



Shia Muslim Council of Southern California

Statement on the Sentencing of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr Saudi Human Rights & Pro-democracy Champion

On Wednesday, October 15, 2014 Saudi Arabia sentenced to death a Shia Muslim Scholar, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr who has spearheaded the country's pro-democracy movement and has championed the cause for basic human rights for all Saudi minorities, including the disenfranchised Shia population in the Saudi Kingdom. Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a 53 year-old cleric has been detained since his backing of pro-democracy protests in 2011, in the Qatif district of eastern Saudi Arabia. At the time of his arrest by police, he was shot in the leg four times causing protests in the Shia communities across Saudi and elsewhere. Certainly, by this latest expression of Saudi repression of human rights, the flames of sectarian divide in the area would reignite.

Human rights groups in Saudi and elsewhere protested that Sheikh Nimr did not receive a fair trial and was not given adequate medical care for his gunshot wounds received during his arrest. The Saudi authorities maintain that he was "aiding terrorists" and "waging war on God", which carry the death penalty by crucifixion. This barbaric punishment involves beheading followed by a public display of the decapitated body.

Sheikh Nimr is on record as having said that he was supporting "the roar of the word against authorities rather than weapons...the weapon of the word is stronger than bullets because authorities will profit from a battle of weapons." In his court submissions he has called for peaceful protests. "I recommend for young people not to be dragged into confronting swords with swords with a regime that wants to lure people to violence to justify the repression of the protests. We are stronger with our words. We are willing to die," said Sheikh Nimr.

Shia Muslim Council of Southern California calls upon the U.S. government to stop ignoring the gross human rights violations that are occurring in Saudi Arabia. Inaction by Washington in influencing the Saudi authorities to stop the execution of Sheikh Nimr would send a very negative message to all freedom loving people of the world. It is intolerable for us, as U.S. citizens to accept the fact that peaceful voices are not only silenced but crucified as well. We implore our government and all those who are in a position of influence, to use their good offices with the Saudi authorities to demand the release of civil rights activist and distinct scholar, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. As Americans we grimace upon the inhuman treatment for speaking out against the Saudi regime, being shot by its authorities, arrested and held without charges for over a year, and then to be tried and sentenced unfairly. These methods go against the very core of American values of freedom of speech and human rights.

We owe it to Shaykh Nimr to help save his life and send a resounding message echoing his own words that, "The weapon of the word is stronger than bullets." We call upon our community members to send letters and emails to their elected officials as well as the media, to create maximum impact upon policymakers and the government to act promptly, and bear pressure on the Saudi authorities to spare the life of Shaykh Nimr.

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