



Statement by H.E. Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohammed AL KHALIFA

Minister For Foreign Affairs

Adoption of Bahrain Report on the UPR Recommendations

21st Session of the Human Rights Council

Wednesday, 19th September 2012

Madame President

Madame High Commissioner

Excellencies

Distinguished Participants:

I am here to reaffirm the Kingdom of Bahrain's commitment to the cause of universal human rights and to this Council. My Government has consistently upheld these commitments: through persistent efforts aimed at cultivating a pluralistic Bahraini society – and through co-operation with this august Council. My Government shares the High Commissioner's vision of ensuring human rights for all. We welcome engagement with all stakeholders.

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We believe we have put to good use the 176 recommendations received at Bahrain's second Universal Periodic Review. After careful deliberation and consultation, the Government of Bahrain is pleased to fully accept 145 of them and partially accept 13 more. As detailed in our response paper, these mainly relate to: criminal justice issues; prevention of torture; rights of women; protection of children and minorities; ratification of international treaties; the fight against human trafficking; and implementing BICI recommendations and findings of our National Dialogue. We will voluntarily provide an interim report to the Council prior to the next UPR.

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

The rule of law is *the* essential condition of a society that respects human rights. The rule of law presumes respect for national institutions and constitutional processes – and unequivocally rejects the methods of excessive force, violence and sabotage.

Our actions, more than our words, should dispel any doubts regarding my Government's commitment to upholding human rights through the rule of law. But the Government is only one actor. It cannot do it alone – all segments of society need to play a constructive role. And so I am pleased that many Bahrainis are in the gallery today. I extend a hand of constructive engagement to each of you. Let us follow the path of dialogue, not propaganda.

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Every person has the right to disagree with, or dissent from, their Government, and to state that disagreement or dissent publicly – and of course within the limits of orderly discourse in a democratic society. But no one has the right to force factionalism upon a society against its will. We welcome peaceful expressions of disagreement, but not incitements to hatred and violence which damage the social fabric of a nation.

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We do not shirk from bold initiatives. We have undertaken unprecedented reforms. A number of these were outlined to the Council in May, and we are grateful for the expressions of support that we received.

To give some salient examples since the last Council session, in line with the BICI recommendations:

- We have established a Special Investigations Unit, reporting to the Attorney General, to investigate police misconduct in order to achieve accountability. In the three months of its existence, this Unit has investigated scores of police personnel at all levels of responsibility. 23 prosecutions of security officials have been initiated and so far these have resulted in 3 convictions and sentences. The Unit will work in conjunction with the recently appointed independent police ombudsman.
- Ombudsman functions have been set up within the National Security Agency – as already exist in the police.

- The Government has paid 2.6 million US dollars to the families of 17 deceased victims mentioned in the BICI Report. The Government has allotted a further 3 million US dollars for the next phase of compensation for victims.
- The Government has prepared a new draft labor law improving the protection of workers, based on the principles of non-discrimination and collective bargaining.
- Last week, on the 12th of September, a Royal Order was enacted bringing the National Human Rights Institution into compliance with the Paris Principles.
- As a fundamental priority, on Monday this week, 500 new police officers from all segments of society have been inducted into the police force as part of a continuing policy of inclusiveness.
- We have amended the definition of torture in our penal code and expanded the protections for freedom of expression to bring them into accord with international law.
- Within the framework of the Arab League, we are actively pursuing His Majesty the King of Bahrain's proposal to establish an Arab Court of Human Rights comparable to the great international courts of Europe, the Americas and Africa.

And above all, not a week goes by without our trying to activate dialogue. His Majesty has repeatedly called for dialogue. The Cabinet stands ready to discuss a wide range of issues. The Minister of Justice is leading the way in canvassing opinion from all political societies regarding activating a political dialogue.

I emphasize that there is no limit on our effort to bring about positive, lasting change in the human rights situation in Bahrain.

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I now turn to the challenges we face. We have heard criticism: that we are "dragging our feet". It is true that significant challenges remain. Reforming government structures and restoring the culture of tolerance and understanding in all aspects of civic life takes time. It is difficult. Our leadership is committed, and already significant effects of our reforms are being felt.

Challenges also reside outside of government. Some, unfortunately believe that continued unrest on the street affords them a political advantage. To keep up the momentum and media coverage, they fuel the flames of extremism and violence. They reject dialogue. They should not be encouraged.

Allow me to mention some verifiable facts.

In the three months following May of this year, there were 7,356 instances of tyre-burning in repeated attempts to paralyze our small country by blocking main traffic arteries, causing substantial damage to our economy and to the livelihood of our citizens. The police recovered thousands of Molotov cocktails. Private citizens reported 1,470 cases of vandalism.

Also over the same 90 days, 91 police personnel suffered injuries requiring hospital treatment, bringing this year's total up to 456, of which 52 were injured seriously enough to be rendered invalid. These figures are a direct consequence of the Government's orders to use force only in the most extreme of circumstances – the police can justly be proud of this restraint.

On the 8th of June, an eighteen-year-old high school student died as a result of a homemade bomb explosion as he tried to remove burning tyres from the streets near his home.

Since the 7th of August, a severely burned policeman is in hospital fighting for his life.

On the 23rd of August, 150 masked men attacked the Sitra Police Station with a barrage of Molotov cocktails.

This appalling list could go on.

No one could expect that an inclusive and tolerant system of politics will emerge if leaders of important groups seek dominance instead of dialogue and reject democratic institutions. Such attitudes, it must be said firmly, trample on the ideals of a society governed by the rule of law. The Government has put into place a number of participatory schemes to jumpstart a national dialogue. Reconciliation requires everyone to come to the table: surely it is right to demand that *everyone* serious about the issue should unconditionally condemn *all* violence.

All parts of society should join in. All groups with political aspirations should move away from the politics of the street to the politics of the table. In the real world, what works is co-operation. For the Government's part, we have been proactive about convening inclusive dialogue – in fact, the Minister of Justice has been in meetings with political societies as recently as this week.

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We thank fellow member States and the Office of the High Commissioner for assisting us in our efforts to follow the highest standards of respect for human rights, and look forward to benefiting from their assistance. We all agree on the fundamental principles, which are free speech and fair treatment of those accused and convicted of crimes. Anyone who knows the reality of the situation in Bahrain can certify that our opposition is not limited to voices speaking from abroad. Far from it – the most extreme criticism is voiced continuously *within* Bahrain, beyond what is tolerated, it seems, in other countries.

Of course, we are pleased to take advantage of sincerely offered advice, as proved by our acceptance of 90% of your recommendations, including considering ratification of the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture. It is in this spirit of constructive engagement that I now await your further observations.

Thank you.