

In the Name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful
Opening Speech - Delegation of the Kingdom of Bahrain
Geneva – 11 February 2014

Your Excellency, Ms. Nicole Ameline, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

Your Excellency, Ms. Pramila Patten, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
Distinguished Members of the Committee

I am pleased, along with the members of our official delegation from the Kingdom of Bahrain, to meet again with the esteemed Committee to continue the dialogue, regarding the ongoing efforts to ensure the effective implementation of CEDAW.

To begin with, I am pleased and honoured to convey to the distinguished members of the Committee, the greetings of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, Wife of the King of Bahrain, President of the Supreme Council for Women, and Her wishes for all the success in fulfilling the Committee's mission, to which we express our full support and appreciation.

I am pleased to introduce the members of the official delegation, which includes officials with responsibilities and expertise covering the different fields in which the CEDAW is implemented; Therefore, representing the legislative, judicial and executive branches in various sectors and specialisations. The delegation also includes members of civil society organisations attending this significant meeting that we consider as an efficient and critical evaluation process to identify the observations, in order to continue the process of development and improvement within the framework of our efforts to implement the CEDAW.

Within the time allocated, I would like to highlight the most prominent developments that took place since submitting the third report in July 2011, ensuring our commitment to the main frameworks of the relevant institutions in the Kingdom when implementing the CEDAW. These frameworks include law enforcement, transparency of democratic action and development based on justice, human rights, societal dialogue with emphasis on the important role of civil society and the methodologies required in assessing the achievements and ensuring the process of development and progress in women's empowerment, as well as cooperation with regional and international mechanisms to improve the status of women and to ensure raising awareness of the CEDAW.

Furthermore, the National Action Charter and the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain ensured law enforcement and respect for rights and freedoms, including the principle of equality between men and women, of which laws, policies and programmes assure the implementation on the ground.

Madam Chair...

Women have become key partners in development in its various aspects, and their participation rate has increased in the labour market as well as in the economic, social and cultural activities, in addition to the continued efforts to empower women at the economic and political levels. The report mentioned the First National Conference for Women, which was held in Bahrain in November 2010 and the National Model for Mainstreaming Women's Needs in the Government's Work Programme, as well as the efforts made to grant women's needs responsive budgeting, and the National Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for the advancement of women. In this regard, it is important to note a number of important activities implemented by the Supreme Council for Women to enhance the sustainability of institutional work for the continued advancement of Bahraini women:

1. The Second National Conference on mainstreaming women's needs in development which took place in October 2013, with the participation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches, civil society organisations, private sector, relevant regional and international organisations, in order to follow up regarding the implementation of the National Model for Mainstreaming Women's Needs in Development, in terms of achievements and challenges. The conference resulted in establishing an advanced Model for Mainstreaming Women's Needs in the Government's Work Programme, seeking to achieve the following:
 - Sustainability of women's component in the government's work programme and the general budget.
 - Development of a clear methodology to mainstream women's needs in national legislations.
 - Presentation of the private sector's best practices, ensuring their continuousness.
 - Support to civil society organisations and the capacity building of their cadre.
2. Evaluation of the National Plan to implement the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, which was drafted in partnership with all sectors; governmental, official, private sector and women-related civil society organisations, and approved by His Majesty the King in an unprecedented step, given that it was the first women-related strategy to be approved by a head of state in the Arab region. Also, the development of an updated plan for the advancement of women, including mechanisms to meet the

expectations of the Bahraini society, in line with the current enhanced status of Bahraini women, based on building partnerships and alliances, along with the national ownership of this plan, to ensure mainstreaming women's needs in the course of development. The plan is also based on the shift from the method of "advancing" women to the method of the independent "advancement" of women, as well as on measuring the real impact to achieve an impartial and equal partnership for building a competent sustainable society.

The approval of this plan, which received the royal blessings, coincided with the 12th anniversary of the establishment of the Supreme Council for Women in August 2013, ensuring that the Council's framework is based on comprehensive and systematic mechanisms, set to achieve the objectives of Bahraini women in all fields. In this regard, the Supreme Council for Women has prepared and distributed a number of important publications for the kind information of the esteemed Committee members. These publications document the work of the Council, including details regarding its efforts and activities related to its mandate of supporting and empowering women.

3. The announcement, in Manama on October 23rd 2013, of the outcomes of a study conducted by the Arab Women Organisation in cooperation with the Supreme Council for Women on "The Reality of the Government sector's Workforce in the Kingdom of Bahrain". The outcomes pointed out that the total percentage of working women in the Government sector, as per 2011 statistics, reached 48% comparing to 52% of men. Also, a research paper by the Economic Development Board indicated that the number of Bahraini women working in the private sector has increased in 2011 comparing to the year 2002 by a percentage of 73.5% to reach more than 25,000 women, taking into consideration that women own 29% of the commercial registrations in the Kingdom.

In this regard, Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, Wife of the King of Bahrain, President of the Supreme Council for Women, during a meeting conducted on January 8th 2014 with Bahraini women leaders in decision making and executive positions in the government sector and public institutions, affirmed the high number of qualified women leaders in decision making and executive positions in the Kingdom, ensuring their participation in different sectors and specialisations to support the course of national development.

Her Royal Highness stressed the belief of His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, confirming that women's participation is fundamental in the course of the country's advancement, clarifying that His Majesty's interest and keenness play a vital role in achieving significant results for the benefit of Bahraini women. In this regard, the percentage of women's participation is a third of the national workforce, where the percentage of women's participation in all work sectors reached 40%, which reflects the keenness of the leadership to achieve the effective participation and empowerment of women in all fields.

4. Issuance of Cabinet's decision no.77 for the year 2013 regarding the salaries and allowances, as well as the eligibility rules for employees subject to the laws of Civil Service Bureau with regards to amending the social allowance policy. Therefore, granting this allowance to the second category of married women employees, ensuring equality with men employees, in line with the efforts of the Supreme Council for Women to mainstream women's needs in development and achieve equal opportunities. It is noted that around 15,000 women employees are expected to benefit from this amendment, allowing them to enjoy the same employment benefits as men. Therefore, confirming women's presence as a fundamental foundation of the course of human development, of which the Kingdom is proud to represent at the regional and international levels.
5. Adoption of a process to ensure the commitment of the ministries and public institutions to establish committees to follow up and improve the performance of those institutions, to achieve the aspects of equal opportunities, particularly in terms of adopting policies supporting the participation of women and conducting women empowerment programmes.
6. In the context of the keenness of the Supreme Council for Women to achieve the highest levels of family stability in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Council conducted coordination meetings with the Supreme Judicial Council, in order to activate the role of the family reconciliation unit under the umbrella of the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, starting from February 16th 2014. The offices of this unit will specialise in addressing marital problems by experts, as a step that precede submitting an official divorce lawsuit, in case of the failure of attempts to address the problem. Also, the Supreme Judicial Council issued a statement regarding the regulation of Sharia related legal arguments, and the acceleration of the process of issuing sentences.

Madam Chair...

The Supreme Council for Women launched an annual national initiative to celebrate Bahraini Women's Day on December 1st, of which the theme for the year 2013 was "Women and Media". It is undoubtedly that this event represents an important measure to highlight the journey of women in different national development fields and the challenges opposing their aspirations. This is done through forums and discussions to raise awareness among women with regards to their rights and ways of practicing rights. Also, to prompt the different authorities to make efforts to support women empowerment programmes, as per their duties and responsibilities.

The Wife of the King of Bahrain, and President of the Supreme Council for Women, Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, assured that Bahraini Women's Day, which takes place annually in December 1st, has become a national day in Bahrain, celebrating Bahraini women in particular, as it is a great occasion to express gratitude and appreciation for women's efforts in all fields. Therefore, representing the belief that women's advancement goes in line

with the advancement of their countries. This belief is adopted through the political will to assure the continuity of women's presence in all fields, through directives given to the different authorities to commit to the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities. This is achieved as per the Kingdom's constitutional values, which ensure women's presence and participation in the public sphere, taking into consideration their rights and family status, to enable them to accomplish their national duties with the best capacity and confidence.

On the other hand, the Supreme Council for Women is keen, while conducting the different events and activities, to cooperate with civil society organisations, through the available mechanisms, such as the cooperation committee between the Supreme Council for Women and women-related societies and committees. This reflects the belief of the important role played by civil societies, and therefore the importance of implementing this role in all fields including economic, social and cultural aspects for the benefit of women, and in the context of raising awareness regarding their rights. Here, I would like to highlight the following examples:

- The Supreme Council for Women, in cooperation with the Arab Women Organisation and the Supreme Judicial Council in the Kingdom of Bahrain, organized the second awareness forum for the Arab Women Organisation's project titled "Women's Human Rights: Highlights of Arab Judiciary Provisions" during the period from 18 to 19 June 2012. The forum focused on Arab judiciary provisions of Arab member states, which are considered as milestones for launching legal principles for the protection of women's human rights. Also, the forum highlighted the best judicial practices, and aimed at raising awareness among officials regarding women's human rights, as well as bridging the gap between legal texts and legal practices.
- On January 30th 2014, the National Institution for Human Rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain organized an introductory forum regarding the CEDAW. The audience included a number of experts and those interested in CEDAW.
- The Supreme Council for Women participated in several activities as part of the regional and international cooperation, such as the workshop on the economic rights of Arab women, held in the Kingdom of Bahrain in November 2013, in cooperation with the Council of Representatives and Shura Council, as well as the Arab Parliament. The workshop aims at drafting a document on Arab Women's rights, which will be launched in June through a general conference to be organised for this objective.

Madam Chair...

The Supreme Council for Women continues to cooperate with the relevant entities, governmental and non-governmental institutions, in order to empower women in all fields. In this regard, I would like to review before the esteemed committee, certain programmes organised by the Council on an ongoing basis:

1. The political empowerment programme, under which the Council has already started to work in preparation for the legislative council's elections to take place in 2014. For example, a programme was conducted to prepare promising cadre. The "Rights and Legal" phase of this programme ended on April 30th 2013. Also, efforts were made to invite qualified Bahraini women intending to run in the coming elections. 25 women already started taking part of the training programme, which will last for a period of one year. In addition, other areas of focus will be tackled, such as raising awareness among voters, encouraging them to participate and choose the qualified candidate based on independence. In this regard, we would like to note that the political rights law assures women's participation in political life, as candidates and voters in elections, equal to men without discrimination.
2. Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa's Award for Bahraini women's empowerment in vocational and political associations, launched as one of the initiatives aiming to support and enhance the participation of women, opening the door for them to run in elections through these associations.
3. Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa's Award for the Empowerment of Bahraini Women, which is a key initiative to enhance the status of Bahraini women, awarded on biennial basis to ministries, governmental and private institutions, with the best performance in the field of supporting and empowering Bahraini working women. The award is based on systematic and objective methods, encouraging these institutions to raise the performance level, in terms of empowering women and equal opportunities.

Speaking of the legislative authority and the independence of all authorities, and cooperation among them, with regards to women empowerment, I would like to note the following:

- The government agreed, on January 12th 2014, to transfer the draft law proposal regarding the amendment of the nationality law to the legislative authority. Therefore, allowing the children of Bahraini women married to non-Bahraini men, to obtain the nationality as per the set rules and regulations.
- The Shura Council also accepted, on October 6th 2013, a draft law proposal on family violence, which will be further examined in line with the provided comments.
- Also, both the Council of Representatives and Shura Council will examine the draft law proposal on civil societies, which is currently presented to the legislative authority.

Madam Chair...

The Kingdom of Bahrain is proud of the efforts and achievements made with regards to the implementation of the CEDAW, as well as Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the

United Nations Millennium Declaration. Furthermore, the Supreme Council for Women, in cooperation with all the relevant governmental and non-governmental entities, contributed in empowering women in all fields; political, economic, social and cultural. Also, the Council designated special emphasis on presenting and raising awareness regarding the CEDAW.

Moreover, in line with the efforts of the Kingdom of Bahrain to implement the recommendations of the esteemed CEDAW committee, the Cabinet agreed on January 19th 2014 to redraft and lift some of the reservations of the Kingdom of Bahrain - in so far as it is incompatible with the provisions of the Islamic Sharia – stated in the decree-by-law no. 5 for the year 2002, on joining the CEDAW. The Cabinet decided to follow the constitutional and legal measures to pass a draft law proposal with this regard to the legislative authority.

Madam Chair...

Despite all these accomplished achievements, of which we are proud. We realise that areas of improvement will always be present, and that all societies should proceed with making efforts to achieve further improvements. As per our report, there are many challenges with this regard, and we are taking the responsibility to tackle them with persistence. We will review, while discussing the Kingdom's report, the accomplished achievements and the persisting challenges.

We also look forward – as we are used to – to benefit from this constructive dialogue to highlight the achievements and to address the challenges.

Thank you for your kind attention...

11 February 2014