

mardi 8 avril 2008

Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Monday 7 April 2008

The first meeting of the first session of the Working Group on the UPR (7-18 April 2008) was opened by the Council President, who noted the "historic day" of this new mechanism. Many delegations echoed these remarks during the day of the Council having embarked on an historic process. The Council President concluded the day by noting the positive spirit in which the review had taken place and that a standard had been set by today's exercise.

Morning

Review of Bahrain

H.E. Dr. Nizar Albaharna, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain presented the national report and headed the 27-member State delegation. 36 Members States and Observer States took the floor during the inter-active dialogue.

H.E. Dr. Nizar Albaharna, quoting UN former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said how the UPR represents the first human rights innovation of this millennium, as it is the spirit of our age. Bahrain has a deep commitment in the respect and protection of human rights, and considers the UPR as a privilege and a responsibility.

Issues addressed during the review included steps taken and planned to ensure equality and non-discrimination of women, the role of the Supreme Council of Women and reform measures to eliminate forced marriages; the independence of the judiciary; the freedom of expression and association; labour polices; the access to water, health services and adequate housing; access to primary and secondary education; and efforts to improve conditions for migrant workers. Other issues raised included the State's intention to sign and ratify the Convention on Forced Disappearances; plans to lift its reservation to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; and steps taken to ensure that the State's counter-terrorism law was in compliance with the ICCPR. The State noted its process towards establishing an NHRI, which it expected to be operational in 2008, and referred to campaigns against human trafficking as well as current debates of a draft law on nationality.

Concerning the capital law, H.E. Dr. Nizar Albaharna underlined how this practise is hardly applied, except for very serious cases.

The Bahraini representatives expressed their country's dedication to learn from other countries how to better guarantee the respect of human rights, also by sharing experiences and practices.

Considering the UPR as an effective tool of technical assistance for the protection of human rights, Bahrain is committed to country visits and special rapporteurs.

During the inter-active dialogue, all countries which took the floor pleased Bahrain for their report, for being the first country to be reviewed and for its commitment in the field of human rights.

India and Switzerland expressed their desire to know the effective steps taken by Bahrain for the protection of migrant workers.

The French delegation asked Bahrain how it is actually guaranteeing the independence of the juridical system, which reforms have been undertaken to prevent forced weddings, and if Bahrain is willing to sign the convention against enforced disappearance.

The UK pleased Bahrain for the good steps carried out since independence, its move to democracy also regarding the improvement of human rights. Nonetheless the UK underlined how press freedom must be ensured.

In response to those countries who asked Bahrain how it is actually improving the condition of women, the Bahraini delegation stated that women's role is growing in the country, as the Supreme Council ensures women rights. The King has also enabled women to stand for elections and vote. (the first woman member of the parliament also took the floor).

The Bahraini delegation also pointed out the assistance provided to the victims of violence and human trafficking.

In all Bahraini schools' curricula, a new subject has been introduced aimed to spread the awareness of human rights-related issues and international conventions.

H.E. Dr. Nizar Albaharna stated that his Government is proud of the health care and education provided to its population. Quoting the words of the King, H.E. Dr. Nizar Albaharna said that by developing the people, Bahrain will develop.

The three Council members serving as the rapporteurs (i. e. the troika) for the review of Bahrain are Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Sri Lanka.

The UPR Working Group is scheduled to adopt the report of Bahrain on Wednesday 9 April.

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Publié par Timor-Leste in Geneva à l'adresse [06:24](#)