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Religious Freedom for Shia Populations – Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
Tuesday, June 26, 2018 – 3:00 p.m.

Despite the growing frequency anti-Shiism around the world, policymakers lack sufficient knowledge about the Shia population and their needs.

Shia Muslims make up the largest minority population in the world. Based on quantitative analysis, Shia Rights Watch estimates 120 million Shia Muslims live in the Middle Eastern and South Asian region. Despite their growing numbers, Shia Muslims are the most persecuted religious minority not just in the Middle East, but all around the world.

While their population can be estimated given statistical parameters, the exact demographics of the Shia population remains a mystery for all. Fact is, for centuries, this population has lived under fear of violence from extremist groups. Moreover, this population has lived knowing the systems of governance they live under provide no support for their efforts to obtain justice.

Despite ongoing efforts to give voice to Shia Muslims, in Egypt, the Salafi movement has expanded its anti-Shia propaganda through social media and public speeches in their mosques to prevent Shia Muslim from practicing their faith. Unfortunately, Al-Azhar University, a Sunni Religious authority in Egypt, has not shown any effort to stop violence against Shia Muslims. The family of Shiekh Hassan Shehata who was brutally slaughtered under the presidency of Morsi in 2013 suffers threats of violence. The Shehata family are forced to move from town to town and house to house to be able to survive.

The chain of anti-Shiism does not stop in Egypt as social media has pushed anti- Shia propaganda. In South Africa, perpetrators of violence attacked a Shia mosque in broad daylight and killed the Imam using machetes.

In Indonesia, hundreds of Shia families were evicted from their homes and villages and now live in the sports arena. The government has provided no protection or security for this population despite awareness of their vulnerability to attacks by terror organizations.

Until now two Shia Indonesians have died due to lack of access to medical resources. Many have been prevented from education and basic needs such as proper nutrition.

In Pakistan, the trend of state and non-state oppression of Shia Muslims has increased by targeting doctors, lawyers and public figures who have worked hard to show that Shia Muslims need to be valued and respected as citizens. Pakistani authorities have not shown any willingness to either stop or prevent violence toward Shia Muslims.

Hazara is ethnically distinct Shia communities who have been reduced in population by sixty percent due to anti-Shia violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many Hazara members have been kidnapped, enslaved, tortured and killed by terrorist groups. The Hazara population has been living in fear for many years since terrorist groups consider them “infidels” and have promoted their killing through incitement of hate.

Incidents of anti-Shia violence in Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are just a few examples of violations against Shia Muslims. And while recognizing dangers Shia Muslims face, it is also important to note that Shia in different regions have proven that the security, stability, and economy of their country are important and have worked toward improving their sociality as citizens.

In nations such as Kuwait and India, the citizenry of Shia Muslims has been documented, and officials work with the Shia community to build and maintain peace in the country. The kingdom of Kuwait with their wise ruling has shown that citizens are valued, and no one is above the law, people of faith and non-faith can live and coexist with each other as long as they obey the law. In India, local governments work hand in hand with Shia Muslims to maintain order in times of turbulence.

Shia Muslims as well have shown that with coexistence and better treatment, they are assets to their nations of birth and residence. The international community must work alongside their Shia constituents to build grounds for reconciliation and peacebuilding. By recognizing anti-Shiism as a crime against humanity and promoting Shia citizenship, stability and security in the Middle Eastern and South Asian regions can be achieved.