

Right to Education- Case of Shia Children

In advocacy effort for Shia children and their rights to education, the following statement is submitted by SRW to the 35th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva

Greetings esteemed colleagues and member states,

Right to education and raising children who are tomorrow's peace builder are one of the priorities Shia Rights Watch. Violation to the right of education is and will cost the world not just economically but sustainability and development. Millions of children are denied access to education due to war or unrest in their counties.

Armed conflicts, wars, unrest and raids are affecting not just life of the children and young people, but their future as well. Children at war zones or ones living in areas where their security is constantly threatened are confronted with physical harm, violence, danger, exploitation, fear and loss. Many children are forced to flee and some witness the death of loved ones.

Children, those whom the future of humanity and development is relied upon, are living under poverty, face displacement, struggle emotionally, and most importantly are restricted from education.

Children of Syria and Yemen cannot attend school either because their schools were bombed, or their parents are fearful to send them to school as many children have been attacked, kidnapped or raped on their way to school. Shia children of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan live under fear of their governments or terror groups preventing them from full access to school and education.

In other parts of the world, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, most Gulf counties, Shia children are forbidden from learning about their faith and culture. They cannot even identify as Shia since that will increase discriminations toward them by school and staff.

Young people who should be thriving, learning, experimenting and use

imagination and creativity to build a better world are oppressed to the point that they live on day to day survival.

Shia Rights Watch calls on world leaders to protect education by criminalizing attacks, prohibiting the use of schools by armed groups, and working with schools and communities to preserve schools as centers for learning. It urged the international community to increase education funding including teacher training, books publications and mobile libraries for Shia communities.

Sincerely,

Shia Rights Watch

High- Level Forum on Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hatred

On January 17, the Permanent Missions of the United States and Canada to the United Nations, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations, and the European Union Delegation to the United Nations jointly hosted the High- Level Forum on Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hatred.

Mustafa Akhwand, Shia Rights Watch's director, alongside more than hundred activists, civil society representative, and human rights organization's representative attended the forum to participate in gathering all tools possible to combat Anti-Muslim discrimination, nationally and internationally.

The day-long event at the United Nations examines the rise of anti-Muslim

discrimination and hatred globally from the perspective of governmental, nongovernmental, and private sector representatives. It will also focus on best practices to combat anti-Muslim discrimination and highlight strategies that promote positive narratives of pluralism. Forum participants will provide recommendations on effective responses by all sectors of society to address the continued challenge of all forms of discrimination and hatred on the basis of religion or belief in all parts of the world.

After the UN Secretary-General António Guterres offered a video message to open the Forum, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein, addressed the issue of violence against minorities such as Shia Muslims in different countries indicating the rise of hate and discrimination toward minorities and issue of violence against minorities from state and non-state actors. Saperstein urged the governments and Human rights organization to work hand in hand to address the issue finding ways to prevent violence through dialogue and peace building.

Three interactive panels considered necessary and complementary tools to combat anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred in anti-discrimination law enforcement, civil society coalition-building and positive narratives to promote pluralism and inclusion.

They assessed the scope of rising anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred worldwide, compare government and private sector responses, share best practices, and provide concrete recommendations for combating anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred.

Peace Day Youth Summit at the

United Nations Headquarters

Representative of Shia Rights Watch attended an event sponsored by UNDP, titled Peace Day. The Peace Day Youth Summit focuses on Youth engagement for peace. Today %50 of the world population is under 30 and 1.8 billion are ages of 11-24. We currently have the largest Youth population in history. Youth Summit event places a global spotlight on sustainable peace and the SDGs and the role of youth in achieving tangible results in eradicating poverty globally and also taking steps forward towards restoring Peace.

Advocacy for Hazara Minority at the 33rd Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva

In advocacy effort for Hazara minority, the following statement was presented by SRW at the 33rd Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva

Dear esteemed colleagues and member states,

The protection of ethnic minorities is a priority for Shia Rights Watch. The Afghan Hazara minorities who are frequently persecuted as a result of anti-Shia extremism are of high concern. A recent Kabul bombing during a peaceful protest that resulted in the death of 80 innocent lives lost and wounded 260 is a key example of such discrimination and the lack of attention the international community gives to this minority group. This incident reversed the progress made by current Hazara reformists, mostly targeting young leaders who hoped to lead future generations.

Hazara have face very harsh and inhumane treatment throughout the history. An estimated 60% of thier population was exterminated during the 1890's genocide of Hazaras in Afghanistan. During and after the genocide, Hazaras lands were

confiscated and distributed , and tens of thousands of Hazaras men, women, and children were sold as slave. It was also reported that tens of thousands of Hazara captives were sold during the same time to pay the expenses incurred in supporting revolt. As the result of past degradation , this population is still considered as second class citizen with no protection.

Once the largest ethnic group in the country, only make up 9 percent of the Afghan population today. The increasing ethnic tensions in the country, under extremists and terrorist organizations such as the Taliban and ISIS have added great fear to Hazara. Currently this underrepresented population face great threat of ethnic and heritage cleansing that must be prevented.

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. Governments are responsible for protection and safety for all, but Hazara dense areas are not protected enough resulting in genocide. Also, Afghan government needs to preserve rich heritage and culture of Hazara by promoting them, and giving them freedom to share and express their belief. Hazara should be recognized under law and their children should have the right to study their own educational materials at their schools.

Hazara are among Afghanistan’s well educated people who have positive impact on the peaceful future of this country. “The Hazaras are producing the most enthusiastic, educated, forward-looking youth” according to Michael Semple, the deputy to the special representative of the European Union in Afghanistan.

Besides claims of genocide, there are claims of forced expulsions of ethnic Hazaras and Tajiks from areas controlled or conquered by the Taliban, as well as harassment of these minorities throughout Taliban-controlled areas. Notable number of Afghan refugees belong to Hazara community who are leaving ancestral homeland to find peace.

Such group are deprived from their rights to dignity, life, security, education, and many more based on International Bill of Human Rights.

Shia Rights Watch believes Hazara are actively and positively contributing to the

well being of the Afghan diverse community and their rights should be recognized and respected. To ensure such, SRW urges the Afghan government to abide by its constitution in protecting the rights of minorities and encourage its citizens to appreciate its rich diversity.

Sincerely,

Shia Rights Watch

SRW Written Statement for 33rd Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva: Case of Pakistani Shia

Greetings esteemed colleagues and member states,

On behalf of Shia Muslims around the world it is a pleasure to be able to present this address to the commission. Today Shia Rights Watch would like to highlight the body's attention towards acts of anti-Shi'ism and terror in Pakistan. The country has great variety in its cultural and religious heritage it should embrace. However too many hate crimes against the Shia minority are caused by terrorist organizations and individuals which condemn the Shia as infidels, or are seen in the lack of protection. The Shia currently constitute up a marginalized group that equates to about 20% of Pakistan's total population based on government repost. This number does not include those who hide their faith in fear of anti-Shia sentiments. In fact, such sentiments are so strong that the recent years of 2012 to 2015 resulted in over 1,900 Shias killed in bomb blasts or targeted gun attacks.

So far in the year 2016, 15 people have been killed, 35 wounded, and 9 arrested. In 2015, Pakistan ranked third in the world for its number of anti-Shia incidents with a total of 285 killed, 275 wounded, and six kidnapped. One key Shia target of extremist anti-Shia groups is prominent human rights leaders and clerics, those vital to progressing rights and equality for the Shia community. This is due to the opinion that the Shia hold more power and recognition than deserved. Several examples from this past year include cleric Syed Shahid Abbas Shirazi, human rights activist Syed Khurram Zaki, lawyer Syed Raza Shah, educational professional Abid Raza, and Shia leader Malik Iftikhar Ali Haideri. The actors which committed these killings are pro-ISIS groups, terrorists of Ahle-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat, or unidentified acts of hate crime.

Current laws in Pakistan make it easy for courts to send Shia to jail for a variety of reasons that are just typical parts of their religious practice. A particular hate crime law, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PEC) Act issued in 2015 was used to prevent cyber-terrorism and hate speech, but Shia are threatened under this law. Earlier in 2016 the act led to the 13 year long sentence of a man from Lahore. He was sentenced for liking a Facebook post that preached Shia beliefs, or as the court stated, religiously offensive content. Other anti-Shia rhetorical and speak is also still widely acceptable across Pakistan. The systematic oppression of Shia can take additional forms. The current educational system for example, has removed references to Shia schools of thought. Pakistani seminaries also have a lack of accountability for their teachings; this typically results in anti-Shia extremism. While much of this occurs from seminaries, hate speech beyond their walls is a result of social norms. The anti-Shia literature published by seminaries accounts for about 12 percent of recruitment. The media refuses to cover anti-Shia atrocities or alters stories to be non-religious or accidental.

As it stands, the Shia perceive radicalism as a major threat, especially the prevalent anti-Shi'ism of Deobandi groups and the Ahle-Hadith sub-sect. Shia Rights Watch would also like to issue thanks to current activists in Pakistan urging for greater action of state bodies to create a safe environment for Shia. Shia Rights Watch hopes for a future in Pakistan without violence, where every individual can fully exercise their right to exist and practice religion peacefully.

Sincerely,

Shia Rights Watch

Presenting the Case of Malaysian Shia- Statement to United Nations

Greetings esteemed colleagues and member states,

On behalf of Shia Muslims around the world it is a pleasure to present this address to the commission. Today I am here to draw your attention to the ongoing threats to Shia Muslims in Malaysia. Although this country grants freedom for most of its diverse groups, Shia are greatly restricted in the nation, as its laws declare the Shia sect illegal to practice. There are also active bodies in Malaysia established to instill systematic oppression onto the Shia such as the anti-Shia task force, which has made statements that Shia are infidels, and deviants in the eyes of Islam.

The government has banned all Shia related publications and raided their commemorations as a means to prevent them from practicing their faith. In April additional considerations to forbid marriage between Shia and non-Shia are also underway despite previous Shia coexistence throughout the nation's history. Other suggestions have also been in contention of whether Shia prepared food is Halal for Muslims of other faiths.

Similarly to many other countries throughout the Middle East, anti-Shia seminaries are spreading their ideology throughout the country, evoking violence on a variety of fronts. Shia Rights Watch is concerned with the level of discrimination and inequality for the right of practicing religion. Other denominations can practice freely, unlike the Shia.

In fact, specific articles 3(a) and 11 of the Malaysian Constitution, Shia Muslims are not given official state recognition as a religious entity. This discrimination received religious legitimacy in 1996 when the Fatwa Committee for Religious Affairs issued statement that branded Shia Islam as deviants. In doing so, it

prohibited Shia from spreading their beliefs and distributing any electronic or print resources that espoused Shi'i principles. Interestingly, this opinion overturned a 1984 decision from the same committee that deemed Shi'ism acceptable in Malaysia. Under the country's federal system, such a decision required agreement on the part of the individual states in order for it to have any effect. Unfortunately for the community, 10 of the 14 states initially agreed to implement the *fatwa*. There is no way for Shia to have protected rights in cases of terrorist attacks, and no legal way to address their human rights violations.

This basis for anti-Shi'ism is found through the 1960 Internal Security Act (ISA) to silence religious dissent, and while significant limits were placed on this act in 2012 there are still many issues. The ISA was used on several occasions to target Shia in Malaysia. Ten Shia were arrested in 1997 under the ISA and another six suffered the same fate in October 2000. In December 2010, 200 Shi'a were arrested by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department and four years later, 114 Shia were arrested by the Perak Islamic Religious Affairs Department with assistance from the Malaysian police. A recent statement from the Prime Minister's Department Jamil Khir Baharom clearly stated in his remarks that Shi'ites in Malaysia have no rights; "we have rules, we practise the teachings of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah under the Shafie School, so we do not allow proselytising of Muslims. So, there is no issue of human rights violation here"

To reiterate statements made from the Middle East Institute, "Regardless of the historical antecedents of the faith, the primacy of ethnic Malays (and by association their adherence to Sunni Islam) has meant that Shi'i Islam is considered a "deviant" sect in the country.

Unfair treatment of Malay-Shia is clear violation to at least 13 Articles under the International Bill of Human Rights such as:

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11. (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

Article 16. (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and

association. (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 27. (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

The Malaysian state aspires to be a moderate nation that embraces globalization, therefore it should refrain from oppressing and vilifying Shia who figure from among its own indigenous Malay-Muslim citizenry. Instead, it should engage them intellectually, socially and perhaps even religiously as part of *dakwah*, in sync with the lofty spirit of Malaysia as championed by Prime Minister Najib Razak”.

Shia Rights Watch encourages the Malaysian government to appreciate its rich diversity and provide fair and equal rights to its Shia population.

Sincerely,

Shia Rights Watch

Azerbaijani Shia and their Struggles- Presented at UN 33 Session of Human Rights #HRC33

Greetings esteemed colleagues and member states,

On behalf of Shia Muslims around the world it is a pleasure to be able to present this address to the commission. Today I am here to draw your attention to the

increasing oppression of Shia Muslims in Azerbaijan. Thus far in 2016, Azerbaijan has bared witness to several acts of anti-Shi'ism violating the fundamental human right of freedom of religion. While the Shia represent 65% to 80% of Azerbaijani population, they face many discrimination such as unlawful arrests or prevention of practice through the country.

2015 saw the death of 9 Shia and the detainment of 35. In these past six months of 2016 authorities have banned 732 religious books with unjust reason. Azerbaijani forces also destroyed a Shia Religious under the pretext of expanding the street. In recent years, Azerbaijan authorities have been limiting Shia Muslim activities although this country is majority populated country. More than 150 Shia activists including 18 clerics are in prisons of Azerbaijan.

Activists believe during the past few years the Wahhabists have grown notably in Azerbaijan, especially in areas of the country sharing borders with Russia. This is of particular worry for Shia Rights Watch as human rights organizations in Azerbaijan are currently not allowed to investigate these matters. Azerbaijan currently ranks 127th of 177 on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index and over the years has frozen assets on bank accounts of NGOs and jailed some of the country's most prominent human rights activists. In April large numbers of Shia leaders were arrested unfairly. Police raided the homes of clerics and activists, including Karbalayi Qismat, and Syed Nazem and Seyed Waqar. As of today, there exists over 150 Shia activist and 18 Shia scholars imprisoned on basis of religious expression and identity.

Other concerns regarding freedom of speech for NGOs and Shia are related to recent arrests of journalists and in the 2015, Azerbaijan's parliament debated a law to ban the display of flags honoring the killed Shia Imam (Hussein) on streets and also prohibiting those Azerbaijanis who have received religious education at international Shia seminars abroad from performing religious ceremonies. These violations of freedom of religion and expression are in violation of the current Azerbaijani constitution, which grants Azerbaijani citizens the right for life, freedom, safety, culture and religious practice, the presumption of innocence, and the right to equality regardless of denomination. Without the right to freedom of practice, radicalism becomes a greater threat, undermining prospects for a peaceful society where individuals can reach their full potential.

Shia Rights Watch hopes for a fairer governmental system that encourages and

celebrates diversity and equal rights for all denominations

Sincerely,

Shia Rights Watch

Interactive dialogue with Item 3-Clustered ID with the Special Rapporteur on internally displaced persons and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Shia Rights in Azerbaijan

Greetings esteemed colleagues and member states,

Despite recent efforts to improve intercultural awareness and promote equality for all, there has been regions of the world with deteriorating quality of life for minority populations. One such nation is Azerbaijan. Although Shia Muslims are not minority in this country, they have been treated as one with limited freedom. In the past decade, the Shia of Azerbaijan have fallen victim to targeting by state and non states. Time and time again, their public presence was reduced by eradicating their centers of religious practice and imprisonment of Shia scholars. As of today, there exists over 150 Shia activist and 18 Shia scholars imprisoned on basis of religious expression and identity.

Once a secular nation, the nation of Azerbaijan is under increasing influence of anti-Shia narratives from neighboring nations, and facing a growing anti-Shia ideology. Such ideology is also fueled by a growing and false narrative by which

the Shia population is associated with foreign political entities.

Sincerely,

Shia Rights Watch

Interactive dialogue with Candidates for 71st General Assembly Presidency

Shia Rights Watch's representative to the United Nations in New York attends an interactive dialogue with candidates for the Presidency of the 71st General Assembly.

Hosted by the World Federation of United Nations Associations (**WFUNA**), H.E. **Andreas Mavroyiannis**, nominated by the Government of Cyprus and H.E. **Peter Thomson**, nominated by the Government of Fiji addressed important topics related to framework of the General Assembly and answered question by State delegates and Civil Society organization moderated by WFUNA's Secretary-General, **Bonian Golmohammadi**.

The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and the only one in which all member nations have equal representation. Its powers are to oversee the budget of the United Nations, appoint the non-permanent members to the Security Council, receive reports from other parts of the United Nations and make recommendations in the form of General Assembly Resolutions.

The General Assembly plays a key role in mechanism of the United Nations, and its reliability is directly effective on the outcome of the projects promoted by the United Nations and its bodies. The president of the General Assembly can be an enabler of positive policy adoption for the UN entity at large and by including minorities in the mechanisms of the UN, and standing firm for the Rights of

Minorities reassures the civil society, State Delegates, and NGOs of the advancement of UN aims and goals.

Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education

Shia Rights Watch, New York/June; In the Middle East and other countries where violent extremism has effected the stability and growth; violent groups continue targeting educated professionals and continue to promote isolation and radicalization.

The UNSG Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) advocates global citizenship education (GCED) as one of its 3 priority areas. As a GEFI partner, UNESCO leads the technical work in GCED at the global level and seeks to equip learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are based on and instill respect for human rights and diversity, and contribute to building young people's resilience to violent extremist messaging. On 15 January 2016, the UN Secretary-General presented his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to the General Assembly. On 12 February 2016, the General Assembly adopted the resolution which "welcomes the initiative by the Secretary-General, and takes note of his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism".

Our expert in De-Radicalization attended a roundtable debate focusing on Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education in the Trusteeship Council Chamber in New York

The roundtable Debate on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education will provide a platform for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to exchange ideas and share their perspectives, innovative solutions and initiatives in the prevention of violent extremism and the role education can play in the different contexts where young people might be susceptible to movements and organizations promoting violent extremism.

