On International Women's Day, 23 NGOs Urge Bahrain's King to Grant Bahraini Mothers Equal Nationality Rights

Letter · Bahrain · 8 March 2025

His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
King of Bahrain
Royal Court
Riffaa Palace
Manama, Bahrain

March 8, 2025

Your Majesty,

We extend our greetings and recognize the efforts of the Supreme Council for Women in advancing gender equality in Bahrain. Equality before the law is a fundamental right enshrined in Bahrain's Constitution and international commitments. Yet, Bahraini mothers lack the equal ability to pass their nationality to their children, which often leads to them being left stateless. We respectfully call on the Kingdom of Bahrain to amend its 1963 Nationality Law, in order to grant Bahraini women, the right to pass on their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. Women's inability to equally confer nationality has significant consequences for Bahraini mothers, their children, and their families, as well as for the broader society of Bahrain.

Personal testimonies (PDF) highlight the profound impact of this discrimination. Gender discrimination in Bahrain's nationality law results in wide-ranging human rights violations and severe hardships for affected families. Without citizenship, children face serious challenges, including unequal access to education, healthcare, access to formal employment, residence, financial services, property rights, and inheritance, as well as restricted freedom of movement. These obstacles undermine their ability to fully participate in Bahraini society and their potential to contribute to Bahrain's future. When Bahraini women are unable to pass their nationality to their children, and children are unable to acquire their father's nationality, they are often rendered stateless.

In addition, Bahraini women's inability to pass on their citizenship to their children often puts their families at risk of separation and places significant financial, psychological, and physical strains on families. This can result in an intergenerational spiral of poverty, destitution, and depression that negatively impacts the social fabric of the nation.

The Supreme Council for Women, under the esteemed leadership of Her Royal Highness Sabika bint

Ibrahim Al Khalifa, has previously presented proposals to amend the Nationality Law, allowing Bahraini women married to foreigners to confer their nationality to their children. This commitment underscores Bahrain's recognition of the importance of granting equal nationality rights to mothers, a step that strengthens families and benefits all Bahrainis.

Bahrain's constitution guarantees equality before the law, yet this equality is not fully realized in the case of nationality rights.

Bahrain is a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In paragraph 34 of its February 2023 Concluding Observations of Bahrain's third periodic report, the treaty body stated that:

"The Committee notes with concern the delay in adopting the 2014 draft amendment to the Nationality Law, pursuant to which Bahraini women would be granted the same rights as Bahraini men to transmit their nationality to their children. It also notes with concern that the draft amendment does not provide for an automatic transfer of nationality to the child when the woman is married to a foreign spouse, unlike when a Bahraini man is married to a foreign spouse, thereby putting the woman's child at risk of being stateless."

In 2019, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the independent treaty body that assesses compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Bahrain is also a state party, stated in paragraph 21 of its Concluding Observations, addressing Right to a nationality and birth registration, that it was concerned that Bahraini laws "*[...] are insufficient in guaranteeing the right of all children born to Bahraini mothers to nationality."*

In paragraph 22, The Committee called on the Government of Bahrain to *"Expeditiously amend its Citizenship Act to ensure the right to a nationality for all children of Bahraini women married to non-Bahraini men, to establish safeguards to prevent children from being stateless and to ensure that the citizenship of such children is not revoked [...]"* and *"Guarantee the right to acquire Bahraini citizenship for all children currently residing in the State party who would otherwise be stateless, regardless of their own, or their parents ' , legal status."*

Bahrain is likewise a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In paragraph 20 of the 15 November 2018, Concluding Observations to Bahrain's initial report (UN reference CCPR/C/BHR/CO/1), the treaty body – the Human Rights Committee, called on Bahrain to *"repeal all discriminatory provisions against women in its legislation. In particular, it should (a) expedite adoption of the amendments to the Nationality Act to ensure that women and men have equal rights in transmitting their nationality to their children [...]"*

Furthermore, equal nationality rights for women are essential to Bahrain's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. The ability for Bahraini women to transmit their nationality to their children would enhance their rights and well-being and benefit the economy by enabling greater participation in the workforce and ensuring that future generations can fully contribute to the Kingdom's economic and sustainable development. The economic and

social benefits of equal nationality rights are far-reaching and will contribute to Bahrain's progress and prosperity.

By eliminating discrimination against Bahraini mothers in the nationality law, Bahrain would be at the forefront of advancing gender equality in the region, setting a powerful example for other countries to follow, and joining the 90% of nations globally that uphold women's right to confer citizenship on their children on an equal basis with men.

Reforming Bahrain's nationality law and ensuring equal nationality rights would exemplify Bahrain's stated commitment to human rights. Over a decade has passed since international human rights bodies, which the government asserts it supports, have called for this inequality to end. We appeal to the government to take action to realize its commitments and amend Bahrain's nationality law to ensure Bahraini women can pass their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. We stand ready to offer our technical expertise and assistance to support this reform, in alignment with Bahrain's constitution, values, and commitment to equality and international human rights standards.

The Signatories:

1. Al Rawnak Organization
2. Apatride Network
3. Bahrain Center for Human Rights
4. Bahrain Forum for Human Rights
5. Bahrain Press Association (BPA)
6. Equality Now
7. Family Frontiers Malaysia
8. The Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights (GCENR)
9. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
10. Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (GIDHR)
11. Human Rights Sentinel
12. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
13. Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI)
14. MENA Rights Group (MRG)
15. The MENA Statelessness Network (Hawiati)
16. MUWATIN
17. Nationality For All (NFA)
18. Rights Realization Center
19. Salam For Democracy and Human Rights
20. The Somali Gender Hub

21. State Free
22. Warsheh Team – Syria
23. Wogood for Human Security

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