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**HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES AND MECHANISMS**

**Report of the President of the Human Rights Council on his visit to Bahrain  
(16 to 20 May 2009)**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the invitation of the Government of Bahrain, I, in my capacity as President of the Human Rights Council, undertook a four-day visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain from 16 to 20 May 2009. This visit was facilitated by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, H.E Dr. Nezar Al Baharna, who has represented his country at the Human Rights Council on several occasions.
2. My visit coincided with the launching of the 2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) held in Manama on 17 and 18 May. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon launched the report, in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Khalid Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain, His Excellency Sheikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Hamad Al Attiya, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, and other national and international high-level personalities.
3. I delivered a statement on the first day of the event to underscore the human rights dimension of the DRR. My statement emphasized that the incidence of disasters, both natural and human-made, have serious and multi-dimensional human rights implications, particularly in the areas of poverty and climate change. I also underscored that investment in DRR and management was tantamount to investing towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and for a safer and more secure world.
4. In my closing remarks at the event I called on the participants to incorporate cooperation with the Human Rights Council as an integral part of the international strategy for DRR. I drew particular attention to the convening of a panel discussion on climate change and human rights during the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Council.
5. The visit afforded me the opportunity to meet and interact with the high-ranking Government officials and to exchange views with representatives of civil society on various issues pertaining to human rights.

## II. MEETINGS WITH HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

6. Thanks to the efforts of His. Excellency Dr. Nezar Al Baharna, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and H.E Ambassador Abdullah Abdullatif, Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations Office in Geneva, the Kingdom was able to organise a well conceived program which successfully facilitated high level political dialogue between the Government of Bahrain and the Human Rights Council.
7. In this regard, I had the pleasure to meet with His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain , His .Excellency Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa , Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, His Excellency Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Her Excellency Dr. Shaikha Mariam bint Hassan Al Khalifa, Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Women, His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs as well as with the Bahraini civil society.

**A. Meeting with His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain**

8. On 18 May, I had the honour to meet with His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain. Our discussion enabled me to learn more about the efforts the Government of Bahrain is making to overcome important challenges in the field of human rights as well as about progress being made, in particular in the areas of the right to housing, justice, education and economy, as well as in civil and political rights.

**B. Meeting His Excellency Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain**

9. On the same day, I also had the opportunity to meet with His Highness Shaikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain. Our discussion not only facilitated a high-level political dialogue between the Government of Bahrain and the Human Rights Council, but also afforded me an opportunity to witness first-hand the commitment of the country to the promotion of human dignity and the implementation of policies to that end.

**C. Meeting with H.E Dr. Nezar Al BAHARNA, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs**

10. During our meeting on 18 and 19 May, I witnessed the impressive work being undertaken by “Tamkeen”, an institution headed by Minister Al Baharna which formulates strategic and operational plans to enhance the overall prosperity of Bahrain by investing in Bahraini employability, job creation, and social support.

11. Dr Al Baharna made a presentation about “Tamkeen” (Labour Fund), which was established in 2006 as an important step to develop the labour market. Tamkeen is an institution that aims to increase the level of skills of Bahraini employees to competitive standards and to assist the private sector to become the engine of growth in society. Tamkeen has thus far provided training to more than 19,000 new graduates and employees and supported more than 5,000 companies and enterprises financially, logistically, and technically. This semi-autonomous, yet independent authority, formulates strategic and operational plans to enhance the overall prosperity of Bahrain by investing in Bahraini employability, job creation, and social support. It supports Bahrainis to become the employees of choice, and supports high quality private sector job creation and helping the private sector cope with the impact of labour market reform.

12. Tamkeen invests in the cost and quality competitiveness of Bahrainis by reducing cost of employing Bahrainis relative to expatriates, investing in skill and work ethics of Bahrainis, and tackles employment barriers on both employer and new market clients through a combination of financial incentives and capacity building.

13. In conclusion, I observed first-hand the priority attached by Dr Nezar Al Baharna and the Bahraini Government at large to the improvement of the living standards of Bahraini people, by forging a synergy between capital and labor in a most fascinating and practical manner.

**D. Meeting with Her Excellency Dr. Shaikha Mariam bint Hassan Al Khalifa, Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Women**

14. During my meeting with Her Excellency Dr. Shaikha Mariam bint Hassan Al Khalifa, Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Women, on 19 May, I received an in-depth briefing about The Supreme Council for Women - Bahrain's advisory body to the Government on women's issues. The Council is chaired by Her Highness Shaikha Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, the wife of His Majesty the King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, and comprises a membership made up of women serving in public offices and women with expertise in women's affairs.

15. The Supreme Council was established to promote women's rights in the Kingdom and women's full participation in society. To that end, it has set up a national strategy for women's empowerment, signed a memorandum of understandings and has created partnerships between government institutions and civil society. Moreover, the Council has been at the forefront of the campaign for the introduction of a unified personal status law, the first part of which was issued lately, as well as seeking to amend Nationality Law to grant nationality to children of Bahraini women married to non Bahrainis, and combating violence against women. It has also published studies, worked to coordinate campaigns with other women's rights groups, and sought to promote female candidates for the municipal and general elections.

**E. Meeting with His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs**

16. My meeting with His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs, took place on 19 May. The discussion focused mainly on the judicial system and efforts made in to promote and protect human rights in Bahrain through this system. As explained by the Minister, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs is seeking to preserve the rights and freedoms, the public and private properties under the Constitution and the law through an independent judiciary system, advanced and efficient legal system, effective and specialized administrative body relying on qualified national cadres, and accessible laws and procedures. The Ministry aims to support and develop the judicial, legal and administrative departments so as to bolster the principles of the independence of the judiciary and the respect of the rule of law in accordance with the political, social and cultural development, the Minister explained.

**F. Meeting with the civil society**

17. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, at the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I had the opportunity to meet with different NGO'S and civil society. During this meeting I witnessed the vibrancy of the Bahraini civil society which is a tribute to the quality, the depth and strength of Bahraini democracy. Through these encounters, I witnessed first-hand the effectiveness and the commitment of the Bahraini civil society to contribute towards advancing human rights in-country.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

18. In conclusion, I assured the Government of Bahrain that the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms were ready and available to it by way of providing useful inputs to help address the common challenges. In fact, the Human Rights Council and Bahrain can only benefit from sustained interaction in this manner.

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