

His Majesty Delivers a Speech to Citizens Concerning Request to Amend Some Articles of the Constitution, 15 January 2012.

Manama, Jan. 15 (BNA) -- His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa delivered today a speech to the citizens, and here is the following content of the speech:

In the name of the Almighty God the most Merciful the most Gracious Dear citizens, Peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you We are pleased to address you today, as we move forward on the path of development to enable Bahrain to build further gains.

This will be for the benefit of our beloved country, and in the interests of its honorable children, with the aid of Almighty God, in adherence to the values of tolerance and coexistence in light of God's law, and Arab traditions. These are the values upon which we have all been brought up; and they have protected us against the dangers of intolerance and sectarianism.

Our loyal people have demonstrated that their will, despite all events, is devoted to continuing the reform project, to preserving the achievements of the Charter and the Constitution, and to accelerating progress and momentum through constitutional institutions.

Today, we will continue this march with anyone who has genuine patriotic desire for further progress and reform in all its forms, whether it is political, economic or social, on the basis of our common convictions that reflect the spirit of the times and meet the legitimate aspirations of all citizens to achieve further development consistent with the principles of a peaceful democracy.

Brothers and sisters,

It is beyond doubt that the National Consensus Dialogue recommendations have outlined the shape of the reform that we are aiming to achieve, and emanate from the solid base of our national experience, laid down by the historical consensus on the National Action Charter. We have instructed the Executive and Legislative Branches to implement without preconditions these recommendations, for which many parts of society resolutely participated so as to move forward through comprehension and belief in the principle of national action encompassing everyone.

Accordingly, and in line with our mandate to propose constitutional amendments and to honor our promise, we will later issue a Royal Decree to refer to the Council of Representatives and the Shura Council, requesting the constitutional amendments as stated in the recommendations of the National Consensus Dialogue. The philosophy and motivation behind this request is to open new horizons for our democracy, based on the National Consensus Dialogue recommendations, and to reflect our commitment to the stability of the nation, the unity of its people, and the realization of their aspirations, taking into consideration the best interests of the homeland, and the interests of present and future generations of citizens to develop our democracy and our political programs.

Brothers and sisters,

These proposed amendments bring greater harmony in the relationship between the Executive and Legislative Branches in order to achieve greater balance among them.

The amendments add new guarantees to be applied when exercising the right to dissolve the Council of Representatives. They require and entail consultation with the Chairman of the Shura Council, the Chairman of the Council of Representatives, and the President of the Constitutional Court, while previously it required only the consent of the King and the Prime Minister. Further, in respect of the appointment of members of the Shura

Council, the amendments call for a Royal Decree to be issued by the King prior to the order of appointment setting out the method, procedures, and guidance that govern the selection process.

To empower the Councils concerning preparation of the state budget and legislation, the proposed amendments extend the scheduled sessions of the National Council in its both Chambers, the Shura Council and the Council of Representatives, when necessary to pass draft laws regulating economic issues urgently requested by the government.

In addition, the amendments set out the competent authority for drafting bills, raising constitutional amendment proposals, proposing laws or draft Constitutional amendments, and determining the necessary period of time to refer such bills to the Council where the proposal was originated. These amendments allow both Councils to more easily set the state budget, in a way that helps to effectuate the new budget at the beginning of the fiscal year, and preclude the announcement of a budget of more than two fiscal years.

In line with the conclusions of the National Consensus Dialogue, these constitutional amendments aim to reflect the popular will in the formation of the government based on its program. The Council of Representatives will discuss the government program after it swears the constitutional oath. Moreover, it has the right to approve or reject the government program, and if the program is approved, the government has secured the confidence of the Council.

In addition, the proposed recommendation consolidates the oversight role of the Council of Representatives as a sole monitoring Power. Thus, the recommendations grant the Council the right to end cooperation with government, and to initiate discussions on any public theme. The amendments add additional guarantees to ensure the participation of the Council of Representatives collectively during the discussions of the questions addressed to Ministers, and to set a timeframe for the government to justify any rejection of the demands of the Council.

Alongside this, the Council has been vested with the constitutional right to question and withdraw confidence from Ministers, as well as to set up Committees to conduct such questioning.

While the Constitution had previously given jurisdiction to the Chairman of the Shura Council to refer the bills approved by the two Chambers to the Prime Minister to pass them, and given him priority to preside over the meetings of the National Council, the amendments have vested these jurisdictions and this priority to the Chairman of the Council of Representatives.

Brothers and sisters,

We are confident that the Legislative Power will resume its constitutional responsibilities to make these amendments, responsive to the recommendations of the National Consensus Dialogue. However, the historic step we make today will open doors wide to democracy and develop its exercise, enabling future generations to build on it to reach new heights.

We cannot fail at this point to emphasize that democracy is not just literature, or constitutional and legislative provisions. Democracy is a culture and practice, commitment to the rule of law, respect for the international principles of human rights, coupled with serious national political action that represents all spectrums of society without exclusion or quotas. In parallel with this crucial step that we take today, we call for other important steps to be made to reinforce the democratic culture and practice on the land of our beloved country. Furthermore, we call upon all segments of society – the community and the family – to work together to ensure that our young people respect the law. This is a responsibility that must be shouldered by all, especially when respect for the law is linked to the principles of coexistence, tolerance, harmony and love.

Today, we are passing an important era in the history of Bahrain. Constitutional and political reform cannot be

attained, or continue to exist, in a vacuum, but it is in parallel and closely related to economic reform, development efforts and to the social reform that takes into account the interests of all citizens of this country.

We will march together at this period of time to attain all these achievements with determination and resolve, praying to Almighty Allah to protect our country, our security, our stability and to bless our steps and sustain the unity of our voice, as he who listens to our supplication.

God save Bahrain and its citizens and give us His help, support and guidance, for He is the Lord and the Patron.

May peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you.

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