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

**Note verbale dated 30 September 2024 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 has the honour to refer to the candidature of Saudi Arabia for election to the Human Rights Council for the term 2025–2027, at the elections to be held on 9 October 2024 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 would be grateful to the President of the General Assembly if the present note and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 115 (c).



**Annex to the note verbale dated 30 September 2024 from the
Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations
addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

[Original: Arabic]

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

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia submits its candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council for the 2025–2027 period based on its deeply-rooted Islamic values that require human rights to be protected and their violation prohibited. It does so as an extension of its national, regional and international human rights efforts, and out of recognition of the general role played by the Human Rights Council in improving the human rights situation around the world. The Kingdom has been a member of the Council for four terms since its establishment in 2006, and participated as an observer in 2013, 2020, 2021, 2023, and 2024. It has spared no effort to make the Council's work a success.

2. The Kingdom is seeing major developments in human rights. It has legislative and institutional frameworks that ensure the promotion and protection of human rights based on its constitutional values and principles. The most important is the Basic Law of Governance, which provides that governance in the Kingdom shall be based on justice, consultation and equality, and that the State shall protect human rights in accordance with the Islamic sharia. It is on that basis that the Kingdom has adopted numerous laws, institutions and remedies that form a legal and institutional framework to strengthen and protect human rights.

3. The Kingdom's Vision 2030, issued on 25 April 2016, is based on these principles and is in line with this approach. It serves as a platform that defines the State's general policies, programmes and initiatives, within the framework of three major themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation. Under each theme there are a number of objectives that impinge directly or indirectly on human rights and have a bearing – explicitly or implicitly – on various specific rights, including the following: the right to security, the right to health, the right to work, women's rights, children's rights, the rights of persons with disabilities, the rights of the elderly, the right to development, the right to take part in public life, the right to form and support associations, and a number of other social and economic rights. In line with this ambitious vision, many programmes and executive measures have been launched to implement Vision 2030. It should be noted that the Vision enshrines the principle enunciated in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development that the human being is the central subject and main beneficiary of development.

I. Framework within which human rights are promoted at the national level

The judiciary and criminal justice

4. There have been many positive developments in the Kingdom. On 30 December 2021, the Evidence Act was enacted. It contains provisions specifying legal methods of proof, so as to protect rights and minimize disputes. On 9 March 2022, the Personal Status Code was adopted. It contains provisions regulating family relations. Its goal is to preserve the stability of the family as the basic component of society, rein in the discretionary power of the judiciary so as to promote consistency and uniformity in judicial rulings, provide a framework for relations among family members and protect their rights, and expedite the resolution of family disputes.

5. On 18 June 2023, the Civil Transactions Act was enacted. It is part of a body of legislation designed to protect property, enhance the consistency and authority of contracts, define the sources and effects of rights and obligations, and clarify legal foundations. That has a positive effect on the business environment and increases its attractiveness. It helps to regulate economic activity, establish financial rights, and facilitate investment decisions.

6. Flogging for ta'zir crimes has been abolished. The Supreme Court, sitting in full session, duly issued Decree No. 40/M dated 24 Jumada II A.H. 1441 (18 February 2020), in which it decided by a majority that the courts should, in cases of ta'zir crimes, impose imprisonment and/or a fine or alternative punishments, in line with the laws and decrees issued in that regard.

7. In March 2020, a Royal Order was issued to stay the enforcement of final death sentences handed down against offenders before the enactment of the Juveniles Act for crimes they committed while under the age of 18, and to make them retroactively subject to the Juveniles Act.

Combating trafficking in persons

8. The Kingdom has taken bold steps to combat trafficking in persons. A number of legislative, institutional, procedural and judicial measures have been adopted to combat and prevent such crimes. A national referral mechanism for trafficking victims was launched in August 2020 to document instances of human trafficking and identify victims. It tracks cases from when they first emerge until they are definitively adjudicated by the courts. The mechanism also serves to guide staff of the competent bodies on the procedures they should follow at each stage, in accordance with the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act. An electronic system has been completed. Coordination is ongoing to train liaison officers at all the relevant authorities, as are procedures for electronic links with agencies that are part of the national referral mechanism.

9. A national plan to combat trafficking in persons (2021–2023) was adopted on 25 Dhu al-Hijjah A.H. 1442 (25 July 2021). The plan was drafted in coordination with the Committee and with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It includes four strategic priorities: prevention; protection and assistance; prosecution; and partnership and cooperation. Strategic objectives, activities and initiatives under each priority are detailed in accordance with achievable goals. A number of agreements and memorandums of understanding have been signed by the Committee to Combat Crimes of Trafficking in Persons with civil society institutions, local and counterpart government agencies, and international organizations to reinforce anti-trafficking efforts, support victims, build national capacities and create a database of trafficking cases. More than 6,500 persons from government and civil society institutions received training during the 2020–2023 period through 65 specialized training programmes.

10. Special criminal chambers have been set up within the courts to hear cases involving trafficking in persons. The Public Prosecutor has established branch offices to investigate such cases. The Ministry of the Interior has adopted protocols for arrest and deportation that conform to international standards, including the principle of non-refoulement and the detection of possible victims of trafficking in persons.

Civil society space

11. The Civil Associations and Foundations Act adopted on 1 December 2015 represents an advanced legal framework with development and social objectives. It aims to regulate, develop and protect civil society work, contribute to national development, enhance citizens' contribution to the management and development of

society, encourage a culture of community volunteerism, and promote social solidarity. The Act authorizes the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to license associations and foundations, work to develop them, provide government subsidies to associations, and disseminate a culture of volunteerism in the community.

12. The past few years have witnessed major developments that enhance and protect the role of civil society within the framework of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. The number of non-governmental organizations and institutions in the Kingdom has increased to over 4,000. In August 2022, the National Centre for the Development of the Non-Profit Sector issued regulations for an associations support fund to provide financial support to non-governmental organizations in various fields, including, but not limited to the following: family, women, children, orphans, youth, Hajj and Umrah pilgrims, consumer protection, housing construction, employment and training. The Centre tries to develop resources, investments and partnerships to help the non-profit sector achieve financial sustainability, maximize social impact, and improve services for all segments of society. To date, financial support has been provided in excess of \$3,314,737.

13. Article 19, paragraph 2, of the implementing regulations of the Civil Society Associations and Foundations Act was amended to allow children as young as 15 to play a role in the non-profit sector by becoming members of the general assemblies of non-governmental organizations. The goal is to promote the values of solidarity among members of society. The Volunteer Work Act was enacted by Royal Decree No. M/70 of 27 Jumada I A.H. 1441 (23 January 2020). It aims to spread a culture of volunteerism among community members and institutions, and regulate relations among volunteer work organizations.

14. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has launched a project to develop legal and legislative social investment incentives. It aims to enact legislation to incentivize the social investment market and overcome legislative obstacles. Procedures have been launched for several social investments in partnership between the Ministry, the non-profit sector and the private sector. The goal is to stimulate the injection of funds into social investments that have a positive social impact and are financially sustainable. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has worked to expand the establishment of specialized associations. It has found a number of innovative ways to expedite the establishment of civic associations. Over 700 civic associations have been founded in various areas across the Kingdom. They all serve the priorities and needs of development. Work is now underway on the following:

- A draft development plan to cover development needs
- Awareness campaigns to familiarize society with development areas in the non-profit sector
- A project to establish socioeconomic empowerment associations
- Maximization of the societal impact of the work of nonprofit organizations

15. The King Khalid Foundation, the King Saud Foundation, the Nahdah Women's Association, and the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue have been granted consultative status as non-governmental organizations by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Freedom of opinion and expression

16. The Kingdom's laws – first and foremost among them the Basic Law of Governance – operate to promote freedom of opinion and expression in a manner mindful of other rights, given that human rights are universal, indivisible and

interdependent, as stated in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme. This concept, which the Kingdom adopts in law and practice, is fully consistent with relevant international standards that allow freedom of opinion and expression to be subject under the law to restrictions necessary to protect public order, national security, public morals, public health and the rights or reputations of others.

17. On 12 December 2017, the Audiovisual Media Act was enacted. It emphasizes respect for freedom of expression and opinion; protection from anything that would provoke strife, division and hatred among citizens, incite violence, or threaten the peace of society; and respect for the essence of humanity. It is part of the legal framework that promotes freedom of opinion and expression.

18. Cabinet Decision No. 713, adopted on 30 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1438 (22 August 2017), requires government agencies to publish proposals, rules, regulations and decisions taken within their purviews so that the relevant parties and individuals can express their views and observations on them. This reinforces the right of access to information, on which many other rights are based, most notably the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

19. As part of efforts to promote freedom of opinion and expression, many laws touching on freedom of opinion and expression – for example, the Cybercrime Act – are periodically reviewed in the light of international human rights standards. The goal is to ensure that they fulfil their pivotal role of protecting public order, national security, public morals, the rights and freedoms of others, and other basic principles, in a manner that does not impinge on the enjoyment of the right of every person to express their opinion. That naturally extends to enforcement by those charged with enforcing those laws.

Right to education

20. The importance attached to education under Saudi Vision 2030 has led to a number of rapid developments and reforms in various areas. These include making educational opportunities available to all; promoting free education; equality of opportunity; curriculum development; teacher performance; education oversight; school buildings and equipment; tools and methods of measurement and evaluation; educational guidance and counselling; visually, aurally and intellectually impaired students; students with autism; and schooling for students with disabilities. In that connection, a lifelong learning initiative has been launched with the name “Istidamah”. It is just one of the initiatives envisaged under the programme of national transformation that has emerged from the Saudi Vision 2030. The initiative, which is aimed at adults between the ages of 15 and 50, aims to eradicate illiteracy and to empower individuals to benefit from education and training opportunities. In September 2021, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia launched a Human Capacity Development programme, which is one of the programmes the intended to achieve Vision 2030. The goals of the programme include the development of an integrated educational itinerary, improving equality of educational opportunity and enhancing the outcomes of basic education.

21. The Kingdom's laws guarantee the right to education for all without discrimination. Article 30 of the Basic Law of Governance provides that the State shall provide public education and shall be committed to combating illiteracy. Public education is compulsory for persons between the ages of 6 and 15 pursuant to a Council of Ministers decision issued on 15 June 2004. The Child Protection Act regards interruption of a child's education, regardless of gender or nationality, to be a form of abuse and neglect prohibited by law. The Kingdom's general education policy stresses education free of charge in all its types and levels. It should be noted that the Kingdom is party to the Convention against Discrimination in Education

adopted on 14 December 1960 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is also party to other human rights conventions that provide for the right to education in various contexts. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

22. As a result of its efforts, Saudi Arabia has advanced eight places in the annual Global Competitiveness Index, which is issued by the World Competitiveness Centre of the International Institute for Management Development. Overall, it ranked 24 out of 63 countries and was the second ranking nation in terms of progress achieved. The report also highlighted remarkable developments in the country's performance under several sub-indicators, including education, where Saudi Arabia ranked third in terms of public expenditure out of 63 States. The Kingdom also advanced in the Global Talent Ranking, ranking thirtieth overall among 63 of the most competitive countries in the world. Moreover, under a number of sub-indicators, Saudi Arabia ranked among the top 10 States in the world, notably: government spending on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (third), graduate training (ninth) and language skills (twentieth). Since Saudi Arabia began participating in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in 2007, it has won 133 awards, including 92 major awards, and 41 special awards.

23. The number of universities has increased. As of the end of 2020, there were 29 public universities and 35 private universities and colleges. That is a reflection of the attention paid to enabling citizens to pursue university education.

Right to health

24. The National Centre for Mental Health was established pursuant to Cabinet Decision No. 685 of 27 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1440 (30 July 2019) with a view to developing national programmes for the promotion of mental health, building a better life for all members of society, fostering positive engagement and supporting those who are most vulnerable to mental health problems.

25. The implementing regulations of the amended Mental Health Act were issued by Ministerial Decision No. 838102 dated 20 April A.H. 1441 (17 December 2019).

26. Cabinet Decision No. 401, dated 18 Rajab A.H. 1441 (13 March 2020), established the Public Health Authority. Its objective is to protect and promote public health.

27. The "Priority" initiative was launched to facilitate access to health care for certain target groups, including persons with disabilities, persons over 60, patients in home care and other cases approved by a special medical committee.

28. A number of primary care centres have been operationalized. They cover all the Kingdom's governorates and administrative regions. As of December 2022, there were 2,131 health centres providing primary care to beneficiaries.

29. The "Be reassured" and "Be certain" clinics provide coronavirus disease (COVID-19) testing to all residents without discrimination. The Ministry of Health has launched the "My health" unified platform, which allows users to access health information and obtain a number of health services provided by different agencies within the Kingdom's health sector.

Right to work and workers' rights

30. Saudi Vision 2030 has helped to make the country's work environment more attractive and competitive and more focused on human rights. Several reforms have

been introduced, including a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and work, which aims to eradicate all forms of discrimination. To that end, laws and policies are being developed to explicitly define and prohibit discrimination, to promote equal treatment in the workplace and to support women and other groups least represented in the labour market. In addition, the Labour Code was amended in July 2019. Specifically, article 3 now reads: “Work is the right of citizens and may not be undertaken by anyone else unless they fulfil the conditions stipulated in the present Code. Citizens are equal in their right to work, without discrimination on grounds of sex, disability, age or any other grounds, be it during the performance of their duties, during recruitment or in job advertisements”.

31. Another initiative launched as part of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 is aimed at “improving contractual relationships”. It seeks to boost the labour market, increase employment rates, improve productivity and attract skills from across the globe, while at the same time promoting and protecting human rights. It includes the following services:

- A “job mobility” service, which allows migrant workers to transfer to another company once 12 months have passed since they first entered the Kingdom; the transfer can take place without the agreement of their first employer, under rules that are intended to protect both parties to the contract;
- A “definitive departure” service, which allows migrant workers to submit an application for definitive departure during the period of validity of their employment contract or following its termination; the application is to be made online using the Absher platform and the workers then have the right to leave the country without the agreement of their employer, under rules that are intended to protect both parties to the contract;
- A “departure and return” service, which allows migrant workers to submit an application for departure and return during the period of validity of their employment contract; the application is to be made online using the Absher platform and the workers then have the right to leave the country without the agreement of their employer, under rules that are intended to protect both parties to the contract.

32. The “occupational screening” programme was launched on 7 March 2021. Its goal is to maintain professional competence in the Saudi Arabian labour market.

33. The Human Capacity Development Programme – referred to above in the section on the right to education – was launched by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz in September 2021. Its goals include the following: Matching educational outcomes to labour market needs; improving the readiness of youth to enter the labour market; expanding vocational training to meet the needs of the labour market; and promoting and supporting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

34. Modern working arrangements have been introduced for flexible work, freelancing, and remote work. The goal is to increase job seekers’ chances of getting jobs, as well as to enable them to enter the labour market and upgrade their skills and expertise.

35. The “Madad” platform was launched in 2020 to help businesses regulate and manage workers’ wages using integrated and advanced systems.

36. The “Masar” digital platform was launched in 2020. It includes a package of e-services for public sector employees from the time of their appointment through termination of service.

37. The service for reporting absenteeism from work has been abolished because it gave rise to exploitation and put pressure on workers. It has been replaced with a service for reporting interruptions in work and termination of contracts while preserving the rights of both parties to the contract. As a result, workers can move to a different employer or be granted a final exit visa. A contract documentation service has also been launched using the Quwa platform, which now acts as a single unified location for the registration of employment contracts; as a consequence, registration of contracts using the Madad platform has been suspended. The aim is to consolidate registration platforms, to preserve the rights of the contracting parties (employers and workers), to create a work environment that promotes the stability of workers and boosts productivity, to ensure compliance with the Labour Code, to verify the accuracy of the data in the contract, and to reduce labour disputes.

38. Decree No. 73945 was issued endorsing the “Musaned” online visa platform. “Musaned” is a new and integrated online tool that facilitates procedures for entering into contracts with domestic workers while preserving the rights of all the parties involved.

39. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has set up the unified telephone number 19911, which operates in several languages to receive complaints from foreign workers. This constitutes a significant development in the provision of means of redress. In addition, inspection visits to recruitment bureaus have been stepped up with a view to detecting any violations involving misuse of visas. A total of 1,301,791 such visits were conducted in 2022. A number of violations were detected where employers were engaging workers in work other than that stated on their work permit or contract of employment, leading to the issuance of 5,523 warnings and the recording of 263 offences. Cases where employers were discovered to be practicing an activity other than that registered in the Ministry’s records led to the issuance of 87 warnings and the recording of 5 offences.

Women’s rights

40. A Department for the Empowerment of Women has been established within the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. Its purpose is to develop and implement projects to support women in the Saudi Arabian workplace with a view to increasing female labour force participation and strengthening equal opportunities in public and private sector employment. The Women’s Empowerment Initiative was launched by the Ministry with the aim of increasing the participation of women in the public and private sectors and at all job levels. It envisages women assuming senior structural leadership positions, taking advantage of their energy and capabilities, expanding their work options and increasing their participation in order to ensure equality of opportunity between the sexes and shrink the gender gap both quantitatively and qualitatively. The initiative’s goal is to help women overcome the obstacles standing between them and human, economic and social development. Women’s empowerment programmes have been expanded, most notably, the Qurrah programme to support childcare for working women. More than 14,200 working women have been supported through the Qurrah childcare services programme. The Wusul programme has supported commutes for over 184,700 working women. The Self-Employment Support programme has expanded opportunities for women to augment their incomes based on their skills. The part-time and remote-work programmes enable women to achieve a balance between work and family, and allow rural women to join the labour market. A Gender Balance Centre has also been established.

41. The Sarah Al-Sudairi Centre for Women’s Studies has been created as part of Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University. The new Centre, which concerns itself with supporting the development of women within the framework of the Saudi Vision

2030, conducts studies into women's changing perceptions and values, and documents and highlights the role Saudi women play in building society. The Centre also conducts research related to women in the Arab world and the rest of the world and then compares their situation with that of women in Saudi Arabia. The Centre is working to create a digital library of academic research in women's studies.

42. As a result, the percentage of women in the total labour force during the period from 2017 to 2022 rose from 21.2 per cent (second quarter) to 34 per cent (fourth quarter). The rate of women's participation in the labour force increased during the same period from 17 to 36 per cent (fourth quarter). The percentage of women's participation in administrative positions (senior and middle) during the period from 2017 to 2022 increased from 28.6 to 41.1 per cent. The percentage of Saudi women in the civil service had reached 42 per cent by the end of the third quarter in 2022. The share of women in small and medium enterprises during the period from 2017 to 2022 rose from 22.5 per cent to 45 per cent. The percentage of women active in information and communications during the same period increased from 7 per cent to 30.5 per cent. The percentage of Saudi women's ownership in commercial registers increased to 40 per cent of the commercial registers of existing institutions.

43. Beginning in January 2018, the Public Prosecution Service has been seeking to attract well-qualified women to work as members of the Service, on an equal footing with male members of the Service. Similarly, the Ministry of the Interior has opened the way for women to be accepted and registered in a number of military posts.

44. Some 30 women were appointed to the Shura Council, representing 20 per cent of the total number of council members. On 30 June 2020, a royal decree was issued to reconfigure the board of the Human Rights Commission in its fourth session to make women's representation 50 per cent, with 13 female and 13 male members.

45. Full equality between men and women has been achieved with regard to support for finding employment. Women now receive the same subsidy as men and the Human Resources Development Fund provides the same level of training and employment support to women and men who work in the private sector. That includes the amount of support offered for training expenses and wages, and the duration of such support.

46. A "national platform for women leaders" has been launched. It is an interactive national platform launched under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in cooperation with Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University. The platform contains a database of national women leaders to facilitate quick access to women leaders from the public sector, private sector organizations, and civil society organizations.

47. These efforts have been reflected in international indicators. For example, Saudi Arabia moved from index ranking 31 to index ranking 70.6 in the 2020 "Women, Business and the Law" report published by the World Bank. Thus, at a global level, Saudi Arabia made more progress than any other country towards gender equality in the period between 2017 and 2020, as its ranking on the general index jumped by 40 points and it achieved full marks (100/100) on four sub-indicators: workplace, pay, entrepreneurship, and pension. On the overall index, Saudi Arabia ranked second in the Arab world, fifty-third in the Middle East and North Africa and ninety-fifth globally. In 2023, Saudi Arabia had an index ranking of 71.3 (out of 100) and scored full marks on the sub-indicators of workplace, entrepreneurship, pension and pay. The Kingdom was among the three most improved countries in employing both genders for 2022 in the World Economic Forum report.

Rights of the child

48. In March 2020, Royal Order No. 46274 dated 29 Sha‘ban A.H. 1441 (24 March 2020) was issued to stay the enforcement of definitive death sentences handed down against offenders before the enactment of the Juveniles Act for crimes they committed while under the age of 18, and to make them retroactively subject to the Juveniles Act.

49. In 2020, the Prince Mohammed bin Salman initiative for the protection of children in the online world was launched to provide a safe online environment for children.

50. A kindergarten development initiative was launched with a view to expanding services to all regions of the Kingdom. That was done to achieve the strategic goal of “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”, specifically the “overall enrolment rates in kindergarten” indicator. One of its major objectives is to raise the percentage of children enrolled in kindergarten from 17 per cent to 95 per cent by 2030.

51. For its part the Public Prosecution Service has a special unit for children, while the Family Affairs Council attends to the question of children’s rights via its committee for childhood. The committee, which is composed of children’s rights experts, studies existing laws and proposes new ones and develops plans, programmes and initiatives to respond to children’s needs. The committee for childhood is associated with another body, the children’s advisory committee, which seeks to provide children with the opportunity to discuss childhood-related issues and their own needs before the Family Affairs Council. A national strategy for the family, which includes 39 child-related initiatives, has also been launched and is being implemented through a human capacity development programme, which is one of the programmes under the Saudi Vision 2030.

52. The Audiovisual Media Authority has established age ratings for electronic games. The rating and evaluation system determines the suitability of content for different age groups.

53. A national child labour prevention policy was adopted with Council of Ministers Decree No. 493 of 24 Sha‘ban A.H. 1442 (6 April 2021). It aims to provide a safe and supportive environment for children with a view to building a society in which they are able to enjoy all their rights guaranteed by the Islamic sharia and the Kingdom’s legislation.

Rights of persons with disabilities

54. On 22 August 2023, the Council of Ministers approved an Act on the rights of persons with disabilities. It replaces the previous Disability Welfare Act. It was drafted to cover all life requirements and serve as a basis for allowing persons with disabilities access to their rights in various sectors. The Act is in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

55. The Authority for Persons with Disabilities was established by Cabinet Decision No. 266 of 27 Jumada I A.H. 1439 (13 February 2018). Its purpose is to deliver care for persons with disabilities and ensure they obtain their disability-related rights. It seeks to improve the services provided by government agencies to the disabled, help them access essential care and rehabilitation, improve prevention, and define the role of each agency concerned with the welfare of persons with disabilities. A directive has been issued to include the term “persons with disabilities” in all official communications and media announcements.

56. Article 13 of the Protection against Abuse Act was amended in March 2022 to introduce more severe penalties for cases of abuse where the victim is a person with

disabilities. The Authority for Persons with Disabilities was established under Council of Ministers Decree No. 266 of 27 Jumada I A.H. 1439 (13 February 2018) to provide care for persons with disabilities and ensure that they are able to exercise their rights. Currently, the Authority is working with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to establish a single consolidated register of persons with disabilities, which will act as a comprehensive database on disability in the country. The database will serve as a resource for research into the current situation and will help to identify and address the obstacles and challenges facing persons with disabilities. Working in cooperation with the General Directorate of Civil Defence, the Authority has produced an evacuation guide for persons with disabilities in emergency situations. The guide aims to raise awareness among security personnel and crisis management divisions in government and private bodies about optimal ways to deal with persons with disabilities during emergencies.

57. The Labour Code was amended in July 2019 to ensure equality among all persons in rights, duties and conditions of service. Specifically, the amendments affected article 3, prohibiting workplace discrimination on grounds of sex, disability, age or any other grounds. Vocational training is provided to persons with disabilities to enable them to enter the labour market.

58. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has launched its “Mowa’amah” programme under which special licences are granted to disability-friendly workplaces, thus contributing to the creation of a safe and supportive working environment for persons with disabilities through the application of optimal standards and practices. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development issued Decree No. 3249/1/14 of 9 Rabi’ I A.H. 1438 (8 December 2016) under which large and very large businesses are required to obtain a certificate of compatibility in order to be able to count workers with disabilities among the four workers for which special provision is made in the “Nitaqat” Saudization programme. Under Ministerial Decree No. 156563 of 18 Sha’ban A.H. 1440 (23 April 2019), medium-sized businesses are required to obtain a certificate of compatibility in order to be able to count workers with disabilities among the four workers for which special provision is made in the “Nitaqat” Saudization programme.

59. In cooperation with the Human Resources Development Fund, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has developed services for persons with disabilities. A total of 11,538 such persons have enrolled in its labour-market training programmes, while 10,000 graduates from the training programmes joined the labour market during the course of 2022.

60. Thanks to all the efforts that have been made in this connection, the labour-market participation rate of persons with disabilities increased from 7.7 per cent to 12.3 per cent in 2022.

61. The Government provides continuous financial and in-kind support to persons with disabilities with the aim of mitigating the impact of their disability and empowering them socioeconomically. The total value of this financial support amounted to more than 3 billion Saudi riyals in 2022, for some 410,000 persons with disabilities. At the same time, 67,915 assistive devices – valued at 70 million Saudi riyals – were distributed to 36,069 persons with disabilities.

62. In realization of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 provisions for providing alternatives to residential services, the Kingdom supports the provision of the various services. Day-care centres are available that provide persons with disabilities with services such as social training and rehabilitation. During the year 2022 services were provided to some 22,000 beneficiaries valued at some 770,000,000 riyals. The home social care programme provides caregiver services at home during specific hours of

the day and provides training programmes for the family on how to care for their children. There are also recreational programmes.

63. The Ministry of the Interior runs a number of services and platforms with a view to promoting human rights. These include the Absher platform which, in the name of just and equal treatment, digitalizes services offered by the Ministry offers to enable all to access them on an equal footing. The Taqdeer service offers older persons and persons with disabilities the chance to request civil status services at their own homes. The Ashir service facilitates communication with persons with hearing disabilities. The Faraj fund is an online service through which families, charities and others can pay debts owed by persons imprisoned for debt.

64. The Kingdom acceded to the 2013 Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled by Royal Decree M/109 dated 5 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1439 (18 July 2018).

65. A special education development initiative was launched by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Education Evaluation Commission, charitable associations, and the King Salman Centre for Disability Research.

Rights of the elderly

66. The Kingdom was among the first countries to take measures to promote and protect the elderly, stemming from its values that call for the preservation and care of the rights of this group. The Kingdom has called on the international community to adopt a convention on the rights of the elderly. It would be similar to other conventions on the rights of specific groups. Major reforms in this area include the following:

67. An Act on the rights and welfare of older persons was enacted by Royal Decree No. M/47 of 3 Jumada II A.H. 1443 (6 January 2022). Article 2 of the Act provides that the Ministry of Human Resources shall coordinate with the competent authorities to ensure that older persons are able to live in an environment that preserves their rights and protects their dignity, to raise awareness of their rights, to support volunteer activities that serve them, and to equip public, commercial and residential facilities for the needs of the elderly.

68. Ministerial Decision No. 167493 dated 18 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1441 (9 July 2020) approved regulations for private senior citizens' centres. They are to be licensed and overseen by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, and provided with operational models and developed. Work is underway on the national project for social clubs to enhance the well-being of senior citizens by providing social, athletic and cultural services. The committee on the elderly of the Family Affairs Council charged with reviewing regulations and legislation for services provided to the elderly.

69. In 2020, the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque set aside two paths for the elderly and persons with disabilities in the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

70. The Ministry of Health launched the "Priority" service, which provides expedited COVID-19 vaccines for person 75 and older – both citizens and residents – on the spot without advance registration or an appointment.

71. On 4 February 2021, transportation services were inaugurated for elderly Umrah pilgrims and worshippers at the Grand Mosque.

72. On 3 January 2021, the Ministry of Justice announced an expansion of mobile notary service for the elderly to include those aged 65 and over, instead of 70. The goal was to serve the largest possible segment of society and save them time and effort.

Dissemination of a human rights culture and human rights education

73. There have been a number of developments in the area of dissemination of a human rights culture and human rights education. Several educational and training programmes, workshops, lectures, and Internet and television awareness campaigns have been held on various aspects of rights. The participation of influential social figures has enriched these awareness programmes, especially those related to children, women, persons with disabilities and migrant workers. The Kingdom's education authorities also take care to disseminate a culture of human rights. Efforts in this connection culminated in the issuance of Royal Decree No. 13084 dated 27 Rabi' I A.H. 1436 (18 January 2015). The Human Rights Commission, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, incorporates human rights into the curricula of the Kingdom's higher education institutions. Work is ongoing to create an independent specialization in human rights at the relevant colleges.

74. Various training programmes have been held within the framework of the memorandum of understanding concluded in 2012 between the Human Rights Commission, on behalf of Saudi Arabia, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). There are more than 103 programmes and activities designed to provide information on the human rights conventions to which Saudi Arabia is a party.

75. The Ministry of Information launched the Centre for Government Communication as part of a strategy of the Ministry of Information to enhance integration and coordination between government agencies and various media outlets, and to keep pace with development and with the comprehensive renaissance in the Kingdom. The Centre's primary task is to support the media departments of government agencies.

II. International human rights commitments and cooperation

76. The Kingdom is a party to five major United Nations human rights conventions: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by Royal Decree No. M/7 dated 16 Rabi' II A.H. 1416 (12 September 1995); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, by Royal Decree No. M/11 dated 4 Rabi' II A.H. 1418 (8 August 1997); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (by Royal Decree No. M/12 dated 16 Rabi' II A.H. 1418 (20 August 1997); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, by Royal Decree No. M/25 dated 28 Jumada I A.H. 1421 (28 August 2000); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by Royal Decree No. M/28 dated 22 Jumada I A.H. 1429 (27 May 2008). It is also a party to three 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. M/38 dated 18 Rajab A.H. 1431 (30 June 2010); the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, by Royal Decree No. M/39 dated 18 Rajab A.H. 1431 (30 June 2010); and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by Royal Decree No. M/28 dated 22 Jumada I A.H. 1429 (27 May 2008).

77. These conventions became part of the Kingdom's national law when the Kingdom joined them. Their provisions to which the Kingdom is committed have the same legal authority laws. That is because the legal instrument issued declaring accession to those conventions was a Royal Decree. Article 70 of the Basic Law of Governance provides that laws, treaties and international agreements and concessions shall be issued and amended by Royal Decree. Article 11, paragraph 1 of the Procedures for Contracting International Treaties, promulgated by Council of Ministers Decree No. 287 of 14 Sha'ban A.H. 1431 (27 July 2010), provides that once

a treaty comes into force, the authorities are required to take measures to implement it and ensure that the Kingdom meets all obligations arising from accession.

78. The Kingdom has endeavoured to implement its obligations under the conventions to which it has become a party and to follow up through the relevant government agencies and means of redress, above all the judiciary. The statute of the Human Rights Commission, issued by Cabinet Decision No. 207 of 8 Sha‘ban A.H. 1426 (12 September 2005), calls for follow-up with government agencies to ensure that they are taking the measures necessary to implement international human rights instruments to which the Kingdom has acceded. These efforts culminated in the establishment of a standing committee for drafting the Kingdom’s human rights convention reports by Supreme Decree No. 13084 dated 27 Rabi‘ I A.H. 1436 (18 January 2015). That committee’s mandate includes following up on recommendations issued by the treaty bodies and the universal periodic review mechanism.

79. With regard to the procedural obligation to submit treaty reports, the Kingdom has submitted all of its national reports on the human rights conventions to which it is a party. It is one of only 36 States parties out of a total of 197 that have submitted all their reports on time.

80. The Kingdom cooperates proactively with the Human Rights Council’s universal periodic review mechanism. It submits its national reports on time and creates effective national mechanisms to follow up on recommendations. It involves stakeholders, with delegations made up of high-level representatives from various concerned parties. It has endorsed and implemented most of the recommendations made to the Kingdom during the three previous review rounds, having implemented 85 per cent of a total of the 450 recommendations made during those rounds. It has submitted reports for the first, second, third and fourth rounds that took place in 2009, 2013, 2018 and 2023. In the fourth round, it received 354 recommendations, which were presented on 22 January 2023. The Kingdom has in turn offered recommendations to other United Nations Member States through this mechanism.

81. The Kingdom is determined to promote and protect human rights to the best of its ability in accordance with its obligations under international agreements, and to implement the recommendations it received during the third round of the universal periodic review in 2018 that it partially or fully endorsed. The Kingdom received 258 recommendations in that round. It endorsed 181 recommendations and partially endorsed 31. Of those, 173 are now considered implemented, and 39 are under implementation.

82. The Kingdom cooperates with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council by responding proactively to special rapporteurs’ inquiries and the Council’s complaints procedure. These cases were handled with complete independence and objectivity. They were examined through the national mechanism established by Supreme Decree No. 2775/MB dated 27 Rabi‘ I A.H. 1431 (13 March 2010). The Kingdom has extended invitations to a number of substantive mandate holders to visit the Kingdom. That includes the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty, who visited the Kingdom in January 2017, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, who visited the Kingdom from 30 April to 4 May 2017. The reports issued by those two special rapporteurs are being studied to help promote and protect human rights at the national level.

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

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

- Continuing to fulfil its obligations under regional and international human rights agreements to which it is a party, and continuing to consider accession to the agreements to which it is not yet a party
- Continuing to cooperate with the Human Rights Council and its various mechanisms, including the universal periodic review mechanism and special procedures, and implementing recommendations that have been endorsed by the Kingdom
- Stepping up dialogue with countries and international entities to exchange best experiences and practices in the promotion and protection of human rights
- Working to develop national indicators to measure human rights progress, uncover obstacles and challenges, identify priorities and link them to relevant national initiatives
- Continuing to review and develop existing national legislation to ensure that it is consistent with the Kingdom's obligations under international human rights standards
- Continuing to promote and protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups of the population, particularly children, persons with disabilities and the elderly
- Supporting the contribution of civil society organizations to the promotion and protection of human rights in various areas