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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Third World Institute - Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 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.

[5 September 2014]


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

GE.14-15832 (E)



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## Scholarships violation in Bahrain

### Introduction

After the pro-democracy uprising of February 14, The *Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* 'BICI'<sup>1</sup> reported that students were arrested, expelled or suspended from their studies as part of the crackdown.

Beginning in February 2011, 97 of Bahraini students studying at universities abroad had their scholarships revoked. In 18 May 2011, a total of 427 students had been expelled by Bahrain university and 54 by Bahrain Polytechnic.

The *Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* resulted in that ministry of education, The University of Bahrain and Bahrain Polytechnic took indiscriminate disciplinary action against students based on their involvement in the February/March 2011 demonstrations, and thereby infringed on their right to free expression, assembly and association. They largely relied on insufficient or circumstantial evidence, and drew conclusions about alleged student involvement in criminal activity from assumptions and improper inferences.

Although most of the students after BICI recommendations were reinstated, but the violation against students have not stopped since then. Education process has been politicized and a systematic discrimination campaign continued against shia community including studying scholarships.

### New scholarship Mechanism:

All high school graduates from government and private schools received scholarships or financial grants based on a cumulative GPA of at least 90 per cent only.

The new system for distribution of scholarships was introduced by the MoE in June first, 2011 "the last day of martial law" aftermath of the events of February and March 2011. Instead of basing the distribution fully on academic merit or marks, it has taken a suspicious route by forming a Scholarship Distribution Committee which supposedly focuses on the student's personal capabilities and preferences, whereby the distributions of scholarships were based on a personal interview that lasts for 15 minutes only which accounts for 40% and the remaining 60% to their academic marks accumulated from three years.!

Students have to log in to the Ministry of Education's website in order to register for a scholarship, they have to choose his\her interest from 1-12 choices of scholarships. Later, they have to be interviewed by the Scholarship Distribution Committee before they get their final choices approved.

Many students have complained about the unjust mechanism of this new method where those of whom have been working for three years to maintain a high GPA, have not received scholarships despite of their academic marks of GPAs ranging from 95% to 99%. While some students with lower GPAs received the best scholarships due to their pledged loyalty to the government.

Students confirmed that the purpose of the interview was not to focus on their capabilities but was used to Investigate their religious background and loyalty to the government<sup>2</sup>.

### Lack of Transparency:

In addition to the new mechanism for distribution, the Ministry of Education has failed to maintain transparency by publishing results of the distribution of scholarships in local newspapers with student's name, his\her marks and the scholarship given as followed for the last 30 years. Instead they published the results individually on their website, where each student had to log in with their CPR number and a given password in order to find out their result. If the MOE published the students' details along with the scholarships given, the government's political aims of discriminating would be discovered<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, MOE refuse to allow any civil societies even to attend in order to monitor the scholarships distribution process.

On the contrary, the Crown Prince's International Scholarship Program has adopted an open and transparent program. The Program has developed its own specialized process to shortlist scholarship candidates and select the final recipients. First, CPISP staff brief 11th grade students with high GPAs about the Program and its application criteria through presentations and school visits. Students then submit their applications to the Scholarship Office within a specified annual deadline, and sit for qualifying tests to assess their English proficiency and critical reasoning abilities. To qualify as a CPISP applicant, students must be enrolled in the 11th grade and have a 97 per cent or higher cumulative GPA for grade 10 and the first semester of grade 11, as well as Bahraini citizenship. About 60 students are then shortlisted based on their GPAs and qualifying test scores, and join the CPISP Candidacy Program, which leads to the selection of the final recipients.

Therefore, no complaints have been recorded since the program started in 1999.

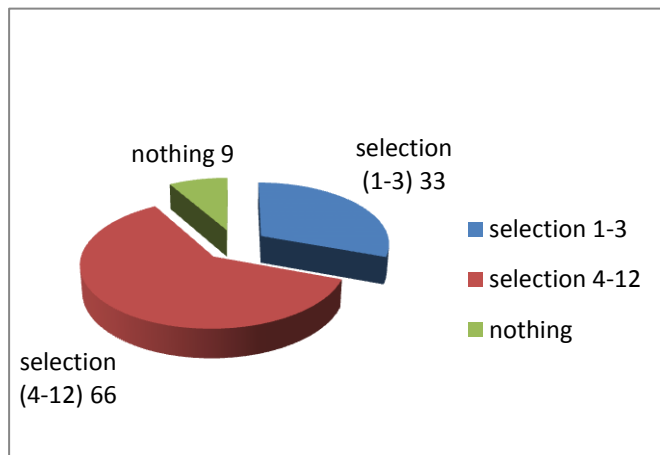
Alwefaq-human rights division<sup>4</sup> has carried out three surveys published in the local newspapers on the scholarships distribution through face to face interviews for 2012-2014. In 2012 they stated that 166 students with marks ranging 95-98% found deprived from their choices 1-3 and some of them received their last choices. Another survey carried out in 2013 with 101 students found for example that one student with a cumulative GPA of 98.1% had been given her choice of no. 12 whereas, another student with 98.3% had been given her choice of no. 6. (choices from no.1 the most favorable to no.12 the least favorable).

This year (2014), Alwefaq has carried out the third random survey with 108 students with marks above 95%. The survey results were: 33 students only got their choices from 1-3, 66 students got their choices from 4-12 and 9 students got no scholarship although their marks were 98.5%, 98% and 97%.

The following table shows a sample of the survey including the students marks and choices given but students name were removed for their personnel safety.

NO	MARKS %	CHOICE GIVEN		NO	MARKS %	CHOICE GIVEN
1	98.8	6		16	97.7	Financial grants
2	98.6	4		17	97.7	5
3	98.4	6		18	97.6	4
4	98.4	7		19	97.6	7
5	98.4	4		20	97.5	11
6	98.4	4		21	97.5	11
7	98.2	7		22	97.4	12
8	98.1	5		23	97.4	6
9	98	10		24	97.3	7
10	98	9		25	97.3	12
11	98	Financial		26	97.2	11

		grants				
12	97.9	6		27	97.2	8
13	97.9	5		28	97.2	12
14	97.9	4		29	97.1	Financial grants
15	97.8	5		30	97.1	Financial grants



Although the Minister of Education had promised not to deprive students of their rights with the new mechanism, cases that have been reported prove otherwise. An example is a case mentioned in Al Wasat newspaper<sup>5</sup>, where students with GPAs ranging from 95- 98.8% have not received the scholarships they want. One student with 98.8% was given her selection no 6 and another with 97.9% was given her selection no 10.

Students with 95% and above who were deprived from scholarship were given financial grants of BD 400 per year which is barely enough to cover the costs of their higher education.

Students who participated in the survey confirmed that some of their classmates with GPAs less than 95% have received scholarships in the fields they were interested in, which proves to show that the Ministry picked and chose who to grant scholarships based on their background and personal views instead of their academic achievement.

**International Law Violation:**

We must mention that Bahrain is a member of the United Nations, which preaches equality to all in terms of civil rights and freedom as well as education. In Article 26 (B) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it states that "Everyone has the right to education. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit"<sup>6</sup>. Bahrain's recent unfair distribution of scholarships is in violation of the above mentioned article. It is also in violation of the **Convention against Discrimination in Education**<sup>7</sup>, where scholarships were distributed on the basis of loyalty to the government instead of academic merit.

**Conclusion:**

As reported by the Ministry of Education, there were 2,426 scholarships and financial grants available to high school graduates this year<sup>8</sup>, which could have been enough for all academically excelling students if only they were distributed on the basis of competency.

In order to make the scholarship distribution fair with no discrimination and deal with all students equally, Ministry of Education should:

- Cancel the Ministry's new mechanism of scholarships distribution, scholarship should be distributed based only on students merits or marks .students interviews have to be stopped.
- Stop the secret system and make the scholarship distribution process completely transparent. student name, his\her marks and the scholarship given must be published in local newspapers if MOE has nothing to hide.
- Form new independent national committee to supervise the scholarship distribution process and receive students complains.
- Investigate and take actions against all officials whom were found responsible for their discriminative actions.

**References:**

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