

Stand Up for Awamiya

Saudi Shia are not even treated as second class citizens anymore: siege suggests they are not considered citizens at all, says SRW.

Six days in, the siege in Awamiya remains strong. Sources report that Saudi forces invaded the town beginning at 3 am, closed all entrances and started to demolish the 400 houses in the old neighborhood, shooting at buildings, businesses and cars.

Local respondents report countless arrests. Among the killed is two year old Javad al-Dagher and his father, shot as they were passing by. Javad's mother was left on the streets injured as ambulances are restricted from the town by the days old blockade.

Residents of Awamiya are left in both physical and psychological fear. The increased presence of army vehicles and lack of medical care has left people fearing for their lives. Damage by the military shootings has also left the town without electricity and sufficient water sources. One source states, "No one has been able to leave their houses to go to work, school or even get food as people are afraid to move."

Many residents in al-Mosoura were forced from their homes and businesses, as well.

While the Saudi government claims the relocation is in attempts to renew the districts infrastructure, the destruction of historical and archeological sites are seen by all. Despite the UN's call to halt the project, the Saudi government seems unfazed. Social media hash tags used by non-Shia Saudi citizens and army forces call for a "cleansing" of the kingdom from the Shia population.

Targeting of the Shia minority in Saudi Arabia is not new. For years, Shia in Saudi have lived under pressure to conform to the nation's extremist ideology and forgo their own identity. Since the kingdoms origin, Shia Muslims have been marginalized, their towns provided the least government funds- lacking in infrastructure and maintenance. And despite their living quarters being home to one of Saudi's largest oil drills, Shia Muslims are left in the worst of the nation's living conditions. Drilling has caused air and noise pollution and the citizens of

that area are allowed minimal say in policy. While they make up over 20% of the population, Shia Muslims lack sufficient representation in the government.

The siege is yet another reminder that Shia are not even considered second class citizens- they are not considered citizens at all.

Shia Rights Watch (SRW) calls for increased coverage of this conflict by all news sources. Further, SRW demands a review of Shia ethnic cleansing in Saudi Arabia and the Middle Eastern region by the United Nations.