



Address by

H.E. Dr. Bandar bin Muhammad Al-Aiban,
President of the Human Rights Commission,

at the 10th session of the

United Nations Human Rights Council

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In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to begin by commending, on behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the exemplary role that Mr. Martin Uhomoibhi of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has been playing since his assumption of the presidency of the Council. I take this opportunity to congratulate him on the successes that have been achieved in the Council's work during the period of his presidency. I also wish to express our appreciation for the endeavours made by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navanethem Pillai, which enjoy the full support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few weeks ago, the Kingdom discussed its Universal Periodic Report before the UPR Working Group during a positive and beneficial dialogue in which the Kingdom reaffirmed its policy of promoting and protecting human rights.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has chosen the culture of dialogue as a policy and methodology. It has established the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue which has provided an appropriate environment for interaction among social groups and has helped to promote the culture and exercise of human rights by addressing national issues on a basis of broad participation and freedom of expression within a comprehensive framework of mutual respect for all cultures and beliefs.

In keeping with this policy, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, convened a meeting of Muslim scholars and theologians at Makkah where, declaring that Islam was a religion of tolerance, moderation and compassion, they called for the building of bridges of dialogue and constructive cooperation between peoples. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques also convened a World Conference on Dialogue among followers of divinely-revealed religions, civilizations and cultures at Madrid, attended by theologians and scholars representing various religions and cultures, which issued the Madrid Declaration affirming the unity of origin of mankind and the need to respect human rights and dignity and warning of the dangers of campaigns that seek to intensify discord and disrupt peaceful coexistence.



Mr. President,

In the light of the positive outcome of the Madrid Conference, the General Assembly of the United Nations held a meeting last November, at the request of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, which was attended by a large number of world leaders. During the meeting, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said that the participating States had drawn attention to the need to develop dialogue, mutual understanding and tolerance among peoples, as well as respect for their diverse religions, customs, traditions and beliefs. He also affirmed that King Abdullah's initiative had come at an appropriate time in view of human society's dire need for dialogue between religions, cultures and civilizations.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom is continuing its consistent policy of promoting and consolidating the principles of justice and equality among all members of society and guaranteeing all their legitimate rights and freedoms. During the last ten years, the Kingdom has witnessed reforms and qualitative developments through the updating of basic laws and dozens of other legislative instruments, such as the Statutes of the Judiciary, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Code of Civil Procedure and the Code of Practice for Lawyers, the establishment of numerous institutions and bodies such as the Human Rights Commission and the adoption of a National Strategy to Preserve Integrity and Prevent Corruption. In furtherance of this reform and development process, a few weeks ago a number of Royal Decrees concerning the restructuring of important organs of the State, including the judiciary, the Ministries of Education and Health and the Consultative Council, were also promulgated.

In the judicial sector, all the judicial institutions underwent far-reaching structural and organizational development, including the establishment of a Supreme Court, appellate courts and specialized criminal, commercial, labour, personal status and other courts. A President of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary was appointed, as well as nine members of the Supreme Court with the grade of President of a Court of Appeal; a Council of the Administrative Judiciary was formed in the Board of Grievances; and seven judges were appointed to the Supreme Administrative Court with the grade of President of a Court of Appeal.

In the education sector, the changes included the appointment of a new Minister and new Deputy Ministers, as well as the appointment of a woman as Deputy Minister of Education. The appointment of a woman to such a high-level post was consistent with the policy of assigning a greater role to Saudi women in order to increase their positive participation in the overall development process. Last month, the Council of Ministers adopted a number of executive measures to increase the absorption capacity of technical and vocational training institutions and facilitate a quantitative and qualitative expansion of the fields of employment available to women.



Mr. President,

The Kingdom has condemned all forms and manifestations of terrorism and, in practical terms, has achieved notable successes in its endeavours to combat terrorism and counter extremist ideology through the adoption of programmes based on intellectual persuasion and dialogue, such as the counselling and social rehabilitation programme for persons detained on security grounds which has won worldwide acclaim and proved to be of benefit to a number of States. The Kingdom has also acceded to most of the international conventions against terrorism in keeping with its belief that the campaign against extremism and terrorism requires international cooperation to address their root causes. In this forum, I wish to reaffirm that, although the Kingdom has been a victim of terrorism, the measures that it has taken to protect its security have not affected human rights or the administration of justice since all these measures were in conformity with the laws in force.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the wake of the World Conference against Racism, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, the Kingdom promulgated legislation prohibiting the establishment of organizations which are of a racist character or which support or advocate racial discrimination or propagate ideologies based thereon. That legislation also stipulated that it is a criminal offence for anyone to fund racist activities or issue pamphlets or material inciting hatred. In this connection, I have pleasure in announcing that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, firmly believing in the Conference's noble objectives, has notified the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that it will be contributing an amount of US\$ 150,000 to further the work and objectives of the Durban Review Conference due to be held in Geneva in April of this year.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have noted, with deep concern, the way in which some individuals and extremist information media have recently disparaged the religious beliefs and symbols of other peoples, including the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, and the Prophet Jesus, on whom be peace. We are hoping for international cooperation to combat these racist practices.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The vicious acts of aggression to which Israel has subjected the defenceless Palestinian population of Gaza, including women and children, and which left thousands dead



or wounded, has propelled the region towards increased violence and extremism and led it away from the goal of an equitable peace and security which will be achieved only by enabling the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate rights, as recognized in United Nations resolutions. In keeping with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's policy of endeavouring to remedy injustice by alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques announced the Kingdom's contribution of an amount of US\$ 1 billion for the reconstruction of Gaza.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human development, economic prosperity and political stability are important pillars of the social structure and the promotion of human rights. The Kingdom, seeking to further these objectives, has allocated about 4 per cent of its GDP over the last three decades, amounting to more than US\$ 24 billion, to external assistance for the developing countries and international organizations endeavouring to promote the human rights of peoples. The Kingdom has also provided:

- A donation of US\$ 500 million to the United Nations World Food Programme during the world food crisis.
- Support for the establishment of an Islamic Development Bank fund to address poverty-related problems, and contribution of an amount of US\$ 1 billion to this end.
- Budgetary support for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the amount of US\$ 150,000 per year with effect from 2008
- Support, amounting to US\$ 25,000 each, for four funds established by the Office of the High Commissioner.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that the promotion of human rights and ongoing domestic reforms that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, is championing in the Kingdom are the fruits of a purely national endeavour undertaken in accordance with a truly Islamic approach inspired by the Holy Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet and in conformity with universally recognized human rights concepts. Accordingly, I wish to affirm the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's support for the Human Rights Council in its efforts to promote fruitful international cooperation based on friendly relations among nations and respect for the principle of the equal rights of peoples in accordance with Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of which are in harmony with the Islamic concept of human relations based on mutual understanding and cooperation in righteousness and piety, as advocated in the Holy Qur'an : "O mankind! We have created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other".

Thank you, Mr. President.