

Congressional Hearing Report: Religious freedom of Shia Muslims in non-Shia dominant nations

Shia Rights Watch is honored to share with all volunteers, followers and human rights advocates, that as the result of their restless work, the world is now more than ever prepared to hear the concerns of Shia Muslim communities.

On June 26th, 2017, Mustafa Akhwand, Executive Director of Shia Rights Watch presented, on behalf of Shia activists, among panelists from USCIRF and HRW on the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission to discuss religious freedom of Shia Muslims in non-Shia dominant nations.

The briefing was supported by the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Representative Randy Hultgren.

In the session, speakers discussed Shia political prosecution by U.S. allies in the Middle Eastern and South Asian regions.

Mustafa Akhwand took to raise issues Shia Muslims face in their home nations and nations of residence/ occupation. He noted that centuries of anti-Shiism and lack of justice have led Shia Muslims to practice their faith in private only as they fear for their livelihood. For instance, the Hazara, a native Afghan community of Shia Muslims, have seen a 60% reduction in their population in the past 100 years. While the Hazara are ethnically distinct, Shia Muslims in Indonesia, Malaysia and even Gulf nations of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain will frequently hide their identities as they feel their religious identities make them targets of extremism.

Mustafa further noted that Shia Muslims, like various other minority religions, are void of geopolitical input. Shia Islam is a religion with constituents from all over the world, and when addressing their prosecution, the United States must recognize that Shia Muslims are not political agents of any governmental entity he continued. This declaration comes in response to Shia Muslims expressing concern over the constant undermining of their citizenship as their counterparts use the term "Shia" as a derogatory statement and accusing them of loyalties to

foreign entities.

Cases of violence against Shia Muslims in nations such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan were highlighted with aims of reinforcing the importance of peacebuilding endeavors that emphasize justice for Shia Muslims.

With growing numbers of anti-Shia violence all around the world, Shia Rights Watch urges leaders of the free world to promote justice for Shia Muslims as well as other religious minority groups. This NGO calls for series of meetings and briefings to be hosted by various entities to discuss and address the ongoing violations toward Shia Muslims. Lack of support and gap in advocacy has marginalized this population while they could be positively contributing to the wellness of their societies if they did not have to focus on their survival on a daily basis.