



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

www.pomed.org ♦ 1820 Jefferson Place NW ♦ Washington, DC 20036

"Bahrain's Vision Amidst Regional Realities"

Middle East Policy Forum and Distinguished Women in International Affairs Series
The Elliot School of International Affairs – The George Washington University
1957 E Street NW
January 28, 2010, 6:00 – 7:30 PM

The Middle East Policy Forum along with the Distinguished Women in International Affairs Series sponsored an event featuring **Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo**, Bahrain's Ambassador to the United States. Ambassador Nonoo presented remarks on the relationship between the United States and Bahrain and commented on Bahrain's role in the Persian Gulf.

Ambassador Nonoo began with an overview of Bahrain's diplomatic posture towards a number of pertinent issues. She echoed Bahrain King **Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa**'s call for a fresh start to peace talks and quoted the king as saying: "The biggest mistake has been to assume that you can simply switch on peace like a light. We should move towards real peace now by consulting our people and by reaching out to Israelis to highlight the benefits of a genuine peace."

While acknowledging the legitimacy of America's concern with the gulf region, Nonoo maintained that for Bahrain, security issues are of "immediate concern; a matter of survival." The Iranian nuclear program should be addressed "in such a manner as to spare our region a confrontation," she said. However, **she alluded to Bahrain's strong, multifaceted relationship with the United States** as a reason for hope. To produce positive momentum on many of these challenges, Nonoo called for the creation of an organization to include all nations in the Middle East without exception.

In response to a question on the nature of the security relationship between Bahrain and the United States, Nonoo said that her country's security apparatus is working with American officials to combat terrorism. However, **Bahrain does have Islamists in the parliament**, which she views as an indicator of an open society.

With regard to Iran and the United States' presence in the region, **Nonoo welcomed America's role** and particularly cited the importance of the American 5th Naval Fleet which is stationed in Bahrain. Iran periodically makes territorial claims on Bahrain and the visible American presence serves "as a deterrent to the Iranian regime – they know the U.S. has a base in Bahrain." She feels it's important that the United States maintain this base.

Nonoo further highlighted recent advancements in the area of civil rights, noting a **recent piece of legislation that mandated equal rights for Sunni women** in court over the custody of children after a divorce.

Finally, the ambassador responded to a question about the differences between Presidents **Bush** and **Obama** by praising Obama's immediate outreach to the Arab world and his willingness to engage in tough issues. But she conceded that "we need to see action now."