



Organisational Discrepancies and the Fight for Universal Human Rights

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The protection of universal human rights must remain a key priority for the international community. Yet, given the ever-evolving international environment, it has become difficult – if not impossible – for key institutions and decision-makers to examine breaches of human rights independently. Instead, increased reliance is being placed on specialised organisations, or bodies within organisations, to publically and fairly investigate issues related to human rights and their abuse. While a wide assortment of human rights NGOs fulfil their mandates with professionalism, honesty and a genuine ideological belief in human rights protection, others have been formed for political reasons and with a political agenda in mind. Nowhere is this clearer than in the proliferation of human rights organisations that deal with the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. It is essential that the right organisations are selected to inform decision makers otherwise the risk of taking sides – in often complex socio-political relationships – runs high.

The EGIC recognises that some GCC members still have a long way to go before reaching European models of human rights though highlights that great strides have been taken in what is referred to as the **Reform and Reflect (R+R) formula** to reform governance structures to better reflect the population and its multifaceted interests. The EGIC also recognises that the GCC needs support in order to fully and comprehensively integrate European approaches of human rights into daily discourses. To do so however, it is vital for European and international decision-makers to select the most appropriate organs to report to them about the human rights situation facing the members of the GCC. It is time to end organisational discrepancies in relation to human rights in the Gulf and wider Middle East, and to identify those human rights groups that have been formed with a political agenda.

The following is an annotated sample of human rights NGOs that peddle political agendas – often based on sectarian lines – and deliberately distort information related to their target countries. This sample has been selected due to the ambiguity in the organisational name which lends greater and wider credibility than the content of their focus would warrant.

1. **The Gulf Centre for Human Right** (<http://www.gc4hr.org/>)—brands itself as a multi-vector human rights organisation that provides safe environments for human rights activists reporting on the Gulf countries, Yemen and Syria. On inspection however, the organisation only superficially treats the Gulf countries and pays attention only to Bahrain. For instance, there are 25 full pages of articles that detail alleged human rights violations in Bahrain and only 2 pages that do the same for Iran, 3 for Iraq and 10 for Syria. Iran is one of the worst human rights violators in the world and has among the highest execution rates while both Syria and Iraq are in the throes of civil war. It is shocking that Bahrain is regarded as a worse human rights offender than Iran, Iraq and Syria combined.
2. **The European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights** (<http://www.ecdhr.org/>)—is a complete misnomer, dealing neither with democracy nor human rights. Instead, it is a sectarian platform. If one enters 'Yemen,' 'Iran,' 'Iraq,' or 'Syria' (for instance) into the webpage's search engine, stories about Saudi Arabia and Bahrain - exclusively - appear. This site appears to be a selected web-feed that reproduces information from its four main partners:
 - a. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain,
 - b. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy,
 - c. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights
 - d. Defenders for Medical Impartiality

each of which maintains a sectarian programme. The only main difference between the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights and its partners is its location, Brussels, since the ECDHR targets MEPs in order to promote its agenda.

3. **Institute for Gulf Affairs** (<http://www.gulfinstitution.org/>)—is almost entirely focused on Saudi Arabia and reinforces many of the narratives of Saudi Arabia as a regional and international spoiler. Much of the IGA's recent work is sectarian and depicts Saudi Arabia as reacting to the new 'Iran-friendly' international environment through violence. The IGA also wrongly suggests that Saudi Arabia was connected to the Paris violence with the deployment of very superficial evidence (see: <http://www.gulfinstitution.org/saudi-school-in-paris-teaches-violence-against-france/>). While the IGA does produce alternative narratives and explorations of other GCC and Gulf states, these are eclipsed by its sectarian agenda.

Please note that comprehensive research into human rights organisations that deal with the Gulf will be freely available by mid-2016.

Human rights protection must remain a firm priority for all GCC countries. At the same time, greater awareness of the abuse of human rights discourses by some NGOs must be made public. The EGIC calls on human rights activists to be held to greater account for their actions and for international decision-makers to adequately vet those human rights groups they rely on to inform them in their policy choices. The failure to do so increases the risk of feeding into the unfolding sectarianism in the Arabian Gulf rather than anchoring good practices and dialogue from the European experience.