

Hajj 2017 Travel Advisory

With the upcoming Hajj Travel season approaching, travel within Saudi Arabia remains alerting for Shia Muslims making the pilgrimage. The ability of foreign Embassies to assist Shia facing difficulty is extremely limited and difficult. Shia Rights Watch (SRW) has also faced extreme difficulty in assisting Shia in Saudi Arabia who are in immediate danger of being harmed.

Over the past there has been a consistent practice of Shia pilgrims in Saudi Arabia being targeted by Saudi law enforcement agencies for unexpected searches, summons, imprisonment and harassment. The pilgrims are also at high risk for being victims of violent crimes inflicted by other pilgrims, or law enforcement agencies themselves.

Each year numerous complaints are made by Shia Muslims, particularly clerics, over the treatment received during the Hajj pilgrimage. Many of the complaints highlight mistreatment by Saudi officials towards Shia Muslims. The complaints detail a systemic targeting by Saudi officials; practices include stopping, searching and harassing the Shia pilgrims. Some pilgrims were held and questioned for hours upon arrival to Medina airport. During previous Hajj seasons pilgrims were exposed to sexual harassment while being searched at the airport. Shia groups have also consistently complained about being placed in lower quality tents/residence, and receiving maltreatments.

SRW has been putting forth an effort to bring awareness to the issue, and reduce the number of threats and violations towards Shia Muslims during the 2016 Hajj Season. Recently SRW has sent a letter to foreign Embassies located across Saudi Arabia. The letter encouraged Embassies to be alert, and take precautionary steps to protect their Shia citizens, and have policies in place to assist these citizens should they be harmed or in immediate danger.

In a continuing effort to ensure a safe and holy Hajj pilgrimage, SRW invites Shia Muslims to be alert and take following steps if they are faced with any violations, threats or harassment while in Saudi Arabia:

- Carry a copy of your passport at all times (if you are traveling with group, you will not have access to your passport, therefore carrying a copy of it is critical),

- Carry contact information of your country's embassy in Saudi Arabia at all times,
- Contact your embassy immediately to report a violation you or your family member faced,
- Use [#Hajj2017](#) to share your experience with the rest of pilgrims,
- Contact your trusted SRW representative to receive advocacy support.

SRW urges the Saudi authorities to do what they can to serve and protect all pilgrims this Hajj season, regardless of their political or theological differences. Unity and human dignity is a central message during Hajj, and it is our hope that the Saudi authorities uphold this message.

SRW wishes everyone a holy and safe Hajj pilgrimage.