



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: January 1 to March 31, 2005

BAHRAIN: POLITICAL PARTY BUILDING (04855) USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00

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I. SUMMARY

Two years after municipal and legislative elections afforded Bahraini citizens the opportunity to participate in a more open and democratic system of governance for the first time in almost three decades, the balance between democratic reforms, political capacity and public confidence in government remains uncertain. The government of Bahrain continues to implement measured democratic reforms while clamping down on human rights activists and free speech advocates. Political societies wrangle with each other and the government in negotiations about the laws to govern political activity. Bahrain citizens increasingly feel alienated from the formal political process.

As political parties are afforded greater legal status and a more significant role in Bahrain's transition, it is important that they be capable of acting as effective advocates of viable policy alternatives, especially prior to the 2006 elections. Public confidence in the democratic process will depend largely on the ability of political parties to fulfill this role and be active in the political process. In order to encourage a political environment conducive to this development and help political organizations reach this goal, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is implementing a program that seeks to meet the following objective:

- *To help political societies develop the capacity to organize and increase their abilities to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and with the government to improve the environment in which the 2006 elections will take place.*

To meet this objective, NDI undertook the following activities during the last three months:

- Held regular meetings with MPs, members of the *Shura* Council and political society leaders to encourage continued dialogue and consultation on issues of national importance;
- Organized a roundtable discussion on the political experience of elected women officers from the Gulf;

- Conducted a pre-election planning workshop to assist political society organizations in thinking about planning and preparations for the 2006 election cycles; and
- Co-organized, with the Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS), a “political organization financing” workshop and follow up forum for political societies.

Additionally, NDI assisted the Central Municipal Council in organizing a two-day conference to mark the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) municipal day and the parallel workshop, the “Gulf women’s role in municipality.” NDI also attended the “Towards a Contractual Constitution Conference,” the second constitutional convention organized by the four political society organizations that boycotted the 2002 elections.

NDI’s program is focused on strengthening the capacity of political societies to organize, think strategically and effectively represent citizens’ interests so that they may more positively impact the decision-making process. The Institute’s activities in the last quarter aimed at preparing the ground for the 2006 elections by improving the political framework and institutional environment in which parties will compete and campaign.

II. BACKGROUND

Political Events

Cabinet Shuffle

In January, the King reshuffled the cabinet for the third time since ascending power in 1999. Four ministers were removed. Fatimah al-Baloushi, dean of the faculty of education at Bahrain University was appointed as Minister of Social Affairs. Al-Baloushi is the second woman in Bahrain to join the government; Dr Nada Haffadh remains head of the Ministry of Health. Former ministers of Cabinet Affairs, Finance and National Economy and Justice were appointed as special advisors to the Prime Minister.

Public Gathering Law

An alternative version of the controversial draft law governing demonstrations and public gatherings was unanimously approved by political societies in Bahrain. The government's original draft was criticized for restricting freedoms and imposing harsh penalties on citizens. It would require organizers of any public gathering to get permission from authorities first; imposes jail sentences of up to two years or a fine of BD 1,000, or both, on anyone organizing a public gathering without permission; and would apply to all public meetings which do not require an invitation to attend - affecting every kind of public meeting, not simply demonstrations.

The societies’ version was drafted by the National Democratic Action Society and was presented to authorities for consideration. There are plans to ask the government to withdraw its original proposal and replace it with the new version, which has been backed by every society in

the country. The alternative draft legislation carries softer penalties and would ban police from using firearms to disperse protesters.

Demonstrations

A number of demonstrations took place in Bahrain during this quarter. Men and women protested outside the Bahraini Interior Ministry demanding that officials accused of practicing torture in the 1990's be put on trial. On the occasion of Arab Women's Day, women demonstrated demanding the resignation of the attorney general and several court judges. The women also demanded the issuance of a civil status law. Citizens also gathered to protest the arrest and detention of the webmaster of www.bahrainonline.org. Authorities said that the site stirs hatred against the government and spreads false news that could jeopardize state security.

Al-Wefaq Rally

The largest demonstration was staged by *Al-Wefaq* National Islamic Society. Over 7000 people participated in the society's demonstration to demand for constitutional reform. The protest came several days after *Al Wefaq* spokesman Dr. Abduljalil Al Sengace was removed from his position as a department head at Bahrain University. The decision followed a faculty committee inquiry into Dr. Al Sengace's travel to the US, to take part in political and human rights activities.

The Interior Ministry had rejected *Al Wefaq*'s request to stage the political rally because of regional security and citizen safety concerns. The predominantly *Shia* society demanded constitutional change, particularly the elimination of amendments that give the king's appointed upper house of parliament, the *Shura* Council, as much power as the elected lower house.

The *Shura* council condemned the *Al Wefaq* National Islamic Society-sponsored rally in Sitra and called upon political and social societies to protect the national security by promoting peace and harmony. The Council highlighted that the Kingdom defends the freedom of expression but the safety of its citizens especially youngsters and the weak come first. In a statement earlier that week, King Hamad bin Ids Al Khalifa gave a speech stating that there should be no limits on free speech and expression, but freedom should be rooted in patriotism. Bahraini officials were quoted in a pro-government newspaper as saying that the authorities could take legal action against *Al Wefaq* for defying a government order banning the rally.

Contractual Constitution Conference

Four *Shia* political societies, those who boycotted the 2002 elections, held their second annual "Towards a Contractual Constitution" conference seeking to address a petition created last year for constitutional reform. The petition, which according to the Nationalist Democratic Rally spokesman had 75,000 signatures on it, stressed the groups' commitment to Bahrain's constitutional monarchy. It was originally addressed to the King but the Royal Court refused to accept it. The royal court Minister declared that the petition should be addressed to parliament and not the king.

International Women's Day and National Strategy for the Advancement of Bahraini Women

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Her Highness Shaikha Sabika bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, Chairwoman of the Supreme Council for Women, launched the "National Strategy for the Advancement of Bahraini Women." The strategy aims to put forward recommendations and policies to empower women and ensure the Kingdom of Bahrain becomes a signatory to the major international conventions on women. Al Khalifa has continually expressed her support for the empowerment of the Bahraini women. However, she has publicly rejected the idea of quota for women in the 2006 municipal and legislative elections. She considers the

"The strategy is a pledge and we are committed to enforcing all necessary rules for the sake of achieving women's inspired objectives and to ensure that they play their role in development as partners worthy of confidence."

- Chairwoman of the Supreme Council for Women, Her Highness Shaikha Sabika bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa

quota system a discrimination and unconstitutional.

Democracy and Human Rights in Schools

The government approved a suggestion by the parliament to teach the subject of "democracy and human rights" in state run preparatory and secondary schools.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Meetings and consultations

NDI continued to hold regular meetings with MPs, members of the *Shura* Council and political society leaders to encourage continued dialogue and consultation on issues of national importance. These consultations are aimed at resolving the current political impasse in the country and providing strategies to address future conflicts. NDI continues to see slow, but positive, progress in the abilities of political societies to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and with the government. Evidence of this progress is illustrated in the ongoing workshops and roundtable discussions that enable political societies to reach negotiated agreements on recommendations and strategies for approaching government on electoral reform issues.

Roundtable on "Yemen Women Political Experience"

In conjunction with the GCC municipal day activities, NDI organized a roundtable discussion on "Gulf women political experience." Shaikha Yousef Al Gefery, the legal affairs committee chair, and the lone woman elected, of the Qatar Municipal Council and Ms. Fatima Muraisi, the social affairs committee chair of the local authority of the Aden region in Yemen, were invited to share their experience as elected women with forty-five Bahraini women political activists. The discussion focused on women political empowerment in the political organizations.

Ms. Muraisi expressed her gratitude to NDI-Yemen for providing her the tools to become a strong political party woman and shared with the participants the “Declaration of “Yemen Advances with Women’s Participation”, encouraging Bahraini women to follow this example in demanding leadership positions in their respective political organizations.

Pre-Election Preparations Workshop

NDI conducted a workshop to assist political society organizations in preparing for the 2006 election cycles. The workshop was timely given that political discourse across the country is already beginning to look towards next year’s elections.

The discussion began with a roundtable discussion on the tenets of pre-election planning, the steps and rationale of why it is important. Societies were also encouraged to consider steps for negotiating electoral reform issues such as redistricting, establishing an independent election commission and pushing for campaign financing laws.

A brief explanation of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercise was given and societies broke into groups to conduct their own SWOT analysis to see how prepared they are for the 2006 elections. Afterwards, each society presented the results of their SWOT.

Participants were provided with a brief overview of the features of a political campaign, with emphasis placed on why planning should start now. Topics included a review of what NDI covered in its 2002 campaign programs and what is covered in NDI campaign planning publications. In addition, participants received information on targeting seats, identifying possible coalition partners, voter registration lists, selecting and preparing candidates, campaign structures, campaign team roles, campaign research, message development, voter targeting, volunteers and budgeting. Societies then went back into their groups and drafted an action plan for the next six months on what they need to do to start preparing for the elections. Each group presented their action plan.

Political Organizing Financing Workshop and Forum

NDI, in collaboration with the BTS, organized a series of “political organization financing” workshops. Thirty-four people representing political organizations participated in the first workshop while seventy-five people, representing political organizations, civil societies, municipal council, the *Shura* and *Nuwab* councils and the media participated in the second forum.

During the initial workshop, Dr. Scott Waalkes, a Fulbright Scholar and Bahrain University professor explained the importance of political parties in democracy, and the difference between political parties, interest groups and other NGOs. He then explained the important role money plays in politics, contrasting the different approaches in political party and election financing taken by some countries, such as the United States and Germany.

Ms. Noha Stephanos, of BTS, presented International Transparency and International IDEA comparative studies on political party funding around world. She stressed the importance of providing state funding to political parties and elections through legislation to insure transparent and equitable distribution of public funding to curb corruptions in public institutions.

NDI Resident Senior Program Manager, Fawzi Guleid, presented the facilitators qualities and skills to prepare participants to serve as facilitators. The facilitators were briefed on the principles of democracy; learned techniques for leading group discussions; and practiced handling group dynamics.

The second forum was opened with a speech by the first deputy of the *Nuwab* Council, Hon. Abdulhadi Marhoon, given on behalf of the president of the *Nuwab* Council. Following the opening speech, participants were divided into small groups to discuss one of two topics: the legal framework of political organizations financing or how much funding should be appropriated to political organizations and elections expenditures in the 2005-2006 budget.

The groups were asked to consider questions regarding political party funding in order to construct the legal and budgetary framework of political organizations and elections financing. The questions included: Is public funding intended to be a primary source of resources for the parties? What are the regulations concerning the expenditure of political parties? Are there limits on expenditures? What enforcement bodies should oversee the fair implementation of a political party funding system? Are political parties provided with free or subsidized media time? Are media organizations required to provide free or subsidized time?

The groups returned to the plenary sessions and each facilitator summarized the discussion of his group. They came up with recommendations for both of the topics of the workshop: a legal framework regarding political party financing and preparation of the budget of political organizations and elections. These recommendations will serve as the basis for continued dialogue between political society organizations and the government on legal and electoral reforms surrounding this issue.

Complementary Activities

NDI assisted the president of the Central Municipal Council in organizing a two-day conference to mark the GCC municipal day. The council also organized a parallel workshop to highlight the “Gulf women’s role in municipality.” Qatar is the only GCC country that has an elected woman in the municipal council. In 2002, 31 Bahraini women vied for elected municipal council seats, but none were elected. NDI recommended several women from Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen that the council could invite to participate in the workshop.

NDI’s Resident Senior Program Manager was the only non-Bahraini allowed to attend the “Towards a Contractual Constitution Conference.” The Minister of Social Affairs had summoned the organizing committee chair and informed him the government position of banning non-Bahrainis to attend the conference. Organized by the four *Shia* political societies who boycotted the 2002 elections, the conference was the second of its kind. The conference created a

secretariat to implement the conference recommendations. Among the recommendations of the conference were:

- Organize national conference for all political forces to discuss “Constitutional Reforms” in Bahrain;
- Hold seminars and symposiums to raise constitution awareness;
- Use the media to publicize our position on the constitution;
- Contact Arab and international political parties, parliaments and independent activists to explain our position on the constitution;
- Organize workshops on constitution crises in Bahrain in other countries; and
- Capitalize on the constitution petition signed by more than 75,000 citizens demanding a contractual constitution in the international arena.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Result 1: Political Societies demonstrated initial steps in preparing for municipal and legislative elections in 2006

- Political society leaders identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of their respective society;
- Based on their SWOT analysis, political society leaders drafted actions plans to start preparing for the 2006 elections; and
- Political society leaders identified areas of negotiation for key electoral reform that they would like to take up with government.

Result 2: Political Society leaders, media representatives and Nuwab and Shura Council members came together to discuss the financing of political society organizations

- Political society leaders identified accurate financing needs of their respective society;
- Participants discussed and presented on the legal framework of political organizations financing and how much funding should be appropriated to political organization and elections expenditures in the 2005-2006 budget;
- Participants developed recommendations to provide government funding to political societies; and
- Bahraini newspapers published details of the discussion, recommendations and positive response from government representatives in moving forward with further action.

Result 3: Bahraini men and women demonstrate a greater understanding about women in politics, from other Gulf experiences.

- Political society leaders continue to express their interest in more actively engaging women leaders in political society activities and in the 2006 election cycle;
- Bahraini women leaders and activists are incorporating the experiences of Yemen, Qatar and Morocco to inform their strategies;

- Bahraini women leaders and activists approached NDI for assistance in implementing plans for engaging political society leaders in dialogue about women’s political participation; and
- Bahraini women leaders and activists approached NDI for assistance in pre-campaign training and skills development.

V. EVALUATION

During this quarter, NDI further developed relationships and maintained its reputation as a valued resource in Bahrain. By providing consultations on pre-election planning, political society financing and women’s political participation, the Institute continues to be a relevant and helpful resource.

Public support shown by colleagues in political societies and the government, as evidenced by the large turnout for the Political Organization Financing workshop and forum, reinforces the validity of NDI’s work in Bahrain. The Institute’s continued involvement in the activities of Bahraini political societies and government, both in the legislature and within the broader political context, have enabled NDI to observe events such as the “Contractual Constitution Conference”, where non-Bahraini entities are normally shunned.

The atmosphere of the “Contractual Constitution Conference” was more subdued compared to last year’s; attendees were more vocal in their support for the issue of constitutional reform, but were more critical of how political societies are moving forward. Participants complained that the four political societies’ lacked a political agenda and gave a weak performance in contrast with the government’s international public relations campaign. Adding to the tension were the efforts of Shaikh Ali Salman, president of *Al Wefaq*, in trying to keep a tight rein on the conference’s proceedings. Salman was among the majority of the *Al Wefaq* board of directors who were in favor of participating in the October 2002 legislative election. Despite being overruled in this decision, Salman continues to support *Al Wefaq* unity. Board and other influential members of *Al Wefaq* continue to wrangle over whether the society will participate in 2006. Salman will need to shore up the support for *Al Wefaq* unity or risk a split that could throw the society and its supporters into chaos.

The conference created a secretariat to implement the conference recommendations, but didn’t give it any decision-making authority that would bind the four political societies in the future. News articles since the conference have questioned the role and progress being made by the secretariat; other than a few op-ed pieces it is not clear what the secretariat has accomplished or how it plans to move forward its agenda.

It was notable that the president of the Central Municipal Council took part in the conference to mark the GCC municipal day. In the past, the Ministry of Agriculture and Municipality Affairs has been organizing such events. However, the municipal councils asserted their rights as the elected councils to organize this and any future events.

Ms. Maraisi was very well received in Bahrain. In addition, Bahraini women found the Declaration on “Yemen Advances with Women’s Participation” particularly informative on how

Yemeni women political leaders organize. Muraisi also discussed her stance on quotas, saying she was not in support of quotas for women. However, she is now a strong supporter of quota as a temporary measure to enable women reach at all level of policy-making positions. She said that in Yemen there is one woman in Parliament. She admitted that one woman in a 301-seat parliament has difficulty achieving her goals and proving herself to her constituents. As quotas are becoming more of a hot topic in the Gulf region of the Middle East, her assertions encouraged interesting dialogue among the women participants.

At the Pre-Election preparation forum, all of the major political societies were represented and most included women as participants. Participants were very engaged in the discussions and knowledgeable about the steps of campaign planning. Each society group took assignments seriously and gave strong presentations to the whole group.

The SWOT analysis illustrated that the societies share many of the same strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Almost all of them credited their leaders for the strength of the society while noting that their biggest weaknesses were limited membership/branch activities and financial resources. Opportunities were almost always linked to expanding the membership base and building up support for society ideals. Government regulations prohibiting the formation of political parties and limiting fundraising by societies were seen as the biggest threats to society stability and election success; the issue of electoral districting was also seen as an important threat. Smaller societies also tended to see the actions of the larger societies as threats to how much support they could gain.

With regard to the six-month planning exercise, the societies came up with similar steps to take in preparation for the elections. All seemed to understand the need to delegate responsibilities to working groups and research the constituencies in which they might run candidates. If the plans for fundraising and developing messages begin now, societies will likely be well prepared for the election cycle.

More in-depth workshops on specific campaign related topics will be of great benefit to the societies in order to ensure that they carry out their plans and make the most of the preparation and campaign time.

NDI has also specifically focused on political party financing as a topic for civic and political reform. The Institute's non-partisan position and commitment to increasing the capacity of both political and civil societies, has afforded it a unique position. Workshops like the political financing forum, demonstrate that NDI facilitates dialogue between these two segments of society on issues of governance and public policy.

V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

During the next quarter, NDI will continue to work on helping political societies develop the capacity to organize and increase their abilities to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and with the government. The Institute also looks to work with political societies to further

strengthen their institutional capacities and strengthen their constructive and effective roles in moving forward the process of negotiating electoral reform issues.

NDI will conduct several roundtable discussions with political society leaders and government representatives on key electoral issues such as re-districting, the establishment of an independent election commission and the powers of the *Shura* Council. It is expected that political societies will be able to identify areas of recommendation to present to the government, reach consensus on points of negotiation and begin to engage government in dialogue on these issues. Political society leaders will also continue to press for the passage of the political organization law that they presented to the government last fall and for the inclusion of political organization financing policies.

Additionally, NDI will continue to provide one-on-one assistance to political societies in developing their internal structures and capacities. It is expected that political societies will continue to make progress in improving the democratic processes by which it operates as well as developing strategies for ensuring a smooth transition to a formal legal status, should the political organization law be passed by parliament.

Pending additional funding, NDI will work with Bahrain women leaders and activists to engage political societies in discussions to support women's participation within the society and as candidates in the 2006 elections. These women would initiate dialogue with political society leaders about the issue and take steps to develop a strategy for greater support from the political societies and the general electorate.