

# The Case of Amri che Mat

On the 26 of November 2016, Amri Che Mat's car was found near the Perlis Timah Tosah Dam in Perlis, Malaysia with its windows shattered. From then on, the whereabouts of Mat remain unknown.

Mat was a foreign exchange trader, a husband and father to four minor children. He was also the co-founder of Perlis Hope, a charity organization active in the community.

Previous to his disappearance, Mat had received numerous warnings from the Perlis Religious Department to reduce his social activities. The local mufti (non-Shia religious leader), Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin, had shown up on Mat's doorstep along with local law enforcement questioning him and his family about their Shia beliefs. Asri and other local religious leaders had made assertions that increased prominence of Perlis Hope activities could be a "threat to national security".

Recently, witnesses have come forward stating that Mat's car had been stopped by five vehicles close to his home around 11:30 pm on November 24.

Locals have compared the disappearance of Mat to that of Pastor Raymond Koh, who was also abducted in a "military-like assault" by his home on February 13, 2017. Neighbors recall seeing five cars, two of which were SUV's, and 15 men stopping Koh and pulling him out of his car in broad daylight.

Despite the emerging facts and the continued violence against minority groups in Malaysia, little has been done by local law enforcement. Norhayati Mohd Ariffin, Mat's wife states she has lodged numerous police reports over the past year, yet her case was not taken seriously. During investigations, the Koh family recalls the same procedure- instead of investigating the crime, the police questioned the Pastors social activities.

## Religious Freedom in Malaysia

In 1996, Shia Islam was officially referred to as deviant. Although officials have said private practice of Shiism is permitted, Shia Muslims, along with other minority groups face constant discrimination. In 2017, \$10 Billion were spent on the building of the King Salman Center for International Peace that aimed to "bring together Islamic scholars and intelligence agencies". Funded and educated

by conservative Wahhabi schools, religious authorities in Malaysia have welcomed intolerance against nonconformist to their definition of Islam and the new center, sources say, is a way to increase resources to identify and locate religious minority communities and their leaders.

Prejudice against minority groups have become systematic in the nation as law enforcement, too, ignores acts of violence that threaten these communities. The lack of due-process for direct violence welcomes increased bigotry and targeting of these groups. Further, lack of safety for religious minorities in the nation creates a power vacuum, allowing other religious extremist organizations such as the Kumpulan Mujahiddin Malaysia (KMM) to become active in the region.

Decades long religious intolerance in Malaysia not only threatens the diversity in the country, but it also reduced pro-social efforts. Perlis Hope is a charity organization that provides aid to those in need in the area. By providing well needed social services, Perlis Hope, and its likes, are creating stability for their constituents.

Intolerance in Malaysia is a growing threat to the nations security. By targeting religious minority leaders, authorities have created opportunities for the expansion of extremism and violence to the nation.

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## **Shia of Nigeria**

The case of Shia Muslim in Nigeria has been a measure of the nation states morality. In December 2015, a Shia Muslim religious center in Kunduna was attacked amidst religious processions. The Nigerian army killed over 400 Shia men, women, and children on that day alone. Two days later, a mass grave was discovered with the bodies of those killed. Local respondents report the burial was based on a court order by the state government, in attempts to thwart consequences of the militaries actions.

The attack in December was not the first case of anti-Shiism but an escalated direct act of violence against this community. In addition to systematic discrimination in the broader community, the leader of the mosque, Ibrahim

Zakzaky faced the loss of his sons and his sister in previous clashes with armed forces.

In the attack in December, Zakzaky and his wife, Hajia Zainab Zakzaky were taken into custody without arrest warrants or viable charges. Despite increased international awareness and efforts of local activists, the Zakzaky's are yet to be released.

Sources report Zakzaky has lost sight completely in his left eye and has a deteriorating vision in his right eye as a result of violence. Zainab Zakzaky still has a bullet lodged in her chest from the 2015 attack. The couple has been denied medical attention.

Backed by international humanitarian organizations, Femi Falana, the couple's lawyer secured an order from the Abuja division of Federal High Courts to release the Zakzaky's. The judge awarded Zakzaky 50 million NGN and temporary accommodations as reparations.

The state and the federal government have yet to follow through with the judge's orders. The lack of compliance and accountability in the Nigerian judicial and executive branches of government are unsettling. In 2015, the Kunduna state governor, Nasir el-Rufai set a Judicial Commission of inquiry to probe the military's actions against Shia Muslims in the state. The panel investigation concluded that Zakzaky must not be held in the trial as evidence against him is lacking. Not only did Rufai keep Zakzaky in detention, but the governor's office also failed to prosecute military personnel who were active in the attack against Shia Muslims.

Falana notes that Zakzaky's case is the first case since 1914 of a couple's detention such as long duration.

The brutal lack of justice against Shia Muslims in Nigeria brings the credibility of the State into question. Injustice is apparent in the prosecution of Zakzaky's case as evidence is lacking and there is inconsistency within the government's judicial and executive actions.

Nigeria is home to one of the fastest growing populations of Shia Muslims in the African region. Despite the government's attempts to thwart such growth, more Nigerian nationals have turned towards the religion. Discrimination against Shia

Muslims has only made it clear that the Nigerian state thrives on inequality and injustice. Further, anti-Shiism has reduced the peoples trust towards their government.

Shia Rights Watch (SRW) calls for increased international attention in the case of Nigerian Shia Muslims. SRW offers its deepest condolences for the lives lost as a result of the anti-Shia action and provides its full support to those demanding justice in their communities.

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# **Parachinar: Post-Conflict Remunerations**

For Shia Muslims, the Holy month of Ramadan is a month of fear and anxiety as attacks on Shia congregations are prevalent. Terror Organizations feed on already existing anti-Shia sentiment to encourage suicide bombings.

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, twin blasts went off in northwestern Pakistan. The city of Parachinar became the home to over 60 civilian deaths. The attacks took place in busy areas of town- one in a central bus station and another in the Toori Bazaar Market. On that same day, another explosion detonated in a Quetta police checkpoint killing 14 people. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, two prominent terror groups claiming responsibility for the attacks, strategically aimed their attacks on areas densely populated with Shia Muslims in the final days of Ramadan. The nature of attacks and their timing points to the groups' goals of dehumanizing Pakistan's Shia populations. To these hate-inciting groups, the motto "Ramadan Kareem" (Generous Ramadan) does not apply to the Shia minority as they are not regarded as part of the Islamic religion.

Over 300 people in total were critically injured as a result of attacks in Parachinar and Quetta- Shia Rights Watch anticipates a rise in death toll.

Anti-Shiism in Pakistan has an extensive history, and despite the authorities denouncement of violence, anti-Shiism remains as high as ever. Attacks on Shia congregations in Ramadan are not new, and despite official's promise of increased security for this population, not much has been done to prevent attacks.

With close analysis, one can see a trend of authority involvement *after* cases of anti-Shiism, and that in response to immense and widespread Shia protests. It's also important to note that Shia populations are most dense in geopolitically important areas of Pakistan and chaos in those regions create regional distress.

After the Parachinar terror attacks, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called on provincial governor Iqbal Zafar to distribute monetary compensation to victims and their families. Those injured were given Rs 500,000 (appx. 5,000 USD), and family of those killed were given Rs 1,000,000 (appx 9,000 USD) checks. With money, the Pakistani government momentarily called for peace in the districts, but anyone looking at trends of violence in Pakistan can tell that attacks in the Shia community are nowhere near over.

The fact that two terror organizations were able to join and collaborate so extensively (as seen in these attacks) points to widespread systemic violence in the nation. Pakistani officials have done little regarding violence *prevention* and anti-hate education. Educational material that denounces Shia Islam and public speakers who call for the marginalization of Shia Muslims remain in circulation. Until Pakistani officials can work to reduce anti-Shia sentiment, violence will continue.

Shia Rights Watch (SRW) calls on regional authorities to recognize anti-Shiism as a leading cause of instability. Further, SRW demands Pakistani authorities not only focus their aids in post-conflict compensation but to understand the roots of violence in the nation as a form of violence prevention.

SRW applauds the Shia Pakistani community for their unity and activism in demanding recognition of their rights. Also, SRW condemns any act of violence towards or against Shia Muslims and offers its condolences for those bereaved by acts of anti-Shiism.

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# Unraveling Centuries of Power

In the month of June, five Shia Muslims were reported killed on the basis of their religion every day. Note, this statistic is based on incidents reported to Shia Rights Watch, and that from only six countries. In the past decade, cases of anti-Shiism have become more and more evident in the news and social media.

One reason may be that with the development of communication mediums, minority populations have become more confident in their efforts for recognition. Easy communication, namely through the internet has allowed minority communities to join in their struggles. What was once 10% of the population can now be 50% of the world. Next, the internet has made public scrutiny of non-humanitarian endeavors difficult. When a nation commits a crime against humanity within its borders, the open flow of information opens doors to the international critic. Although efforts to limit Internet availability and communication censorship in various anti-Shia nations, the influence of technology cannot be undermined in the newfound wave of human rights campaigns in the world.

Toby Matthiesen, the author of *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent, and Sectarianism*, once noted that to document political dissent and social unrest, one need not travel to conflicting nations. One can obtain the majority of his information through TV and social media outlets streaming from the conflict zone.

In addition to providing coverage for conflict, communication developments augment and empower equality building endeavors. During the Arab Spring, the international community stood witness to the numerous nations that had a change of regimes. The public and free flow of information through social media outlets allowed for grassroots members of the international community, you and me to be involved. We have first-hand information, minutes after major incidents. Such grassroots involvement allowed for international dichotomies to become permanent points in global history. Knowing details of non-human events enabled us to question the role of major political entities in diplomacy and criticize nations that stood for democracy in one nation, but opposed it in another.

In addition to international involvement, the internet allowed domestic awareness. In the case of Gulf countries, Shia Muslims recognized their membership as global citizens and were empowered by their ability to report and spread incidents of anti-Shiism in their nations. While many Gulf countries limit internet access and use media expression as grounds for arrests, complete censorship on the web is physically impossible. Next, marginalized populations became aware of their domestic and regional resources. For instance, the Shia of Pakistan like in key strategic locations in the country. Unrest in those areas not only destabilizes the nation and makes it susceptible to foreign powers, but it also threatens the region as a whole. In one case, a community of Shia Muslims refused to bury their loved ones after a terror attack in protest the government's lack of response. Days later, the prime minister himself traveled to that region to meet the small community and personally listen to grievances after neighboring nations threatened to pull trade deals in fear. Digital communication allowed for the small community to join and come to realize their power of persuasion.

As time goes by, the reduced need to raise arms in the struggle against tyranny becomes apparent. While some may think to achieve equality through media and technology is naïve, campaigns on the internet have proven to be permanently archived and broader in outreach. Social media post and news coverage may not be immediately responsive, but they remove the limitations of borders and allows the human race to join as one force against the bad and ugly. Modern communication mediums allow grassroots populations to develop a "human" narrative- one that is open sourced and free from political bias (mostly).

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## **Who is Responsible?**

### **Mapping Responsible Parties of Anti-Shia Violence from January - July 2015**

Since the beginning of 2015, Shia Rights Watch has collected data on incidences of anti-shi'ism around the world. By our records and reports there have been a total of 2,959 Shia killed and 3,662 wounded in various bombings, attacks, and

shootings in the seven months beginning January 1<sup>st</sup> and going until the end of July. Additional incidences of mosques being vandalized or demolished, citizenships being revoked, hate speeches, employment discrimination, and abductions have also been reported.

Of these events, various parties have declared responsibility for attacks that have claimed a total of 1,209 lives and left 1,281 wounded. Governments, as well as terror groups, have been responsible for many attacks and were named as responsible parties in instances of citizenship removal, illegal incarcerations, and  violent suppression of peaceful attacks.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has claimed thirty of the attacks that have occurred this year and are responsible for over 1,016 of the deaths recorded to date.

The group has claimed two of the largest attacks of 2015: the March 20<sup>th</sup> mosque attacks in Sana'a Yemen which resulted in 142 deaths with 350 wounded, and the July 18 bombing of Ramadan celebrations in Diyala, Iraq which resulted in the death of 120 men, women, and children, leaving 130 more wounded. The terrorist group also claimed responsibility for the Kuwait suicide bombings that took place at a Shia mosque as worshippers were gathered for prayer. This attack left 27 dead and 227 wounded. Moreover, on May 28<sup>th</sup> a mass grave was discovered in territory former controlled by ISIS. Over 470, mostly Shia, bodies were discovered.

More recently, there have been five bombings in late July that many officials are attributing to ISIS, although nobody from the organization has released a statement confirming their involvement yet. Between July 10 and July 25 there were 4 bombing attacks in Shia neighborhoods in Iraq, as well as a suicide bombing at a crowded swimming pool in Northern Iraq that targeted the Shia Turkmen minority. Combined these attacks left 81 dead and 180 wounded. The method and location of attacks is consistent with previous ISIS attacks and due to the recentness of the events it is too early to rule out ISIS involvement.

In recent months it has become clear that ISIS is one of the primary sources of chaos in the region. However, the Taliban is still very active in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since January 1<sup>st</sup> the terrorist group has claimed six attacks. The

January 9<sup>th</sup> attack on a mosque in Rawalpindi resulted in 7 deaths followed by the February 13<sup>th</sup> attack in Peshwar that left 19 dead and 60 wounded. On June 10<sup>th</sup> the group abducted nine Shia in Damarda Afghanistan and forty-five days later on July 25<sup>th</sup> they kidnapped eighteen more Hazara Shia from Baghlan Afghanistan. Since the second abduction five victims have been released and negotiators are still working to get the rest home safely. While these attacks are heinous in nature the worst of the Taliban attacks occurred on June 20<sup>th</sup> as they beheaded six Shia Hazaras in Ajristan, Afghanistan. The New York Times suggests that in light of the growing media attention on ISIS's attacks, the Taliban is plotting equally shocking attacks in order to gain recognition and media coverage as well.

While incidences of hate speech, discrimination, and forced denouncement of faith have been reported against the Egyptian, Indonesian, Nigerian, Saudi Arabian, and Pakistani governments, the Kingdom of Bahrain is by far the government currently carrying out the most attacks against Shia. 153 Shia protestors have been arrested including Sheikh Ali Salman who was arrested June 16 for tweeting about regime change, opposition leader Majeed Milad who was arrested July 2, and prominent opposition member Ibrahim Sharif who was arrested July 12. By March 11<sup>th</sup> there had been 155 recorded instances of mistreated Shia detainees in government custody - a number we expect to have increased since. These arrests all come after the 15 October 2014 death sentence of Shia Sheikh Nimr in Saudi Arabia, whose appeal was denied by Saudi Arabia authorities on March of 2015.

Moreover, The Bahraini government has stripped 72 people of their right to citizenship, 50 of which were confirmed members of the opposition. Security forces have used violence to suppress at least three large protests resulting in one child being injured due to tear gas exposure as well as a thirteen year old boy being shot in the face by regime forces. Numerous home raids have occurred without cause and upwards of 46 Shia have been beaten. Prominent Bahraini Cleric Jalal al-Sharqi made a public statement on May 12<sup>th</sup> that denounced Shi'ism by accusing Shias of not believing in Allah and calling them Jewish and underserving of mercy.

*A full list of groups taking responsibility for attacks includes: Al-Nusra Front (1), ASJ-TTP (1), Ahlus Sunnah wal Jammah (2), Bahraini government (18),*

*Bahraini civilian militia (1), Egyptian government (2), Indonesian government (1), ISIS (30), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (1), Judallah (2), Lashkar-e-Jhaqui (1), Madagascar Police (1), Nigerian citizen (1), Nigerian Military (1), Punjab government in Pakistan (1), Saudi Arabian Authorities (2), Saudi-led coalition (10), Sipah-e-Sahaba (4), Somolian Mayor (1), Extremist Militia connected to ISIS (1), Tabliban (6), United Arab Emirates government (1). This is a list to date of reported and confirmed instances of anti-shi'ism where there is a party clearly responsible for the attack. There are still countless unreported, unconfirmed, or unclaimed attacks that have occurred in the first seven months of 2015.*

Date	Responsible Party	details	Dead	Wounded	Arrests
28-Jul	Al-Nusra Front	Shooting at shrine in Damascus	2		
7-Feb	ASJ-TTP	Habib Hussain was ambushed and killed	1		
6-Jul	ASWJ	Quetta, Pakistan - open fire on 3 Hazara Shia	3	2	
7-Jul	ASWJ	Quetta, Pakistan - Syed Hashim (Hazara) gunned down walking home	1		
5-Feb	Bahraini Government	72 people stripped of citizenship, 50 confirmed from the Shia Opposition Party			
12-Jun	Bahraini Government	57 Shia jailed, stripped of nationality, given sentences of 3 years to life			57
16-Jun	Bahraini Government	Sheikh Ali Salman sentenced to 4 years for tweeting about regime change			1
2-Jul	Bahraini Government	Majeed Milad, senior opposition, arrested because of accusations against the gov't			1
11-Jul	Bahraini Government	Protest Suppression - tear gas			

12-Jul	Bahraini Government	Arrest opposition leader Ibrahim Sharif			1
13-Jul	Bahraini Government	conducted raids in the districts of Karanah and al-Diraz			
16-Feb	Bahraini Civilian Militia	Sitra, Bahrain one was arrested for insulting the king			1
12-Jan	Bahraini Government	45 people beaten			
30-Jan	Bahraini Government	Regime forces shot 13 year old boy in the face			
13-Feb	Bahraini Government	Protest Suppression including 3 home invasions	48		20
17-Feb	Bahraini Government	Protest Suppression: Child received head injury after exposure to tear gas	1		
18-Feb	Bahraini Government	1 beaten by government forces			
11-Mar	Bahraini Government	Numerous home raids resulted in 15 arrests			15
11-Mar	Bahraini Government	Between Jan 1 and March 11 reports of 155 mistreated detainees			
22-Apr	Bahraini Government	91 protesters arrested			91
12-May	Bahraini Government	Jalal al-Sharqi denounced Shia saying they do not believe in Allah, are Jewish, and deserve no mercy			
14-May	Bahraini Government	Upheld Nabeel Rajab's 6 month sentence for insulting public institutions			
15-May	Dr. Abdussamael Uma	Doctor in Ayuba Nigeria wrote a letter the Nigerian President warning against Shia			
30-Apr	Egyptian Government	Shut down kindergarten in Nile Delta Province for 'promoting Shia ideology'			

12-May	Egyptian Government	Physician sentence to 6 months for blasphemy, attempting to cause sectarian violence, and threatening national security because practicing Shia			
11-Mar	Indonesia Government	34 Shia prisoners forced to recant faith			
18-Jan	ISIS	Bomb in Tuz, Iraq targeting Shia	13	25	
8-Feb	ISIS	ISIS demolishes Shia shrine in Shifaa, Iraq			
23-Feb	ISIS	Bombings destroyed 12 Shia homes in Mosul, Iraq			
28-Feb	ISIS	Balad Ruz bombing	11	50	
28-Feb	ISIS	Sabaa Al Bour mortar shells	3		
9-Mar	ISIS	Larkana, Pakistan - vandalized on internal and external buildings			
14-Mar	ISIS	27+ bodies discovered in a mass grave near Shia town of Basheer, Iraq	27+		
20-Mar	ISIS	Bomb went off in Sanaa Yemen. 3 mosques targeted	142	350	
29-Mar	ISIS	beheaded 8 with the aid of child soldiers	8		
6-Apr	ISIS	2 bodies found in Zabul, Afghanistan	2		
8-May	ISIS	Bombing in Balad Ruz	18	41	
8-May	ISIS	Car bomb detonated a worshippers left Imam Hussein mosque in Kanaan Iraq	4	18	
8-May	ISIS	Bombing targeting commercial buildings in Hamamiyat neighborhood on Taji, Iraq	2	8	
12-May	ISIS	Shia pilgrims targeted throughout the day in Baghdad	15	38	

14-May	ISIS	Multiple car bombs around Baghdad targeting Shia	15	42	
22-May	ISIS	Bomb at mosque in Qatif, Saudi Arabia as prayers were read	21	80+	
22-May	ISIS	Targets 2 Yemeni mosques	13+		
24-May	ISIS	Iraqi soldier executed then hung from bridge	1		
28-May	ISIS	In former ISIS territory a mass grave with 470 (mostly Shia) bodies	470		
29-May	ISIS	Imam Hussein Mosque in Damman, Saudi Arabia. Bomber dressed as woman	4	10	
1-Jun	ISIS	Suicide bomber attacks police base in Anbar, Iraq	45	33	
7-Jun	ISIS	Idlib, Syria - Air Strike killed 14 + 15 year old girls`	2	10	
15-Jun	ISIS	Car bomb in Qahira, Baghdad	10	20	
17-Jun	ISIS	4 car bombs targeting Zaydi mosques during evening prayer in Sana'a, Yemen	31		
20-Jun	ISIS	Car bomb in Sana'a, Yemen at Qabat al-Mandi mosque	2	6	
26-Jun	ISIS	Kuwait suicide bombing at mosque	27	227	
8-Jul	ISIS	Car bomb outside mosque in Sana'a, Yemen	1	5	
18-Jul	ISIS	Khan Bani Saad, Iraq bombings at a market in Diyala celebrating end of Ramadan	120	130	
20-Jul	ISIS	Attack bombing in mosque in Sana'a, Yemen	5	7	
29-Jul	ISIS	IED attack on Ismali Mosque in Sana'a Yemen	4	6	
16-May	ISIS & Taliban Conflict	Shia police officer shot in Karachi, Pakistan	1		

22-Jul	ISIS blamed	al-Shaab car bomb in Iraq	8	22	
10-Jul	ISIS blamed	Series of bombs in Baghdad	14	41	
12-Jul	ISIS blamed	Series of bombs in Baghdad	29	81	
22-Jul	ISIS blamed	Al-Bayaa car bomb in Iraq	18	36	
25-Jul	ISIS blamed	Suicide bombers attack busy pool in Northern Iraq targeting Shia Turkmen minority	12		
7-Apr	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Beheaded 1 in Afghanistan with aid from Taliban	1		
18-Feb	Jundallah	Suicide bomb in Rawalpindi, Pakistan	2	7	
30-Jan	Jundullah	Bombing in Islamabad	60	50	
7-Jun	Lashkar-e-Jhaqvi	Shooting in Quelta, Pakistan	5		
20-Apr	Madagascar Police	Arrested 3 including the head of a Shia mosque for no apparent reason			3
25-Jul	Nigeria military	Military Personnel involved in killing 34 peaceful Shia Protestors	34		
2-Mar	Punjab Government	Arrested Shia leader Allama Ghulam Raza in Lahore Pakistan			
21-Apr	Saudi Authorities	1 dead in shooting in Qatif, Saudi Arabia	1		
15-Jul	Saudi Authorities	Khobar, Saudi Arabia - Shia man arrested and lashed for hosting weekly prayer meeting			1
30-Mar	Saudi-led Coalition	Airstrike in Mazraq, Hajja Governorate - no apparent military target in the area	29	41	
7-Jan	Sipah-e-Sahaba	Shooting in Karachi, Pakistan	3		
31-Jan	Sipah-e-Sahaba	70 year old Shia man in Pakistan shot	1		
18-Feb	Sipah-e-Sahaba	Shooting in Karachi Pakistan	2		
11-Mar	Sipah-e-Sahaba	Shooting at the Khan Hotel in Kotla Jam, Pakistan		3	

5-May	Somalia Mayor	Mayor of Mogadishu denounced Shi'ism and swore to fight the spread at any cost			
10-Feb	Extremist Militia connected to ISIS	Bombing in Baghdad	14	43	
9-Jan	Taliban	Rawalpindi, Pakistan bombing - attack on a Mosque	7		
13-Feb	Taliban	Peshwar, Pakistan - bombing and shooting	19	60	
2-Apr	Taliban	Damarda, Afghanistan 9 Shia abducted			
20-Apr	Taliban	Beheaded 6 Shia Hazaras in Ajristan, Afghanistan	6		
10-Jun	Taliban	Police officer gunned down in Karachi, Pakistan	1		
25-Jul	Taliban	18 Hazra Shias kidnapped in Baghlan, Afghanistan. Released 5 already			
13-Mar	UAE Government	Deporting 62 Lebanese Shia			

# **Children in Bahrain: From Playground to Prison**

**Shia Rights Watch paper in**

# #HRC29 Side Event; “Children in Bahrain From Playground to Prison”

06/19/2015

Childhood moments are meant to produce memories of carefree enjoyment. At the same time childhood experience cultivates the foundations of our education of society, and builds our understanding of the socio-structures of how to build upon our hopes to become adults who can participate in a meaningful and productive way in our communities, and to forge our own futures with the energetic exuberance that comes with youth, towards the ‘**tomorrow**’ of the next generation.

It is not hard to understand that unlike other country’s future generations, Bahrain’s children have suffered from a wide and hideous range of psychological and physical health setbacks due to the continuous violence perpetrated against them.

Sadly neither the government of Bahrain nor the international community fully realize that without the future generation there will be no possibility for the great country that they enthusiastically hope for.

The consequence of the relentless and sustained oppression targeted at children has caused many to lose their lives and many others to live with debilitating medical problems directly associated with the inhumane treatment committed against them.

Considering the size of the population there are per capita so many who have faced discrimination, arrest, torture and the traumatic loss of a fellow classmate, or family member. This has left emotional scars and translates to diminished behavioral functionality.

These afore mentioned issues are evident in problematic relationships between them and their siblings and parents, and aggressive behavior at school is also a known factor, given the history of other countries experiences, for their future

ability to have healthy interpersonal relationships either with their peers or furthermore into their marriages and relationships with their own children.

This 'legacy of hurt', violence and psychological torment is being perpetuated by the Bahraini Regime and their tactical abuse of children in an effort to decimate the culture and socially fragment the Opposition Community.

We have to clearly realize that the amount of violence that children face in that society brings them only anger sadness and anxiety. They worry about their family, they are disillusioned and saddened by the lack of access to a credible education, and they experience anger towards the society that is meant to support and nurture their growth. Now they are left be wildered, and bereft at being imprisoned for seeking respect, dignity and equality for their peers and their family members.

It is of great concern that children are themselves worried about the threat to their ability to have an identity, through the refusal of the regime to issue birth certificates or passports, just as they are unable to attend college and satisfy their right to equal access to education, and to help promote a better society for their fellow citizens.

Not being able to travel and discover the world will, without doubt, lead them to less tolerance and a lack of understanding toward other cultures.

Children who always dreamed of growing up to be a doctor such as Professor McCormack The pediatric doctor who went beyond his field of his expertise to defend the doctors in Bahrain, an engineer such as Mustafa Akhwand, Founder of Shia Rights Watch who left his work as Computer programmer to defend Shia Rights, an activist like Tara Raynor O'Grady, Irish activist who didn't let her cancer destroy her confident and realize that there are many ways to support the people of Bahrain even during her Chemo trophy, the moments that many people only think about their own health and feeling of their families or such as many activist who sacrificed their time and effort for Bahrain, now have a dream instead to attend a meal with their family without being worried about potential suffocation of one their family members due to indiscriminate blanketing of Tear Gas in their village by regime forces, or their privacy violated and their peace interrupted by someone being dragged out into the street, beaten and removed to a detention centre and God knows what by foreign police paid to

suppress the community.

Now, at this moment, it is actually in our hands to either support the regime who are slamming and locking shut all the doors against this targeted generation, or to gather our collective effort to shed light on their oppression and offer them hope towards a better path, the ability to follow their very reasonable and simple dream for freedom and stability.

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## **Moharrams Message for Anti Shia Leaders**

In the midst of ISIS intimidation in the area, Shia Muslims unite under the flag of Hussain, the third Shia Imam. Shia populations of Baghdad come together in Moharram to commemorate the death of Imam Hussain, honoring the martyrdom of a man who fought for freedom and justice for all. The unification of the Shia majority has instilled fear in the nation's Sunni minority. In examination, one must ask how and why a united Shia front instills angst in the Sunni minority of this nation. Despite centuries of discrimination worldwide against Shia practices, Shia still stand for their beliefs and show no sign of backing down. A united front is exactly what this nation needs in response to the massacres carried out by ISIS and other extremist organizations, and while Shia populations strive for unification against such terror groups, they are held under constant criticism.

1,400 years ago, Hussain's 72 person army stood against the 140,000 army of the oppressive regime of his time in a land called Karbala. Hussain's campaign for freedom has withstood the aversion of centuries, inspiring Shia unification against oppression and violence towards humanity. At least for a duration of a month in the year, Shia Muslims openly campaign against the terror of their time, yet as they stand for their beliefs, they are killed and eradicated. In 2014 alone, tens of people were killed all over the world, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iraq, and even in the western nation of Australia. Mourners are targeted and massacred for their show of support for freedom.

Despite their peaceful campaign, Shia alliance is seen as a threat in the eyes of anti-Shia leadership. After centuries of enduring oppression, the Shia majority has finally come to power in Iraq, and still they face great criticism of sectarian support. One may say the enragement of Sunni populations is of a fear that the now in power Shia leaders will do to them as the Sunni leadership did and continues to do to Shia Muslims worldwide. They marginalized the Shia for generations and now they fear revenge. Little do they know, Shia Islam is that of kindness and peace.

Despite living under pressure for thousands of years, they have made it their aim to stand for their rights and are persistent in striving for Democracy. A rise of Shia power means an end to oppressive regimes, and that threatens the dictatorship of many majority Sunni nations. Throughout history, the Shia have proven their peaceful yet persistent opposition of oppressive dictators, Sunni populations have bowed their head to any and every rising regime of power. The flag of Hussain and his campaign for justice should not be that of intimidation but that of hope. Hussain fought for the right to choice, a deserved morale for anyone and everyone, yet by some, Shia fellowship in Moharram is called a support for "sectarianism".

Hussains venture in Karbala should be examined for what it truly was: a stand for integrity. Moharram provides an opportunity to reexamine our values towards human rights and inspires us to withstand the tyrant of our time. Commemorations during this holy month is not that of intimidation, but a reminder for all to unite in the fight for human rights.

Therefore, our message for Anti-Shia leaders is to stop feeling threatened by this commemoration but instead join the effort to stop radicalization in their states.

By Zhara Akhwand

November 14, 2014

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# Five Question and Answers about “ Call to Arm” in Iraq

On Friday the 13th Ayatollah Ali Sisitani’s representative, Mortaza Kishmiri, urged Iraqis to take up arms in order to defend their country and protect religious Shrines. Since then, many Shia, both men and women, put on military uniforms and joined the Iraqi Army. This article aims to answers five important questions about what is going on in Iraq.

1- What’s the significance of Shia clerics’ recent call to arms in Iraq?

It is the first time that Shia clerics such as Ayatollah Sistani who usually does not interfere with politics, have invited civilians to take arms and defend their country from armed extremists. Another Shia spiritual leader, Ayatollah Seyed Sadiq Shirazi, who is very active in politics, on the other hand says Shia do not need to be reminded by clerics that defending shrines is mandatory: anyone who is capable should defend shrines in Iraq. Shia clerics play huge role in the Shia communities and their comments have changed the world in past. For example, The Tobacco Protest was a [Shia](#) cleric-led revolt in Iran against an 1890 tobacco concession granted by the Shah to [Great Britain](#). The protest climaxed in a widely-observed fatwa against tobacco use supposedly issued by Grand Ayatollah Mirza Hassan Shirazi in December of 1891. The Victory of the tobacco ban movement led by Mirza Shirazi’s, created two historically important results: First, the appearance of religious authorities’ unrivaled power in the country’s political scene and scholars leading in the mobilization of popular movements. This eventually led to the breakdown of the control of a dictatorship and the disintegration of colonial power in Iran and made spiritual leaders a symbol of national aspirations. Second, it led to a sea change of political opinion, which provided the context of a fundamental change in the administrative and political system of Iran and the formation of a larger populist movement during the Constitutional Uprising.

2- Is Ayatollah Sistani the only Shia cleric to call people to arm against ISIS?

NO, Ayatollah Shirazi also said defending Shrines is every Muslims’ duty, a duty that is self-evident without a scholar’s Fatwa. Ayatollah Shirazi’s office in Syria

helped many Shia flee when anti-Shia groups targeted them in Zeynabia, Syria. His followers have also steadfastly protected the Seyedeh Zeynab Shrine in Syria since the Arab spring.

3- Is this a call to Jihad?

NO, both clerics clearly stated that it is a call to voluntary action. Jihad is when it becomes mandatory for ALL to join the army.

4- Will this call to arms turn into sectarian bloodshed in Iraq?

Both clerics invited all Iraqis to join the army, not just Shia Muslims. Therefore it is not a war against any sect but a countrywide effort to defend Iraq's stability and Iraqi security against ISIS.

Also Ayatollah Sistani stressed that civilians who want to defend holy shrines should join the army, encouraging them to operate under the government's supervision. This call to arms is not a call to vigilantism, which would become difficult to monitor.

5- What is the Iraqi reaction to the call to arms?

According to media outlets, thousands of Iraqis have joined the army so far. This call to arms has united the Sunni minority and Shia majority of Iraq against a common enemy, ISIS. By using their moral authority and considerable social influence in a nonsectarian and pro-Iraqi way, Shia clerics can help restore the mistrust that Iraqis have developed toward the Army since the embarrassing retreat in Mosul. Since the call to action, the army is increasingly made up of civilians motivated by the desire to ensure that Iraq remains a country free from extremists, rather than those who fight for the sake of a government and its political agenda.

The situation in Iraq is a threat with ramifications that extend well beyond the borders of Iraq and is not limited to the Middle East. While all are closely monitoring the situation there has been very little action. Here are some suggestions for immediate action:

- Saudi Arabia and Qatar must stop their financial and moral support to all terrorist groups in the region, including ISIS,
- The UN must take steps to secure areas for vulnerable refugees displaced

- by the extremists in Iraq,
- The Iraqi army should organize and train civilians who are joining the army. Volunteers who choose to fight to keep Iraq free from the grip of extremists in a time of violence have better motivation than those who joined for the prospect of a steady paycheck,
  - The government of Iraq also must work to unite all sects and groups within Iraq to fight one common enemy, ISIS.

ISIS and other terrorist groups cannot be defeated when the governments of neighboring countries, the US and Europe choose pragmatism over their self-professed values.

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## **AEI: Shia Muslims are not Iran**

“Mideast Shi’ites defy Iranian Domination?” was the title of a conference held by American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) on June 19<sup>th</sup> in Washington DC. It seems like the West is finally hearing what the Shia community has been trying to say.

Shia Muslims across the globe have consistently insisted that they should not be associated with Iran just because Iran is a predominantly Shia country. Yet, they have continually been ignored. In the Middle East and South Asia fear of Iran’s nuclear power and political advancements have led to a number of anti-Shia alliances such as the one in Malaysia that was announced in April 2014.

The same fear led Egyptians to hold anti-Shia rallies and attack Shia rituals and encouraged the international community to cover up the oppression of peaceful Shia pro-democracy protestors in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and normalized the targeted killing of Shia in Syria, Iraq and Pakistan.

Fear of Iran and its influence in the region muted empathy for the Shia citizens of Mosul who were killed when ISIS attacked the primarily Sunni Iraqi city. The Sunni residents of Mosul welcomed the killing of their Shia neighbors and the ISIS take over the city.

Associating Shia Muslims with the Iranian government has led to fear and distrust of Shia throughout the region and this fear has cost hundreds of thousands of Shia lives. Because Shia are associated with the Iranian government, their loyalty to their home countries is unjustly called into question. Local support for Shia who are being killed, slaughtered and attacked in Pakistan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Malaysia and... is undermined

The world's apathy for the struggle of the Shia minority across the Middle East and elsewhere and its inaction in the face of growing anti-Shia movements could force many Shia to ask Iran for help and protection only serving the Iranian government's desire to claim to represent the entire Shia population.

Shia Rights Watch (SRW), a human rights organization in Washington DC, was the first Shia NGO to reach out to governments, policy makers and senators to emphasize the position that Shia should not be associated with any government or political movement. "Shia hold different citizenships and are loyal to their own governments unless they are being oppressed", said SRW director Mustafa Akhward during an interview. "It is unrealistic and unfair to associate a certain faith with a certain government and then ignore their rights based on political agendas," he continued.

AEI is among first NGOs that finally stood up and addressed how the United States can interact with Shia in Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq and Azerbaijan as they work to resist Iranian influence. Such conferences attracted many American Shia who are eager to end their oppression, as well as many politicians who have finally decided to wake up and break the silence.

by Hawraa Zakery

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## **Who is who in Yemen?**

Yemenis, like citizens of number of other Islamic countries, have gone through tough times seeking social justice and freedom. In such process some groups gain power and some lose fair representation due to political agendas. Usually

minorities are ones who are easier to sacrifice, and once again Yemeni Shia are paying the price of underrepresentation.

In recent conflict between Houthis and Yemeni Army as many as 500 people were killed during three weeks of flare-up in Sana'a.

Houthis, who are Zaidi Muslims: a small sect of Shia Islam. Media outlets have always identified this militant group as "Shiite insurgents" when Ansar Allah, the military wing of the Houthis Movement, have always stressed that whatever political agenda they carry, they do so on their own behalf and not under the banner of Shia Islam. They claim seeking justice for Yemenis and not a specific group in this country.

Many, including politicians and media agencies make the mistake of association all Yemeni Shia Muslims with this militant group. 45% of Yemeni population are Shia Muslims and most of them have no interest in military movement. They are loyal native Yemenis who practice Shia faith. Association all Yemeni Shia with Houthis is a misconception that endangers the Shia minority within this country. Historically Shia have been underrepresented and associated with political groups such as Hezbollah and Houthis who barely have good reputation in majority of Shia populations. Such association victimized many native Shia communities who do not receive any support from international committees due to such assumption.

Considering the increasing anti-Shia movements in Middle East it is critical that politicians and media outlets differentiate between militant groups and majority of Shia populations in order to present this minority in a more realistic picture.

The Houthis themselves say to aim to speak for the Yemeni people and represent the Yemeni people's aspirations, beyond religious dogma and such differentiation is critical.

Shia of Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi, and even south Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia are accused of depending on Iran and therefore this minority has not been supported or even advocated for by Western prodemocracy nations. Although Iran does not mind claiming all Shia and increase its political visibility, most Shia Muslims do not support this ideology of Iran. Ignoring rights of Shia population will only push this minority under the umbrella of Iran and feed into what this country is aiming for.

International committees must know the pain this community is feeling and protect them from political abuses.