents.
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## **Hajj 2017 Travel Advisory**

With the upcoming Hajj Travel season approaching, travel within Saudi Arabia remains alerting for Shia Muslims making the pilgrimage. The ability of foreign Embassies to assist Shia facing difficulty is extremely limited and difficult. Shia Rights Watch (SRW) has also faced extreme difficulty in assisting Shia in Saudi Arabia who are in immediate danger of being harmed.

Over the past there has been a consistent practice of Shia pilgrims in Saudi Arabia being targeted by Saudi law enforcement agencies for unexpected searches, summons, imprisonment and harassment. The pilgrims are also at high risk for being victims of violent crimes inflicted by other pilgrims, or law enforcement agencies themselves.

Each year numerous complaints are made by Shia Muslims, particularly clerics, over the treatment received during the Hajj pilgrimage. Many of the complaints highlight mistreatment by Saudi officials towards Shia Muslims. The complaints detail a systemic targeting by Saudi officials; practices include stopping, searching and harassing the Shia pilgrims. Some pilgrims were held and questioned for hours upon arrival to Medina airport. During previous Hajj seasons pilgrims were exposed to sexual harassment while being searched at the airport. Shia groups have also consistently complained about being placed in lower



quality tents/residence, and receiving maltreatments.

SRW has been putting forth an effort to bring awareness to the issue, and reduce the number of threats and violations towards Shia Muslims during the 2016 Hajj Season. Recently SRW has sent a letter to foreign Embassies located across Saudi Arabia. The letter encouraged Embassies to be alert, and take precautionary steps to protect their Shia citizens, and have policies in place to assist these citizens should they be harmed or in immediate danger.

In a continuing effort to ensure a safe and holy Hajj pilgrimage, SRW invites Shia Muslims to be alert and take following steps if they are faced with any violations, threats or harassment while in Saudi Arabia:

- Carry a copy of your passport at all times ( if you are traveling with group, you will not have access to your passport, therefore carrying a copy of it is critical),
- Carry contact information of your country's embassy in Saudi Arabia at all times,
- Contact your embassy immediately to report a violation you or your family member faced,
- Use [#Hajj2017](#) to share your experience with the rest of pilgrims,
- Contact your trusted SRW representative to receive advocacy support.

SRW urges the Saudi authorities to do what they can to serve and protect all pilgrims this Hajj season, regardless of their political or theological differences. Unity and human dignity is a central message during Hajj, and it is our hope that the Saudi authorities uphold this message.

SRW wishes everyone a holy and safe Hajj pilgrimage.

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# Shia Rights Watch Appreciates

# **countries who have taken steps to protect Shia Muslim during Muharram 2016**

Shia Rights Watch would like to thank countries who have taken steps to protect Shia Muslims during the commemoration of Imam Hussein (A.S) in the month of Muharram 2016. According to Shia Rights Watch sources in Kuwait and Pakistan, these two governments have directed the authorities to take necessary steps to ensure the safety of Shia Religious places and rituals.

Shia Rights Watch urges nations with a history of anti-Shiism, such as Bahrain, to adopt protective measures for their Shia populations in this time of religious mourning. Moharram rituals are void of any political (use another word than interaction), and Shia Rights Watch urges members of states to use this chance as a means of increasing peace talks and encouraging dialogue among their citizens in areas of human rights.

Unfortunately, like years before Bahraini government with majority Shia citizens not taken any steps to respect Shia Muslim and have taken steps to remove all banners from streets. We urge Bahrain government to respect Shia Muslim citizens as they are practicing ritual programs without any disturbance toward government. As Shia Rights Watch stated in a letter to different embassies with Shia population, Muharram program does not have any political interaction.

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## **Violence towards Shia Clerics Spreads to Afghanistan**

Shia Rights Watch is concerned about sudden increase of violence toward Shia clerics in Afghanistan as Afghan authorities arrested Sheikh Ghorban Gholampour, a Shia cleric, for unspecified reasons. Last week Sheikh Younes

Alawi was killed in Harat as he was returning from prayers at night.

Afghan Shia have been under many attacks throughout history. Last month an attack to Shia community killed 80 Shia and wounded 260.

Recently, targeted killing and imprisonment of Shia cleric has increased resulting in more fear among Shia communities.

Shia clerics of countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan have been attacked and now such human rights violation has spread into the Afghanistan.

SRW is extremely concerned over such violation and urges Afghan Authorities to release arrested clerics and increase security of Shia dense cities.

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## **Alarming Arrest of Shia Clerics: 47 arrested in 60 days**

Shia Rights Watch is greatly saddened and disturbed at the alarming number of Shia clerics who are being unlawfully arrested in Bahrain. This blatant targeting of Shia religious leaders is unacceptable and unfounded.

According to recent investigations as many as 47 Shia clerics have been arrested since June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Such increase threat to Bahraini Shia leaders is concerning and must be addressed by international committees immediately.

SRW calls on Bahrain's leaders to release him and all the other wrongfully imprisoned clerics immediately.

Bahraini forces routinely raid clerics' residences, disturbing their families, and threatening their well-being.

SRW believes Bahrain is making great mistake imprisoning agents that are key in bringing peace back to the society. This NGO invites Bahraini Kingdom, to collaborate with community leaders such as clerics to create reform for better

society where all Bahraini citizens have equal rights.

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## **International Youth Day 2016**

As most other International days, International Youth Day is to celebrate youth, talk about its importance and pay more attention to issues concerning this group. August 12 is recognized as International Youth Day by the United Nations. As a human rights NGO, Shia Rights Watch would like to use this opportunity to focus on Bahrain's minors. Although the country has signed the Convention of Rights of Children it has the highest number of children imprisonment. Many times, the Bahraini government arrests and detains minors for no certain cause and keep them away from their families and lawyers while in prison. Most of these minors are pre-teen to teenage citizens.

Children are being detained as they play in the streets, or express their opinions or participate in pro- democracy assemblies. The authorities see them as enemies or a tool to pressure their active parents.

The narration of Bahraini youth is full of sufferings and terrible conditions in prison. Many face torture until they confess to accusations and are forced to live in adult detention centers with other adults. While in prison, youth are being neglected and missing out on education which is detrimental to a child's development. Once a child misses an opportunity to education, it is harder to re-enroll in school once released. Therefore, a vicious cycle evolves.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights has documented 237 cases of detained children since 2015.

Under the Convention of Rights of Children, no child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. No child should be subject to torture, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults, every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect, and every child deprived of his

or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance.

Bahrain is clearly not respecting the laws of the Convention. Human rights are being violated daily.

Shia Rights Watch strongly urges the government of Bahrain and its allies to provide fair treatment to its underage citizens. We call on Bahrain to give equal rights and liberties to its youth while providing a safe environment for everyone to live. Bahrain must be held accountable for their crimes against humanity as well as the prison authorities who are torturing these children. The government must give its youth adequate education even while detained. Moreover, we call on the government to re-evaluate all allegations against the detained minors. The children of Bahrain have rights to civil liberties and desire to live in peace, without fear, while having an education to ensure a successful future.

We wish to celebrate International Youth Day of 2017 with zero minor in Bahrain prisons.

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## **Bahraini Clerics under Attack**

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Shia Rights Watch is greatly saddened and disturbed at the alarming number of Shia clerics who are being unlawfully arrested in Bahrain. This blatant targeting of Shia religious leaders, including Sayed Majeed Al Mishal is unacceptable and unfounded. SRW calls on Bahrain's leaders to release him and all the other wrongfully imprisoned clerics immediately.

Bahraini forces raided the cleric's home Saturday morning arresting him and disturbing his family. Last month, the Bahraini government arrested 2 other Shia clerics for participating in a sit in to protest the detainment and revoked

citizenship of Sheikh Issa Qassim.

Another prominent Shia cleric, Sheikh Ali Salman, has been sentenced to 9 years in prison for allegedly seeking a regime change and collaborating with foreign powers. He has denied these allegations, but if he really was seeking to better the situation in Bahrain, he should have proudly declared so openly. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

Bahrain's constant violation to Shia human rights, and pressure to religious and community leaders has added to the unrest and dissatisfaction of the Bahrainis, and that should be enough reason for international committees to intervene.

SRW urges Bahraini government to respect the right to freedom of religion of its citizen and free the leaders immediately.

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## **International Day of the World's Indigenous People "The Case of HAZARA"**

Shia Rights Watch believes that all human beings are entitled to equal rights and liberties. Unfortunately, the indigenous Hazara people of Afghanistan are currently being restricted from their full liberties as a persecuted minority. Rather than facing oppression, these indigenous and minority groups should be embraced for the diversity and culture they bring to their home nations. A recent bombing which killed 80 innocent Hazara Shia in Kabul, Afghanistan has heightened our organization's concern for their safety and protection of rights. Today, August 9th, The International Day of the World's Indigenous People recognizes that all human beings are equal under the law, and that minority groups are essential to political processes and global discourse.

The Afghan Hazara minorities who are frequently persecuted as a result of anti-Shia extremism are a priority concern for Shia Rights Watch. This incident

reversed the progress made by current Hazara reformists, mostly targeting young leaders who hoped to lead future generations. There are approximately 2.7 million Hazaras in Afghanistan. They were once the largest ethnic group in the country before the 1893 massacre as a result of loss of political autonomy. Today they only make up 9 percent of the Afghan population and according to the World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples the **Hazara life expectancy is 47**. The increasing ethnic tensions in the country under extremists and terrorist organizations such as the Taliban have instilled great fear to Hazara.

Shia Rights Watch has noted the Constitution of Afghanistan has several clauses which provide protection to minorities, including the Shia Hazara. SRW would like to reiterate that according to article twenty-two, “any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law”

Additionally, the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples articles one and two guarantee indigenous groups these same liberties, stating “Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law” and “Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind “

Shia Rights Watch urges the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan government to abide by their constitutions and UN declarations to protect the rights of minorities and encourage its citizens to appreciate its rich diversity.

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## **SRW's 6 Month Report**

SRW's 6 Month Report: January - June 2016

Shia Rights Watch's 12 page, biannual report highlights the rights of Shia Muslims across the world, and intends to raise awareness of the blatant oppression of this population.

From January through June of this year, Shia in the Middle East experienced increased oppression through the various governments under which they reside. In those 6 months alone, 1,737 Shia civilians lost their lives, and 1,383 were wounded. While some of these senseless acts of violence emanated from the so-called Islamic State, who openly state that they are targeting the Shia for their religious beliefs, both state and non-state actors are at fault. There were a total of 481 human rights violations committed against the Shia throughout the Middle East during this six month period. These violations include revocation of citizenship, forced deportation, arbitrary arrests, and the denial of freedom of religion, press, assembly, and education. Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain witnessed the worst violations, including:

- 252 unlawful arrests in Bahrain
- 1,416 deaths and 913 injuries in Iraq, 45% of which occurred in the month of May, making Iraq the country with the largest number of attacks on Shia in the world.
- 58 arbitrary arrests in Saudi Arabia
- 249 civilians deaths and 404 injuries in Syria

Shia Rights Watch invites everyone to view the report when it is officially published on August 1st.