

Mr. President,

Recalling the Durban Declaration's commitment to combating all forms of "*racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance,*" Alsalam Foundation together with Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain calls upon States to effectively safeguard vulnerable ethnic and religious groups.

We therefore call the Council's attention to Saudi Arabia's discriminatory policies that target its Shia minority, who constitute 10-15% of its population. Shia in Saudi Arabia face reduced access to public education and government employment, and unequal treatment under the justice system. Since 2011, the government has detained and imprisoned many Shia in relation to peaceful assembly and religious gatherings.

In 2012, for example, the government arrested Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, a prominent Shia cleric and human rights activist, on charges related to his free expression. In his speeches, Sheikh Nimr frequently called for justice for all Saudi citizens, Sunni and Shia. The prosecutor demanded the

death sentence for Sheikh Nimr despite this, and Saudi Arabia executed him on 2 January 2016.

Saudi Arabia has also destroyed sites of religious and cultural importance. In November 2014, for example, the government demolished seven mosques in Medina where the Prophet Muhammad historically worshipped. The destruction of religious heritage especially impacts Shia Muslims, for whom visitations to the resting places of the Prophet's companions and early Imams are customary religious practices.

We are also deeply concerned over the arrest today of well known Islamic Shia scholar Sheikh Husain Alradhi. We call on the Saudi government to immediately release him and to stop targeting Islamic Shia scholars who are critical of government practices. We fear that he may be dealt with in the same way as Sheikh Nimr.

These examples demonstrate Saudi Arabia's disregard for the principles and objectives of the Durban Declaration. We call on all States to take concrete steps towards providing real

and effective protections for all religious and ethnic groups in order to uphold the provisions of the Durban Declaration.

Thank you.