



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Universal Periodic Review

### **Written statement\* submitted by The Next Century Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2017]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-15586(E)



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## **Press Freedom in Bahrain**

Freedom of Expression is one of the greatest freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 19 of which states “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

It is sad to see that the Kingdom of Bahrain has fallen to 164<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking of the 175 nations assessed for the 2017 World Press Freedom Index. This index ranks Bahrain slightly above Sudan, Syria and Saudi Arabia but below all other Arab nations.

The reform program introduced by His Majesty the King of Bahrain has, by and large, been exemplary. The King expressed a particular interest in promoting freedom of expression in Bahrain. It was with the active encouragement of His Majesty the King that Al-Wasat Newspaper was established in Bahrain.

The establishment of Al-Wasat widened freedom of expression, in part by encouraging the people of Bahrain to express their own views in what had thus become a diverse media spectrum.

Many of the interlocutors in the current Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Bahrain have expressed a desire to encourage greater press freedom in Bahrain. Countries making reference to the issue include Montenegro / Slovenia / United Kingdom / Denmark / France / Spain / Mexico / New Zealand / Switzerland / United States of America / Canada / Estonia / Cyprus / Occupied Palestinian Territory / Germany / Iceland / Italy / Lebanon / Australia / Lithuania / Luxemburg / Austria.

We would like to join our voice to theirs. It is sad to note that Al-Wasat Newspaper was closed down by the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Whatever the reasons for this action, were this action to be reversed it would be of great benefit to democratic progress in Bahrain, and give the Kingdom of Bahrain a far better image in the eyes of the world at large.

Bahrain was once regarded by some as the best country in the Gulf with regard to freedom of media. It would be to the benefit of all of the nations of the Gulf were Bahrain to maintain the high standards of press freedom for which it was once noted. Bahrain can and should be an example to the region. To allow Al-Wasat Newspaper to again run its presses would be a gracious and positive gesture and one worthy of international acknowledgement.