



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 February 2021]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Environmental Violations committed by the Government of Bahrain**

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc (ADHRB) welcomes the opportunity at the 46th session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to draw attention to the ongoing climate violations perpetrated by the Government of Bahrain which are negatively impacting the local environment, particularly coastal areas.

### **Bahrain's Local Environment**

Bahrain resides within the heart of the Arabian Gulf, an archipelago of 33 natural islands with an additional 51 artificial ones, it comprises a total area of 765 sq. km.

The largest of Bahrain's islands is Manama, the capital, and comprises approximately 85 percent of the country's total land mass. Manama consists mostly of rocky and bare terrain, apart from the narrow fertile strip located along the island's North and North-Western Coast.

Bahrain has a population of approximately 1.5 million people and is particularly vulnerable to plastic waste. Bahrain's waters have been historically known for their richness of wildlife and are home to over 200 different fish species. Fishing, particularly pearl fishing, plays a significant role in Bahraini history as it was the primary means of subsistence for the Bahraini people for centuries. The sea is so important to Bahraini identity and culture that its name means two seas in Arabic, a tribute to its natural heritage of sweet water springs and salty seawater.

### **Effects of the Government of Bahrain's Policies on the Environment**

In 2003, the Bahraini government adopted the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030, which serves as the country's plan for social and economic development. Its primary aim is to transform Bahrain's economy to ensure sustainability, diversity, and justice. This development plan is tied to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **Effects of Rapid Urbanization**

Over the recent decades, Bahrain has witnessed a significant urban boom. Such urbanization covers the construction of housing markets, manufacturing utilities, office complexes, infrastructure, etc. However, this rapid urbanization is not designed to meet the natural flux of the local population. Rather, its aim is to profiteer off real estate and the open-door policy in place for the expatriate workforce, which has led to a tripling of Bahrain's population in the span of two decades. This substantive urban boom has resulted in a resounding increase in the very human and material activities which substantially increase pollution levels. This intensifying of pollution, alongside a rise in average temperatures and less seasonal rain has contributed greatly to the erasure of local marine life.

Moreover, the effects of pollution have detrimental effects on the local Bahraini population as well as its marine life. The area around the village of Ma'ameer in Bahrain is known for its large industrial complex which handles petrochemicals, aluminium smelting, and concrete and asphalt production. Local residents in the area have reported detrimental health consequences as a result of the highly toxic pollution they are exposed to in their residential and public spaces. The children of this area are particularly affected by this pollution with cancer rates, birth defects, and the likelihood of physical abnormalities being higher in Ma'ameer than anywhere else in the country.

## **Effects of Land Reclamation**

Additionally, since the 1970s, but increasingly in the last two decades, Bahrain has been witnessing an increasing reclamation of lands from the sea. Bahrain's terrestrial area in 1971 was 650 sq. km, however, by 2019 its terrestrial area had increased to 780 sq. km. Moreover, the Green Belt surrounding Manama has been steadily shrinking with the government failing to establish new green zones as a form of compensation. This has caused significant disruption to the local environment and has contributed to the deterioration of the climate. This alongside Bahrain's high pollution levels and flat topography puts the country at high risk of being submerged by rising sea levels. One of the major contributors to local pollution in Bahrain are the sizeable electricity generating stations, which are powered by hydrocarbon gas and reside within close proximity of urban areas.

## **Actions Should be Taken by Bahrain to Protect the Environment**

In order to address the critical climate challenges facing the country and, in an effort, to reduce its plastic consumption, the Bahraini government joined the UN Environment Programme's global Clean Seas campaign in 2018. In June 2019, the government passed a ministerial order to regulate and phase out the use of plastic bags across the country. This order also aims to ban the import of bags that are non-biodegradable, and future phases include a permanent ban on the use of plastic at certain malls and supermarkets. The government also plans to increase recycling through increasing the total number of recycling facilities available to reduce plastic waste. The Supreme Council for the Environment, in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism is working on policies and guidelines for suppliers and manufacturers to guarantee a smooth transition away from the use of plastic.

While the government has taken some constructive steps to protect the environment these have not been substantial enough to halt the threat of climate change. Bahrain has failed to produce any concrete plans for a shift away from hydrocarbon fuel, with its gas emissions, to renewable sources of energy, despite being a perfect candidate for solar energy due to its sunny climate. The government has also failed to produce any major plantation projects for green zones. Moreover, Bahrain has quite a high proportion of cars to its population size and has failed to promote the use of electric cars.

In a document filed to the UN's Green Climate Fund (GCF), Bahrain's Supreme Council of Environment stated that the country is "severely threatened by climate change." The 104-page document also specifically mentioned the threats facing the country's water sector which are caused by increasing temperatures and concomitant increases in demand for water, rising sea levels which cause saline intrusion into aquifers and higher intensity of rainfall, which decreases rates of aquifer recharge. Of particular concern is the Bahraini government's treatment of environmental human rights defenders. Those who attempt to actively speak out against the disastrous effects of climate change are routinely persecuted by government officials, thereby denying their right to freedom of expression. The protection of human rights defenders, including environmental human rights defenders, remains a serious cause of concern in Bahrain. This is unlikely to change as long as the government insists on targeting, arresting, and even killing activists due to their humanitarian activities.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As a member of the UN HRC, it is imperative that Bahrain be held to high standard when it comes to its commitments to human rights, which is inextricably tied to the protection of the environment. The Bahraini government's failure to adequately protect the environment, its ongoing economic and development policies, and its persecution of environmental human rights defenders are deeply concerning. Despite nominal measures to protect the environment through the banning of plastic, these steps mean nothing if the government

does not take concrete steps to protect its environment and halts its ongoing crackdown on activists.

ADHRB urges the Government of Bahrain to:

- Immediately drop all charges against and release all environmental human rights defenders targeted for their activism;
  - Develop extensive public transportation infrastructure, such as a metro and public bus system, with incentives to reduce the reliance on private cars;
  - Promote the use of electric cars to reduce carbon emissions;
  - Switch to renewable energy sources, such as solar power; and
  - Establish Green Zones and promote natural conservation projects.
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