Untold Stories
The Suffering of Shia Muslims
Annual Report of Anti-Shiism Around the Globe

This report reflects investigative work Shia Rights Watch staff undertook in 2018

March 2019
Shia Rights Watch estimates the population of Shia Muslims to be approximately 50% of the Middle Eastern community. While the Islamic faith is perceived to be native to the Middle Eastern region, Shia Rights Watch notes the existence of Shia populations in the West reaching as back as the 8th century. The Shia faith is void of geographically dependent identity, and there exist Shia populations native to all nations of the world. As with the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the international Shia population, dynamics of anti-Shiism, targeting of individuals following the Shia faith, are unique to subpopulations.
Shia Rights Watch

Defending Justice and Rights

Shia Rights Watch (SRW), established in 2011, SRW is the world’s first independent organization dedicated to define and protect the rights of Shia Muslims around the world. SRW is a non-governmental, not-for-profit research entity and advocacy group headquartered in Washington D.C. U.S.A. Shia Rights Watch holds a 501(c) status, as well as a Special consultation status (ECOSOC) with the United Nations. Shia Rights Watch aims to draw international attention to countries where Shia rights are violated. The aim is to give a voice to the oppressed and hold oppressors accountable for their crimes. SRW achieves its objectives through strategic investigations supported by targeted advocacy in order to bring about informed action.

Vision

Freedom of Religion for all

Shia Rights Watch envisions a peaceful world for all regardless of religion, gender, race and origin. SRW believes that Shia Muslims should be recognized as a religious group by the countries in which they reside. Discrimination should not be allowed and be brought to light whenever and wherever it takes place. God has given us all the freedom of religion and the right to live in peace.

Mission

Shia Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the rights of Shia Muslims worldwide. SRW stands up for victims of prejudice, and supports activism in order to prevent discrimination, support political freedom, and help ensure people’s human rights and religious freedom. SRW enlists the local public and international communities to support the cause of human rights for all.

SRW achieves these ends by investigating violations against Shia communities in order to raise awareness and fight injustice. SRW promotes needed change through research and publications and submits reports and articles to governments and international organizations. Also, SRW continually monitors media outlets to ensure coverage of Shia rights violations.

The Purpose of SRW

Shia Muslims face constant oppression throughout the world solely due to their faith. In some parts of the world, Shia Muslims for centuries have been targeted for persecution, as evidenced by the well-documented extremism of the Wahhabi movement. SRW believes that Shia Muslims need a human rights organization that highlights the violations committed against them and gives voice to their call for help.

Staff Organization

Shia Rights Watch began with the collaborative efforts of religiously and ethnically diverse activists and volunteers who sought to advocate in support of international human rights. The momentum created by the activism of an increasing number of volunteers Shia Rights Watch. SRW currently has more than 1000 active members working in various locations worldwide. Members’ responsibilities range from gathering news and information to publishing reports and articles in order to advocate for change.
SRW’s Methodology

SRW believes that information is the most valuable resource in the investigative process. From the organization’s inception, SRW has focused on gathering information through various media: interviewing witnesses, family members of victims and victims themselves; on-site collection of resources; analyzing reports from various national and international organizations; meeting with non-governmental and religious organizations, leaders, and journalists; and creating information networks in a wide range of social sectors. Based on the information collected from the above sources, SRW is able to identify different types of human rights violations. These violations include but are not limited to:

- Violation of the right of living;
- Arbitrary arrest;
- Unfair trial, and illegal detention;
- Psychical & psychological abuse: torture, rape, and sexual assault;
- Illegal confiscation of private property;
- Demolition of religious centers;
- Employment discrimination;
- Education discrimination;

SRW as a Resource

Journalists investigating topics regarding the Middle East will benefit from SRW’s focus on the Shia communities since they are crucially important members of Middle Eastern society. For instance, in order to fully examine the ongoing atrocities committed against Arab Spring protesters, it is necessary to know about the Shia struggle in specific nations or regions in which the discrimination of Shia has been subtle, but persistent. The Arab Spring opened the door for more obvious persecution. Cases reported in other parts of the world, such as in South Asia, include violence and intimidation that reflect fluctuating trends in sectarian hostilities that have been fueled by various political issues, including terrorism. SRW’s aim is to be able to report the crimes affecting Shia in every part of the globe.

SRW’s investigators communicate directly with the victims and monitor multilingual news media outlets. SRW networks with national committees, international human rights organizations, as well as religious scholars of Shia communities. SRW’s members are made up of people with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds united in defense of human rights. This international network provides invaluable information to commentators and journalists who are seeking to explore the impact of events on the Shia communities worldwide. Reports can be viewed at www.shiarightswatch.org.
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Introduction

Parallel to the rise of coverage of the Shia identity came to an increased need for recognition for the dynamics of the faith-based population. With the Arab Spring starting at the end of 2010, the opportunity was created for Shia Muslims to express their beliefs in regions where they long stood as marginalized people. Along with increased expression, anti-Shia sentiment rose to international headlines, shedding light on faith-based injustice all over the world.

Shia Rights Watch estimates the population of Shia Muslims to be approximately 50% of the Middle Eastern community. While the Islamic faith is perceived to be native to the Middle Eastern region, Shia Rights Watch notes the existence of Shia populations in the West reaching as back as the 8th century. The Shia faith is void of geographically dependent identity, and there exist Shia populations native to all nations of the world. As with the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the international Shia population, dynamics of anti-Shiism, targeting of individuals following the Shia faith, are unique to subpopulations.

This report reflects investigative work Shia Rights Watch staff undertook in 2018 in collaboration with Shia rights activists native to various regions across the world. This report aims to highlight cases of anti-Shiism that endanger the existence of this identity. Factors considered in determining the endangered status of this population include the number of Shia Muslims killed, arrested, and wounded. Also, deviations to the International Bill of Human Rights despite expression of support by nation-states were noted. This report neither reflects all of the work Shia Rights Watch does in terms of which countries we investigate for human rights violations nor does it showcase every single Shia human rights violation.

The absence of a particular state or issue often simply reflects limitations due to the prosecution of human rights activist or lack of verifiable information and should not be taken as a commentary on the significance of the problem. There are many serious Shia rights violations that SRW cannot address. For instance, countries such as Iran, Yemen, Iraq and Syria do have numerous Shia rights violations, however, due to restricted access and dangerous environments, advocates could not pass on critical information to be included in this report. Finally, the focus of this report is to highlight anti-Shia violence against unarmed civilians. This report does
not cover the number of casualties that are the results of armed conflict. The Shia Rights Watch condemns all human rights violations regardless of their explicit address in this report.

It should be noted that this analysis does not cover every case of persecution targeting Shia Muslim, and instead focuses on the following human rights violations: murder, maiming, unlawful arrest, revocation of citizenship, and prisoner’s rights. This analysis provides a clear report of confirmed human rights violations targeting the Shia population.

Shia Rights Watch’s monthly analysis, issued throughout the year, contains a more detailed account of issues addressed in the brief summaries of this volume. Monthly analysis can be found on the Shia Rights Watch website, [www.ShiaRightsWatch.org](http://www.ShiaRightsWatch.org).
Minority Status

International law under the United Nations Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities defines minority populations as groups, “numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the State—possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.”

The United Nations Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation, further notes, “Minorities, however, do not necessarily have the long ancestral, traditional and spiritual attachment and connections to their lands and territories that are usually associated with self-identification as indigenous peoples.”

Shia Muslims are live as natives and diaspora in all regions of the world. In some nations, they exist as indigenous ethnic distinct groups long recognized as followers of their faith. One such group is that of the Afghan Hazara population, which are targeted both in the native home nation of Afghanistan, but also in countries in which they exist as the diaspora. Shia are not ethnically or linguistically different from their peers, yet they are regarded as inferior and face daily struggles of preserving their right to exist as citizens of their home nations. Approximately 340 million Shia experience some levels of persecution either by their governments, terrorist groups or discrimination by their fellow Muslims.

Interestingly, most of the violations against Shia take place in their very own homelands. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) nations have a remarkable number of Shia. More than 50% of the overall population of the Middle East is Shia. This area of the world is one of the most dangerous places to practice Shiism.

Tactics

Methods of human rights violations against Shia Muslim are diverse.

**Arrest**

Arbitrary arrest is another widely used method of violation. In the year 2018, arbitrary arrests spiked compared to previous years. Bahrain, a country with a majority status Shia population, has the highest number of arrests. Saudi Arabia comes next in line. Most arbitrary arrests start as raids to Shia communities, spiritual gatherings, congregations in community leaders’ residents, Mosques and Islamic Centers.

**Assassinations**

Individual assassinations is another common type of violation. Shia Muslims in Pakistan repeatedly report that masked individuals attack Shia professionals or businesspeople at their place of work or during their commute. Assassinations of prominent community leaders identified as Shia occur in significant rates in the nation of Pakistan.

**Bombing**

Bombing is the most frequent method used to kill and wound Shia Muslims. The bombs used to target Shia Muslims have been a mix of bombs installed into parked cars and individual suicide bombers that set their bombs off in large crowds such as marketplaces or during rush hour. This method is most commonly used in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

**Other**

Minors and women are not immune to such violations. Bahrain has the highest number of children detained with an allegation of terrorist charges due to their participation in pro-democracy protests. Women also make up a notable percentage of prisoners.

Other violations include but not limited to:

- Banning Shia publications, mostly reported from South East countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.
- Citizenship revocation that results in the removal of one’s right to property, mobility, access to social
services, and results in statelessness. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are leading countries with this type of violation toward their native Shia population.

- Violation to rights of prisoners spiked dramatically in the year 2018, too. The authorities postpone hearings and court days as a mean to psychological torture the victims. In some cases, the prisoners were injured under integrations, denied access to medical care, limited in visitation time and forbidden to practice their belief based rituals.

**Tactics of Anti-Shiism**

- Bomb
- Assassination
- Arrest
- Ban of Text
- Citizenship Revocation
- Restriction of Rights

**Responsible Party**

Terror organizations such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Lashkare-Jangvi (among others) in Pakistan are just some entities who have expressed disdain for Shia Muslims, using derogatory language to dehumanize them. Shia Rights Watch recognizes a need for addressing third-party source of anti-Shiism. However, Shia Rights Watch also notes it is unrealistic to negate the government's role in violations, despite the government's lack of direct involvement in all violations. Thus far, most Shia rights violations reported are directly governmental. In Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Nigeria, Malaysia and Indonesia, the government oversees and orders violations of Shia Muslims. In countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, India, and Azerbaijan, the government's failure to protect their minorities affects this population's wellness and is a key driver of anti-Shiism.

Some of the significant factors leading to human rights violations of this minority group is the tendency for sovereigns to create their definitions of the terms “terror,” “terrorist,” and “national security” to propel their state-interests as opposed to using uniform definitions.

By skewing these terms, sovereigns can curtail human rights on the accusation that the person in question is a threat to the physical safety of millions of people as well as a danger to a national identity. For example,
according to the Saudi Arabian Terrorism Law Template, a terrorist is defined as someone, who “insults the reputation of the state or its position,” meaning that under the law even peaceful pro-democracy protesters can be punished as terrorists. Not just in Saudi Arabia, the use of vague wording in criminal laws allow officials to violate human rights without restrictions and limitations.
Shifts in Presentations

In the past, persecution and violations were only limited to physical actions such as killings and injuries. Statistically, the number of casualties in the Shia population is reducing. And if we look at the number of victims reported, we might conclude that the world is a better safer place. However, the reality is that persecutions are changing their manifestations. The number of Shia killed during this year might be less than the previous one, but the question is: Does this population feel safe to vote? Can they access higher education and equal employment? Can they practice their faith in the privacy of their home? Are they recognized as lawful citizens? The answer to all these questions is, no. Shia might not be killed but do they have a livelihood? The answer once again is, no.

As much as the reported number of killings has gone down, the number of imprisonment has gone up. Modern persecution are no longer directly violent ones, but they consist in lack of access to information and higher education, isolations and social hostilities, political ostracization, hate speech and more. The danger of modern persecution is far more than traditional violent persecution. Direct violence is easier to be noticed and reported. However, current persecution does not attract as much attention from the media and governments, and therefore it goes unnoticed.

Country-Based Analysis

Countries examined in this report include Nigeria, Bahrain, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Iraq, Canada, India, Afghanistan, Iran, U.S, Canada, Italy, and Israel. Some of the worst placed for Shia are Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Standard methods of anti-Shia attacks include, but are not limited to, shootings, bombings, torture, home raids, abductions, deportation, denial of medical care, institutionalized anti-Shia laws, stabbings.

AFGHANISTAN

Lack of institutional protection for minorities like Shia Muslims has left this population vulnerable to targeted attacks from extremist groups like ISIS and the Taliban, two groups who consider Shia to be infidels because of their faith.
HAZARA COMMUNITY

Afghan Shia, most of which belong to the Hazara community, live in fear of suicide bombings in their areas of residence. The Hazara minority is a community of ethnically distinct Shia Muslims originating from Hazaristan. The Hazara count has been reduced by approximately 60% of their total population due to anti-Shia targeting by extremist populations. Today, the population lives as diaspora in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and even some Western nations.

Knowing the government has not done much to protect this population, witnesses report that Shia have taken upon themselves to defend their areas.

BOMBINGS

The year 2018 started relatively quietly for Afghanistan but progressing into March and April; there was a sharp spike in anti-Shia incidents. Suicide bombings during these two months alone took the lives of 118 Afghan Shia, wounding 228 others in the process. April 22nd marks a high volume of Shia deaths in Kabul as a result of multiple attacks. Bombers targeted Hazara Shia at voter registration locations, killing 63 and wounding over 100 others as they waited in line to get their voter cards. ISIS claimed responsibility and said they were intentionally targeting Shia. Later that afternoon, a roadside bomb took the lives of 6 others, making it the deadliest day of 2018.

In the first six months of 2018, the total number of Afghan Shia killed rose to 122, and the number wounded in attacks grew to 233.

August stood witness to 2018’s second largest attack on Shia Muslims in Afghanistan. In mid-August, 48 were killed, and 67 were injured in a bombing of a university in Hazara community in Kabul. Those killed were university students. The attack was claimed by ISIS militants.

In another incident, a Shia mosque, Khawaja Hassan, in the Paktia Province in Gardez city, Kabul was bombed while Shia worshippers were carrying-out Friday Prayers. The total number of casualties is expected to grow, but latest reports say at least 39 were killed and 81 were injured. Once again, the bombing was claimed by ISIS.

In September, yet again, Kabul was home to twin bombings targeting Shia communities of the city. On September 5, more than 20 were killed and 70 others injured as ISIS agents detonated explosives near a gym in Dasht-e-Barchi, Kabul. A second explosion in the form of a car bomb was set off 40 minutes later targeting rescue aid.

A day later, Amaq news, reported ISIS’s claim on the incident, conveying their goal of targeting “a gather of
apostates.” Last month, 50 students were killed in Dasht-e-Barchi.

In November, Afghanistan witnessed some explosions throughout the month mainly in Kabul. At least 73 civilian casualties are reported throughout the month, with more than a hundred wounded individuals, some of which are in critical condition. Some of the explosions such as one in Malack Asqar, Kabul targeted Shia population and some targeted civilians in mixed communities. Hundreds of ethnic Hazara Shia had gathered outside the presidential palace on November 11th and 12th, angry at the government’s inability to stop recent attacks on predominantly Hazara areas of the province southwest of the capital. A single attack targeting this demonstration on 12th killed at least 6 Shia.

Election and peace talks between the government and Taliban create more opportunity for unrest in the country. Taliban and ISIS are two terrorist groups in Afghanistan, both of have expressed disdain for Shia Muslims.

Targeting Journalist

A trend of violence highlighted in September was the targeting of Shia journalists. The International Federation of Journalists reported Afghanistan was the most dangerous place for journalist during 2018, as 16 journalists lost their lives, 9 of which were covering explosions in Kabul, a large percentage of which was in Shia populated areas. Lack of protection for Shia Muslims has allowed violence to permeate to all Afghan populations. Shia Rights Watch emphasizes a need for increased security measures in Kabul and recognition of Shia Muslims, the Hazara specially, as targets of violence by extremist groups.

BAHRAIN

Almost a decade after the initial uprising in Bahrain, anti-Shia violence continues in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Relative to 2014, public mass protests have been reduced, yet arrests and systemic discrimination continues. The first half of 2018 stood witness to 1,287 cases of anti-Shiism. Incidents included that of home raids, enforced disappearances, destruction of property and targeted violence. The cases continued into the second half of the year. In June 2018, the European Parliament expressed concern for impunity in Bahraini systems for noncompliance to international human rights documents and “regret” for Bahrain’s award of the European Union Delegation Chaillot Prize.

Themes of mistreatment in government facilities and denial of due process prevail. While abuse of Shia Muslims in Bahrain is diverse in form and widespread, this report highlights a previously unmet need of recognition for Shia detainees.
VIOLATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Despite Bahrain’s signature on International human rights documents such that of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the actions of the Kingdom are non-compliant. Moreover, the actions of the authorities have lead to the progressive deterioration of human rights for Shia Muslims in 2018.

DETENTION

Given the nation’s demographic of majority Shia and pro-democratic efforts in the past decade, Shia Muslims make up the largest population of detainees in the nation. In order to legitimize arrests and reduce avenues of legal dispute in cases against the government, laws have been ratified by authorities, granting maximal power to the Bahraini courts in defining “treason” and “terrorism” for actions internationally recognized as expression of religious identity or criticism of unjust legal actions. By keeping the definition of “terrorism,” broad, authorities can apply punishments to any number of legitimate civil activities in which they can allege are harmful against the kingdom or which damage national unity. According to The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), charges used against Shias include ‘illegal gathering,’ ‘inciting hatred against the regime,’ ‘money laundering,’ and ‘acts of terrorism.’ These charges have been used to quell peaceful gatherings, religious congregations, as well as other forms of peaceful expression of Shia beliefs, views, and dissenting opinions.

Individuals are detained without due process, are denied legal (private and public) resources, and are mistreated within detainment centers. Arrests occur without warrant and many disappear for days to weeks at a time prior to their families being informed of their location. Sources report extraction of forced confessions as well as torture by military personnel in the both Jaws Prison and Dry Docks Detention Center. Prison authorities use derogatory language that targets the religious identity of the prisoners and prohibit practices based in faith.

PRISON CONDITION

Moreover, in 2018, denial of medical attention for illnesses existing prior to detainment and more importantly those acquired as result of torture and harsh prison conditions rose to the headlines. Investigations into existing medical resources show limitations in allotted medical facilities. Within Jaw Prison, there exists only one general practitioner per shift and a maximum of three medical staff. There are no medical equipments
such as x-ray machines and special medication aside of cold and flu medicine is not held within the facility. Prisoners are event denied medication provided to the facilities by their family members.

**MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE**

Despite legally allotted financial resources, authorities display a general unwillingness to transfer prisoners in need to sufficient facilities. Those who request external care on basis of lacking facility resources are treated harshly and coerced into surrendering rights through fear of further torture.

The following cases are just a sample of cases of medical negligence by Bahraini prison authorities. Sheikh Mirza al-Mahrous who suffers from illness in his colon, Ammar Sahwan who needs medical attention due to gun wounds, Habib Allawi who suffers from repercussions of birdshot pellets and Sayed Kadhem Abbas who suffers from a brain tumor which is believed to have been exacerbated by his detention are examples of inmates whose right to access medical attention is denied under Bahraini authority supervision. In late August, Abbas reported loss in his eyesight yet denial of medical care was continued.

Aside from lack of medical attention to detainees, conditions in detainment centers are lacking. On numerous occasions, prisoners have expressed lack of running water at their facilities to visiting family members. External inspection reports indicate severe insect infestation and toilets and showers lacking functionality. In combination with ongoing torture and mistreatment by officers, previously healthy individuals have developed permanent medical conditions, many of which are results of infections which could have been avoided by proper sanitation in the facility.

**INDIA**

Although Islam is one of the nine recognized religions in India, this country is not free from violations against Shia Muslims.

Indian Shia and other Shia residents of India have faced violations of their freedom of religion during Muharram of 2018. Shia of Kashmir report being met with violence in the hands of state operatives while participating in Muharram rituals. Witnesses report raids, violent attacks to Shia Muslims, use of baton-charge and tear-gas shelling on Shia mourners in different areas of the Kashmir, one such area being Srinagar.

**ANTI-SHIISM IN THE MEDIA**

A recent Bollywood film called ‘Satyamev Jayate’ containing intolerant sentiments of the Shia community was released in 2018. Reported indicate that the movie presents Shia as a violent group and Shia is speaking out
against claims. Indian Shia stated the negative portrayal of Shia practices is a major problem considering the role the media plays in shaping a society’s worldview, and films like ‘Satyamev Jayate’ assist in rationalizing Shia discrimination. Given the permeation of international media across state lines, Shia Rights watch notes the movies ability to categorize Shia as violent in the media and fuel marginalization of Shia Muslims all over the world.

**TARGETING PROFESSIONALS**

Board Chairman Waseem Rizvi of the newly formed Shia Waqf political party in Uttar Pradesh, India, has allegedly received a death threat by email. Waseem claims that the danger comes from a Pakistani-based extremist group called Jamaat-e-Islami. Threats to Shia individuals in positions of power is consistent with regional anti-Shia trends. In the past decade, India has stood witness to direct and indirect violence against Shia Muslims. When their lives are not being threatened, Shia in rising political roles are associated with foreign entities and undermined in patriotism.

Shia Rights Watch contacted the president of India through a letter to express its concern regarding violation of human rights in this country as the Right to Freedom of Religion is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.

Anti-Shiism within the media and the targeting of socially prominent Shia Muslims signals a shift in the promotion of cultural violence within and outside India. Bollywood movies are viewed all over the world and serve as a potential source of identity based discrimination even outside India such that acts of anti-Shiism begin trending as a form of pop-culture.

**IRAQ**

Although a Shia majority country, Iraqi Shia face daily bomb explosion threats in areas rich in Shia population. As the dominance of ISIS has diminished in Iraq, Shia Rights Watch notes a reduction in an overall level of violence in the country. However, there are still clear incidents of anti-Shiism being enacted all across the countryside. Shia neighborhoods in Baghdad continue to be one of the most affected areas of sectarian violence, and Iraq overall is one of the most turbulent locations for Shia Muslims. In 2018, Iraqi Shia were victims of roadside bombings, suicide bombings, mosque bombings, targeted poisoning, snipers, shootings, and beheadings. January marked the deadliest month during the first half of the year with 48 killed and 140 wounded in a twin blast. During the second half of the year, September was the deadliest with eight killed and
42 wounded in 26 reported attacks throughout the country.

**GRAVE DISCOVERIES**

Authorities continue finding bodies and mass graves in different parts of Iraq. In July, authorities found 36 more bodies from the Speicher Massacre in a cemetery at Saddam Hussein’s former palace in Tikrit. In the highly publicized 2014 attack, more than 1,700 Shia soldiers were slaughtered by ISIS after the terror organizations took over Camp Speicher military base.

Shia Rights Watch recorded 193 attacks during the year 2018 that resulted in at least 108 killed, 343 wounded. The number of people kidnapped, and damages to the properties is unknown.

As a result of the high volume of killed breadwinners, Iraqis suffer from poverty.

Although Iraq is a prominent destination for millions of Shia Muslims in a number of rituals and religious occasions, the government's corruption, bad economy, lack of leadership skills, and a growing amount of political interference prevents this country from utilizing opportunities for growth through tourism and other investments.

Moreover, failures to address violent cases of anti-Shiism, Shia Rights Watch argues, is the leading cause of the nations massive impoverished population. In 2017, the rate of poverty in Iraq was announced at 19%. Shia Muslims make up the largest population of impoverished individuals. The continued lack of protection for Shia Muslims and the ever-growing measures taken by terror organizations to identify and target areas dense in Shia population note an increase in poverty in the country. The effects of terror attacks on these populations are augmented as they occur in civilian-rich areas such as marketplaces, leading to the death of male and female guardians and orphancy of millions of Shia children.

**IRAN**

On September 20th, 2018, two women were arrested in Qum, Iran. Witnesses report that female special security forces raided a Muharram gathering in private property, insulted the participants, forcefully removed headscarf from one of the victim’s head and seized ritual books and other personal materials.

The victim’s families reported that the authorities have previously raided their home, summoned the female victims to the local police station, and ordered them to avoid participating in Muharram rituals, even in the privacy of their homes.

Attacks and arbitrary arrests during the month of Muharram in ritual gatherings is not new. Such violations
toward women appear to be a new and worrisome trend.

In October the wife and two daughters of Sheikh Mohammad Hedayati, dissident cleric, were arrested while returning from Najaf by order of the Special Clerical Court.

Mohammad Hedayati is the chairman of the Traditional Clerics Association and resides in the United States. His wife and three and five-year-old daughters were to be transferred to Dastgerd prison in Isfahan and then to Evin prison in Tehran. It is reported that his three-year-old daughter, has diabetes and requires insulin shots after meals. According to the latest reports, they were freed on bail but cannot leave Iran. The daughters are missing school and medical care that they are entitled to in the United States.

Anti-Shia violations in Iran are mainly limited to arrest and raids to clerics in the country. In Iran, clerics are obligated to support the Supreme, or they are considered and treated as anti-government.

**NIGERIA:**

Peaceful Shia protesters are often targeted by Nigerian soldiers and the Nigerian Police force. Freedom of expression is not guaranteed to Shia Muslims in Nigeria, and when they express their rights to expression, it often leads to extralegal killings. Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) has written the United States Congress asking them to impose sanctions and an embargo on Nigeria until these inhumane, unjust murders cease to occur.

Nigeria started the year with two cases of Anti-Shiism in January and spiked up to more than 330 by the end of the year. In April, 230 reported peaceful protesters were arrested as they gathered to demand the release of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky, an Islamic Movement leader, unjustly held in prison by the Nigerian Federal Government since December of 2015. In an attempt to disperse the crowd, Nigerian police officers opened fire on the group and employed the use of tear gas, killing one person and injuring two others. Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky, a prominent leader in the area, remains in state detention despite national orders for his release.

Sources say Governor El-Rufa’i ordered soldiers to open fire on Shia Muslims in Zaria in July as Nigerians were peacefully mourning the tragic killings of 34 Shia by the military under the Jonathan administration in 2015. Also on the 20th of September, the congregation of Shia populations of Zaria gathered in Muharram religious ritual was met with violence from government forces who attacked gatherers with the utmost brutality. Shia protestors report they are being specifically targeted and are unjust victims of police brutality. Last but not least in October the army opened fire on protesting civilians. The military had admitted killing six members of the Islamic sect between October 27 and October 29, 2018. However the video obtained by New York
Times shows at least 26 bodies. The protestors said they had collected a total of 49 bodies during four days of protests. According to the New York Times, some of the corpses had bullet wounds in the back, indicating that they were shot while fleeing. Persecution of Shia Muslims has increased significantly in the past five years. Unlawful attacks and arrests during Shia rituals has created the culture of fear among African Shia and needs to be addressed before this case, like most other anti-Shia cases, becomes an ongoing and spreading violation. Anti-Shiism in the nation is exacerbated by the corruption and miscoordination in the judicial and executive entities. Nigeria is home to the largest, and fastest growing, Shia population in the African Continent. Nigeria ranks 27 on the world corruption index, with zero being most corrupt. The case of Shia Muslims is an explicit display of lack of efficiency and coordination between regional and federal judicial systems in the nation. Despite success in pro-Shia efforts within the federal court systems, regional courts in Zaria have shown unwillingness to release Shia prisoners and federally-ordained reparations for families affected by violence by the hands of State officials. State authorities regard Shia individuals agents of Iranian expansion and therefore they actively limit expression of this group, despite the groups ongoing declaration of independence from all political entities, internal and external.

**PAKISTAN**

Like Afghanistan, Shia Muslims in Pakistan live with the constant threat of targeted terrorism due to a lack of substantial government intervention measures. The radical anti-Shia sentiment is allowed to flourish, making Pakistan a hotbed for violent incidents of anti-Shiism. The assassination of professionals, attacks to pilgrims, roadside bombs, hate speech and anti-Shia influence of the terror groups on the authorities and the general public are leading causes of Shia sufferings in this country.

**INFLUENCE ON AUTHORITIES**

In March, a member of the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ) used his connections at the Jamiat Ulema-e Islam political party to bring charges of blasphemy against 20 Shia Muslims in the Sindh province. This case was a blatant attempt to normalize blasphemy as punishable by law to make religious discrimination in Pakistan systematic, rather than just an extremist sentiment. The fear for Pakistan’s future is that radical groups like ASWJ will continue to assert their influence on the government in a systematic fashion, normalizing violence against the Shia population until anti-Shiism becomes institutionalized.

**SUICIDE BOMBS**
In July, at least 31 people were killed by an ISIS-affiliated suicide bomber in the Shia majority town of Quetta. The attacker was trying to enter a polling station during Pakistan’s general election when police attempted to apprehend him. He detonated the bomb just outside before the police could reach him. Even though polling resumed in the area shortly after the attack, reports say that voter turnout was significantly reduced. With ISIS’ history of targeting Shia populations, this is an apparent incident of anti-Shiism and an attempt to keep Shias from participating in elections.

**TARGETING SHIA PROFESSIONALS**

Unique to Pakistan is the targeting of Shia professionals such as lawyers, doctors, policy-makers and businessmen. Individuals identified as practicing Shia Muslims are targeted by terror organizations. In most cases, sources report men on motorcycles shooting at individuals at their workplace or on their daily commute. Car bombs are another form of individual assassinations. Vehicles of prominent individuals are identified and equipped with explosive devices that detonate upon entry. Rarely do car bombs only affect the targeted individuals as their explosion damages nearby property and injures passerbys.

**ATTACK TO PILGRIMS**

In October, approximately two dozen busses carrying Shia pilgrims were stopped at the inter-provincial borders between Sindh and Balochistan provinces. The pilgrims were on their way to Iraq via Iran. However, the security officials stopped them denying them entry into Balochistan province. Pakistani pilgrims face unique dangers in their travels. Traditionally, pilgrims face specific targeting from terror organizations that have long regarded Shia pilgrimages as “shirk,” or denial of Islamic belief systems. Denial of entry into Balochistan is a display of anti-Shia sentiment within local authorities. The Shia community protested the denial of entry to Shia pilgrims. The protests are a show of the Shia community’s unwillingness to face discrimination by religion.

**HATE SPEECH**

Hate speeches are another violation provoking concern in Pakistan. Witnesses report that a cleric in Punjab critiqued his audiences for attending a Shia woman’s funeral. He told the attendees that they are “no longer considered Muslims” and must “convert to Islam.” He further told them that “if they are married, their marriage has to be re-done.” This behavior was previously observed in Saudi trained clerics in Malaysia and Indonesia. The clerics use their platforms to spread anti-Shia ideologies and encourage people to keep a
distance from Shia individuals because they are considered non-Muslim. This NGO believes hate speeches are
directly linked to increased motivation in suicide bombing such as one that claimed at least 25 Shia Muslims
lives and injured dozens outside the door of a religious seminary in Hangu’s Lower Orakzai area on November
23rd.

**SAUDI ARABIA**

Saudi Arabia is known as the birthplace of Anti-Shiism as this kingdom not only violate the right of its Shia but
fuels and supports such violations internationally. Furthermore, International Anti-terror collaborations created
an opportunity for this kingdom to label and charged pro-democracy activists as terrorists.

Like Bahrain, over the past several years, Riyadh has redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism
and peaceful demonstrations, particularly in the Shia-majority Eastern Province. Government officials and
Saudi religious scholars have called Shia “brothers of Satan” and often refer to them using derogatory terms,
such as “rafidha” or a plural “rawafidh,” which means “rejectionist.” The Saudis have also implemented a
discriminatory educational curriculum wherein the Shia faith is stigmatized, and students from an early age
learn to perceive Shia religious beliefs and practices as bad, or “other.” Saudi religious clerics have utilized
fatwas and their influence over the judicial system to implement arbitrary criminalization tactics against Shia
and their religious practices. Hate speech goes virtually unchecked on social media and in the press which only
serves to perpetuate the anti-Shia attitude which currently prevails in Saudi Arabia.

**ANTI TERRORIST CHARGES**

Saudi Arabia targets Shias with “anti-terrorism” charges. These types of accusations are a long-term
practice in Riyadh utilized by the Specialized Criminal Court for sentencing Shia civilians and activists to long
imprisonments and death sentences.

During 2018, the United Nations spokeswoman for the United Nations human rights office, Ravina Shamdasani,
issued a statement calling on the Saudi Arabian government to release those who have been arrested for
peaceful protests and activism.

The year began with one case of reported anti-Shiism in January, but by the end of June had 33 total incidents
total. In the first six months of 2018, the total number of incidents of anti-Shiism in Saudi Arabia included three
people killed, one wounded, 26 arrested.

In July, Saudi forces arrested Shia cleric Zuhair Hussain bu Saleh in another incident of the Riyadh regime’s
persistent clampdown against dissidents and pro-democracy campaigners. Saudi Arabia has banned Shia Muslims from practicing their religion, and authorities have accused Saleh of holding illegal congregational prayers at his home. Zouyer Bussehal was arrested for similar charges. Sources say Bussehal was arrested and given 50 lashes for performing prayers based on the Shia religion at his home. Shia Muslims have not been allowed to set up a Mosque in Khobar to hold formal services. Therefore many clerics hold services of their own that may result in an arrest because authorities claim that congregational prayer meetings held in private homes are illegal. The right to freedom of belief and religion is continuously stripped from the Shia population in Saudi Arabia.

**FIRST FEMALE ACTIVIST ON DEATH ROW**

**First Female Activist and the case of 1st female Death Penalty**

Saudi Arabia witnessed a unique incident of anti-Shiism as officials detained 17 high profile female activists. These female activists were arrested for advocating for a progressive reform for women’s rights. The activists are still in detention although the country is moving toward more freedom for women.

The historical act of sentencing a female to death penalty took place in August when Israa al-Ghamgham, a detainee and a female Shia rights activist was sentenced to the death penalty for her involvement in peaceful demonstrations in Qatif. Al-Ghamgham is the first woman to be sentenced to the death penalty. The Saudi regime has arrested some women from the Eastern Province with political involvement accusations, including Naima Al-Moustoud, Fatimah Nassif, Nasima Al-Sada.

Shia Rights Watch raises concern over the case of al-Ghamgham and escalation of human rights violations in the form of direct violence. Moreover, Shia Rights Watch notes a shift in human rights violation that targets female activists, specially those of the Shia faith.

**THE CASE OF KHASOGGI**

Following the killing of Jamal Khashoggi in October, the Saudi kingdom has been under international pressure to explain its involvement in the killing of the Washington Post columnist and a critic of the crown prince, at Riyadh’s consulate in Istanbul. Although Saudi Arabia has said the prince, heir to the throne of the world’s top oil exporter, had no prior knowledge of the murder the world is refusing to accept that answer given the country’s long history of suppressing its oppositions. The killing of Khashoggi affected the high-profile investment summit in Riyadh as prominent businesses and media groups have pulled out. Saudi Arabia’s
Vision 2030 project, the master project of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is strongly dependent on overseas investment. The killing also prompted some political critiques, too. U.S. demonstrators called for an end to the Saudi-led military campaign in neighboring Yemen, which was launched by Prince Mohammed in his role as defense minister in 2015. However, since Saudi Arabia plays a fundamental role in maintaining security in the Middle East this country is given the green light to maintain its human rights violation without the fear of facing serious political consequences. U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis told U.S. senators, in a closed briefing, that “I must note we are seldom free to work with unblemished partners ... Our security interests cannot be dismissed, even as we seek accountability for what President Trump described as the ‘unacceptable and horrible crime’ of Jamal Khashoggi’s murder,” Mattis stated to reporters.

Khashoggi’s murder is becoming a worldwide challenge, testing countries for their human rights priorities and political interests. Following the Khashoggi’s case, U.S Senate voted to end its military support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen however the votes were largely symbolic because to become law the resolutions would have to pass the House of Representatives, whose Republican leaders have blocked any legislation intended to rebuke the Saudis.

Although Khashoggi was not a Shia, his case encourages the urgency to revisit to Saudi’s human rights violations. SRW hopes that this case helps bring attention to the ongoing rights violations of the Saudi kingdom and initiate resolutions to end them.

These arrests, violations, threats, and limitation in Saudi Arabia should be viewed as a reiteration that only the government has the power to enact change and that protests against the traditional modus operandi will not be tolerated, leading to an activist arrest by charges that are anti-establishment activities. Based on most recent reports 34 Saudi Shia are still on death row, including four minors. Twelve of these Saudi prisoners are at risk of “imminent” execution.

**SYRIA**

Following months of relentless attacks on the Shia towns of al-Foua and Kefraya, an estimated 6,000 civilians were evacuated from their hometowns. The two municipalities rank at one of the highest targets of violence amidst war in Syria. Not only were Shia residents in these towns targeted by ISIS militants looking to advance political grounds, but also by religious extremists acting on a cultural belief that Shia is “vermin” in the nation. Also, anti-Iran actors limit aid and humanitarian action in al-Foua and Kefraya as a means to reduce Iranian influence in the country. Discrimination against Shia in the context above is an expansion of a false association
of Shia Muslims with the Republic of Iran.

Evacuation efforts come after an unsuccessful extraction effort in April which was targeted by ISIS militants, leading to the death of 150 people, 72 of which were children.

Anti-Shiism in Syria is prevalent, and there has been limited action in meeting the progression of violence against this population. In 2016, Secretary Kerry identified Shia Muslims as targets of militants aiming to “kill them, to fight them, to displace them, and to cleanse the land of their filth.” However, since then, there has been no implementation of programs that are inclusive to the Shia population.

Lack of social and political protection of the Shia community has thus far created grounds for terror activity.

With a cultural education of anti-Shiism, non-Shia entities are less willing to provide aid to their Shia counterparts, thus creating opportunities for infiltration of anti-Shia endeavors within the nation of Syria. The frequency of attacks on the towns of al-Foua and Kefraya are explicit signs of a lack of protection for Shia populated areas, and until the Shia populations special needs for protection is met, violence in Syria is sure to continue.

REGIONAL INCIDENTS

Other countries around the world are contributing to the spread of anti-Shiism in a variety of ways. In a recent video published by the head of the Arab media division for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Avichay Adraee commented that the Shia are a threat to the stability of the region, inviting “Arabs and Muslims” to take his advice and resist Iran. Adraee references sources in Islamic literature to warn about the Shia faith, and then talks about the danger of Iran’s influence on the region. Although it is expected for an Israeli officer to have negative comments on Iran and reaction to its political movements, it is not acceptable to degrade a faith or religion and associate them with a specific country. SRW believes such action and comments from the Arab media division of the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit is an absolute false association. Limiting Shia to one nation and identifying them as a threat by Adraee is clear evidence that there must be more education and advocacy for Shia rights. Shia Muslims must not be associated with any particular country, political or ethnic group.

There was a similar thread of Anti-Shia rhetoric in South Africa in May with postings such as “If you kill a Shia you go straight to heaven,” and “When walking in the street, or public places, it’s becoming increasingly important to become vigilant as to who may be a Shi’ah, and who may be not. Here are some general guidelines…” These remarks were posted on Facebook accounts and aired on local radio talk shows.

Lest it is thought that anti-Shiism doesn’t affect Shia communities in the West, in February prayer stones in
University of Toronto prayer room were vandalized, and a letter was left stating: “To the Shia: No such thing as following Imam Ali. And no such thing as using a stone for praying.” This is further proof that anti-Shiism sentiment knows no boundaries and can be used against Shia Muslims anywhere, anytime, for any reason.

In the United States, Shia resident of Detroit have reported suspicious activity at their mosque. A Shia mosque on Van Dyke Avenue in Detroit, US state of Michigan, caught fire twice. The first fire happened Saturday, September 22nd, and the second started on the second floor at about 11 a.m. Sunday the 23rd. No one has claimed responsibility.
Conclusion:

In 2018, anti-Shiism prevailed. Efforts of Shia Rights Watch and other minority rights organizations grow to meet the needs of the Shia population, yet change on an international level is needed to acknowledge the endangered state of this population. Nation-States must recognize the violence, both systemic and direct, that limits basic rights of this population.

Unmet cases of anti-Shiism has allowed violence to permeate to all tiers of society. Targeting of Shia populations has not only lead to human rights violations for this group, but it has also left social and economic deficits. Moreover, the lack of protection for Shia Muslims has lead to the continued existence of terrorist activity in all regions of the world. In the nations of Syria and Iraq, cultures which define the Shia identity as one of deviance, ISIS thrive on a constant lack of protection for the population. In Pakistan and India, individuals most contributive to their societies are targeted on the basis of their religious identity, leading to a substantial lacking in their social systems.

Recommendation

To Shia Muslims:

SRW recognizes the decades of ongoing conflict Shia Muslims have had to endure. Shia Muslims all over the world face direct, systemic and cultural discrimination by their religion. SRW believes the first front against human rights violations. Hence, SRW promotes the use of dialogue, education, social engagement and peaceful protests as a means of raising awareness against oppression.

* Shia Muslims must first build an active, educated and aware populace that promotes justice and condemns anti-Shiism.
* Minority groups have the right to demand equality in their communities. However, SRW warns against the use of violence to demand rights. At its core, Shia Islam denounces violence while encouraging education and peace-building endeavors.
* SRW encourages active participation of Shia Muslims in their nations legislative process such to show active citizenship.
* Further, Shia Muslims must contact their national officials volunteering participation in dialogues and planning that directly, and indirectly effects their communities.
* Establish and build coalition with other minorities in your country. Through coalitions disempowered can develop their power and together you can defend your interest with stronger voice.

**To Leaders and Governments:**

* SRW invites governments and Shia Muslim leaders to take steps towards building a better rapport and mutual respect.
* Governments must recognize their Shia population as a rightful citizen who are entitled freedom, security, education and economic advancement as the rest of the society.
* We further encourage taking advantage of nonviolence and peaceful approaches Shia Islam offers to create communities in which people from all faith, ethnicity, religion, color, and background live happy and productive lives.
* Attacks against Shia Muslims are dense on religious occasions such as Ramadhan and Moharram, and that in religious centers. Protection of major Shia centers on religious occasions can reduce the casualty count significantly.
* SRW invites governments to allocate resources and management to the protection of Shia Muslims, especially in these two Holy months.
* Further, SRW encourages the co-creation of security plans by both Shia Muslims and their governments. Cooperation between Shia Muslims and their policy makers instills trust in both parties and thus can lead to long-term positive social change. While state leaders are the official decision-makers in the nation, Shia Muslims are targets of a significant portion of violence.
* SRW also invites governments to establish relationships with their Shia Muslim communities through their leaders and Marja’. Marja means “source to imitate/follow” or “religious reference,” is a title given to the highest level Shia leaders. Maraji’ (plural of marja) are influential resources within the Shia communities, thus they can be a great source of encouragement for human rights involvement.
* We invite governments to free political prisoners and treat detainees with fairness as a sign of their intention to rebuild healthy relationships with their Shia Muslim constituents.
* SRW encourages the governments to revisit their definition of “terrorist” and exclude peaceful and pro democracy protester as terrorist. Saudi Arabia for example, partially, defines terrorist as anyone who intends “to change the ruling system in the Kingdom”.
* Governments are asked to conduct independent and impartial investigation of prosecutors and other law
enforcement officials who used maltreatment and torture toward prisoners and prosecute those found responsible.

* Ensure all trials are open to public, and guarantee due process.

* Acknowledge that the detainees have the right to select unbiased lawyer. The government must provide free lawyers, in case of the detainees financial hardship, however they must have the freedom to choose a lawyer of their choice.