

BAHRAIN

THE MINISTER'S SPEECH

The Adaptation of Bahrain's UPR in the Human Rights Council

9 May 2008

PART A

Honorable Chair of the Human Rights Council and fellow Council members,

Once again, let me express my great pleasure to be here in the Human Rights Council on the occasion of the adaptation of the Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Permit me to begin by thanking Council members for their support that has resulted in the successful re-election of Bahrain to the Council. It is indeed an honor and a privilege. But we deem it an important responsibility as well. During our 3 year term on the Council, the Kingdom of Bahrain re-commits itself to striving to strengthen the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council as a mechanism for international dialogue and cooperation on human rights. The Kingdom of Bahrain also re-commits itself to striving to establish the UPR, over the coming 3 years, if not sooner as a unique vehicle for international cooperation on measures to improve the human rights situation on the ground through implementation of the Outcomes of the Universal Periodic Review.

The past 3 months have been especially eventful for the Kingdom of Bahrain in terms of its engagement with the Human Rights Council. After submitting our UPR Report to the Council on February 25th, we were the first-ever country to be reviewed by the Council on April 7th. On May 26th, with the presence of a representative from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, we nationally adopted our *Action*

Plan to Implement Bahrain's Pledges, Voluntary Commitments and UPR Outcomes. Today, we eagerly await receiving the UPR Report adopted by the Council. We will publicize and promote dissemination of the Council Report in Bahrain. We will study the Report carefully and harmonize our *Action Plan to Implement Bahrain's Pledges, Voluntary Commitments and UPR Outcomes* with the Report. We will encourage national stakeholders, civil society and media in Bahrain to also study our Report carefully and to promote awareness and advocacy in support of the Council Report.

Permit me to make a few observations about Bahrain's UPR by the Council. We commend the work of the Council secretariat (the OHCHR) and the two documents they have prepared for Bahrain's UPR. We are truly appreciative of the contribution of the "troika" and the UPR Working Group. We can only, humbly, hope to emulate them when Bahrain draws its turn on a UPR troika and starts serving as a Council member on the UPR Working Group. We tasked a team on our UPR delegation to observe and draw lessons from the 15 other UPRs undertaken alongside Bahrain, recognizing and promoting recognition that UPR is much more than an event – it is a process with several stages and with successive 4-year time-frames. Our study of our 15 UPR cohorts in April, 2008 will help us approach the UPR stages , downstream of the interactive dialogue stage, with an appreciation that we will still bear the burden and privilege of still being the first, in every stage of UPR processes downstream of the interactive dialogue process and downstream of receiving the HRC Bahrain UPR Report.

Now , permit me to highlight some aspects of the nationally adopted, *Action Plan to Implement Bahrain's Pledges, Voluntary Commitments and UPR Outcomes* which we bring, and present to this meeting of the HRC, it is also available on the web page of the our ministry of foreign affairs. The *Action Plan* is the product of a transparent and participatory national process which has sought to involve all national

stakeholders. The present text of the *Action Plan* addresses actions to fulfill or implement:

- The pledges that Bahrain made in seeking election to the Council in 2006 and in seeking re-election in 2008.
- The voluntary commitments contained in the Bahrain UPR Report submitted to the HRC.
- Responses to the suggestions and issues raised in the Bahrain UPR Interactive Dialogue and in the draft report from the UPR Working Group (to be reviewed and revised in light of the outcomes contained in the HRC UPR Report. adopted today.

The specific areas for action set out in the *Action Plan* fall into 4 broad categories:

- Actions related to strengthening Bahrain's national system for protecting and promoting human rights: both specific national human rights institutions such as human rights commissions, as well as institutions of government such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary that are vital to protecting and promoting human right.:
- Actions to enhance protection for vulnerable and "at risk" groups in Bahrain such as, for example, foreign workers, women, children and human rights defenders.
- Actions to advance the progressive realization of specific human rights in Bahrain such as freedoms of speech, expression, assembly and association, equality and nondiscrimination.
- Actions to strengthen Bahrain's international cooperation with the UN, regional and bilateral intergovernmental arrangements for the protection and promotion of human rights, starting with the HRC and the UPR..

Every aspect of the *Action Plan* from design and implementation to monitoring, evaluating and reporting will be guided by the following human rights values and principles:

- Participation and inclusion of all relevant national stakeholders, governmental and nongovernmental including the judiciary, members of parliament, NGOs and political societies and the private sector, as appropriate.
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Cooperation between the government and people of the Kingdom of Bahrain as well as between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Human Rights Council
- Commitment to results

Let me also mention the two next steps in our *Action Plan*.

Immediately, we are proceeding with a strategic program to strengthen human rights capacities, both governmental and nongovernmental, in Bahrain.

Before the final set of UPRs to be conducted towards the end of this year, we plan to organize in Bahrain, a regional and comparative meeting on “Strengthening participatory UPR processes: learning from the UPRs undertaken thus far”. And the study of the Bahrain UPR team of the first 16 UPRs will be an input to this meeting..

PART B

We are proud in Bahrain to announce that we have already started working on implementing the recommendations Bahrain has received last April on its UPR. Allow me on this regard to highlight the main steps Bahrain has taken on implementing the recommendations it has received.

First of all, I would like to mention that Bahrain is launching today and tomorrow a national conference on understanding the concept of "gender". This conference is taking place under the Patronage of H.M King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, a gesture that reflects the great importance the Government of Bahrain is attaching to this particular issue.

Secondly, and on the issue of freedom of expression and speech, Bahrain has made an important amendment on the 4th May 2008 on its Press law, by abolishing the punishment of imprisonment of journalists and abolishing the censorship on publications.

Thirdly, we invited a representative from the High Commissioner for Human Rights to observe the first workshop conducted by the UPR working team from the ministry of foreign affairs on applying Human rights based Approach on the 29th May 2008. This workshop is the first step the UPR working group has taken on their plan to conduct further workshops with the assistance of the United nations Development Programme in Bahrain(UNDP) and experts from the High Commissioner.

It is also essential to underline establishing a National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking. This national Committee embodies members from the government sector, Human Rights

Societies and relevant NGOs such as migrant workers protection society.

I would like also to draw the attention to another essential step we have taken in Bahrain regarding further enhancement of our efforts regarding the Human Rights.

Bahrain is currently working on implementing a "Project Document" with the assistance of the UNDP and with consultations with the civil society in Bahrain. A representative of the High Commissioner has observed the discussions between the government and civil societies regarding drafting this project. This Project Proposal seeks to address the needs for supporting for Bahrain's *National Action Plan to Implement Bahrain's Pledges, Voluntary Commitments and UPR Outcomes*. The Proposed Project provides a vehicle for further development of the Action Plan, based upon emerging needs and implementation experiences over the present 4 year UPR cycle. This Project Proposal seeks to address:

- The need for strengthening Bahrain's human rights data-base and information systems.
- The need for more effective implementation of Bahrain's obligations under international human rights treaties.
- The need for strengthening Bahrain's institutions for the protection and promotion of human right.
- Specifically the for strengthening Bahrain's institutions dealing with ratification of international human rights instruments and dealing with national legislative incorporation of human rights treaties that Bahrain has ratified.
- The need for strengthening Bahrain's human rights capacities, both governmental and nongovernmental, especially capacities for monitoring and evaluation.
- Specifically the need for strengthening Bahrain's capacities for applying a human rights-based approach to development.

Before concluding, I would like to reaffirm Bahrain's determination regarding establishing a National Commission for Human Rights. The Commission is expected to be established before the end of this year according to Paris Principles. However, we are hopeful that the Commission will be established within one month from now with the participation and representation of governmental bodies, civil societies, and human rights experts.

With this, let me conclude by expressing once again our appreciation of the spirit of cooperation and constructive dialogue that has characterized every step of Bahrain's UPR within the HRC.

