

Persecution of the Muslim minority “Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light” in Iraq

Answers of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in the UK to the questions related to the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minorities:

Do you consider the interests of persons belonging to minority groups appropriately taken into account in your country? If yes, how? If no, why?

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light is a religion recognized in a number of democratic states. It is registered as a 501c3 non-profit religious organisation in the United States of America, and has legally registered bases in the United Kingdom and the EU.

It has thousands of members worldwide and has been recognized by the United Nations, Amnesty International and other human rights organisations as a persecuted religious minority. Despite this international recognition, members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light face systematic persecution from the government of Iraq for adhering to this new Muslim faith and being part of this religious minority. Their adherence to the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light is perceived as tantamount to treason, particularly for not prescribing to the notion of the “divinity” of the clergy and for being critical of the government backed religious establishment in Iraq.

Members of the faith are also targeted by state and non-state actors for propagating progressive beliefs deemed unorthodox or diverging from mainstream Muslim views. Because of this, members of the faith face significant danger to their lives, with repeated imprisonment and government raids, gunned militia attacks on their homes, and prominent religious leaders calling for them to be killed. Members of the faith are deprived of their right to practise or proclaim their religion freely, and are forced to worship in secret, or to flee the country out of fear for their lives.

Persecution cases

There are around 40 Iraqi members of the faith who have fled Iraq since 2022. In Iraq there are around 157 members left of the faith. From the period of 2023-2024 alone, adherents of the faith reported 10 cases of militia attacks, 6 cases of imprisonment and 4 cases of police interrogations. Furthermore, 15 members reported receiving death threats from government backed militias, with 2 cases of kidnapping with weapons, where members of the faith had to bargain for their lives and were not freed until they pledged to give up their faith and never to speak about it again. Members reported also having lost their jobs in governmental bodies for being members of the faith.

Since 2002, the Iraqi government has led a relentless crackdown on members of the faith for publicly denouncing the government backed Shia establishment in Iraq. As a result, the founder of the faith, Imam Ahmed Al-Hassan and his disciples were severely persecuted. The Shia

establishment pushed the Iraqi security forces to raid the homes, arrest and attack adherents of the faith, with many followers being innocently killed, arrested without just cause, and jailed without due process. The Shia militias and those representing the Shia establishment declared the faith as heretical and openly called for Imam Ahmed Al-Hassan to be killed.

Since then, members of the faith kept their faith hidden and gathered only secretly for worship. This continued until December 2022, with the release of the official gospel of the religion “The Goal of the Wise”, which sparked a wave of persecution across the Muslim world, as well as in Shia-majority countries such as Iran and Iraq. The reason for the persecution includes beliefs stated in the book that are deemed unorthodox and contrary to traditional Muslim beliefs. Some of these beliefs include: Announcing the appearance of Imam Mahdi and his successor Aba Al-Sadiq to be the divinely appointed leader of the age. This is problematic in Iraq as this announcement can only be made by the supreme religious authority of the country.

Furthermore, the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light devotees also believe that

- the real Kaaba is not in Mecca (but in Petra, Jordan),
- fixed times for prayer are not necessary,
- headscarves are not mandatory from women,
- alcohol can be freely if moderately drunk,
- LGBTQ people should not be judged or persecuted,
- and all prophets made mistakes.

Members of the faith were also severely attacked in Iraq for taking the 6-pointed star of David as a symbol of their faith. This has resulted in them being accused of being Zionists and agents of Israel.

Are there institutional arrangements and/or political practices that de facto exclude persons belonging to minorities from effective participation in decisions at the national – and, where appropriate, regional level – concerning the minority to which they belong?

In Iraq, official government bodies as well political parties and the justice sector are strongly influenced by the militias. Members of the faith reported being severely targeted by the militia of Muqtada al-Sadr with total impunity.

In June 2023, three members of the faith reported having received direct death threats and were forced to recant their faith and pledge joining the Sadrist militia to spare their lives.

In October 2022, two members of the faith reported getting fired from their job at the ministry of health after their adherence to the faith became known. They reported that the ministry is almost under the complete control of the militia, and that they received death threats on their phones for having unfavourable views of Sistani and Muqtada Al-Sadr.

Another member reported being transferred three times in less than a year from a hospital in Baghdad to a smaller clinic and finally to administrative work after her adherence to the faith became known.

Are there legal, administrative or other barriers that prevent persons belonging to minorities to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic or public life?

The Iraqi personal status law does not recognize The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light as a religious group registered with the government. As a result, it remains unrecognised under federal law, and lacks legal protections provided to the recognized religions. To register, a group must have a minimum of 150 adherents, and demonstrate it is not “anti-Islam.” Several religious government institutions across the Muslim world have issued religious decrees, declaring our faith to be heretic and against Islam. In Iraq, since the release of the official gospel of the faith “The Goal of the Wise” more than 6 state-sponsored and senior religious figures and institutions issued statements against the faith, as being blasphemous and an “Israeli” project to fight Islam. The theological research centre belonging to Grand Ayatollah Sistani, for example, has issued 60 books that speak against the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light. This makes it impossible for our community in Iraq to get recognition nor be granted any protection of the law or participate in public life.

The Iraqi constitution provides for freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration “regulated by law.” Those regulations prohibit all “slogans, signs, printed materials, or drawings” that would prove insulting to Islam, “honour, morals, religion, *holy groups, or Iraqi entities in general.*” Regulations like this have been used to imprison members of the faith.

The Iraqi penal code article 372 also punishes with up to three years’ imprisonment or a 300 dinar fine (\$.21) any person who publicly insults a symbol or a person who constitutes an object of sanctification, worship, or reverence.

In February 2024, another 3 members reported being arrested and detained under the aforementioned article, for their social media posts about the faith. They were summoned for interrogation in the city of Al-Muthanna by the Iraqi intelligence. Their pictures were taken, they were then blindfolded and handcuffed and moved to the police station for interrogation. They were told that they had been under surveillance for a long time and they are part of the “deviant Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light”. These same members were then released on bail but report being constantly harassed by members of the Badr militia. Every 15 days they are also contacted by the intelligence agency to make sure they have not left the country.

In Najaf in 2023, one member of the faith was arrested and taken for interrogation by the head of the Najaf police station for propagating the faith. Upon searching his phone, they found the symbol of the faith and material relating to our gospel, and so he was detained under trumped up charges related to combating terrorism, where he was accused of “spreading corruption” . He was reportedly physically assaulted before being transferred to the intelligence service. In early 2024 he appeared in an online live streaming on TikTok where he was speaking about the faith. Shortly afterwards a raid was conducted on his house by the Iraqi National Security Services who have been monitoring the activities of the members, located his residence and stormed his house.

In March 2023, four members of the faith in Nasiryah reported suffering attacks on their homes by militias belonging to the leader of the Shia Sadrist movement, Muqtada al-Sadr. Upon reporting the incident to the police, the investigative judge closed the case, and the members were told that they are considered apostates, and the sentence of apostasy from Islam is supposed to be carried out against them, which is death.

In August 2023, another member of the faith reported being physically assaulted by members of the Mahdi army militia, after he filed a complaint with the police, he received death threats. Out of fear he was forced to withdraw the complaint and sell his property and relocate to another city.