

*Civil Society Space Report*  
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Effective and ongoing participation with non-governmental organizations is an essential requirement for the success of national human rights institutions in fulfilling their responsibilities in the promotion and protection of human rights. Cooperation is a fundamental requirement for success. This is what the Paris Principles call for. Therefore, the National Human Rights Institution of the Kingdom of Bahrain has ensured that the law of its establishment contains provisions guaranteeing pluralism and ensuring effective and continuous participation with civil society organizations through the following texts:

Article (3/b) of Law No (26) of 2014 on the Establishment of the National Institution for Human Rights As amended by Decree-Law No. (20) of 2016 stated that:

“Members of the Council of Commissioners shall be selected from advisory firms, academic organizations, **civil society organizations**, unions, social, economic and professional institutions, human rights defenders, provided that woman and minorities are adequately represented. Members may be selected from members of the legislative authorities. They shall not form a majority in the Council of Commissioners, and they can participate in the discussion as non-voting members”.

Moreover, Article (5/a) of Law No (26) of 2014 on the Establishment of the National Institution for Human Rights As amended by Decree-Law No. (20) of 2016 stated that:

“Members of the Council of Commissioners shall be appointed by Royal Decree for a period of four years, renewable for similar terms. Appointments shall take place after **consultation with relevant bodies of civil society** and various other organizations. The Royale Decree shall identify the full-time and part-time members. The members shall practice their work in their personal capacity”.

Also, Article (12/j) of Law No (26) of 2014 on the Establishment of the National Institution for Human Rights As amended by Decree-Law No. (20) of 2016 stated that:

“Holding meetings and joint activities, cooperation, coordination and consultation **with civil society and non-governmental organizations** and various other groups and human rights defenders, and communicate directly with the claims of exposure to any form of abuse, and to report back to the Council of Commissioners”.

Concerning partnership with the relevant civil society organizations and regional and international bodies, NIHR signed several memoranda of understanding, and these are; with the International Bar Association on June 26, 2013, the Friends of Environment Association on July 10, 2013. Dignity for Human Rights Association in Bahrain on January 21, 2014, Bahrain Youth Society in Bahrain on February 9, 2014, Bahraini Association for Multiple Sclerosis Patients in Bahrain on April 20, 2014.

Memoranda of understanding were also signed with the International Organization for Penal Reform based in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on May 25, 2014, Gulf International Organization for Human Rights, based in the United Arab Emirates on October 20, 2014, the Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights on October 29, 2014, Alba Trade Union in Bahrain on November 9, 2014 and finally with Together for Human Rights Society in the Kingdom of Bahrain on December 21, 2014. These memoranda aim to build bridges of cooperation with those civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations to improve the promotion of human rights and to work together to develop programs to achieve the envisaged goals.

In 2013, in terms of the legislative review authority of the NIHR, and the desire of it to improve the reality of trade unions and to bring Bahraini legislation in line with international standards, the NIHR made its recommendations to the government on the Freedom of Trade Unions Act and the right to organize trade unions in Bahrain. Furthermore, In its annual report for 2013, the NIHR has made a recommendation to civil society urging them to deepen the understanding of the right to peaceful assembly, raise the awareness of the participants and organizers of peaceful gatherings about the legal aspects and violations that might be committed by the participants and their implications, and to assume an active role in promoting awareness of the importance of this right, its exercise and its envisaged objectives in a peaceful context as a civilized form of democratic practice, announcing the end of the assembly formally, and inviting the participants to disperse.

In order to strengthening the status of NGO's, other recommendations were made to the legislative authority, which was "to expediently approve a draft law on civil organizations and institutions, taking into account the appropriate developments in human rights, and supporting this law with the guarantees for the exercise of the right to organize in line with international human rights instruments", and "incorporating a provision in Decree-Law No. 33 of 2002 Promulgating the Law on Trade Unions, as amended, that grants the workers governed by civil service regulations the right to form and join trade unions".

In 2014 NIHR, under the auspices of the King, organized the first international conference on the "Arab Court of Human Rights" over two days (25 to 26 June 2014). On the sidelines of the conference, four specialized workshops were held. Given the NIHR's belief in the principle of partnership with all concerned parties and stakeholders, including the various civil society organizations, to establish regular and constructive working relationships for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights at the national level, and in view of the great importance of civil society institutions as a link between the public and the national institution, the third workshop was dedicated to the role of civil society organizations in supporting the Arab Court of Human Rights work.

The conference was concluded with issuing "Bahrain Declaration", which includes recommendations concerned with the development of the Statute of the Court. The participants in the conference recommended, urging NIHR and civil society organizations to provide legal assistance to the litigants in order to resort to the Arab court, and to invite the Arab Network of National Institutions to further support the implementation of the recommendations and initiatives of civil society organizations on the development of the Arab human rights system.

In order to give effect to NIHR plan and strategy for the years (2013-2016), NIHR took part in the program of technical cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which commenced in March 2013. A series of events were held which aim to identify priorities relevant to the advancement of human rights condition in the Kingdom. Representatives of ministries, government agencies, NIHR, relevant civil society organizations and national human rights activists took part in the program.

Based on the initial consultation with stakeholders and the review of the various recommendations made by the United Nations mechanisms, six events were held. One of these events targeted civil society organizations and was titled "The

role of civil society organizations in the promotion and protection of human rights”.

In the framework of cooperation with civil society organizations in human rights-related issues, NIHR organized a training course over three days for the members of the Board of Directors of Together for Human Rights Society on “International and national mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights”. The course addressed the basic concepts of human rights, the role of national institutions in the promotion and protection of those rights, and search methods in the official electronic sources of the United Nations related to human rights. These activities are held in pursuit of the memorandum of understanding signed by NIHR with the Society based on its belief in the necessity of partnership with civil society organizations concerned with human rights issues in the Kingdom.

NIHR has keen interest in participating in regional and international forums which organized by civil society organizations held in and abroad the Kingdom, which are relevant to its work and mandates. It took part in several seminars, workshops, training courses, and conferences. At the local level, NIHR for example participated in the joint seminar titled “Diplomacy in the service of humanity”, which was organized by the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry and the Bahrain Red Crescent Society on humanitarian diplomacy.

In 2015, with a view to enriching the scientific and academic aspects in issues related to human rights for the public, the NIHR held two specialized lectures, the first of which dealt with the subject of “Social Rights of Persons with Physical Handicaps”, which garnered the wide participation of civil society organizations and those interested in the rights of this group, while the other lecture treated the topic “Concepts of Democracy and the Principle of the Rule of Law and its Impact on Human Rights in the International System.”

Within the framework of the NIHR building bridges and forging cooperation with civil society organizations operating in the human rights field, it held discussion encounters with each of the General Federation of Workers Trade Unions in Bahrain (GFWTUB), the Bahrain Labor Union Free Federation (BLUFF), the Bahrain Women Association (BWA), the Bahrain Bar Society (ABC), Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS), the Bahrain Diabetes Society (BDS), the Mabade'a Society For Human Rights, the Together for Human Rights, the Manama Center for Human Rights, the Migrant Workers Protection Society

(MWPS), the Children & Mothers Welfare Society, the Bahrain MS Patients Society. Moreover, the NIHR organized a workshop for civil society organizations operating in the field of human rights on the sound methodologies and recognized methods in preparing legal reports, such by guidance of the model principles adopted by the UN in this regard, where those encounters discussed a number of subjects foremost of which is the origin of the NIHR and its legal framework and its role in the field of promoting and protecting human rights, in addition to the role of those organizations and their activities in terms of various issues related to human rights, and the means for joint cooperation and support between the two parties, and the readiness of the NIHR to offer expertise in the field of training in terms of the issues of human rights and build the capacity of those affiliated to those institutions in respect of the various international human rights conventions and the obligations of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the international mechanism of the relevant human rights council.

Moreover, the NIHR participated in the consultative meetings held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015 with the presence of civil society organizations operating in the relevant human rights field, such with a view to discussing and evaluating the recommendations concluded by the working team concerned with the mechanism of comprehensive regular overview at the Human Rights Council affiliated to the United Nations, and to state what was accomplished from those recommendations.

In 2017, the NIHR, in cooperation with the Dutch Embassy in Kuwait, prepared a special training program for civil society organizations, including six lectures and workshops, for examples; a training course on "International and regional mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights" and another training course on "Promotion and protection of human rights "

It is clear that the NIHR believes that the civil society is complementary to its work, and that through cooperation and coordination among them, the NIHR can achieve noticeable progress in improving the human rights conditions and basic freedoms on the ground. Therefore and since its establishment, the NIHR has always involved civil society organizations in many of its powers and activities, and this is a continuous and ongoing process.