**By His Excellency Dr. Abdel-Majeed Za’lani[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Workshop on the Regional Arrangements for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights**

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Arab Human Rights Committee (AHRC)[[2]](#footnote-2) was established in 2009 under the Arab Charter on Human Rights[[3]](#footnote-3). Although the Committee was recently established, compared with other regional tools, it insures the engagement of Civil Society through preparing preliminary and periodical national and regional reports represented by State Parties, or by reviewing countries’ preliminary periodical reports at the Periodic Review.

Within this scope, The Human Rights committee aims at gathering maximum reliable and objective information from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to reach a real and independent evaluation on the achieved progress as well as the obstacles facing the enforcement of the Arab Charter on Human Rights.

Realizing the importance of engaging National Human Rights Committees, NGOs and other stakeholders in the AHRC’s examination of the State Parties’ commitments, as per the Charter, via providing the Committee with the information gathered by those organizations on the State Party report under discussion;

And in achieving these goals, the AHRC has established permanent and continuous interaction with NGOs and National Institutions in the report drafting process. This was achieved via preparing a Manual of the Participation of Civil Society Organizations with a Guidelines and Guidance for Report reception from State Parties.

The Manual of the Participation of Civil Society Organizations establishes the participation process of concerned National Institutions for Human rights, NGOs and other Stakeholders via written or verbal participation. Such participations are opportunities for civil societies and their organizations to voice out their opinions on human rights issues in their respective countries.

This also allows them to deliver their recommendations on improving human rights protection in State Parties[[4]](#footnote-4).

The AHRC has adopted the wide definition for Civil Societies where it can receive shadow reports from the concerned National Institutions of Human rights, NGOs, academic institutions, research centers, regional organizations and other stakeholders. The AHRC also receives collective reports from the above-mentioned bodies’ leagues. National Institutions of Human rights, NGOs, and stakeholders can apply to attend the AHRC State Parties’ report discussion.

The AHRC considers shadow reports and verbal participations (hearing sessions) provided by National Institutions of Human Rights, NGOs and stakeholders available for public access unless requested otherwise by the body presenting the report.

**Written Participations**

The AHRC publishes the State Parties’ reports for allowing the respective National Institutions of Human Rights, NGOs, and stakeholders to access them. The AHRC then receives shadow reports prepared by National Institutions of Human rights, NGOs or other bodies. Consequently, written comments on the State Party Report and commitment can be submitted. Recommendations can also be made accordingly.

Shadow reports providers need to consider the Guidelines stated in the Manual of the Participation of Civil Society Organizations by writing an introduction that highlights briefly the most prominent results, additional information and important recommendations. The shadow report must include an independent analysis for all State Party report sections and recommended best practices to be followed by the State Party to secure progress on human rights. The shadow report should also include the difficulties faced by State parties in enforcing the Charter provisions.

The AHRC demands that shadow reports are sound, credible and recent. Shadow reports are to be based on a wide range of authentic information including legislations, surveys and studies issued by governmental bodies, universities or NGOs. Shadow reports should be based on the final recommendations of the previous report adopted by the AHRC.

**Verbal Participation (Hearing Sessions)**

The AHRC discusses the State Party reports in public hearings. Respective National Institutions of Human Rights, stakeholders, and licensed NGOs operating in the respective country, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference, or the United Nations are allowed to attend these hearings as observers. The AHRC may allow other bodies to attend the hearings as observers too.

The AHRC may hold more than one hearing session attended by National Institutions of Human rights, NGOs and stakeholders. Such hearings are public unless the AHRC decides otherwise. The AHRC may use any piece of information, as deemed appropriate, for discussions with the State Party. Public hearings attended by shadow reports providers are considered part of the shadow report. The hearings include comments on the State Party’s delegation responses to the AHRC inquiries during the discussions. The hearings also refer to the main obstacles facing the State Party in applying the Charter provisions. The hearings also include recent information gathered after the submission of written reports.

The hearings provide AHRC members the chance to directly gather information and opinions on the State Party Report under discussion. AHRC members are to decide on using, not using, or how to use such information to insure a certain degree of confidentiality and speaking freely.

The AHRC constantly insures communication with National Institutions of Human rights and NGOs operating in the Arab region. During its visit to the State Party, the AHRC insures meeting with NGOs to introduce the Charter, the AHRC’s operating mechanism, and the rules of shadow reports submission.

The AHRC’s operating mechanism includes inviting the largest number of NGOs operating in the State Party, within a sufficient period of time, after receiving the State Party’s report and prior the Review before the AHRC. The AHRC also requires shadow reports to be submitted on the enforcement of the Charter’s provisions. The AHRC has regularly received shadow reports. During the Review of State Parties reports from Qatar, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and Jordan shadow reports were submitted.

Submission of shadow reports depends on several factors: the interaction of the NGO with the AHRC, the NGO’s awareness of the AHRC’s operating mechanism, the NGO’s financial and technical capacities enabling it to map human rights and freedoms stated in the Charter, the NGO’s submission of sound and professional shadow reports, the ability of the NGO to create networks with other NGOs to cover the diversified aspects of the Charter, the organizational abilities and freedom that the NGO enjoys as per the country context.

1. The Arab Human Rights Committee Vice President (AHRC). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. AHRC is composed of seven members elected through a secret ballot by Charter State Parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Arab Charter on Human Rights was adopted by Arab League summit, May 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paragraph (4) of the preamble:Manual of the Participation of the Civil Society Organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)