

The Kingdom of Bahrain

Positions for the League of Arab States

I. Achieving Gender Diversity: Incorporating the Role of Women in the Economic and Political Arenas

In recent years, the Kingdom of Bahrain has witnessed a number of significant and historic developments due to the tutelage of His Majesty King Hamad Bin Essa Al-Khalifa. These efforts have been aimed at bringing further political, social and economical development to the Kingdom and we are honored to say our country has taken great strides in the area of female empowerment.

The Arab Human Development Report identifies three outliers exclusive to the Arab region: in freedom; in women's empowerment; and in knowledge. The Kingdom of Bahrain recognizes that women's contributions are necessary for the advancement of Middle Eastern societies. Bahrain's commitment to the progression of gender and women's rights has been reinforced by the pledge contained in the National Action Charter that "all citizens are equal before the law in rights and duties. There is no discrimination on the basis of sex...". We remain cognizant of the fact that female empowerment is not something that will occur without action and are remaining steadfast in our dedication to promoting the rights of women to explore economic and political opportunities while still abiding by the law of her State. Empowerment must—of necessity—take on a political meaning in the sense that the transformation of needs into rights is a socio-political process. A fundamental step we took toward this was the creation of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). The BCHR holds the purpose of combating racial discrimination and promoting freedoms and basic rights. Although a new organization, BCHR has carried out many projects including advocacy, training, seminars, media campaigns and reporting to UN bodies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to focus on areas of most importance such as women's empowerment. It's imperative to note that in 2002, the Bahraini government underwent several wide-ranging political reforms. The Supreme Council for Women was established as an advisory body to assist the government in formulating gender-related policies. Furthermore, the 11 woman-orientated NGOs in Bahrain play a major role in supporting women; the government is committed to working closely with these NGOs especially on matters relating to the formulation of gender policies. Though the Bahraini roster of women in political and economic positions is growing at an exponential rate each year, there is still much work to be done within the Arab region. In a Middle Eastern context, consideration needs to be given to the broader position of women's economic and social rights. The Bahraini Business Women Society has succeeded in promoting the role of businesswomen in all economical activities and to support them in all fields that would show women's participation on both the national and international level.

In accordance with the UN Global Compact and the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), we are committed to the recruitment and advancement of women through initiatives such as Deloitte in the Middle East's Retention and Advancement of Women program. The WEPs aim to create an environment that enables both men and women to grow, develop, and contribute within the workplace. To ensure women's economic and political advance, there is a need for Middle Eastern States to support general empowerment initiatives through the integration of gender and diversity principles which will highlight the importance of the connections between work-related values and religion. To ensure the development of a safe environment for women to move into positions of greater leadership, the Kingdom of Bahrain suggests the creation of formal flexible work arrangements to help employees meet their multiple commitments. We believe that by establishing a leadership program which will promote the idea of men and women as colleagues; garner active support and mentoring from senior leaders; and implement both religious and gender awareness education, we can generate an environment where all men and women are valued equally and have a level playing field for advancement. We also believe in the creation of an external advisory council within economic and political fields that will meet annually to address the progress of the retention of women in the workforce. There have yet to be any rigorous methods for measuring and tracking changes in levels of empowerment; thus, in the absence of such measures, it is difficult for the international community to be confident that their efforts to empower women are succeeding. From these councils we hope to see significant quantifiable improvements in the retention and advancement of women, particularly in key leadership roles within the Arab region.

II. Examining the Impacts and Opportunities of the Arab Spring on the Region's Sustainable Development Agenda

The Kingdom of Bahrain has been in the forefront of sustainable development (SD) initiatives within the region long before the manifestations of the Arab Spring. Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa has placed sustainable development plans amongst his top priorities; creating programs with goals of raising the standard of living, which he believes constitutes the prime goal behind any development plan. Stagnant human development within the Arab region is an obstacle that has prevented members from battling the challenges of globalization. Bahrain urges governments to exploit the opportunities created by the Arab Spring and pursue policies that aim to create sustainable management practices, rather than focus on short-term economic stimulus for political gains. The political ramifications of the Arab Spring could be largely managed, but a lagging economy, high unemployment levels, food insecurity, and water scarcity are amongst the biggest problems that confronts this region and should thus take precedence. In accordance with the 2011 Human Development Report, achieving sustainable development in the Arab states requires investments that improve equity. Guided by and in congruence with Article 4 of our constitution, the state of Bahrain will work to ensure social solidarity and equality of opportunity for its citizens. While working towards achieving these goals, Bahrain will work in harmony with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Arab countries in order to arrive to appropriate solutions for Arab states. In abiding by Article 1 of the *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, states should consider that all peoples have control over their wealth and natural resources and therefore have the right to economic, social, and cultural development.

Bahrain recognizes that resource optimization is essential for social, economic, and environmental sustainability; with a special emphasis on states that are not endowed with natural resources. Voting in favor of *A/RES/63/178*, which stipulates the right to development, we place emphasis on policies that foster development and a better understanding of SD. In an effort to ensure food security for the GCC, Bahrain has sought an agreement with the African Union Commission (AUC) that allows for the utilization of natural resources found within the African continent. This was a result of negotiations between Head of His Royal Highness Premier's Court Shaikh Hussam bin Isa Al Khalifa and Chief of Staff of the Cabinet of the AUC Chairperson John K. Shinkaiye, in which Bahrain expressed its interests in nurturing relations with international organizations and cooperation with foreign countries. Keeping in mind that the goal of sustainable development is to secure resources for future generations, President of the Supreme Council for Environment (SCE), HH Shaikh Abdullah bin Hamad Al Khalifa, assures that Bahrain has adopted the international principles of sustainable development in line with environmental protection and preservation of natural resources. Earlier in 2013 the SCE adopted a coordinative program that includes all sectors, with the purpose of implementing national policies for SD and integrating partnerships among all government and private institutions. Bahrain also seeks to collaborate with the UN Industrial Development Organization in order to organize the second edition of the Bahrain International Green Technology Exhibition and Forum in January 13-16, 2014.

Bahrain strongly believes that education is a basic human right and an end in itself, due to its impact on life in health and also as a means of enhancing human well-being. Quoting the Arab Human Development 2011 report, while the costs of improving education systems may be substantial, the costs of perpetuating ignorance are incalculably greater. Therefore Bahrain stresses the role education and training has on sustainable development through the continuance of regional workshops started by the International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) programs in the Arab region, and the creation of a UNEVOC network that includes 40 educational and training institutions. These efforts have served to increase the interest of the Arab states in environmental issues meanwhile enhancing their awareness of the positive effects environmental care has on their societies and the socio-economic aspect of SD. Bahrain recommends the sharing of expertise between our countries and institutions in order to overcome the problems that might arise from the incorporation SD measures. Moreover, management of future food-price shocks and food insecurity could be alleviated through the strengthening of safety nets, improving access to family planning services, enhancing domestic food production and improving rural livelihoods through increased investment in research and development to increase productivity. Arab countries can also aim to reduce exposure to market volatility by using more efficient supply chains and better use of financial instruments. In working towards achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7, we can also conquer MDG 1 and pacify the stresses of hunger and poverty. Bahrain applauds the Arab League for their work thus far, though there is still room for improvements and for avenues that facilitate discussion on this issue. Recalling the Council of the League's endorsement of the report and recommendations made by the Standing Commission on Human Rights in the January 11 session, Bahrain encourages members to respond to the Arab Spring by executing all proposed solutions, while remaining mindful of their political considerations.