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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).



Exploring the roots of Prejudice and Discrimination in The Saudi Education curriculum

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 7. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Prejudice is a negative or hostile attitude, opinion or feeling towards a person or group, formed without adequate knowledge, thought or reason and based on negative stereotypes. Prejudice is the result of 'prejudgment' and often leads to discrimination.

As there are many causes of prejudice, there can be many forms of prejudicial expression, the most common of which is discrimination. Discrimination is the unfair treatment of people simply because they are different from the dominant group in society or one person over another on some arbitrary basis, such as gender, social or religious class (groups of people sharing similar wealth and social standing), rather than on individual merit.

The history of other wars and conflicts should remind us that education could be used to promote hatred, division, and hostility, from Hitler and the Nazis, to the Southern American slave owners; prejudice of one race against another has resulted in atrocities.

Shia-Muslim in Saudi Arabia

Shi'a Muslims are the second largest branch of Islam, comprising less than 20% of the world's Muslim population¹, with large numbers living in some of the Arab countries such as Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE and Qatar. Shi'a Muslims are a numerical majority in Iraq and Bahrain and make up a plurality in Lebanon.² However, in Iraq and Bahrain, though they constitute a clear majority, nonetheless they still suffer 'minority' status, while in Lebanon, only in recent years did they gain a degree of political power commensurate with their numbers. Regardless of their numbers, the dilemma of Shi'a Muslims is in many ways more complicated than a minority issue, because it is far more subtle, unstated and virtually unmentionable.

Shia Muslims have been marginalized in the Muslim world for religious, political, and demographic reasons. In Iraq, they suffered from two major crackdowns at the hands of Saddam Hussein's regime; in the late 1970s and early 1980s, followed by the 1991 Gulf War, when they were brutally crushed after their uprising.³

In Saudi Arabia, an estimated 10% to 15% of approximately 20 million natives of Saudi Arabia are Shia Muslims⁴, who are based mainly in the oil-rich East province.

The root cause of prejudice against Shi'a Muslims

According to Freedom House after the events of 11th September 2001, many scholars and state officials, including those in Saudi Arabia expressed concern that Saudi Arabia's educational system was actually fostering the intolerance and animosity that helped to lead to the murderous attacks of that day.⁵

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia follows a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam known as Wahabbism or 'The Wahabbi

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>

² http://www.islamicweb.com/beliefs/cults/shia_population.htm

³ <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1992/Iraq926.htm>

⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2122.html>

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/CurriculumOfIntolerance.pdf>,

mission⁶, which dominates religious institutions, courts and education systems in the Kingdom; much of education in Saudi Arabia is based on Wahhabi religious material and thought.

Under the ‘Major polytheism’, Saudi curricula exclude entire Islamic groups from within the fold of Islam, such as Sufism, Shi’a Muslims, and Ismailia’s. All of this is mentioned boldly in the education curricula. The book of "Tawhid" for the third secondary class of the scholastic year (2006-2007) considers that “what is blatant infidelity” against any other sects or groups who preform and worship differently then what stated on “Wahhabism ideology”

The expression of ‘blatant infidelity’ is common in the language of the Saudi curricula, as a jurisdictional judgment that raises the sense of responsibility among students towards the beliefs of others. This sense holds them a duty to ‘repudiate’, which obliges them to conduct what replaces the blatant infidelity with the honest belief. In other words, the ‘blatant infidelity’ is provocation to kill on which the very small kid is raised in Saudi Arabia, until he becomes able to press the destructive button to detonate an explosion.⁷

The general contempt of Shi’a Muslims in the Kingdom is by no means a hidden phenomenon. For several decades Saudi publications have been indoctrinating students with an ideology of religious hatred against Christians, Jews, and others, and are very outspoken about their disdain for Shi’a Muslims and other Muslim sects who do not adhere to strict Wahhabi teachings.⁸

Some of the most disturbing examples include the following

Regarding Sunni, Shi’a, and Sufi Muslims, and other ‘non-Wahhabi’ or ‘non-Salafi’ Muslims, the textbooks teach to:

- Condemn the majority of Sunni Muslims around the world as “bad successors (of) bad predecessors”⁹,
- Condemn and denigrate Shi’a and Sufi Muslims’ beliefs and practices as heretical, calling them “polytheists”¹⁰,
- Denounce Muslims who do not interpret the Qur’an “literally.”¹¹
- Command Muslims to “hate” Christians, Jews, polytheists and other “unbelievers,” including non- Wahhabi Muslims, though, incongruously, not to treat them “unjustly”¹².

According to a 2009 Human Rights Watch report, Shi’a Muslim citizens in Saudi Arabia "face systematic discrimination in religion, education, justice, and employment".¹³

State discrimination against Shi’a Muslims stems from the official Wahhabi thought and is manifest in the state's religiously infused education system, state sponsorship of official religious worship, and a judiciary, which draws its legitimacy from Wahhabism.

No one should forget the spite expressed by the leader of the congregation at the Grand Mosque (Masjid-ul-Haraam) in

⁶ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saudi/analyses/wahhabism.html>

⁷ <http://www.shiitenews.org/index.php/saudi-arab/item/20307-saudi-curricula-and-takfirism-matching-with-isil-3/20307-saudi-curricula-and-takfirism-matching-with-isil-3>

⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/CurriculumOfIntolerance.pdf>

⁹ *Monotheism, Tenth Grade*. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ministry of Education. Education Development, 1426-1427; 2005-2006, p. 67

¹⁰ *Monotheism, Tenth Grade*. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ministry of Education. Education Development, 1426-1427; 2005-2006, p. 67.

¹¹ *Monotheism, Tenth Grade*. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ministry of Education. Education Development, 1426-1427; 2005-2006, p. 66.

¹² *Monotheism and Jurisprudence, Fourth Grade*. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ministry of Education. Education Development, 1425-1426, p. 49.

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/saudi0909webwcover.pdf>

Mecca, Adel Al Kalbani, which shocked even his interviewer on BBC in May 2009¹⁴, when he declared that all Shia Muslims were apostate, unbelievers, and as such should be hunted down and killed.

“Shi’a have only two options, they can convert to ‘Islam’ or be killed if they decided to keep their beliefs....”¹⁵

The descriptions found in these textbooks for the current academic year refer to ‘other’ Muslims as “deviants”, “polytheists”, and “infidels”. This reflects a school of thought that does not comport with the image of “moderation and tolerance”. Saudi Arabia wishes to promote. These books continue to reflect a curriculum that inculcates religious hatred toward those who do not follow Wahhabi teachings.

Recommendations

Khiam Center and SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights, view that robust protections of freedom of expression also protect the right to be free from racial discrimination by urging a holistic approach to preventing racial discrimination that avoids over-reliance on legal prohibition and sanction and focuses on positive measures, especially through education, to combat racial intolerance and discrimination.

To the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a Member State of the United Nations, Saudi Arabia is obliged to uphold tolerance and respect pluralism and religious freedom, in addition to putting an immediate end to the propagation of hatred and religiously based justifications for hostility and violence in its public school educational materials, textbooks, and curriculum.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights does not specify grounds for restrictions on freedom of expression, but in Article 7 protects the right to be protected from any discrimination as well as incitement to discrimination. Articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR, as noted, protect the rights of others against advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

To the Human Rights Council

The strategic response to hate speech is more speech; more speech that educates about cultural differences, more speech that promotes diversity, more speech to empower and give a voice to minorities, for example through the support of community media and their representation in mainstream media. More speech can be the best strategy to reach out to individuals, changing what they think and not merely what they do.

Prohibition of hate speech can only be truly effective when undertaken as part of a holistic approach to combating prejudice and discrimination that goes beyond prohibition of expression and takes account of all the requirements of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Such an approach should especially take account of obligations under Article 7 to “undertake to adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and to promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups.”¹⁶

SALAM for Democracy and Human rights, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

¹⁴ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=32011>

¹⁵ <http://www.internationalpolicydigest.org/2014/05/26/saudi-arabias-escalating-campaign-shia-muslims/>

¹⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx>