

STATEMENT
HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS IN BAHRAIN
Side Event 19 September 2013
14:00-16:00
UN Offices at Geneva Room XXII

Bahrain is standing at a crucial intersection. Whereas the government remains in continuous denial of its ongoing human rights violations, the country is chosen to be the host for the Arab Human Rights Court. Nevertheless, the Court's existence in Bahrain is not a welcome step unless it creates a push for the Bahraini government to ensure that human rights conditions are protected and respected in Bahrain. This is particularly important given that since the first cycle Universal Periodic Review in 2008 and the second cycle revision in 2012, Bahrain's human rights records are deteriorating especially with regard to the freedom of opinion and expression and in particular the situation of human rights defenders in Bahrain.

The situation is alarming as well, given that the violations continue despite the fact that Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) recommendations covering legislative, political aspects and overall enjoyment of human rights were accepted by the Bahraini Government. The promising stance of the government did not turn into concrete actions even with the continuous call of the international community in various human rights monitoring mechanisms, including Universal Periodic Review. Key recommendations notably the release of protestors convicted for exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly; and the investigation of those responsible for abuses remain simply concealed.

It is important to highlight that the continuous uprisings are a culmination of years of inadequate policies that lacked recognition and realization of the rights that Bahrain has obligations to undertaken under international law. For instance, the commitment to obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have been weakened by the change introduced in 2002 to the Bahraini Constitution whereby reference to economic and social rights was changed from "ensuring" rights to "seek(ing) to ensure" rights, such as employment rights. Furthermore, whereas Bahrain took some positive steps including adoption of the Bahraini Economic Vision 2030 that states the objectives of achieving fairness in society, "described as all are treated equally under the law, in accordance to international human rights; and that everyone has equal access to services, namely education and health care, and that the needy are supported via adequate job training and a targeted social safety net", the protests that started two years ago signaled the lack of equality in the implementation of social and economic policies and the discrimination among Bahraini citizens and geographic regions.

In this context, human rights activists continue to raise their demands in Bahrain but as well to face further restrictions on their freedom of opinion and assembly. For instance, the restrictive measures adopted prior to August 14 including the ban of protests in the capital Manama and toughened anti-terrorism laws, including

imposing longer prison terms and revoking citizenship are simply confirming the deteriorating situation in the country. In this context, the ongoing National Dialogue's sincerity remains doubtful and there is a strong challenge to be overcome in order to ensure that its outcomes do actually correspond to the obligations under international human rights law and the fully respect and protection of human rights of all Bahrainis.

In this context, ANND, a regional network, working in 12 Arab countries with seven national networks, and an extended membership of 200 civil society organizations and who has actively taken part in the human rights records revision of Bahrain during UPR process, together with our partners in Bahrain, namely Bahrain Transparency Association and Bahrain Human Rights Society call UN HRC member states to urge Bahraini government to:

- ***expedite the implementation of the recommendations received from the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and the recommendations Bahrain agreed to accept through the Universal Periodic Review***
- ***lift the total ban on freedom of assembly and expression and unconditionally release all those detained for exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly***
- ***investigate all allegations of enforced disappearance and bring those responsible before a fair and independent trial and end impunity***
- ***engage actively with the human rights monitoring mechanisms of the United Nations and cooperate with the Special Rapporteurs, particularly on freedom of association and assembly, on the situation of human rights defenders and on torture acknowledging that an independent assessment of human rights conditions by Special Rapporteurs would actually contribute to National Dialogue process and strengthening a culture of human rights in Bahrain***

Finally, despite the constant call of international community-recently on September 9th a joint statement issued by 47 countries- and despite the positive pledges made by Bahraini government towards the promotion and protection of human rights highlighting the fact that the real situation on the ground reflects the opposite, we reiterate our call to the international community:

- ***to support the establishment of an international monitoring mechanism to be set-up through a UN HRC Resolution that will monitor the implementation of the BICI recommendations and the overall situation of human rights in Bahrain.***
- ***to call for a special session on Bahrain at Human Rights Council which corresponds to the concerns of the international community towards grave violations occurring***