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Brunei Darussalam

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I. Introduction

1. Brunei Darussalam (“Brunei”) underwent its third UPR on 10 May 2019 during the 33rd session of the Working Group on the UPR of the HRC. During the session, a total of 220 recommendations were addressed to Brunei, out of which 108 recommendations were accepted; 7 recommendations were partially accepted; 81 recommendations were not accepted; and 24 recommendations were taken note of. The outcome of the review was subsequently adopted at the 42nd session of the HRC on 20 September 2019.

2. Brunei appreciates the constructive approach of the UPR mechanism towards the promotion and protection of human rights in all UN Member States, and extends its gratitude towards the UN Member States that had proposed recommendations during the review. Brunei has made, and will continue to make efforts to fulfil its commitment towards the accepted recommendations and reaffirms its commitment to fulfil its international obligations in promoting and protecting human rights.

3. Brunei is located on the north-western side of the island of Borneo, bounded on its coast by the South China Sea. As Brunei celebrates 40 years of full independence this year, it continues to enjoy a high standard of living where in 2023 the GDP per capita was B\$ 45,102.10. Brunei’s high income and small population of 450,500 enables the country to continue to adopt an income tax-free and generous welfare system. The Brunei people and residents enjoy subsidised education, water, housing, electricity, petrol and various essential foods and high-quality healthcare. The crime rate in the country is low and law enforcement measures have continued to be strengthened.

II. Methodology

4. Brunei’s IAWG, formerly known as the Inter-Agency Expert Group, established in 2008, has continued its mandate to prepare the national report for the UPR, where the Department of International Organisations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs serves as the Secretariat in collaboration with focal points from each government ministry, and maintains a dedicated email account – upr@mfa.gov.bn – for greater efficacy in communication and to also serve as a digital repository for correspondences and documents.

5. Additionally, extensive coordination within the IAWG as well as with relevant government ministries and agencies and increased consultations with other stakeholders including NGOs, were also held.

6. This report focuses on the actions taken by Brunei with regard to the development of the promotion and protection of human rights in the country and the progress of implementation of accepted recommendations from its third review¹. A list of abbreviated terms can be found in ANNEX 1.

III. *Wawasan Brunei 2035* and the Sustainable Development Goals²

7. *Wawasan Brunei 2035* represents the vision of the future for Brunei as it defines the long-term goals and framework for national development plans and implementation strategies, through which Brunei aspires to develop itself as a nation that will be widely recognised for its educated, highly skilled, and accomplished people; with high quality of life; and a dynamic and sustainable economy, by 2035.

8. *Wawasan Brunei 2035* is operationalised through three Blueprints namely, Manpower Blueprint, Social Blueprint, and Economic Blueprint, which serve as guidance for line ministries and agencies in developing current and future policies and projects, and ensuring incorporation of the SDG concepts. The alignment and harmonisation of the SDGs with *Wawasan Brunei 2035* ensures that the nation’s efforts to advance both sustainable development and the national development agenda go hand-in-hand.

9. In particular, the Government established the SNCC on SDG in 2016 to strengthen coordination efforts and catalyse the integration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the country's national vision. In this regard, the VNR process has been instrumental in guiding the nation in setting instrumental milestones to stay on the trajectory of attaining the goals and targets of the SDG. Brunei has undergone two VNRs of its SDG progress, in 2020 and 2023, both of which were stocktaking exercises. The post-VNR actions were presented as transformative SDG commitments at the 2023 SDG Summit in September 2023³. SNCC continues to work with relevant stakeholders to follow-up on the initiatives raised.

10. Prior to the submission of the second VNR, Brunei elevated its stakeholder engagement to incorporate inclusive views on the national implementation of the SDG through workshops and forums, which led to the 2023 SDG Youth Dialogue initiated by SNCC, and run by the Brunei Youth Council, Green Brunei, and My Actions for the SDG with support from MCYS, BIBD, the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office and UNESCAP.

11. In June 2024, ongoing efforts to drive further progress in SDGs continued through events such as the Second SDG Youth Dialogue⁴ and the Brunei Mampan Forum⁵, under the theme 'Sustainable Consumption and Production, A Solution for All', both of which focused on advancing SDG 12.

IV. Implementation of the promotion and protection of human rights

A. Social welfare⁶

12. There remains no official national poverty line in Brunei with several agencies continuing to be mandated to address challenges faced by low-income individuals and families namely MOE, DCD, JMUI, JPI, and NGOs and CSOs such as YSHHB and MKM.

13. MKIS also continues to review national policies and plans on poverty eradication through a whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approach.

14. On 15 July 2020, MOFE and MCYS collaborated to launch the National Welfare System, a centralised database system integrating various welfare aids to improve the efficiency of the distribution of financial assistance to ensure those who are eligible for assistance are not left behind. The system, among others, aligns the processes of online applications of the existing social assistance provided through DCD, JMUI, MOE and YSHHB. This includes integrating applications for the Annual School Needs Assistance in 2022 with future plans to include applications for disbursement of old age pension and disability allowances.

15. In addition, the Zakat Collection and Distribution Division of JMUI was upgraded to a department in July 2023, highlighting the Government's efforts to provide and improve the disbursement of welfare and assistance to vulnerable individuals ensuring that their basic needs can be met.

16. JMUI also organises various empowerment programmes⁷ aimed at providing skills and tools to zakat welfare recipients to alleviate them from poverty and nurture self-reliance and sustainability including upskilling, training and providing opportunities to showcase their products and services.

17. Under a housing project⁸ for the underprivileged funded by zakat collection, 124 houses had been provided to eligible low-income families between 2009-2023. In 2023, the Religious Council allocated B\$6 million to JMUI for rental housing payments from zakat collection for an estimated 500 households which will be distributed over a 24-month period.

18. In July 2023, a new national retirement scheme, SPK, was implemented to further strengthen the social security landscape for current and future members of the Employee Trust Fund. SPK applies to the government sector, the private sector as well as the informal

sector (e.g self-employed). SPK ensures not only the adequacy of retirement income but also emphasises sustainability and inclusiveness within its design, by taking into account factors such as Income Replacement Ratio, inflation rates and its impact, while encouraging productivity and employment.

19. The National Plan of Action on Poverty Eradication (2020-2024) was revised to incorporate three focus areas, namely capacity, access and income generating opportunities; capacity and access to education; and policy, legislation and infrastructure. The National Plan of Action identified nine strategic goals under which collaborative programmes and initiatives are spearheaded by strategy champions consisting of government agencies, government-linked agencies, private sector, and NGOs in order to reduce dependence on welfare and create a self-reliant and resilient society.

20. The number of people receiving welfare assistance from MCYS fell from 5,812 households in 2019 to 1,991 households in June 2024. To further alleviate the effects of poverty, DCD also provides further financial support through welfare assistance to eligible elderly citizens who are already receiving old age pension.⁹

21. MOHA also initiated a collaboration with BIBD¹⁰ in 2022 which provides a platform for the sale of locally made products by underprivileged individuals and therefore foster entrepreneurship, enhance business knowledge and skills, as well as enable them to earn a livelihood. The initiative has been implemented in two districts.

22. Brunei continues to provide sustainable and affordable housing for its citizens as one aspect to improve the quality of life, and contribute towards social stability. Government initiatives began as early as 1952 with the Bunut and Berakas resettlement schemes, and was extended in 1984 with the STKRJ and RPN. As of March 2024, more than 30,000 housing units have been built, while 27,515 individuals have received houses under RPN and STKRJ. Under the same scheme, the Government has also provided a total of 1,977 land lots to citizens to build their own houses. There are ongoing efforts to expand housing projects to other villages and to streamline processes and create guidelines to expedite housing assistance within ministries.

23. The Government continues to place great importance on an effective water supply system to ensure access to clean, safe, and affordable treated water in conformity with WHO standards and in a way that does not adversely impact water resources. 100% of the population have access to clean treated water and 94% to improved sanitation. The improved sanitation system covers 96% of the population in urban areas and 93% in rural areas by a centralised network system or septic tanks. Wastewater treatment service is still provided at no cost to the public and without generating any revenue. Sewerage infrastructure also still relies on state funds for its operation and maintenance activities.

B. COVID-19 pandemic measures

24. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Brunei took a whole-of-nation approach with the involvement of various government agencies and the private sector in developing strategies to respond to the pandemic. Brunei reported its first COVID-19 imported case on 9 March 2020, and the country's initial response involved the adoption of public health social measures as countermeasures to prevent community transmission. This included quarantine of close contacts, social distancing, guidelines for mass gatherings, and mask-wearing policies, which were proven to be successful as evidenced by the absence of widespread community transmission during the first two years. In the initial phase, 'Trace, Test and Isolate' approach was used where active contact tracing was conducted, and swabbing centres were set-up in all districts. In addition, mobile swab teams and 'drive-thru' facilities were activated. BruHealth, a mobile application developed to assist with contact tracing, was later expanded to adapt to Brunei's needs in subsequent waves, including issuance of Digital Quarantine Orders, automated triage for COVID-19 patients undergoing home quarantine, booking of vaccination appointments, reporting of adverse events post-vaccination, and requests for food, medication and ART test kits.

25. The National Isolation Centre was expanded with a new extension building to cater for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. Additional temporary community centres were also set up for stable COVID-19 cases.

26. In the treatment for COVID-19, cases were divided into five categories based on disease severity¹¹. As the infection became more widespread and majority of cases were found to have mild symptoms, the treatment protocol was revised to allow home quarantine, monitoring through BruHealth and requiring inbound travellers to undergo quarantine upon arrival. Those under quarantine were provided access to medical facilities whereby the costs of any patient's treatment and vaccination as a preventive measure in an outbreak were borne by the Government.

27. The Government developed a vaccination strategy for citizens and residents, following WHO guidelines and advisories from the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Committee, which comprised MOH experts. The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme is free for all citizens and residents and was rolled out in phases based on risk. The vaccination strategy contributed significantly in slowing down COVID-19 transmission in the country. MOE assisted in the provision of information, coordination and scheduling of vaccination for students. Mobile vaccination services and home visits were also provided to ensure accessibility for rural, elderly and housebound residents. As of January 2024, 79.2% of the population received three doses of the vaccine¹².

28. An important factor in Brunei's successful management of the pandemic is the strong public communication that provided information and health advice that was timely, transparent and reassuring to the public, conducted through daily press conferences, official press releases, issuance of government circulars and communication via all media outlets including social media platforms. A national hotline was also set-up for COVID-19 related public enquiries.

29. By July 2020, a COVID-19 Travel Recovery Taskforce was established to oversee safe passage of travellers while maintaining existing travel restrictions and at the same time, ensuring the viability of Brunei's economy. After 457 days of zero local transmission, Brunei faced a second wave of COVID-19 in August 2021. Following this, the Taskforce was upgraded to a National COVID-19 Steering Committee in September 2021 with members comprising all cabinet ministers to guide the country's response to COVID-19.

30. In responding to this second wave, the coordination of response activities was undertaken by MOH and RBAF with support from other government ministries and departments. The National COVID-19 Coordination Centre was operational 24 hours, seven days a week.

31. Measures addressing the economic impact of the pandemic focused on three main components: namely, to maintain the wellbeing of the public, to protect jobs and provide support for individuals, and to support and assist businesses. In September 2021, financial assistance of B\$250 was provided to three groups of people in the private sector: (i) those who have lost their jobs due to the impact of the pandemic; (ii) those who were placed on unpaid leave for more than seven days either due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the company or being issued a Quarantine Order by MOH; and (iii) those who were self-employed or freelancers. This ensured the wellbeing of citizens and permanent residents, particularly those working in the private sector and earning a basic monthly salary of B\$1,500.00 and below, and assisted the private sector to improve business cash flow in addressing the impact of the pandemic.

32. The Government also announced other interim measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 including providing salary subsidies, partially funding salaries for small businesses, deferring loan payments, offering drive-through pension collection, creating a relief fund for medical equipment and introducing a Building Tax Relief¹³ of up to 50% for businesses operating in Municipal premises where revenue was severely affected.

33. Brunei was no exception to experiencing disruptions in the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic, and took action by adapting to online and remote learning. Teachers and students utilised digital tools to lessen the adverse impact of learning delays,

while adjustments were made on students' assessment and grading, in place of traditional written examinations.

34. To ensure inclusivity of access to learning, Home Learning Packs were provided for students with difficulties accessing online learning, and Home Learning Programmes were broadcasted on national television. Various stakeholders¹⁴ also made efforts to assist by providing laptops and internet sim-cards, computer devices, and personal protective equipment.

35. The youth also played a crucial role during the pandemic. In March 2020, the Youth Volunteers COVID-19 Task Force was set up by MCYS together with MOH and National Disaster Management Centre. Approximately 10,000 registered youth volunteers were involved with contact tracing, delivery of food rations and medicines including to the underprivileged, and quarantine security.

36. By October 2021, the National COVID-19 Steering Committee rolled out the National COVID-19 Recovery Framework to guide the country's transition to endemic phase. Successful transition was attributed to the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

C. Health¹⁵

37. The Government is fully committed to continuously improving the health status of people in the country, and considers government funding for healthcare as one of its major public investments in human development. Health policies and programmes are constantly reviewed in the context of changing economic, social, technological, environment, and health situations. Brunei remains committed to strengthening the healthcare system through the principles of UHC, and ensuring the provision of services that are fair and accessible to all. All Bruneians have access to free comprehensive healthcare under MOH's UHC, regardless of any pre-existing conditions or disabilities. As part of efforts to provide UHC, hospitals, health centres, clinics, and dental services have been set up in all districts. In rural areas, travelling clinics and flying medical services are also provided to ensure those who have difficulties travelling to urban areas have access to health services.

38. Access to timely, accurate, and reliable information was enabled with the introduction of BruHealth, setting up of a Health Advice Line 148, Brunei Red Crescent Helpdesk Line, dedicated MOH email, as well as the Telegram mobile application to facilitate receipt of questions and concerns from the public. Since the return to a post-pandemic society, efforts have been made to continue this digitised and enhanced flow of information with upgraded or additional features to support digitalisation of healthcare services, such as online booking of vaccinations, medical appointments, personal health records tracker, access to video consultations, and an online payment platform.

39. Mental health difficulties intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, placing greater emphasis on the need for a whole-of-nation approach. The use of the national mental health helpline¹⁶, video and telephonic consultations as well as social media provided mental health information and services during the pandemic. In November 2022, MOH launched the Mental Health Action Plan 2022-2025 as part of its commitment to further improve mental health literacy and care with four main strategies identified¹⁷, and further introduced guidelines in collaboration with key agencies such as MOE in addressing depression and bullying. MORA also introduced a programme¹⁸ aimed at providing students with a better understanding on measures to address social issues, including bullying, and a helpline¹⁹ to assist teachers, students and parents/guardians in dealing with students' wellbeing, including depression and bullying.

40. In order to support all mental health initiatives and programmes, MOH also initiated partnership with local youth groups and NGOs to ensure sustainable mental health promotion in communities, with plans to work with other relevant ministries and agencies in providing mental health and psychological first aid trainings to workplace managers and leaders as well as to community leaders such as village heads and clerics.

41. Brunei led regional efforts on cooperation in mental health, culminating in the adoption of the EAS Leaders Statement on Mental Health Cooperation at the 16th EAS in 2021. As a result of this, Brunei and Australia co-hosted the EAS Workshop on Mental Health Cooperation in the COVID-19 Recovery, in November 2021, to strengthen mental health systems, programmes and interventions.

42. In Brunei, there is a high prevalence of NCDs which are risk factors for dementia. In 2022, 354 patients were registered with ICD-10 diagnosis of dementia. Efforts continue to improve the diagnostic rate through early diagnosis and raise awareness of symptoms and risk factors, including through collaboration between ministries, educational institutions, and NGOs²⁰. In addition, MOH continues to review health system requirements to make high-quality infrastructure accessible and available for risk reduction and to support people with dementia and their caregivers. MOH also ensures that healthcare workers as well as volunteers are well-trained and competent in the provision of advice and support services.

43. Brunei is an active member of WHO and serves as a member on the WHO Executive Board for the term 2024-2027. Through this, Brunei hopes to contribute to the implementation of decisions and policies of the World Health Assembly and support the work of WHO.

44. Several projects under WHO Programme Budget either have been or are currently underway in Brunei to upgrade the capacity building of health officials and improve Brunei's health environment as well as to continuously improve the nation's healthcare system. WHO has provided technical assistance in areas such as prevention and control of NCDs, public health, pharmaceuticals, and primary healthcare. Several projects under WHO Programme Budget for Brunei have been completed²¹ and several others are in the process of discussion for the future²².

45. As continuation from the first action plan BruMAP-NCD 2013-2018, Brunei then launched BruMAP-NCD 2021-2025 with the goal to reduce the mortality rate between ages 30 and 69 years from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease by 10% by 2025. A multisectoral mechanism that involves the Multisectoral Task Force for Health, Cross Functional Teams for Health, and National NCD Technical Working Committee have been formed to strengthen the coordination and implementation of BruMAP-NCD 2021-2025. The Government has also introduced a whole-of-society approach in preventative measures to control NCDs with the aim to give every child the best start in life, improving Brunei's food environment, providing supportive workplace environment, promoting active communities, reducing smoking, and ensuring a mentally healthy and resilient nation.

46. Brunei had long been exploring the possibility of introducing telehealth and telemedicine services, as part of continued efforts to embrace new technology and strengthen the resilience of its healthcare ecosystem. This goal had been accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, seeing the establishment of the MOH Intelligence Hub in November 2022. The Hub comprises three units namely the MOH Epidemic Intelligence and Response Unit²³; the Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Unit; and the Digital Health Unit. More government health units are planned including the Behavioural Insights Programme, the National Clinical Research Unit, and the Non-Communicable Disease Unit.

D. Education²⁴

47. Brunei was one of the top three performing countries in all domains of PISA 2022²⁵ among participating ASEAN Member States. OECD published some key findings where Brunei is one of only four countries that recorded improvement in all three domains, and the only country in PISA 2022 where both its advantaged and disadvantaged students' competencies increased by at least 13 points. School leaders also reported a positive increase in parental engagement with teachers from PISA 2018 where over 80% of students indicated that their teachers were always ready to help during times of need.

48. MOE launched their Strategic Plan 2023-2027 on 23 September 2023 during the 33rd Teacher's Day Celebration as part of its commitment towards realising *Wawasan Brunei*

2035. The Plan provides a roadmap to foster educational excellence, strengthen the capacity of the education system as a whole, support capabilities and diversity of talents responsive to a changing and dynamic education ecosystem with three strategic goals: (i) Nurture Future-Ready Learners; (ii) Enhance Innovative Education Ecosystem; and (iii) Build Up Human Resources.

49. The amendments to the Compulsory Education Act which entered into force in January 2024, lowered the minimum compulsory school age from six to five years old to give every child equal opportunities and access to equitable quality education at a young age. This not only aligns with MOE's Strategic Plan but also demonstrates Brunei's continued commitment towards achieving international educational goals including SDG 4.2.²⁶

50. The Special Education Policy Guidelines introduced in 1997 was supplemented in 2022 with the launching of the SEF and the guidebook for SEN for teachers and parents. SEF is underpinned by the 5As of inclusion (Acceptance, Accessibility, Adapted Assessment, Adapted Instructions, and Adapted Curriculum) and aims to address critical issues which determine the delivery of inclusive quality education for students with educational needs and addresses issues of equity and improvement of learning environments, in order to improve participation and involvement of people with SEN in mainstream activities.

51. In January 2024, Brunei established its first special school²⁷ that brings a special curriculum designed to address unique individual learning needs, ensuring support and participation. This marks a significant step for students with high support needs, particularly those classified under severe and profound learning needs. MOE is working towards the provision of a special education allowance as part of its commitment to equity and inclusivity.

52. In addition to the measures to protect children in Section J (Children) of this report, a welfare unit under MOE²⁸ and various hotlines have been established to provide support to students and teachers.²⁹

53. Furthermore, MOE has put in place initiatives to support the education of children who have suffered from abuse or are from dysfunctional families to ensure their wellbeing, protection and learning continuity as follows:

(a) the newly upgraded Department of Special Education³⁰ focusing on developing specialised competencies and skills for students with SEN;

(b) monitoring students' attendance throughout the year to avoid prolonged or chronic absenteeism that will affect their academic performance;

(c) establishment of students' welfare sections in schools nationwide to ensure students' wellbeing particularly underprivileged students and those from dysfunctional families as well as supporting those facing mental health issues; and

(d) the Department of Special Education consistently collaborates with the Child Development Centre to discuss the needs and assistance required by students with SEN in schools, and Inter-school Progress Meetings are held monthly also involving representatives from JPI and DCD.

54. As part of its continuous efforts towards ensuring 'equity and equality' of quality education as well as promoting lifelong learning, emphasis is placed on sharing of best practices and technical cooperation with international organisations such as ASEAN, SEAMEO, ASEMME, ICESCO, Commonwealth, and UNESCO to provide broader perspectives on current developments in approaches and strategies in implementing an effective education system through comparative learnings and to develop a better understanding of cross-cutting issues.

E. Cultural/religious understanding and social harmony³¹

55. Brunei, the 'Abode of Peace', is a country with a small population, strong religious values, and a rich heritage of tradition and culture. It is well-known as a peaceful country where individuals of different races and religions live together harmoniously, guided by the national philosophy of 'Malay Islamic Monarchy' or *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB). The right

to practise one's religion is safeguarded by the Constitution of Brunei Darussalam and Islamic principles, and there continues to be social harmony in the country.

56. Harmony and prosperity among its people are preserved through the protection of basic rights and securing access to essential needs. In an environment of political stability, peace, and security, this social harmony is due to the strong social values emanating from the importance placed upon family institutions, community support, and mutual respect, as well as a strong foundation in faith and religion.

57. Social inclusiveness is inherent in Brunei's society. Participation of all walks of life can be seen in various national events and festivities which are regularly held, for instance the tradition of 'Open House' visits during cultural celebrations such as the *Hari Raya* Eid celebrations and Chinese New Year festivities, as well as the *Majlis Bersama Rakyat* events providing direct engagement and access between the monarch and the people. These traditions and norms strengthen social harmony, promote friendship, and foster understanding amongst communities in the country. Individuals of different ethnicities and religions have held high-level positions in government, the judiciary, and the legislature, such as the recent appointment of the first ethnic Chinese woman, and a youth, as Member of the Legislative Council³² in January 2023, and the appointment of the first ethnic Chinese Chief Justice of the Supreme Court³³ in June 2018.

F. Peace, justice and strong institutions³⁴

58. To maintain this Abode of Peace, Brunei places high importance on the peace and security of its people and the nation. Safeguarding the stability of the country and the existing social harmony is therefore a priority. Brunei has continued efforts to ensure this by upholding strong institutions and taking a whole-of-nation approach towards upholding peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all whilst building effective, accountable, and strong institutions.

59. Brunei strongly upholds and maintains the rule of law through its dual legal system³⁵ – civil and syariah – which are well placed to protect society from harm and injustice. Common law was inherited from its time as a British Protectorate in 1888 whilst syariah law has been practiced since the 14th century.

60. Despite the challenges that COVID-19 pandemic posed, the commitment to ensure access to justice and provide everyone with the opportunity to seek protection and legal redress remained imperative. Legislation was amended to allow for the conduct of court hearings online. Urgent applications, including both criminal and civil cases deemed appropriate for video-conferencing, were heard online through remote hearings. The court rooms were also remodelled to ensure the health and safety of all those attending court.

61. Brunei remains committed to upholding its international obligations, including those core international human rights treaties of which it is a party. Brunei recognises the sovereign right of all States to accede to any treaty, and makes continued efforts to study the feasibility of acceding to any international treaties including ensuring that domestic laws, policies and practices are aligned with international obligations.

G. Family institution³⁶

62. Strong social values continue to be inculcated within Bruneian families and communities, through the importance placed upon family institutions and of mutual respect within the community. For Brunei, the family is not only a social unit but a fundamental institution, deeply rooted in its cultural and religious values, and forms the foundation of society. To support this, the Plan of Action on Family Institution 2023-2027 is currently being drafted under MKIS to provide a safety net and enhanced family protection system.

63. Furthermore, the Government, together with strategic partners, plays an important role in engaging with communities through various outreach and awareness programmes³⁷ such as programmes aimed at disseminating information to guardians on various social issues such as the harms of drug abuse and keeping children safe on the internet.³⁸

64. As Chair of ASEAN in 2021, Brunei championed two important initiatives; the ASEAN Declaration on the Importance of the Family for Community Development and Nation-Building, which among others introduced an annual ASEAN Family Day, and the ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy, which stressed the importance of building stronger and resilient families as the foundation of the care economy.

H. Women³⁹

65. Recognising that women and girls are among agents of change and catalysts for socio-economic development and the preservation of peace and security, strengthening effective mechanisms to promote women's development becomes an increasingly important task which Brunei continues to build on through means towards advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

66. In leadership and decision-making, Brunei has recorded progress in women's career development in various fields, including legal, political, financial and managerial professions, and continues to appoint women to high level positions in both government and private sectors, such as Ambassador-at-Large, Minister, Heads of Missions, Legislative Council members, Deputy Minister, Attorney General, High Court Judge, Permanent Secretaries, Clerk to the Privy Council, Solicitor General, and Chief Executive Officers⁴⁰. As of June 2024, 34 NGOs in Brunei are led by women.

67. Women entrepreneurs are also supported through initiatives and awards by the Government and other agencies, such as the ASEAN Young Women Entrepreneurs Award 2022 and Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, which has led to the increasing recognition of Bruneian women business leaders. Further, in 2022, Agronect, a mobile application developed by a women-owned and women-led business from Brunei, and which offers farmers and agri-food entrepreneurs access to education and immersive virtual reality training experiences, won the APEC Digital Prosperity Award. This highlights the growing role of women-led businesses in driving innovative and smart technological solutions, such as in the agro-food sector, to tackle sustainability and food security challenges.

68. According to the "2021 ASEAN Gender Outlook", a collaborative report between ASEAN and UN Women, Brunei has the highest proportion of women in public policy and decision-making, a significant proportion of female executives in the private sector and in business, as well as middle and senior managerial positions. Brunei also participated in the ASEAN - EU-READI study on "Women's Political Participation and Leadership" which highlighted a significant increase in the number of women appointed to middle management and senior-level positions, demonstrating progression towards gender parity within the government's decision-making domain.

69. As an outcome of the Research on Women's Development in Brunei Darussalam launched in April 2022, a new National Plan of Action on Women with the objective of promoting gender equity, capacity building and self-development will be introduced prioritising women's safety and wellbeing, optimising women's work potential and career development opportunities, and driving women's empowerment within the community.

70. Several programmes were launched by the Government and the private sector to encourage women's economic empowerment, including assisting and providing entrepreneurship opportunities to housewives⁴¹, underprivileged mothers, women entrepreneurs especially businesses owned by mothers⁴², such as BIBD SEED, an award-winning collaboration between BIBD with MORA, MCYS and MOHA.

71. Recognising the importance of providing greater support for women's participation in the workforce, as well as to ensure the health and safety of children:

(a) Guidelines for Child Care Centres in Government Buildings is currently being drafted under the Plan of Action on Family Institution 2023-2027 to improve work-life balance;

(b) the licensing process for child care centres under the Child Care Centres Act is strengthened; and

(c) the National Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines for Child Care Centres was launched in August 2019 as part of collaborative efforts between MOH and MCYS.

72. On the protection of women and elimination of violence against women, Brunei records and tracks its progress on five national priority areas with the following key achievements:

(a) a number of mechanisms have been established to address the issue of domestic violence from prevention to protection, including amendments to various legislations such as the Married Women Act, Islamic Family Law Act, and Penal Code whereby provisions with respect to protection orders and expedited orders are available to the court to protect women who are victims of domestic violence;

(b) relevant agencies compiling data on violence against women within their organisations to develop action plans;

(c) civil and syariah laws provide protection and restraining orders for victims of domestic violence regardless of gender. The Penal Code, amended in 2017, expanded the definition of rape to include an offender in a position of trust or authority, criminalised any use of words, gestures or acts intended to insult the modesty of women, and introduced heavier penalties for sexual offences against women;

(d) awareness-raising activities by government agencies and NGOs, private sectors as well as youth advocates, have had positive impacts, including more victims being willing to file a report, and greater awareness of the interventions needed to address the health (including mental health), welfare and safety of women; and

(e) access to justice for victims and survivors has been improved through a better referral system where guidelines are in place and used internally by each relevant government agency.

73. NGOs focusing on women's issues have been active in calling for more protection for women and girls, and in promoting awareness about the protections offered, including in rural areas.⁴³

74. Brunei recognises and values women's contributions in the regional and international arena, in bilateral⁴⁴, regional⁴⁵, and international partnerships which also includes the participation of female personnel of RBAF in UNIFIL where, as of March 2024, 10 Bruneian women peacekeepers have participated, demonstrating continued commitment and support for the efforts of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations to increase the participation of women in peacekeeping at all levels.

75. In 2021, Brunei also led the development of the inaugural ASEAN publication "Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind", in partnership with the ASEAN Secretariat and UN Women. With support from USAID, ACWC and ACW launched the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework in January 2022, which outlines key strategies and priority areas to further enhance gender equality and women's empowerment in ASEAN.

76. The ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, in cooperation with UN Women and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, launched the ASEAN Regional Framework on Protection, Gender, and Inclusion in Disaster Management 2021-2025 in October 2021, which delineates a comprehensive approach to disaster management whilst prioritising gender inclusion and ensuring the integration of inclusive practices in line key policies and declarations.⁴⁶

I. Youth⁴⁷

77. Brunei maintains the prioritisation of youth development and empowerment, to provide them equal access to opportunities and to reach their full potential. Brunei also recognises the youth as the country's future leaders and key contributor to attaining a better and more sustainable future. The National Youth Policy and Strategy⁴⁸ introduced a set of guidelines and expectations of the nation to establish youth (aged 15 to 35) that are virtuous,

internationally recognised, leading agents of future change and to promote inclusive national development.

78. The Strategy also aims to inculcate entrepreneurship by providing strong infrastructure and supporting regulations. In this regard, the Youth Entrepreneurship Steering Committee, now co-chaired by the Minister at the Prime Minister's Office as well as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, produced initiatives including the Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Handbook⁴⁹ and entrepreneurial development programmes such as *i-Usahawan* and Shell LiveWIRE Brunei.⁵⁰ A Youth Entrepreneurship Working Committee was also established in 2023, to support the work of the Steering Committee.

79. The national Youth Development Index continues to be one of the measures of success of the youth programmes, which is undertaken every five years to be in line with current standards. The current Brunei Darussalam Youth Development Index (2018) overall scored 65% (good). Brunei scored 85% (very good) in two out of eight domains of the Youth Development Index rates namely, Health and Social Issues. Brunei is currently undergoing another review.

80. Brunei actively encourages the progress and recognition of its youth in local, regional, and international fora to enable sharing of ideas, best practices and development of skills in various areas, for example, Brunei led efforts in establishing the ASEAN Junior Fellowship Programme in 2021.

81. Recognising that volunteerism offers valuable opportunities to engage in and contribute to the development of peaceful and inclusive societies, the *Caring (Mengalinga)* mobile application was launched during the 16th annual National Youth Day in 2021. The application is a platform to register volunteers and for organisations to offer programmes, as well as serves as a directory for NGOs in Brunei. The application is a collaboration between the youth (Nextacloud), the Government (MCYS) and the private sector (Baiduri Bank), and is a testament of the youth as the driving force on humanitarian issues in Brunei. Regionally, a Bruneian youth⁵¹ received the ASEAN Prize 2022 for his commitment and dedication towards improving the lives of vulnerable communities in ASEAN.

J. Children⁵²

82. Children make up a significant proportion of Brunei's population; in 2023, it is estimated that children below 15 years old made up 20.2% of the population. Recognising the need to ensure they are provided sufficient support for basic needs to lead a safer and quality life, as required under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, MCYS launched the national framework NFCP in December 2020 to further develop the child protection ecosystem.

83. NFCP introduced the Sector Assessment Protocol to enhance reporting mechanism through the Child Protection Reporting Protocol which serves as an interagency guideline in child protection. A Register of Children and Young Persons in Need of Protection was also launched in May 2022 to assist agencies in identifying children and young people in need of protection and aid inter-agency communication and information sharing.

84. Under NFCP, guidelines are currently being drafted to provide alternative care options for children and young persons in need of protection, such as foster care, and to enable them to experience the atmosphere of family life. The guidelines are expected to be finalised this year.

85. A public hotline⁵³ was established in 2006 to receive complaints and provide immediate advice by trained officials on social concerns including child abuse. To further improve the efficacy of social services for children, a second public hotline⁵⁴ was launched in 2019 with the support of private companies. Cases received under both hotlines are addressed by DCD, in close collaboration with other government agencies.

86. The '1 Village 1 Family'⁵⁵ (1K1K) programme co-organised by MOHA and MORA provides holistic guidance and assistance to at-risk members of society. The current focus of

this initiative is the children of inmates whereby assistance, such as transport, food and education supplies, are provided and guidance and counselling support are offered.

87. As ASEAN Chair in 2021, Brunei also led several regional initiatives pertaining to the protection and welfare of children which resulted in ASEAN Leaders adopting the Declaration on the Elimination of Bullying of Children in ASEAN to strengthen concerted efforts and undertake appropriate measures to promote and protect children in ASEAN against all forms of bullying in different settings, ensuring that their best interests and welfare are upheld. The APT Statement on Cooperation on Mental Health Amongst Adolescents and Young Children was also adopted at the 24th APT Summit.

K. Persons with disabilities⁵⁶

88. Brunei remains committed to ensuring all PWDs are afforded equal rights and opportunities, are able to fully live their lives, are recognised as part of relevant strategies of sustainable development, and ensured full participation as equal members of society. Since its ratification of CRPD on 11 April 2016, Brunei consistently reviews the policies and initiatives to uphold the welfare of PWDs. As of June 2024, a total of 6,168 PWDs are registered as recipients of monthly disability allowances.

89. Brunei is committed to the implementation of the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted at the 33rd ASEAN Summit in November 2018, which demonstrates ASEAN's commitment towards an inclusive community especially towards advancing the rights and welfare of PWDs, in line with CRPD.

90. The Persons with Disabilities Act which came into force on 1 October 2021, introduces a national definition of PWDs, and expands upon the definition under CRPD. The Act also provides for the establishment of a national register for PWDs, and the introduction of disability cards for verification purposes, and access to certain services. The legislation also imposes severe penalties for the offences of abuse and neglect of PWDs reinforcing Brunei's commitment to improve the quality of life of PWDs, in line with CRPD.

91. The Old Age and Disability Pensions Act⁵⁷ was amended in 2021 which among others introduced a monthly care providers allowance to support the provision of care of PWDs. As of June 2024, there are 1,337 recipients of care provider allowance.

92. Under MKIS, the government as well as non-government stakeholders work closely together to address all national social issues faced by vulnerable groups such as underprivileged families, children, women, the elderly, and PWDs. MKIS established a Special Committee on the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities, responsible for implementing a range of programmes and social services to provide care for these vulnerable groups in areas such as housing, health, employment, transportation, recreation, and social participation.

93. The Government works closely with NGOs to encourage participation of and empower PWDs in employment, entrepreneurship, and economic activities. For example, through attachment programmes for students with special learning needs who are nearing the end of their academic studies (i.e. pre-vocational), vocational and employment training, as well as annual job fairs and digitally accessible job seeking platforms.

94. Policies established to better improve job opportunities and wage equality for the local community, such as those reflected in Section M (Productive Employment and Decent Work for All), applies to this Section.

95. The Different Abilities and Design Guidelines, launched in November 2018, focused mainly on the additional needs of PWDs to access public buildings and infrastructure. Mandatory requirements were introduced to minimise restrictions to enable PWDs to make full use of building premises and amenities. As Brunei prepares for a fast ageing population and moves towards becoming a more inclusive society, the Guidelines also emphasises universal design concepts and provisions that benefit a wide spectrum of people, including parents with infants, the young, and the elderly. It also requires buildings frequented by

families to provide family-friendly facilities including child-friendly toilets and lactation rooms for nursing mothers.

96. PWDs continue to be given opportunities to participate in sporting events regionally and internationally, actively participating in and winning medals⁵⁸ in events such as the National Swimming Para Circuit 2024 in Malaysia, 12th ASEAN Para Games 2023 in Cambodia, World Disability Sport Games 2023 in Thailand, 11th ASEAN Para Games 2022 in the Republic of Indonesia, World Para Bowling Tour Championship 2019 in the Republic of the Philippines, and the Arafura Sports Games 2019 in Australia.

97. The Government continues to recognise the role of NGOs in complementing its programmes for PWDs and in promoting public awareness on PWDs' needs and rights. The Council for the Welfare of Persons with Different Abilities continues to work with DCD, and in 2019 introduced Basic Sign Language workshops and Braille, Orientation and Mobility workshops⁵⁹.

98. Another significant milestone was the introduction of the use of sign language in the broadcast of Brunei's national news programme on RTB television channels, with trained sign language interpreters, since February 2021, ensuring that information is now easily and immediately accessible for the hearing-impaired. Sign language courses for news programme sign language interpreters continue to be provided to enhance skills, knowledge and ethics when broadcasting live, whilst the promotion of sign language in the community is also undertaken in collaboration with NGOs to further support talent identification and widen the pool of skilled sign language interpreters.

L. Elderly⁶⁰

99. Brunei attaches great importance to the welfare, protection and promotion of the rights of the elderly, as the elderly aged 60 years or older in 2023 constituted an estimated 10.3% of the overall population. This is ingrained in the social and cultural values of the Brunei people, and is reflected in the country's coordinated whole-of-nation approach. They are an invaluable support system and seasoned collaborators in the nation's progress towards achieving Wawasan Brunei 2035.

100. The Special Committee referred to in paragraph 92 above is also responsible for implementing programmes related to the elderly.

101. MKIS developed a new Plan of Action for Senior Citizens 2023-2030 which focused on the concept of successful ageing and emphasised comprehensive successful ageing strategies, considering legal aspects, long-term care, age-friendly cities as well as inclusive empowerment and development programmes. This Plan of Action takes into account the demographic trend of 'population ageing', and is in line with the UN Decade on Healthy Ageing and the WHO Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Pacific West 2021-2025.

102. The Government continues to provide facilities for citizens and residents, including the elderly. PKWEs, centres for elderly citizens to carry out daily social and religious programmes and activities, provide inclusive access to all generations and help strengthen relationships between older people, youths, PWDs, and the local community. The centres also serve as a knowledge-hub for the elderly⁶¹. Of particular note, PKWE Tutong has been recognised by WHO and is listed in its Global Database Age-Friendly Practices.

103. Health promotion and education programmes continue to be conducted to raise awareness on elderly-related issues⁶², such as the Healthy Lifestyle Programme to foster a culture of healthy lifestyle practices⁶³, in collaboration with UBD, *Demensia* Brunei, *Persatuan* WARGAMAS, and PKWEs. Evaluation⁶⁴ of the programme has demonstrated an increase in the level of knowledge among the elderly and fostered a culture of healthy lifestyle practices.

104. To ensure the welfare and social security of the elderly, the Government continues to provide a monthly old age pension to all citizens and permanent residents with stateless status who have attained the age of 60. As of June 2024, the number of recipients is 43,094. The

Old Age and Disability Pensions Act (Amendment) Order, 2021, referenced in paragraph 91 above, also enables elderly PWDs to receive double benefits, the old age pensions and the disability allowances, every month, provided that they have been verified as a PWD, of which 767 recipients were reported as of June 2024.

M. Productive employment and decent work for all⁶⁵

105. In November 2019, MPEC was established to address unemployment-related issues effectively and efficiently. This involves constant collaboration with industries and the education sector, as well as training institutions to increase the marketability and employability of Bruneians. MPEC has allocated funds through the Human Resource Development Fund to further invest in the development of Brunei's human capital. This is to create and continuously widen the talent pool of competent workforce, and provide opportunities for the local labour force to stay relevant and competitive as well as develop future-ready capabilities, towards building a marketable and employable manpower supply that is aligned with skills and qualifications needed in today's economy.

106. The Manpower Planning Office under MPEC works with stakeholders, including ministries, regulators and relevant industries, such as working with E-Government National Centre Brunei Darussalam for the preparation of a Labour Market Information System to collect, integrate, and model data sources in a holistic manner. A National Competency Framework has also been introduced, which lists the competencies required by the industry, and to be coordinated with training or programmes conducted by educational institutions offering that Framework. As a result of concerted efforts by various agencies, a total of 62,299 individuals were successfully recruited from 2019 to 2023 across the public and private sectors.

107. Other initiatives undertaken by MPEC include:

(a) the establishment of JobCentre Brunei:⁶⁶ provides various employment services and training as well as facilitates recruitment in the private sector;

(b) the establishment of the Manpower Industry Steering Committee:⁶⁷ identifies critical occupations which are in high demand, develops required competency framework and standards, and facilitates professional placements or on-the-job training; and

(c) the implementation of the Learn and Grow Programme and the Growth for Excellence Programme:⁶⁸ enhances skills and academic qualifications of local job seekers or employees in the private sector as well as increases job seekers' marketability and employability.⁶⁹

108. The Employment (Minimum Wage) Order, 2023 established a baseline wage that provides a fair and reasonable income to support a decent livelihood, motivation for progress and productivity enhancement, and to stimulate economic spending. The law applies to both local and foreign workers in the private sector, whether in full-time or part-time employment, and will be implemented in phases.⁷⁰ Failure to comply with the Order is punishable by way of a fine or imprisonment.

109. MPEC also launched the first series of the Salary Guideline for the private sector in February 2023 to provide recommended salary levels as well as career progression pathways in selected sectors. This will support the private sector by creating competitive and attractive salary packages, enable meaningful and long-term employment as well as empower progress. MPEC further plans to broaden the Guideline to other job positions, including those that are in demand.

110. In 2019, the Government established a centre, L3C, to offer a variety of lifelong learning programmes⁷¹ to help people gain skills through upskilling and reskilling including access to funding assistance⁷² through the SkillsPlus initiative. These programmes are conducted in collaboration with strategic partners comprising higher education institutions, technical and vocational education institutions, and training organisations in the private sector as well as government agencies.⁷³

N. Climate change, the environment and disaster management⁷⁴

111. As a small coastal state situated on an island, Brunei is not exempt from the effects of climate change, and believes that the challenges posed by the existential threat of the impacts of climate change demand urgent, decisive and concerted global action.

112. As part of its global commitments, Brunei ratified UNFCCC on 7 August 2007, acceded to the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC on 20 August 2009, and ratified the Paris Agreement on 21 September 2016. In 2020, Brunei submitted its NDCs which outlines its commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas by 20% relative to business-as-usual levels by 2030.

113. In 2018, the Brunei Climate Change Secretariat, now BCCO, was established to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate Brunei's climate change policies, strategies, and actions. Guided by the Brunei Darussalam National Council on Climate Change, BCCO's mission is to ensure a whole-of-nation approach in addressing the challenges and opportunities of climate change, and strategic alignment across government and non-government agencies.

114. Brunei's climate change policy, BNCCP, was launched in July 2020 with the aim to pave low carbon and climate-resilient pathways, and includes 10 key national strategies. Fully integrated with *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, it serves as the basis of Brunei's NDCs. A group of 51 youth representatives from different sectors were invited to participate and provide insights in the review and drafting of BNCCP.

115. Brunei's future climate change plans will focus on adaptation measures, including the establishment of a National Adaptation Plan, assessing the feasibility of suitable carbon pricing instruments, and the strengthening of transparency in greenhouse gas inventory through the National Forest Inventory and Directive projects.

116. Local communities and indigenous people also play a significant role in the development, management, and protection of terrestrial and forest areas in Brunei while promoting awareness of disaster risk reduction and adaptation strategies that will help increase the resilience of people to the impacts of climate change.

117. The Chairman's Statement of the 38th and the 39th ASEAN Summits in 2021, supported in principle the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change, that will facilitate cooperation and coordination on climate change initiatives and provide policy recommendations. The Centre will be hosted in Brunei, with the country pledging US\$1.5 million towards its operational budget for the first three years following establishment. Negotiations on the Agreement on the Establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change were concluded in August 2023 and has since been signed by a majority of ASEAN Member States.

O. Nationality

118. In Brunei, the path to citizenship is outlined in the Brunei Nationality Act, whereby non-nationals, including stateless persons can be naturalised subject to the fulfilment of certain criteria, including period of domiciliation, fluency in Malay language, and knowledge of Bruneian culture and tradition. During the period under review, 4,634 people were granted citizenship, out of which 2,177 were stateless, showing significant progress compared to 1,275 stateless persons who received citizenship grants between 2013 and 2018.

119. Brunei has a policy of single nationality and does not recognise dual nationality. The Brunei Nationality Act provides the acquisition for either a Bruneian father or Bruneian mother to obtain nationality for their children. Under the Act, a Bruneian woman married to a foreign national can apply to transmit her nationality to her children. Additionally, the foreign husband of a Bruneian woman may also acquire nationality through application.

P. Trafficking in persons and migrant workers⁷⁵

120. Brunei continues to take measures to strengthen legislation and enforcement to prevent crimes of TIPs. In 2019, the relevant legislation was reviewed and strengthened with the introduction of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and Prevention of People Smuggling Act, which imposes stringent penalties of imprisonment and fines.

121. The Government continues to ensure the capacity of prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, and social workers are enhanced through local and regional training programmes as well as technical assistance. Training covers various areas such as victim identification, trafficking indicators, elements of trafficking, information sharing, and case referral mechanism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, training continued virtually.

122. Brunei also actively engages bilateral and regional partners for training programmes to combat people trafficking such as the International Visitors Leadership Program on Combatting Trafficking in Persons, held in the United States of America from November-December 2023, and the Seminar on Combatting Human Trafficking and Forced Labour held in Brunei in August 2023, that was jointly organised by RBPF and Homeland Security Investigation, United States of America.

123. Brunei continued to enhance inter-agency coordination in conducting investigative efforts to evaluate human trafficking cases, including by establishing a TIP Assessment Team in 2020, comprising PMO, AGC, HTU, Royal Customs and Excise Department, DINR, and DoL.

124. As part of its anti-trafficking efforts, Brunei has reviewed and improved its standard operating procedures, and introduced NaSOP in 2021. NaSOP includes an inter-agency checklist for identifying the elements of human trafficking, caters to the interest of all victims, and is applicable without discrimination against any victim. Various departments including AGC, HTU, DINR, and DoL have conducted training and aligned their respective internal operational procedures with NaSOP.

125. Brunei continued its prevention efforts through training programmes for labour and immigration officials and NGOs. In November 2020, the National Committee on Trafficking in Persons set up the Taskforce of Awareness Programme on TIP to raise public awareness on human trafficking. Various awareness campaigns have been conducted for both public and private sectors to provide awareness on laws relating to immigration, passport, trafficking and smuggling of persons, and workers' rights. RBPF and RTB also produced a television series which included a feature on a TIP case handled by HTU that aimed to increase the public's knowledge on human trafficking crimes and the elements of TIP.

126. To fully implement the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, existing shelters were upgraded to provide a dedicated shelter for human trafficking victims, including possible victims, at the Welfare Home Complex. Besides shelter and temporary accommodation, TIP victims are provided with counseling services, medical and psychological assistance as well as employment, education, and training opportunities, and Community Rules and Regulations of the TIPs shelter are also made available in eight different languages.⁷⁶

127. Under the Children and Young Persons Act, any child trafficking victim will be placed in a designated place of safety⁷⁷ within the Welfare Home Complex specifically for children and young persons. Child victims, including child trafficking victims, receive specialised care such as medical and psychological care, and have access to education, vocational training, sports facilities, self-building programmes, counseling sessions, and family visits.

128. Understanding the linkages between forced labour and human trafficking, Brunei deposited its instrument of ratification of the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) on 12 June 2023.

129. In 2020, Brunei ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. That same year, Brunei endorsed and operationalised its

National Plan of Action on TIP 2019-2022, and to date, is finalising the Plan of Action for 2024-2028.

130. Brunei views issues of TIPs seriously and has been actively engaged in international efforts in addressing this global concern. Brunei has been collaborating with UNODC and participated in various regional and international meetings relating to TIPs, people smuggling, and other transnational crimes. Brunei also works closely with regional counterparts through ASEAN and its related platforms.⁷⁸

131. To ensure an effective and transparent recruitment process and prevent incidences of visa forgery, fraud, and illegal entry of workers, the Government has entered into Memorandums of Understanding on the employment and recruitment of workers, with Bangladesh in 2022 and with Timor-Leste in 2023, which allows only registered employment agencies to recruit workers through specified agencies.

132. Ongoing efforts undertaken with sending countries include ensuring that, prior to departure, the migrant workers have knowledge of their rights and job scope, and of Brunei's socio-cultural norms. Furthermore, the Government works with resident diplomatic missions to translate contracts into their respective languages and ensures the workers retain a copy of their contracts.

Q. Collaboration with international bodies and mechanisms related to human rights⁷⁹

133. Regionally, Brunei demonstrates its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights including through its support of AICHR.⁸⁰ Brunei contributes annually to the AICHR Fund, which supports the implementation of their Five-Year Work Plan 2021-2025, and as the Chair of ASEAN in 2021, promoted engagements with additional stakeholders, including ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, CSOs, National Human Rights Institutions, and UN and its respective agencies. Since then, this engagement has been expanded to include other entities such as ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation.

134. Additionally, AICHR cooperated with ASEAN Dialogue Partners such as Australia, the United States of America and the European Union, further fostering international cooperation on human rights issues. In 2023, AICHR activities included a working visit to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg,⁸¹ and the 1st AICHR-UN Dialogue on Human Rights in Geneva where AICHR and OHCHR exchanged views on ways to address challenges, realise human rights and improve synergy between the work of the UN and regional organisations.⁸²

135. The Government maintains regular consultations and dialogue with regional and international organisations relating to human rights, including UNICEF, UNDP, and UNESCAP, such as the South-east Asia Experience Sharing Meeting on the National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-Up held in September 2023 in Thailand. Brunei has also collaborated with UNDP and UNICEF for projects under the Brunei Darussalam – Commonwealth Third Country Training Programme⁸³ in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

136. Brunei recognises the importance of preserving human rights protections in times of armed conflict, and thus is party to a number of international humanitarian law instruments. Most recent, Brunei signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 26 September 2018.

137. Brunei ratified the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership on 13 May 2023, which also contains provisions related to environment, labour, development, and small and medium-sized enterprises. This reflects a commitment to promoting sustainable development, protecting labour rights, and enhancing the ability of women to fully access and benefit within the context of international trade and investment.

138. In December 2023, Brunei was one of the countries that commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by submitting pledges as part of the global Human Rights Initiative. Illustrating its commitment to the promotion and

protection of human rights, Brunei associated itself with joint pledges by ASEAN (on the ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue), the State of Qatar (Family Pledge on behalf of a group of OIC states), and the State of Palestine (on Self Determination of Palestine), and also submitted five national pledges. The national pledges reflect Brunei's imminent future needs and clear targets for future development to:

- (a) ensure its people lead harmonious, dignified and empowered lives by fostering more inclusive and equitable quality education and training, ensuring provision of decent jobs and better services, as well as an enabling ecosystem supported by assistive technologies;
 - (b) increase its implementation of SDG 12 in achieving sustainable consumption and production through green initiatives;
 - (c) improve the quality of life of PWDs, to ensure inclusivity and equality;
 - (d) demonstrate its commitment to the advancement and development of women;
- and
- (e) embrace a multifaceted strategy to ensure the wellbeing and dignity of the elderly.

139. Brunei frequently participates in regional and international events relating to human rights and looks forward to continuing sharing experiences and best practices with other countries. Brunei also actively engages with the UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights, as and when required. At the same time, Brunei stands ready to deepen engagement with relevant UN bodies to support Government efforts in promoting and protecting human rights in the country, and to effectively fulfil and implement its obligations under the conventions to which Brunei is a party.

Notes

- ¹ Paragraphs 24, 32, 54, 62, 64, 65, 98, 123, 135, 136, 140, 147, from Brunei's national report for the 3rd UPR Cycle remain relevant and applicable for Brunei's national report for the 4th UPR Cycle.
- ² Recommendations 79, 94, 96, 98, 103, 104, 106.
- ³ The post-VNR actions from the stocktake of the Second VNR are as follows: (i) greater and comprehensive harmonisation of *Wawasan Brunei 2035* and SDG; (ii) upgrade data capacity through National Strategy for the Development of Statistics; (iii) inclusive and equitable quality education and training, decent jobs, better services and enabling ecosystem supported by assistive technologies to ensure everyone can lead harmonised, dignified and empowered lives; (iv) moving towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 through a just energy transition and forest preservation, and increasing adaptation measures to future-proof the country and communities through the National Adaptation Plan; (v) further enhance the progress in SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by exploring ways to achieve economic, social and environmental equity by making collective actions towards sustainability such as strengthening legal and institutional frameworks to ensure sustainable management and efficient use of resources and creating economic opportunities from the green and circular economy model; and (vi) implementing energy transition pathways towards clean and low-carbon energy, whilst meeting the world's growing economic demand.
- ⁴ The Second SDG Youth Dialogue built upon its established partnership and success stories, empowering the youth to develop sustainability projects related to SDG 12.
- ⁵ The Brunei Mampan Forum convened various stakeholders to gain insights from local and international experts on issues and pathways forward in sustainable practices. Additionally, a workshop focused on Environmental, Social and Governance Awareness for Micro-Small-Medium Enterprises was conducted to enhance understanding among businesses about the benefits of sustainability in operations, emphasising its crucial role in sustainable development.
- ⁶ Recommendations 79, 105, 130, 135, 136, 137, 139, 141, 142, 143, 144, and 145.
- ⁷ These programmes include *PROPAZ-Pusat Pembangunan Belia*, *PROPAZ-Apprenticeship*, and *PROPAZ-Zira'ah* (Agricultural) where the underprivileged or their dependants were offered to undergo various reskilling courses at the Youth Development Centre under MCYS. Various activities were held in 2022 by MORA and other strategic partners by providing the underprivileged with booths to showcase their products and services.
- ⁸ *Projek Pembinaan Rumah Bantuan Golongan Daif, Fakir dan Miskin*.
- ⁹ In April 2024, 228 elderly citizens received welfare assistance and old age pension.

- ¹⁰ *Tunas Project Marketplace.*
- ¹¹ Category 1 are cases that do not have any signs of infection; Category 2 are cases that have signs of infection but do not have lung infection or pneumonia; Category 3 are cases that have signs of infection as well as lung infection or pneumonia; Category 4 are cases that have lung infection or pneumonia and require oxygen support and normally require close monitoring at the Intensive Care Unit; and Category 5 are critical cases where the COVID-19 infection has caused multiple organ failure which normally require ventilators or heart/lung machines.
- ¹² For children ages 5-11 years old, 88.9% have received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine.
- ¹³ To qualify for the tax reduction, commercial building owners must deduct at least 10% of their monthly rent for a minimum of five consecutive months.
- ¹⁴ This included MOE, MORA, MTIC, and the Authority of Info-communications Technology Industry of Brunei Darussalam.
- ¹⁵ Recommendations 85, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 158, 211, and 212.
- ¹⁶ *Talian Harapan 145.*
- ¹⁷ Strengthen Effective Leadership and Governance for Mental Health; Strengthen Mental Health Services by ensuring the availability and accessibility of comprehensive quality mental health services; Strengthen Mental Health Promotion and Mental Disorder Prevention; Develop Capacity for National Information Systems and Research for Mental Health.
- ¹⁸ *Ta'adil As-Suluk.*
- ¹⁹ *Talian Syifa.*
- ²⁰ Such as *Demensia Brunei.*
- ²¹ Global Youth Tobacco Survey; Assessment of Age-Friendly Communities; and Salt Reduction Study.
- ²² Needs Assessment of Adolescent-Friendly Health Services and Programmes; Development of guidelines for prevention and management of obesity among children; Training of healthcare workers on Integrated Care for Older People; Mid-term review of Brunei Darussalam's Multisectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases 2021-2025; and Mid-term review of the National Mental Health Action Plan 2022-2025.
- ²³ A surveillance centre for communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- ²⁴ Recommendations 142, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 205, and 218.
- ²⁵ PISA provides indicators of the competencies in mathematics, reading and science for a nation's 15-year-olds. Data from the PISA Student Questionnaire was also used to generate the index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status which gives some measure of equity in education. A sample of 690,000 students aged 15 participated in this study, with Brunei contributing 5,576 students across 54 secondary schools.
- ²⁶ SDG 4.2 states that by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.
- ²⁷ *Al-Ameerah Al-Hajjah Maryam School.*
- ²⁸ *Unit Kesejahteraan Pemimpin Sekolah dan Tenaga Pengajar.*
- ²⁹ Namely the *Sejahtera* hotline to support school leaders and school teachers, the *Hal Ehwal Pelajar* hotline to support student welfare, and the *Talian Syifa.*
- ³⁰ The Special Education Unit under MOE was formally upgraded to the Department of Special Education on 1 June 2021.
- ³¹ Recommendations 88, and 121.
- ³² The Honourable Queenie Chong Chin Yee.
- ³³ The Honourable Chief Justice Dato Seri Paduka Steven Chong Wan Oon.
- ³⁴ Recommendations 10, 14, 61, 75, and 81.
- ³⁵ The Government continues to provide training programmes and awareness raising initiatives for better understanding on relevant legislations, including to relevant officials and members of the public.
- ³⁶ Recommendations 74, 131, 132, 133, 134, 148, 198, and 199.
- ³⁷ Such as through (i) the Narcotics Control Bureau's Preventive Drug Education Division, which actively promotes awareness about the negative effects of drugs to reduce drug dependency and to spread the anti-drug message to students and youths as well as the general public; (ii) the DCD's *Merakit Masyarakat* Programme which aims at providing exposure, knowledge and information on the role of DCD on issues pertaining to SKN, monthly welfare assistance, children, women and family issues, senior citizens, and pensions, PWDs, counselling, and DCD's Welfare Line 141 and *Talian Anak 121*; and (iii) other programmes with NGOs.
- ³⁸ *Awasi Anak Kitani.*
- ³⁹ Recommendations 34, 101, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172, 174, 175, 177, 178, 184, 186, 187, 188, and 214.
- ⁴⁰ In June 2022, Brunei appointed its first female Minister, The Honourable Datin Seri Paduka Dr. Hajah Romaizah binti Haji Mohd Salleh as the Minister of Education. Subsequently in February

2024, The Honourable Datin Paduka Dayang Hajah Nor Hashimah binti Haji Mohammed Taib was appointed as the Attorney General, and Dr. Dayang Hajah Huraini Binti Pehin Orang Kaya Setia Jaya Dato Paduka Awang Haji Hurairah, was appointed on 9 January 2024 as Clerk to the Privy Council, Secretary to the Cabinet Ministers' Council, and Clerk to the Legislative Council. Her Excellency Ar Siti Rozaimeryanti binti Dato Paduka Haji Abdul Rahman is also Brunei's first female Secretary-General of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, while Nur 'Azizah binti Dato Seri Paduka Haji Ahmad is the first female President of the Law Society, appointed in February 2024.

- ⁴¹ MCYS has developed several programmes including Business from Home, specifically targeted to provide housewives with entrepreneurship opportunities. The programme includes product marketing and entrepreneurial guidance through DARE's 'Institute Business Academy' and 'Micro Business Bootcamp'. DARE is the main government agency that promotes and facilitates the growth and development of local MSMEs.
- ⁴² An example is Dynamik Technologies, an IT company in Brunei, that plays a significant role in fostering inclusivity, with their recently re-launched 'eBunda' initiative, which provides valuable networking and marketing opportunities for women entrepreneurs especially businesses owned by mothers.
- ⁴³ Notably, the Council of Women of Brunei Darussalam, Project Women Brunei, Survivors.bn, *Persatuan Siswazah Brunei*, and *Persatuan Membangun Wanita dan Masyarakat*.
- ⁴⁴ With the United States of America, Brunei Darussalam conducts the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, as part of the White House-led Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative. The programme gives enterprising women the knowledge, network, and access they need to launch and grow successful businesses, along with other funded programmes, such as Micro-Grant for Empowerment and Special Underprivileged Mothers and Empowerment Entrepreneurship Development.
- ⁴⁵ Such as the ASEAN Japan Women Entrepreneurs Linkages Programme, an initiative aimed at linking MSMEs to bigger companies, mentors and peers for their business development. In 2020, Brunei hosted the 4th edition of the programme, which saw the participation of 27 women entrepreneurs from across ASEAN and Japan, who had the opportunity to network with 24 supporting companies from a range of sectors including logistics, food and beverage, hospitality, advertising, banking and technology.
- ⁴⁶ Such as the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response 2021-2025 and the ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN, One Response.
- ⁴⁷ Recommendations 95, 97, 99, 100, 101, and 102.
- ⁴⁸ *Dasar Belia Negara dan Strategi 2020-2035*.
- ⁴⁹ First published in 2022, the Handbook is a guide for appropriate business opportunities and programmes, including capacity building, shared support services, financing, and market access initiatives.
- ⁵⁰ *i-Usahawan* is a programme under DARE which helps start-ups secure contracts in energy and non-energy sectors; Shell LiveWIRE Brunei is a programme by Brunei Shell Petroleum company, which focuses on areas building capacity through collaborations with academic institutions, online platforms and public engagements.
- ⁵¹ Haji Muhammad Iqbal Fakhri bin Haji Damit, founder of non-profit organisation, Hand4Hand.
- ⁵² Recommendations 74, 86, 165, 177, 189, 191, 192, 194, 198, 200, 201, and 214.
- ⁵³ *Talian Kebajikan 141*.
- ⁵⁴ *Talian Anak 121*.
- ⁵⁵ *Satu Kampung Satu Keluarga*.
- ⁵⁶ Recommendations 158, 161, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, and 218.
- ⁵⁷ Now known as the Old Age Pensions and Disability Allowances Act.
- ⁵⁸ From 2019 to 2024, a total of 11 gold medals, 8 silver medals and 8 bronze medals obtained from 8 regional competitions.
- ⁵⁹ Between February 2019 to September 2023, 1,687 Data Sign Language Workshops and 95 Data Braille, Orientation and Mobility Workshops have been held.
- ⁶⁰ Recommendations 159, 160, and 162.
- ⁶¹ For example, a programme for senior citizens was organised at PKWE Tutong in 2022 consisting of a legal clinic providing free consultation and legal advice on property management, family matters and criminal offences. The programme was carried out in collaboration with several government agencies.
- ⁶² Health promotion and education programmes constitute basic NCD risk factors health screening such as BMI, blood pressure and glucose check; convening health talks on various elderly health-related issues such as NCDs, fall prevention, and oral health; carrying out hands-on or practical activities such as healthy cooking demonstrations and healthy grocery tours; encouraging physical activities such as the 'Amazing Race', a group activity whereby the elderly complete physical activity sessions within a specific period of time and winners receive prizes, and walkathons.

- ⁶³ The scope of the programme has been expanded to include health promotion and education, training on infection prevention and control during COVID-19, and visits to HPC as part of a health tour.
- ⁶⁴ The HPC conducted a pre-and-post survey on the knowledge on health amongst elderly who participated in the programme.
- ⁶⁵ Recommendations 105, 138, 140, 174, 186, and 214.
- ⁶⁶ *Pusat Pekerjaan Brunei.*
- ⁶⁷ A tripartite platform that links industry, regulators, and educational and training institutions to ensure alignment of supply and demand, with five sectors currently identified: (i) Hospitality and Tourism; (ii) Information and Communication Technology; (iii) Transportation and Logistics; (iv) Energy; and (v) Construction.
- ⁶⁸ A programme that supports local job seekers or employees in the private sector to enhance their skills and academic qualifications through training initiatives such as SkillsPlus, SPIN in Accountancy, and Trade Skills.
- ⁶⁹ A 18-month apprenticeship programme that provides a platform for unemployed graduates (Degree and above, HND and TVET) to gain work experience and on-the-job skills in the public and private sectors. For those undergoing their apprenticeship in the private sector, there are additional benefits in the form of top-up allowances from the 11th month, to boost more interest to join the private sector.
- ⁷⁰ The first phase will only apply to companies within the banking and finance, and infocommunication technology industries.
- ⁷¹ The programmes and courses offered under L3C fall under four pillars, namely Workforce Development, Academic Upgrading, Community Development, and Personal Development.
- ⁷² The assistance is provided to eligible local jobseekers, i-Ready officers, local employees working in the private sector including freelance workers to upskill and reskill themselves by taking programmes and courses that are less than one year offered through L3C.
- ⁷³ These include: the Centre for Lifelong Learning of UBD, Tri-CED of University of Technology Brunei (*Universiti Teknologi Brunei*), Continuous Education and Training of the Institute of Brunei Technical Education, Centre for Leadership and Lifelong Learning of Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (*Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali*).
- ⁷⁴ Recommendations 76 and 107.
- ⁷⁵ Recommendations 27, 115, 116, 129, and 219.
- ⁷⁶ Languages are Malay, English, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Thai, Mandarin, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani.
- ⁷⁷ *Darussakinah.*
- ⁷⁸ ASEAN Chiefs of Police; ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime; ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime; ASEAN Ministerial Meeting of the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and related Transnational Crime.
- ⁷⁹ Recommendations 33, 35, 80, 82, 83, and 84.
- ⁸⁰ AICHR is a consultative body of ASEAN established in 2009 and is tasked to "promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of the peoples of ASEAN".
- ⁸¹ The visit also included meetings with the European Parliament, Council of Europe, and the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe.
- ⁸² 5th Policy Dialogue on Human Rights in Brussels, and 3rd EU-ASEAN Civil Society Forum on Human Rights.
- ⁸³ This is a technical assistance programme provided by Brunei to developing countries of the Commonwealth for their economic and social development. Since 2016, Brunei has held five projects with participants from the Commonwealth small island developing states. The implementation of this programme was suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and is aimed to be resumed this year.
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