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PARTICIPATION IN OICOA EXCHANGE TRAINING PROGRAM: A Transformative Experience in the Kingdom of Bahrain



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HOSTED BY:

Independent Ombudsman Office of the Kingdom of Bahrain
On behalf of OICOA – Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ombudsman Association

Dates of Exchange Program:

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Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain



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With heartfelt appreciation, I reflect on my participation in the **OICOA Exchange Training Program** in the Kingdom of Bahrain—an experience that was both professionally enriching and personally inspiring.

I extend sincere thanks to the **OICOA Secretariat** and **Board of Directors** for approving and supporting this valuable initiative, which fosters collaboration and learning among ombudsman institutions across the OIC region.

A special acknowledgement goes to Her Excellency **Ms. Ghada Hameed Habib, Ombudswoman of Bahrain**, for her gracious leadership and unwavering commitment to justice. Her role in hosting and shaping this program was truly commendable.

I am equally grateful to Honourable **Dr. Asif Mehmood Jah, Federal Tax Ombudsman of Pakistan and Secretary General, OICOA**, for his encouragement and continued support, and to **Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah, Legal Advisor at the FTO Secretariat and Executive Secretary, OICOA**, for his dedicated coordination throughout the program.

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This experience reinforced the power of knowledge-sharing and international cooperation. I am honored to have represented Pakistan and will carry its lessons forward with purpose and pride.

MEET THE DELEGATION



The Pakistani delegation to the OICOA Exchange Training Program in Bahrain comprised four representatives from the Federal Tax Ombudsman Secretariat. The delegation was led by **Mr. Rana Hassan Akhtar (Advisor Incharge at Regional Office Gujranwala of FTO)** with **Mr. Mubasshar Satti, Mr. Zakariya, and Ms. Munimah Riaz** as participating members. Together, the team actively engaged in institutional dialogues, shared insights, and represented Pakistan's commitment to international cooperation and ombudsman reform within the OICOA framework.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A MEMBER OF THE DELEGATION



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Her work focuses on legal research, public engagement, and institutional outreach, including leading the FTO's social media and awareness initiatives. She also coordinates the Internship and Capacity Building Program under the leadership of Honourable Dr. Asif Mehmood Jah, Federal Tax Ombudsman and Secretary General, OICOA, and Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah, Legal Advisor and Executive Secretary, OICOA.

This report reflects her personal contributions as well as the collective effort and shared experiences of the Pakistani delegation to the OICOA Exchange Training Program in Bahrain.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	FULL FORM
OICOA	Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ombudsman Association
FTO	Federal Tax Ombudsman
BICI	Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry
SIU	Special Investigations Unit
NIHR	National Institution for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
AG	Attorney General (Office)



INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Background

As societies grow more complex and governance systems more layered, the role of ombudsman institutions becomes increasingly vital. In democratic and accountable societies, ombudsman bodies serve as essential guardians of public trust—ensuring fairness, transparency, and protection of rights in dealings between individuals and state institutions. Their impartial oversight is not just a legal mechanism, but a moral anchor in governance. Recognizing the need for cross-border cooperation and shared learning among such institutions, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ombudsman Association (OICOA) was established as a multilateral initiative in 2014, following its conception during the 2012 OIC Session in Djibouti. With its headquarters in Islamabad, Pakistan, OICOA represents a collective commitment among member states to elevate ombudsman practices, align with international standards, and foster a culture of administrative justice across the Islamic world.

In recent years, OICOA has taken significant strides to move beyond dialogue and into action. One such initiative is the OICOA Exchange Training Program, designed to facilitate experiential learning. The proposal of exchange program was formally approved during the 10th OICOA Board of Directors Meeting in Islamabad. This marked the beginning of OICOA's practical initiatives and an MOU was signed in Marakesh in 2024.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of this Report

This report encapsulates my participation in the OICOA Exchange Training Program, held in Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, from November 30 to December 6, 2024. As a representative of the Federal Tax Ombudsman Secretariat of Pakistan, I had the distinct privilege of joining a delegation tasked with observing Bahrain's institutional approaches to justice, human rights, and public service accountability.

More than just a professional assignment, the program represented a rare opportunity to learn directly from a peer institution—one operating under a distinct cultural, legal, and administrative context. Through presentations, guided tours, institutional briefings, and discussions, we engaged deeply with Bahrain's ombudsman infrastructure and its role in safeguarding rights and dignity.



1.3 A Glimpse into the Experience

While the specifics of our visit are detailed in subsequent sections, it is worth noting that the program went far beyond institutional observation. It was a multi-dimensional learning experience—designed not only to showcase best practices but also to provoke reflection, foster dialogue, and cultivate lasting professional relationships. The structured itinerary balanced formal learning with informal cultural exchanges, allowing us to understand Bahrain's governance model through both policy and people.

From encounters with investigative bodies and judicial institutions to witnessing Bahrain's community-centered justice innovations, the exchange reinforced the idea that accountability is strongest when it is both systemic and humane.

1.4 Structure of the Report

The following pages document our journey—day by day, encounter by encounter. They provide insight into the host institutions, highlight key observations and thematic takeaways, and offer reflections on how such models might inspire reform and innovation within Pakistan's own ombudsman ecosystem.

At its core, this report is a tribute to the transformative power of mutual learning. It stands as evidence of what is possible when institutions cross borders, listen, observe, and return home not only with knowledge—but with vision.



OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM

2. Overview of the Program

The OICOA Exchange Training Program in the Kingdom of Bahrain, held from November 30 to December 6, 2024, marked a meaningful step toward deepening institutional cooperation, comparative learning, and cultural understanding among ombudsman institutions across OIC member states. Organized under the banner of the OICOA, the program exemplified the growing momentum behind experiential engagement and peer-to-peer development.

Representing the FTO of Pakistan, I had the privilege of participating alongside fellow delegates. The program was structured to offer delegates a comprehensive look into Bahrain's rights-based institutional landscape. Through high-level engagements with the Ministry of Justice, Public Prosecution, Special Investigations Unit, Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Institution for Human Rights, we were introduced to governance models that prioritize transparency, accountability, and human dignity. Each visit provided critical insights into the mechanisms through which Bahrain upholds citizen rights and ensures independent oversight.

2.1 Learning in Layers

What distinguished this exchange was its ability to interweave formal institutional learning with immersive cultural exploration. Alongside meetings and briefings, the program brought us into the heart of Bahraini society—with guided visits to the Al-Fateh Grand Mosque, Bahrain Fort, and the storied Pearling Path in Muharraq. These excursions were not side notes—they were essential lenses through which to understand the values that shape Bahrain's public institutions.

The dual exposure—legal and cultural—offered a layered, holistic learning experience. We saw not only how systems functioned, but why they operated the way they did—grounded in history, driven by community needs, and shaped by a unique national identity.

INSTITUTIONAL VISITS AND KEY LEARNINGS

3. Institutional Visits and Key Learnings

A central pillar of the OICOA Exchange Training Program in Bahrain was the opportunity to engage directly with the institutions at the forefront of justice delivery, human rights enforcement, and public accountability. Each institutional visit not only reflected Bahrain's legal and administrative architecture but also provided valuable lessons on how such systems can be structured to uphold fairness, transparency, and citizen trust. As delegates, we were given unparalleled access to interact with senior officials, observe operational procedures, and explore the conceptual frameworks guiding each entity's work.



Fig. 1: Briefing at Ombudsman Office of Bahrain

3.1 Independent Ombudsman Office of Bahrain

Our first and most immersive visit was to the Independent Ombudsman Office of Bahrain, the very institution that hosted our delegation. Established in 2012, the office was a direct outcome of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI)—a landmark effort to respond to internal challenges through institutional reform. It stands as a regional exemplar of how internal security oversight can be conducted with transparency and procedural rigor.

The Office's core mandate includes receiving complaints against personnel of the Ministry of Interior, overseeing conditions in detention facilities, monitoring investigations of alleged abuses, and reviewing deaths in custody. Unlike traditional ombudsman setups confined to administrative complaints, this institution has a uniquely robust mandate covering law enforcement agencies—arguably the most sensitive area of public governance.



INSTITUTIONAL VISITS AND KEY LEARNINGS

We were briefed on the Office's operational model which reflects international best practices in complaint handling. A multi-disciplinary team, including legal experts, forensic specialists, psychologists, and field investigators, collaborates to ensure each complaint is approached comprehensively. The process is initiated through one of several accessible channels—walk-in submissions, online forms, phone lines, or complaint boxes installed in police stations and prisons.

Once received, complaints undergo triage assessment, after which full investigations are either launched internally or referred to the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) if criminal conduct is suspected. Complainants are kept informed throughout the process, and their confidentiality is strictly maintained. The office also publishes Annual Reports detailing the nature of complaints received, the number investigated, and institutional recommendations issued—thus promoting a culture of transparency and reform.

Of particular significance is the Ombudsman's detention monitoring program. The office conducts both scheduled and surprise inspections at prisons and detention centers, checking for compliance with international norms such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules). During these inspections, issues such as overcrowding, medical access, nutrition, and hygiene are evaluated. One of the most notable achievements cited was the 2013 inspection of Jau Prison, which resulted in tangible policy improvements, especially in healthcare provision and facility conditions.

The leadership of the Honourable Ms. Ghada Hameed Habib, Bahrain's Ombudswoman, is a testament to the institution's evolution. Under her direction, the office has expanded its outreach, digitalized complaint management, and gained international recognition from global ombudsman and human rights bodies, including the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI).

Despite its progress, the office also acknowledged challenges such as maintaining public perception of neutrality given its administrative attachment to the Ministry of Interior. However, operational independence, transparent reporting, and victim-oriented processes have helped mitigate such concerns.

The Bahraini Ombudsman Office left a profound impression on our delegation. It offered us a viable model of how institutional oversight over law enforcement can be designed not just for compliance—but for restorative justice, reform, and rebuilding public trust.

INSTITUTIONAL VISITS AND KEY LEARNINGS

3.2 Special Investigations Unit (SIU)

Mohamed Khaled Al Hazza, Acting Advocate General and Head of the Special Investigation Unit (SIU), received our delegation. Our visit to the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) further deepened our understanding of Bahrain's approach to legal accountability. The SIU operates under the umbrella of the Public Prosecution and is specifically mandated to investigate cases involving allegations of torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, or deaths resulting from police conduct.

We were introduced to their case handling protocol, which follows international forensic standards, notably the Istanbul Protocol. Investigations are evidence-led and often involve collaboration with medical examiners, trauma specialists, and forensic scientists. The SIU's independence from the Ministry of Interior reinforces the credibility of its findings and strengthens its authority to initiate legal proceedings where violations are confirmed.

Importantly, the SIU also functions as a liaison with other oversight bodies, including the Ombudsman Office and the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission (PDRC).



Fig. 2: Pakistani Delegation with Head of SIU at SIU headquarters

3.3 Ministry of Justice and Public Prosecution

At the Ministry of Justice and Public Prosecution, we observed a justice system balancing the demands of state security with the protection of individual rights. Bahraini officials walked us through initiatives targeting systemic efficiency and fairness, including digitized court systems, legal aid for vulnerable groups, and fast-tracked family courts.

INSTITUTIONAL VISITS AND KEY LEARNINGS

Abdullah Al Doseri, Advocate General and Head of the Office for International Cooperation and Human Rights of the Public Prosecution received our delegation. The Public Prosecution shared their work in victim-centered justice—especially trauma-informed protocols used in interviewing children and survivors of domestic violence. Prosecution staff are trained in sensitivity and non-coercive procedures, ensuring that judicial proceedings do not retraumatize victims.

Bahrain's justice framework also incorporates restorative justice approaches, promoting reconciliation and rehabilitation alongside legal resolution—a model worth exploring in Pakistan's own reform context.



Fig. 3: Pakistani Delegation at Public Prosecution office and AG office

3.4 Attorney General's Office

The Attorney General's Office plays a central role in prosecutorial oversight and legal policy development. We were briefed on their oversight functions, case supervision, and performance audits conducted to evaluate prosecutors' adherence to legal and ethical standards.

Digital innovations, such as e-case tracking and evidence management systems, were showcased as part of Bahrain's broader Judicial Modernization Initiative. These tools enhance transparency, improve inter-agency coordination, and reduce procedural delays.

INSTITUTIONAL VISITS AND KEY LEARNINGS

3.5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Chief of Human Rights Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Dr. Arwa Hassan Al Sayed received our delegation. Our discussions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focused on Bahrain's international human rights engagement. The Ministry shared its coordination processes for reporting to UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, participation in Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycles, and its bilateral human rights dialogues. Officials underscored that human rights diplomacy and domestic reforms are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. The Ministry acts as a bridge—interpreting international expectations while conveying national legal reforms and context-specific constraints.



Fig. 4: Pakistani Delegation at Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)

3.6 National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR)

The National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) operates independently to monitor human rights implementation, review draft legislation, and investigate complaints. It has the authority to conduct field visits, organize awareness programs, and submit shadow reports to international bodies.

Their outreach programs to migrant workers, women, and juveniles underscore their emphasis on inclusive protection. During our visit, we were shown case studies and annual publications that demonstrated their role in shaping public discourse and influencing legislative reforms.

INSTITUTIONAL VISITS AND KEY LEARNINGS



Fig. 4: Pakistani Delegation at National Institute of Human Rights

3.7 Open Prisons Complex

One of the most progressive highlights of the program was the visit to Bahrain's Open Prisons Complex. This initiative is a hallmark of Bahrain's restorative justice framework, aimed at preparing inmates for societal reintegration.

Eligible inmates—primarily non-violent offenders—are granted extended freedoms within a supervised environment, including access to vocational training, academic education, and limited family interaction. The prison's management is built on trust and self-discipline, enabling inmates to assume responsibility for their rehabilitation.

Such a model, which bridges the punitive and rehabilitative aspects of criminal justice, aligns with modern criminological thinking and offers valuable insights for Pakistan's penal reform efforts—especially regarding overcrowding, repeat offenses, and community-based rehabilitation.

Together, these institutional engagements provided a multidimensional view of Bahrain's justice system—its aspirations, its innovations, and its adaptive strategies. The takeaways from each visit extend beyond procedural understanding; they serve as blueprints for reimagining how public institutions can embody transparency, equity, and reform-oriented governance.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND BROADER REFLECTIONS

While the institutional dimension of the OICOA Exchange Training Program in Bahrain offered valuable professional insights, it was the cultural immersion that lent soul to the experience. Carefully interwoven into the schedule, these encounters served not only as opportunities to witness Bahraini traditions but also as lessons in resilience, identity, and the enduring value of human connection. They reminded us that the essence of good governance often resides in the spirit of the people it seeks to serve.

4.1 A Warm Welcome: Souq Al-Braha and Haji Café

Our introduction to Bahrain's cultural spirit began with an evening stroll through the vibrant Souq Al-Braha, a traditional market in the heart of Manama. The souq, alive with the aromas of spices, the shimmer of local fabrics, and the chatter of shopkeepers, felt like a portal into Bahrain's living history. Here, trade wasn't merely economic—it was cultural, intergenerational, and deeply communal.

The experience was elevated by a traditional dinner at Haji Café, a beloved establishment that has served generations. Seated under soft lights and surrounded by the quiet rhythm of the market, we enjoyed dishes infused with local flavors and history. This moment of shared hospitality set the tone for the days ahead—it was more than a meal; it was a cultural embrace.



Fig. 5: Pakistani Delegation at Haji Cafe in Souq Al-Baraha

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND BROADER REFLECTIONS

4.2 Sailing through Modern Identity: Bahrain Bay

One of the most serene moments of our journey was the boat ride along Bahrain Bay. As we glided past Bahrain's modern skyline reflecting in the tranquil waters, the serenity of the bay mirrored the country's balanced progress. The juxtaposition of skyscrapers with traditional dhows offered a poetic reflection on Bahrain's dual identity: rooted in heritage, yet boldly forward-looking.

This calm passage through water allowed us a moment of quiet observation—how infrastructure, architecture, and urban design can echo the same balance that institutions strive to achieve: progress with purpose, and development with dignity.

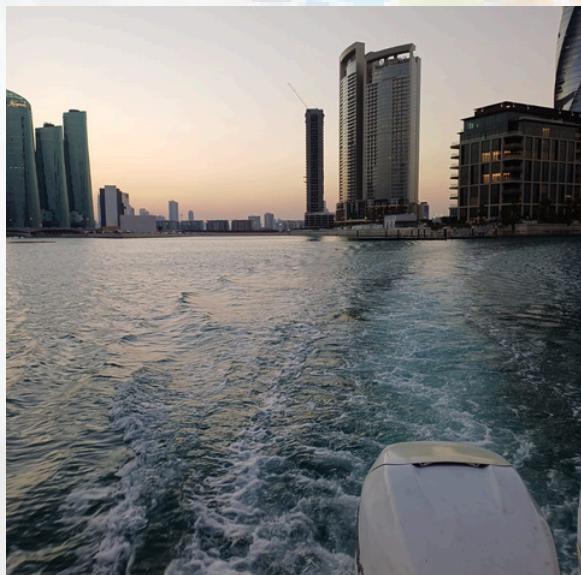


Fig. 6: Pakistani Delegation at Bahrain Bay

4.3 Art as Narrative: Bahrain Art Gallery

Our visit to the Bahrain Art Gallery opened yet another window into the nation's narrative. Through modern installations, traditional motifs, and experimental mediums, we witnessed the cultural dialogues that Bahrainis are having with their past, present, and future. Art, in this space, was more than aesthetic—it was introspective, political, and profoundly human. The gallery reinforced a central idea that emerged throughout the program: that institutional reform and cultural expression are parallel forces. Where one codifies rights, the other gives them voice.

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND BROADER REFLECTIONS



Fig. 7: Pakistani Delegation at Bahrain Art Gallery

4.4 In the Footsteps of History: Bahrain Fort and GB Café Lunch

Among the most profound moments of cultural reflection was our visit to Qal'at al-Bahrain (Bahrain Fort) and its adjacent Site Museum. Walking through the ruins of what was once the capital of the ancient Dilmun civilization, we were humbled by the depth of history beneath our feet. The fort's layered architecture and excavated remnants told stories of trade, diplomacy, and continuity spanning over four millennia.

Following this immersive tour, we gathered for a reflective official lunch at GB Café, set just beside the museum. It was a setting where history and hospitality blended seamlessly. Over traditional Bahraini dishes and warm conversation, we connected on shared themes of heritage, resilience, and public service—transforming colleagues into companions, and experiences into enduring insights.



Fig. 8: Pakistani Delegation at Bahrain Fort (Left) and GB Café (Right) for official lunch

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND BROADER REFLECTIONS

4.5 Craft and Continuity: A'ali Pottery Workshop

The journey through Bahrain's cultural soul continued in the town of A'ali, home to one of the oldest pottery traditions in the region. At the A'ali Pottery Workshop, we witnessed artisans shaping clay with techniques passed down through generations. The process—patient, deliberate, and rhythmic—offered a metaphor for institution building itself: shaped by hands, fired by history, and strengthened through continuity.

The tactile connection to this tradition served as a reminder that even in an age of rapid change, heritage lives on through the practices people sustain with pride and precision.



Fig. 9: Pakistani Delegation at Fun Filled Pottery Workshop

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND BROADER REFLECTIONS

4.6 The Desert's Secret: The Tree of Life

In the barren heart of Bahrain's desert stands a mystery: the Tree of Life, a 400-year-old mesquite that thrives without any known water source. Our visit to this solitary guardian of the sands was a moment of quiet awe. As we stood beneath its vast canopy, we couldn't help but see it as a living symbol of resilience, defying odds, surviving storms, and offering shade where none is expected.

For us, the tree became a metaphor for the very institutions we strive to build—those that must endure harsh climates of criticism, constraint, and challenge, yet continue to grow because they are rooted in purpose.



Fig. 10: Pakistani Delegation visiting the Tree of Life, Bahrain

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND BROADER REFLECTIONS



4.7 Pearling Path in Muharraq: Preserving Collective Memory

Our cultural journey concluded with a contemplative walk along the Pearling Path in Muharraq, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Once the economic lifeblood of Bahrain, the pearl trade had not only enriched the island but shaped its culture, migration patterns, and social structures.

As we walked through restored merchant houses, narrow alleyways, and waterfront vistas, we experienced a Bahrain that remembers. A nation that does not erase its economic transitions, but honors them, preserving collective memory as a guide for future growth.

Reflections Beyond the Cultural Itinerary

These cultural experiences did more than enrich our stay—they transformed the way we understood Bahrain's institutions. Justice, accountability, and governance are not just systems; they are expressions of culture. They reflect the values of a people, their memory of the past, and their hopes for the future.

What we took home was more than knowledge—it was perspective. The kind that cannot be taught in a seminar or read in a report, but only felt when history, art, tradition, and humanity converge.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: REIMAGINING THE OMBUDSMAN IDEAL

In Bahrain, we did not just observe ombudsman practices—we stepped into a different rhythm of justice. It was one shaped by ancient soils and modern values, by structured institutions and the silent force of culture. What we witnessed was not a textbook model, but a living one—responsive, humane, and boldly inclusive.

For Pakistan, and for the wider OICOA community, the question now is not what did we see? but what will we do with what we saw?

5.1 The Ombudsman as Bridge, Not Bureaucracy

In the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Ombudsman Office is more than an oversight body—it is a bridge between state and citizen, between grievance and remedy, between silence and voice. It breathes accessibility. Complaints are accepted in person, by phone, by email, and even by post. If filed in person, a Tamil speaker, a Pakistani national, a French national, or an English expat will find someone who understands—not just the words, but the sentiment behind them.

This multilingual inclusivity is not decorative; it is democratic justice in action. It says: You matter. Your voice is welcome here.

In Pakistan, where the population is vastly multilingual and regionally diverse, this approach holds profound relevance.



Fig. 11: Complaint forms in multiple languages in Bahrain Ombudsman Office (Left): Building of Ombudsman Office (Right)



REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: REIMAGINING THE OMBUDSMAN IDEAL

5.2 Justice at Work: The Culture Within the Office

It is easy to focus on procedures and protocols. But Bahrain's true strength was visible in its people—not in policy manuals, but in smiles, in the easy camaraderie among coworkers, in the way a South Asian staff member described their job as "fulfilling, not exhausting." Workplace well-being isn't a luxury—it is an institutional safeguard. A happy office creates humane outcomes. The energy we felt at the Bahraini Ombudsman Office was one of respect, autonomy, and quiet pride. And that made its way into every process and every interaction.

For Pakistan's Ombudsman institutions, especially the FTO, this is a call to shift focus from systems alone to the humans who run them. Staff wellness frameworks, team empowerment programs, open-door leadership, and emotional intelligence training are not optional anymore. They are survival tools for public trust.

5.3 The Forum of Ombudsmen in Pakistan: An Orchestra in Search of Harmony

Pakistan has one of the most expansive ombudsman frameworks in the Islamic world: federal, provincial, thematic, and specialized. Yet, the melody often feels fragmented. Bahrain showed us the power of institutional cohesion—where the Ombudsman, Special Investigations Unit, National Human Rights Commission, and Ministry of Justice play from the same sheet of values, even when their functions differ.

This level of alignment is not accidental—it is architected. It is the result of shared ethics, collaborative mechanisms, and regular inter-institutional dialogue.

The Ombudsman Forum of Pakistan can lead a similar transformation by becoming a conductor rather than just a committee. It can set unified ethical standards, pilot inter-institutional platforms, share complaint trends in real time, and host cross-office residencies to enhance professional kinship and knowledge circulation.

5.4 OICOA: From Observation to Transformation

OICOA has created the stage. What comes next is the script we choose to write together. This exchange was not just a visit—it was a prototype for the future of Islamic ombudsman. Bahrain showed us that oversight can be transparent without being adversarial, rights-based without being rigid, and victim-centered without compromising institutional dignity.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: REIMAGINING THE OMBUDSMAN IDEAL

The next step for OICOA must be strategic acceleration:

- Expand the exchange program into **longer-term secondments and fellowships**.
- Build a **digital library** of translated ombudsman practices, tools, and reports across all member states.
- Organize **thematic innovation labs**—on subjects like AI in complaint handling, women and minority access, and ethical automation.
- Position OICOA as a **regional thought leader**—not just responding to injustice but shaping how justice itself is understood.

5.5 The Tree, the Fort, and the Complaint Form

As we stood before the Tree of Life in Bahrain's desert, it was not lost on us that institutions must be like that tree—rooted *in values*, *resilient in isolation*, and quietly life-giving. At the Fort of Dilmun, we understood that civilizations are remembered not for how they governed, but for how they cared. And at the Ombudsman Office, as we watched a complaint form, which can be submitted by a migrant worker in his language, we realized that systems only matter when people can see themselves inside them.

Conclusion: From Reflection to Reformation

This report is not just a record of where we went and what we saw—it is a mirror held up to our own systems, and a window into what they could become.

What Bahrain offered us was more than a glimpse into effective ombudsmanship. It offered a reminder—that justice is not simply a structure, but a sentiment. That accessibility is not an administrative feature, but a human right. That dignity, when embedded in institutions, echoes far beyond complaint forms and case files.

As representatives of Pakistan, and as contributors to the broader OICOA vision, we return not only with observations, but with resolve. The resolve to ask better questions of our systems. To widen the doors of access. To humanize our policies. To care as much about how we deliver justice as what justice looks like.

This experience has reframed the work ahead—not as a technical mission, but as a moral one. The kind of work that, like the Tree of Life in Bahrain, endures in challenging conditions and becomes more meaningful with time.

The next chapter is ours to write—not just *with policy*, but *with purpose*.

FINAL NOTE

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION

As we close this report, it is important to emphasize that the OICOA Exchange Training Program in Bahrain was not an isolated event, but part of a wider, ongoing conversation—one that spans borders, cultures, and institutions. It was a testament to the shared values that unite ombudsman bodies across the Islamic world: justice, dignity, accountability, and the unwavering belief in the citizen's right to be heard.

What we witnessed, learned, and reflected upon now returns with us—not as static knowledge, but as active commitment. It will inform our work within the Federal Tax Ombudsman Secretariat and beyond, influencing the way we serve, the systems we shape, and the future we help to build. This is not the end of the journey. It is, in every sense, a beginning.



OICOA TIMELINE

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ombudsman Association (OICOA) has steadily evolved from a visionary concept into a fully operational, impactful international body. Its timeline reflects not only organizational growth but also a commitment to meaningful reform and collaboration among member states:

1. 2012 – Djibouti:

- During the OIC session in Djibouti, the idea of forming a network of ombudsman offices from OIC member states was proposed, setting the foundation for a shared platform of cooperation and institutional development.

2. 2014 – Islamabad:

- OICOA was formally established during the OIC session held in Islamabad, Pakistan. Islamabad was declared the official headquarters of the Association, marking a historic milestone for Pakistan in the international ombudsman community.

3. October 2023 – Istanbul:

- During the 3rd General Assembly meeting of OICOA, the concept of an International Internship and Exchange Program was introduced—envisioning hands-on collaboration and shared learning between member institutions.

4. January 2024 – Islamabad:

- The proposal was formally approved during the 10th OICOA Board of Directors Meeting in Islamabad. This marked the beginning of OICOA's practical initiatives toward capacity building through cross-institutional training programs.

5. June 2024 – Marrakech:

- At the 11th Board of Directors Meeting in Morocco, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Federal Tax Ombudsman of Pakistan and the Institution of Mediator of the Kingdom of Morocco, officially launching the inaugural batch of the Internship Exchange Program.

6. July 2024 – Rabat:

- The first group of OICOA exchange interns from Pakistan participated in a three-week training at the Institution of Mediator in Rabat, Morocco—marking the beginning of practical implementation of OICOA's global learning vision.

7. September 2024: Pakistan

- The delegation of officials from Independent Ombudsman Office of Bahrain visited Federal Tax Ombudsman Pakistan for an exchange training programme.

8. November 2024 – Manama:

- The second institutional exchange was launched with the Independent Ombudsman Office of Bahrain, where a delegation from Pakistan participated in a week-long exchange training program—further expanding the reach and relevance of the initiative.

MEDIA COVERAGE

SIU receives Pakistan Ombudsman delegation

04 Dec 2024 Created: 07:58 PM Last Updated: 07:58 PM Views: 335



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Bahrain News Agency



Manama, Dec. 4 (BNA): Mohamed Khaled Al Hazza, Acting Advocate General and Head of the Special Investigation Unit (SIU), received a delegation from Pakistan's Wafaqji Mohtasib (Ombudsman)'s Secretariat.

Representatives from Bahrain's Ombudsman Secretariat attended the meeting.

The discussions highlighted the unit's independent role in upholding human rights within Bahrain's judicial system and its commitment to international standards of accountability and justice. Both sides explored opportunities for strengthening collaboration and exchanging expertise.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Public Prosecution receives Pakistani Ombudsman Secretariat delegation

03 Dec 2024 | Created: 06:57 PM | Last Updated: 06:57 PM | Views: 280



Manama, Dec. 3 (BNA): Abdullah Al Doseri, Advocate General and Head of the Office for International Cooperation and Human Rights of the Public Prosecution received a delegation from Pakistan's Waqaiq Mohtasib (Ombudsman)'s Secretariat.

The meeting reviewed the working mechanisms of the Public Prosecution, the applications of the Alternative Sanctions and Open Prisons Law, and the systems for criminal mediation and reconciliation in family and child cases.

The delegation was also briefed on the achievements of the Public Prosecution, its social initiative Raya'a (Care), and procedures for ensuring child protection and promoting their best interests.

The meeting also discussed cooperation in training and the exchange of expertise.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Human Rights Affairs Chief receives Pakistani Ombudsman delegation

03 Dec 2024 · Created: 08:09 PM · Last Updated: 08:09 PM · Views: 338



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Bahrain News Agency



Manama, Dec. 3 (BNA): Ambassador Dr. Arwa Hassan Al Sayed, Chief of Human Rights Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, received a delegation from the Wafaqi Mohtasib (Ombudsman) Secretariat of Pakistan.

The two sides highlighted the strong ties between Bahrain and Pakistan and discussed means to enhance their ongoing cooperation.

The delegation was briefed on Bahrain's achievements in human rights, including the key pillars and objectives of the National Human Rights Plan.

The meeting also highlighted Bahrain's advanced national redress mechanisms, which serve as a leading model in the region, as well as programmes focused on societal reintegration, such as alternative sanctions and open prisons.

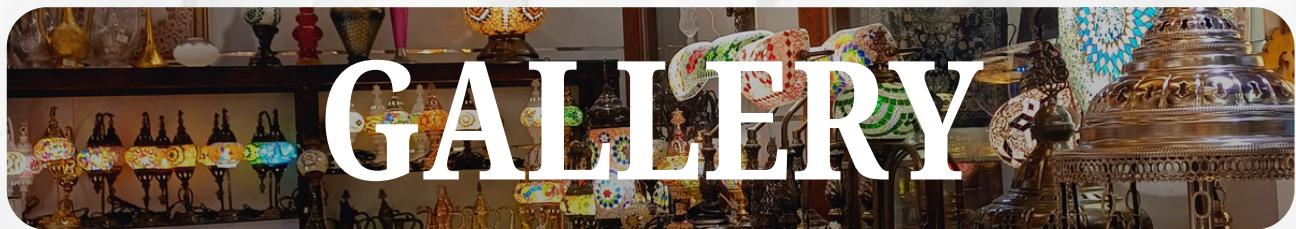
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