

42nd CEDAW SESSION – BAHRAIN
NGO ORAL STATEMENT TO CEDAW COMMITTEE

Thank you madam chair. My name is Ghaniya Alaiwi, I am speaking on behalf of the 21 Bahraini NGOs. My colleague and I will outline 5 of the most pressing issues facing women in Bahrain. These issues are the **absence of Family Law, Violence against Women , Nationality law, political participation, domestic workers and trafficking in Person.**

Firstly : Absence of Family Law

Despite the demand of Bahraini women organizations and other NGOs to issue a family law since 1982, such law has not been issued yet. The absence of this law, has created legislative gap in light of variation in Bahraini judiciary because of the different and contradicting interpretations of Islamic Sharia by the Sunni and Shaii judges. The absence of such law is considered great discrimination against Bahraini women and violation of her human rights in accessing justice, assurance and security.

Therefore, we demand the withdrawal of Bahrain's reservation on this Article and to speed up issuing a family law that treat women on equal terms with men in rights and duties.

Secondly Violence Against Women :

The absence of a law criminalizing violence against women in Bahrain is causing the continuation of the violence cycle and the increase of violence incidences. Official statistics in such cases is almost non-existent. The study conducted by Bahrain Women Union revealed that 43% of the population sample that consisted of 4000 Bahraini women were subjected to violence. In addition, the findings revealed that the main reasons for divorce are beatings, adultery by the husband and the failure of husbands to support their wives financially.

We demand to introduce such law to protect women from all types of violence, impose stronger punishment on rape crimes and educate the concerned authorities on how to deal with violence cases and construct a shelter for violently abused women.

Thirdly : Nationality Law

Bahraini women, who are married to non bahrainis, are deprived from giving their nationality to their children. These children are abandoned all their citizenship rights, of which healthcare, land ownership, political participation, high education and employment. The situation gets worse when the women get divorced or abandoned or when the husbands die .

The Bahraini government has been involved in heavy political nationalization over the last years causing the population to jump suddenly from nearly three quarters of a million to over one million and forty thousand.

Therefore, we demand the amendment of the law for equality of women and men and withdraw the reservation on part 2, Article (9) of the CEDAW.

I will now hand over to my colleague Aysha Bucheery

Fourthly Political Participation

The percentage of Bahraini women in political participation is almost negligible. The government has been exploiting the notion of political empowerment to appoint executive women in legislative positions such as the Shura council which is the appointed chamber . To give women a fair chance, the electoral law should be amended along with a fair distribution of electoral

constituencies and also changing the one man one vote principle .NGOS in Bahrain are advocating the proportional representation system with giving women electable positions on top of the lists. Although Bahrain has no reservation on Article (4) , it considers any implication of quotas unconstitutional and contradicting with the equality principle in the constitution . While at the time the supreme council of women used the same article to support women candidates financially during the 2006 parliamentary elections.

Therefore, we demand the amendment of elections law to endorse a proportional representation system and party lists; and to put a mechanism to support the representation system and support the political participation of women.

Finally Domestic workers and Trafficking in Persons

The current figure of domestic workers in Bahrain stands at around 62 thousand, the majority of which are women. Their exclusion from the Bahraini labor law has led to their deprivation of their legal rights, living under abuse, withholding their passports, involuntary servitude. Our government did not yet activate anti trafficking legislation in order to protect them from forced prostitution.

So, we demand taking immediate steps to amend the labor law to cover domestic workers and to in place all necessary measures to insure its implementation

For all the above issues we demand the withdrawal of all the reservations on CEDAW and ratifying the Optional Protocol which will lead to accelerating the harmonization of all national legislation and laws with CEDAW .

