

Madame Rapporteur,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, together with Al Salam Foundation, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, would like to thank you for your support of human rights in GCC countries and around the world. We further would like to applaud your continued perseverance on preserving the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural rights in this region.

In your previous report to the Council, your mandate spoke at length about the right of societies to memorialization. In the latest joint communications report, your mandate joined with the mandates on free expression and free assembly to express concerns to the Government of Bahrain regarding the destruction of the Pearl Roundabout and the removal of related imagery from the public square. Your communication voiced apprehension regarding, “what appears to be a policy of removing from public space and public memory the symbol of the pro-democratic movement of Bahrain, and thereof preventing the expression of narratives deviating from the official discourse.” Today, we applaud the painting of the pearl roundabout hanging outside this room which echoes your message that the expression of these narratives should not and will not be silenced.

We continue to be concerned, however, with similar issues of memorialization in Bahrain, particularly with respect to the Government’s active campaign to erase the culture and history of the indigenous Baharna people, a group which represents the majority of the ethnoreligious population in the country. In past years, the vandalization of Al-Barbaghi mosque, a heritage site that dates back even before the Al-Khalifa Kingdom has been an example of systematic disregard for this population’s culture and history. This year, we are particularly concerned with the Ministry of Culture’s plans to finish transforming the iconic Khamis mosque – believed to be the first ever mosque in Bahrain – into a museum, as part of a new project called ‘Our Heritage, Our Wealth’. As a cultural and historic endowment of the Baharna population, whose cultural rights have already been targeted in the past, we are extremely concerned that the appropriation of this mosque could be yet another attack to overwrite or distort the cultural history of the Baharna.

In spite of our concerns, we have certainly been encouraged by your mandate’s recent inquiry into the destruction of pearl roundabout and urge you to continue your work in promoting and safeguarding the protection of cultural rights in the GCC. We wish to conclude our remarks by asking you whether you have received any correspondence from the government of Bahrain on this communication, as it had previously been stated in your joint communications report that the government of Bahrain had failed to respond at that time. Thank you.