

Mr. President,

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action calls on States to provide effective frameworks of remedies to redress human rights violations, including national institutions that promote and protect human rights. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, together with the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, would like to raise our concern at ineffective national human rights institutions in Gulf Cooperation Council states.

In Bahrain, for example, the Ministry of Interior Ombudsman's Office and the National Institute for Human Rights lack sufficient independence from the government. The Ombudsman is responsible for investigating complaints of abuses committed by MOI personnel and ensuring that personnel uphold human rights. However, the Ombudsman financially and administratively depends on the Ministry of Interior, compromising its ability to transparently monitor the ministry. In two separate cases, Ministry of Interior agents reportedly engaged in retaliatory torture against victims who complained to the Ombudsman.

As of today, Bahrain's National Institute for Human Rights has not obtained accreditation as a successful national human rights institute. The Paris Principles stipulate that human rights institutes must be firmly independent from the government. The NIHR is not independent from the government: it maintains personnel who are or have been Ministry of Interior employees and functions with little transparency. Furthermore, it has praised government policies that violate human rights, such as banning peaceful gatherings.

We remain concerned that these mechanisms represent only cosmetic steps towards redress and have been unduly highlighted by certain States as a sign of progress.

In remembering the Vienna Declaration, we call on all States, including Bahrain, to provide independent, effective and credible frameworks for citizens to address human rights violations.

Thank you.