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National report submitted in accordance with resolutions 5/1 and 16/21 of the Human Rights Council*

Bahrain

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. The Kingdom of Bahrain submitted its third national report to the Human Rights Council in February 2017, and it was adopted by the Council in May of the same year. In September 2017, Bahrain fully supported 139 recommendations. It took note of 36 recommendations because they were incompatible with certain national laws based on the provisions of the Islamic sharia, because they would require the amendment of laws that were still being considered by the legislative authority, or because they would require additional scrutiny and vigorous action to change specific social patterns. In addition to the report, the Kingdom of Bahrain submitted a voluntary report in 2019 on the action and measures taken by the Kingdom to implement the recommendations issued in the context of the universal periodic review.

2. In line with its obligations, the Kingdom of Bahrain hereby submits its fourth national report on developments relating to the previous recommendations and its international commitments, and highlights the Kingdom's progress in promoting and protecting human rights through an institutional, legislative and political framework.

II. Methodology and procedure for preparation of the report

A. Methodology for preparation of the report

3. In line with the plan that has been implemented since the Kingdom of Bahrain chose to be the first country to submit a report under the universal periodic review mechanism, the Kingdom has sought to promote the participation of society in the preparation of its reports.

4. The High Coordinating Committee for Human Rights, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, held a number of meetings to study the recommendations concerning the third national report under the universal periodic review mechanism, which was adopted in September 2017, and adopted many important decisions aimed at implementing the recommendations that had been supported by the Kingdom. The Committee's mandate requires it to coordinate with governmental agencies and official institutions on all matters relating to human rights and to prepare the reports of the Kingdom of Bahrain to United Nations organizations (annex 1).

5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also held four consultation meetings with civil society organizations, in which more than 30 people participated. The aforementioned recommendations were reviewed in detail, and the actions and comments of civil society organizations and other stakeholders were taken into account in the drafting of the fourth national report.

B. Procedure for preparation of the report

6. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the relevant official bodies and civil society organizations in order to obtain their views on what had been achieved in the area of human rights in terms of the results and recommendations of the universal periodic review mechanism during the period 2017–2022. The views and ideas that were discussed and shared with the parties concerned resulted in a joint conviction that the information provided in the periodic review report should be based on the principles of transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability, non-discrimination and inclusiveness.

7. The High Coordinating Committee for Human Rights was responsible for preparing the report, and a team from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was tasked with collecting the information required for the purpose from governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

8. Care was taken in preparing the report to group the measures taken by the Kingdom into clusters based primarily on the division of the recommendations as they appear in the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review entitled "Views on

conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review” ([A/HRC/36/3/Add.1](#)).

III. The most important developments and achievements in the area of human rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain since September 2017

9. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic presented a global challenge that had a major impact in all areas, particularly in the health-care, economic and social sectors. However, the Kingdom of Bahrain was determined to take vigorous action to protect, respect and promote human rights in all areas to the best of its ability. The most prominent initiatives are set out below.

10. With a view to enhancing the Kingdom’s human rights achievements within a planned and coordinated framework, and in line with its belief in the importance of strengthening the infrastructure for a preventive and protective human rights system, the Council of Ministers adopted the National Human Rights Plan (2022–2026). The Plan comprises the following four basic components: civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; the rights of groups requiring priority care; and solidarity rights. The Plan contains 17 main objectives, 34 sub-objectives and 102 projects that cover virtually all bodies and sectors, the aim being to achieve the desired comprehensive and collective goals, particularly in the areas of legislation, institutional development and capacity-building.

11. The Kingdom of Bahrain developed a pioneering module to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions by means of proactive plans and remedial measures that enabled public life to continue functioning without requiring the adoption of exceptional measures such as partial or total restrictions on movement. The Kingdom also launched a financial and economic package in March 2020, which provided support for individuals and the private sector. Its most important results were: maintenance of the private sector’s ability to operate; reduction of layoffs or dismissals on economic grounds; and support for and enhancement of the financial status of the most affected sectors. Additional action was taken by the Government to address the impact of the pandemic through the announcement of an economic recovery plan, which included five financial and economic packages involving more than 40 initiatives, which were funded by more than 4.5 billion Bahraini dinars (BD).

12. With regard to health care, a total of 30,000 medical examinations were conducted on a daily basis, which is one of the highest rates in the world. Examinations, treatment and vaccinations were provided free of charge to all citizens and residents on an equal basis. As a result, 84 per cent of the total population were vaccinated.

13. In line with the Kingdom’s commitment to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their incorporation into all governmental programmes and projects, Decree No. 25 of 2022 introduced a reshuffle of the Council of Ministers that included the establishment of a Ministry of Sustainable Development to promote the achievement of that objective.

A. Reports submitted by the Kingdom of Bahrain

14. The Kingdom of Bahrain has taken vigorous action to meet its obligation to submit reports to the treaty bodies. It has submitted the following reports:

- The fourth periodic report on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- The combined eighth to fourteenth periodic reports on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- The fourth periodic report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

- The initial report on the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- The combined fourth to sixth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- The combined first and second reports to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- The initial report on implementation of the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the initial report of the Kingdom of Bahrain on the implementation of the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

B. New human rights legislation (annex 2)

- Act No. 4 of 2021 promulgating the Act on Restorative Justice for Children and on Their Protection from Ill-treatment;
- Act No. 18 of 2017 on Penalties and Alternative Measures, as amended in 2021. The amendments to the Act provide broader possibilities for requests to replace the sentence that has been imposed, either before or after execution of the penalty;
- Act No. 23 of 2018 promulgating the Health Insurance Act;
- Legislative Decree No. 59 of 2018 amending the Private Sector Labour Code and prohibiting discrimination against workers and the offence of sexual harassment;
- Act No. 19 of 2017 promulgating the Family Code.

IV. Action and measures taken by the Kingdom of Bahrain to implement the recommendations of the universal periodic review

The right to life (recommendation 78)

15. The legislature of the Kingdom of Bahrain adopted the death penalty but decided that it should be imposed in accordance with the safeguards enshrined in article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Accordingly, the death penalty may be imposed only for the most serious crimes, such as premeditated murder as an aggravating circumstance, and certain crimes of high treason.

16. Similarly, the death penalty prescribed in Act No. 58 of 2006 on the Protection of Society from Terrorist Acts, as amended, was imposed for any crime punishable under ordinary law with life imprisonment if it was committed for a terrorist purpose, and also for some of the crimes defined in Act No. 15 of 2007 on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, inasmuch as such crimes pose a grave danger to society and its human and economic components.

17. The imposition of the death penalty in the Kingdom of Bahrain is extremely rare, due to the fact that judges are legally entitled to choose between the death penalty and penalties involving deprivation of liberty. In addition, they are empowered to reduce penalties in circumstances that justify commutation. Furthermore, an important safeguard provided by the Bahraini judicial system is the requirement of unanimity on the part of judges at all stages of the proceedings. As appeals against the death penalty are mandatory by force of law, such cases must pass through all stages of litigation.

Sustainable development (recommendations 64, 65, 66 and 67)

18. The Government has taken all necessary steps to implement policies and programmes aimed at comprehensive and sustainable development through its programmes for 2015–2018 and 2019–2022. The Government has adopted the policies and procedures required to ensure the alignment of the national priorities contained in the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. They are also reflected in the Government's programme in terms of goals and objectives, implementation procedures in various areas of relevance and monitoring of their implementation.

19. Two of the six core components of the Government's programme for 2019–2022, namely sovereignty and governmental performance, are designed to promote peace, justice and good governance in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16.

20. The Government's current programme includes nine general objectives that it sought to achieve during the period from 2019 to 2022. They are reflected in the following three strategic priorities that intersect with the main areas of the Sustainable Development Goals: strengthening of the basic pillars of the State and society; financial sustainability and economic development; securing an environment that supports sustainable development. The Council of Ministers has instructed all ministries and governmental bodies to align their goals, plans and policies under the Government's current programme with the Sustainable Development Goals.

21. The Government has succeeded in achieving a balance between security and development in a stable environment. It continues to chart its path towards development and to devote action and resources to promotion of the well-being of citizens and residents.

22. The Strategic Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (2021–2022), which was signed by the Kingdom of Bahrain and 21 United Nations agencies, is the first of its kind in the region. It is fully aligned with the development strategies and policies of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the five streams of work listed in the United Nations framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19.

Criminal justice (recommendations 79, 80, 81, 82, 87, 94, 100, 102, 112, 127, 128, 130 and 167)

23. With regard to recommendations 79, 80 and 81, the Bahraini justice systems provides no protection or safeguards against prosecution for any State officials, even ministers, and there are no special courts for them. National mechanisms and oversight institutions, such as the National Human Rights Institution, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Special Investigation Unit, continue, in accordance with their fields of competence, to investigate and ensure the accountability of government officials who have deliberately perpetrated acts that breach the law and that violate the right to life, the right not to be subjected to torture, or the right to liberty and security of person, or who have negligently caused the torture or ill-treatment of civilians. The aim is to institute criminal and disciplinary legal proceedings against them, including persons occupying civilian or military leadership positions.

24. The Special Investigation Unit is responsible for determining the criminal responsibility of government officials for crimes of torture and ill-treatment, and for ensuring the accountability of any persons proven to have been involved in such crimes, regardless of their status. The Unit's work has resulted, over the years, in the referral of 181 accused police officers for criminal and disciplinary legal proceedings, and deterrent penalties were imposed on officers who were found guilty. This action has led to a reduction in such offences by more than 70 per cent. In addition, a Victims and Witnesses Affairs Division has been established within the Unit to implement legal protection measures on behalf of victims and their families and to provide them with the necessary support.

25. The Office of the Ombudsman examines and investigates all complaints submitted to it regarding infringements by police officers and takes the necessary legal measures. It also seeks to improve the environment of prisoners and detainees by receiving, analysing and

issuing recommendations on requests for assistance. From the date of its establishment in 2013 until the end of April 2021, the Office received 7,249 complaints and requests for assistance (2,370 complaints and 4,879 requests for assistance). It investigated them and took the necessary legal action, either by referring them to the competent judicial and disciplinary authorities or by archiving them in the absence of any wrongful act.

26. With a view to developing procedures and legislation in line with recommendations 82, 87, 100, 102, 112, 127, 128 and 130, the powers of the Office of the Ombudsman were enhanced and its mandate was expanded to include all staff of the Ministry of the Interior, including law enforcement officers and civilians. It was granted the authority to visit prisons and remand centres in order to ensure that inmates and detainees were not being subjected to torture or ill-treatment.

27. The Commission for the Rights of Prisoners and Detainees plays a key role in monitoring prisons and places of detention in the broad sense of the term. Between August 2014 and May 2022, the Commission conducted 22 comprehensive announced and unannounced inspection visits. The results of the visits were published in detailed reports on its website. Its operating procedures are in line with relevant international and United Nations standards and with international best practices.

28. The National Human Rights Institution studies the human rights complaints that it receives, refers them, where appropriate, to the competent authorities and monitors their implementation. It also monitors cases involving human rights violations and undertakes the necessary investigations. It undertakes field visits to correctional institutions, places of detention or any other place where persons are suspected of being exposed to human rights violations.

29. The judiciary in the Kingdom of Bahrain operates in accordance with the law and within an integrated and binding legislative framework in which no discrimination or exception is tolerated. As the achievement of justice requires that rulings should take mitigating or aggravating circumstances into account, the law enables members of the judiciary to take the compatibility and appropriateness of the circumstances into account in determining the penalty, such as premeditation and surveillance in the commission of a crime, commission of a crime at nighttime, and mitigating legal circumstances such as the young or old age of the accused. All such procedures must respect the limits prescribed by law, and members of the judiciary, whether they be judges or public prosecutors, have no right to violate the procedural and punitive provisions laid down by law.

30. Act No. 52 of 2012 amended the definition of torture contained in articles 208 and 232 of the Criminal Code and included a provision to the effect that the statute of limitations shall not be applicable to torture.

31. In addition, article 81 of the Public Security Forces Act, as amended by Act No. 49 of 2012, stipulates that cases involving allegations of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or death related thereto shall not be deemed to constitute military offences.

32. The legislature amended the Code of Criminal Procedure in order to ensure that its provisions comply with international norms. It authorized the Public Prosecution Service to investigate cases of torture, ill-treatment or death related thereto which allegedly occurred during criminal proceedings. Accordingly, the Special Investigation Unit was established as an independent judicial body to perform that function.

33. Article 253 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that: "Judges shall adjudicate cases in complete freedom, based on the convictions that they form. However, it is not permissible for them to base their judgements on any evidence that was not presented during the hearing or any statement which is found to have been made by an accused person or witness under coercion or threats. Such statements shall be deemed null and void and unreliable."

34. With regard to recommendations 100, 102 and 112, criminal proceedings are not instituted by the competent authorities in the Kingdom of Bahrain against natural or legal persons for engaging in political, rights-related or social activities. The Criminal Code focuses on wrongful acts, while the aforementioned activities are safeguarded by Bahraini legislation, such as the Political Associations Act and the Clubs and Associations Act. Legal

provisions are respected in the area of criminal accountability, and no persons are charged unless they have committed an act that has been explicitly defined as an offence and unless there is compelling evidence, which may not be based on a confession. In addition, no groups are subjected to reprisals and human rights defenders are not targeted. Everyone is protected by the country's legislation, and there are national means of redress to protect and promote human rights.

35. In line with the findings of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, the Public Prosecution Service decided to drop all charges that undermined the right to freedom of opinion and expression. As a result, a number of cases were finally resolved and 334 defendants benefited from the withdrawal of the charges. However, some cases are still in progress because they concern other offences of a different nature involving acts of violence and vandalism against persons and against private and public property.

36. All judgments handed down by the National Safety Courts have been assessed and reviewed to determine their consistency with international human rights norms by a special judicial committee. The committee was established by a decision of the Supreme Judicial Council on 2 January 2012 to have the judgments examined on the basis of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. This led to the commutation of some sentences, the quashing of others, the release of some convicted persons and the expiry of the conviction of others.

37. With regard to recommendations 94 and 167, the Kingdom underscores that the Bahraini legal system criminalizes all acts that constitute the crime of enforced disappearance. Article 19 of the Constitution stipulates that no one may be arrested, detained, imprisoned or searched, compelled to reside in a specified place or restricted in his freedom of residence or movement except as provided by law and under judicial supervision. The same article stipulates that no person may be detained or imprisoned in locations other than those designated in the prison regulations, and that they shall be subject to control by the judicial authority. No one may be subjected to physical or mental torture, enticement or degrading treatment. In addition, any statement or confession found to have been obtained through torture, inducement or similar treatment, or any threat thereof, shall be deemed null and void. In addition, article 61 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that no one may be arrested or detained other than by order of the legally competent authorities. He must be treated in a manner that preserves his human dignity and may not be subjected to physical or mental harm. He is also entitled to contact his lawyer and his family.

38. Many effective measures have been adopted by the Ministry of the Interior with a view to safeguarding accused persons. For instance, arrests must be undertaken in accordance with the legal procedures set forth in article 61 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and they must be subject to the direction and oversight of the Public Prosecution Service and the supervision of the judiciary. The Ministry's security centres and the Public Prosecution Service have also established a joint criminal database to maintain electronic records. The time of their registration in the database may not be modified (the date and time of a person's arrest). Concerned parties or relatives of accused persons may easily contact a specialized security centre to enquire about their situation and location.

Citizenship (recommendations 149, 150, 151, 152 and 174)

39. As one of the restrictions that may be imposed on civil rights, including the right to citizenship, is the need to protect national security, according to the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and as the granting of citizenship includes both a legal dimension and a security dimension owing to the small size of the Kingdom's territory, the question as to whether Bahraini women should be permitted to pass their nationality to their children has been studied with great interest, in cooperation with the legislature and in discussions that take these two important dimensions into account. The Kingdom endeavours, in this context, to guarantee the rights of children of Bahraini women married to foreigners by adopting measures aimed at safeguarding the children's right to benefit from educational and health services and a range of established government services, in accordance with Act No. 35 of 2009, and it seeks to ensure that the children are treated in

the same manner as Bahraini children. These measures have proved highly beneficial for children of Bahraini women and have reduced the number of problems pertaining to non-enjoyment of Bahraini citizenship.

40. The Kingdom of Bahrain has reviewed relevant legislation with a view to ensuring complete stability for Bahraini women and their children. One of the foremost examples of this action was the adoption of Decree No. 24 of 2022 concerning the granting of an entry visa and a family residence permit to first-degree relatives of Bahrainis, wives of Bahrainis and foreign husbands of Bahraini women, facilitating the granting of entry visas for a lengthy period to children of non-residents when they wish to visit the Kingdom, and facilitating the procedures for issuing children with travel documents for specific periods in special cases, for instance when they travel abroad for studies or treatment.

41. A number of laws concerning alimony, care, benefits for people with disabilities and social security treat the children of a Bahraini women married to a foreigner as Bahrainis.

42. With regard to recommendation 174, the provisions of the Bahraini Citizenship Act concerning the regulations governing the granting, withdrawal or revocation of citizenship are similar to those contained in the citizenship laws of many countries throughout the world. Citizenship is revoked pursuant to judgments handed down for the commission of criminal offences that undermine State security. Such judgments are based on the laws in force and on legal and judicial guarantees. The law also permits persons whose citizenship has been withdrawn or revoked to file an appeal against the judgment.

43. Article 3 of Legislative Decree No. 16 of 2019 amended the Citizenship Act by repealing article 24 bis of the Act on the Protection of Society from Terrorist Acts, which provided for the revocation of citizenship when a person was convicted of certain terrorist offences. Accordingly, the courts have not revoked citizenship in any judgments since the amendment entered into force. They have also repealed such rulings when adjudicating appeals filed by convicted persons.

44. His Majesty the King confirmed the citizenship of 551 convicted persons whose sentence had included revocation of citizenship. This reflects His Majesty's eagerness to ensure that lawbreakers have the opportunity to review and correct their behaviour.

The Family Code (recommendations 133 and 153)

45. Act No. 19 of 2017 on the Family Code contains comprehensive provisions governing family relations and replaces the 2009 Family Provisions Act. The provisions standardize the legal status of the Bahraini family, facilitate legal action, and eliminate the disparities discernible in judgments handed down in similar lawsuits.

46. The Code, which comprises 141 articles based on the Islamic sharia, regulates family life and includes clear articles on the rights and duties of both parties with respect to alimony, custody, guardianship, proof of parentage, dissolution of marriage, divorce cases and other issues. It also includes clear provisions that permit divorce on grounds of harm of any kind and the dissolution of marriage by means of *khul'* or annulment of the marriage contract.

47. The Kingdom of Bahrain, through its enactment of the Code, has joined the group of countries that regulate personal status in the family environment by means of laws that provide comprehensive legal protection, specify the rights and duties of all parties, and ensure that judicial rulings are based on justice and equity and on protection of the interests of all family members.

48. A separate building has been reserved for sharia courts, in which proceedings have been conducted since 2017. The aim is to guarantee an appropriate judicial environment for Bahraini families, bearing in mind the privacy of family proceedings. The building combines all the services required by women under a single roof, in particular the Family Reconciliation Office, the Alimony Fund, courts with jurisdiction to consider family disputes, and the Enforcement Court. This constitutes a qualitative step forward in the development of the judiciary's work in Bahrain. A number of laws and decrees have been

promulgated concerning appeals against judgments handed down by sharia courts and the organization of mediation regarding sharia issues.

Women and gender equality (recommendations 73, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 155, 156, 157 and 158)

49. The implementation of the National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women (2013–2022) is being monitored. It seeks to ensure family stability for women in the context of family cohesion, to enable women to contribute competitively to the development process on the basis of the principle of equality of opportunity, to integrate women’s needs into development by providing them with opportunities for outstanding performance, and to achieve progress in their aspirations to improve their quality of life and to promote lifelong learning. Provision is also made for integration with partners and allies in institutional work. Steps are being taken to develop a plan for the next phase (2023–2030) in line with the progress achieved by Bahraini women.

50. The National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women was included in the Government’s work programme for 2019–2022, which provides for continuous monitoring of the integration of Bahraini women’s needs into all comprehensive development programmes and for action to ensure the sustainability of national action to promote the advancement of women.

51. A total of 54 equality of opportunity committees have been established in the public sector. Their key responsibilities include the integration of women’s needs into the equality of opportunity framework in all areas of work, and promotion of the principle of equality of opportunity and gender balance.

52. In line with the principles enshrined in the Constitution, the Kingdom of Bahrain enacted a number of laws providing support for women, in particular the following:

- Act No. 13 of 2022 amended some provisions of Act No. 13 of 1975 concerning the Regulation of Pensions and Retirement Benefits for Government Employees. It grants both men and women, after reaching the normal retirement age, the right to continue working until the age of 65.
- Circular No. 4 of 2017 issued by the Minister of Finance and National Economy concerning allocations, regulations and instructions for implementing the general State budget for the fiscal years 2017 and 2018 contains a special provision concerning application of the principle of equality of opportunity and implementation of a budget that is responsive to women’s needs.
- Decree No. 97 of 2017 amended article 4 of Decree No. 84 of 2017 regulating the activity of business incubators and accelerators with a view to promoting women’s entry into the field of entrepreneurship.
- The Council of Ministers has adopted a decision regarding the preparation of a national report on the gender balance index every two years with effect from 2018. According to the national report on gender balance in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the gender balance index increased from 0.65 during the period 2017–2018 to 0.69 during the period 2019–2020.
- Royal Decree No. 59 of 2014 specifying the regulations governing the appointment of members to the Shura Council includes a provision in article 2 (2) requiring appropriate representation of women.
- Royal Decree No. 17 of 2017 specifying the regulations governing the appointment of members of the Board of Commissioners of the National Human Rights Institution provides for the appropriate representation of women.

53. A number of policies and measures have been adopted with a view to enhancing women’s economic participation in the labour market. The most important are listed below:

- Establishment of the Bahraini Women's Capacity Development Centre (Riyadat), which is the first institution in the region that focuses on investment in the area of entrepreneurship in order to provide a range of supportive services for future businesswomen;
- Launching of the portfolio of Her Royal Highness Princess Sabika Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa aimed at supporting women's commercial activities;
- Launching of the Bahraini women's development portfolio for commercial activities, which targets small and medium-sized enterprises in cooperation with the Bahrain Development Bank. It is worth BD 37,700,000 (US\$ 100 million) and provides multiple benefits to women entrepreneurs;
- Implementation of the third version of the National Guidance Programme for Bahraini Women with a view to supporting the Government's financial balance initiative and thereby supporting a smooth and safe transition for beneficiaries of the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, if they so wish, from a governmental position to entrepreneurship or private-sector institutions through the establishment of innovative and high-quality pioneering projects in the local market, ensuring their continuity, and raising awareness of the options and opportunities available in the labour market;
- Establishment of a Women in Financial Technology Committee to support the sustainability of Bahraini women's participation in that area, to enhance their competitive potential in order to meet national requirements and priorities in shifting to a digital economy and boosting the national development industry, and to achieve gender balance in the financial technology sector.

54. The experience of the Kingdom of Bahrain in implementing the national model for gender balance has encouraged decision-makers to take decisions and introduce services and initiatives aimed at supporting women's economic participation and enhancing their ability to reconcile family and professional responsibilities. A prime example of such action was the issuance of Civil Service Directives No. 4 of 2020 concerning the application of the work-from-home policy to employees of government agencies. Preference is given to pregnant employees, employees entitled to two hours of care, elderly employees and those who suffer from chronic diseases and underlying health conditions.

55. An integrated framework was devised for the Women's Political Participation Programme, which is based on five main themes: partnership and networking; high-quality training and development; awareness-raising and media advocacy; monitoring and assessment; and knowledge management (studies and documentation).

56. The Women's Electoral Consultation Programme has been launched. It aims to achieve a number of goals, such as enabling women to play a role in the formulation of public policies, and enabling them to review and develop national legislation through their political participation.

57. The Women's Political Participation Programme is one of the pivotal initiatives and programmes launched under the National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women. It promotes the electoral participation of women in order to prepare them to join legislative and municipal councils and to assess their contributions in that area.

58. The Kingdom underscores that its legislation contains no provisions that discriminate against women, and that the achievement of gender balance and the prohibition of gender-based discrimination in all areas constitute core provisions of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain for both men and women.

59. With regard to protection and accountability mechanisms, the following are some of the pivotal measures taken with a view to ensuring the full protection of women and their families in various circumstances:

- The adoption of Act No. 19 of 2017 promulgating the Family Code, which constituted a quantum leap in the judicial system in terms of family affairs;
- The promulgation of Act No. 17 of 2015 concerning Protection against Domestic Violence;

- Establishment of the Family and Child Prosecution Department, which is mandated to act on behalf of groups referred to in the Act concerning Protection against Domestic Violence in all cases involving psychological, physical, sexual and economic abuse in order to ensure that such groups are guaranteed the privacy that is required in such cases;
- Establishment and mobilization of special offices in the police departments of the Ministry of the Interior that are mandated to provide protection for families and children and to handle cases professionally, efficiently, effectively, expeditiously and flexibly when providing family counselling services;
- Opening of eight family counselling centres in social centres based in all the Kingdom's governorates to provide psychological, social and legal counselling to all family members; the licensing, in addition, of four civil society centres affiliated with civil society associations and five private centres;
- Opening of a temporary shelter to protect women victims of violence and their children, and to provide them with all necessary subsistence, legal and psychological services.

60. Prime importance is attached in national education and training plans to women's education. They include the National Strategy for the Advancement of Education, the National Strategy for Child Welfare and Advancement (2006–2020), the National Higher Education Strategy (2014–2024), the National Scientific Research Strategy (2014–2024) and others.

61. According to the annual Global Gender Gap Report 2021 issued by the World Economic Forum (Davos), closure of the gender gap in the field of education reached 98.5 per cent. Accordingly, the Kingdom of Bahrain ranked first in the world in terms of closure of the enrolment gap in both secondary and higher education.

62. Continuous action is being taken to expand girls' enrolment in technical and vocational education and training and to update school plans and curricula so that they are in line with gender balance. With that end in view, a number of technical and vocational education establishments for girls were opened, most recently in 2021. Female students in technical and vocational education accounted for 10 per cent of the total number of students in 2020. The percentage of female students in the commercial branch of technical and vocational education, compared to the total number of students specializing in multimedia, increased from 49 per cent in 2013 to 66 per cent in 2020.

63. Labour Fund (Tamkeen) programmes have been established to support the development of women's professional skills by identifying appropriate learning and training opportunities and options for women. The Fund created 28,500 training opportunities with basic and professional certificates, and the proportion of beneficiaries of the training platform totalled 75 per cent.

64. The proportion of women deans of Bahraini university faculties increased from 7 per cent in 2016 to 33 per cent in 2020. During the same period, the proportion of women heads of Bahraini university departments rose to 55 per cent, which represents an increase of 5 per cent. In addition, the proportion of Bahraini women in leadership positions in higher education reached 46 per cent in 2020, which represents an increase of 9 per cent. The proportion of Bahraini female academics rose to 49 per cent, which represents an increase of 3 per cent during the period from 2014 to 2020.

Rights of the child (recommendations 44, 159 and 160)

65. The Kingdom of Bahrain, through the National Committee for Childhood, takes continuous action through the National Committee for Childhood to promote the educational, cultural and psychological development of children of all ages.

66. The Committee took the necessary steps to implement and monitor the National Strategy for Children (2013–2017) and its Action Plan, in cooperation with relevant partners (the Office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the Gulf region, the Office

of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bahrain, and governmental and non-governmental bodies working in support of children). As the Committee succeeded in implementing about 79 per cent of the Action Plan, the implementation period was extended for five years, from 2018 to 2023, so that the remaining projects could be implemented.

67. A number of centres, shelters and units run by the Ministry of Social Development provide diverse care services for children whose parents are unknown, orphans and children from broken families. The Ministry is also taking steps to complete a Social Care Complex project, pursuant to which social care centres provide care and rehabilitation services for juveniles and afford shelter for abused persons of both sexes.

68. The Kingdom's child-friendly laws include the Act on Restorative Justice for Children and Their Protection from Ill-treatment, which was promulgated by Act No. 4 of 2021 and seeks to achieve restorative justice for children, to guarantee their welfare and to protect them from abuse. The Act constitutes a major advance in the protection of children in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Article 10 stipulates that: "The child shall be guaranteed all rights and safeguards enshrined in the Code of Criminal Procedure at all stages of criminal proceedings and during the enforcement of the sentence."

69. The Act provides for the establishment of a special committee and specialized courts for children with a view to guaranteeing privacy and high-quality legal proceedings in cases involving children. The Judicial Committee for Childhood was established to investigate cases in which a child under 18 years of age is in a situation of endangerment, as defined by the Act, cases in which children have been subjected to psychological, physical, sexual or economic abuse, and cases involving offences committed by children under 15 years of age.

70. In accordance with the Act, a Lower Restorative Justice Court and a Higher Restorative Justice Court were established. Both courts adjudicate major and minor offences committed by children in the 15 to 18 age group, depending on the jurisdiction of the court.

71. The Judicial Committee for Childhood issues legal rulings and may only prescribe one or more of the measures specified in the Act, such as placement of children in social or health-care establishments, requiring them to participate in certain activities, or enrolling them in training and rehabilitation programmes in order to reintegrate them into society.

72. Act No. 17 of 2015 concerning Protection from Domestic Violence contains provisions aimed at providing security and protection from family disintegration, guaranteeing legal protection for family members, including children, who are subjected to violence, and guaranteeing protection from all forms of violence as well as physical, verbal, economic and other forms of abuse.

73. Corporal punishment is prohibited in educational and private institutions by the regulations governing school discipline issued by the Ministry of Education in Decree No. 168/549-1992/1.

The rights of persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups (recommendations 43, 132, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 168 and 169)

74. The goal of the National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is to create a society in Bahrain that is based on the principle of inclusion and in which citizens with disabilities can exercise all their rights in a fair and equitable manner. The Strategy is aimed at persons with disabilities, their families and all those involved in providing services to persons with disabilities in local communities.

75. A number of laws and decrees concerning persons with disabilities have been adopted. The following are the most important:

- Decree No. 80 of 2018 concerning the conditions and regulations for granting two hours' rest to an employee or worker with a disability or who looks after a person with a disability;
- The High Committee for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities was reformed by Decree No. 5 of 2020. The Committee performs many tasks on behalf of persons with

disability, in particular the planning and coordination of programmes providing for the care, rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities;

- Application of the articles of the Children's Act to children with disabilities in the same manner as to healthy children;
- Female employees with disabilities are entitled to special leave with a full salary, which is not deducted from their normal leave, if they are pregnant and the medical committee recommends that such leave is required;
- Persons with disabilities are granted a retirement pension if they have completed 15 years of service in the case of males and 10 years of service in the case of females;
- Persons with disabilities are granted a monthly allowance of at least BD 100 (approximately US\$ 250), unless its disbursement has an impact on any other rights or benefits assigned to them under another law.

76. Act No. 18 of 2006 on Social Security defines groups entitled to benefit from social security assistance as those without an adequate source of income for their livelihood. Such assistance is provided by the State to individuals or families belonging to the categories defined in the Act (widows, divorced women, women who have been deserted, families of prisoners, unmarried girls, orphans, persons with disabilities, persons who are unfit for work, older persons). The amount of assistance granted to beneficiaries was increased by 10 per cent from January 2022.

77. Action has been taken to promote the incorporation of citizens with disabilities who seek employment into diverse sectors of the labour market by organizing special career fairs to enable them to obtain decent work and to provide them with the professional skills required by jobs or occupations.

78. Steps are also being taken to integrate citizen and expatriate persons with special needs who are able to learn into public schools and the public University of Bahrain, and to provide specialized teaching staff for integrated schools as well as all facilities and assistive devices that enable such groups to obtain access, without discrimination, to science and knowledge just like other students.

79. Training courses for educational and administrative school personnel form part of the plan to organize rehabilitation programmes and training workshops for members of administrative and educational bodies. In addition, a special career development programme has been introduced for all persons involved in special education. Completion of the 240-hour training programme constitutes one of the conditions for job promotion.

80. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, services continued to be provided for students with special needs. Digital lessons were prepared for students belonging to groups with learning difficulties, autism, mild intellectual disabilities or Down's syndrome, as well as for those with special talents, in a manner that took into account their abilities and health conditions. The number of lessons provided during the last academic year (2020–2021) totalled more than 28,000. Tuition was provided in sign language for deaf students and audio lessons were prepared for students with visual disabilities.

81. The Comprehensive Disability Complex is one of the largest complexes and specialized centres for people with disabilities in the Middle East. It will serve as a development and health-care facility for persons with disabilities who benefit from such services, and it will serve a wide segment of Bahraini society. The Complex is scheduled to start operating in 2023.

82. With regard to the health care provided in reform and rehabilitation centres, the Ministry of Health, acting in coordination with the Ministry of the Interior, provides specialized care for all age groups and for people with special needs, and takes continuous action to improve the conditions in health-care facilities. A new medical clinic was opened in 2019, the number of beds in patients' wards was increased, and a department for treatment and medication was introduced as well as a room for minor operations and treatment of injuries. Clinical services are provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and all medicines without exception are provided to inmates on a daily basis.

Employment and occupational equality (recommendation 131)

83. Article 16 (b) of the Constitution stipulates that: “Citizens shall have equal access to public-sector employment in accordance with the conditions laid down by law.”

84. According to official statistics, the percentage of Bahraini women in the public sector increased from 38 per cent to 56 per cent during the period from 2010 to 2021, which represents an increase of 18 per cent. The proportion of women in the private sector increased from 24 per cent to 35 per cent during the period from 2021 to 2021, which represents an increase of 11 per cent.

85. The following laws and decrees were adopted:

- Legislative Decree No. 16 of 2021 amended some provisions of the Private Sector Labour Code promulgated by Act No. 36 of 2012. A second paragraph was added to article 39 of the Private Sector Labour Code prohibiting wage discrimination between male and female employees for work of equal value. In addition, Decree No. 52 of 2020 prohibited wage discrimination between male and female employees and repealed articles 30 and 31 that permitted the Minister of Labour to prohibit the employment of women at night. Decree No. 51 of 2020 contained provisions concerning the employment of women at night.
- Legislative Decree No. 59 of 2018 amended the Private Sector Labour Code in order to prohibit discrimination between employees and the offence of sexual harassment.
- The Council of Ministers decided in 2019 to submit a bill amending article 8 of the General Budget Act with a view to rendering the budget more responsive to the integration of women’s needs into development programmes, in line with the principle of justice and equality of opportunity, and with a view to allocating resources to achieve the goal of participation and justice for both sexes.
- Act No. 13 of 2022 amended some provisions of Act No. 13 of 1975 concerning pensions and retirement benefits for public-sector employees in order to grant the right to both men and women, after they reach the normal retirement age, to continue working until the age of 65.

Strengthening the protection of migrant workers (recommendations 154, 170, 171 and 172)

86. The Inspection and Occupational Safety Department of the Ministry of Labour is responsible for ascertaining the suitability and safety of the labour environment so that workers can perform their duties safely. It conducts more than 7,000 inspection visits each year and ensures that employers fulfil their obligation to ensure the effective implementation of the Labour Code without discrimination.

87. Some of the numerous measures taken to protect migrant workers are set out below:

- Recognition of the right of migrant workers to change employers without the consent of the original employer, in accordance with the regulations laid down by law;
- Implementation of the flexible work permit system, which allows migrant workers employed under unfair conditions to apply independently for a personal work permit without being associated with an employer; a total of 63,155 workers have benefited from the system since 2017.
- Entitlement to unemployment insurance without discrimination on grounds of category of work or nationality in order to protect workers from becoming destitute during a period of unemployment;
- Migrant workers, just like Bahraini workers, are entitled to be represented in trade union and labour federations, regardless of their nationality.
- Domestic workers are subject to the basic provisions of the Labour Code, including application of work contract principles, annual leave, wage protection, a termination

of service indemnity, and exemption of domestic workers from litigation fees at all stages of legal proceedings.

- Distribution of free SIM cards to migrant workers in order to keep them constantly updated on the progress of their work permits and their legal status via text messages in their own language;
- More than 200,000 copies of the Migrant Worker's Guide have been printed and distributed in 13 different languages. The Guide contains detailed explanations about legal procedures in the Kingdom of Bahrain and about mechanisms for submitting complaints and regularizing one's legal status.
- Launching of a campaign, directed at both employers and migrant workers, for the rectification of cases of irregular legal status; the campaign envisages a grace period during which the competent authorities will not adopt any punitive measures against workers who are found to be in contravention of the employment and residency conditions. The campaign led in 2015 to the regularization of 51,000 workers.

88. The competent bodies communicate with the embassies of foreign countries accredited to the Kingdom and with civil society institutions in order to solve any problems faced by migrant workers and to help them to regularize their status.

89. Decree No. 68 concerning the wage protection system was issued in 2019. The system specifies the procedures and regulations applicable to the payment of employees' wages and the information to be provided to the competent authorities in order to verify their payment.

90. During the implementation of precautionary measures to address the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain took steps to guarantee the application of principles of equality in order to protect all citizens and migrants. The aim was to ensure the safety of employees in their workplaces and the existence of basic safety requirements and physical distancing in housing facilities. In addition, sterilizers and masks were distributed and free health care, including examinations, vaccinations and treatment, was provided for all.

91. Minister of Health Decree No. 29 of 2014 concerning the determination and regulation of basic health-care facilities for workers, as amended by Decree No. 6 of 2015, regulates the health-care facilities that employers must provide for their workers without discrimination on grounds of race, sex or domicile.

92. In light of the fact that domestic workers account for a large proportion of the total migrant workforce in the Kingdom, and given their right to protection from all forms of exploitation, a number of measures have been taken to address their specific requirements, including those set out below:

- The Bahraini legislature amended the Private Sector Labour Code in 2018 with a view to prohibiting discrimination against employees on grounds of gender, origin, language, religion or creed. The Code thus guarantees fair and ethical employment, including decent employment for migrant workers.
- The legislature adopted another amendment to the Code that prescribes penalties for sexual harassment of an employee in the workplace by gestures, speech, acts or by any other means, and prescribes a harsher penalty if the offender is the employer or his representative.
- The procedures whereby workers can submit complaints and grievances concerning contraventions or exploitation to the Migrant Worker Protection and Support Centre at the Labour Market Regulatory Authority have been simplified. They can also benefit from preventive, counselling, legal and accommodation services provided by the Centre.
- The signing of a tripartite contract between the employer, the intermediary (the authorized recruitment agency) and the male or female domestic worker is mandatory. Workers must also be informed of and consent to the terms of the contract prior to their arrival in the Kingdom of Bahrain. This procedure is designed to prevent

domestic workers from being subjected to any violation of their rights or to any form of exploitation.

- With a view to guaranteeing and protecting the rights of the parties to a domestic labour relationship, steps have been taken to implement the Optional Insurance System for Domestic Workers, in cooperation with the Central Bank of Bahrain and the Bahrain Insurance Association. It covers direct and indirect recruitment, thereby guaranteeing full protection for the employer and the domestic worker, compensation in the event of injury and death, and other benefits.
- Domestic workers have been offered the opportunity to adjust their legal and administrative status in the Kingdom through the launching of two grace periods in 2018 and 2020, which enable them to adjust their status in the event of a contravention.
- A bill concerning domestic workers has been submitted to the legislature.

Combating human trafficking (recommendations 85, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92 and 93)

93. The Kingdom of Bahrain attaches great importance to measures aimed at combating trafficking in persons. As a result, the report of the United Nations State Department has placed Bahrain in the Tier 1 category for five years in a row since 2018.

94. Act No. 1 of 2008 on Combating Trafficking in Persons is deemed to be one of the foremost laws addressing the issue in the region. It criminalizes all forms of transnational crimes and provides for the establishment of the National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which is composed of representatives of a number of official bodies and competent civil society institutions. It is mandated to devise a combat strategy and to provide various types of protection and care for victims of the crime.

95. Legislative Decree No. 44 of 2018 on international crimes criminalizes acts of slavery and servitude. Such acts include the subjection of an individual to authority stemming from a property right, the subjection of an individual to deprivation of liberty or anything similar, and the exercise of authority as a means of trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

96. The Public Prosecution Service issued Decree No. 34 of 2020 establishing the Public Prosecutor's Office for Trafficking in Persons, which is mandated to investigate the offences defined in Act No. 1 of 2008 on Combating Trafficking in Persons as well as related offences defined in other legislation, such as forced labour, withholding of wages, and other contraventions of human rights and freedoms involving exploitation similar to that perpetrated in the crime of trafficking in persons. It is also required to adopt the victim protection measures stipulated in the Act.

97. During the period from 1 January to 30 April 2022, the Department for Combating Human Trafficking and Protection of Public Morals in the Ministry of the Interior issued 13 communications on human trafficking and arrested 14 male and 7 female suspects.

98. The Kingdom continues to support the rights of vulnerable groups, including contract workers in general and women contract workers in particular, with a view to guaranteeing their protection from all forms of exploitation and ill-treatment. The Kingdom has created a number of support services to which workers may resort in the event of abusive practices by their employers, such as procedures for submitting individual complaints to the Ministry of Labour in order to secure an amicable settlement. In addition, migrants are entitled to institute legal proceedings and are exempted from litigation fees at all stages, and workers can benefit from other services provided by the employment sector.

99. The following are some of the social services provided to contract workers:

- The Dar Al-Karama (Dignity Shelter) for Social Care, which provides all kinds of care and services to beggars and homeless persons;

- The Dar Al-Aman (Safety Shelter) for women and children who are victims of domestic violence, and victims of psychological, physical and social violence, regardless of whether they are Bahrainis or non-Bahrainis; it is the first of its kind in the region.

100. A committee was established to assess the situation of foreign victims of trafficking in persons. It seeks to eliminate any impediments encountered by foreign victims if they appear to require employment. It also takes coordinated action with the Ministry of the Interior to return victims to their country of origin and nationality, or to their place of residence in any other country if they so request.

101. The Regional Training and Capacity-Building Centre for Combating Trafficking in Persons was established in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in the States of the Cooperation Council. Its programmes were launched in December 2021.

102. An official website designed to raise awareness of indicators of human trafficking has been established and launched (www.endtrafficking.bh).

103. The Migrant Worker Protection and Support Centre, which is a comprehensive and specialized body and the first of its kind in the Middle East, offers protection and support to migrant workers by providing diverse preventive, counselling, legal and medical services as well as shelters, in accordance with approved standards and international best practices. The Centre has dealt with 51,487 cases since its establishment in 2016.

104. A plan for a national campaign to raise awareness and educate migrant workers has been drawn up in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration.

105. A call centre and a hotline (995) that operate around the clock in many different languages have been established.

106. A grace period until the end of 2020 was announced for rectification of the conditions of “irregular” migrant workers. Migrant workers can apply for rectification of their status without paying any fines or additional fees, and a new work and residence permit is issued free of charge. In addition, the competent authorities assist workers in obtaining an appropriate work permit with a new employer or a flexible work permit, while ensuring that no migrants are deported.

107. A fund has been established to assist victims of trafficking in persons by providing financial compensation for the damages incurred from the crime. A total of 106 victims have benefited from the fund since its establishment in 2018.

108. The National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in Persons was established to provide protection and assistance to potential victims of trafficking in persons and to serve as a roadmap for the procedures and measures to be taken by the competent authorities in order to combat trafficking and to ensure that all cases are managed in a correct procedural sequence.

109. Protective tools have been developed to monitor cases of forced labour and trafficking in persons in the work environment, such as interventions to retrieve a worker’s passport that has been seized by an employer or any other person in order to prevent the worker from being exploited or becoming a victim of trafficking. A total of 6,800 such interventions have been undertaken since 2018.

110. Action has been taken to simplify the procedures that enable migrant workers to exercise their right to litigation. The measures include preparation of the case file in accordance with all procedures and requirements, referral of the case file to the competent judicial authority, monitoring of the case until the dispute is resolved and provision of legal support and assistance. A total of 2,554 labour cases have been registered since the procedure was launched in 2020.

111. Action has been taken to enhance the competence of the judicial and executive system in cases involving trafficking in persons.

112. The Kingdom of Bahrain, in cooperation with IOM and UNODC, hosted the first Regional Forum on Combating Trafficking in Persons, and it continues to promote active collaboration on the issue with many international organizations, embassies and consulates.

Combating racial discrimination and intolerance (recommendations 62 and 63)

113. In line with the pivotal role played by the Kingdom of Bahrain in uplifting all elements of society and protecting them from negative influences in order to promote social security and peaceful coexistence, the Ministry of Justice has taken great care to control, monitor and analyse the content of religious sermons, and has drawn up a comprehensive national strategy to address social issues and negative phenomena resulting from extremist ideology by updating the language used in such sermons in such a way as to strengthen social unity, maintain cohesion in the national social fabric and put an end to deviant ideology which gives rise to extremism and bigotry.

114. The competent authorities monitor the language used in Friday sermons on a weekly basis, taking into account, in particular, the following four basic contraventions during the monitoring process: dissemination of hatred; incitement to violence; provocation of sectarianism; and direct politicization of the pulpit. Action taken against persons who breach the rules include counselling, warnings and suspension.

Human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations (recommendations 57, 97, 98, 99, 119 and 124)

115. Articles 22, 23, 27 and 28 (b) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain guarantee the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Freedom to form associations and unions based on national principles for lawful objectives and by peaceful means is also guaranteed by the Bahraini Constitution, in accordance with the rules and conditions laid down by law, provided that the fundamentals of religion and public order are not infringed.

116. The Kingdom of Bahrain uses all ways and means to promote the principle of respect for the law, to preserve the fundamentals of citizenship based on coexistence, tolerance and respect for others, and to provide a suitable democratic environment for political action. Political associations can only be dissolved by the judiciary pursuant to judicial rulings.

117. According to the Private Sector Labour Code No. 36 of 2012, an employer's decision to terminate an employment contract constitutes unfair dismissal if the termination is due to the worker's membership of a trade union or to his or her legitimate participation in any of its activities, in accordance with the laws and regulations in force.

118. Decree No. 7 of 2020, which determines the rules and procedures to be followed at each level of collective bargaining, highlights the support granted by the Ministry to trade unions and their right to represent workers, and to the consolidation of social dialogue aimed at improving the working environment and preserving acquired rights.

119. Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1989, which promulgated the Act on Social and Cultural Associations and Clubs and Private Bodies Operating in the Area of Youth, Sports and Private Institutions, provides for the establishment and operation in the country of social associations and clubs under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development.

Freedom of opinion and the formation of political associations (recommendations 96, 101, 104, 107, 109, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 122 and 123)

120. Legislative Decree No. 26 of 2005 on Political Associations, as amended, provides for the establishment of political associations and grants them the legal protection that they

require to express their opinions. It is not permissible to dissolve a political association, to halt its activities or to dismiss its leaders save in accordance with the provisions of the association's statute or pursuant to a ruling by the administrative chamber of the High Court. This is entirely consistent with the right enshrined in article 27 of the Constitution, which regulates freedom of association.

121. Legislative Decree No. 18 of 1973 on Public Meetings, Processions and Gatherings, as amended, which regulates public gatherings and processions, grants people freedom to exercise their constitutional right to assembly. It also contains some regulatory provisions aimed at preventing any breach of public security as well as restrictions relating to public security and the inviolability of homes and places of worship.

122. The regulations governing the establishment and operation of non-political associations are contained in the Act on Social and Cultural Associations and Clubs and Private Bodies Operating in the Area of Youth, Sports and Private Institutions promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1989, as amended. They are guaranteed all the rights and freedoms enshrined in international instruments governing such associations.

123. Freedom of opinion and expression is guaranteed by article 23 of the Constitution. Legislative Decree No. 14 of 2002, which regulates the press, printing and publishing, specifies the rights and duties of journalists. It states that journalists are independent and are subject to no authority in the performance of their duties other than the law. Journalists are entitled to obtain information, statistics and news from sources provided that their publication is permissible by law. Restrictions that impede the flow of information are prohibited, and journalists may not be dismissed until the Bahrain Journalists Association has been notified of the grounds for dismissal. If the Association's action to promote reconciliation between a newspaper and a journalist proves unsuccessful, the provisions of the Private Sector Labour Code shall be applicable to the employee's dismissal. In addition, the confiscation of newspapers, their suspension or the revocation of their licence is permissible solely on the basis of a court ruling.

Implementation of the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (recommendations 37, 58 and 59)

124. Since the beginning of the reform process, the Kingdom of Bahrain has taken continuous action to develop and improve the procedures and practices that are necessary in order to guarantee human rights. It has attached great importance to the implementation of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. The implementation monitoring body takes vigorous action to monitor the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. The Kingdom of Bahrain has been constantly reviewing their implementation since 2016. Many of the recommendations have been incorporated into the interim plans produced by diverse bodies and into the National Human Rights Plan. Such action contributes to their ongoing implementation, since the Kingdom is determined to maintain a reformist approach to its commitments and human rights obligations.

National mechanisms and institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights (recommendations 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 83, 126 and 129)

125. The National Human Rights Institution was accredited with category B status in 2016 and is actively seeking to raise its classification to A status, in cooperation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It is adopting the financial, administrative and legal measures that are required to ensure full compliance with the Paris Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions. The Institution has sought to obtain the support it requires to increase its representation in international forums, to develop its relations with international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and to cooperate with civil society organizations operating in the area of human rights.

126. The Institution focuses on building partnerships and cooperating continuously with the competent authorities, and performs its statutory duties in a fully independent manner, such as monitoring cases involving human rights violations, conducting the necessary

investigations, bringing them to the attention of the competent authorities, and submitting proposals for initiatives aimed at putting an end to such situations. It also receives, studies and investigates complaints concerning human rights violations and refers them, where appropriate, to the competent authorities to ensure effective follow-up action.

127. The Institution enjoys administrative and financial independence. It is not subject, during its recruitment process, to the procedures imposed by the body responsible for service in the public sector, which is the Civil Service Bureau. Furthermore, it is not subject, in financial terms to the procedures imposed by the Ministry of Finance, since article 20 of the Act that established the Institution stipulates that the funds required by the Institution shall be allocated as a separate item in the general State budget issued by law. The Institution manages and controls its financial resources in a fully independent manner, and its financial accounts are supervised by the National Audit Office.

128. Article 14 of the Act that established the Institution stipulates that the Institution is entitled to request any information, data or documents that it deems necessary for the achievement of its objectives or the performance of its duties from the competent ministries and other bodies in the Kingdom. The ministries and other bodies are required to assist the Institution in the implementation of its tasks and to facilitate the performance of its duties.

129. The Office of the Ombudsman is also fully independent in financial terms and manages its funds without interference. It is administratively independent since it bears sole responsibility for the employment and selection of its personnel. It is also independent in operational terms since it performs its duties and implements its mandate without any interference or commentaries.

130. With regard to the possession by the staff of the Office of the Ombudsman of the requisite authority for the performance of their duties, they have been granted full capacity to undertake investigations. In addition, various authorities are required to facilitate their tasks, in accordance with article 13 of the Decree that established the Office, as amended.

131. The Office of the Ombudsman was awarded, jointly with the National Human Rights Institution, the Chaillot Prize for the Promotion of Human Rights in the Arab Gulf region in 2014. It was presented by a European Union delegation in Riyadh, at a ceremony held in December 2014 in the presence of ambassadors of foreign countries and a number of human rights activists.

132. The Commission for the Rights of Prisoners and Detainees was granted financial, administrative and operational independence by Decree No. 61 of 2013. The Commission has taken vigorous action since its establishment to improve its performance. It is composed of representatives of the judicial branch, including the courts and the Public Prosecution Service, as well as representatives of the National Institution for Human Rights and civil society institutions (annex 3).

133. Decree No. 28 of 2012 established the independent Office of the Inspector General and the Office of Professional Standards in the National Security Agency. The Office of the Inspector General is empowered to receive and examine complaints of ill-treatment of persons by the Agency's employees that were in breach of the law and of conventions, and to conduct investigations if such breaches were perpetrated in connection with, on account of or during the performance of their duties, or if the Agency played a role therein.

134. The Special Investigation Unit is fully independent in the performance of its duties from all judicial and executive bodies and is subject to the strict authority of its President, in accordance with the Decree concerning its establishment and its operating instructions. Its independence is demonstrated by the fact that the investigators who work for the Unit enjoy all the guarantees prescribed by law for members of the judiciary. In addition, the Unit's headquarters is independent of the headquarters of the Public Prosecution Service, and its structure is composed of administrative and technical departments that are completely independent of all other bodies.

135. The Special Investigation Unit has published periodic reports since its establishment, in which it informs the general public, in a fully transparent manner, of the details of its work and the statistics that it has compiled. The Unit recently published its first annual report,

which contains statistics concerning all its activities during 2021 and which was published on all approved official websites.

Strengthening of national unity (recommendations 56, 60 and 61)

136. The National Plan to Promote National Unity and to Consolidate the Values of Citizenship in Bahrain was launched on 26 March 2019. The document presents guidance, based on a reformist approach and humane concepts of rational leadership, aimed at consolidating the Gulf, Arab and Islamic components of national identity and at promoting the values of loyalty, affiliation and tolerance in a society based on security and stability as a mainstay of modernization and sustainable development.

137. A Royal Decree establishing the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence was issued in March 2018. The Kingdom of Bahrain attaches great importance to action aimed at laying the foundations of a State based on fraternity, altruism and coexistence and the dissemination of lofty human values through respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of a person's gender, origin, religion or creed.

138. The Kingdom of Bahrain aspires to consolidate the values and principles of religious tolerance, national unity and peaceful coexistence among all religions and creeds and between all layers of society through diverse media and religious platforms and through the implementation of educational initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns to promote such values.

The Constitution and national legislation (recommendations 35, 105, 106, 108, 110, 120 and 161)

139. Article 37 of the Bahraini Constitution stipulates that international treaties shall have the force of law once the constitutional procedures required for accession, ratification and publication have been completed. They then have the status of binding legislation in the Kingdom just like domestic laws.

140. The Prime Minister issued Decree No. 50 of 2012 establishing the High Coordinating Committee for Human Rights, which is responsible for promoting coordination among government agencies, in line with each body's field of competence, on all matters relating to human rights. The Committee reviews the Kingdom's international human rights obligations and ensures compliance with relevant international norms.

141. The Council of Ministers endorsed a memorandum submitted by the Ministerial Committee for Legislative and Legal Affairs amending provisions of the Press, Printing and Publishing Act promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 47 of 2002. The amendments include the abolition of penalties of imprisonment for journalists and the incorporation of new definitions that reflect developments in the media.

142. The Kingdom of Bahrain was one of the first countries in the region to enact press legislation that has guaranteed freedom of expression for media personnel since 2002. The Act guarantees freedom of the press and underscores the fact that journalists are independent and are subject to no authority other than the law in the conduct of their work. In addition, the legal framework defined in the Act for the right of the press to freedom of expression is the same as the framework contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, namely respect for the rights or reputation of others, and prevention of damage to national security or public order, or to public health or morals.

143. The above-mentioned Act on Restorative Justice for Children and on Their Protection from Ill-treatment defines criminal responsibility. Thus, persons who have not attained the age of 15 years at the time of commission of the offence must be presumed to lack criminal capacity. They are not deemed to be criminally responsible, but correctional measures are adopted to remedy their behaviour. The Act defines a child as any person who was not over 18 years of age at the time of commission of the offence.

Countering terrorism (recommendations 69, 70 and 72)

144. All laws aimed at countering terrorism in the Kingdom of Bahrain are consistent with the international principles and treaties that the Kingdom has ratified and are fully in line with those principles. They include all legal and judicial safeguards pertaining to the treatment of accused persons in such cases. All actions taken in this regard are based on a clear strategy that is consistent with international counter-terrorism legislation and treaties, with the Arab Strategy to Combat Terrorism and with the Cooperation Council Counter-Terrorism Agreement.

145. The Bahraini legislature took steps to criminalize and combat terrorism by promulgating Legislative Decree No. 4 of 2001 on the Prohibition and Combating of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, as amended, and Act No. 58 of 2006 on the Protection of Society from Terrorist Acts, as amended.

146. The two above-mentioned laws are consistent with all the Kingdom's international human rights obligations, and the legislature complied with the constitutional provision that there shall be no crime and no punishment except as defined by law, which is one of the most important human rights guarantees of the legality of criminal proceedings. In addition, provision is made for all elements of a fair trial for accused persons, including the presumption of innocence, a public trial, the independence and jurisdiction of the courts, and the requirement that all offences defined in the two laws must be examined at all legal stages of a fair trial.

Human rights education, training and awareness-raising (recommendations 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54 and 125)

147. Capacity-building is a core component of the 102 projects contained in the National Human Rights Plan (2022–2026), including capacity-building for employees and specialists in all areas relating to human rights.

148. A school project based on promotion of citizenship values and human rights is being implemented in accordance with exemplary international practices. It aims to promote the values of citizenship, peaceful coexistence, tolerance, moderation and humanitarian values in schools.

149. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Associated Schools Network project is being implemented by encouraging contacts and establishing links between schools at the national and international levels, the aim being to share experiences and initiatives, and to consider the possibility of benefiting from field experiences aimed at promoting the values of peace and human rights as well as education in support of international understanding and sustainable development.

150. Universal human rights principles and values have been included in the curricula of the Ministry of Education, especially in courses on citizenship and human rights, which are a basic subject in public and private schools at the three stages of education in the Kingdom of Bahrain. A holistic approach is adopted based on common humanity, the principles of global citizenship, and respect for the specific cultural characteristics of different peoples and societies.

151. A human rights course in both Arabic and English is compulsory in all local public and private universities.

152. The Ministry of the Interior has developed a comprehensive training plan, which is being implemented by the Royal Police Academy. The subject of human rights has been integrated into all study programmes for students at the Royal Police College. There are also graduate programmes for officers, diploma programmes for individuals and a special human rights programme for all law enforcement personnel.

153. The Ministry of the Interior is taking vigorous action to disseminate the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials as widely as possible and to promote compliance with its principles. The Code was promulgated pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 14 of 2012

and is based on international best practices and codes of conduct for law enforcement officials (annexes 4, 5 and 6).

154. As great importance is attached to the training of judges and members of the Public Prosecution Service, a comprehensive strategy was developed for the purpose. More than 60 judges participated in a number of workshops organized in cooperation with the International Institute of Higher Studies in Criminal Sciences, which is based in Syracuse, Italy.

155. The Supreme Judicial Council signed contracts with international experts with a view to designing training courses to meet the needs of members of the judiciary. The courses are conducted jointly with the Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies and a number of international institutions and organizations, including UNDP and UNODC.

156. The Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies provides basic and continuing training courses for all law enforcement personnel in the Kingdom. It signed a cooperation agreement with UNODC on the development of a training programme for members of the judiciary and legal professionals with a view to upgrading their crime-fighting skills. A number of workshops and seminars have also been held.

157. In addition to the projects under the National Human Rights Plan aimed at bolstering the role of civil society institutions and raising awareness of their important role as a major partner in promoting human rights, the National Centre for the Promotion of Civil Society Organizations has taken steps to improve their performance, to develop their skills and to build their capacity. The Voluntary Work Development Centre was established in 2016 to respond to such needs.

International human rights treaties and mechanisms (recommendations 4 and 17)

158. Although the Kingdom of Bahrain has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, it has created a solid structure aimed at preventing and addressing any infringements that constitute forms of torture through the establishment of a number of independent national mechanisms that provide protection against torture and ill-treatment and ensure that perpetrators of such acts are held accountable. Reference has already been made to the Office of the Ombudsman, the Commission for the Rights of Prisoners and Detainees, the Special Investigation Unit and the National Human Rights Institution. In addition, the judiciary plays a role by handing down deterrent judgments. The question of ratification of the Optional Protocol is currently being studied.

Cooperation with the United Nations and the international community (recommendations 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33 and 55)

159. The Kingdom of Bahrain continues to boost its cooperation with various United Nations bodies through their regional and international offices, and to implement projects and initiatives, such as those listed below, that demonstrate its international commitment:

- In 2017, an office representing UN Women was opened at the headquarters of United Nations House in Bahrain as a result of cooperation within the United Nations system.
- A memorandum of understanding was signed with UN Women in 2016 concerning the launching of the Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa Global Award for Women's Empowerment.
- The candidacy of the Kingdom of Bahrain for membership of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women for four years (2017–2021) was approved, and its candidacy for membership of the Executive Board of UN Women for the period from 2017 to 2019 was also approved.
- The country office of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Kingdom of Bahrain was opened in 2021 in the presence of the Director-General of WHO.

- The Special Investigation Unit signed an agreement in 2014 with the United Nations Office in the Kingdom of Bahrain with a view to building the Unit's capacity to perform its role in accordance with international norms and to achieve the highest levels of efficiency. The Unit also responds to any inquiries that it receives from local bodies or international organizations.

160. The Kingdom of Bahrain takes continuous action to meet its obligations vis-à-vis the treaty bodies, which monitor the implementation of human rights treaties. The Kingdom also endeavours to enhance its cooperation with the special procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council, to forge strong cooperative bonds with OHCHR and to benefit from its best practices, training and technical assistance.

161. Decree No. 19 of 2018 established the Committee on Coordination and Follow-up between the Kingdom of Bahrain and United Nations agencies. The Committee is mandated to monitor cooperation projects and initiatives with United Nations agencies, bearing in mind the structure and priorities of the Government's action plans, the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030, and national plans and policies aimed at achieving sustainable development.

162. In acknowledgement of its action on behalf of the international community, the Kingdom of Bahrain was elected for the third time to the Human Rights Council (2019–2021) and was elected to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Economic and Social Council.

163. The Kingdom of Bahrain studies all requests for visits received from special rapporteurs or non-governmental organizations, and it continues to study the possibility of accepting such visits in a manner that serves and enhances human rights in the Kingdom.

V. Challenges and obstacles

164. The COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge to the entire world, but the Kingdom succeeded in applying the highest standards with a view to guaranteeing basic health-care, educational and economic rights for all persons, both citizens and residents, within its territory.

VI. Voluntary commitments

165. The Kingdom is committed to ensuring full implementation of the 102 projects contained in the National Human Rights Plan (2022–2026), which aim to promote respect for human rights at all levels in the Kingdom.

166. The Kingdom is committed to submitting voluntary reports every two years with a view to benefiting from observations and improving and developing its human rights system.

VII. Conclusion

167. The Kingdom of Bahrain continues to advance in its efforts to promote and protect human rights and to ensure respect for human dignity. It is inspired in so doing by its plans and projects based on the comprehensive reform process, the National Action Charter, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the inherent values of Bahraini society that call for harmony, affection and peace. The Kingdom is determined to build on its achievements and gains, thereby serving its citizens and residents.

168. The Kingdom of Bahrain looks forward to continued cooperation with the Human Rights Council, OHCHR and the universal periodic review human rights mechanism established by General Assembly resolution 60/251.