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Universal Periodic Review

Written statement* submitted by the Arab NGO Network for Development, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human rights conditions in Bahrain

The UPR Working Group session of Bahrain was the occasion for Bahraini authorities to claim the national dialogue and progress achieved on human rights since the first cycle revision in 2008. Nevertheless several members of the Working Group challenged this position and raised the concerns on serious human rights violations taking place in the country, in addition to the restrictive environment for the civil society organizations and human rights defenders with an opposition voice.

Since May 2012, to-date the violations on human rights and particularly restrictions that human right activists are facing remain critical for Bahrain. The so-called and claimed open, transparent and participatory policy adopted in Bahrain is not accurate. Indeed the representatives of various civil society groups from Bahrain that were actively engaging in the UPR revision, with side events and advocacy at international level and with their direct presence in Geneva during the May session were threatened aftermath. The restrictions on their right to freedom of expression continue with arbitrary detentions and judicial harassments.

The Arab NGO Network for Development, a regional network working in 11 Arab countries with 8 national networks (with an extended membership of 200 CSOs from different backgrounds) and 30 NGO members recalls that the uprisings in Bahrain are a culmination of years of inadequate policies that lacked recognition and realization of the rights that Bahrain has obligations to under international law. Thus the demands for equality and non-discrimination, alongside the call for institutional, political, economic and social reforms aimed at reducing social inequalities and creating better economic and social conditions for all need urgent and genuine action from the Bahraini authorities.

In this regard, several measures noted in the Working Group session by the Bahraini Delegation as accomplishments and success, including on the right to education, women's rights, labors rights require sincere and immediate implementation on the ground. Moreover we highlight the recommendations in the Joint Submission 2¹ presented by Arab NGO Network for Development, Bahrain Transparency Association and Bahrain Human Rights Society and call Bahraini authorities to:

- Ensure that all domestic law conforms to international standards and accordingly to make required amendments to the domestic legislation.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- Improve the availability and accessibility of database and indicators on poverty level and human rights issues in a disaggregated level for the efficient and effective work of all human rights related institutions.
- Ensure that respecting human rights is at the very foundation of all relevant Bahraini institutions and ensure the genuine transformation of all relevant institutions in Bahrain in order to operate in full respect of human rights and the will of the people
- Ensure that human rights and equality is at the core of the formulation of reforms and policies.

¹ http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session13/BH/JS2_UPR_BHR_S13_2012_JointSubmission2_E.pdf.

- Ensure the transparency of the work of all the official actors and institutions, ensuring the submission of periodical reports with regard to the implementation of the reforms and in line with their
- Open transparent and independent investigations of the cases raised by the Bahraini Parliament in regards to privatization of public land and its implications on the realization of economic and social rights of Bahrainis.
- Reform the labor policies and employment policies to address the rising unemployment both among nationals and migrant workers and reform the institutional mechanisms responsible for the unemployment insurance to ensure respect of equality and non-discrimination in its practice.
- Take corrective measures to address persistent wage gaps ensuring that the principles of equality and non-discrimination are at the core of the wage policies.
- Reform the education policy to ensure that equality and nondiscrimination in access to quality education is ensured among all Bahraini and geographic regions.
- Reform the health care system and ensure the availability and accessibility and acceptability of the right to health to all citizens, with full realization of the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Taking into consideration that the realities of human rights conditions in Bahrain were not presented and therefore reviewed in depth in the Working Group session, we restate our call for a consideration of human rights conditions in Bahrain during the regular session of the Human Rights Council. We call the members of the Human Rights Council to urge Bahraini authorities as well to ensure that the reforms based on the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry are genuinely and sincerely implemented. Furthermore, given the severe restrictions on the freedom of expression in Bahrain, we call the HRC members to urge Bahraini authorities to give an end to arbitrary arrests and detentions of human rights activists with an opposition voice and ensure that the freedom of expression is fully respected and protected and Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience including the prominent human rights defenders Nabeel Rajab, Zainab Al-Khawaja and Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja.
