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I- Methodology:

Based on NHRC's belief in the constructive role of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism and its recommendations to assess governments' performance and urge them to improve human rights conditions and fulfill commitments to enable citizens to enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms, NHRC presents this written contribution to assist in assessing Qatar's human rights performance from 2019 to April 2024.

The term "Committee" wherever it appears in the report refers to NHRC.

II- Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations supported by Qatar - by topic:

Qatar received (270) recommendations, supported (178) recommendations, and noted (92) recommendations.

NHRC categorized the accepted recommendations by topic as follows:

1. Continuing the development of civil and political rights legislation (partially implemented)

The Legislative Council Election Law has been issued, as well as the Conflict of Interest Law, the Right to Access Information Law, the Judiciary Law, and the Public Prosecution Law.

According to NHRC's recommendations, the Election Law should be harmonized with human rights standards.

2. Continuing to harmonize national legislation to develop the right to protection from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (partially implemented)

The Convention's definition of torture is in the Penal Code, but there's been no amendment to the punishment for the crime of torture, which is three years' imprisonment. There has also been no amendment to the provision that exempts public officials from criminal responsibility when executing their superiors' orders or believing that obedience is required of them.

NHRC recommends amending the law to increase the punishment for torture, revising the provision exempting public officials from punishment when following orders, and modernizing detention facilities with new buildings. Mandatory training for staff on detainee rights and treatment standards, along with establishing an independent judicial committee to investigate torture allegations, are also recommended.

3. Continuing to develop the right to litigation and fair trial (partially implemented)

The Judiciary Law and the Public Prosecution Law, issued in 2023, have established the principle of independence and the development of the judicial system, and have achieved some flexibility in litigation procedures to suit the principles of access to justice and fairness.

To enhance the judicial system, NHRC recommends measures to ensure the independence and complete neutrality of the judiciary, such as ensuring that the removal of judges conforms to international standards. Activating the Supreme Constitutional Court and enabling it to exercise its jurisdiction.

4. Continuing to develop the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (partially implemented)

The population in Qatar practices religious rites and rituals in designated places such as mosques, churches, or embassies, adhering to legal regulations. Additionally, all communities have the right to establish schools, teach their mother tongue, and host events and celebrations.

Qatar has established the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue with the aim of promoting and enhancing a culture of dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

5. Continuing to develop legislation on the right to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of the media (not yet implemented)

The Cabinet approved a draft law regulating publications, publishing, media activities, and arts in September 2018, which was referred for legislative action to be issued.

NHRC recommends expediting the adoption of the draft law regulating media activities, taking into consideration international human rights standards, including ending custodial sentences in media cases, and resorting to provisions of the Penal Code only in the most serious cases.

6. Continuing to develop the right to peaceful assembly (not yet implemented)

The provisions of the Public Gatherings and Marches Law 1 still restrict this right. It requires obtaining prior permission from the Ministry of Interior, and there is no possibility of appealing against a rejection or implicit rejection decision before the judiciary.

NHRC recommended the need to review the laws regulating this right to allow more space for civil society.

7. Continuing to develop the right to form associations and freedom of association (not yet implemented)

¹ Public Gatherings and Marches Law No. 18/2004

Many restrictions still hinder this right, including the broad powers of the administrative authority in deciding whether to approve or reject the establishment of associations or civil institutions, and the authority's ability to dissolve an association without the possibility of appeal before the judiciary.

NHRC recommends the need to review the laws regulating the formation of associations and to allow more space for civil society.

8. Continuing to develop economic and social rights (implemented)

The Second National Development Strategy (2018-2022) aimed at sustainable economic prosperity through: (developing economic infrastructure, economic diversification, developing the private sector, and managing natural resources), and enhancing human development through: (providing a comprehensive and integrated healthcare system, quality education and training, and a competent and committed workforce), and achieving sound social development through: (social protection, ensuring public safety and security, and enriching cultural and sports excellence), also aimed at achieving sustainable development that preserves the environment.

9. Continuing to work on developing labor laws and the rights of migrant workers (implemented)

a. Abolishing the sponsorship system: (partially implemented)

The Ministry of Labor (the competent authority) received 367,532 requests for job change in 2023, of which 227,799 requests were approved, indicating that the right to change jobs has become more realistic and available to those who wish to do so in accordance with the applicable regulations.

Based on the data and figures related to job changes, NHRC believes it is necessary to understand and analyze the data in order to achieve a comprehensive solution and full implementation of abolishing the sponsorship system.

b. Combating human trafficking (partially implemented)

The abolition of the sponsorship system and the system of certified electronic contracts at the Ministry of Labor helped in combating visa trafficking, which could lead to cases of human trafficking. Since the second half of 2019, a unit has been established in the Public Prosecution to investigate reports of human trafficking, and several cases, trials, and compensations have been announced. Authorities have investigated 13 reports of human trafficking for 2022 and 7 reports for 2023, and issued 7 prison sentences ranging from 7 to 10 years, along with fines and compensation for the victims.

The "National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking" monitors and follows up on cases, and refers them to the relevant authorities. "House of Humanitarian Care" has been opened since July 2019 under the management of Qatar Red Crescent, specialized in receiving cases and providing humanitarian care services including rehabilitation,

health, and legal assistance.

It is worth mentioning that NHRC, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, provided 12 training courses for hotel workers in Qatar on human trafficking law. Employees of HIA and Qatar Airways also received these courses from specialized security companies during the Qatar 2022 World Cup.

c. Rights of domestic workers (partially implemented)

Positive developments include the mechanism for filing complaints and reports for domestic workers, which has become available online to all workers, as the Labor Department received 1,391 complaints from this category.

Despite providing more access, fairness, litigation, and announcing shelter for affected cases in "Comprehensive Safe House" and "House of Humanitarian Care", domestic workers are subjected to negative and inhuman practices, such as forcing some of them to work long hours, and not receiving their rights, especially the right to a weekly day off.

NHRC recommends establishing a mechanism to monitor law enforcement.

d. The right to form labor unions (not yet implemented)

Despite the provisions of Qatari labor law that include the right to organize labor unions, restrictions imposed by the legislator prevent the exercise of this right.

NHRC recommends considering developing the right to form labor unions in accordance with International Labour Organization standards.

10. Continuing to develop the right to health (implemented)

Qatar provides equal access to healthcare for all residents, allowing them to benefit from free government healthcare facilities and medications.

There is a high level of healthcare, food, medical immunization, clean drinking water, and safe sanitation.

However, the right to health still faces some challenges, including the issue of mental health.² The mental health law still lacks provisions and mechanisms to establish an independent oversight council or committee tasked with monitoring decisions on mandatory treatment, receiving complaints and adjudicating them, and ensuring that situations of patient exploitation by their relatives do not arise.

NHRC recommends reviewing the mental health law according to the comments provided, in addition to the need to establish modern facilities for psychiatric patients that meet all international standards.

² Mental Health Law No. 16/2016

11. Continuing to develop the right to education (implemented)

Qatar has succeeded in implementing a law for compulsory and free education, providing equal seats for all children, male and female, in all regions of the country. Administrative regulations prohibit all forms of corporal punishment against children in schools. NHRC emphasized in its recommendations, with the continued influx of expatriates and their families, including school-aged children, to Qatar, the need to provide the necessary infrastructure equipped appropriately to accommodate all students in government schools, regardless of their parents' places of work.

One positive aspect in the field of education is the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Qatar Foundation (Education Above All program) and the Ministry of Endowments, in opening two schools (Al-Salam School First and Second) to educate children from resident families facing financial difficulties. This was followed by the opening of Al-Salam Third, Fourth, and Fifth schools.

12. Continuing to work on developing women's rights (partially implemented)

26 women applied for membership in the Shura Council, but none of them were successful in obtaining a seat in the council. However, two women were appointed. Therefore, NHRC reiterated the necessity of providing temporary special measures such as preferential treatment and increasing quota allocations for appointment.

Women have access to social security services, housing services, and equal opportunities in education. Women can work flexible hours, have breastfeeding breaks, and maternity leave with pay, along with childcare services. Women hold several positions in ministries, diplomatic corps, and the judiciary.

Qatar provides a comprehensive healthcare system that follows up on women in various stages of pregnancy, providing psychological and medical support for women, even after childbirth, through Hamad Hospital, Women's Health and Research Center, and Sidra Medicine.

Although Qatar ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, it reserved a number of rights, most notably the right to nationality, where Qatari women are still deprived of the right to grant nationality to their non-Qatari husbands and their children.

Qatari mothers face significant difficulties, as NHRC has observed cases of inequality for their children compared to Qatari citizens, including difficulties in employment, complications in obtaining housing rights and social security, and inheriting property for non-Qatari children.

NHRC recommends reviewing reservations on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially Article 9 regarding granting women equal rights with men in nationality.

Qatar opposes violence against women and punishes it through the Penal Code. However, there has been no progress in explicitly criminalizing domestic violence in national legislation, amid a lack of comprehensive data on violence and a low level of reporting cases due to social stigma.

NHRC recommends adopting legislation that criminalizes all forms of domestic violence, providing protection, rehabilitation for victims, and punishment.

13. Continuing to work on developing children's rights (partially implemented)

Qatar provides children with health, education, and rehabilitation services in government centers for free. It has also established several institutions for child care, such as the Cultural Center for Children, centers for children with disabilities, and shelters under the Social Work Foundation, in addition to various sports centers.

The draft Child Rights Law is expected to be issued to meet the standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. NHRC learned that an explicit provision in the draft law includes a ban on all forms of corporal punishment against children of both sexes and punishment for it.

The draft law also includes the establishment of a specialized police force called the "Child Police" and the establishment of a specialized prosecution called the "Child Prosecution," in addition to the formation of the Primary Child Court, with appeals being heard by the Child Department of the Court of Appeal.

Complaints about violations of children's rights are received through a child support hotline, and shelter services are provided at Qatar's Safe House when there is an imminent danger to the child, in cooperation with the prosecution.

The Social Work Foundation and its affiliated centers received about 751 cases in 2023 and conducted several awareness campaigns, including the "Stop the Silence" and "Combat Violence Against Disabled Children" campaigns.

NHRC urges Qatar to expedite the adoption of the Child Rights Law and to raise the age of criminal responsibility according to internationally accepted standards.

14. Continuing to work on developing the rights of persons with disabilities (under implementation)

The Cabinet approved on March 6, 2024, a draft law on persons with disabilities and referred it to the Shura Council.

The draft law includes provisions in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in society, enabling them to exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others, and the law prohibits discrimination based on disability.

NHRC recommends issuing the law on the rights of persons with disabilities quickly.

15. Continuing international cooperation in sustainable development, environmental protection, and climate change mitigation (implemented)

Qatar has focused on the right to development from a human rights perspective, such as addressing it in the context of business principles and human rights. The number of Qatari companies and businesses joining the

United Nations Global Compact Initiative during the period from 27/3/2012 to 27/11/2023 reached approximately 22, including 3 non-governmental and non-profit organizations, 10 small and medium-sized enterprises, and 5 banks, with the rest being diverse in energy, industry, and consulting. Ten companies joined since 2022.

The initiative aims to encourage businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable policies in the areas of human rights, labor, environmental protection, and anti-corruption.

Environmental protection has been one of the most important human rights concerns in Qatar over the past two decades, where it has joined international agreements for environmental and climate protection, and has enacted more than 22 laws and 40 regulations regulating the protection of natural, terrestrial, plant, and animal environments. In 2021, the National Environmental and Climate Change Strategy for the years 2021-2030 was approved. By the end of 2022, Qatar managed to recycle its metallic solid waste locally by 100%, and the processing rate of household and organic waste will approach 90%.

Qatar has committed to reducing emissions from the energy production sector from 46% in 2013 to 40% in 2016, and inaugurated the "Al-Kharsaah" solar power plant in 2022, which will contribute to generating the equivalent of a tenth of the energy used in the national electricity grid during peak times, as part of its commitments regarding carbon footprint, aiming to reach zero by 2050.

NHRC recommended that the relevant authorities follow a participatory approach with all stakeholders in developing and implementing strategies, in order to gain full understanding and support from all members of society and its institutions, and to integrate environmental issues into educational curricula.