



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

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

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Al-khoei Foundation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

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

[22 August 2014]

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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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## Hostilities Against Minorities

The Al-khoei Foundation is an international charitable organisation founded in 1989 by the late Ayatollah Al-Khoei, which has had General Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 1989. The Foundation works to promote freedom of religion, tolerance, respect and justice for religious groups and ethnic minorities worldwide and actively supports all initiatives that foster peaceful co-operation and friendship between different religious and ethnic groups.

We participate in and sponsor many interfaith and intrafaith initiatives which aim to bring communities together and are signatories of international faith declarations such as the Amman Message (2004) and the “A Common World” initiative (2007). We also work hard to raise standards and promote interfaith dialogue in national forums, such as the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board in the UK, and have helped spearhead initiatives such as the Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue in Iraq. The Foundation unequivocally supports the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the principles within the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The Foundation is growing increasingly concerned by the rise of hostilities against minority groups worldwide, especially the shocking and violent manifestations that some of these hostilities are taking. As an organisation committed to speaking out for the rights of minorities worldwide, and particularly Shia Muslims who are a minority group within Islam, the Al-khoei Foundation fully and absolutely condemns the targeting of minority groups in any part of the world. Having minority groups thrive in countries across the world makes nation-states more diverse, more respectful and tolerant, and enriches our societies and our understanding of what it means to be human. But while minorities enrich our societies and cultures, they are often some of the most vulnerable citizens, falling prey to dominant groups or ideologies, and are targeted for their differences, including race, ethnicity, religion or class. The importance of protecting minorities by ensuring their basic safety and security, their empowerment and their deserved respect, has never been more important than it currently is now.

In particular, there are two forms of hostilities against minorities that the Al-khoei Foundation is especially concerned about. Firstly, we are deeply alarmed by the systematic targeting and massacring of minorities in the Middle East by the extremist group which calls itself the ‘Islamic State’ (IS). Since forming as an offshoot of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, IS has targeted both religious and ethnic minorities in the region, such as Christians, Yazidis and Shia Muslims. We recognise that there are many other groups in the region targeting minorities and that IS are by no means the sole threat to civilians, especially in Syria, but we would like to highlight the plight of minorities who have been subjected to IS’ barbaric and inhumane acts in recent months and we believe that based on their recent systematic and violent offensive they pose an ongoing and incredibly dangerous threat to minorities in Syria, Iraq and, possibly, other countries where they make gains in such as Lebanon.

Shia Muslims have become a primary target by IS. We have found that throughout IS controlled areas there have been numerous cases of discriminatory behaviour and ethnic cleansing towards the Shia community through a number of violent means. IS view the Shia as heretics, falsely attributing the Shia sect of Islam to be polytheistic, and are actively attempting to rid the areas they control of them. In Iraq IS has been guilty of conducting mass executions of captured Shias, the massacre in Tikrit on June 11.

Additionally, the targeting of the Turkmen Shia minority group, indigenous to areas in the north and west of Iraq that are otherwise majority Sunni, has been active and violent, with IS reaching many Shia Turkmen villages and committing massacres in many areas such as Birvageli, Telafar, Qozrobat (Al-Sa’diya) and Bashir. We have received reports that IS have brutally attacked villages surrounding Amerli, killing civilians, burning dead bodies and assaulting women, children and the elderly. More than 4,000 people have reportedly had to flee their homes which were burnt alongside mosques and schools, and it has been under siege since IS arrived in the area. It is said that the victims of another mass killing in Kirkuk, June 16, consisted of dozens of Shia Turkmen, including children. Such attacks are few amongst many of blatant discrimination and hostility towards the Shia.

Beyond the Shias, IS have targeted and killed many members of other minority religious groups such as the ethnic Yazidi minority and Iraq and Syria’s Christian population. The Al-khoei Foundation fully condemns the targeting of the

Yazidi community, and was shocked and appalled by the actions taken against the group, which numbers around 800,000 members, after IS occupied the Yazidi town of Sinjar in northern Iraq in early August 2014. The trapping of Yazidi civilians on Mount Sinjar was a brutal act that led to a humanitarian catastrophe and the inhumane starving of innocent men, women and children, alongside other barbaric killings of members of the Yazidi community in other attacks by IS.

The Al-khoei Foundation in Iraq has worked hard to establish solidarity with Yazidi and Christian refugees displaced by IS, including by opening doors to displaced persons in Shia cities of Karbala and Najaf.

The Christians of Iraq are considered one of the oldest surviving and continuous Christian communities in the world, dating back almost 2,000 years. From July 14, 2014, a number of homes in Mosul were painted with the letter ‘N’ (ﻧ) in Arabic) for Nasrani (the Arabic word for Christian), allowing ISIS fighters to easily identify Christian families in the city. In Iraq, Christians are demanded to convert to Islam or risk death, and the killing of Christians by IS has already been documented. Sources inside the Syrian Orthodox Church have reported that an “ongoing ethnic cleansing of Christians” is being carried out by the Free Syrian Army in Homs, with Christians being expelled without their belongings and the confiscation of their homes. As a result, the Christian population of Homs has decreased from 160,000 to about 1,000.

On top of civilian casualties, IS systematically attacks places of worship. IS views Shia places of worship to be centres of polytheist preaching and deviant belief and wish to eliminate them, such as the desecration and harm done to thirteen Shia and Sufi mosques and shrines in an area outside of Mosul between June 24 and July 2 and the destruction of nine Shia mosques and shrines in Tal Afar between June 25 and July 2. Since the ISIS occupation of northern Iraq, a number of prominent and historical Christian churches have been targeted and burnt, whilst others have been converted into regional headquarters for ISIS fighters. On July 22, 2014 ISIS militants seized Mar Behnam, a 4th century monastery run by the Syriac Catholic church near the town of Qaraqosh in Northern Iraq and expelled the monks inside. This is but some of the damage being inflicted upon the heritage and active religious centres of many communities.

The Al-khoei Foundation condemns all attacks, discrimination, persecution and violence by IS to multiple minorities in the Middle East. As well as deep concern over the actions of IS in Iraq and Syria, we are also troubled by the ongoing structural and political hostilities against minorities in many countries throughout the world, including the targeting of Shia Muslim minorities in particular. In Pakistan, the Hazara community have continually been victims of a sharp rise in sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing, leading to the targeted killings of over 1,000 civilians since 2012. The Shia Muslim minority worldwide, although a majority of the population in Bahrain, still face severe repression and discrimination, including destruction to Shia places of worship in Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, the Shia minority is regularly subjected to discrimination on sectarian and ideological grounds, including employment, judicially, the right to worship publicly, eligibility for public office and by being subjected to accusations of ‘heresy’. On July 8, 2012, Ayatollah Nimr Baqir al-Nimr was arrested on the grounds of “inciting unrest” for his leading role in the 2011-2012 Saudi Arabian protests. He is due to be sentenced shortly, where he faces the prospect of life imprisonment or execution.

We are particularly concerned about the treatment of Shia Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia, where they represent a very small minority of the overall population. The Foundation has received numerous reports that indicate there is a growing stigmatisation and increasingly harsh sectarian treatment of minority faith communities. Shia Muslims, who are a small minority in the country, have been actively discriminated against since a fatwa was issued on May 5 1996 which labelled Shia Islam as a “deviant” ideology, and has now been implemented in eleven of Malaysia’s fourteen states. According to sources, there have been crackdowns against the Shia community since 1997, with Shias facing arbitrary arrest, attacks on private property and the prohibition of publishing and distributing Shia Islamic materials. In Indonesia, Shia Muslims are being increasingly subjected to discrimination on the grounds of their religion and beliefs, as well as violations of their human rights. In recent years, these communities have increasingly been subjected to laws, fatwas and regulations that restrict their right to practice their religion, as well as their freedoms of expression and opinion.

Accordingly, there are a number of additional suggestions the Al-khoei Foundation would like to make to the following

parties:

To the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues:

- To continue to speak out for the rights of all minorities, whether religious, racial or other, who are victims of ongoing persecution, violence and human rights violations.
- To call for deeper investigation into the situations of the peoples we have highlighted in this statement as experiencing human rights violations as a result of their minority status.
- To work to ensure that at the international level IS are recognised as a severe and ongoing threat to multiple minority groups who could well continue or increase their campaigns against vulnerable minorities in the Middle East region.

To States:

- To protect and find ways to enshrine respect for minority groups within their country.
  - To pass legislation criminalising any forms of hostilities against minority groups that links to their minority status, from violent manifestations of hostilities through to discrimination and withholding of human rights.
  - To declare all places of worship and sacred sites, including those belonging to minority religions, to be inviolable neutral ground at all times and not to be threatened, damaged or desecrated but instead protected and preserved.
  - To call for thorough investigations into reported human rights violations against minority groups occurring within their country.
  - To recognise that minority groups in the Middle East, specifically Iraq and Syria at the present time, are worryingly vulnerable to the ongoing destruction wrought by the Islamic State (IS).
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