



Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, and the European Center for Democracy and Human Rights would like to welcome the conclusion of the first technical capacity-building program between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Office of High Commissioner. We call on Saudi Arabia to renew this agreement and continue its program of cooperation with OHCHR beyond 2015.

When the program began in 2014, it showed a willingness by the government to collaborate with OHCHR in order to improve its capacity to protect human rights. Additionally, it marked an emerging opportunity to construct durable human rights institutions in Saudi Arabia.

While these efforts certainly represent a step forward, the program's nominal achievements also highlight the need – and public desire – for a lasting and more expansive program. The OHCHR's first training session in the kingdom, for example, was designed for 50 participants; it attracted roughly 200. With the current agreement set to conclude, the Kingdom should neither ignore this demand nor abandon its initial progress. Rather, it should capitalize on these nascent successes by renewing the existing program and extending its parameters to include State institutions and human rights bodies in Saudi Arabia.

Additionally, a renewed program of cooperation with OHCHR should include formalized guarantees for the participation and protection of independent civil society actors in Saudi Arabia. Such guarantees could provide a framework for independent civil society to participate in approved, legal work within the Kingdom, and build a protected space for human rights defenders to carry out their work, and further develop civil society capacity.

We therefore call on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to renew and expand its technical cooperation and capacity-building agreement with the OHCHR. We strongly recommend that any renewed program include formalized participation and protection for independent Saudi civil society, and we urge the Kingdom and OCHRH to expand the parameters of the planned program of work.

Thank you.