

Speech by King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifi on Reform, 1 June 2011.

Brothers and sisters,

It is our pleasure to meet with journalists and media personnel in our beloved kingdom. You are the leaders of public opinion, the enlightened power, the mediators and connectors between society's official and civic bodies. You are essential partners in the process of this country's development.

We would like to take this opportunity to underline our great appreciation for your noble work, as well as our everlasting commitment to upholding freedom of expression within the framework of political, cultural and intellectual pluralism. A free, impartial, and independent press is the backbone of democratic progress, and it plays a positive role in strengthening social cohesion, and in disseminating the spirit of affinity and love.

We should only look back over the events of the past few months in order to draw useful lessons and morals. The reform process began with the historic consensus on the Charter of National Action, in which the Bahraini people decided on a new chapter of their history, calling for comprehensive modernisation, a better life, the promotion of the popular representation in the process of decision making, and paving the path for Bahrainis' present as well as charting the future for generations to come.

Reform is the mission from which we shall not digress; it is an expression of belief and determination between us and our people. With the help of Allah, we will proceed forward in this promising national process within the natural progress of the life cycle and the development of people and nation.

Who doesn't want more efficient and effective governmental performance? Or more efficient legislative representation? Or political and civic societies that operate within the framework of national unity and the rule of law? Those who resist such aspirations act against the process of evolution, and ultimately, they cannot stop natural progress of people's lives.

We have worked throughout our reign to create a democratic life in which everyone could raise their demands freely through institutions furnished by this democracy. In adherence to these measures, and in support of the initiative of the crown prince, backed by the government and the legislative branch, and affirming what came in the National Unity Gathering's last statement that dialogue is a national strategic choice to reach the required and agreed upon solutions, we instruct both the executive and legislative branches to call for a national dialogue for an optimal outcome for the kingdom of Bahrain, and to take all necessary measures to prepare for this comprehensive, serious dialogue – without preconditions to begin early July of this year, in which all people could participate with their vision of the future.

Their recommendations – upon which we hope you will agree – will drive the pace of reforms towards further growth on all levels, consolidate the pillars of the reform project, and achieve the aspirations of the kind people of Bahrain for peace, justice, and the continuation of the process of development and growth. The recommendations of the dialogue are to be submitted to us and be presented to the constitutional institutions, each in its area of authority.

Based on the aforementioned, the byelection will come as an essential part of the national dialogue to complete the House of Representatives' membership to enhance the participation of all citizens in the development process, preservation of the national achievements, and sustainability of development and growth. We hope and truly wish the participation of citizens of our beloved homeland in these elections in all vacant constituencies, in order to realise the popular hopes of the 2010 elections.

Citizenship's connotation of loyalty, patriotism, pride in its identity and allegiance have all placed a great responsibility on journalists and the media in this crucial phase, which needs to heal the social rift, and work on the rationalisation of public opinion, maintenance of national unity, restoration confidence among all, wisdom and balance to generate positive communication on all levels. The press and the media are the identity of the reform project. We will continue our support to you so that you will be able to play your national role.

We meet today in a time in which the kingdom is proud of the political, defence, and financial support from our brothers in the GCC states, which reflect mutual respect between the GCC countries, and has also led, praise be to Allah, to the announcement of the largest budget in the history of the kingdom, after being approved by the government and legislature. This will strengthen the national economic process, affirming the importance of

your media role, enriched by your analytical criticism and constructive opinions. The goal is to stimulate productivity, boost competitiveness, encourage and attract investments, and enhance human resource efficiency to enable everyone to play their role in the process of construction, development, and to create means to a decent life.

In conclusion, despite the fact that what has occurred recently in Bahrain has hurt us deeply, we remain determined to honour our commitments before Allah and our people. Our confidence in journalists and in the media is high, and our hopes in you are higher. The Bahraini people are eager to obtain facts to enable them to shape a comprehensive national opinion without division among its people. We confirm to all journalists and media personnel in the kingdom of Bahrain that their freedom is preserved and their rights are safeguarded. Further, no one shall be harmed due to his peaceful, civilised expression of opinion in this state of law and intuitions.

May Allah guide us to the good of the kingdom of Bahrain and its loyal people. Peace, God's mercy, and blessings be upon you.