

# Muharram 2017 Advisory

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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 encourages 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.

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**SRW's**                      **Six**                      **Month**

# Accomplishments

## **SRW's Six Month Accomplishments**

Dear SRW members, interns, volunteers, followers and subscribers,

While you were busy supporting us, we were working hard defending Shia minority rights. This is a *brief summary* to thank you for your help, hard work and support. Because of you, SRW has been able to defend Shia rights through various advocacy methods, research based reports, and presentations in Geneva and the New York UN and other human rights committees. The following shows only some of our accomplishments. Your trusted SRW representatives have:

- Participated in an Interactive Dialogue with the [Special Rapporteur on Internally Displaced Persons and the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary executions under Item 3- Clustered ID at the United Nations](#) in Geneva in June 2016,
- Attended and participated in interactive dialogue with candidates for the Presidency of the [71st General Assembly in New York UN](#) that was hosted by the World Federation of United Nations Associations,
- Took part in the sixty-sixth [Department of Public Information \(DPI\)/Non-Governmental Organization \(NGO\) Conference hosted by South Korea in Gyeongju in May 2016](#). The conference is held under the theme "Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Your SRW Representative to the United Nations attended series of [moderated debates for candidate Member States running for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in](#) order to highlight Shia rights violations in May 2016.
- SRW New York representative Mr. Akhwand attended [66th Session of UN DPI/NGO](#) to emphasize on the importance of education and its availability and accessibility for Shia children who have lost their right to education, in March 2016.
- Shia Rights Watch's UN representative Mujtaba Akhwand with

cooperation from the Freemuslim Association participated in an item 3 [Interactive Dialogue on Minority Issue regarding discrimination against Shia Muslims in Malaysia at the 31st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva](#). Oral and written statements of the NGO were presented in the meeting and published on the UN website in five languages.

- The NGO advocated for the rights of Saudi, Malaysian, and Azerbaijani Shia through oral and written statements presented at UN Human Rights Council- 31st Session.
- SRW presented its concern regarding the misuse of the term, “terrorism” by many governments and urged the UN to [adopt a universal definition for terror and terrorism](#) at UN Human Rights Council- 31st Session.
- The SRW Women’s Rights Wing has hosted a [Women’s Empowerment: A Major Step in Peace, Reconciliation & Capacity Building](#) seminar at UN to advocate for Shia women and their struggles.
- SRW’s Saudi Arabia expert participated in an item 3 Interactive [Dialogue on Freedom of Religion or Belief, addressing GCC](#) discrimination toward Shia Muslims at the 31st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva

SRW’s Executive Director, Mustafa Akhwand presented as an expert on Bahraini Shia rights violations at “[Persecution of Shia in Bahrain](#)”, a two day summit in Brussels. The summit was organized by SALAM for human rights and justice and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), to promote and protect human rights and democracy in the Middle East and in Bahrain in particular.

SRW’s expert in de-radicalization, Mujtaba AKhwand, actively participated in a roundtable debate focusing on [Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education](#) in the Trusteeship Council Chamber in New York as part of The UNSG Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) advocates global citizenship education (GCED).

SRW Women’s Rights Wing has hosted a side event at the UN to highlight specific struggles of Shia women under the topic of [Women’s Empowerment: A Major Step in Peace, Reconciliation & Capacity Building](#).

On 6/12 SRW volunteers and members celebrated International Shia Day by

hosting flower and peace message distribution in Washington DC, launched <http://internationalshiaday.com> and also took pledge to stand for Shia rights through a [pledge](#) page on the official website, using hashtags #612 and #612ShiaDay.

Watch videos of International Shia Day here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0YcrzIDiBU>.

Shia Rights Watch staff would like to thank you all for making Shia rights watch possible with your support. Stay in touch