



General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 October 2020
English
Original: Arabic

Seventy-fifth session

Item 119 (c) of the agenda

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 30 September 2020 from the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and has the honour to refer to the candidature of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Human Rights Council for the term 2021–2023, at the elections to be held on 13 October 2020 in New York.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution [60/251](#), the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations has the further honour to transmit herewith the voluntary pledges and commitments reaffirming that the promotion and protection of human rights are a priority of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations would be grateful if the present note verbal and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 119 (c).



**Annex to the note verbale dated 30 September 2020 from the
Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations
addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

**Candidature of Saudi Arabia to the Human Rights Council,
2021–2023**

**Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly
resolution 60/251**

Preface

1. Saudi Arabia is nominating itself for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2021–2023 owing to its deep-rooted Islamic values, which prohibit the violation of human rights and require that they be protected, its human rights efforts at the national, regional and international levels, and its recognition of the important role that the Human Rights Council plays in improving the situation of human rights in the world. Since the Human Rights Council was established in 2006, Saudi Arabia has served four terms as a member and was an observer State in 2013 and 2020. Saudi Arabia has done everything possible to ensure the success of the Council and its work.

2. Major developments related to human rights have occurred in Saudi Arabia, including in the legislative and institutional frameworks that ensure the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with the country's constitutional values and principles. The most important of those values and principles is the guarantee enshrined in the Basic Law of Governance that governance in Saudi Arabia is based on justice, consultation and equality, and that the State protects human rights in accordance with Islamic law. Accordingly, the country's systems, institutions and redress mechanisms together form a legal and institutional framework that promotes and protects human rights.

3. Saudi Vision 2030, which is based on the aforementioned premises and in keeping with that aspiration, was promulgated on 25 April 2016. It serves as a blueprint for public policies, programmes and initiatives, and is aimed at marshalling the country's capacities and God-given resources on the basis of three themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation. Each theme incorporates a number of goals that are linked directly or indirectly to human rights and addresses, explicitly or implicitly, a number of those rights, the most significant of which are the right to security, health and work, the rights of women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, the right to development and participation in political and public life and the right to form and support associations, as well as a number of other social and economic rights. Accordingly, several programmes have been launched and many administrative measures have been taken on the basis of the country's ambitious vision.

**I. Promotion and protection of human rights at the
national level**

Judiciary and criminal justice

4. Many positive developments have occurred in this regard, the most significant of which are the promulgation and updating of several laws, including the Code of Criminal Procedure, Sharia Court Procedure Act and the Board of Grievance Procedure Act; granting greater independence to the Public Prosecution Service and enhancing its status as a judicial agency; and the establishment of several relevant

institutions, such as the Saudi Arabian Bar Association. Those developments have reinforced the statutory and institutional framework for the protection and promotion of human rights by enshrining judicial rights and guarantees.

5. New, specialized courts have been established within the court system, with a view to unifying the judiciary. Commercial courts and civil status courts have been opened throughout the country, specialized branches have been established in the court system and appellate courts that include specialized chambers have been inaugurated.

6. The Judicial Training Centre, which is part of the Ministry of Justice, aims to develop the capacity and enhance the qualifications of judges and their associates. Since its creation, the Centre has organized several training programmes for judges and lawyers, including programmes that are based on the provisions of the human rights instruments to which Saudi Arabia is a party.

7. The Public Prosecution Service has begun installing closed circuit television cameras in interview rooms to ensure that due process is observed when questioning suspects. Furthermore, the Public Prosecution Service has issued a circular in which it is emphasized that case documents must show that suspects have been informed of their rights and that indictments contain references to the concepts contained in the human rights conventions to which Saudi Arabia is a party.

Combating trafficking in persons

8. The promulgation of the Trafficking in Persons Act, accession to the conventions and protocols on combating human trafficking, the formation of an anti-trafficking committee that includes among its membership representatives of relevant government bodies and the creation of a department in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to combat crimes of trafficking in persons have all contributed to the development of a statutory and institutional framework that guarantees that all persons, without discrimination, are protected from crimes of trafficking in persons and that the victims of such crimes receive medical, psychological and legal assistance and are awarded compensation for damages and offered other forms of redress. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has allocated a dedicated telephone number (19911) to receive complaints in eight languages, including complaints relating to trafficking in persons.

9. Royal Decree No. 109 was issued on 24 Shawwal A.H. 1438 (18 July A.D. 2017) approving a memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation between Saudi Arabia, represented by the Human Rights Commission, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The memorandum is designed to promote cooperation in preventing and combating trafficking in persons, provide victims with care, protection and shelter, and develop national activities, programmes and capacities. On 19 November 2018, a memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation was concluded between Saudi Arabia, represented by the Human Rights Commission, and the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons of the Department of State of the United States of America.

10. Work is under way to establish the National Referral Programme, a state-of-the-art technical programme for documenting cases of trafficking in persons from the time that they are identified to adjudication by the competent courts. In addition, the programme will provide guidance to staff members of the relevant authorities in the procedures that are to be followed at each stage, in accordance with the Trafficking in Persons Act.

11. Law enforcement officers have participated in many training programmes and activities on discovering and identifying cases of trafficking in persons and best

practices for addressing such cases, including with respect to the prosecution of offenders and providing assistance to victims in accordance with the Trafficking in Persons Act. An intensive training programme on the National Referral Programme is being developed in cooperation with IOM.

Reinforcing civil society space

12. The Civil Associations and Organizations Act, which was promulgated on 1 December 2015, is a progressive law that sets out development and social goals. The Act is designed to regulate, develop and protect the work of civil society organizations, promote national development, enhance citizens' involvement in charting the course of and developing society, promote a culture of volunteerism in society and achieve social solidarity. Article 8 of that Act provides that an application to establish an association must be submitted by at least 10 natural or legal Saudi Arabian persons, whereas the minimum number of applicants had previously been 20. It also provides that the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development must respond to such an application within 60 days from the time that the application requirements have been satisfied, and that failure to respond within that period shall be considered as approval for the establishment of the association. That Act and the other relevant laws of Saudi Arabia guarantee the diversity and independence of civil society organizations.

13. Thank to efforts to support civil society organizations, the number of associations and non-governmental organizations in Saudi Arabia had grown to approximately 1,121 at the time of writing. Such organizations are making an ever greater contribution to the process of reviewing draft laws and are expressing their opinions known with regard to laws already in force. In addition, civil society organizations perform such vital functions as receiving complaints and monitoring violations, as that is part of the national redress system, and preparing periodic reports and studies on human rights.

14. It should be noted that civil society organizations have contributed to many of the legislative, institutional and procedural measures taken to promote and protect human rights. Indeed, some of those measures were the brainchild of civil society, including, for example, the Protection from Abuse Act (2013), which concerns combating all forms of domestic violence; the women's offices that have been established in the personal status courts to provide legal and procedural assistance to women and facilitate litigation; the preparation of legal studies that contributed to the establishment of the Maintenance Fund; and the study on harmonizing the laws of Saudi Arabia with international human rights standards, which led to the review of several relevant laws and regulations.

15. Under the Civil Associations and Organizations Act, civil society organizations receive government subsidies. In addition, the Act establishes the Support Fund for Associations, the purpose of which is to support associations in developing programmes and ensure their continued operation. Efforts are under way to attract volunteers to work in many areas related to human rights as part of Saudi Vision 2030, one of the aims of which is to have 1 million volunteers working in the non-profit sector every year.

Freedom of opinion and expression

16. The laws of Saudi Arabia, the most significant of which is the Basic Law of Governance, work in harmony to promote freedom of opinion and expression while respecting other rights, because, as stated in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, human rights are integrated, interdependent and indivisible. That approach, which Saudi Arabia has adopted in its laws and policies, is fully

consistent with the relevant international standards, which place necessary legal restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression in order to protect public order, national security, public morals and health, and the rights or reputation of others. Article 39 of the Basic Law of Governance provides that the mass media, publishers and all other vehicles of expression shall employ civil and polite language, comply with the laws of the State, contribute to the education of the nation and promote unity. That article further provides that it is prohibited to commit acts that cause sedition and division, affect the security of the State and its relations in general, or undermine human dignity and rights. Moreover, article 8 of the Printed Materials and Publication Act provides that freedom of expression using all means of publication is guaranteed within the scope of Islamic and statutory law.

17. The Audiovisual Media Act, which was promulgated on 13 December 2017, forms parts of the legal framework for promoting freedom of opinion and expression. The Act reaffirms respect for freedom of expression and opinion and provides that the media must avoid provoking strife, division and hatred among citizens, inciting to violence and threatening civil peace, and that they must respect human dignity.

18. On 22 August 2017, the Council of Ministers issued a decision ordering Government agencies to publish, within their respective areas of competence, draft texts, rules, regulations or decisions so as to enable affected parties and individuals to express their views thereon. That decision strengthens the right to access to information, which the basis of many rights, the most significant of which is the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

19. Further to the efforts being made to promote freedom of opinion and expression, many laws relating to freedom of opinion and expression are currently being reviewed in the light of the country's laws and international human rights standards, with a view to ensuring that they are capable of protecting public order, national security, public morals and the rights and freedoms of others, as well as other fundamental principles, without adversely affecting the right of individuals to express their views. This process will ensure that law enforcement officials are committed to realizing that aim.

Right to education

20. Under the laws of Saudi Arabia, the right to education is guaranteed for all, without discrimination. Article 30 of the Basic Law of Governance provides that the State shall provide public education and commit itself to eradicating illiteracy. Public education is compulsory for all persons from the age of 6 to the age of 15 pursuant to a Council of Ministers decision that was issued on 15 June 2004. Pursuant to the Child Protection Act, causing a child, regardless of the child's sex or nationality, to stop pursuing education is considered to be a form of abuse and neglect that is prohibited. Moreover, the country's public education policy reaffirms that every type and level of education is without charge. Saudi Arabia is a party to the Convention against Discrimination in Education, which the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted on 14 December 1960, as well as other human rights instruments that address the right to education, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

21. Textbooks and curriculums are reviewed periodically by the Ministry of Education in coordination with governmental and non-governmental bodies that are concerned with human rights, including the Human Rights Commission, in order to revise them comprehensively and ensure that are devoid of content that promotes

negative attitudes towards women and girls. If such content is found, it is addressed immediately.

22. The importance that Saudi Arabia attaches to education has resulted in many rapid developments and reforms, including with respect to education for all, equality of opportunity, free education, equality in education, curriculum development, teacher performance, school administration, school buildings and equipment, tools and methods of measurement and evaluation, educational guidance and counselling, students with visual, auditory and intellectual impairments, autistic students and compulsory schooling for students with disabilities. The Lifelong Education Initiative (Istadamah) is a national development initiative aimed at eradicating illiteracy and enabling individuals to take advantage of a range of educational and training opportunities. The initiative targets adults of both sexes between the ages of 15 to 50.

23. On 14 December 2017, the Human Rights Commission concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education. One of the initiatives agreed to in that memorandum is the establishment of an e-education portal for human rights under the slogan “My country protects my rights” that will inform students of their rights and promote a culture of human rights, which is in accordance with the obligations of the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in respect of the right to education.

24. At the regional and international level, Saudi Arabia has supported humanitarian and relief work in the education sector by providing assistance that enables educational institutions and programmes to help those affected by crises continue their education.

Right to health

25. Efforts continue to improve the delivery of health services while observing the principles of equality and need. There are several areas of focus, including maternal and childcare, immunization programmes, health care for the disabled, the elderly and students, psychological health, health care for victims of accidents, emergencies and disasters, epidemic and infectious disease control, treatment of incurable diseases and organ transplant, as well as other components of a comprehensive health-care system and related support infrastructure.

26. In 2017, the Saudi Arabian Patient Safety Centre was established. The Centre, which is the national authority for all matters relating to patient safety and preventing medical errors and the harm caused thereby, will formulate a national strategy for patient safety that is in line with the initiatives set out in the national programme for the transformation of the health-care sector.

27. The Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Prevention Act, which was promulgated in January 2018, contains provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights of AIDS patients, including their right to education and employment, and requires health-care agencies to provide them with health care, counselling and psychological support and to respect their rights.

28. Saudi Arabia has taken several measures to combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including measures aimed at preventing the spread of the disease and treatment measures aimed at providing high-quality health care to patients. A committee made up of all relevant government agencies has been formed to serve as a national mechanism for all issues related to the fight against this pandemic.

29. It should be noted that Saudi Arabia took preventive measures early on in order to control the spread of the disease. Following are the most notable of those measures:

- Nationals and residents were temporarily prevented from travelling, flights to and from several countries where the disease had spread were stopped and movement through land entry/exit points was suspended, with the exception of commercial and freight traffic and humanitarian and exceptional cases.
- Nationals stranded abroad received help with housing, preventive and medical services, as well as subsistence and psychological support.
- Religious, social and cultural gatherings and events and study were suspended and workplaces closed.
- Stores and shopping centres were closed, with the exception of pharmacies and food markets. Food, medical, preventive and consumer items were made available.
- Home quarantine measures were imposed and cities and areas were isolated.
- Measures were taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons, detention centres and care institutions.
- King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, ordered that all health-care facilities must provide free medical treatment to all nationals, residents and persons in violation of the Residency Act who have or are suspected of having COVID-19.

30. Measures have been taken to ensure that all those affected by the aforementioned restrictions are able to enjoy their rights. One of the most significant of those measures has been to authorize remote education and work and to make basic government services available remotely. In addition, several initiatives and efforts have been launched to promote those rights, including the “We All Give” initiative to provide students with free SIM cards and tablets. All government and private-sector health-care workers who have real estate, consumer or rental financing credit facilities have been given a three-month payment deferral in recognition of their efforts. The collection of municipal service fees from the private sector has been deferred for three months for more than 1,400 types of businesses, and migrant workers whose residency has expired have been exempted from fees until 30 June 2020 by having their residency period extended free of charge for three months.

31. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency has launched a 50 billion Saudi Arabian riyal support programme for the private sector, so as to enable it to play its part in promoting economic growth and support Government efforts to combat COVID-19. The programme, which provides support and financing to small and medium enterprises, consists of three elements: a programme under which payments due will be deferred by depositing up to 30 billion riyals in banks and finance companies in exchange for a six-month deferral of payments owed by small and medium enterprises to the financial sector; a loan financing programme under which up to 13.2 billion riyals of concessional financing will be provided to small and medium enterprises in the form of six-month loans from banks and financing companies; and the finance guarantee support programme under which up to 6 billion riyals will be deposited in banks and finance companies so as to enable them to exempt small and medium enterprises from the costs of the small and medium enterprise loan programme, thereby reducing the cost of borrowing for enterprises that take advantage of these guarantees in 2020 and supporting the expansion of financing for six months. In addition, the Government has allocated 17.3 billion riyals through the human resources and social development system in order to enable small and medium enterprises to continue growing and contribute to supporting economic growth and sustaining employment as part of the effort to mitigate the effects of the preventive measures that have been taken to combat the epidemic.

32. At the regional and international level, Saudi Arabia, in its capacity as the President of the Group of 20, called for the convening of an extraordinary virtual summit in order to explore ways of consolidating efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The summit was held on 26 March 2020, at the conclusion of which the participants issued a statement in which leaders set out their commitments and undertakings to combat the disease and control its spread. In addition, Saudi Arabia has provided the World Health Organization (WHO) with \$10 million in financial support in response to the urgent appeal that WHO made to all nations to intensify their efforts at the international level to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. Saudi Arabia, acting through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, has provided medical assistance to Yemen, including \$3.5 million worth of preventive and therapeutic medicines and medical supplies, to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Saudi Arabia has also assisted China in securing medical equipment and supplies through a number of international companies to combat COVID-19.

Right to work

33. Saudi Vision 2030 projects offer an excellent opportunity to employ the largest number of young persons possible. The unemployment level is expected to decline gradually in the coming years. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has launched a number of initiatives designed to protect and promote the right to work, the most significant of which are the programme to fill jobs with Saudi Arabian workers (Nitaqat 1); the enhanced programme to fill jobs with Saudi Arabian workers (Nitaqat 2); the social security programme, which is designed to provide social security benefits and protection against occupational hazards to Saudi Arabians employed by the private sector; and the Wage Protection System, which is designed to ensure that the wages agreed upon between worker and employee are paid on a regular basis. The e-recruitment system (Jadarah) launched by the Ministry of Civil Service is the national platform for public sector recruitment.

34. With regard to developments in methods of redress, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has allocated a dedicated telephone number (19911) to receive complaints from migrant workers in eight languages. In addition, the Ministry launched the “Your Labour Counsellor” electronic programme, which is hosted on the worker knowledge portal, and a programme to ensure that workers’ wages are paid on time through local banks.

35. A large number of measures to promote the rights of domestic workers have been adopted. Those include awareness-raising measures introduced by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Human Rights Commission, the National Society for Human Rights and other civil society organizations; the measures taken by the Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons to identify the underlying causes of crimes of exploitation; and the measures taken by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and the Human Rights Commission to ensure oversight. Additional measures include improved recruitment mechanisms, oversight and control of recruiters, and protection and support mechanisms.

Women’s rights

36. Women’s rights is the area that has seen the greatest share of developments and reforms. A royal decree was recently issued on 30 July 2019 amending a number of laws to promote women’s rights in various areas. Those laws included the following:

- *The Travel Documents Act*. Amendments were inserted to ensure equality between men and women with respect to conditions for obtaining passports and travelling abroad.

- *The Personal Status Act.* There were a number of amendments, the most important of which was to grant both husband and wife the right to submit entries for the family register to the Department of Civil Status. That allows either the husband or the wife to take responsibility for reporting civil status changes such as marriage or divorce and enables women to report the death of ascendants, descendants, husbands, or any other relatives on an equal footing with men. The concept of head of household was also expanded to include both fathers and mothers with respect to minor children.
- *The Labour Act.* There were several amendments to ensure equality between men and women in rights and duties and terms of service. Article 3 provides that all citizens shall have the right to work and may not be discriminated against on the basis of sex. Retirement age was set at 60 for men and women alike. The amendments also prohibit dismissing or threatening to dismiss a woman employee while she is pregnant or on maternity leave, or in the event of illness during either period.
- *The Social Security Act.* Article 38 of the Social Security Act was amended to set 60 years as the retirement age for both men and women, thereby guaranteeing equal rights in that regard.

37. One of the most important legislative measures taken to eliminate discrimination against women was the royal decree issued on 26 September 2017 mandating enforcement of the provisions of the Traffic Act and its implementing regulations, including with respect to issuing driving licences, on an equal footing for both males and females.

38. A number of other measures have been taken to empower women. Supreme Order No. 33322 of 21 Rajab A.H. 1438 (18 April A.D. 2017) affirmed that relevant agencies may not require a woman to obtain the consent of any other person when providing services or carrying out procedures. Saudi Arabian women hold such important positions as deputy minister, assistant minister, university president and ambassador, and chair the boards of directors of a number of companies, including Tadawul, the Saudi Arabian stock exchange. Women have been empowered to ascend to decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors.

39. The Anti-Harassment Act was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 96 of 16 Ramadan A.H. 1439 (31 May A.D. 2018). It is intended to prevent and combat the crime of harassment, punish offenders and protect victims. It seeks to maintain the privacy, dignity and personal freedom of the individual as guaranteed by sharia and statutory law.

40. There have been a number of decisions promoting women's rights in judicial proceedings. One of the most notable was the establishment of the Support Fund on 7 August 2017 to guarantee prompt payment of support. Under article 4, the fund pays support in cases where someone has a court judgment entitling them to support but has not been paid for reasons other than insolvency. It also pays support to someone who has a court decree but whose case is still pending before the court, and pays provisional support to beneficiaries prior to the issuance of a judgment. In addition, the President of the Supreme Judicial Council issued a circular guaranteeing custody of a child to the mother without the need to file a suit in cases where there is no dispute. Rules have been issued to regulate and expedite cases involving an attempt to prevent a woman from marrying (*'adl*). The rules stipulate that the court handling the case shall have 30 days from the date of filing to hand down a ruling.

41. The creation of the Family Affairs Council, which has a committee devoted to women's affairs and a committee devoted to family protection, is a significant development in the institutional framework promoting and protecting the rights of

women and the family. The Council's committee for women's affairs has begun holding a number of consultative workshops to review the most important laws relating to women. The Council has also adopted a mechanism to formulate a national strategy for women.

42. The enactment of the Protection from Abuse Act and its implementing regulations is an important legislative measure in the fight against violence against women and girls. A complaints centre was put into operation in 2016 to receive and take action on all domestic violence reports. The Public Prosecution Service, in accordance with article 17 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, initiates criminal proceedings and investigates crimes against individuals if it deems that it is in the public interest to do so.

43. Several initiatives have been launched to empower women economically in all regions of Saudi Arabia. They include the Qurrah programme to support childcare for working women; the Wusul programme to support transportation for working women; the Work Freedom programme to expand opportunities for women to increase their incomes commensurate with their skills; and part-time work and telecommuting programmes to allow women who are caregivers to balance their work and family obligations, and to enable women in rural and remote areas to enter the labour market.

44. There has been a marked increase in the proportion of women working in legal fields, as court attorneys, public prosecutors and lawyers, on an equal footing with their male colleagues. Instructions have been issued by the Public Prosecution Service requiring female lawyers to be treated the same as their male counterparts, enabling them to study their clients' case papers and be present when clients are questioned, in accordance with article 70 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

45. Article 34 of the standard model employment regulations sets out the general rules on equal pay for work of equal value, which include a prohibition on any form of discrimination between male and female workers in respect of equal pay for work of equal value. It is worth noting that Saudi Arabia is a party to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

46. To these developments in women's rights may be added the adoption of the mother and child health passport, which monitors the health of the mother and child from pregnancy and childbirth until the child reaches five years of age. The most up-to-date models of pregnancy care are applied. Publications have been revised in line with WHO standards. The National Observatory for Women has been established as an expert centre within the King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies of King Saud University. It monitors the participation of Saudi women in development. The role of women has expanded in civil society organizations. Some 25 per cent of the founding members of the National Human Rights Commission are women. Women's presence has increased in the boards of banks, chambers of commerce and the Saudi Arabian Council of Engineers Association. The number of charitable organizations founded or supervised by women has increased.

47. Saudi Arabian businesswomen feature prominently on global lists and rankings. They organize workshops across Saudi Arabia to promote women's rights and play a prominent role in the activities of the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue and the cultural dialogue sessions it organizes. They are also involved in implementing action programmes to improve the delivery of services for women, including family security mechanisms, productive family programmes, motherhood programmes, sport and leisure programmes and programmes to help families with limited income develop their own resources and transition from dependency to productivity.

Children's rights

48. Saudi Arabia has made remarkable progress in respecting, protecting and realizing the rights of children. It has adopted several different measures that have contributed to strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, including enactment of the Child Protection Act and establishment of the Family Affairs Council with a committee devoted to children.

49. On 31 July 2018, the Juveniles Act was promulgated. It contains provisions and procedures for cases involving juvenile offenders, including arrest, detention, investigation and trial procedures that are age-appropriate and geared towards correcting their behaviour. The Act reinforces the rights of juveniles in the criminal justice system. Article 15 provides that if a crime committed by a juvenile is punishable by death, he or she should be sentenced to no more than 10 years in a home.

50. With regard to combating violence against children, the Ministry of Education has launched the "Rifq" programme to reduce violence in schools by various means, principally by making students, staff and parents/guardians aware of the causes and forms of violence, helping staff and parents/guardians to acquire the appropriate educational tools to address and reduce violence and providing guidance counsellors with the tools for early intervention and treatment in cases of violent behaviour.

51. A single consolidated toll-free helpline (116111) has been introduced to support children under the age of 18 subjected to various types of abuse, neglect or exploitation at home or at school, in the neighbourhood, in public places or government or private institutions and offer them on the spot, specialized counselling. The child support line is a member of Child Helpline International.

52. The Minister of Justice issued a circular on 23 December 2019 instructing court personnel not to process marriage contracts for persons under age 18 and to refer any such cases to the competent court for implementation of paragraph 3/16 of the implementing regulations of the Child Protection Act, which provides that prior to the conclusion of a marriage contract, it must be ensured that a person under the age of 18 will not suffer harm and that the best interests of both the male and the female are served.

53. The growing role of civil society organizations concerned with childhood is reflected in the improved identification and nurturing of gifted children by the King Abdulaziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity and various Ministry of Health and civil society initiatives; improved delivery of education and health services to children with disabilities; increased interest by educational institutions in childhood behaviour; and a rise in the number of social upbringing programmes designed to implant sound values and behaviour in the minds of young children, protect them from the temptations of delinquency and combat extremist ideas.

The rights of persons with disabilities

54. The concern of Saudi Arabia with the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities is evident from the many measures adopted in this area. These include the following: guaranteed access to their rights for persons with disabilities; improved delivery of government services for the disabled; the adoption of guidelines for the Universal Access Programme, putting in place an urban environment to enable persons with disabilities lead an independent life and integrate in the community; the creation of the King Salman Centre for Disability Research, which is at the forefront of research into the causes, avoidance and treatment of disability; and the establishment of the King Salman Award for Disability Research, which has helped

promote research into disability care, improve the delivery of services for persons with disabilities and ensure commitment to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

55. One of the most important developments in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities was the establishment of the Authority for the Care of Persons with Disabilities on 13 February 2018. The Authority delivers care for persons with disabilities and ensures they are able to exercise their disability-related rights. It seeks to improve the services provided by government agencies to the disabled, help them access essential care and rehabilitation, raise the level of prevention, and define the role of each agency concerned with the welfare of persons with disabilities.

56. The implementing regulations of the Labour Act and its supplements issued on 18 December 2018 are included in annex 2, which contains a schedule of arrangements and services to facilitate the work environment for workers with permanent and temporary disabilities, and workers with disabling diseases.

57. Saudi Arabia has made efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in all areas, including economic, social and cultural rights, so that they can become partners in development. A number of programmes and measures have been implemented in a number of fields. In the field of health, various preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitation services are offered, including preventive genetic counselling, screening for early detection of disease, and registration of children born with elevated risk of disabilities, whose cases are followed up and reported to the competent authorities. Training courses are provided to health-care workers and first responders to reinforce tools for treating persons injured in accidents. Support offices have been established in health facilities to provide logistics services for people with disabilities to make them disability friendly.

58. In education, the Ministry of Education partially integrates some students with disabilities, placing them in special classrooms attached to its schools, and fully integrates others by placing them in the same classrooms as their non-disabled peers. Educational support and rehabilitation is provided to ensure that they keep up with their peers in all classes. Assistive devices, such as hearing aids, vision aids and wheelchairs, are provided free of charge. Educational materials are provided for the blind, including textbooks printed in Braille and audiobooks; the textbooks approved for use in public education are adapted for use by the deaf. Sign language is used to communicate with deaf students. The Ministry of Education adopted the concept of inclusive education and began putting it into practice in public education schools at the beginning of school year A.H. 1436/37 (A.D. 2015/16). This serves students with disabilities by promoting implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

59. A special education initiative, involving development of a national strategy document for the teaching of persons with disabilities, was launched by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Education and Training Evaluation Commission, a number of charities and the King Salman Centre for Disability Research.

60. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development launched the “Tawafuq” programme, designed to employ Saudis with disabilities; provide them with an appropriate work environment; encourage private sector enterprises to recruit and train persons with disabilities, with a view to increasing their level of performance; provide financial assistance for families looking after a person with disabilities; and create and subsidise organizations and centres that provide care and rehabilitation programmes for persons with disabilities.

61. The Prince Sultan Centre for Special Education Support Services is an integrated centre that seeks to provide a first-class service for children suffering from learning difficulties that prevent them from enrolling in ordinary or special needs schools. The Centre carries out assessment, evaluation and diagnosis at government schools and kindergartens and then develops an appropriate treatment plan for the individual child in accordance with his/her needs with a view to returning the child to his/her natural environment at school or home as an independent individual, able to interact with others.

Disseminating and teaching the culture of human rights

62. Advances in the dissemination and teaching of a culture of human rights include implementation of a number of educational and training programmes, workshops and lectures, as well as online and television campaigns covering various aspects of human rights. The involvement of influential figures in the community in programmes relating to children, women, persons with disabilities and migrant workers, has been particularly rewarding. The educational authorities in Saudi Arabia are keen to disseminate the culture of human rights and their efforts were crowned with the issue of Supreme Order 13084 of 27 Rabi' I A.H. 1436 (18 January A.D. 2015), instructing the Human Rights Commission, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, to mainstream human rights in the higher education curriculum and take action to create a separate human rights specialization in the appropriate faculties.

63. Numerous training activities and programmes have been launched under the memorandum of understanding signed in 2012 by Saudi Arabia and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Between 2014 and 2018, more than 50 activities and programmes for judges, members of the Public Prosecution Service, lawyers, health practitioners and law enforcement officers, were implemented to raise awareness of the human rights conventions to which Saudi Arabia has become a party and explore how best to implement their provisions.

64. On 14 December 2017, the Human Rights Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education (noted above) launching the human rights e-learning portal, under the slogan "My nation is the protector of my rights", designed to inform students about their rights and disseminate the culture of human rights.

65. As part of its communication strategy, the Ministry of Information established the Centre for Government Communication to promote integration and coordination between government agencies and the media, keep abreast of developments and keep pace with the comprehensive renaissance of Saudi Arabia. One of the key tasks of the Centre is to provide support for media departments in government agencies.

II. Scope of international commitments and international cooperation in human rights

66. Saudi Arabia is a party to five of the main United Nations conventions on human rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by Royal Decree No. *mim*/7 dated 16 Rabi' II A.H. 1416; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, by Royal Decree No. *mim*/11 dated 4 Rabi' II A.H. 1418; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, by Royal Decree No. *mim*/12 dated 16 Rabi' II A.H. 1418; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by Royal Decree No. *mim*/25 of 1421; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by Royal Decree No. *mim*/28 dated 22 Jumada I A.H. 1429. Saudi Arabia is also a party to the following optional protocols: the Optional Protocol to the

Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, by Royal Decree No. (*mim/38*) dated 18 Rajab A.H. 1431, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, by Royal Decree (*mim/39*) dated 18 Rajab A.H. 1431, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by Royal Decree No. (*mim/28*) of 22 Jumada I A.H. 1429.

67. By virtue of the accession of Saudi Arabia thereto, those conventions have become part of national law and the country's obligations thereunder have the same legal force as other statutory laws. The legal instrument of accession to these conventions (the royal decree) is the same as that under which the country's other laws are promulgated, in accordance with article 70 of the Basic Law of Governance, which stipulates that laws, international treaties and agreements, and concessions shall be issued and amended by royal decrees. Furthermore, article 11 (1) of the procedures for concluding international conventions, promulgated by Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 287 of 14 Sha'ban A.H. 1431 (26 July A.D. 2010), states that once a convention has come into force, the appropriate bodies are required to take the measures necessary for implementation to ensure that Saudi Arabia meets all its obligations arising from accession.

68. Saudi Arabia has sought to meet its obligations under those conventions to which it is a party and ensure that implementation is monitored by the relevant governmental and judicial bodies, principally the various branches of the judiciary. The regulations for the Human Rights Commission, issued pursuant to Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 207 of 8 Sha'ban A.H. 1426 (12 September A.D. 2005), gives the Commission a mandate to monitor government bodies to ensure application of the international human rights instruments to which Saudi Arabia has acceded and ensure that these bodies are taking proper measures for enforcement. These efforts were crowned by the formation, pursuant to Supreme Order No. 13084 of 27 Rabi' I A.H. 1436 (18 January A.D. 2015), of the standing committee responsible for preparing the country's reports on human rights conventions. One of the committee's tasks is to monitor recommendations emanating from treaty bodies and the universal periodic review.

69. With regard to procedural obligations with respect to submitting reports to treaty bodies, Saudi Arabia has submitted all of its national reports on the human rights conventions to which it has become a party by the deadlines, making it one of only 36 States that have submitted their reports on time (out of 197).

70. Working in collaboration with the Human Rights Council, Saudi Arabia actively participated in the first, second and third cycles of the universal periodic review in 2009, 2013 and 2019 respectively, and has made considerable progress in implementing the recommendations emerging from those cycles.

71. Saudi Arabia has cooperated with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council by responding proactively to the questions and inquiries of the special rapporteurs and processing complaints coming from the Council. Issues are dealt with completely independently and objectively, and are considered via a national mechanism established under Supreme Order No. 2775/*mim ba* and dated 27 Rabi' I A.H. 1431 (13 March A.D. 2010). Saudi Arabia has extended invitations to a number of substantive mandate holders to visit the country, including the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, who visited in January 2017 and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, who visited from 30 April to 4 May 2017. The reports of the two special rapporteurs were studied to with a view to enhancing the promotion and protection of human rights.

III. Voluntary pledges pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251 concerning the Human Rights Council

72. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia pledges to continue its efforts to promote and protect human rights nationally, regionally and internationally by doing the following:

- It will continue to implement its obligations under the regional and international human rights conventions to which it has become a party, and continue to consider joining conventions to which it has not yet become a party.
- It will re-examine laws that impose the death penalty and consider to what extent it can be replaced by other penalties.
- It will work to replace corporal punishment with other penalties in the light of the provisions of the Basic Law of Governance.
- It will consider enacting legislation to combat racial discrimination and hatred.
- It will take further legislative, procedural and other measures to promote freedom of opinion, expression and the press.
- It will work to build national human rights indicators that can measure progress, detect obstacles and challenges, and identify national priorities and initiatives.
- It will continue to review and develop existing laws to ensure that they comply with the obligations of Saudi Arabia under international human rights standards.
- It will work to set up an advance technical programme, the “National Referral Program”, to document cases of human trafficking and guide personnel of the relevant agencies in the procedures to be followed at each stage.
- It will continue to promote women’s rights and empowerment in all areas.
- It will re-examine laws, regulations and instructions relating to foreign workers, including with regard to their relationship with employers, in the light of international human rights standards.
- It will work to promote the rights of the elderly and put forward national, regional and international initiatives to reach optimal levels of realization of the rights of the elderly.
- It will continue to cooperate with the Human Rights Council and its various mechanisms including the universal periodic review mechanism, special procedures and complaints procedures; to engage proactively with the Council’s decisions and presidential statements; and to work in the spirit of teamwork with Member States to maintain the Council’s principles and achieve its objectives.