



المجلس الأعلى للمرأة
Supreme Council for Women



Speech By:

Her Excellency Dr. Shaikha Mariam bint Hassan Al Khalifa
Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Women
Head of the Kingdom of Bahrain's delegation

**To discuss Bahrain's report of the Convention on the Elimination of
all forms of Discrimination Against Women.**

(CEDAW)

Genève 30th October 2008

Your Excellency Mrs. Dubravka Simonovic, Chairperson of the
Committee
Honourable Members of the Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me a great honour on behalf of myself and my colleagues the members of the official delegation, to meet with your much respected Committee to discuss the first and second reports as well as the supplementary report of the Kingdom of Bahrain which are included in document No **CEDAW/C/BAH/2/ADD.1** dated **6 June 2008** on the Kingdom's implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. I feel proud that the delegation comprises of Bahraini figures from all relevant bodies concerned with the application of the Convention including the Legislative, Judicial and Executive authorities in addition to civil society members such as lawyers working on concerted efforts to give effect to the rights provided for in the Convention in favour of Bahraini women.

Your Excellency the Chairperson of the Committee

Please allow me to start with an introduction about the characteristics of the Bahraini society which is an open society. No inferiority or superiority concept because of race, sex or religion, since the principles of the Islamic faith is based on the idea of equality, the rejection of discrimination, and acceptance of others. In addition, the Bahraini Constitution provides that personal freedoms are guaranteed, and that justice and equal opportunities are essential to the community. The principle of equality is also confirmed through the respect for human dignity.

In such a society, and since ages, women have shared men in the conservation, development and advancement of society. Thanks to this ambition, we find their achievements clear in various stages of development and modernization since the beginning of the last century to the present day. Women have played a prominent role in education development and have been the engine behind the establishment of official girl schools since 1928. The selection of the first day of December as the Bahraini Woman Day to be celebrated each year with national consensus is only the culmination of the honourable and brave role of women in Bahrain. This year it falls with the 80th anniversary of the beginning of formal education for women in Bahrain.

Bahraini women have invested all the equal human rights provided by their religion optimally, joined all levels of education and successfully applied all what they have learnt in building a modern society. They topped all ranks of honour in the field of education and employment.

This honourable role had a great impact on recognizing women's rights at constitutional and legislative levels. The texts of the Constitution of 1973 confirmed that citizens are equal in rights and duties. This was followed by the issuance of the National Action Charter in 2001 which stressed clearly and unambiguously that citizen means both men and women. Tantamount to the reform and modernization project of His Majesty the King which is adopted by the constitutional amendment issued in 2002.

All these achievements are crowned by the accession of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. This was as a result of the official and public concerted efforts that confirm the Kingdom's belief and commitment to enhance the role of Bahraini women and to empower them in the political, economic, social and cultural domains, and in order to push forward the community movement with high effectiveness towards achieving full undiminished equality in rights through combating all forms of discrimination against women at all levels.

Since the accession of the Kingdom to this Convention, many efforts were exerted to put the convention into practice, particularly with regard to the elimination of many improper practices.

In order to shed light on the official efforts exerted in this regard, I would like to note in particular, that these efforts focused on the fruitful cooperation between all State institutions and bodies, the civil society on one hand, and the Supreme Council for women on the other. The Supreme Council for Women, presided by Her Highness Shaikha Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of His Majesty the King, is considered as a meeting point between these official institutions and bodies as executive authorities and the civil society as demanding establishments. The Supreme Council for Women played an effective role in this regard, in order to institutionalize and streamline the achievements to fulfill the aspirations. The Council has prepared a strategy for the advancement of women, in cooperation with civil society institutions. The Strategy has been approved by His Majesty the King, and thus was

the first unprecedented opportunity in the Arab world. It was provided to the official institutions and bodies to be incorporated in their development plans and programmes to complete the integration of women requirements and to achieve the equality of opportunities.

I would also like to refer to the national plan for the implementation of the strategy for the advancement of Bahraini women, prepared by the Supreme Council for Women in collaboration with civil institutions and the private sector, in which the vision is based on the fact that (women as capable partners in building the society). The national plan's mission is to support women, raise their awareness to their rights and to qualify them professionally and scientifically. The basis of this plan is justice, equality of treatment, transparency, clarity of goals, efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of the themes adopted by the plan.

For the effective implementation of this action plan, cooperation protocols were initiated. The cooperation protocol between the Supreme Council for Women, the Government and civil society institutions came to reflect the partnership required to activate the implementation of this plan. On the official level this is reflected through the existing cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and the issuance of the Circular by the Minister of Finance on July 7, 2008 on the instructions for the review of the estimates required for the general budget of the State for the financial years (2009 – 2010). The assessed budgets clearly reflected the requirements of the national plan to implement the strategy for the advancement of Bahraini women.

In addition to this, there is a cooperation protocol between the Supreme Council for Women and the Women's Union and cooperation programmes with the societies and women committees.

The creation of the Award of Her Highness Shaikha Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa for the Empowerment of Bahraini Women came to encourage the ministries, governmental and private institutions to support and empower Bahraini women and strengthen their role and presence in all ministries and private institutions. This comes as a mechanism of including the needs of women in decision making. The initiative of Her Highness Shaikha Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, was launched to honour distinguished Bahraini women in all fields and to promote the Bahraini high competencies to make further contribution and achievement. The recent appointments to the posts of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States of America and the Adviser to the General Secretary of the Arab League are more gains achieved for

the Bahraini women at this level to be added to all facts mentioned in the report.

To implement the Kingdom of Bahrain's obligations towards the Millennium Development Goals, the Supreme Council for Women, under the High Patronage of His Majesty the King, organized the "National Conference on Gender Mainstreaming in Development" in June 2008 in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The conference aimed at specifying the obstacles and finding solutions.

The Consultative meetings organized by the Council with women associations and committees in various global or Arab women occasions, are considered good opportunities to exchange views and dialogue within the framework of the empowerment of women and including its challenges , but not limited to the expanded meeting held on March 4, 2008 in which the two reports were reviewed in order to receive comments and views of these institutions to be added in the supplementary report submitted to your respectable Committee. In addition to the meeting to review the findings and recommendations of the report of human rights with regards to the part on the empowerment of women, as well as the consultative meeting in which a proposal on the Bahraini woman day was introduced.

Your Excellency,

In order to achieve integration between public and private establishments we were keen on the collective work during the preparation of these reports to give the opportunity to all official and civil society organizations to contribute.

In the preparation of this report, we have observed the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Goals as well as the principles and objectives of promoting respect for and protection of human rights. We have also included in the report the drawbacks and challenges we face while applying the CEDAW convention.

The preparation and contents of this framework reflects our keenness to gain from the expertise of your esteemed committee on one hand and building on the achievements accomplished on real grounds on the other hand in order to enhance the status of women continuously.

We hope that as a result of the consideration of the Kingdom of Bahrain's report by the CEDAW committee to be able to support the national efforts to overcome the difficulties faced by Bahraini women and restrain their eligibility to their legislative, constitutional and legal rights. The absence of a family law and the urgency to work on finding legislative and executive measures to face the problem of violence against women and the problem of the children of Bahraini women married to foreigners come on the top of the difficulties.

Hence, the national measures taken to minimize the size of these problems which are as follows shall not be ignored:

- **Amendment of the Procedural law before the Law courts** giving a sense of urgency to family lawsuits.
- **Amendment of the Evidence Act** to facilitate evidence procedures for the participation of women in household spending
- **Amendment of marriage contract** to ensure the inclusion of conditions for the regulation of matters of marriage between the man and woman
- **Issuance of Marriage officials Regulations** to ensure that marriage contract is signed in accordance with the terms and conditions stipulated by the law and safeguard and guarantee the rights of women. It also included the minimum age for marriage for both parties, noting in this context that early marriages remain rare in the kingdom
- This is in addition to granting **Bahraini citizenship to a number of children of Bahraini women** married to foreigners, through the powers of HM the King and the formation of a joint committee between the Supreme Council for Women and stakeholders to consider the various aspects of the issue of nationality
- Resolution No. (12) for the year 2004 was also issued ensuring the right of Bahraini women **in the use of housing services**
- **Alimony Fund** to ensure coverage of the service for children of Bahraini women married to foreigners, provided that they are residing in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Your Excellency,

The Kingdom of Bahrain's ratification to a number of International Conventions in the field of human rights such as the International covenant for civil and political rights and the International covenant on the economic, social and cultural rights. This along with the agreements of the World Labour Organisation and Bahrain's active participation as a member in the Arab Women Organisation and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. In addition to the United Nation's conferences related to women, and the periodic review of human rights. All the above results in the national obligation towards women issues in peace and development in particular and human issues in general. Therefore, indicating the strategic economic vision until 2030 which was launched by His Majesty the King during this month which is based on the principle of justice among citizens. The execution of the vision is considered compliant to all state institutions and it is the first economic strategy launched on the regional level. In addition to the conference which the Kingdom of Bahrain will host in the beginning of 2009 on combating human trafficking.

Your Excellency,

As a conclusion I would like to stress that our continuous discussion with your esteemed committee and the comments and recommendations presented by the committee will be a point of concern and follow up by us. Considering their efforts that complete our national efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

It is our pleasure, as members of the Bahraini delegation to participate in this dialogue and respond to any queries or clarifications posed by the Committee members.

Thank you for Listening