

Panel Discussion on National Policies & Human Rights

Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, with the support of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, is honored to contribute to today's discussion on 'National Policies and Human Rights.' We take note of last session's report on technical assistance and capacity building by the Office of the High Commissioner and urge all Member States to take urgent steps to align national policies with a view towards the effective promotion and protection of human rights.

We continue to be concerned that the absence of judicial accountability mechanisms remain at the heart of undermining the effective implementation of human rights protections in national policies in many States. For example, in Bahrain, while we have been encouraged by the creation of a National Institution for Human Rights and Ombudsman office, we are disappointed that these institutions have had little to no impact on the continued occurrences of arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance and torture to extract coerced confessions.

Just last month, human rights defender Husain Jawad Parweez was arrested and taken to the Criminal Investigations Directorate where he was physically tortured, deprived of sleep, food, toilet facilities, and subjected to sexual assault by a female officer. In May 2011, Bahraini Journalist Nazeeha Saeed faced similar abuses. After being physically tortured to coerce her signature to an unknown document, Ms Saeed filed a complaint with the Bahrain ministry of interior. All five officers who took part in her torture have been acquitted by Bahraini courts, despite the nominal measures taken by Bahrain to outlaw torture through national legislation and signing the Convention against Torture.

These cases highlight a pervading gap between legislation and practical implementation of national human rights policies.

We therefore ask the panel, what further steps can be taken by States like Bahrain to bring national practices protecting human rights in-line with nominal policies? We also ask the panel to comment on how States can better enforce practical measures that ensure national and international accountability for human rights beyond the typical emphasis on legislation.

Thank you.