



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Religious Freedom for Shia Populations

Panel I



Geneive Abdo is a resident scholar at the Arabia Foundation where she specializes in political Islam and Iranian geopolitics. She was previously a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East and the liaison officer for the Alliance of Civilizations, a UN initiative which aims to improve relations between Islamic and Western societies. Prior to joining the United Nations, Ms. Abdo spent twenty years as a Middle East correspondent for The Guardian, The Economist, and The International Herald Tribune. She was the first American journalist to be based in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Ms. Abdo is a lecturer at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University and the author of four books, including *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*. Ms. Abdo was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University in 2002.



Mustafa Akhwand is the Founder and Executive Director of Shia Rights Watch, and has a background in journalism and media publishing. He worked as an advisor for several peacebuilding organizations including Freemuslim at the Center for Deradicalization and Extremism Prevention. He was later assigned to direct the organization for two years. After this, Mr. Akhwand founded Shia Rights Watch. Mustafa holds a variety of certificates from human rights and peacekeeping organizations. For his work on behalf of minority rights he received an award from the Human Rights Education Association. He also advocates for human rights through numerous publications in various digital news agencies, including his "Shia Sentinel" column. Mustafa holds a BA in Applied Information Technology from George Mason University, and is continuing his postgraduate studies in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.



Sarah Leah Whitson is the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division where she oversees the work of the division in 19 countries with staff located in 10 countries. She has led dozens of advocacy and investigative missions throughout the region, focusing on issues of armed conflict, accountability, legal reform, migrant workers, and political rights. She has published widely on human rights issues in the Middle East in international and regional media, including The New York Times, Foreign Policy, The Los Angeles Times, and CNN. She appears regularly on Al-Jazeera, BBC, NPR, and CNN. Before joining Human Rights Watch, Whitson worked in New York for Goldman, Sachs & Co. and Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard Law School. Whitson is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She speaks Armenian and Arabic.



Dwight Bashir is Director of Research and Policy at the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). For more than 20 years, Mr. Bashir has worked in the areas of international human rights, freedom of religion or belief, and conflict resolution. While at USCIRF, Mr. Bashir has led or participated in numerous fact-finding missions internationally and has traveled widely throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Mr. Bashir provides periodic training for officials at the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security and is serving his second two-year term on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Holocaust Denial and State-Sponsored Antisemitism. Mr. Bashir has been featured in major media outlets, blogs, and academic journals, including BBC, CNN, The Washington Post, Foreign Policy, PBS NewsHour, National Public Radio, Al Jazeera, the Yale Journal of International Affairs, and the Cairo Review of Global Affairs, among others. He has given lectures in the United States and globally on various topics in international affairs, including countering violent extremism, ethnic and sectarian conflict, and global peace and security. Mr. Bashir pursued his Bachelor's degree in political science and international relations at the University of Richmond and his Master's and Doctoral degrees in international conflict analysis and resolution at George Mason University.

Moderator



Dr. Kenneth Katzman is a Senior Middle East Analyst at the Congressional Research Service. He covers Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Persian Gulf Affairs. He is responsible for analyzing regional developments and U.S. policy to assist Members of Congress in their legislative and oversight responsibilities. He has participated in several congressional delegations to the region at the Member and staff level, and given many official presentations and briefings at conferences and meetings throughout Europe, Asia, and the Islamic world. Dr. Katzman holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from New York University, and previously served as an analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency. He is the author of various outside publications, including a book entitled "The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard," based on his doctoral dissertation.