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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[03 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Racial and sectarian discrimination in Bahrain

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) takes this opportunity at the 44th Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to presents its observation submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which monitors the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), regarding the trends on the issue of racial and sectarian discrimination in Bahrain.

In its observation, ADHRB has found that even though the Government of Bahrain has signed and ratified the Convention, the government has largely failed to adhere to the provisions of the Convention due to the widespread, persistent and systematic discrimination of the indigenous people of Baharna and Ajam citizens. In nearly every sector that concerns daily life, Baharna and Ajam citizens living in Bahrain have to face discrimination and inequality cause by the government's broad legislations that facilitates the suppression of Baharna and Ajam, political participation and the general enjoyment of basic human rights such as free expression, belief and association.

Suppression of religious practices, gatherings and associations

After the 2011 protests, 53 Shia mosques were damaged, and 23 were completely demolished. This is a direct discriminatory attack on the Baharna indigenous population. The government of Bahrain has explicitly stated that they will only rebuild sites that have the proper permits. However, some of the oldest mosques and religious sites from the Baharna indigenous population were built long before the construction permit process was enshrined in Bahraini law. Meanwhile, progress on the remaining reconstruction sites is stagnant. In many parts of Bahrain, Baharna indigenous communities continue to hold religious services in damaged mosques, makeshift structures or other substandard conditions, which are often destroyed by Bahraini security forces. These actions taken by the Bahraini government are in direct contradiction to government statements that claim that "the Constitution of Bahrain guarantees all freedoms, providing (...) freedom of belief, freedom of movement and freedom to voice".¹

Excessive force, arbitrary detention and torture

Bahrain's Baharna indigenous population disproportionately faces extrajudicial violence such as the use of excessive force and torture. Security forces misuse crowd control equipment such as birdshots and tear gas to target Baharna protesters, and even fire this equipment into mosques at times of worships or funerals.² In addition to facing police brutality in public spaces, Bahrain's Baharna population are also routinely subjected to systematic arbitrary detention and torture.³ On 15 March 2011, shortly after King Hamad declared a state of emergency, security forces effectively seized control of Salmaniya Medical Complex, which is the largest public healthcare facility in the country. During the early hours of 2 April 2011, officers woke up four physicians sleeping in a break room at the hospital. After requesting to know the names and ethnicity of each physician, the officers

¹ Point 47, pp. 18-19. Combined eight to fourteen periodic reports submitted by Bahrain under article 9 of the Convention, due in 2007, International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, June 11, 2019.

² Alan Williams, "Videos of recent attacks on unarmed Shia by Bahraini security forces." Communities Digital News, November 13, 2014, <http://www.commdiginews.com/world-news/middle-east/videos-of-recent-attacks-on-unarmed-shia-by-bahraini-security-forces-29320/>.

³ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. By Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, Nigel Rodley, Badria al-Awady, et al. Manama, Bahrain. 2011. Pp. 299-300.

then began interrogating the physicians and even beat and called them “traitor physicians”.⁴ Furthermore, they threatened the lives of the physicians and their families.⁵

Discrimination in education, media and employment

The government has done little to address the systemic socioeconomic inequalities experienced by Bahrain’s Baharna indigenous community. Even though several Bahraini laws such as Law No. 27 of 2005 supposedly ensure that education is a right guaranteed to all citizens, the Bahraini government continues to discriminate against the country’s Baharna indigenous population by preventing children and adolescents from equal access to education.⁶ Furthermore, Baharna students not only struggle to be awarded with scholarships, the verbal expression of Baharna dialects is also suppressed and education curricula are increasingly hostile in their narrative on Baharna in order to exclude their culture from the country’s history.⁷ Furthermore, the Bahraini government actively defames and discriminates against them through its control over the media.⁸ The government has manipulated how the public views both the pro-democracy movement and the Baharna population. There is an effective censorship of the media coverage of Shia religious and cultural heritage.⁹ In employment, sectarian discrimination towards Baharna individuals is most obvious in the police and security forces. Unequal treatment reaches from discriminatory hiring practices towards Baharna with requirements such as having to provide documents that prove their sect or even often not being employed at all on the grounds of alleged ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran to the distribution of radical anti-Baharna material.¹⁰ Apart from discriminatory hiring practices, Baharna also experience difficulties when trying to ascend in hierarchy and are therefore often stuck in non-sensitive and administrative roles in lower rungs of the hierarchy with no supervisory power.¹¹

Nationality and citizenship

The government of Bahrain explicitly discriminates against Baharna and Ajam population regarding their citizenship, often used as reprisal against Baharna and Ajam human rights defenders and activists. Since the international community’s initial call in 2013, the authorities have only increased their use of punitive denaturalization.¹² Since the pro-democracy movement of 2011, the Bahraini authorities have denaturalized over 1000 Bahraini citizens.¹³ Many of these denaturalized Bahrainis are rendered stateless and subsequently deported. In February 2015, the government released a list of 72 persons whose

⁴ Holly Atkinson and Richard Sollom, “Under the Gun: Ongoing Assaults on Bahrain’s Health System.” Physicians for Human Rights (2012). Accessed January 5, 2016, <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/reports/under-the-gun-ongoing-assaults-on-bahrains-health-system.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Law No. 27 of 2005 with Respect to Education, Kingdom of Bahrain, Ministry of Education, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=73041

⁷ Apart in Their Own Land: Government Discrimination Against Shia in Bahrain, Vol. II, ADHRB, BCHR, and BIRD, September 2015, <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/09/adhrb-releases-part-2-of-shia-discrimination-report/>.

⁸ Apart in Their Own Land: Government Discrimination Against Shia in Bahrain, Vol. II, ADHRB, BCHR, and BIRD, September 2015, <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/09/adhrb-releases-part-2-of-shia-discrimination-report/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State*, Indiana University Press: 2015, Print.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Shattering the Facade: a report on Bahrain’s implementation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) recommendations four years on (Washington, D.C.: Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 2015).

¹³ “Infographic: Timeline of Citizenship Revocation,” Bahrain Institute for Rights & Democracy, 10 February 2016, <http://birdbh.org/2016/02/infographic-timeline-of-citizenship-revocation/>.

citizenship it had revoked. The names of numerous Baharna and Ajam human rights defenders, political activists, journalists, academics, and religious scholars can be found on this list.¹⁴ By stripping Baharna and Ajam Bahrainis of their citizenship and engaging in broader demographic engineering policies, thousands of Ajam are estimated to be stateless, separate from the denaturalization campaign. Recently the government of Bahrain reinstated the citizenship, however their no clear legal venue of how Baharna and Ajam can claim back their citizenship.

Conclusion and recommendations

Considering the provisions of the ICERD, ADHRB found that the Bahraini government has effectively failed to protect the political, religious and cultural rights of the Baharna and Ajam groups. Instead of actively improving the situation, the Alkhalifa government has intensified the political, religious and socioeconomic oppression of the basic human rights of Bahraini Baharna and Ajam. In the light of these findings, ADHRB calls on the Bahraini government to:

- Demand the release of all Baharna and Ajama political prisoners.
- Facilitate the missions of the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council to the country.
- Consider hosting multilateral talks between the Bahraini government and Baharna and Ajam indigenous population with the goal of creating a permanent and inclusive solution.
- Relax censorship and allowing the opposition greater access to television broadcasts, radio broadcasts and print media.
- Undertake appropriate measures, including legislative measures to prevent incitement to violence, hatred, sectarianism and other forms of incitement which lead to the violation of internationally protected human rights, irrespective of whether the source is public or private.
- Develop educational programs at the primary, secondary, high school and university levels to promote religious, political, and other forms of tolerance, as well as to promote human rights and the rule of law.

¹⁴ “HRC32: ADHRB calls attention to citizenship revocation in Bahrain,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 14 June 2016, <http://www.adhrb.org/2016/06/hrc32-adhrc-highlights-crackdown-civil-society-bahrain/>.