Information presented by NIHR on:

**Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief
and Achievement of** **Sustainable Development Goal (16)**

At the Request of:

**United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief**

**June 2020**

**Introduction**

Reference to the request received from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to obtain information related to intolerance and discrimination based upon religion or belief in order to prepare a report on “Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief and Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (16)” scheduled to be presented at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly scheduled to be held in October 2020. The NIHR submits the following information:

Pursuant to the terms of reference of the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) stipulated in its Establishment Law, especially Article (12), which states the importance of “cooperation, coordination and consultation with civil society, regional and global organizations and the relevant institutions in other countries concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights”[[1]](#footnote-1), the NIHR presents this report in two sections: the first section illustrates NIHR’s efforts and activities in promoting and protecting the values of religious tolerance, and the second section explains NIHR’s follow-up on the Kingdom’s efforts and activities in promoting and protecting the values of religious tolerance guided by the list of subjects mentioned in the request by the Special Rapporteur.

**Section I**

**NIHR’s Efforts and Activities in the Promotion and Protection
of the Values of Religious Tolerance**

**Firstly: NIHR’s Role in the Promotion of the Values of Religious Tolerance**

1. The provisions of the Law no. (26) of 2014 establishing the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) stated its role in the promotion of human rights, where Article (12) thereof approved a set of competencies for it in order to achieve its objectives in this area through its participation in developing and implementing a national plan to promote human rights at the Kingdom’s level as well as the study of legislation and applicable regulations related to human rights, recommending the amendments it deems appropriate, especially with regards to the consistency of such legislation with Bahrain’s international human rights obligations and recommending the issuance of new legislation on human rights.
2. Those provisions also entrusted the NIHR with organizing conferences, seminars, educational and training courses in the area of human rights. As well as conducting research and studies in human rights. Participating in local forums and meetings of regional and global organizations and issuing bulletins, publications, data, special reports. All this data is made available on NIHR’s website.
3. NIHR’s fulfilled its mandate in promoting the values of religious tolerance in Bahrain, through participation in a forum organized by the Parliament entitled **“Bahrain: Tolerance and Coexistence”** in 2019, on the occasion of International Day for Tolerance. NIHR presented a paper on **“Tolerance and Human Rights in Bahrain”**. The forum was attended by representatives of the UN, International Peace Institute, Shura Council’s Committee on Human Rights, human rights bodies and the media.
4. For the purpose of enhancing cooperation ties between NIHR and King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence, the Chairwoman of NIHR participated in the International Roundtable on Religious Freedom held in Washington in 2019. The roundtable featured the participation of a group of senior religious and academic leaders, members of the American Senate and stakeholders. During the event, the Kingdom of Bahrain was commended for its success in becoming an exceptional regional and global platform for tolerance and peaceful coexistence, this is attributed to legislation and laws that encourage the acceptance of all, regardless of religion, sect, or race, in addition to protection of the rights of all and freedom of expression and worship in an atmosphere full of love, friendship and human brotherhood.
5. In association with the general situation in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the NIHR issued a statement in 2018 calling for continuing all efforts towards development, refusal of extremism, and promotion of respect for religious rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and International Covenants and Treaties as governed by national laws and legislation. In 2019, the NIHR issued another statement on the occasion of its visit to several Correction, Rehabilitation CENTERS during Ashura (Religious events) for the purpose of ensuring that all concerned prisoners enjoyed the freedom of practicing their religious rituals NIHR concluded in its statement that the freedom of prisoners to practice their religious rituals is fully guaranteed without prejudice to the freedom and privacy of other prisoners of all other religions and sects to practice their rituals, and in such a manner that ensures the preservation of the security of the centres and the safety of prisoners therein.
6. In 2020, the NIHR issued another statement on religious tolerance, in which it commended the directives of HM The King of Bahrain to dedicate the 14th of May for prayers and human solidarity to overcome the Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19), in which it stated that the Kingdom’s participation in this day embodies the full belief of leadership and people in the importance of consolidating and protecting religious freedoms as well as the importance of solidarity among all people of different religions and sects in order to promote the values of peace and love and enjoy the fruits of human brotherhood.
7. The NIHR, represented by its Chairwoman, is a member on the Committee on the Promotion of National Unity and Consolidation of Citizenship Values, which was formed by the Minister of Interior on March 20, 2019 in order to develop a national plan to promote national belonging and consolidate the values of citizenship. The Committee includes 16 members from various national, specialists and experts.

**Secondly: NIHR’s Role in the Protection of the Values of Religious Tolerance**

1. The provisions of the Law no. (26) of 2014 establishing the NIHR stated its role in the protection of human rights. Article (12) stipulates a number of competencies in this area through its mandate to receive complaints, monitor alleged violations and conduct the necessary investigations thereon, in addition to conducting field visits to monitor human rights situations in places of detention or any other places where alleged human rights violations may be committed.
2. At the level of the NIHR’s mandate in protecting the values of religious tolerance in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the NIHR provided legal assistance for two cases in 2019, which covered freedom of belief and the practice of religious rights. It also observed and monitored two cases on the practice of religious rights by persons with restricted freedom. All these cases have been studied and addressed separately.
3. In line with NIHR’s conviction that all individuals have the right to practice their religious rights in accordance with the established customs in the country, which also includes he right of prisoners, the NIHR conducted six visits to Correction & Rehabilitation Centers during Ashura season 2019 for the purpose of ensuring that all related persons are enjoying the free practice of religious rites guaranteed to them by the relevant law and regulations.
4. During those visits, the NIHR met with a number of male and female prisoners, explored the extent of their comfort with the level of facilities and services provided to them to ensure the continuation of their practice of religious rites and coordinated with the administrations of those centres to increase the period of practicing rites on the 10th of Muharram, where they responded and doubled the dedicated time.
5. During the past three years, the NIHR received two complaints on the allegation by two prisoners in the Correction and Rehabilitation Centre that they were exposed to ill-treatment because of their practice of religious rites. The relevant authorities were immediately contacted and it was found that they enjoyed freedom to practice religious rites but one of them was causing chaos and inconvenience to other inmates, the matter which caused the administration of the centre to apply the rules and administrative procedures for such cases.
6. The NIHR also provided legal assistance on several occasions, regarding allegations that the Correction and Rehabilitation Centre’s administration was preventing prisoners from conducting religious rites and obtaining religious books as well as harassment from other prisoners. The NIHR contacted the concerned at the Centre, who provided religious books and ensured the prevention of harassment against them.
7. The NIHR also monitored cases on social media of prisoners at the Correction and Rehabilitation Centre. The first case was regarding a prisoner who wanted to move from one room to another in the evening in order to participate with fellow prisoners in religious rites during Muharram, where the allegation was proved incorrect as the classification of inmates is the responsibility of the centre’s administration. The second case was regarding preventing a prisoner from practicing religious rites, where the NIHR visited him and concluded that he was not prevented from his religious rites and the published information was false. The third case about an allegation that the Centre destroyed personal belonging of a prisoner related to practicing religious rites, where it turned out that there was no violated right since the prison’s administration was conducting a routine inspection documented by CCTV that revealed the possession of bladed weapons and prohibited drugs.

**Section II**

**NIHR’s Efforts and Activities in the Promotion and Protection
of the Values of Religious Tolerance**

1. Pursuant to the amended Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Article (22) stipulates that: **“Freedom of conscience is absolute. The State guarantees the inviolability of worship and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country”**. Article (23) also stipulates that**: “Freedom of opinion and scientific research is guaranteed. Everyone has the right to express his opinion and publish it by word of mouth, in writing or otherwise under the rules and conditions laid down by law, provided that the fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine are not infringed, and the unity of the people is not prejudices, and discord or sectarianism is not aroused”**, emphasizing the respect for religious rights and freedoms related to the values of equality and religious tolerance.
2. The Penal Code promulgated by the Decree-Law no. (15) of 1975 and the Decree-Law no. (47) of 2002 on the Regulation of the Press, Printing and Publication provided for explicit provisions prohibiting any incitement calls that violate freedom of religion, belief, thought and conscience or incite violence or national, religious or racial hatred, which are entirely consistent with the relevant international human rights instruments to which Bahrain has acceded.
3. The Kingdom of Bahrain has taken measures to ensure that all religious groups fully and effectively practice their fundamental rights and freedoms without any discrimination, by creating favorable conditions to enable them to express their culture, language and religion, in compliance with the laws and regulations in-force in the Kingdom of Bahrain. They are allowed to form entities such as social and cultural societies and clubs under the Decree-Law no. (21) of 1989 promulgating the Law on Associations, Social and Cultural Clubs and Private Bodies operating in the Field of Youth, Sports and Private Institutions.
4. With regard to international human rights instruments related to the values of religious tolerance, the Kingdom of Bahrain has acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right under the Law no. (56) of 2006 as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination under the Decree-Law no. (8) of 1990. By virtue of Article (37) of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain, both the Covenant and the International Convention are deemed as binding national domestic laws.
5. On the 13th of September 2017, **“Bahrain Declaration”** was launched as a global document on tolerance that aim to consolidate the approach of moderation and rejection of intolerance and to maximize Islamic values that call for spreading love and peace among humans, where it was texted in five principles that are the pillars of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, namely: **freedom of religious belief, freedom of choice, the will of God, religious rights and responsibilities and faith**.
6. By virtue of the Royal Decree no. (15) of 2018, **“King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence”** was established to reflect in its vision, mission and goals the principles drawn from the history and civilization of the Kingdom of Bahrain through its history, which reflects openness to all civilizations, religions and cultures and the promotion of the values of coexistence, tolerance and peace, inspired by the contents of the aforesaid Bahrain Declaration.
7. On the 5th of November 2018, **“King Hamad Chair for Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence”** was launched in Sapienza University in Italy. This is aimed at achieving academic results in dissemination of a culture of tolerance and promoting the principles of coexistence and dialogue.
8. The **“National Plan to Promote National Unity and Consolidate the Values of Citizenship in Bahrain”** was launched to reflect the royal vision of the King of Bahrain aiming to maintain national constants and consolidate citizenship values.
9. On the occasion of Community Partnership Day in March 2018, the Minister of Interior formed a committee to promote national affiliation and consolidate citizenship values. It contained 16 members from national cadres, specialists and experts to develop a national plan that will serve as a guiding document and a general framework for the work of all bodies in the public and private sectors, civil society institutions and the media, in order to promote loyalty, affiliation, citizenship values and human rights. The Chairwoman of the NIHR is one of the members of this committee.
10. The Kingdom of Bahrain's efforts in the field of providing locations for the exercise of religious freedom as a manifestation that reflects the values ​​of tolerance and peaceful coexistence is revealed by an organized institutional structure formed according to the law represented by the existence of a large number of establishments devoted to establishing rituals of denominations, sects and religions. They all exist in various regions of the Kingdom of Bahrain, which illustrates the unique religious and civilized diversity that reflects the multiplicity of Bahraini society and the rule of tolerance among its members in light of religious freedom of a pluralistic nature guaranteed by the Constitution and regulated by the law and the legislation.
11. Curricula have been prepared to promote the values ​​of citizenship and human rights at all stages of education, and to introduce the rights and freedoms based upon those values ​​among the various sectors of the Bahraini society. Such curricula are deemed as mandatory subjects for students of public and private schools.
12. The Ministry of Education launched the Enhanced Schools for Citizenship and Human Rights Project, which includes curricula around values ​​and concepts focusing on belonging, loyalty, tolerance, volunteerism, moderation, dialogue, democracy and a culture of acceptance of diversity. This project has won praise from the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO).
1. To review the Law no. (26) of 2014 on the Establishment of the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) modified by the Decree-Law no. (20) of 2016, please visit the NIHR website: <http://www.nihr.org.bh>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)