

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 report. 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