

Mr. President,

With last week's interactive panel discussion on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in mind, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, the Bahrain Institute for Rights & Democracy and the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights applaud the panel's emphasis on learning from historical tragedies as a central consideration for the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Unfortunately, we are increasingly concerned with state-perpetrated discrimination in laws and practices that show little consideration for these historical tragedies observed.

We are even further concerned with situations in which States have taken active measures to integrate discrimination against ethnic and indigenous divisions of society, in clear contravention of the Durban Declaration which seeks to promote 'freedom', 'equality', 'dignity' and 'human rights' for all. Such examples of systematic ethnic discrimination can be observed in Bahrain, where violence against the country's vulnerable Baharna population, an ethno-religious group who are the indigenous people of Bahrain, has been systematic. These attacks have taken several forms, including excessive use of force against peaceful protests, arbitrary imprisonments, torture and defamation, as well as the institutionalization of disadvantaged social circumstances and disproportionate political representation. Specifically, the Baharna group has been systematically excluded from any senior or leadership positions in government, military or security.

The Baharna have also suffered widespread attacks against their cultural rights. Between 30 March and 27 April 2011, the government of Bahrain destroyed a total of 38 mosques, many of which had considerable cultural significance to the Baharna. More recently, the vandalization of the Baharna's cultural heritage site Al-Barbaghi mosque shows clear disregard for the object and purpose of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which emphasizes cultural pluralism and the value of indigenous heritage.

The Durban Declaration recognizes that "indigenous peoples have been victims of discrimination for centuries." We therefore call on all Member States to reaffirm the protection of indigenous peoples and ethnic groups, recognizing the historical importance of these peoples and the historical tragedies of discrimination as a lesson.

Thank you.