

Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain would like to bring to the Council's attention the destruction of religious and cultural sites in Saudi Arabia.

In recent years, the Saudi government has demolished mosques, cemeteries, residences, and historic Ottoman architecture. Many of these sites are sacred to billions of Muslims around the world. Article 60 of the Durban Declaration protects the right of all religious groups to "practice their beliefs" free of "hostile acts and violence." The demolitions violate these international human rights enumerated in the Declaration.

In 2011, the Saudi government authorized a \$21 million plan to modify the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Officials have since destroyed the 17th century portico of the Grand Mosque, the Ghamama Mosque, the House of Khadija bint Khuwaylid, and the Ottoman and Abbasi columns of Dar al-Aqram. In October 2014, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments reported that 95 properties and 126 mosques will be destroyed before the Grand Mosque renovations are complete.

Saudi authorities have destroyed other sites as well. The Mecca Hilton and Royal Clock Tower stand on 400 significant sites, including the home of Abu Bakr, the Ottoman Al-Ajyad Castle, and the Ottoman Al-Ecyad Castle. In February 2014, the General Presidency of the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques announced its plans to demolish the Prophet Mohammed's birthplace to build a residence for the imam of the Grand Mosque.

The Saudi government's systematic destruction of religious and cultural sites has created an environment of animosity and mistrust in the region. The demolitions harm society by preventing visitors from learning about early Islamic history. We therefore call on the Government of Saudi Arabia to facilitate a country visit by the Special Rapporteur on religious freedom to conduct an independent assessment of these demolitions at the earliest possible date.

Thank you.