

Mr. President,

Alsalam Foundation, in coordination with Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy and the European Center for Democracy & Human Rights, would like to call attention to acts by the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council to extraterritorially censor acts of free expression. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action calls on States to recognize and strengthen an individual's right to free expression. Despite this, GCC States have punished human rights defenders for acts of free expression made in Europe and North America.

Last year, Saudi human rights activist Samar Badawi addressed human rights abuses in her country at the Human Rights Council. Afterwards, she traveled to Washington, DC, where she advocated for greater respect for human rights in Saudi Arabia. After her return, Saudi authorities subjected her to a travel ban in retaliation against her advocacy in Europe and the Americas. She remains subject to this travel ban today.

Nabeel Rajab addressed the 27th Session of this Council regarding human rights abuses in Bahrain. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Rajab tweeted statements linking the Bahrain Ministry of Interior to supporters of ISIS. Mr. Rajab was in Belgium when he published these remarks. Upon his return, Bahraini authorities arrested Mr. Rajab, stating that his tweets violated Bahraini law. The government eventually convicted Mr. Rajab on these charges, and remains under a travel ban in Bahrain.

In 2012, Emirati human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor traveled to Switzerland to take part in 21st Session of the HRC. Shortly after his return to the UAE, Mr. Mansoor suffered intimidation, physical assaults, and a travel ban to further restrict his work. Mr. Mansoor claims that his treatment was in retaliation against acts of free expression in Geneva.

In remembering the Vienna Declaration, we call upon all States to respect the freedom of expression both inside and outside their borders. We further call upon European and American States to better protect acts of freedom of expression made by foreign human rights defenders within their borders.

Thank you.