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National report submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21*

Saudi Arabia

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia¹ is submitting its national report under the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review mechanism,² in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 and with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1, 16/21 and 17/119. The report reviews the progress made in the field of human rights in Saudi Arabia between November 2018 and October 2023, in the light of the country's obligations and of the recommendations made during the third cycle of the universal periodic review in 2018 that were fully or partially endorsed.³

II. Methodology for preparing the report

2. The process of drafting the report involved several stages:

(a) *Monitoring the implementation of previous recommendations*: Follow-up on recommendations is entrusted to a standing committee for drafting reports, which is responsible for preparing national reports under the treaty-body system and the universal periodic review, as well as for following up on the implementation of the recommendations received. The standing committee, which is part of the Human Rights Commission, brings together representatives from the relevant State agencies, and the process of following up on the implementation of the recommendations includes direct monitoring of the bodies involved. The Human Rights Commission issues annual human rights reports, and the recommendations represent one of the sources used by the Commission to examine and analyse the current situation.

(b) *Preparation and drafting*: The submission and discussion of the country's national report under the fourth universal periodic review cycle was regulated by a timeline, which comprised collecting and analysing data and information from the competent authorities, which was then entered into a special database for follow-up to recommendations; complementing that data and information through a series of meetings, workshops, and focus sessions; writing and adopting the draft report; and holding a further two workshops with the participation of concerned parties and other stakeholders. All this took place within the framework of the 2012 memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

(c) *National review and consultation*: The draft report was shared with several civil society organizations for them to review and express their opinions. As a result of this, many amendments were introduced into the text.

III. Implementation of the recommendations from the previous cycle

3. At the thirty-first session of the universal periodic review in November 2018 Saudi Arabia received 258 recommendations, of which it endorsed 182, partially endorsed 31, noted 36 and rejected 9. This section contains data and information concerning the implementation of the recommendations that were endorsed or partially endorsed, grouped by subject matter.

A. Accession to and compliance with international human rights treaties and withdrawal of reservations thereto

Endorsed recommendations: 122.1, 122.2, 122.3, 122.4, 122.5, 122.6, 122.10, 122.15, 122.16, 122.17, 122.24, 122.26 and 122.27

Partially endorsed recommendations: 122.14, 122.22 and 122.32⁴

4. Saudi Arabia acceded to the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), under Royal Decree No. M/73

of 26 Sha'ban A.H. 1442 (8 April A.D. 2021); to the ILO Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95), under Royal Decree No. M/10 of 8 Muharram A.H. 1442 (27 August A.D. 2020); and to the ILO Hygiene (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1964 (No. 120), also under Royal Decree No. M/10 of 8 Muharram A.H. 1442 (27 August A.D. 2020). The competent authorities in Saudi Arabia, including government agencies at various levels, are still studying the possibility of acceding to the core human rights treaties, including the two International Covenants.

5. Saudi Arabia has adopted the definition of torture contained in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment which has, since accession under Royal Decree No. M/11 of 4 Rabi' II A.H. 1418, been considered as part of national law.

6. Within the framework of cooperation with the universal periodic review mechanism, Saudi Arabia has implemented most of the recommendations it received during the previous three cycles of the review, in 2009, 2013 and 2018. In fact, of the 450 recommendations received over those cycles, 85 per cent have been implemented.

7. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a founding member of the United Nations, and it has served and continues to serve as a member of many United Nations organs, councils, mechanisms and specialized agencies. It has provided financial contributions to the United Nations and several of its organs which, as of the date of submitting the present report, amounted to \$734,203,869. It was also the first country in the Middle East and North African to conclude a memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation with OHCHR, and it has signed memorandums of cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In addition to this, Saudi Arabia has invested its status, influence and friendly relations to consolidate the three pillars of the United Nations – peace, security and human rights – by itself adhering and inviting others to adhere to the principles of international law and international customary law, including principles for the amicable resolution of conflicts. It also supports and advocates for humanitarian causes within the framework of international and regional entities, including the United Nations and, as of the date of submitting the present report, its contributions and assistance for development and relief amounted to \$109.8 billion, benefiting 168 countries.

8. The possibility of withdrawing reservations made by Saudi Arabia to human rights treaties is still being examined.

B. Legal and institutional human rights framework and national plans and strategies

Endorsed recommendations: 122.35, 122.44, 122.45, 122.47, 122.48, 122.49, 122.50, 122.51, 122.54, 122.55, 122.56, 122.57, 122.60, 122.62, 122.67, 122.82, 122.83, 122.84, 122.85, 122.86, 122.90, 122.91, 122.93, 122.120, 122.193, 122.194 and 122.195

Partially endorsed recommendations: 122.88, 122.177 and 122.190

9. Since adopting its Vision 2030 in April 2016, Saudi Arabia has implemented extensive legislative reforms including amendments to existing laws and the enactment of new ones, most notably:

(a) *The Terrorist Crimes and Terrorism Financing Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. M/21 of 12 Safar A.H. 1439 (1 November A.D. 2017)*: The definition of terrorism contained in the Act is consistent with the United Nations treaties to which Saudi Arabia has acceded and with the relevant international standards, in particular General Assembly resolution 49/60 on measures to eliminate international terrorism, and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), while also taking account of the historical context of terrorist crimes in the country. The Act envisages human rights safeguards during arrest, detention, investigation and trial, including the appointment of a lawyer, temporary release and the imposition of penalties commensurate with the impact of the offence.

(b) *Travel Documents Act, as amended by Royal Decree No. M/134 of 27 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1440 (30 July A.D. 2019)*: The amendments envisage full gender equality in the conditions to be fulfilled for obtaining travel documents.

(c) *Civil Status Act, as amended by Royal Decree No. M/134 of 27 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1440 (30 July A.D. 2019)*: The amendments envisage full gender equality in obtaining civil status documentation and in reporting civil status events.

(d) *Social Insurance Act*: Article 38 of the Act was amended by Royal Decree No. M/134 of 27 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1440 (30 July A.D. 2019) to make 60 the retirement age for both men and women.

(e) *Labour Code*: The Code was amended under Royal Decree No. M/134 of 27 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1440 (30 July A.D. 2019) and under Royal Decree No. M/5 of 7 Muharram A.H. 1442 (26 August A.D. 2020) to ensure equality between men and women in rights, duties and conditions of service. According to the amendments, citizens have an equal right to work, without discrimination on grounds of sex, disability, age or any other grounds. The provisions, which are contained in article 3, apply equally to the performance of duties, to recruitment and to job advertisements.

(f) *Anti-Harassment Act*: The Act was amended by Royal Decree No. M/48 of 1 Jumada II A.H. 1442 (14 January A.D. 2021) with the addition of a paragraph to article 6. The amendment makes it possible to publish a sentence – once it has become definitive – in one or more local newspapers at the expense of the convicted party.

(g) *Statutes of the Bar Association*: The Statutes were amended by Royal Decree No. M/66 of 15 Rajab A.H. 1443 (16 February A.D. 2022) with the aim of promoting the legal profession and raising professional standards. The Act alters the status of lawyers working with foreign legal firms, with which they have cooperation agreements or the like.

(h) *Protection against Abuse Act*: The Act was amended by Royal Decree No. M/72 of 6 Sha'ban A.H. 1443 (9 March A.D. 2022). One of the amendments concerns article 12 whereby cases of abuse are to be monitored for a period of not less than 6 months after the court has handed down its ruling. Article 13 was also amended to introduce more severe penalties for cases of abuse where the victim is a person with disabilities, is one of the perpetrator's parents or is over the age of 60, or if the victim is pregnant and miscarries as result of the abuse. More severe penalties are also envisaged if the abuse occurs in a place of work, study or worship, if the perpetrator is a person entrusted with the enforcement of the present Act or if the abuse is perpetrated using a weapon.

(i) *Child Protection Act*: The Act was amended by Royal Decree No. M/72 of 6 Sha'ban A.H. 1443 (9 March A.D. 2022). One of the amendments concerns article 19, under which the authorities are required to develop health, educational, psychological and social programmes to rehabilitate children who have suffered abuse or neglect. In cases of need, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development can coordinate with the Ministry of Health to ensure that perpetrators of abuse or neglect undergo psychiatric treatment or attend rehabilitation programmes, depending upon the case. In addition to this, a paragraph 3 was added to article 23 which states that, taking due account of the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development is to monitor cases until they are adjudicated by the courts.

(j) *Social Security Act*: The Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/32 of 4 Rabi II A.H. 1442 (19 November A.D. 2020), aims to establish means and measures to address poverty in society and to ensure a minimum income sufficient to meet basic needs.

(k) *Personal Data Protection Act*: The Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/19 of 9 Safar A.H. 1443 (16 September A.D. 2021), seeks to uphold the right to privacy and to protect the rights of holders of personal data.

(l) *Evidence Act*: The Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/43 of 15 Jumada I A.H. 1443 (30 December A.D. 2021), regulates what constitutes legal evidence, including in its new forms such as digital evidence. It also seeks to accelerate court

proceedings, to allow the parties to a case to agree on specific rules of evidence and to fulfil international standards concerning rules of evidence.

(m) *Act on the Rights and Welfare of Older Persons*: Article 2 of the Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/47 of 3 Jumada II A.H. 1443 (6 January A.D. 2022), states that the Ministry of Human Resources is to 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.

(n) *Personal Status Act*: The Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/73 of 6 Sha'ban A.H. 1443 (8 March A.D. 2022), regulates family relationships with a view to maintaining the stability of families, which constitute the main component of society. The Act also controls the discretionary powers of judges in such a way as to ensure the stability and consistency of judicial rulings, provides a framework for relations between family members, protects their rights and accelerates the settlement of domestic disputes.

(o) *Voluntary Work Act*: The Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/70 of 27 Jumada I A.H. 1441 (23 January A.D. 2020), aims to spread the culture of voluntary work among the members and institutions of society.

(p) *Civil Transactions Act*: The Act, which was promulgated under Royal Decree No. M/191 of 29 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.D. 1444 (18 June A.D. 2023), contains provisions to regulate contracts and financial transactions between individuals. It is intended to consolidate the stability of financial operations and civil contracts, to protect individuals' financial rights and to improve the predictability and consistence of rulings relating to financial matters.

(q) *Regulations governing appeal proceedings*: The regulations, which were issued pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 5134 of 9 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1440 (12 July A.D. 2019), mark an important development in the field of court proceedings, as they contain in-depth and detailed information about the procedures to be followed in the case of appeals.

(r) *Implementing regulations of the Juveniles Act*: The regulations, which were promulgated under Council of Ministers Decree No. 237 of 16 Rabi' II A.H. 1442 (1 December A.D. 2020), forbid the use of restraints or shackles when a juvenile is arrested. The regulations also state that the juvenile and the juvenile's guardian are to be informed of the reasons for the arrest and the charges, and of the juvenile's right to seek the assistance of lawyer at every stage of proceedings, from evidence gathering to investigation to trial.

(s) *Implementing regulations of the Labour Code*: The implementing regulations and their annexes were approved by Decree No. 70273 of the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development of 11 Rabi' II A.H. 1440 (18 December A.D. 2018) as amended by Ministerial Decree No. 131235 of 7 Rajab A.D. 1443 (8 February A.D. 2022). The most important of the annexes concerns "reasonable accommodation and services in the work environment for workers with permanent or temporary disabilities, and for workers with an illness that places them in a situation of disability".

10. The Human Rights Commission, which measures progress in the field of human rights, is currently developing a set of national indicators on which to base its annual reports on the human rights situation in the country. For its part, the Family Affairs Council measures progress achieved in the rights of women, children and older persons, while the Authority for Persons with Disabilities is cooperating with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to establish a single unified register of persons with disabilities, which will act as a comprehensive database on disability in the country. A national observatory was established in 2017 to monitor women's participation in development using indicators intended to measure progress in that regard. Furthermore, as part of the strategic goals envisaged in the Saudi Vision 2030, a centre for gender equality was set up in 2021 with a view to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 by coordinating the efforts of stakeholders to achieve gender balance and promoting initiatives and projects to help bridge the gender gap.

11. As concerns national policies and plans, a national policy and action plan for the prevention of child labour were launched under Council of Ministers Decree No. 493 of 24 Sha'ban A.H. 1442 (6 April A.D. 2021). The aim of the initiative is to combat and prevent

child labour by raising awareness on the issue, promoting high-quality educational opportunities for children, improving and enforcing the law and conducting prosecutions, alongside other strategic initiatives. In addition to this, a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and work was launched in January 2023 with the aim of eradicating all forms of discrimination in that field. 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 on the labour market. Measures have been put in place with a view to the effective implementation of this policy.

12. National law safeguards individual rights and freedoms by criminalizing abuse of authority and upholding fair trial principles. These include, inter alia, the requirement that crimes and penalties be set forth in law, the fact that penalties are applicable only to individuals, the presumption of innocence. In this connection, article 38 of the Basic Law of Governance stipulates that there can be no offence and no penalty save on the basis of sharia or statutory provisions. No penalty can be imposed save for acts committed subsequent to the enactment of a law. Under article 36 of the Basic Law, no one may have their movements restricted or be arrested or imprisoned except according to law. For its part, Royal Decree No. 43 of 1958 states that public officials who, in the course of their duties, inflict ill-treatment or use coercion can face imprisonment for up to 10 years. According to article 3 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, no one may be sentenced to a criminal penalty save after being convicted in a trial conducted in accordance with due process of law, while article 40 of the Code states that anyone who knows that a person is being imprisoned or detained unlawfully, or in a place not intended for imprisonment or detention, must notify the Public Prosecution Service. Under article 35 of the Code, no one may be arrested or detained except in cases of flagrante delicto or under an order from the competent authority. Furthermore, in no case may the administration of a prison or detention centre admit or detain any person save pursuant to an order specifying the reasons and period for such imprisonment duly signed by the competent authority. The accused person is not to remain in custody following the expiry of the period specified in that order. Under article 37 of the Code, persons are to be imprisoned or detained only in places designated for that purpose.

13. Complaints and reports of domestic violence made to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development are handled by a special centre for receiving reports, which was set up in March 2016 and which operates 24 hours a day via its 1919 unified hotline. In addition to this, there is a national centre for security operations, which can be contacted at 911, the “*Kulna Amn*” app and protection teams, which have been formed throughout the country and which also receive reports. Reports received by the centre are referred to social protection units, which are responsible for completing the necessary procedures, assisting victims, and referring persons against whom there is sufficient evidence of committing a crime to the Public Prosecution Service for it to pursue the matter under the Protection against Abuse Act. The Public Prosecution Service has set up prosecution offices specializing in family cases. In 2022, a total of 29,991 reports of domestic violence were received, 70 per cent of them from females and 30 per cent from males. Disaggregated by age, 36 per cent of reports were from children under the age of 18, 61 per cent from persons aged between 19 and 60, and 3 per cent from persons aged 60 and over.

14. The draft national strategy for human rights has been developed in the light of several fundamental criteria, including international human rights standards, foremost among them the human rights treaties to which Saudi Arabia is a party. The draft strategy, which underwent studies at different levels, covers six areas: legal framework, institutional capacities, civil society, business sector, human rights culture and regional and international cooperation.

15. With reference to the question of hate speech, the 2017 Audiovisual Media Act includes provision to prevent anything that would provoke strife, division and hatred among citizens, incite violence, or threaten the peace of society (art. 5). In the same way, article 9 of the Press and Publication Act prohibits the publication of material that would give rise to enmity and division among citizens. Work is currently underway on a draft criminal code which will include a definition of all offences and their relevant penalties. For its part, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance has issued guidance for Friday sermons

that is intended to eradicate hate, division, racism and extremism while emphasizing coexistence, moderation, tolerance and respect for other religions.

16. With reference to efforts to increase the efficiency and accountability of public services, the measures taken against corruption constitute a radical reform that aims to root out corruption, protect public funds, and achieve great economic benefits in the form of the restitution to State coffers of public assets that were unlawfully taken and the enhancement of confidence among investors who are thereby encouraged to enter the Saudi market. Evidence of resolve in this regard is clearly evident in the creation of a higher committee to fight corruption, headed by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia and with a membership made up of heads of the competent agencies. The committee has taken action to contain corruption-related crimes and violations and to hold persons implicated in such activity accountable before the courts. The National Centre for Performance Measurement was created under Council of Ministers Decree No. 323 of 2 Sha'ban A.H. 1437 (9 May A.D. 2016) to measure the performance of public bodies through the application of unified and binding models, tools and methodologies to support efficiency and effectiveness.

17. Since the inception of the Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, reforms have been introduced and progress achieved in various fields, including in the field of human rights. This is part of the framework of the Vision and serves towards the attainment of its goals. Those reforms and developments are addressed in the present report, while the 2022 annual report of the Saudi Vision 2030 may be consulted via the following link: [Vision 2030 Annual Report 2022](#).

18. The criminous acts defined in the Terrorist Crimes and Terrorism Financing Act are specifically related to terrorism and the financing of terrorism. Moreover, the fact that the expression of ideas (which is a human right) is criminalized when it deviates into incitement to terrorism, does not undermine the right to freedom of expression, as the criminalization is limited to the incitement. The new Terrorist Crimes and Terrorism Financing Act of 2017 – which marks an improvement on the earlier Act of 2014 – incorporates a number of reforms intended to promote and protect human rights in the context of combating terrorism.

19. National laws criminalize all forms and manifestations of torture and ill-treatment. Those laws include Royal Decree No. 43 of 1958, which states that public officials who, in the course of their duties, inflict ill-treatment or use coercion, such as torture, cruelty or other forms of abuse, can face imprisonment for up to 10 years. In addition to this, article 2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure stipulates that a person under arrest cannot be subjected to physical or moral harm or to torture or degrading treatment. Allegations of torture are investigated in line with the Code of Criminal Procedure and its implementing regulations and other relevant laws.

20. The Specialized Criminal Court is a court that was established under the law – by a decree of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary – to be part of the criminal justice system. The only difference between it and other criminal courts is that it has a specific jurisdiction, being concerned with adjudicating cases of terrorism and terrorism financing, unlike the criminal courts which hear other criminal cases.

C. Fair trials and criminal justice

Endorsed recommendations: 122.116, 122.117, 122.121, 122.180, 122.185, 122.188, 122.191 and 122.225

Partially endorsed recommendations: 122.92 and 122.226

21. As concerns the prevention of torture in prisons and detention centres, all such facilities are subject to judicial control through visits by the Public Prosecution Service. Prosecutors also have various channels via which to receive reports about persons being detained unlawfully as well as complaints from inmates. These channels, which include an online portal directly linked to the Public Prosecutor, serve to ensure compliance with the safeguards stipulated in law, including the criminalization of torture and ill-treatment. The Human Rights Commission and the National Society for Human Rights also conduct regular

visits to prisons and detention centres, listen to prisoners and detainees and receive their complaints. In order to consolidate means of redress, offices have been opened for the Commission and the Association inside prisons and detention centres. The Public Prosecution Service has fitted closed-circuit television cameras inside interrogation rooms to ensure that what happens there is recorded in audio and video; the recordings can then be used if any act of ill-treatment or torture is observed or alleged. The interrogation of accused persons is to be conducted in a manner that does not influence their will to make statements. They must not be required to take an oath or be subjected to coercive measures. Nor may they be interrogated outside the premises of the investigating authority unless the investigator deems such action to be necessary. Decree No. 43, which criminalizes torture and was referred to in paragraph 19 above, envisages that persons who have suffered harm have the right to seek appropriate compensation. In addition to this, article 147 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that any person – or his heirs – who has suffered detriment as a result of an offence is entitled to pursue a private action before the court that is hearing the criminal case, at any stage of the proceedings, even if the request was not deemed admissible during the investigation. For its part, article 215 of the Code stipulates that a person who has suffered damages as a result of a false accusation or as a result of being detained or imprisoned for a period exceeding the prescribed term is entitled to claim compensation before the court that heard the original case. This same principle is also upheld in the Terrorist Crimes and Terrorism Financing Act.

22. As concerns the internal oversight of government agencies, Council of Ministers Decree No. 662 of 24 Shawwal A.H. 1441 envisages that certain human rights-related tasks should be delegated to the legal departments of government agencies, including that of seeking to uncover abuses that might constitute human rights violations. In that regard, the competent departments within the Ministry of the Interior visit prisons and detention centres with a view to detecting such abuses.

23. With regard to the independence of the courts, the judiciary in Saudi Arabia derives its authority and principles from Islamic sharia, which enshrines the principle of justice as the basis of governance and provides guarantees for judicial independence. In fact, the independence of the courts, is a well-established constitutional principle that is also upheld by sharia and is guaranteed under article 46 of the Basic Law of Governance, which reads: “The judiciary is an independent authority, and the decisions of judges are subject to no authority other than that of Islamic sharia.” Article 1 of the Statutes of the Judiciary states: “Judges are independent. They are subject to no authority other than Islamic sharia and statutory law, and no one may interfere in the course of justice.” The Public Prosecution Service is one of the organs of the judiciary, as per Royal Order No. A/240 of 22 Ramadan A.H. 1438 (16 June A.D. 2017) which confers judicial status upon its operations. The Service is entirely independent and is answerable to the King, and no one may interfere in its work.

24. As to the recommendation to further the principle of public trials and the right to appoint a lawyer, it should be noted that article 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states: “Court hearings shall be public. The court may exceptionally consider a case or a part thereof in camera, or may prohibit certain groups from attending the hearings for reasons of security or preservation of public morals, or if such action is deemed necessary in order to ascertain the truth.” All trials in Saudi Arabia are held in public and are attended by the defendant’s lawyer and family, as well as by the Human Rights Commission and other bodies. As to allowing diplomats to attend proceedings, the general rule (as just stated) is that court sessions are public, and therefore foreign diplomats can attend trials involving citizens of their country. In any case, whether or not permission to attend a trial is granted depends upon the discretion of the court, and no other body may interfere in its decision.

25. On the subject of young offenders, the enactment of the Juveniles Act constitutes a watershed in the field of juvenile justice. The Act includes provisions relative to the treatment of juvenile offenders and the cases in which they are involved, including procedures governing arrest, detention, investigation and trial, that are appropriate to the age of the persons concerned and that aim to achieve their best interests and correct their behaviour. According to article 15 of the Act, if juveniles commit an offence that attracts the death penalty, they are to be placed in a special home for juveniles for a period of up to 10 years. Royal Order No. 46274 of 29 Rajab A.H. 1441 (24 March A.D. 2020) was issued to stay the

enforcement of definitive *ta'zir* 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 subject to the Juveniles Act. For its part the Public Prosecution Service has established special offices for cases involving juveniles.

D. Promotion of human rights culture and education and capacity-building

Recommendations: 122.46, 122.52, 122.58, 122.59, 122.171, 122.198 and 122.199

26. As concerns integrating human rights into education, in March 2023, the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Education signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation and coordination in human rights-related awareness-raising and education. The memorandum addresses the inclusion of human rights values and concepts in school curricula at various stages, educational activities, visual and print materials including guides to human rights, participation in research and building capacity in the field of human rights. In addition to this, numerous training activities and programmes have been launched under a memorandum of understanding signed in 2012 between Saudi Arabia and OHCHR. More than 100 activities and programmes for judges, members of the Public Prosecution Service, lawyers, health practitioners and law enforcement officers have been implemented to raise awareness of the human rights conventions to which Saudi Arabia is a party and explore how best to implement their provisions

E. Education

Recommendations: 122.198 and 122.199

27. The importance attached to education under the Saudi Vision 2030 has led to a number of rapid developments and reforms. These include a focus on education for all; promoting free education; equality of opportunity; curriculum development; teacher performance; educational supervision; 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 context, a lifelong learning initiative has been launched under the name "*Istadama*", which 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 building programme, which is one of the programmes the intended to achieve the 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.

28. According to statistics, the literacy rate (reading and writing) in persons aged between 15 and 24 stood at 99.5 per cent in 2020. The net enrolment rate in primary education was 99.39 per cent in 2021 while, in 2020, the completion rate for primary education was 99.5 per cent. The net enrolment rate in middle-school education was 98.56 per cent in 2021 while the completion rate was 93.13 per cent. The net enrolment rate in secondary education was 99.37 per cent in 2021 while the completion rate was 98 per cent. The total enrolment rate in higher education was 71.41 per cent in 2021. As of 2021, the number of years students are expected to spend in education stood at 16.17.

29. As a result of the efforts it has made, 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 (IMD). 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. Saudi Arabia 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), it has won 133 awards, including 92 major awards, and 41 special awards.

F. Women's rights

Endorsed recommendations: 122.63, 122.64, 122.65, 122.66, 122.129, 122.133, 122.184, 122.197, 122.200, 122.201, 122.202, 122.203, 122.204, 122.205, 122.206, 122.207, 122.208, 122.209, 122.210, 122.211, 122.212, 122.213, 122.214, 122.215, 122.216, 122.217, 122.218, 122.219, 122.221, 122.222, 122.223, 122.224, 122.227, 122.228, 122.231 (first part), 122.232, 122.233, 122.234, 122.235, 122.236, 122.237, 122.238, 122.239, 122.240, 122.243, 122.244, 122.245 and 122.246

Partially endorsed recommendation: 122.258

30. Royal Order No. 33322 of 21 Rajab A.H. 1438 (18 April A.D. 2017) was an effective step forwards towards make gender equality a reality in all operations and services. As of 2018, moreover, women have been able to take part in cultural, sporting and recreational activities on an equal footing with men, while a series of legislative amendments in July 2019 also aimed to enhance gender equality. One of those amendments affected the Travel Documents Act and its implementing regulations under which women now have the same rights as men to obtain a passport and travel abroad. The Civil Status Act was also amended and now envisages full gender equality in obtaining civil status documentation and in reporting civil status events, thereby strengthening women's autonomy. Amendments were also introduced into the Labour Code, so as to ensure equality between men and women in rights, duties and conditions of service. Specifically, the amendments affected article 3 – to prohibit workplace discrimination on grounds of sex, disability, age or any other grounds – and article 155 – to prohibit dismissal or threat of dismissal against a female worker during pregnancy or maternity leave, including during any illnesses arising during that time. Further amendments focused on article 38 the Social Insurance Act to make 60 the retirement age for both men and women. In addition to this, Council of Ministers Decree No. 416 of 17 Jumada II A.H. 1444 (10 January A.D. 2023 AD) was issued to approve a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and work. The policy aims to eradicate all forms of discrimination in that field. To that end, laws and policies are being developed to define and prohibit discrimination in the workplace and, at the same time, a body of measures, programmes and initiatives is being rolled out to promote the participation of women and other groups least represented on the labour market.

31. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development issued Decree No. 1/2370 of 18 Ramadan A.H. 1431, which prohibits discrimination between male and female workers in respect of wages for work of equal value.

32. The Ministry also issued Decree No. 4906 of 8 Muharram A.D. 1442, which concerns unified workplace regulations for private sector facilities. The regulations include rules – including discrimination-related rules – governing the employment of workers in all activities. They state: “It is the responsibility of employers to prevent discrimination (on grounds of sex, disability, age or any other grounds) between workers in the terms and conditions of work, be it during the performance of their duties, during recruitment or in job advertisements. Employers are also prohibited from discriminating between male and female workers in respect of wages for work of equal value.”

33. A women's empowerment department has been established as part of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, in line with one of the goals of the Saudi Vision 2030, which is to increase the involvement of women in the labour market. In fact, Saudi women's progress towards empowerment is being accelerated thanks to the enactment of a body of laws and decrees aimed at improving their status in society. At the same time, initiatives and projects are being devised and implemented to promote women's empowerment and increase their representation on the labour market via just and equal

opportunities to work in the public and private sectors and in civil society. In this way, women are becoming active partners in national development, in various fields and at all levels. As part of the programmes and strategic plans associated with the Saudi Vision 2030, the Ministry has launched a number of initiatives aimed, inter alia, at increasing job opportunities for women and at providing training and development. The latter includes a leadership training and guidance initiative run in partnership with Princess Nourah University and the Institut européen d'administration des affaires (INSEAD), which was aimed at 1,000 female leaders. A further 1,700 female leaders also received training. For its part, a parallel training initiative for female job seekers has provided training to 51,667 beneficiaries as of the second quarter of 2023. Other initiatives are intended to support women during the first years of their working life, such as by providing kindergarten services. Between their launch in 2017 and the second quarter of 2023, the “*Qurrah*” programme has assisted 17,110 beneficiaries and “*Wusoul*” programme has provided assistance with transportation to 210,708 beneficiaries. One of the most important ways to increase the proportion of women on the workforce is to empower them in different ways of working. In that connection, between the second quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2023, 109,559 beneficiaries participated in a flexible working initiative 111,036 beneficiaries in a remote working initiative and 1,432,769 beneficiaries in a self-employment initiative.

34. The Sarah Al-Sudairi Centre for Women’s Studies has been created as part of the 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 the role Saudi women play in building society. The Centre also conducts research related to women in the Arab world and globally then compares their situation with that of women in Saudi Arabia. The Centre is working to create a digital library to house academic research in the field of women’s studies.

35. Thanks to all this, Saudi Arabia has made appreciable progress in the empowerment and economic involvement of women on the labour market. All the efforts made and the legislative reforms undertaken in recent years, within the framework of the Saudi Vision 2030, have increased the rate of female participation. In fact, the economic participation rate of Saudi women over the age of 15 reached 36 per cent in the first quarter of 2023. The proportion of women in senior and middle management positions increased from 28.6 per cent in 2017 to 42.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2023. In the same way, female participation in the workforce rose from 21.2 per cent in 2017 to 33.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2023.

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

37. All these changes 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. According to a report of the World Economic Forum, Saudi Arabia was among the top three countries in the world in 2022 in terms of improvements in gender equality in employment.

38. Violence against women is criminalized under the Protection against Abuse Act mentioned in paragraph 9 of the present report. The Act aims to offer protection against abuse of all kinds, to deliver assistance and treatment and to provide victims with shelter and with social, psychological and health care. It also seeks to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and punished, and it focuses on raising awareness about abuse and its

consequences. According to statistics, 1,695 violations of the Protection against Abuse Act and of the Child Protection Act took place between 2018 and 2023. On the subject of legal aid, Royal Order No. 25803 (29 Jumada I A.H. 1439 (15 February A.D. 2018) concerns the provision of legal assistance to women and children in cases of abuse. It includes provisions directing the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to coordinate with the Saudi Bar Association, to obtain a periodically updated list of the names and addresses of lawyers willing to provide legal aid. This matter is regulated under article 13 (11) of the Charter of the Saudi Bar Association.

39. A mother and child health passport has been introduced as a way of monitoring the health of mothers and their children through pregnancy and childbirth. The holder's medical history, monitoring and health check-ups, tests and analyses are all recorded in the passport, which can then be used in health centres as a primary reference for maternal health. A developed prenatal care model is being applied and literature thereon is being distributed, amended in accordance with World Health Organization (WHO) standards. As a result of these efforts, Saudi Arabia ranked 28 out of 122 States on the Hologic Global Women's Health Index, with a score of 61.

40. Saudi women married to foreign men can bring in their children if they are outside the country, and their residency fees are borne by the State. The children are allowed to work in the private sector, and they are treated on a par with Saudis as regards education and medical treatment. They are also counted as part of the Saudi quota in the "Saudization" of posts in the private sector. A Saudi woman can also bring in her foreign husband if he is outside the country, and he too can work in the private sector if he holds a recognized passport. Children of Saudi women also benefit from the "citizen's account" programme, which is intended to address the potential impact of the economic reforms being rolled out in the context of the country's "Vision 2030" and involves the disbursement of cash sums to middle- or low-income citizens.

41. As concerns early and forced marriages, the minimum marriageable age under the Personal Status Act is 18 years and it is forbidden to register any contract of marriage involving a party under that age. Exceptionally, the Act does allow the court to approve the marriage of a person under the age of 18, subject to rules and conditions intended to prevent any harm befalling either of the marriage candidates.

42. As concerns a gender equality strategy, efforts are currently being made, in coordination with the competent authorities, to draft a national plan for women as part of the country's draft national strategy for the family. The plan will be aligned with the initiatives and goals envisaged as part of the Saudi Vision 2030 as well as with the Sustainable Development Goals and with global indicators concerning women. The national plan for women is a dynamic document that reflects the current context and the vision for the future, and it will develop in the light of coming changes.

G. Children's rights

Recommendations: 122.222, 122.223 and 122.224

43. Under the Juveniles Act of 2018, *ta'zir* death penalties are no longer to be handed down against juveniles who are, instead, to be placed in a special juvenile care home for a period of up to 10 years. Royal Order No. 46274 of 29 Rajab A.H. 1441 (24 March A.D. 2020) was issued to stay the enforcement of definitive *ta'zir* death sentences against persons thus sentenced before the enactment of the Juveniles Act for crimes they committed while under the age of 18. In 2020, Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched an initiative for the protection of children in the online world. A national policy for the prevention of child labour – launched under Council of Ministers Decree No. 493 of 24 Sha'ban A.H. 1442 (6 April A.D. 2021) – 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. 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.

44. With reference to the prevention of child recruitment, under article 8 of the Child Protection Act it is forbidden to involve children in work that may harm their physical or mental well-being or health or to engage them in military operations or armed conflicts. Article 4 (d) of the Enlistment Act, as amended by Royal Decree No. M/7 of 18 Dhu al-Qa’dah A.H. 1443 (26 August 2021), states that a candidate for military service must be not less than 18 and not more than 40 years of age, whereas it had previously stated that the minimum age was 17.

45. As for eliminating discrimination against children and guaranteeing their right to education, national law – including the Child Protection Act mentioned in paragraph 9 of the present report – aims to protect children’s rights and welfare without discrimination or restriction. On that subject, article 3 of the Child Protection Act stipulates that subjecting children to discrimination on ethnic, social or economic grounds and causing them to interrupt their education constitutes a form of child abuse and neglect.

46. Action has also been taken to help children who have been abandoned or who are deprived of a family environment, and policies have been rolled out to empower orphans (including children of unknown parents and the like) and ensure their welfare. A plan is being developed to close State-run care homes and to transfer the children there to foster families, having first licensed and provided training to those families. In addition to this, independence and empowerment programmes are being developed that are intended to provide such children with qualifications to ready them for the labour market and help them find suitable jobs. They are also given financial support to obtain appropriate accommodation and specialized psychosocial assistance to ensure that they are able to live a decent life.

H. Rights of persons with disabilities

Recommendations: 122.229, 122.230 (second part), 122.231, 122,241 and 122.242

47. 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 A.D. 2018) in order to provide care for persons with disabilities and to 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 unified 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.

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

49. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has launched its “*Mowamah*” 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 A.D. 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 envisaged in the "Saudization" incentive programme ("*Nitaqat*"). Under Ministerial Decree No. 156563 of 18 Sha'ban A.H. 1440 (23 April A.D. 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 envisaged in the "Saudization" incentive programme ("*Nitaqat*").

50. 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.

51. 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.

52. 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 in excess of 3 billion Saudi riyal (SRI) in 2022, for more than 410,000 beneficiaries. At the same time, 67,915 devices – valued at SRI 70 million – were distributed to 36,069 persons with disabilities.

53. In pursuit of one of the goals of the Saudi Vision 2030, which is to come up with alternatives to institutionalized shelters, the State is supporting day-care centres for persons with disabilities, which provide training, socialization and habilitation services. More than 22,000 persons benefit from the services the centres provide, at a cost of some SRI 770 million. In addition to this, there is a home social care programme whereby caregivers are on hand at specific hours of the day to provide training to families on how to care for their children and to run recreational programmes.

54. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance has acted to facilitate access to mosques and to provide multiple services to help persons with disabilities participate in worship. This includes help with entering and leaving mosques, with performing the daily prayers and with attending Friday sermons. When building new mosques, the precepts of the Saudi Building Code regarding motorial disabilities are duly applied, with wheelchair access ramps and special toilets for older persons and persons with disabilities.

55. 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 the services the Ministry offers, enabling everyone to access them on an equal footing. The *Taqdeer* service offers older persons and person with disabilities the chance to request civil status services at their own homes and the *Ashar* service facilitates communication with persons with hearing disabilities, while the *Farajat* service is an online instrument through which families, charities and others can pay the dues of inmates in prison for debt.

I. Compliance with the rules governing international humanitarian law and humanitarian assistance

Recommendations: 122.68, 122.69, 122.70, 122.71, 122.72, 122.73, 122.74, 122.80 and 122.81

56. The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre was established on 24 Rajab A.H. 1436 (13 May A.D. 2015) as a body for the provision of international humanitarian aid and relief. The Centre runs programmes tailored to the latest international standards which are intended to complement the vital role played by the relief and assistance programmes Saudi Arabia already runs to alleviate the suffering of communities facing humanitarian

crises and help them live a decent life. The Centre aims to orchestrate all the country's relief efforts by coordinating with the parties involved, both governmental and non-governmental. In 2018, the Centre launched a Saudi electronic aid platform (<https://data.ksrelief.org>), which records how much support and assistance the country has provided for humanitarian and development causes. Since it was launched, the platform has been used by 422,468 users from 169 countries. In 2020, the Centre created another online platform to facilitate the submission of applications to participate in volunteer programmes abroad. Several voluntary programmes have been rolled out in areas such as protection for women and children and education and training in handicrafts and manual skills. A total of 53,424 persons have registered on the voluntary work platform while 416 voluntary projects and programmes have been run in 35 countries where they have benefited 1,024,616 people.

57. Saudi Arabia provided more than \$109.8 billion in relief and humanitarian assistance between 1975 and 2022, benefiting 168 nations. Since it was established in 2015, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre has supported more than 2,402 humanitarian projects in 92 countries for an amount in excess of \$6,248,552,169. These projects have been implemented with 175 international and United Nations partners. Saudi Arabia is one of the top ten donor countries in the world – even occupying first place among donor countries providing development assistance in 2021 – and its ranking among other countries making humanitarian aid contributions improved on the Financial Tracking Service for the period 2018–2022.

58. The Saudi Development and Reconstruction Programme for Yemen, which was set up in May 2018, is a strategic initiative that aims to assist the Yemeni Government by providing a comprehensive and regulated plan for development in the country, both during and after the conflict. The programme includes 91 subprogrammes across all governorates of Yemen in areas such as security, transport, health, education, water, oil derivatives, energy, agriculture and fisheries.

59. In March 2021, Saudi Arabia announced an initiative to end the crisis in Yemen and to find a global political solution, including a comprehensive ceasefire under United Nations auspices. The solution also envisages the deposit of taxes and customs revenues from oil tankers in the port of Hudaydah into a joint account at the Central Bank of Yemen in Hudaydah, as per the Hudaydah Agreement, the opening of Sana'a International Airport to a number of direct regional and international flights and consultations between the parties in Yemen with a view to reaching a political solution to the crisis, under the auspices of the United Nations and based on Security Council 2216 (2015), the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its implementing mechanism, and the outcomes of the comprehensive Yemeni national dialogue.

J. Corporal punishment

Endorsed recommendation: 122.107

Partially endorsed recommendations: 122.96, 122.97, 122.99, 122.100, 122.101, 122.110, 122.111, 122.112, 122.113, 122.114, 122.118, 122.119 and 122.220

60. Saudi Arabia adheres to international standards regarding the application of the death penalty, which is imposed only under an existing legislative text and only for the most serious crimes. It is handed down under a definitive ruling from a competent court, only in the presence of evidence that leaves no room for any alternative interpretation of the facts and only after all legal safeguards have been duly respected. These include the provision of legal aid and the fact that death sentences handed down by a court of first instance are subject to mandatory appeal before the Court of Appeal and then to review by the Supreme Court. This means that such cases are heard by 13 judges at different stages of the legal process, alongside other safeguards that are consistent with the relevant international standards.

61. The ongoing process of legislative review in Saudi Arabia led, in 2018, to the enactment of the Juveniles Act, according to which, if a person aged between 15 and 18 commits an offence that attracts the death penalty, that person is to be placed in a special home for juveniles for a period of up to 10 years. A Royal Order was issued in March 2020

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 subject to the Juveniles Act.

62. The penalty of flogging for *ta'zir* crimes was abolished under Decree No. M/40 of 24 Jumada II A.H. 1441 (18 February A.D. 2020), issued by the Supreme Court sitting in full session, in which it decided by majority that the courts should, in cases of *ta'zir* crimes, impose imprisonment and/or a fine, or alternative penalties.

K. Combating trafficking in persons

Recommendations: 122.61, 122.122, 122.123, 122.124, 122.125, 122.126, 122.127, 122.128 and 122.257

63. A national plan to combat trafficking in persons has been developed in coordination with international organizations and duly adopted. It focuses on four strategic areas: prevention, protection and assistance, prosecution, and partnerships and cooperation. A national referral mechanism for trafficking victims, launched in August 2020 to document instances of human trafficking and to identify victims, tracks cases from when they first emerge until they are definitively adjudicated by the courts. The mechanism also serves to guide staff in the competent bodies on the procedures they should follow at each stage, in accordance with the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act. Work is currently underway to develop an online system to connect all stakeholders. Saudi Arabia has ratified the 2014 Protocol to the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). For its part, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has set up a special department to receive and act on reports of suspected cases of trafficking in persons. The department receives the reports then provides protection and support to suspected trafficking victims.

64. Special criminal chambers have been set up inside the courts to examine cases of trafficking in persons, while the Public Prosecution Service has also 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. In cooperation with UNODC and IOM, the standing committee to combat trafficking in persons has provided training to more than 4,000 persons.

L. Civil liberties

Endorsed recommendations: 122.131, 122.132, 122.134, 122.135, 122.137, 122.138, 122.139, 122.140, 122.142, 122.143, 122.144, 122.145, 122.146, 122.147, 122.148, 122.151, 122.152, 122.153, 122.155, 122.156, 122.158, 122.160, 122.162, 122.164, 122.172, 122.174 and 122.247

Partially endorsed recommendations: 122.149, 122.150, 122.154, 122.157, 122.159 and 122.161

65. Article 38 of the Basic Law of Governance states: "Penalties are imposed on individuals, there can be no offence and no penalty save with reference to the provisions of the sharia or statutory law, and penalties can be imposed only for acts committed subsequent to the enactment of a law." Under article 36 of the Basic Law, no one may have their movements restricted or be arrested or imprisoned except according to law. The Code of Criminal Procedure clearly states that no one may be sentenced to a criminal penalty save after having been convicted in a trial conducted in accordance with due process of law. The conduct of peaceful activities is duly safeguarded under national law, as long as such activities do not prejudice national security, public order, public morals, public health or the rights and freedoms of others (as well as other necessary restrictions stipulated in international human rights law). If persons claim to have suffered a violation of their legal rights, they, their families or their legal representatives have the right to pursue channels of redress, foremost among them the courts, the Public Prosecution Service, the Human Rights Commission, civil society institutions and other bodies.

66. Freedom of expression is safeguarded under national law, including the Press and Publication Act, which states that freedom of expression using different media is guaranteed. Measures taken in this connection include the enactment of the Audiovisual Media Act pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/33 of 25 Rabi' I A.H. 1439 (13 December A.D. 2017). According to article 5 of the Act, freedom of opinion and expression is to be respected as long as it does not conflict with existing laws and regulations. In addition, expressions of opinion that do violate laws or regulations are treated as "misdemeanours" and not as "crimes"; thus, any infractions attract only civil penalties and not deprivation of liberty. Such cases are considered by special media commissions. Freedom of publication is the principle that underlies national law, and censorship is applied only very sparingly, in accordance with the law and for legitimate purposes, such as access restrictions on content according to age. Under Council of Ministers Decree No. 713 of 30 Dhu al-Qa'dah A.H. 1438 (22 August A.D. 2017), government agencies are to publish online their proposals for draft regulations or decrees within their fields of expertise so as to enable organizations and individuals to express their views and comments thereon. The King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue aims to provide a suitable environment for the discussion of problems and concerns in various fields.

67. Under national laws and regulations, non-Muslim residents are able to worship and to practise their religious rites without interference, while duly respecting restrictions related to privacy and to the standing of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world. In fact, within the framework of the Saudi Vision 2030, the country is experiencing an unprecedented openness to the world and has become a destination where people of different religions, races and cultures come for work, investment and tourism or to participate in activities and events.

68. Reform and rehabilitation centres are one of the institutions involved in the fight against terrorism. There, with the help of academics, intellectuals, social workers and psychiatrists, ideas are confronted with other ideas with a view to promoting the rehabilitation and mental stability of inmates. The Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology ("*Etidal*") is a global mechanism to combat terrorism which, in cooperation with States and with other organizations, monitors and analyses extremist ideology with a view to countering and preventing it. For its part, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue is one of the most important institutions in the world working to combat terrorism, which it does by disseminating values of tolerance and coexistence while rejecting hatred and extremism. For its part, the Ideological War Centre was established with a mandate to address the roots of extremism and terrorism and to consolidate a true understanding of religion. The Centre also proposes initiatives to the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition and seeks to immunize young persons against extremism through prevention and treatment programmes.

69. The role of civil society has been significantly promoted and protected over the past few years, as part of the Saudi Vision 2030. This has led to an increase in the number of civil society associations and institutions in the country, which currently number in excess of 3,000. In August 2022, the National Centre for the Non-Profit Sector issued regulations to govern the operation of the Associations Support Fund, which provides financial support to help civil society groups in several different areas, including the family, women, children, orphans, young persons, pilgrims performing the hajj or the umrah, consumer protection, house building, employment and training, etc. Via the Fund, the Centre strives to build resources and investments, to establish partnerships, to achieve financial sustainability for the non-profit sector, to maximize the sector's social impact and to raise the quality of services provided to all groups in society. More than \$3,314,737 has been provided in financial support to date.

70. As a way of promoting solidarity among members of society, article 19 (2) of the implementing regulations to the Civil Society Associations and Institutions Act has been amended so as to allow persons aged 15 to participate in the non-profit sector by becoming board members of civil society organizations.

M. Right to work and workers' rights

Recommendations: 122.196, 122.248, 122.249, 122.250, 122.251, 122.252, 122.253, 122.254, 122.255 and 122.256

71. The 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 in that field. 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 on the labour market. In addition to this, the Labour Code was amended in July 2019, as explained above. Specifically, the amendments affected article 3, which 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." In order to enhance means of redress, unified workplace regulations for private sector facilities were issued in September 2020, with a view to creating a safe and attractive work environment and to keeping pace with labour market developments. In addition, the "*Madad*" platform was launched in 2020 to help businesses administer workers' wages using integrated and advanced processes.

72. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development issued Decree No. 18632 of 30 Muharram A.H. 1441 (29 September A.D. 2019), which regulates work during night-time, including working hours, compensation, benefits and health services. The Ministry also issued its Decree No. 20912 of 2 Safar A.H. 1441 (1 October A.D. 2019) which promulgates rules intended to protect against misbehaviour in the workplace. The rules aim to promote the creation of a safe working environment in private sector facilities, one characterized by respect for all, and the preservation of individual privacy, dignity and freedom.

73. 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, visits of inspection to recruitment bureaux have been intensified with a view to detecting any violations concerning the 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 practising an activity other than that registered in the Ministry's records led to the issuance of 87 warnings and the recording of 5 offences.

74. An initiative has been launched – just one of the initiatives envisaged in the Saudi Vision 2030 – aimed at "improving contractual relationships". The initiative 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. Since its launch, more than 1.5 million workers have benefited from the initiative, which envisages a number of services:

- A "job mobility" service, which allows migrant workers to transfer to another company once 12 months have passed since they first entered the country; 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.

75. The service for reporting absenteeism from work has been abolished and replaced with a service for reporting interruptions in work and the termination of contracts (when these are caused by exploitation or pressure on workers) while preserving the rights of both parties to the contract. Following this, workers can move to a different employer or be granted a definitive exit visa. A service has also been launched using the “*Quwa*” platform, which acts a single unified location for the registration of employment contract; as a consequence, the registration of contracts using the “*Madad*” platform has been suspended. The aim of this is to unify the 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.

76. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development issued Decree No. 73945, under which it endorsed the “*Musaned*” online visa issuance 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.

M. Service of the Two Holy Mosques

Recommendations: 122.130 and 122.192

77. The State launched the Pilgrims Programme (Guests of the Rahman) in the framework of its Vision 2030. Its goal is to provide an opportunity for as many Muslims as possible to fully perform the hajj and umrah pilgrimages and to enrich and deepen their experience by preparing the Two Holy Mosques to receive them, delivering the message of international Islam, developing tourism and cultural sites, offering the best possible services before, during and after pilgrims’ visits to Mecca, Medina and the holy sites, and projecting the venerable and civilized image of Saudi Arabia in serving the Two Holy Mosques and the pilgrims. The strategic goals of the Programme are to: facilitate the hosting of more pilgrims and their access to the Two Holy Mosques; provide high quality services to pilgrims undertaking the hajj and the umrah pilgrimages; and enrich the religious and cultural experience of pilgrims. The baseline for the number of pilgrims was 6.2 million per annum but the number has now increased to 8.4 million, exceeding the target by 23 per cent, as demand has returned to the levels before the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) struck.

78. A service (“Holodoctor”) was launched to grant visitors to the Two Holy Mosques access to online medical services and advice by video from doctors at the Virtual Hospital. The service includes examinations, diagnoses and treatment. This technology can be used for the doctors to interact with patients, check their vital signs and provide them with medical advice. Thirteen information guides were produced in 14 world languages to provide legal, health, procedural and organizational information in simplified language. Illustrations are included, together with links to audiovisual information materials.

79. The “*Nusuk*” platform was launched to facilitate arrivals of pilgrims from across the world and to streamline the process for issuing online visas for visits and pilgrimages. The platform supports the organization and planning of all details of visits, beginning with the online submission of visa applications and including booking of hotels and flights and enabling those living in the Gulf States to visit Saudi Arabia, perform the pilgrimage and visit the Mosque of the Prophet. On average, 66,415 pilgrims per month come to Saudi Arabia from the Gulf States, and the number of users of the platform stood at 400,000 at the end of 2022. The Mecca Road initiative is designed to make it easier for thousands of pilgrims to make the pilgrimage. This begins with the issuance of electronic visas and includes the completion of passport checks at the airport in the country of departure, the pick-up and delivery of luggage, depending on the transportation and accommodation arrangements made in Saudi Arabia, and direct transportation of pilgrims to their accommodation in Mecca and

Medina. Special channels were available to five countries in 2022: Malaysia, Morocco, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The list of countries covered by the initiative may be lengthened in the future.

80. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has drawn up timetables, equipped mosques and prepared the sacred sites (more than 1,000 mosques in all). It has also acted to raise awareness about the hajj with more than 32 million publications in over 40 global languages. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques runs a hajj and umrah visiting programme which this year hosted 4,951 pilgrims. In its more than 26 years of existence, the programme has hosted more than 60,000 pilgrims.

O. Regional and international cooperation

Endorsed recommendations: 122.36, 122.38 and 122.42

Partially endorsed recommendations: 122.37, 122.39 and 122.41

81. The State received 206 recommendations between 2016 and 2018 from the human rights treaty bodies, namely the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee against Torture, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It also received recommendations from the Committee for the Arab Charter on Human Rights at the time of the adoption of the 2030 Vision and the related programmes in 2016. In the framework of the Vision, many historic developments and reforms have been carried out in different domains, including in the area of human rights. One outcome of these reforms is that most of the recommendations that the human rights treaty bodies submitted to the State have been put into effect. As for the recommendations that have yet to be implemented and that are part of the State's commitments, follow-up is being assured by the Human Rights Commission, in keeping with its terms of reference, and by its standing committee. Recently, the State submitted its combined eleventh and twelfth periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and its fifth periodic report under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

82. The State cooperates with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council by submitting replies to the requests of mandate holders for clarifications on human rights issues and cases. Its response rate is 99 per cent. The State participates actively in the completion of questionnaires that the mandate holders draw up in preparation for submission of their thematic reports to the Council and the General Assembly. Here, its response rate is 98 per cent. As for visits by mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism visited Saudi Arabia in 2017. The State pays close attention to the recommendations that are submitted by the mandate holders after their visits and is currently reviewing pending requests for visits and options for expanding invitations to visit the country.

P. Other recommendations

Recommendations 122.166, 122.167, 122.169, 122.170, 122.175, 122.176, 122.178, 122.179, 122.181, 122.183, 122.186, 122.187 and 122.189

83. Please refer to paragraphs 3–7 of the addendum to the report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (A/HRC/40/4/Add.1) containing views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review.

IV. Implementation of voluntary commitments

84. The State has honoured most of its commitments under the human rights treaties to which it is a party as well as its voluntary commitments. It is working in the framework of the 2030 Vision to transition from a commitment-based approach to a best practices approach. Efforts are under way to develop a national universal periodic review that is inspired by the universal periodic review mechanism. The present report describes the action taken on voluntary commitments in connection with accession to human rights treaties (para. 4); the death penalty and corporal punishment (paras. 60–62); the elimination of racial discrimination (para. 15); freedom of opinion and expression (para 66); the establishment of an electronic system to monitor cases of human trafficking (para. 63); the rights and empowerment of women (paras. 30–42); labour rights (paras. 71–76); and the rights of older persons (paras. 9 (m), 10 and 54–55).

85. With regard to the development of national human rights indicators, national indicators have been adopted, including a Sustainable Development Goals indicator managed by the General Authority for Statistics; a women’s empowerment indicator run by the National Observatory for Women; and a gender equality indicator that is the purview of the Centre for Gender Equality of the Public Administration Institute. In addition, work is currently being undertaken, pursuant to Royal Order No. 24004 of 12 Rabi’ II A.H. 1441 (9 December A.D. 2019) to integrate human rights indicators into a system overseen by the National Human Rights Commission, in cooperation with OHCHR.

V. New and emerging challenges and related developments (national priorities)

86. The COVID-19 epidemic had a profound impact on humanity, given the heavy death toll that it took in countries around the world and its damaging effects on the global economy. In the context of its presidency of the G-20 in 2020, Saudi Arabia sought to galvanize action to combat the epidemic. The final document of the summit held on 26 March 2020 contained pledges and commitments by world leaders to combat and prevent the spread of the disease. Saudi Arabia contributed \$10 million to WHO in response to an urgent appeal to all countries to adopt global measures to counter the spread of the epidemic. The State announced that it would be contributing \$500 million to international organizations to support global efforts to combat COVID-19. In all, Saudi Arabia has contributed a total of \$862,758,433 for this work.

87. At home, the State dealt with COVID-19 in two ways: on the one hand, curbing the spread of the disease and providing high quality health care and, on the other, dealing with its socioeconomic impact. The measures that the State adopted were based on a human rights approach, as evidenced in the focus on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and the application in practice of the principle that human rights are indivisible interrelated and interdependent, as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993. The State therefore respected the rights affected by the pandemic, such as the right to education, work, social security, social protection, etc. What follows is a summary of the actions taken by the State to uphold the right to health and to combat the disease. The Keeper of the Two Holy Mosques issued a decree on 30 March regarding the delivery of free treatment to persons infected or potentially infected with COVID-19, meaning Saudi nationals, foreign residents and illegal aliens. Saudi nationals who were stuck abroad were offered shelter. At the same time, preventive care and medical services, living support, psychological support and high-quality health care were provided free of charge to everyone without exception. The collection of municipal taxes was deferred, fines were waived and a programme valued at SRI 50 billion was launched to provide support and funding to small and medium-sized enterprises. A government subsidy of SRI 17.3 billion was allocated by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to enable businesses to grow, in order to boost the economy and preserve jobs. In a bid to save jobs, the State assumed responsibility for the payment of salaries for 60 per cent of private sector employees. The Council of Ministers issued a decision to disburse SRI 500,000 to families of persons working in the State-run or private health sector who have died of COVID-19, whether civilian or military, Saudi or non-Saudi.

Conclusion

88. There is a good deal of background information and data that has not been included in this report, in keeping with the guidance on the word limits for reports. There have been historic and unprecedented reforms and developments in Saudi Arabia both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective with regard to human rights, in the framework of the country's ambitious and creative Vision. These reforms and developments have not ceased, not even when the present report was being prepared for timely submission. Notwithstanding what it has achieved, the State remains determined to achieve even more when it comes to respect for and the protection and realization of human rights.

Notes

- 1 يشار إليها لاحقاً بكلمة "المملكة"
 - 2 يشار إليه لاحقاً بكلمة "الاستعراض"
 - 3 يشار إليها لاحقاً بكلمة "التوصيات"
 - 4 فيما يتعلق بالجزء الثاني المتضمن تعديل المواقف التمييزية ضد المرأة فسيتم تقديم معلومات بشأن في إطار موضوع حقوق المرأة.
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