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Joint written statement* submitted by the Al-Khoei Foundation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, the Alulbayt Foundation, 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.

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

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Shi'aphobia

Shi'a Muslims, comprising of approximately 15-20% of the Muslim Community, remain a marginalized communal collective in many states without the freedom to practice their religion freely while in some states they are treated as second class citizens.¹

Anti-Shi'ism, broadly defined, is the prejudice against or hatred of Shi'a Muslims based on their religious belief, identity, and heritage. Although this phenomenon has been largely confined to religious zealots, it has now become a widespread and global occurrence, the effects of which can be seen in several countries around the world. The symptoms of this discrimination can be seen in different forms that range from banning the practice of Shi'ism, physical attacks against Shi'as, terrorist bombings in Shi'a areas, the systematic destruction of Shi'i places of worship, and hate speech and propagated through sermons, satellite broadcasts and social media, all directed at Shi'a Muslims and Shi'ism. It is evident that this hate is not just limited to terrorist groups and fringe elements; rather it has become an increasingly common phenomenon endorsed and sanctioned by certain states.

Whilst scholars, researchers and academics have often highlighted the growing trend of Islamophobia in the West, no equal attention has been paid to Shi'aphobia. Although the term has not been officially defined, Shi'a Rights Watch, an independent organization campaigning for the rights of Shi'a Muslims, was the first to introduce the term "anti-Shi'ism" in 2011, going on to state that ²"as the odious ideology continues to spread, it has infiltrated media outlets and human rights organizations which continue to ignore the plight of Shi'a Muslims."

The methodology and approach of this statement will draw on multiple case studies of state instances that have contributed to the rise of anti-Shi'ism. However, the analysis is not limited to the given cases that I will be presenting.

Malaysia: Ban on Shi'as

According to official statistics, nearly two thirds of Malaysia's 28 million people are Muslim.³ The Shi'a population estimates vary considerably from 20,000 to 250,000. This vast discrepancy can be attributed to the presence of foreign tourists and students, the opinions shared by Malaysia's political parties and a lack of reliable data.

With the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and hard line ideology that sees a strict one-warped view of Islam and rejects others, certain state actors have adopted aspects of this ideology that has led to the denunciation of minorities. Originating from a *fatwa* passed in 1996 by the Fatwa Committee of the National Council for Islamic Affairs in Malaysia, ⁴ a ban on Shi'a Islam is currently imposed in 11 out of the 14 states.⁵ On 5th May 1996, the Committee discussed the position of Shi'as in Malaysia; the main concern of the religious scholars was how Shi'a Muslims understand the concept of an "Imam", who is considered an infallible leader of the Islamic community. They have also been labeled as deviant due to being a minority sect and not part of the mainstream Sunni Islam. The committee prohibited the spread of any doctrine other than Sunni Islam, hence they unanimously agreed on repealing the Zaidiyyah and Jafariyyah schools of thought within Shi'ism. They also determined that the publishing, broadcasting and distribution of any books, pamphlets, films, videos and others relating to the teachings of Islam which is opposed to the beliefs of Sunni Islam is prohibited.

¹ Institute for Gulf Affairs. Policy Briefing. ??

² 'Shi'a Rights Watch. (2012) ??

³ The New York Times. (2013) *Malaysian Shi'a Muslims Prepare for Trial*.

⁴ Bureau Of Democracy, 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

This treatment towards Shi'a Muslims and banning of Shi'a theology, amongst other discriminatory practices against other religious minorities within the country, contravenes several international agreements and legal documents, the main one being The Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Despite the constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion, only the Sunni sect of Islam is permitted in Malaysia. Although there is a distinction between state and federal law, states have been urged to implement the *fatwa* and renounce Shi'ism.

Indonesia: Anti-Shi'a Alliance

With a population of 253 million, of which 87% are Muslim, Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, whilst including significant Christian and Hindu populations

Whilst religious pluralism is said to exist within the country, anti-Shi'a sentiment is seen to have spread to Indonesia, mainly through Wahhabi influence.

In 2014, a coalition of various groups who maintain an anti-Shi'a agenda created an "Anti Shi'a Alliance" for the first time in Indonesia. Several Government officials and other Islam Organizations including The Indonesian Council of Ulema were in attendance of this convention that emphasized a call for "jihad", specifically against Shi'a Muslims and resulted in an "Anti Shi'a Declaration."⁶

The Anti-Shi'a Declaration read as follows:

The anti-Shi'a declaration⁷

1. *The alliance is a preaching forum to promote virtues and prevent abominable acts.*
2. *The alliance will take any necessary measures to maximize the prevention of the proliferation of heretical teachings by Shi'a followers.*
3. *The alliance will forge good relations with other preaching organizations.*
4. *The alliance will demand that the government immediately ban Shi'a and revoke all licenses for foundations, organizations and institutions owned by Shiites.*

During this conference, a Shi'a Journalist from Alulbait Indonesia, Muhammad Ngaenan, aged 28, who was covering the event, reported that he was interrogated, detained and beaten by group organizers and attendees.⁸

Saudi Arabia: Shi'a marginalization

Another country that is seen to discriminate against its Shi'a citizens is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Shi'a minority, estimated to make up around 10-15% percent of the Saudi Arabian Population mainly reside in the Eastern province, particularly in the oases of Al-Ahsa and Qatif. They are based in Medina al Munawara, the second largest city in Saudi Arabia. Ever since its founding father, King Ibn Saud, assumed the self-proclaimed reign of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there has been a stringent segregationist policy towards the Shi'a Muslims in the Kingdom. In particular, the use of hateful content in their school curriculum along with hate speech propagated by clerics that dehumanizes religious groups has fueled the flames of sectarianism in the Kingdom. In fact, much of the terrorist group calling itself the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations make use of educational curriculum is rooted in Saudi textbooks, which conveys a conservative and narrow-minded worldview, intolerant of other religions and sects in Islam.

⁶ R, Husain. (2014). *World's first Anti Shi'a Alliance convention results in calls for violence and sectarian purging.*

⁷ R, Husain. (2014). *World's first Anti Shi'a Alliance convention results in calls for violence and sectarian purging.*

⁸ The Jakarta Post. (2014). *Anti-Shi'a alliance reported to police*

⁹ Pew Research Centre (2009), 'Mapping the Global Muslim Population',

The Kingdoms marginalization towards Shi'as in employment and the workplace is also evident in the lack of Shi'a representatives in prominent positions of power. According to a report for the US Library of Congress 10 "Shi'a came to occupy the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder in the newly formed Saudi state, as they were often excluded from employment in the civil service, the military and the police."

Inspired by the Arab Spring and events that broke out in Tunisia and Egypt, in 2011, Shi'a protestors expressed their dissatisfaction with their treatment within the state. Calling for an end to anti-Shi'a discrimination and fairer political representation, they were responded with death, injury and jailing of several peaceful protestors. 11

A prime example of the repression faced by the peaceful protestors is Sheikh Nimr and his nephew Ali Mohammed Baqir Nimr. In May 2014, the SCC sentenced Ali Mohammed Baqir al-Nimr to death after convicting him on charges that included demonstrating against the government, possession of weapons and attacking the security forces. He denied the charges and told the court that he had been tortured and forced to confess in pre-trial detention. The court convicted him without investigating his torture allegations, and sentenced him to death although he was aged 17 at the time of the alleged offences. In October, his uncle, Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, a Shi'a cleric from Qatif and vocal critic of the government's treatment of the Shi'a minority, was sentenced to death by the SCC. Security forces arrested Sheikh al-Nimr in July 2012 and executed him on 2nd January 2016, causing a global uproar in condemnation of his execution.

Pakistan: Sectarian attacks

In Quetta, Balochistan, the Shi'a Hazaras have been heavily targeted in suspected sectarian-motivated attacks. Evidence of a sectarian motivation is the alleged involvement of known militant groups, predominantly Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and its various off-shoots, which have publicly declared their agenda to include the targeting of Shi'a and Hazara Muslims whom they consider to be 'kafir'.

Many critics of the Pakistani government have accused government and security officials of not doing enough to prevent violent attacks from occurring. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is officially banned in Pakistan; however it continues to operate with relative impunity under various other names and guises. While the Pakistani government condemns sectarian attacks such as these, many believe that the government could do much more to prevent them from continuing to happen. Discrimination against Shi'as is not found at official, institutional level. However, it is pervasive at communal level and the fact that sectarian militant groups continue to operate effectively unchecked means that the Shi'as of Pakistan routinely face persecution and violence.

Egypt: Anti-Shi'a rhetoric

According to a 2012 Report on international religious freedom in Egypt, published by the United States Department of State, 12 "Government and official Islamic institutions also used anti-Shiite rhetoric." Human Rights Watch have report that "During the rule of former president Hosni Mubarak, security officials arbitrarily arrested and detained Shi'a under the emergency law that was in effect for decades solely because of their religious beliefs. Since the 2011 uprising, police have arrested Shi'a in Cairo and prevented them from commemorating Ashura, a Shi'a day of mourning." 13

The report also affirmed that the anti-Shi'a hate speech by Salafis, who consider Shi'a Muslims heretics and the Muslim Brotherhood, has been going on for two years in Egypt. This anti-Shi'a rhetoric in Egypt led to a vicious attack on four Shi'a's by Salafi sheikhs in the village of Abu Musallim in Greater Cairo on June 23, 2013, including Sheikh Hassan Shehata, who was lynched and dragged through the streets. "For the past two years Salafi political and religious leaders, members of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, and Al Azhar have publicly denounced Shi'a

10 Chapin Metz, H. ed. (1992) 'Shi'a', *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*.

11 The BBC (2014). *Reporting Saudi Arabia's hidden uprising*.

12 US Department of State. (2012)

13 Human Rights Watch (2013). *Egypt: Lynching of Shi'a Follows Months of Hate Speech*.

practices, organized conferences “against Shi‘ism” and said that they are determined to halt the spread of Shi‘ism in Egypt.”¹⁴

Conclusion

In the words of Andrew Hammond, a Middle East analyst at the European Council on Foreign Relations, "I definitely think we're seeing a wave of anti-Shiite bigotry... which would not have happened before. It's reaching places that you wouldn't imagine. Pakistan, Britain, Malaysia, Indonesia. It's really quite a striking phenomenon." ¹⁵

Based on the few case studies provided, anti-Shi‘ism has slowly been spreading across the globe and also exists in other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Bahrain, Iraq and Nigeria.

The Al-Khoei Foundation works to promote freedom of religion, tolerance, respect and justice for religious groups worldwide and actively supports all initiatives that foster peaceful co-operation and friendship between different religious and non-religious groups.

We work at local, national and international levels for the education and welfare of Muslim communities by running schools, and educational and community centers. We also undertake grassroots work such as chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons. We initiate projects that promote the empowerment of women and youth, and undertake international work on development, human rights and research into the protection of sacred sites during times of conflict. We participate in and sponsor many interfaith and intrafaith initiatives, which bring communities together.

¹⁴ US Department of State. (2012)

¹⁵ Press TV. (2014) *UK community leader warns against Shi‘aphobia in West*.