

Dear State representatives,

Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to brief you about the human rights situation in Oman. I am representing MENA Rights Group, a legal advocacy NGO based in Geneva, that works on documenting and litigating human rights violations occurring in the MENA region.

National Human Rights Institution:

I would first like to speak about the Omani NHRI, known as the Omani Human Rights Commission.

The Omani Human Rights Commission has fundamentally failed to fulfill its mandate to protect human rights in the country. In 2024, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions' Sub-Committee on Accreditation conducted a critical review of the OHRC and decided to defer its re-accreditation for 18 months—a clear indication of serious deficiencies. The SCA's decision, informed by submissions from MENA Rights Group and the Omani Center for Human Rights and Democracy, identified three fundamental problems with the OHRC:

First, lack of independence: The Commission's 14 members are directly appointed by the Sultan through Royal Decree, without external oversight or transparent selection criteria. At least five current members have held previous governmental positions, including the Chairman who worked for the Omani Police and Prosecution. The Deputy Chairman served as attorney general and was identified as the investigator in cases against human rights defenders. The OHRC reports directly to the Sultan rather than to parliament, undermining its ability to act independently.

Second, ineffectiveness in addressing violations: The OHRC has consistently failed to address documented human rights violations. It has never recommended reforms to problematic legislation such as the Internal Security Service Law of 2020, which grants unconstrained powers to security services to arrest anyone for acts falling under the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression. The Commission receives a limited number of complaints and has remained silent on the targeting of human rights defenders, journalists, and activists by Omani authorities.

Third, lack of pluralism: The OHRC's composition does not adequately represent Omani society, with only three women among its 14 members, and insufficient representation of civil society organizations.

The OHRC currently holds "B status," indicating only partial compliance with the Paris Principles. Given its continued failure to protect human rights, civil society organizations urged the SCA not to upgrade its status—a recommendation the SCA clearly took seriously by deferring the review entirely.

Arbitrary detention and prison conditions:

Oman's restrictive legal framework criminalizes expressions of dissent under broad and ambiguous statutes that permit the state to limit freedoms under the pretense of maintaining social order and national security. The 2018 Penal Code increased punishments significantly—Article 97 now provides for imprisonment of three to seven years for anyone who "commits slander against the Sultan" or "denigrates him personally," a notable increase from the previous maximum of three years.

According to the 2024 US State Department Human Rights Report, NGOs including MENA Rights Group, the Omani Center for Human Rights and Democracy, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights have documented that the government arbitrarily arrests peaceful activists whose public criticism violates these overly broad laws.

Prison conditions in Oman raise grave concerns as well, particularly regarding medical neglect that has led to deaths in custody. On April 28, 2018, a prominent human rights defender and former diplomat died in Samail Central Prison. He died after a sudden drop in his blood sugar level, having been left lying on the ground for an unknown period without receiving any medical attention. Prison authorities violated UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and caused his death by failing to act with urgency.

Since then, reports continue to raise issues of medical neglect including overcrowding, lack of transparent information about detainees' whereabouts, limited access to legal counsel and independent visits, and allegations of mistreatment in custody. These matters were documented by human rights organization and reflected in wider country reporting by international monitors. Such conditions create a climate of fear that chills legitimate dissent and civic

activism. The OHRC, despite being tasked with conducting prison visits and reviewing complaints, has failed to address these life-threatening conditions. There is no independent ombudsman for prisoners, and no reports of independent monitoring by international observers.

In conclusion, we would like to share with you three immediate priority recommendations:

1. first, the OHRC must be reformed to align with the Paris Principles — guaranteeing clear legal independence, membership pluralism, sufficient resources, and systematic engagement with civil society; GANHRI and the international community should press for concrete legal and institutional changes so the OHRC can credibly monitor and remedy abuses.
2. Second, Omani authorities should end arbitrary detention practices: ensure charges are promptly filed, guarantee access to lawyers and family, and adopt transparent procedures for any national-security cases.
3. Third, independent inspection of detention facilities must be permitted — including access for international monitors and NGOs — to assess and remedy shortcomings in conditions and to prevent ill-treatment.