



STATEMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

BY

**H.E. SHAIKH ABDULAZIZ BIN MUBARAK AL KHALIFA
HEAD OF DELEGATION**

To

**THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

GENEVA, 19-22 JUNE 2006

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,
Madam High Commissioner,
Heads of Delegation,
Representatives of Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to convey to you the sincere congratulations of the Kingdom of Bahrain's delegation upon your election as President of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and to extend my congratulations also to the members of the Bureau for their election to their posts.

The establishment of the Human Rights Council is a continuation of the sixty years' work of the Human Rights Commission in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The rapid developments in the human rights field made it necessary to establish the Council to develop, promote and protect such rights and freedoms around the world.

We hope that this Council will be an international mechanism to encompass all in its work, and be able to take up its important responsibility and become a defender of human rights wherever they are. I want also to commend the work of the previous Commission, and its contribution to the development of human rights, and to commend the efforts of all those who have worked to this end. I hope that its efforts and contribution will be a basis for the Council to exert further efforts to develop and promote human rights.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was eager to cooperate with the Human Rights Commission. During its membership of the Commission, Bahrain strove to promote its role in the protection of human rights throughout the world. I want to affirm today, Mr. President and distinguished members of the Council, that the Kingdom of Bahrain will continue its policy of cooperation and coordination with the Council and with other international human rights institutions, and in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Kingdom of Bahrain hopes that the organisation of the Council's works will be rapid and just, so that the Council can start examining substantive human rights issues, which are so important to us all. Bahrain believes that the most important procedural issues to be agreed between the members of the Council include the organisation of the work of the Council's mechanisms inherited from the previous Commission, as well as reviewing the work of these mechanisms with the

possibility of rationalising some mechanisms. We welcome the Universal Periodical Review established by General Assembly resolution 60/251 and believe that such a review is of great importance to the work of the Council, and requires the utmost transparency and neutrality, as well as agreement on all its aspects. In this regard, we support the position of the Arab Group, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference concerning the organisation of the Council's work especially in regard to the situation in the Arab occupied territories including Palestine.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was, and remains, a defender of the participation of Non-Governmental Organisations accredited to the United Nations. In this regard, I want to reaffirm Bahrain's support for the participation of NGOs in the Council's work in accordance with the agreed status. This support stems from Bahrain's firm belief in partnership between states and NGOs within the framework of developing and promoting human rights.

We are eager that the Council's work be a success and, therefore, wish to reaffirm the importance of the principles of dialogue and cooperation in the Council's work when dealing with issues pertaining to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

Mr. President,

The Kingdom of Bahrain has embarked on a reform programme initiated by His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, which was designed to promote and protect human rights in the Kingdom. Many human rights milestones have resulted from the reform programme, which has strengthened the rights of the individual. This programme has included many human rights elements, the most noteworthy of which are the Political Rights Instituting Law, and the parliamentary and municipal elections held in 2002. The independence of the general prosecutor, further development of the judiciary through strengthening its independence, ratification of the Arab Human Rights Charter on 8 May 2006, and the active cooperation of the Kingdom of Bahrain in combating trafficking in persons through drafting a law to criminalise such trafficking, were all guaranteed in the reform programme.

Moreover, special attention was given to the rights of women through the establishment of the Supreme Council for Women as well as other non-governmental organisations which have encouraged Bahraini women to promote their rights and national development. The promotion of these rights has contributed to the appointment of the first female judge in Bahrain on 6 June of this year, and to the election of Bahrain's first woman diplomat as President of the 61st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, only the third woman to hold the post.

The Kingdom of Bahrain's eagerness to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms has led to its active participation on the international stage. Bahrain therefore hosted, from 11-12 November, 2005, the Forum for the Future, the goals of which included discussing human rights issues, fighting corruption, the rule of law, and empowering women politically and economically. In light of the importance of civil society in discussing these issues, it was therefore given, for the first time, the opportunity to participate comprehensively in the work of the Forum to promote partnership between participating states and civil society. Separately, a parallel meeting also took place which was attended by over hundred local and international NGOs. The meeting covered other important themes, and its recommendations were presented to the Forum.

The Kingdom of Bahrain sees civil society, especially those groups dealing with human rights, as partners in developing human rights and fundamental freedoms. Bahrain has therefore cooperated with a number of international human rights organisations, as well as with national non-governmental organisations. Such engagement with international and domestic NGOs has included dialogue, cooperation and coordination on a number of human rights issues as well as through holding specialised workshops.

The Kingdom of Bahrain is convinced of the importance of the participation of national civil society in drafting Bahrain's position regarding the issues before the Council. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted several meetings with civil society groups in order to discuss and pinpoint the issues important to civil society in the Council's work, so to as present its contributions on these matters to this meeting.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, may I emphasise that the work which awaits us on the Council is very important, and requires us to play a positive role in order to develop and promote human rights. In order to guarantee the work of the Council for all members, we must commit ourselves to neutrality and transparency in our work and dealings. We hope also that the Council will commit itself to the principle of cooperation and dialogue, far removed from confrontation, so that human rights and fundamental freedoms are promoted.

We are certain that the expertise gained by the international community over the sixty years of the Commission's work, will enable us to successfully promote the work of the Council.

Thank you.