

Submission by the Society for Threatened Peoples



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1. Overview

Exploitation and abuse of labour migrants, refused women's rights, the practice of the death penalty and the denial of religious freedom are counted among the human rights violations, which are committed regularly in the Saudi Kingdom. The kingdom is based upon tribal traditions, religion and a Wahabi interpretation of the Sharia. The assignment of more than one thousand soldiers to the Gulf State Bahrain in 2011 as a support of the local security forces against the protests of the opposition shows that Saudi-Arabia is more than willing to take on military action against political opponents.

2. Religious Minorities in general

2.1 Religious minorities are also considered as enemies in the Sunni Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia, especially if they demand religious and cultural rights. Public worshipping is forbidden for non-Sunni religious communities. Their members are systematically discriminated in several areas of society like education, certain fields of activity like public service or jurisdiction and political participation is denied.

3. Shiites in Saudi-Arabia

3.1 Shiites are particularly affected; the majority lives in the region al-Hassa, mainly in the city Al-Qatif, in the east of the country. They constitute around 10 to 15 % (circa 2 million) of the population of Saudi-Arabia.

3.2 The Shiite population demands new regulations for the construction of mosques and prayer rooms, authority for Shiite courts as well as access to positions in the military, the police and the diplomatic service for several years now. In addition they claim a share of the profit which Riyadh achieves because of the great oil reserves in their region. Arrests and even fatalities occur over and over again during peaceful protests of the Shiites.

3.3 In 2012 the Ministry of the Interior prohibited demonstrations categorically because they „contradict the principals of the Islamic Sharia and the values and traditions of the Saudi society”. The government responded to the protests, like those in 2011, with systematic suppression of the minorities. The participants face the suspension from the university, the loss of the workplace or a travel ban.

3.4 In September 2012 two people were killed by security forces in the city of Qatif during the arrest of a state wanted Shiite. A government spokesman told a Saudi news agency that a gunfight arose when the security forces attacked the apartment of the activist. The man is one out of 23 wanted persons, who are supposed to be responsible for the riots in the Shiite populated areas in the east of the country.

3.5 Authorities deny a systematic discrimination of the Shiites. Because of the appointment of three Shiites into the Shura Council, which advises the government politically and the grant of several building licenses for mosques as well as the permission to celebrate festivals the government has complied adequately with Shiite demands from their point of view. However, it is understandable that activists are not content with this. Riyadh’s policy of discrimination and delay weakens the moderate political groups in the east province and strengthens those, who do not flinch from using weapons. Some of them stocked up on illegal weapons from Iraq. If Saudi – Arabia does not grant the Shiites more say the conflict, which simmers just below the surface for now, could turn into an open one in the oil-rich province.

Recommendations

- Release all Shiite political detainees, who were arrested because of their participation in the protests in the northeast of the country;
- Initiate investigations into accusations of torture in Saudi prisons;
- Build mosques and allow religious minorities to practice their religion freely.