

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

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BHR 6/2015:

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Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 28/9, 26/3, and 22/20.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **alleged patterns of continuous discrimination against Shia citizens (mainly Baharna and Ajam), which have been taking place since 2011 and which are undermining their rights to freedom in the area of religion, expression and culture. Such discrimination takes the form of destruction of places of worship and other signs of the presence of Shia citizens in the country, their marginalization in the historical narratives of the country, misinformation regarding their religious and cultural identity through the educational system and the media, as well as violence.** This communication follows previous communications concerning the situation of Shia in the country sent by Special procedures and, in particular, the communications on the destruction of Shia mosques sent by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief on 5 May 2011, (BHR 8/2011, published in A/HRC/18/51), and on withdrawal of citizenship, sent by the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of religion and belief and human Rights defenders on 29/11/2012 (BHR 12/2012, published in A/HRC/23/51).

According to the information received:

In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 protest movement, the Bahraini authorities have targeted influential leaders of the political opposition as well as citizens-protesters. In addition to the excessive use of force against political opposition and protesters that have been raised in several communications from Special

Procedures since 2011¹, it is alleged that repressive actions have been particularly aimed at, or were used specifically against Baharna and Ajam citizens, distinct ethnical groups whose members predominantly belong to the Shia faith.

Excessive use of force and abuses targeting Baharna protesters and Shia clerics

It is alleged that Baharna citizens participating in protests have been the victims of strong reprisals. Between 2012 and 2015, in numerous incidents there were reports of inappropriate use by government forces of tear gas against Shia Bahraini, causing at least 38 deaths. Non-lethal shotguns and security forces vehicles were misused in many instances, causing permanent injuries and death of protesters. Reportedly, at least 18 people have died as a result of shotguns-related injuries, all of them Shia, and there is footage from protests where vehicles were used as weapons against Shia protests.

Furthermore, Shia Bahraini have had their citizenship revoked, some of them remaining stateless². Under the 2013 and 2014 expansion of Bahrain's 1963 Citizenship Act and 2006 Law on Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts, the legal basis has been provided for the denaturalization of persons accused under Bahrain's Anti-Terror Law. Revoking citizenship has been used to target political dissidents, criminalizing the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. It is alleged that more than 250 individuals have been denaturalized since 2012, a majority of them being Shia.

It is alleged that several members of the clergy were arrested and tortured, as referenced in communications 5/2011, 9/2011, 3/2012, 4/2012, 5/2014, 6/2014 1/2015 and 5/2015 from the Special Procedures. Since 2011, at least 31 Bahraini Shia clerics were persecuted for their political statements or religious affiliation. More than half of them are still in prison today.

It is also reported that some clerics have also been forced into exile, as in the case of Sheikh Hussein Najati, a senior Shia cleric, who was interrogated by police officers in April 2014. They informed him that his Bahraini citizenship had been revoked and gave him 48 hours to leave the country for Iraq.

Destruction of relevant mosques and marginalization in the public space

The violence against Shia Bahraini also took the form of destruction of mosques and targeting other signs bearing witness of Shia presence in public space. Since 2011, at least 38 Shia mosques have been destroyed around Bahrain. Two of them

¹ Mainly 21 communications, with reference numbers 1/2011, 4/2011, 11/2011, 16/2011, 17/2011, 18/2011, 1/2012, 2/2012, 5/2012, 6/2012, 7/2012, 8/2012, 10/2012, 2/2013, 3/2013, 4/2013, 7/2013, 1/2014, 10/2014, 12/2014, 15/2014. Concerns were also raised by a group of States during the 30th session of the Human Rights Council, 14 September 2015.

² Communication BHR 12/2012, sent on 29/11/2012 and published in joint communication report A/HRC/23/51, raised this issue concerning political activists deprived of their citizenship, the majority of which were Shia.

have been raised in communication BHR 8/2011 sent by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief.

Following the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission on Inquiry in December 2011, the Government gave a commitment to rebuilding the mosques. This commitment was repeated during the country's 2012 Universal Periodic Review (A/HRC/21/6/Add.1/Rev.1, §26). However, the process has been delayed several times and it is alleged that the Government has taken several actions contrary to this promise. In December 2012, four of the mosques that the Baharna community had begun to rebuild were destroyed. In January 2014, it is alleged that Bahraini security forces significantly damaged the Sa'sa'a bin Suhan Mosque in Askar, one of the oldest mosques in the country, leaving graffiti and hate messages on the walls against Shia.

Many of the above-mentioned buildings were culturally as well as religiously significant. Since their destruction, access to many of the sites where the mosques stood was restricted. Security forces erected a fence around the site of the Barbaghi mosque and, in December 2013, individuals who attempted to pray at the location were prosecuted. In some cases, the mosques were relocated and the original land, repurposed, without consultation of the concerned Shia population. On the site of the Abu Dharr mosque, which was more than three centuries old at the time of its destruction, a playground was constructed. On 14 June 2014, the Ministry of Culture announced its plans to transform the Al Khamis Mosque into a museum. The Al Khamis Mosque is the earliest surviving mosque in Bahrain, one of the oldest in the peninsula and an important religious and cultural center for Shia Islam and the history of the Baharna in Bahrain. This will deny to Shia religious use of the building. As part of the project, it is alleged that certain engravings linking the mosque to Baharna population and Shia Islam are intentionally being removed.

Certain places and areas traditionally inhabited by Shia have been renamed, erasing traces of their Shia heritage. Places of cross-cultural significance have also been interpreted with a sectarian spin, destroyed and/or renamed. It is the case of the Pearl Roundabout, associated with the pro-democracy uprising in February 2011, which has been destroyed, closed to public access and actively erased from public space and public memory³. The new name chosen for the site, Al-Farooq Junction, recalls an early Sunni figure considered as having played an important role in the schism between Sunni and Shia communities.

Use of historical narrative to marginalize Shia communities

It is also alleged that the status and legitimacy of the Baharna in the country has been further challenged in official historical narratives. Although Baharna have

³ This issue of public space and public memory about the Pearl Roundabout was raised in communication BHR 9/2014 sent on 11/07/2014 by the Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights, on freedom of opinion and expression and on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

continuously lived the region for centuries, giving the island its name, State-sponsored history, featured inter alia in textbooks and promotional material, reportedly marginalizes this past, focusing mainly on recent developments under Al Khalifa rule (since 1783). In doing so, the Government fails to present Bahrain's longer social and cultural development and multiple traditions. This can also be observed in the tourism industry, where no Shia historical or heritage sites are promoted to visitors.

In parallel, the Shia political opposition is presented in state controlled media as being associated with a Safavid loyalist movement. Recalling the past rule of the country by the Persian Safavid dynasty of Iran, this presents the Bahraini Shia as traitors and a foreign-lead threat for the country and displaces them from shared national history. This version of history has been propagated by the media since the events of 2011, consistently promoting a causal link between Shia theology, alleged Iranian expansionism and violent extremism.

Discrimination in the educational system

The educational material, forming the basis of Bahraini compulsory education system, reportedly undermines the cultural and religious identity of Shia Bahraini. In addition to the official history textbooks focusing mainly on recent history and omitting Shia heritage, the public and private school and university curricula are based on the Maliki school of Sunni jurisprudence. The Shia Jafaari tradition, followed by the majority of the Baharna population, is excluded by the Government from the curricula. Country wide, there is only one legally operating Shia specific school, the Jaafari Institute, which enrolls 1'200 elementary and secondary children. This is only a small fraction of the Shia children and adolescents of the country.

Consequently, pupils in the public education system, including those belonging to Shia families, receive insufficient information on the Shia heritage in their country, or even receive inflammatory anti-Shia propaganda at schools. Some educational materials directly denounce Shia followers as infidels. One example, found in Bahraini high school curriculum, teaches that Muslims may only direct petitions to Allah, and that petitioning persons other than Allah is an act of blasphemy. This interpretation conflicts with Shia practice, which states that Muslims may direct their petitions towards highly respected figures, such as the Prophet Mohammed or Issa. Other Shia practices are presented in the government curriculum as blasphemous, such as placing one's forehead on a piece of clay during prayer, praying at mosques built around graves of highly respected figures, or participating in a temporary marriage or "Mutah".

Past efforts to end discrimination against Shia in the education system – a motion to the parliament in 2005 and request to the Ministry of Islamic affairs from the Islamic Ulamaa Scholars Council in 2007 - have been rejected by the Government. In January 2014, the Government filed suit against the Islamic Ulamaa Scholars Council, who advocated for educational reform to include the

Jaafari tradition in teaching. On 29 January 2014, a Bahraini court found the Council guilty of exercising unmonitored political activities and dissolved it.

Discrimination in the media

Since 2010, a set of royal decrees have concentrated information and audio-visual broadcasting services of the country, considered by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry as biased towards the Government and state-controlled. Through the BTV, the Government is in a situation of monopoly of the information. Dissenting journalist and activists have been intimidated, arrested and prosecuted; independent media outlets have been fined and forced to close for providing coverage of the Shia community or civil unrest. This issue has been the concern of a communication earlier this year (BHR 4/2015).

Following the unrest of 2011, the media and state information services have been reportedly used to target the Shia majority. The major news outlets and state television broadcasts omit coverage of Shia news, mock Shia beliefs and engage in hate speech. Broadcasters accuse the Baharna of disloyalty, express doubts of their origins, and slander prominent Shia scholars. Shia mosques have been described as dens for harbouring terrorist activities. It is also alleged that the media treat the information about terrorist attacks differently depending on who the presumed terrorist is: if a Baharna is suspected or arrested, their picture and names are broadcasted. Sunni terrorism suspects remain anonymous. Hate speech and incitement to violence against the Shia community in social media are tolerated by the Government, and their authors even praised as “patriotic”.

Bahraini television broadcasts faith-based programs, but solely rooted in the Sunni theology, and none in the Shia faith of the majority. The Shia religious expressions being interpreted as incitement to sectarianism, the State information services have, through the Cyber Safety Directorate created in November 2013, blocked access in Bahrain to numerous websites expressing views about the Shia belief. Bahraini television dramas mainly portray Baharna characters as terrorists, villains, naïves, bad or minor characters or feature no Baharna characters at all. These practices perpetuate stereotyped images of Baharna as second-class citizens.

Discrimination in public employment and in housing policies

The Shia Bahraini suffers from employment discrimination in public structures. Discrimination is especially prevalent in the Government security services, where Baharna are excluded from positions of responsibility and limited to low-ranking administrative jobs. This is reportedly the case for the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), the National Security Apparatus (NSA) and the police forces. Baharna employed in these agencies typically work in low level administrative positions or as informants. Another critical sector is education: many Shia graduates qualified to work as teachers cannot find positions, while the Government has hired a large number of teachers from other countries, such as Egypt and Jordan.

Inadequate access to housing remains one of the most prominent complaints of the Shia majority. Underprivileged areas often find themselves without sewage systems and water supply. This is particularly critical in the Northern governorate, mainly inhabited by Shia citizens, from where 18,045 housing requests were issued to the Ministry of Housing. In 2012, the ministry has pledged to build 15,000 residential units in this area, but only about 1'000 units have been constructed since then.

Exclusion of Shia Ajam from Bahraini citizenship and economic marginalization

According to information received, a 2008 study estimated that 2000 stateless families resided in Bahrain, many of whom were Shia families that legally qualified for Bahrain citizenship. It is also alleged that the majority of stateless people and of those who are denied citizenship belong to the Ajam ethnic group whose members predominantly belong to the Shia faith. This discriminatory practice in granting citizenship based on ethnicity and religion prevents many Shia and Ajam population from obtaining social welfare programs that are offered by the Government. Furthermore, only few social programs operating in Bahrain reportedly provide Shia with equal benefits as other Bahrainis. Such discrimination makes Shia and Ajam more likely to belong to the nation's lower socioeconomic strata and exposes them to violations of many other human rights such as rights to education, health, housing that are attributed by poverty.

Grave concern is expressed about the wide spectrum and frequency of violence and discriminatory acts against the Shia, including destruction of mosques, obliteration from historical narratives and public space, misinformation and discrediting of the Shia faith in school textbooks and discriminatory treatment in the media, public employment, housing policies and access to citizenship, which point towards a systematic pattern of violence and discrimination against Shia Bahraini, their culture and religion. The situation described appears to violate in many ways the rights to equality and non-discrimination of all persons, to freedom of religion and belief and to take part in cultural life. Association of Shia religious and cultural identity with threats to the country's integrity and security seem to have led to increased suspicions against any forms of political activism from Shia Bahraini, which the numerous reports of arbitrary detention, torture and denaturalization concerning them seems to corroborate. We are also concerned about the statelessness of Shia Ajam and the impact this situation has on all their human rights.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to appeal to your Excellency's Government to seek clarification on the information drawn to our attention. In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **relevant International human rights standards provided in the Annex to this communication.**

It is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention. We would therefore be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information about all relevant measures taken to prevent against excessive use of force by the police and security forces and to ensure accountability for any person responsible of such acts.
3. Please provide the legal basis for the arrest and detention of the Shia clergy members mentioned above and indicate how these are compatible with international human rights standards.
4. Please explain the reasons for the destruction of the mosques and for restricting access to these sites of cultural and religious significance after their destruction, and their compatibility with the human rights standards mentioned in the annex. Please provide as well full details about the steps taken by your Government to fulfill its engagement to rebuild these premises.
5. Please provide information on measures taken to ensure that all people in Bahrain, including citizens of the Shia faith, are being treated equally. Provide especially information about the directives and laws protecting against discrimination in:
 - a. the media
 - b. recruitment and employment policies, especially in the public sectors mentioned above
 - c. access to housing and social welfare programs.
6. Please explain the reasons why the proposed reform of the education system to reduce misinformation about the Shia faith has not been accepted and how the actual education curricula is compatible with your country's human rights obligations. How do the actual curricula respect cultural and religious diversity?
7. Please provide information on measures taken to ensure plural and independent media and prohibit advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, especially against Shia believers.
8. Please provide information about nationality laws and the measures taken by your Government to address the situation of stateless persons,

especially Shia Ajam and children. How are these contributing to ensure full respect for their human rights?

We would appreciate receiving a response within 60 days.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary measures be taken to halt the alleged violations, prevent their re-occurrence and guarantee that the rights and freedoms of the above mentioned persons are respected and, in the event that your investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

Your Excellency's Government's response will be made available in a report to be presented to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Farida Shaheed
Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Philip Alston
Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with the above concerns, we wish to refer your Excellency's Government to articles 2, 18, 19, 20, 26 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR), accessed by Bahrain on 20 September 2006, article 2, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), accessed on 27 September 2007, articles 5 and 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), ratified by your Government on 27 March 1990, article 29 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), accessed on 13 February 1992, as well as relevant UNESCO engagements.

We would also like to draw the attention of your Government to the principles of equality and non-discrimination, which are core elements of the international human rights normative framework and enshrined, inter alia, in article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and articles 2 of the ICESCR, and of the ICCPR. All rights must be enjoyed without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Under international human rights law, the right to equality and non-discrimination also requires states to take positive measures to address systemic disadvantage and unequal enjoyment of rights.

Excessive use of force and abuses targeting Baharna protesters and Shia clerics

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 19 of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression. We would like to remind your Excellency's Government that any restriction to this right shall be provided by law; may only be imposed for one of the grounds set out in article 19 and subparagraphs (a) and (b) of paragraph 3 and must conform to the strict tests of necessity and proportionality.

In paragraph 11 of its General Comment No. 34, the Human Rights Committee provides that ideals of all kinds are guaranteed protection and, more specifically, that "the penalization of a media outlet, publishers or journalist for being critical of the government or the political social system espoused by the government can never be considered to be a necessary restriction of freedom of expression" (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 42).

We would also like to take this opportunity to refer your Excellency's Government to paragraph 79 of the report of the previous Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression where he has expressed his concern "at the continuing existence and use of criminal laws ... which are often used by authorities to suppress 'inconvenient' information and to prevent journalists from reporting on similar matters in the future" as well as the "chilling effect which stifles reporting on issues of public interest." He has emphasized that "Laws imposing

restrictions or limitations must not be arbitrary or unreasonable and must not be used as a means of political censorship or of silencing criticism of public officials or public policies” (A/HRC/14/23).

Destruction of relevant mosques and marginalization in the public space (invisibility)

Concerning the destruction of sites of cultural and religious significances, we would like to remind your Excellency’s Government that freedom of religion does not only entail the right to hold religious beliefs, but also to worship, and for religious groups to maintain places of worship, such as mosques. In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly stated in its Declaration on Religious Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, article 6(a), that the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief includes the freedom “[t]o worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes”. We would also like to draw your attention to the Human Rights Council resolution 6/37, paragraph 9 (e), and General Assembly resolution 63/181, paragraph 9 (i) which urges States, “To exert the utmost efforts, in accordance with their national legislation and in conformity with international human rights and humanitarian law, to ensure that religious places, sites, shrines and symbols are fully respected and protected and to take additional measures in cases where they are vulnerable to desecration or destruction.”

According to international law, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion includes freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. We would also like to recall that the General Assembly, in its resolution 63/181, recalling the language of Human Rights Council’s resolution 6/37, urges “(j) To ensure that all public officials and civil servants, including members of law enforcement bodies, the military and educators, in the course of fulfilling their official duties, respect all religions or beliefs and do not discriminate for reasons based on religion or belief [...]”.

In accordance with article 27 of the UDHR and article 15 of the ICESCR, everyone has the right to take part in cultural life. As stated by the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, this includes for all “the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage”. States “should recognize and value the diversity of cultural heritages present in their territories and under their jurisdiction”. They have the duty “not to destroy, damage or alter cultural heritage [...] and to take measures to preserve/safeguard cultural heritage from destruction or damage by third parties” (A/HRC/17/38, in particular paras. 78 and 80 a and b). This obligation was reiterated in the UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (2003), stressing the responsibility of States not to intentionally destroy their own heritage, “whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization”⁴.

⁴ See section VI: “A State that intentionally destroys or intentionally fails to take appropriate measures to prohibit, prevent, stop, and punish any intentional destruction of cultural heritage of great importance for humanity, whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization, bears the responsibility for such destruction, to the extent provided for by international law.”

As cultural heritage represents values linked with the cultural identity of individuals and communities, access and enjoyment of cultural heritage also imply “contributing to the identification, interpretation and development of cultural heritage, as well as to the design and implementation of preservation/safeguard policies and programmes” and should therefore include consultations with all concerned communities before deciding on the destruction of sites of cultural or religious significance (A/HRC/17/38, para. 58 and 79). The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights recalls that participation of individuals and communities in cultural life is crucial and includes the right to develop multiple references and “contribute to the creation of culture, including through the contestation of dominant norms and values within the communities they belong to as well as those of other communities”. “States should [...] acknowledge, respect and protect the possible diverging interpretations that may arise over cultural heritage” and “the choices of individuals and communities to feel associated (or not) with specific elements of cultural heritages”. (A/HRC/17/38, para.10 and 80 a)

The destruction of “property of cultural and religious significance” is considered by the Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General of the Prevention of Genocide as a significant indicator to be considered in the prevention of atrocity crimes. It is cited in four of the fourteen risk factors developed in the “Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes; a Tool for Prevention” (2014)⁵, and considered by the Special Advisor as an “increased risk of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, when combined with other risk factors”. The Special Advisor stresses that these types of destructions constitute a war crime in themselves, and are understood as a threat to their security by the concerned communities.

Use of historical narrative to marginalize Shia communities and discrimination in the educational system

Cultural and religious sites are also critical resources for safeguarding, questioning and transmitting historical knowledge and narratives of the past, and as such, are resources to ensure the right to education and training without any discrimination, as recognized in article 13 of the ICESCR. The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights warns against the fact that “dominant homogenizing narrative blanches out diversity, ignoring the cultural heritage of everyone outside the group in power, simultaneously depriving the majority of the opportunity to understand the complexity of their country.” (A/68/296, para. 31) and recommends a multiperspective approach to history. She recommended that history teaching and memorial practices foster critical thought, analytic learning and debate, and open spaces to a variety of narratives regarding the past.

States parties to the ICESCR must respect free access by people to their own culture, heritage and other forms of expression, as well as the free exercise of their

⁵ See risk factor 7, indicator 7.11, risk factor 10, indicator 10.8; risk factor 11, indicator 11.1; risk factor 13, indicator 13.5. *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes; a Tool for Prevention*, United Nations, 3 October 2014.

cultural identity and practices. This includes the right to be taught about one's own culture as well as those of others (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment No. 21 on the right to take part in cultural life, E/C.12/C/GC/21, para. 49). According to article 13 of the ICESCR, State Parties should "undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions." Article 29 (c) of the CRC establishes that the education of the child shall be directed to: "The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own."

Discrimination in the media

Concerning attacks against Shia citizens, their culture and belief in the media, we would like to recall that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in General comment No. 21 relating to the right to take part in cultural life (article 15), stressed the right of everyone, individually or in association with others or within a community or group, to freely choose their own cultural identity, to belong or not to belong to a community, and have their choice respected. This includes the right not to be subjected to any form of discrimination based on cultural identity, exclusion or forced assimilation, and the right of all persons to express their cultural identity freely and to exercise their cultural practices and way of life. The Committee also stressed the right of everyone to enjoy freedom of opinion, freedom of expression in the language or languages of their choice, and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds and forms including art forms, regardless of frontiers of any kind. This implies the right of all persons to have access to, and to participate in, varied information exchanges, and to have access to cultural goods and services, understood as vectors of identity, values and meaning. (E/C.12/C/GC/21).

We would like to remind your Excellency's Government of the engagement it has taken during its 2012 UPR by accepting recommendations to "prevent incidents of violence against members of ethnic and religious communities" (recommendation 115.93 in report A/HRC/21/6), and committed itself to take executive and legislative measures "to prevent incitement to sectarianism, violence, and national, religious or racial hatred in the media" (A/HRC/21/6/Add.1/Rev.1, §27).

Exclusion of Shia Ajam from Bahraini citizenship and economic marginalization

We would like to recall that in accordance with article 15 of the UDHR, everyone has the right to a nationality, and no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Social security was recognized as a human right in the UDHR of 1948, which states in article 22 that "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security" and

was subsequently incorporated in a range of international human rights treaties. We would also like to recall that General Comment No. 19 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes that social security “plays an important role in poverty reduction and alleviation, preventing social exclusion and promoting social inclusion” and further states that State parties to ICESCR have the obligation to guarantee that the right to social security is enjoyed without discrimination as the Covenant “prohibits any discrimination, whether in law or in fact, whether direct or indirect, on the grounds of race, colour, sex, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, physical or mental disability, health status (including HIV/AIDS), sexual orientation, and civil, political, social or other status, which has the intention or effect of nullifying or impairing the equal enjoyment or exercise of the right to social security.”

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The signatories of this communication remain at the disposal of the authorities of the Government of Bahrain for any further information, advice or guidance to assist them in their effort to ensure that the fundamental rights and freedoms of all persons living in Bahrain are guaranteed, respected and protected.