

International Religious Freedom 2015 Report with Shia Rights Watch summary

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor International Religious Freedom released their 2015 Report on August 10th detailing human rights violations, including some of what Shia face around the world.

At Shia Rights Watch (SRW) we welcome this report and the attention given to the important issue of human right. Shia Rights Watch hopes to see more detailed report in following years with more collaboration between State Department and right NGOs.

We believe highlighting minority rights in such reports will raise attention to these groups and result in more international effort to recognize and protect all human rights.

The following summary is what is reported by Bureau of Democracy followed by SRW findings that were not included in the IRF report.

- **Afghanistan**

Several incidents with the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, ISKP, showed a targeting of Shia Hazara minorities in kidnapping and beheadings. On different occasions the ISKP targeting Shias resulting in the death of 11, the beheading of four men, two women and one girl. Later in the year the same terrorist organization kidnapped 11 Hazaras and an additional 30 on a separate incident while also being responsible for the October 9th attack on a Shia religious center in Kabul.

SRW confirmed death of 46 Shia, 57 wounded and 100 arrests.

- **Azerbaijan**

The government detained approximately 46 religious leaders and placed limits on the publishing and distribution of religious texts. The response from the Ministry of Internal Affairs was to detain an additional 38 people with charges that human

rights activists claim to be fabricated, restrict travel access to the city, and to search homes. Other press reports also show an incident in which Imam Taleh, leader of the independent Muslim Unity movement was severely beaten by Yasamal police. On March 10th, the government also arrested theologian, Jeyhun Jafarov with charges of treason. His religious activities such as leading pilgrimages, television broadcasts, and translation of Iranian literature has led him to still be imprisoned and awaiting at the end of 2015. Lastly, the government has also been accused of demolishing an “unregistered” mosque, placing its founder under investigation.

According to SRW 2015 report, 9 Shia were killed and 35 were arrested in this year.

- **Bahrain**

Bahrain, a Shia majority country led by a Sunni government has seen systematic oppression of the Shia through arrests, travel bans, revoked citizenship and more.

The government has detained protesters, journalists, and human rights activists. In June 2015, a court sentence Sheikh Ali Salman to four years of prison. In August the government also issued an additional arrest to Sheikh Hasan Isa.

Government crackdowns on terrorist investigations resulted in 25 Shia to be tried and convicted, with one defendant given the death penalty while other received ten to life in jail. Bahraini authorities have also revoked the citizenship of 72 accused terrorist supports, including both Shia and Sunni. Other acts of anti-shi'ism include discrimination in employment and education in addition to anti-shia commentary in private broadcasts or in vandalism of Shia mosques and the destruction of grave sights.

The Ministry of Interior promised to rebuild the 30 mosques that the government destroyed however only 27 have seen reconstruction. At educational institutes, Shia students applicants are granted less lucrative or prestigious scholarships in fields they did not wish to pursue. Discrimination is also found in the naturalized process with a Sunni preference, granting Sunnis an expedited process as an attempt to alter the demographic of the nation. On a whole, the larger unemployment rate for Shia shows they are marginalized at large with a lower socio-economic status compared to Bahraini Sunni.

Based on SRW records 393 case of Shia arrest, 97 wounded in attacks and one

killed.

- **Bangladesh**

While issues of discrimination and religious freedom for religious minorities as a whole is a prominent issue in Bangladesh, the country has seen several incidents of anti-shia crimes. On October 24th, a bomb attack on a Shia Ashura celebration resulted in two deaths and scores injured. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack in addition to a November 26 attack on Shia mosque in Borga that killed one and injured 3. According to the report, religious minorities claim that discrimination also exists in exam questions that drew from the majority religion. Additionally, a lack of minorities teachers resulted in minority students being unable to enroll in classes of their faith.

- **Egypt**

Egypt's 800,000 - 2 million Shia live under an oppressive government. The Egyptian government continues to use anti-Shia rhetoric, harasses the Shia, and takes away their right to worship. The government bans the importation and sale of Shia literature, the media is filled with anti-Shia hate speech, and Shia are seen as deviant from true Islam. A committee has also been formed to investigate any NGO that is suspected of promoting or practicing Shia Islam. The committee has raided institutions, confiscated religious books and arrested leaders. There have also been reports of a retired doctor and others being arrested and sentenced to 5-6 years in jail for "adhering to the Shia faith." Their crime was transporting Shia CD's and books. The government has also closed important Shia religious sites, especially during special holidays, saying that Shia practices are "falsehoods," with "no connection to Islam."

Four Shia arrest was confirmed by SRW during this year.

- **Indonesia**

The Indonesian Shia face heavy discrimination and hate speech. The National Anti-Shia Movement (ANNAS) has held several anti-Shia demonstrations, and openly calls Shia the "deviant sect." Additionally, one mayor banned the observance of a Shia holiday, and posters of anti-Shia rhetoric are common throughout the country, websites, and social media. There have also been accounts of detained Shia being forced to repent and renounce their faith.

Additionally, many of the Shia IDPs are not able to return to their homes because the other residents refuse to allow them back in.

- **Iran**

While Shia Islam is the official religion of Iran, Shia who do not agree with the practices of the government face strong discrimination, intimidation and arrest. The government closely monitors the statements and views of independent Shia leaders, media outlet, centers and websites. Hossein Kazemini Boroujerdi who openly criticized the government is serving an 11 year prison sentence.

SRW reported employees of several independent Shia TVs were arrested, their donations and properties are ceased and bank accounts are frozen.

A shooting in non-Shia city of Khuzestan resulted in two deaths and two injuries in October.

- **Iraq**

Iraq has been a haven for terrorist groups in 2015; especially Daesh. The group has sought out minority groups to rape, pillage, and murder minorities in the country. Hundreds of Shia have been killed by suicide attacks in the last few months. In a predominantly Muslim country, most Shia are located in or around Baghdad. In June, the Ministry of Human rights announced that 1,000 bodies had been exhumed from mass graves. These bodies were from a 2014 attack at Camp Speicher.

SRW reported 3861 Shia killed, and 3474 wounded due to anti-Shia activities.

- **Malaysia**

With the current restrictions placed on Shia in Malaysia by the government, religious freedom and anti-Shia discrimination is of high concern. The government has continued to forbid non-Sunni practice and barred Muslims from converting to another religion. For Muslims in violation of Sharia code, there are imposed fines, detentions and canings. The Malaysian government continued to detain Shia Muslims for practicing their religion; In October the State Islamic Department issues arrests to 16 people for participating in Shia religious ceremonies stating that there will be punishment for Muslims that deviate from the "true Islamic faith". The federal and state governments continued to forbid

religious assembly and worship for groups considered to be deviant sects such as Shia.

- **Pakistan**

Pakistan has seen an upward turn in extremist activities. Hundreds of Shia minorities have been killed and injured in the last year by armed sectarian groups. The groups are targeting Shia houses of worship, religious leaders, and religious gatherings. Extremist groups are aiming at minority populations based on religious motives. As the months go by, Shia leaders are reporting more and more hate speech and threats against their people. It is estimated that upwards of 40 million Shia Muslims live in Pakistan. Although it appears the government is against these acts of terror, the violence does not seem to be slowing.

SRW reported killing of 285 Shia, 275 wounded and 6 faith based arrest.

- **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia has had continuous discrimination against the Shia majority on a variety of levels. ISIS has claimed at least five attacks against Shia targets and Shia clerics and activists who advocate for Shia have been arrested; at least one Shia cleric has been executed due to charges of violent opposition. Authorities have arrested more than 1,000 Eastern province Shia since 2011 and groups in Qatif have recorded at least 206 persons remain in prison with others subject to travel bans. At least 30 Shia have been convicted of capital crimes.

Additionally, most mosques have not received official operating licenses because doing so would require the government to explicitly endorse them. The government also did not finance or assist in the construction of Shia mosques.

On May 29th, a suicide bomber killed four Shia attempting to enter a mosque. On August 6th, an attacker carried out another suicide bombing killing 17 people. October 16th a shooter killed five Shia, and later in the month a bomber murdered two people and wounded 26 Shia.

Shia businessmen were also forced to close their shops for all five prayers despite only observing three of the five prayers that Sunni practice.

The government also continued to distribute textbooks with intolerant, anti-Shia material. Additional reports from Shia groups reveal discrimination in the courts

has lengthy sentences would be given to Shia for engaging in peaceful protests.

Based on SRW report 33 shia were killed, 99 wounded and 34 were arrested by the government.

- **Yemen**

During evening prayers on September 2, two suicide bombers attacked the Zaydi Shi'a al-Muayyed mosque in Sana'a's al-Jeraf neighborhood, killing 32 persons and injuring at least 98. After the arrival of paramedics, a follow-on car bomb detonated outside the building. The next day ISIS affiliate Wilayat Sana'a claimed responsibility for the double bombing. Other attacks on Zaydi mosques occurred on March 20, June 17, June 20, July 29, and September 24.

On July 29, a car bomb exploded at the Al-Fayed Al-Hatami mosque in Sanaa, the principal mosque and administrative center for Ismaili Muslims, killing four and wounding six.

SRW confirmed death of 343 civilian Shia and 547 wounded. but it believes the numbers is higher but could not be recorded due to high risk environment.

- **Nigeria**

Human rights organizations reported that army troops killed hundreds of members of the Shia minority Muslim group Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) in Zaria, Kaduna State, in December, and buried them in mass graves.

On November 27 a suicide bombing attack on a Shia religious procession passing through Dakasoye, Kano State, killed at least 21.

SRW reported the arrest of community Shia leader Shekh Zakzaky, and killing of hundreds of Shia whose grave are yet to be recognized due to mass burial by army. The army attacked the community during 48 hours window, killing and wounding. According to community members. Some people are still missing. SRW is seriously concerned for the health of Sheikh Zakzaky as his sons reports he is in need of medical aid but is denied access to it.

- **Syria**

Anti Shia groups such as ISIS and al-Nusra Front (ANF) targeted Shia dense areas, destroyed Shia shrines, and other religious heritage sites. ANF and some

allied rebel groups targeted Druze and Shia minorities in the northern part of the country, claiming responsibility for numerous bombings, including suicide attacks.

In March ISIS also published a video of militants beheading eight Shia in Hama.

After rebels expelled government authorities from Idlib city in March, they surrounded the nearby majority Shia villages of Fu'a and Kafraya, and targeted both with shelling and suicide bombings. The rebels referred to the villagers in Fu'a and Kafraya as "*rawafid*," a derogatory term used to refer to Shia Muslims.

In Aleppo Governorate, several rebel groups, including ANF and Ahrar al-Sham, attacked the Shia towns of Nubl and Zahra, which other rebels had been besieging, and portrayed violence against the villages in sectarian terms

Alawite and Shia youth reported Sunni colleagues continued to threaten them in schools and universities due to their religious affiliations and perceived support for the government.

SRW specified 78 Shia killed, 169 wounded and 10 arrests, but it believes the numbers could be higher.

- **Kuwait**

A suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in June, killing 26 people and injuring more than 200 others. The government ordered the Shia community to commemorate Ashura and other holidays indoors. Shia continued to report discrimination against them in terms of the training of clergy and employment in the public sector. Shia leaders said discrimination continued to prevent Shia from obtaining leadership positions in public sector organizations, including the police force and the military/security apparatus. Based on SRW report there was killing of 27 Shia and 227 were wounded.

- **Libya**

The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) reported increased hostility towards Shia Muslims and Shia Islam since 2012 at various levels of Libyan society. No specific number of casualty is confirmed.

- **Morocco**

The government to deny registration to local Shia groups which religious leaders and legal scholars said prevented those groups from legally gathering for religious ceremonies or forming associations under which they could operate legally. As the result there were no known Shia mosques. Representatives of minority religious groups said fears of government surveillance led adherents of the Shia faiths to refrain from public worship and instead to meet discreetly in members' homes.

- **UAE**

According to media accounts, the government revoked residency permits for more than 100 noncitizen Shia Muslims, mostly of Iranian and Syrian nationality, during the year.

- **Lebanon**

State Department did not specify any anti-Shia activity however based on SRW report a suicide bombing at the southern part of Beirut injured 37 and killed 50 Shia. moreover faulty association of all Shia with Hizballah has prevented Lebanese Shia from receiving international support and recognition.

- **Madagascar**

No Shia rights violation is reported by State Department however according to SRW research five Shia were arrested without explanation and worship center where threaten to be demolished by non state actors .

- **UK**

Based on SRW report, a Shia mosque was vandalized in Bradford infusing fear in British Shia community.

- **Somalia**

According to SRW sources Mungaab, the mayor of Mogadishu and the governor of the Bandari region vowed to take action against expansion of Shia ideology. He stated "Somalia is a Sunni nation and does not need Shia ideology" according to Somali Current.

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