

The Saudi Association for Women's Development – DOAA – under construction

Forum on Minority Issues

Guaranteeing the rights of minority women

Geneva, 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Article 3 of the Agenda: Minority Women and Girls and the Right to Education

Introduction by En'am Abdul Jalil El Asfour, the Saudi Association for Women's Development (DOAA) Qatif

Thank you Madam President for giving me the opportunity to speak to you.

Thank you to High Commissioner for Human Rights for including us in our colleagues' programme on minorities, giving us the opportunity to participate in this valuable forum.

Saudi minorities are dispersed in different regions of the kingdom, living in a state of marginalisation, exclusion and deliberate suppression of their religious identity. Additionally, they are subject to interference in their religious affiliation due to coercion, imposition and charges of unbelief which are a blatant violation of human rights and an appropriation of the most basic rights and lowest level of freedom.

**In education**, despite primary education being mandatory in Saudi Arabia, the expansion of higher education and granting graduation to everyone, the field of education is not devoid of discrimination and bias. These practices of discrimination are contained within the educational curriculum including references to Shias as apostates. In addition the Shia region, which has a population of 500,000, is deprived of universities and colleges, restricting the Shias' opportunities to enrol in universities and educational exchanges. There is a lack of equality in educational posts - there is not a single Shia director of studies at the regional level. There is also discrimination according to faith and not according to ability with regard to promotion in educational posts. The

Saudi media plays a negative role in promoting hatred and claims of apostasy for the Shia faith.

**We advise the Saudi government to:**

1. Officially recognise the Shia faith in the academic curriculum.
2. Give Shias the right to draw up their academic religious curriculum and not compel them to study a curriculum which is religiously blasphemous to them.
3. Pass laws which criminalise those who promote discrimination and sectarianism and punish ministry educational officials who incite religious hatred of Shias and a lack of tolerance and brotherhood.
4. Adopt measures to guarantee the principle of equal opportunity for Shia women as for the rest of Saudi Arabian women in the educational sector.
5. Include the Shia areas in educational planning and build universities and institutes in Shia areas, which are deprived of them equivalent to those in other regions.
6. Allow the opening of local girls' schools in Shia areas where it is currently forbidden to do so.

Thank you for your attention.