



Analytical Reading
in
The National Plan for the Promotion of
National Belonging and Consolidation of
Citizenship Values - Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain Interfaith

28 Nov 2019



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For decades, equal citizenship has been a cornerstone of Bahrain's political and human rights movements, and a pressing national need that hasn't been absent from demands for reformation since the 1930s which has been presented as a solution to many of Bahrain's long-lasting crises. Moreover, equal citizenship was considered a roadmap for managing the diversity of Bahrain's social and political structures. For the past eight years, Bahrain has been experiencing severe political and social issues. These issues have formed an international consensus on the importance of undertaking radical reforms in Bahrain; the addressing of the plight of widespread discrimination in the country, and the absence of principles of equality, justice, and equal opportunities on the basis of equal citizenship. Nonetheless, the Bahraini government has resorted to several useless steps that haven't affected the essence of the problem or changed the international conviction, that Bahrain has failed to comply with international treaties and conventions related to equality rights.

One of the repercussions of the stifling political crisis in Bahrain was the involvement of both conflicting Bahraini parties in an ongoing debate over the concepts of homeland, the citizen, and patriotism. This argument led to the exchange of accusations between government and opposition in the subjects related to these three concepts. The opposition has outperformed the government in international forums, on the diplomatic and human rights levels, by persuading the world that the government of Bahrain breached its international obligations related to equal citizenship rights; which prompted the authorities in Bahrain to go on a project entitled "National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and consolidation of Citizenship Values".

The strife between the two different views demonstrates the need to work on the restoration and reconstruction of the Bahraini national identity to achieve equal citizenship and justice in rights and obligations.

Summary:

1. On March 26, 2019, the Bahraini government launched a national plan titled: “National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values”. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for preparing, implementing, coordinating, and supervising the provisions and initiatives of this plan.
2. The national plan represents an urgent need, if it is exploited and implemented in a comprehensive community partnership, which reflects the various components and repercussions of the Bahraini society.
3. The plan needs to adopt the international decisions and steps considered in building an equal citizenship state, through the study of past international experiences.
4. In order not to remain mere words on paper, the plan must consider that the principle of equal citizenship requires a set of transformations and reforms at the judicial, legislative, and executive authorities, media, and civil society institutions level; as they play a significant role in controlling the society.
5. Past international experiences often entrusted the management of such initiatives to independent experts through a strategic partnership between government institutions on the one hand, and civil society organizations on the other. This step is considered as a crucial and influential social step that plays a significant role in formulating and designing the goals and initiatives, and supervising their implementation; which addresses societal concerns about official actions and reinforces the aspirations for equal citizenship and effective national belonging to various social components.
6. Bahrain's legal obligations, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), represent theoretical and operational references for the success of the plan and the achievement of its objectives; in particular

concerning recommendation 1725 (b) which states that: The Government of Bahrain should prepare a national reconciliation program that addresses the unfair treatment of groups that it believes are deprived of equal political, social and economic rights; which would benefit all the sects in the country.

7. While the national plan is characterized by full and noticeable participation of government and semi-government ministries and institutions, the Executive Committee is missing representatives of civil society, whether from the Legislative Council or civil society institutions, including the opposition. Besides, entrusting the task of planning, implementation, and coordination, to a security agency raises many questions and doubts.
8. The plan lacks the familiarity with the concept of national belonging according to the recent political principles and experiences; which confirm that the application and guarantee of the concept of "equal citizenship" is the foundational, proactive, and necessary step to achieve the idea of national belonging.
9. The announced plan's provisions and initiatives lack basic and urgent principles such as political participation. In addition, it doesn't guarantee the safe involvement of citizens in political, economic, social, and cultural fields without discrimination or exclusion.
10. The plan doesn't adopt any urgent / exceptional measures, including the correction of what is known as the 'political isolation' law, a law that prevents leaders and members of dissolved political associations from running for membership in the parliament (Amendment of Article 3 of the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights – June 11, 2018). Besides, the dissolving of opposition associations and suspending Al-Wasat newspaper.
11. The plan doesn't offer any initiatives related to the practices of sectarian discrimination against the Shiite community; confirmed by international reports issued by the eligible authorities of the United Nations. This reinforces a sense of unfair citizenship and sectarian targeting of the country's Shiite component.

12. The plan's official principles are based on resisting and addressing regional conflicts (Islamic Republic of Iran - Qatar) without mentioning or focusing on the local file and its complexities.
13. The national plan neglects the restructuring of the country's security forces and the integration of its Shi'a citizens in the institutions of the Ministry of Interior and the Bahraini Defense Force. However, if not neglected, this would automatically and positively reflect on the promotion of equal citizenship and national belonging; by representing all the Bahraini sects in the government's institutions.
14. Media-related initiatives don't provide clear measures that allow the access of the opposition to the government's media institutions and state-controlled dailies.
15. The structure and content of the announced initiatives lack "seriousness," "creativity," and "objectivity." Most of them are government programs whose objectives have been diverted and linked to the plan; however, they are not systematically related to the plan and its goals.
16. The plan lacks any real discussion platforms for open community dialogue on national issues.
17. The plan requires an advanced level of expertise and competencies, capable of formulating innovative and effective techniques.
18. The national plan doesn't include any clear and public political commitments of the State.
19. A national plan to promote national belonging is expected to ensure "equality and integration in citizenship and humanity"; which is the actual base of equality among citizens before the law.
20. At the stages of planning, preparing, and designing the plan's initiatives, the government authorities ignored all international obligations relating to justice and equality. Furthermore, it ignored everything related to any open and comprehensive national discussions on the complexities of the internal political file; which clearly explains the predominance of the propagandistic nature of the plan and the absence of professional, objective, legal, social and political content therein.

Full Paper:

The Minister of Interior of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, launched the “National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values” on Tuesday, March 26, 2019.

At its meeting held on September 24, 2018, the Bahraini Council of Ministers approved the launch of a national plan for the promotion of national belonging which derives its principles from the royal vision, and aims to continue building on what has been achieved to: strengthen the internal front, preserve national security and social stability, promote loyalty and belonging, consolidate the values of citizenship, maintain moderate religious discourse, and spread the spirit of tolerance, moderation and commitment to national unity.

Procedurally, the Council of Ministers assigned responsibility for the implementation of the plan to the Ministry of Interior. It was agreed that the plan would include five main axes implemented through 70 initiatives to strengthen national belonging and consolidate the values of citizenship. Also, the Council decided to form a committee comprising ministries and bodies concerned to follow up on the plan and implement its recommendations.

National Plan: From the "Internal Crisis" to "Regional Conflicts"

This initiative represents a step in the right direction, an important platform, and an urgent Bahraini need as well. Moreover, this initiative confirms the government's recognition of crises of trust and citizenship in the country. However, what is of concern in the official provisions of the plan is the significant momentum of regional conspiracies targeting Bahrain, and considering addressing them as one of the main reasons for launching the plan. This suggests that the "National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values" seems politically oriented and directed towards an external conspiracy - specifically Qatari and Iranian - and to the pivotal response to it; neglecting the internal political crisis and its repercussions that have disturbed the country since February 2011.

The Minister of Interior, during announcing the launch of the "National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values," confirmed that Iran, in an effort to devote the approach of sectarian

extremism, is targeting the national identity and destabilizing Bahrain's society. He also explained that the directives of the political leadership in the country, the sacrifices of the security forces, and the country's need to strengthen community cohesion were the main reasons for the initiative; starting from elaborating it as an idea and a proposal in the council of ministers in early January of 2019, followed by assigning the Ministry of Interior (security) to study and submit a proposal, and finally, implement and supervise this plan.

This political (regional) momentum largely explains the fact that a “security agency” is responsible for planning, managing, and implementing the plan. However, this contradicts past international experiences that often entrusted the management of such initiatives to independent experts; through a strategic partnership between government institutions on the one hand and civil society organizations on the other. This partnership is considered as a crucial and influential social step that plays a significant role in formulating and designing the goals and initiatives, and supervising their implementation; which addresses societal concerns about official actions and reinforces the aspirations for equal citizenship and effective national belonging to various social components.

National Plan: International and National Commitments of the Government of Bahrain

The list of stated objectives, according to official sources and details of the content, doesn't state what is related to the origin, reasons, and details of the problem; which cannot be provided without a real and accurate diagnosis of the difficulty. Furthermore, one of the main initiatives proposed for the plan is the inclusion of the recommendations of Bahrain's Independent Commission of Inquiry (the Bassiouni Committee) which issued its report on November 23, 2011. However, the suggestions mentioned below, from the report of the Committee, raise the question of whether the content, results, and aspirations of the recommendations should be considered as an essential and critical reference for the initiative. Also, Bahrain's legal obligations to the international community are in accordance with the international conventions and treaties that it has committed to, which include the articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Social

and Cultural Rights of 1966; which promote the principle of equality and combat discrimination in all its forms.

- Recommendation 1725 (b): The Government of Bahrain should prepare a national reconciliation program that addresses the unfair treatment of groups that it believes are deprived of equal political, social, and economic rights; which would benefit all the sects in the country.
- Recommendation 1724 (b): Establish professional standards for the media and other forms of publications, including a code of conduct and an implementation mechanism, to maintain professional and ethical standards; to avoid provoking hatred, violence, and intolerance; and without breaching internationally protected rights to freedom of expression.
- Recommendation 1724 (c): Take appropriate actions, including legislative measures, to prevent incitement to violence, hatred, sectarianism and other forms of incitement that result in a breach of internationally protected human rights, regardless of whether the source is private or public.
- Recommendation 1725 (a): Develop educational and pedagogical programs at the primary, secondary and university levels to promote religious and political tolerance, as well as the promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

The number of international anti-discrimination conventions ratified by Bahrain is about six international agreements. The first international convention ratified by Bahrain in 1994 is the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which stipulates the State's commitment to:

- (A) The State undertakes not to engage in any act or practice of racial discrimination against individuals, groups, or institutions; and to ensure that all public authorities and institutions, national and local, act according to this obligation.
- (B) The State undertakes not to encourage, protect, or uphold any racial discrimination by any person or organization.

- (C) The State shall take effective measures to review national and local government policies and to amend, rescind, or nullify any laws or regulations which have the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination wherever it exists.
- (D) The State shall prohibit and end any racial discrimination by any person, group or organization, by all appropriate means, including legislation where necessary, as required by the circumstances.
- (E) The State undertakes to encourage, where necessary, multinational integrationist organizations and movements and other means to remove the barriers between races, and to discourage anything that will strengthen racial division.

At the stages of planning, preparing, and designing the plan's initiatives, the government authorities ignored all international obligations relating to justice and equality. Furthermore, it ignored everything related to any open and comprehensive national discussions on the complexities of the internal political file; which clearly explains the predominance of the propagandistic nature of the plan and the absence of professional, objective, legal, social and political content therein.

Manipulation of concepts: the predominance of national belonging over equal citizenship

The Minister of Interior's founding statement, to launch the initiative of "National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values," displays a highly significant and critical problem. The minister affirms that "belonging and loyalty to Bahrain under the leadership of His Majesty the King is not a topic that bears diligence and interpretation." This expression indicates that this affiliation to the homeland and loyalty to the king is necessarily a constant and a permanent concept. Moreover, the national plan is supposed to provide, through a series of programs and initiatives, a clear definition of "binding" and "final," as well as a full understanding of this loyalty and belonging, in accordance with the international definition of the concept of citizenship.

This conceptual sharpness, besides the claim of having a final and decisive understanding of the concept of "national belonging and citizenship", is a

profound problem that creates a gap among the outcomes of the opinions, pillars, and aspirations of the political and media discourse of the Bahraini government and the opposition combined. In other words, the several interpretations of the concepts by the opposition and the various segments of society and civil society institutions which are distinct from what is adopted - decisively and definitively - by the authority, are worthless.

On the other hand, citizenship is defined as "the belonging of an individual to the country where he/she has permanently settled within the state which he/she holds its nationality. The citizen is a participant in the governance and is subjected to the laws issued by the state. Moreover, the citizen benefits from rights based on equality and without any discrimination, such as color or language, like the rest of the citizens and has set of obligations towards the country to which he/she belongs, with a sense of belonging. "

Various international political and legal moralities, including that of the United Nations, emphasized that any democratic citizenship must be based on a set of rights and freedoms that all citizens must benefit from. In addition, the British Encyclopedia (Britannica) confirmed this by its definition of citizenship; the relationship between the individual and the state as defined by the law of that state, and the obligations and rights involved in that relationship. Also, it prefers its concept of citizenship as "giving citizens political rights, such as the right to vote and hold public posts."

The principles of the "National Plan" announced by the Bahraini government doesn't provide an adequate definition of the concept of citizenship that it's working to promote, neither at the level of clarity and methodology nor at the strategic and procedural standards of the plan. Moreover, the theoretical structure, objectives, and aspirations of the plan are fully based on the statements of the Minister of Interior (March 26 and August 4, 2019) and to the supplementary statements of some ministers and official members of the committee overseeing the program. These statements are related to some political positions on the one hand and some marginal moves that have been officially announced under the name of "initiatives" on the other.

National Plan: The Content's Problem

The latest statement by Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, Minister of Interior and Chairman of the Follow-up Committee on the Implementation of the "National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values, on August 4, 2019, when chairing the second meeting of the Committee in the presence of the Ministers of Education, Labor, Social Development, Media, Health, Youth and Sports, emphasized on the following objectives and ideas:

- The national plan comes as part of the comprehensive vision of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to reinforce the spirit of belonging to the nation.
- The Kingdom of Bahrain will remain strong by the unity of its people, the cohesion of its society, and the alignment of all its citizens, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.
- His Majesty's reform program is the most significant national project, and it includes no single word that differentiates between citizens.
- The conspiracies that have been arranged by Qatar and Iran, and their attempts to divide the nation and provoke revolution and chaos are doomed to total failure.
- The national identity is strong, unified, inclusive, and can't be affected by any means of fragmentation.
- Launching the website of the national plan www.bahrainouna.com

This diversified and incomprehensible group of ideas reinforces doubts and raises serious questions about whether the "National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values" is a serious and responsible response to a national need and necessity and an internal crisis that the state is looking to build a community partnership to overcome it, or is it just a collection of headlines and propagandistic mechanisms of the government to mislead and circumvent the stifling political and social crises.

This explains, to some extent, that the plan is devoid of any serious political dimensions or initiatives related to the recommendations of the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry, considering the latter an internally agreed ground to overcome the deepening political crisis in the country. Also, this explains what is affirmed by various segments of society - including the opposition street - about the promotion of discriminatory government policies that incite hatred and undermine the concept of equal citizenship among members of the Bahraini community.

Actually, the national plan doesn't pay any attention to the fact that the differences of intellectual bases and religious and ethnic diversity among the people of the same country, and that the living experiences between one individual and another, and one group and another, lead to the creation of different concepts and differentiated priorities among citizens, and that these differences represent the elements on which consensus is based, according to the nature of the national system and in terms of its characteristics and priorities.

A national plan to promote national belonging is expected to ensure "equality and integration in citizenship and humanity"; which is the actual base of equality among citizens before the law. The first condition of "citizenship" is that it should be built only in a democratic-legal political environment based on a set of rights and obligations, which means a fundamental recognition of the contradictions, the right to be different, and plurality. Therefore, the most crucial element in building and designing the "National Plan" in Bahrain is absent; its principles and initiatives lack the critical component and the fundamental concept of citizenship.

In the case of Bahrain, it is necessary to base itself on a set of key principles that the plan had to include as follows:

- 1- Opening a serious national dialogue to reach a national consensus that meets the aspirations of all Bahrainis.
- 2- Opening wide community dialogues to strengthen the links and relations among the components of the community.
- 3- Creating the necessary measures that will build and enhance trust, familiarity, and tranquility in society.

- 4- Promoting the enactment of legislation to provide legal and constitutional guarantees for the protection of equal citizenship.
- 5- Encouraging and nurturing community-based initiatives aimed at promoting equality and equal opportunities for citizens.
- 6- Eliminating all restrictions that constitute barriers to the principle of equal citizenship.
- 7- Believing in the principle of pluralism and religious, political, societal and cultural diversity.
- 8- Consolidating the independence of the three authorities to ensure good governance, democratic construction, and the protection of human rights.
- 9- Bahrain's commitment to its legal obligations as:
 - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
 - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 - International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
 - Recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry "Basiouni Committee" in particular the following recommendations:
 - Recommendation 1725 (b): The Government of Bahrain should prepare a national reconciliation program that addresses the unfair treatment of groups that it believes are deprived of equal political, social and economic rights; which would benefit all the sects in the country.
- 10- Integrating all the Bahraini components in the national plan, because the key to its success is to absorb all these popular components.
- 11- Recognizing the cultural, social, and human specificities and privileges of the citizens of Bahrain as natural outcomes of the diversity of society; including the promoting of openness and accepting the cultural and historical specificities of citizens.
- 12- Enabling genuine political participation that makes the citizen a real partner in the political decision-making process in Bahrain.

National Plan: Significant Headlines and Lost Initiatives

According to the official website, the national plan is based on five main tracks, targeting different categories of citizens, each with a set of initiatives implemented under the supervision of the Executive Committee, and the number of initiatives is about 70 initiatives, each achieving specific objectives. The Minister of the Interior made the latest update on August 4, which affirmed the creation and consolidation of some initiatives, bringing their total number to 89, of which 60 have been activated.

Program	Announced Details	Remarks
First: Belonging Program	It is a program that aims to develop an individual sense of national belonging through the interaction of all components of society and partners. It includes 13 initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-The program assumes that there is no sense of national belonging or it is diminished, and thus, the task of the program is to create this affiliation. In fact, in any society, any failure or lack of commitment to national responsibilities is necessarily the result of a failure of the state to fulfill the concept of equal citizenship.- There are no specifics about these initiatives or details about whether the civil society with all its segments, including the opposition, is a partner in these actions.

<p>Second: Public Relations Campaigns</p>	<p>These are organized programs and activities aimed at promoting Bahraini values among the public. These programs include 12 initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The program doesn't provide any clarification of what Bahraini values are to be promoted, and whether they are distinct from human values in any democratic society. - The program didn't provide any details about the initiatives.
<p>Third: Media Initiatives</p>	<p>It includes a range of different traditional and non-traditional media activities aimed at promoting national belonging and consolidating citizenship values, and it includes 16 initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are these activities? What are they based on at the level of theory and objectives? - Will these activities allow civil society representatives, including the opposition, to appear on the official media and the press, especially since they are still prohibited from doing so? - There are many questions about the possibility of the emergence of all societal cultures on the media, that presents a single stereotype that it considers the national identity of all Bahrainis.
<p>Fourth: Curricula and Resolutions Initiatives</p>	<p>These initiatives are aimed at developing educational curricula and activities in different educational institutions in order to ensure the promotion of national belonging and the consolidation of citizenship values. This program includes 14 initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The plan doesn't provide any details about the content, and whether it will address fundamental problems related to allowing other cultures in society to exist and express themselves and their cultural distinctions. - Questions are raised about the revision of the content of religious decisions that is derived from a single religious denomination.
<p>Fifth: Legislation and Regulations Initiatives</p>	<p>These initiatives are based on reviewing all national laws and regulations in the Kingdom of Bahrain to ensure that there is nothing that contradicts the promotion of national belonging and the dissemination of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The plan doesn't provide any clarification on the participation of various social segments and civil society institutions in this review, and whether it's responding to the recommendations of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of

Bahraini values. In addition, these initiatives are concerned with issuing new laws and regulations that protect society from any challenges. This program includes 15 initiatives.

Inquiry, which urged the State to complete a comprehensive national reconciliation project.
- It is not known whether such initiatives will address many of the legislation of a political nature, including Article 3 of the "Exercise of Political Rights" law, which prevents leaders and members of dissolved political associations from running in elections.

The national plan exercises, in its details, what can be considered a forgery of reality and it deals with it based on a series of facts. Also, it doesn't create or open space for societal freedoms or the adoption of concepts such as openness and pluralism of opinions which are related to demonstrating this reality and diagnosing its problems and priorities.

The state defines the concept of national belonging in a decisive and closed manner. Its definition contradicts all interpretations and moralities of political and international treaties. Moreover, it creates, implements, and prioritizes initiatives away from real problems experienced in the community. Also, files such as "equal citizenship", "political participation", "reform of security", and "anti-discrimination" are absent and replaced by marginal programs and initiatives that lack seriousness, clarity, and depth.

Below are illustrative examples of some of the initiatives and actions that the plan had to implement:

Item	Remarks
Equal citizenship - political participation	The plan doesn't adopt any urgent/exceptional measures to correct what is known as the 'Political Isolation' Law, a law that prevents leaders and members of dissolved political associations from running for membership in the Council of Representatives (Amendment to Article 3 of the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights - June 11, 2018).
Equal citizenship - representation in judicial institutions, public prosecution and prisons	The plan was supposed to include initiatives that would provide realistic solutions to sectarian discrimination policies against the Shiite component, concerning the access of Shi'a citizens to judicial institutions, courts, public prosecution, and prisons. This leads to a sense of diminished citizenship and sectarian targeting of the country's Shiite component.
Allowing access to media institutions and ensuring freedom of opinion and expression	Media initiatives don't provide any clear measures to ensure the access of opposition components to the state media and state-controlled dailies. The plan could have included an initiative to establish a national (neutral) institution to censor public and private media.

<p>Security file: Ministry of Interior and Bahrain Defense Force</p>	<p>The national plan neglects the restructuring of the country's security forces and the integration of its Shi'a citizens in the institutions of the Ministry of Interior and the Bahraini Defense Force. However, if not neglected, this would automatically and positively reflect on the promotion of equal citizenship and national belonging; by representing all the Bahraini sects in the government's institutions.</p> <p>Recommendation 1722 (e) of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry: The Government should urgently establish and implement a vigorous program to absorb members of all communities into the security forces.</p> <p>The plan also neglects the international recommendations, including the recommendation of the United States of America (103) in the Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights at the United Nations, which recommended the Government of Bahrain to restructure the security forces to include all components and reflect the nature of diversity in Bahraini society.</p>
<p>National Reconciliation</p>	<p>The plan lacks any actions or initiatives related to national reconciliation and the mitigation of the repercussions of the worsening political crisis since February 2011, whether through long-term initiatives related to internal dialogue or unilateral actions.</p>

Missing Declared and Serious Initiatives

While the Minister of Interior confirms the existence of about 89 initiatives and the activation of 60 of them, we review below five announced initiatives, of complete data and objectives. The initiatives involve the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Interior; the Civil Service Bureau; and the Department of Immigration, Passports, and Nationality and the Ministry of Information. The “content” of these initiatives clearly indicates the ambiguity of the concept behind the Committee, in designing its initiatives and the objectives, for which it was first established; the lack of “seriousness” second; and doubts the level of expertise and competence of those responsible.

First: Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Amanakm Allah

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched an initiative (Amanakm Allah) which aims to the awareness of citizens about travel guidelines. This awareness campaign comes within the framework of the national plan in terms of preserving the fundamental national principles, and adhering to the identity and the national and spiritual values and customs it represents; besides its vision to build the present and the future to meet the national aspirations for a safe, dignified and stable life. The campaign gives guidelines about travel planning, the country to be visited, and ways to maintain the security, safety, and property of citizens."

Second: Ministry of Interior: Summer Camp

The initiative, according to the official website, aims to prepare the youth, train them, develop their national sense, and encourage them to volunteer work. It was organized in cooperation with the Royal Police Academy in partnership with Tamkeen from June 23 till July 11, 2019, under the title 'The 11th Summer Camp', which is one of the initiatives of the “National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values”.

The initiative isn't new but has been activated since 2009 after a series of security events in the country at that time; it was suddenly presented over the past few days as part of the “National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging”.

Still, this initiative is criticized for the limited participation of members of the Shiite community in it, first, and for not allowing any integration of Shia members in the security services, second.

Third: The Civil Service Bureau Initiative

According to the statement of Mr. Ahmed bin Zayed Al Zayed, the Civil Service Bureau's initiative targets all employees who work under the umbrella of the civil service. The "Min Ajlakom" (For your sake) initiative, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Development, focuses on "employees who work under the umbrella of the civil service in difficult jobs and aims at appreciating these employees and increasing their satisfaction and appreciation. At the same time, the "Distinguished Government Employee" initiative aims at increasing the sense of appreciation of government employees' efforts at work and their continuous tender, which is based on national responsibility."

In spite of the strange connection between these two initiatives and the concept of equal citizenship and national affiliation, they are government programs that have been in operation for years, and the Civil Service Bureau has been instructed to include both programs within the "National Plan" Initiative.

Fourth: Initiatives of the Ministry of Information

The Minister of Information indicates in an official statement that his ministry is interested in utilizing all its potential to make the initiatives entrusted to it a success; this includes the activation of laws, regulations, and codes of honor among the various media to highlight the positive image of the Bahraini citizen, as well as employing radio and television programs which will enhance efforts aimed at strengthening belonging, preserving national gains, and serving the process of development and renovation.

It is noteworthy that the minister's statement doesn't include any reference to several recommendations emphasizing the need to allow the access to media and press in the country to representatives of civil society, especially the opposition. Moreover, the minister's statement doesn't refer to any recommendations that ensure freedom of opinion and expression in

cyberspace, and stop the policies of misinformation and targeting practiced by the Media Affairs Authority on specific social components.

Fifth: Nationality, Passport and Residence Affairs Initiative: “AL Bahrain Maak” (Bahrain is with you)

This initiative is concerned with issuing a list of travel guidelines, which enhances the security and safety of citizens and entrenches many national values. It mainly concerns itself with the necessity to make sure to register the correct data in the visa application and to ensure the validity of the passport and to keep copies of relevant documents and emergency numbers on the phone and e-mail. Regarding securing the house, it is necessary to use the essential alarms, make sure they are properly operated, disconnect the gas cylinders and close them well, etc.

Such initiatives, considering that it's a part of the “National Plan”, raises justified and realistic doubts about the seriousness of the state in employing and investing this project and its objectives; which may amount to the "underestimation" of citizens, the complexities of the reality and the discriminatory and sectarian policies it produces, and the absence of political participation in the country.

Sixth: Ministry of Justice Initiative “Defining Religious Discourse”

Sheikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments, said that the renewal of the religious discourse is an activation of the initiatives of the “National Plan for the Promotion of National Belonging and Consolidation of Citizenship Values,” which includes the initiative entrusted to it; to rationalize religious discourse and spread national values in various worship places and religious institutions.

He pointed out that "the ministry has prepared a strategy to renew the language of religious discourse, as the ministry, in coordination with the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, and the departments of Sunni and Jaafari endowments, continue to develop and train preachers and has come a long way in this regard."

The statement by the Minister of Justice raised serious concerns among international human rights organizations; that the initiative of defining

religious discourse was being used to restrict freedom of expression and impose restrictions on article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides for the protection of the right of everyone to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression. This right includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, whether in written or printed forms, or in the form of art, or through any other means of the person's choice, especially in the light of Bahrain's failure to comply with the guidelines and articles of the Rabat Plan of Action.

