



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

Distr.: General  
25 October 2012  
English  
Original: Arabic

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties  
under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of  
All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

**Second and third periodic reports of States Parties**

**Syria\*\*\***

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\* According to information referred to the States Parties on the preparation of their reports, this document was not officially prepared.

\*\* Attachments to this report may be examined in the files of the Secretariat.

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## I. Preface

1. The Syrian Arab Republic, in fulfilment of its obligation concerning international conventions, submits herewith its second and third periodic report on progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It does so despite the difficult circumstances and challenges it is facing after a popular movement that arose in 2011 and made just demands for change and reform was quickly exploited by armed terrorist groups supported and financed by foreign powers. These powers have sought to destabilize families and endanger the security and safety of citizens. As a result, Syria has had to pay a heavy price in lives and property, particularly infrastructure. It was therefore incumbent upon the State to discharge its responsibilities to safeguard the security and lives of its citizens in the face of these groups. The crisis has continued to intensify. Its repercussions have been amplified by political pressure, the economic blockade, unjust sanctions and biased media campaigns. This situation has had and will continue to have adverse effects on the development process and human rights. In such circumstances, women are harmed the most, directly or indirectly.

## II. Introduction

2. The Syrian Arab Republic submitted its first report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 18 of the Convention on 15 September 2005.

3. This document comprises the second and third periodic reports of the Syrian Arab Republic. It was prepared by the Formulation Committee and Supervision Committee, which were formed under Prime Ministerial Decree No. 4907 of 2011 based on the recommendation of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. The Formulation Committee provided all information needed to prepare and formulate the report and to amend it based on the comments it received. The Supervision Committee reviewed the proceedings of the Formulation Committee, which comprised representatives of the following Government and non-governmental bodies: the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Ministry of Local Administration, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Religious Endowments, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Central Bureau of Statistics, Planning and International Cooperation Commission, General Women's Federation and non-governmental organizations (the Association for Women's Role Development and the Nada Association).

4. The Supervision Committee included, in addition to the entities mentioned above, included representatives of the Youth Union, Pioneers Organization, Farmers' Union, General Federation of Workers' Unions and Syrian National Students' Union.

5. The Syrian Arab Republic ratified a number of conventions and protocols on the protection of human rights in the period following the discussion of the first report (see annex 1).

6. The Syrian Arab Republic submitted reservations to articles 20 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Decree No. 12 of 2007 (see annex 2). The Syrian Government's reservations to several articles of the Convention are

the subject of serious study at the governmental and non-governmental level, particularly given that some of these reservations do not conflict with the Syrian Constitution.

7. The Syrian Arab Republic has recently taken major, qualitative steps to implement a comprehensive national reform programme that meets legitimate popular demands, including: an end to the state of emergency (see annex 3); the elimination of the Supreme State Security Court (see annex 4); and the promulgation of a series of laws that entrench democracy and human rights, including the Parties Law (see annex 5), General Elections Law (see annex 6), Local Administration Law (see annex 7) and Media Law (see annex 8). The aforementioned laws are required under Syria's new Constitution (see annex 9), the draft of which was approved in a referendum by a majority of Syria's citizens (89.4 per cent of the 57.4 per cent of the electorate who voted).

8. The completion of the new Constitution is the culmination of the people's struggle on the road to freedom and democracy. The new Constitution embodies the gains that have been achieved and responds to the changes and transformations that have occurred. It is a guide that regulates the Government's path towards the future and the activity of its institutions. It is a source of legislation based on basic principles that entrench independence, sovereignty, the rule of the people based on elections, political and party pluralism, protection of national unity, cultural diversity, general freedoms, human rights, social justice, equality, equal opportunity, citizenship and the rule of law. In addition, Law No. 19 of 2012 on the Combating of Terrorism was issued. The aforementioned law defines terrorist activity and a terrorist organization and covers terrorism financing and the penalties for carrying out or promoting a terrorist act (see annex 10).

9. The laws mentioned above went into effect immediately. Dozens of parties were licensed, including the Solidarity Party, Syrian Democratic Party, Ansar Party, Democratic Vanguard Party, Arab Democratic Solidarity Party, National Development Party, Syrian National Youth Party, National Youth for Justice and Development Party, Syria Homeland Party and Popular Will Party.

10. Elections were also held for local administrations and the People's Assembly. Thirty women were elected to the Assembly. They constitute 12 per cent of the Assembly according to the new Elections Law. A National Media Council was formed under the new Media Law. A number of newspapers and television channels were licensed. Concurrently, the Syrian Government's reform programme is continuing. The Government has issued an earnest call to all Syrians, regardless of their affiliation or political orientation, including the opposition, to join a comprehensive national dialogue as the only way to move beyond Syria's painful crisis and achieve the Syrian people's aspirations. Accordingly, a government was formed with the participation of all political forces, including the national opposition, and two portfolios were added. The first is Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister for Domestic Trade and Consumer Protection, and the second is Minister of State for National Reconciliation Affairs, which has been introduced for the first time in Syria's history.

11. The Syrian Arab Republic, which took part in the founding of the United Nations, is guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations when determining its political stance and pursuing efforts to achieve economic, social and cultural development. It abides by the principles of international law, as international law provides a solid foundation for the observance of human rights.

12. The Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan since 5 June 1967 is a major obstacle to the full exercise by Syrian citizens of the occupied Golan of their social, cultural, economic, political and civil rights.

### **III. Several indicators regarding the Syrian Arab Republic**

#### **A. Demographic indicators**

13. In 2011, Syria's population totalled 24.504 million (49 per cent female) according to statistics of the Civil Register, or 21.124 million (48.9 per cent female) according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The State embraces citizens of various ethnic and religious origins in a constitutional framework of equal rights and duties. The State covers an area of 185,180 square kilometres (since 5 June 1967, Israel has occupied the Golan, which covers an area of 1,260 km<sup>2</sup>; 60 km<sup>2</sup> of the Golan were liberated in the October 1973 War). Syria's territory is divided into 14 governorates. Each governorate is divided into districts that are further divided into subdistricts, which are divided into villages. Syria is situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and is bordered on the north by Turkey, on the east by Iraq, on the south by Palestine and Jordan and on the west by Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea.

14. Syria currently suffers from a demographic imbalance due to the displacement of a large number of inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Golan since 1967, the presence in Syria of about 0.5 million Palestinian refugees following the Israeli occupation of the Arab, Palestinian territories in 1948 and 157,141 Iraqi refugees registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees out of the more than 1.3 million Iraqis who have become refugees since the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, according to the report issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in April 2011. The Syrian view is that the residency of Iraqis in Syria is temporary and that the Palestinians will inevitably return to their country pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions. Syria has acted to protect the indigenous and national rights of the Palestinian and Iraqi refugees in their countries of origin. It has provided the refugees with greater assistance than what they have requested or than what is required under humanitarian law. Syria has permitted the refugees to work in Syria and to maintain their rights and gains. It also provides them with services of all types (education, health, etc.), a humanitarian indicator which few countries can claim.

15. Also, a large number of inhabitants have moved from the northeast region (Jazirah) to the outskirts of Syrian cities due to the low rainfall and drought that have affected the region for a number of consecutive years. Turkey's construction of dams on rivers flowing from Turkish territory into Syrian has caused wells to dry up, which has worsened conditions.

#### **B. Economic indicators**

16. The Syrian Arab Republic embraced economic pluralism in 1970. Under this system, the public, private and mixed sectors all have a role to play in economic and social development. The Syrian Government constantly strives to promote this participative approach and to open the way for greater involvement of the private sector, given the increasingly important role that the private sector plays in the development process.

17. Consistent with global economic trends, Syria is shifting gradually from a command economy to a more open economy based on market mechanisms while continuing to be concerned with the social dimension. It has acted to provide the necessary tools for this shift by updating, amending and enacting relevant legislation and by adopting administrative, institutional and human resources policies providing for the establishment of needed administrative and institutional structures, capacity-building and the simplification of bureaucratic processes.

18. The gradual shift to a social market economy in recent years has helped achieve reasonable growth rates but has not lowered poverty. Nor has it improved the standard of living or bridged development disparities among Syria's various regions. Nonetheless, although the economies of countries that undergo such transitional phases are typically adversely affected, Syria achieved a growth rate of 4.5 per cent during 2006-2010. It had hoped to achieve high growth rates in 2011-2012. However, regional and global circumstances and the economic sanctions imposed on Syria have coalesced to impede the achievement of the hoped-for growth rates. The 2012 Constitution, section 2, article 13, adopts economic pluralism.

19. Economic sanctions have been imposed on the Syrian people for many years. They were significantly expanded in 2011. The sanctions, which are oppressive and incompatible with all international humanitarian conventions and principles, have adversely affected the national economy, causing losses estimated in the billions, including a drop in GDP and a decline in fiscal revenues. The sanctions include:

1. Suspension of transactions with the Central Bank of Syria, Commercial Bank of Syria and public and private banks, including the Syria International Islamic Bank.
2. Suspension of financial transactions with the Syrian Government.
3. Suspension of flights and placement of travel restrictions on Syrian officials.
4. Freezing of the Syrian Government's balances.
5. Suspension of financing for projects in Syria and trade financing.
6. Monitoring and restriction of bank drafts (credits).

20. The economic sanctions have affected the Syrian people, annual economic growth rate, macro economy, micro economy and economic sectors. Moreover, recent acts of sabotage have affected the infrastructure, including buildings, enterprises, electrical installations (towers, poles, generators and power lines), bridges, railways, trains, hospitals and public and private health centres. In addition, many mazut and gas transmission lines have been destroyed, as have post offices, consumer establishments and production sites. Leading scientists have been targeted. Many academic sites, including schools, colleges, universities and educational institutions, have been destroyed or put out of service. Following are several results of these developments.

#### **Decline in exports and imports**

##### *Direct effect on the petroleum sector*

21. Petroleum revenues are the main source for the annual budget. European Union countries, which import more than 90 per cent of Syria's petroleum exports, have not been allowed to import Syrian petroleum under the sanctions, resulting in losses totalling \$2 billion. The sanctions have also affected the Syrian Petroleum

Company's exploration, drilling and conclusion of new contracts as well as the population's daily lives (with respect to heating, cooking gas, etc.).

*Decline in foreign trade in 2011 and 2012*

22. Foreign trade in 2011 and 2012 declined by 44 per cent compared to 2010, particularly with European Union countries, Turkey and several Arab countries.

*Decline in the ability to obtain foreign exchange to finance basic needs*

23. Banks, particularly the Central Bank of Syria and Commercial Bank of Syria, which are the heart and nervous system of the Syrian economy, have been adversely affected by the freezing of Syrian assets in European Union countries and by the absence of transactions, including deposits, transfers, establishment of credits, import financing and the sale and purchase of gold and precious metals, with those countries. The effects of these developments are manifold. With the exception of several goods, the Central Bank has retreated from financing imports, which has clearly shaken the markets. A disparity has emerged between supply and demand. Prices are high and there is a black market for many essential goods, including medicines and medical equipment. These developments have spawned riots, destruction by armed terrorist groups and the following outcomes among others:

1. The spread of psychological and financial panic as many depositors withdraw funds from banks and convert them into other currencies.
2. The suspension of lending, which has adversely affected economic investment and consumer activity.
3. The Syrian pound exchange rate has declined, with the pound losing about half its value.
4. Revenues from tourism, which accounted for 10 per cent of GDP, have fallen due to the declining number of tourists.
5. Investments, particularly foreign investments, have declined.
6. Unemployment has increased from 8.6 per cent in 2010 to 14.9 per cent in 2011. Youthful unemployment in the 15-24 age group rose to 35.8 per cent in 2011 from 20.4 per cent in 2010. The labour force grew by 5.8 million in 2011, compared to 5.5 million in 2010, for an annual growth rate of 5.4 per cent. However, the number employed fell by 105,000 from 5.054 million to 4.949 million, due to the closure of many workshops and factories, a lack of new investments and the withdrawal of a large number of foreign investments.
7. Adverse effects on the securities market. Some studies confirm that the securities market has lost 49 per cent of its value.
8. Activity in the service sector (air, ground and maritime transport and electricity) has declined. Syria began to experience power outages of 8-10 hours daily in late 2011 and early 2012 due to: acts of sabotage carried out by armed terrorist groups and the difficulty in securing and conveying petroleum products needed to operate power stations, due to roadblocks, tanker theft and the economic sanctions imposed on Syria.
9. The decline of the vital air transport sector. The number of flights to and from Syria has dropped. The procurement of spare parts for aircraft and aircraft maintenance are no longer possible. Some countries have suspended flights of their airline companies, and transit traffic has declined.

10. Remittances by Syrian expatriates abroad have declined, particularly as foreign banks have stepped up the blocking of transfers. The official dollar exchange rate differs substantially from the black market dollar exchange rate.

11. Health sector activity has declined due to: the destruction, sabotage and theft of the contents and operating supplies of hospitals and health centres; attacks against ambulances; theft of ambulances; and the obstruction of the work of health and other institutions, due to the difficulty of obtaining supplies under the unjust international sanctions and the inability to transfer money via the banks.

12. A decline in the activity of the agriculture sector due to: the difficulty of procuring production supplies and fertilizers; the inability to procure fodder, 70 per cent of which is imported; and the burning of crops by saboteurs, which has reduced agricultural productivity and yield.

13. A decline in the activity of public and private enterprises and companies that depend on imported production inputs due to the difficulty of importing, establishing credits and executing transfers.

14. A decline in the activity of the public sector, particularly factories and enterprises with foreign contracts, due to the difficulty of importing and exporting, which has led thousands of workshops to shut down and lay off their workers.

### **C. Normative and institutional framework for strengthening and protecting human rights**

#### **The Constitution**

24. Syria's Constitution, issued on 13 March 1973 (see annex 11), is in effect until 26 March 2012. It is the supreme legal regulator of the activity of the various State institutions. In the framework of ongoing reforms in Syria, a legal policy committee was formed to formulate a new constitution for Syria that: guarantees political pluralism, social justice, the rule of law and protection of basic human rights; empowers women; is concerned with youth and children; and defines the duties of citizens based on equality among all. It was in this context that article 2 of the new Constitution, which was approved in a referendum on 26 February 2012 and entered into force on 27 February 2012 (Decree No. 94 of 2012) (see annex 12), was set forth. The new Constitution includes numerous provisions that strengthen and protect human rights, including the rights of women, particularly articles 20, 23, 33 and 34.

#### **Basic mechanisms for protecting human rights**

25. Following is a list of the basic mechanisms for protecting human rights:

- The 1973 Constitution and the new 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic.
- The legislative authority and the judicial authority.
- International conventions

26. International conventions are a basic component of the legislative framework for human rights in Syria. Syria has joined most international conventions on human rights (annex 1 elucidates Syria's status with respect to international conventions in terms of approval, ascension and ratification). It may



thus be affirmed that Syria's domestic laws in this regard do not conflict with the provisions of international conventions. If a domestic law conflicts with the provisions of an international treaty to which Syria is a party, precedence is given to the international treaty, as stipulated in article 25 of the Syrian Civil Code.

*Syrian Commission for Family Affairs*

27. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs was established under Law No. 42 of 20 December 2003 (see annex 13). The Commission is a financially and administratively independent legal entity subordinate to the Prime Minister. Its missions include: protecting the family, strengthening its cohesion, preserving its identity and values, improving various aspects of the standard of living of families, promoting the role of the family in development by fostering the family's interaction with the country's governmental and non-governmental institutions and bodies concerned with the family, cooperating with Arab and international bodies concerned with the family to serve development objectives and recommending and amending legislation on family affairs.

28. Under the law regulating the activity of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, the Commission is the primary body responsible for monitoring, coordinating and following up efforts to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in coordination with the concerned governmental and non-governmental bodies.

*National Committee for International Humanitarian Law*

29. The National Committee for International Humanitarian Law, formed under Prime Ministerial Decree No. 2989 of 2 January 2004, is responsible for overseeing and coordinating national efforts to promote full awareness of international humanitarian law, harmonize national legislation, monitoring human rights violations and deepening knowledge of human rights.

*Department to Combat Human Trafficking*

30. Based on Legislative Decree No. 3 of 2010 Prohibiting Trafficking in Persons (see annex 14), the Minister for the Interior issued Decision No. 505/S on 11 March 2010 establishing the Department to Combat Human Trafficking. The department's functions include recommending public policy and executive programmes for combating trafficking in persons for approval by the Ministry for Interior, preparing and providing a reference database containing data on investigations and statistics, coordinating international cooperation with relevant organizations and counterpart agencies in other countries, etc.

*Organizations and unions that provide protection to their members*

**Special nature of 2011 and the crisis in Syria**

31. First, the tendency of some countries to interfere in Syria's internal and external affairs in various ways is nothing new or unexpected. Rather, it is an ongoing, systematic approach that has existed since the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided a portion of the Arab region into countries based on imaginary borders, and the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which granted Palestine to the Jews and displaced the people of Palestine. The aforementioned countries provide unlimited support to Israel by supporting its aggressive acts and occupation of Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan and the invasion of Lebanon, and by occupying Iraq and currently targeting Syria's security, stability and the safety and interests of its people.

32. In mid-March 2011, peaceful demonstrations espousing just demands for reform were held in several regions of Syria. The Syrian leadership responded to these demands by adopting numerous reform measures. Most of these measures had been approved several years prior to that time. However, the constellation of circumstances that surrounded Syria (the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the crisis of 2005 with the international tribunal and murder of al-Hariri and Israel's war against Lebanon in 2006 and aggression against Gaza in 2008) slowed reform measures. As the Government assiduously worked to achieve the Syrian people's just demands and implement reform measures as quickly as possible, some armed terrorist groups exploited these demands for purposes that are totally at variance with the Syrian people's demands and interests. These groups promoted these demands as a tool to sow discord, undermine security, intimidate citizens, destroy public and private property, abduct, kill and mutilate the bodies of military personnel and civilians, steal food and fuel, prevent food and fuel from reaching certain cities and towns, and destroy infrastructure, including power generation equipment, oil and gas pipelines, railways, transportation assets and public and health service centres and institutions. This was done to weaken the State and create pretexts for dangerous foreign interference in Syria's national security and in the future of Syria and the region.

33. The law enforcement, security forces and army personnel exercised the utmost self-control during this period. They refrained from opening fire on the armed men to avoid hitting innocent civilians. The terrorist groups killed many law enforcement, security and Army personnel, clearly indicating that these groups possess weapons and use them against Syrian law enforcement and security agencies, which are prohibited from using their weapons by order of their command. Some of these incidents were also intended to adversely affect the national economic situation in order to increase political pressure on the State and citizens and to thwart the national agreement on reform.

34. After ascertaining that these armed terrorist groups do not desire reform and are pursuing a path of violence and terrorism, State institutions naturally hastened to respond to citizens' calls to save them from the practices of these groups and to restore public order in the country. This is precisely what occurred in some Syrian regions. Many persons involved in these incidents were detained. The security agencies found in their possession large quantities of advanced weapons that had been smuggled into Syria, including grenades, machine guns and high-tech communication devices. The detainees confessed to the crimes, which they had committed and acknowledged receiving large sums of money in exchange for committing acts that no State can accept or justify, including the murder of demonstrators. The perpetrators then accused the law enforcement forces of committing the murders to mislead world public opinion, incite it against Syria, discredit Syria's image and call for interference in its affairs. The perpetrators sent false reports to satellite television stations in this regard. Those stations made it their primary mission to promote false, misleading news about Syria and conditions in the country (including, for example, the case of Zaynab al-Husni and the massacres of Karm al-Zaytun, Hulah and many others). As a result, many international rights organizations and international news agencies (Amnesty International and Reuters) erred and were subsequently compelled to retract stories and issue apologies. These armed terrorist groups are being dealt with according to the provisions of Syrian law, which harmonize with international law, human rights conventions and the role of the State in protecting private and public property, as would be the case in any State that is subjected to such terrorist attacks.

35. Nonetheless, some States are continuing their illegal, interventionist approach, which targets Syria's stability and safety and the interests of its people. These States are encouraging and supporting religious extremism and terrorism. They are urging armed groups not to lay down their arms but rather to continue to engage in violence and destruction. They are calling on the opposition parties to eschew joining the national dialogue. They are supporting them with money, weapons and training. There are imposing unilateral, coercive, unjust sanctions that are outside the framework of international legitimacy on the Syrian people to pressure the Syrian Government to change its policies and external alliances – policies and alliances which obstruct schemes to redraw the geopolitical map in the region to the benefit of Israeli hegemony. These policies also aim to pressure the Syrian people to thereby affect its will and to force the Syrian people to stage a coup against Syria's political system and legitimate leadership.

36. In addition to the economic losses mentioned above, the human and material losses, whose value is inestimable, as of 31 May 2012, are as follows: 5,120 civilians have been killed; 1,863 civilians have been abducted; 348 females and 156 children have been killed; 4,328 cars have been stolen; and 4,340 reports have been received on the destruction of public and private property. In addition, 681 police officers had been killed as of 8 June 2012, and 3,185 members of the Arab Syrian Army had been killed as of 10 June 2012.

#### **IV. Responses to recommendations contained in the concluding remarks of the Committee**

37. Following are our responses to the recommendations and areas of concern expressed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its thirty-eighth session in 2007.

##### **Response to the recommendation in paragraph 10 of the concluding comments**

38. The concluding comments were sent to all relevant national bodies concerned with the Convention. A number of meetings and workshops were held with members of the People's Assembly to study and collaboratively correct and treat lacunae. Members of the board of directors of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the Report Preparation and Formulation Committee were invited to discuss the comments. We commend and are grateful for the precision and earnestness of the Committee's comments and its concern for work of high calibre in both form and content.

##### **Response to the recommendation in paragraph 12 of the concluding comments**

39. Many bodies continue to review the reservations to the articles stated in the report and comments. These bodies include the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, several ministries, the General Women's Federation and numerous non-governmental organizations. Generally, the prevailing opinion is to uphold the reservations to articles that touch on the cultural and religious identity of Syrian society, in which women enjoy many rights, while continuing to act to improve and upgrade the status of women, strengthen women's participation and empower them to exercise these rights (details are provided in the treatment of the articles of the Convention). Nonetheless, the reservations are a subject of ongoing review and study.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 14 of the concluding comments**

40. Awareness of the Convention differs from one region to another and depends on educational level and interest. It is rare to find someone who is not aware of the right of women to education, protection, work and health, even if such awareness does not stem from the Convention. The concerned governmental and non-governmental bodies have held hundreds of training and introductory seminars and workshops in the governorates to spread awareness of the provisions of the Convention and to strengthen gender equality.

41. As to provisions of the Convention not having been utilized in bringing cases related to discrimination against women before the courts, it can be said that the national laws generally harmonize with the Convention and such cases may be brought before the judiciary under article 25 of the Syrian Civil Code (see annex 15), which permits litigation pursuant to articles of the Convention. We recognize that such use of the provisions of the Convention requires additional efforts to raise awareness (primarily through education), the fostering of economic independence, capacity-building and the use of family and social relationships, which remain an influential force in solving many problems for men and women. Some women's rights stipulated in Syrian law are not exercised due to the influence of customs and traditions.

42. As for programmes to raise awareness and provide training concerning the Convention, particularly regarding direct and indirect discrimination, seminars, courses and workshops are continuing, as is the publication of printed, audio and visual material designed to increase awareness of the Convention on the part of society, particularly women and the parties responsible for achieving equality. These bodies include the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Ministry of Religious Endowments, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health, General Women's Federation, the MAWRED (Modernizing and Activating Women's Role in Economic Development) Foundation, the Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria (FIRDOS) and many non-governmental organizations, whose number is constantly growing. In addition, many political parties and unions incorporate awareness of the Convention in their programmes, operating plans and strategies. This matter requires major ongoing efforts, the allocation of resources and physical and human resources that are sufficiently available.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 16 of the concluding comments**

43. Regarding the Committee's concern that the right to equality between women and men and the prohibition of both indirect and direct discrimination against women are not incorporated in the Constitution or any other law, we reiterate that articles 25, 26, 27 and 45 of the 1973 Constitution speak of male and female citizens without discrimination. In addition, such equality is established in numerous laws, with the exception of a few rare articles that are gradually being amended.

44. The national opinion holds against specifying women's rights separately in a single law inasmuch as such rights are to be found in the concept of citizenship as incorporated in the Constitution and in all laws and legislation. Every woman is entitled to resort to the judiciary to challenge discrimination or gender inequality to which she may be subject.

45. The new Constitution of 2012, article 33, stipulates that citizens shall be equal in rights and duties without discrimination among them on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed. Article 154 of the new Constitution requires that all laws be amended to harmonize with the provisions of the

Constitution within three years. Thus, any legal provision that violates article 33 of the Constitution, which covers discrimination against women, will be amended within that period.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 18 of the concluding comments**

46. The comment in paragraph 17 on the delay in the law reform process is inaccurate, as evidenced by the hundreds of laws that have been issued since 2000. These laws grant women and men the same rights.

47. The Committee mentions bills that have been drafted but not adopted. It must be recognized that some bills, particularly those that directly touch upon the cultural and religious heritage of the country, require the broadest possible input and frequently encounter opposition from several groups, which occasionally impedes the promulgation of such laws.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 20 of the concluding comments**

48. Regarding the preparation of a draft National Plan for the Protection of Women, the Committee expresses concern that the plan does not include specific legislation to criminalize violence against women, including domestic violence, and that the Penal Code condones acts of violence against women. The Committee's comment is inaccurate. Any woman subjected to violence is entitled to resort to the judiciary and to file for a separation (if she is married) for the reasons specified by the law, while retaining all her rights. She is entitled to file a complaint if she is harmed in certain incidents (Penal Code, articles 489-492 and articles 504-507 in section 2 of chapter 7 on Crimes against Morals and Public Morals) (see annex 16). She may resort to professional help and concerned organizations when she is unable to resolve her issues and does not wish to resort to the judiciary. The term "rape" in the context of marriage requires clarification: Marital rape is a hypothetical, uncommon case that is reprehensible from the standpoint of Islamic law and the law. Otherwise, it is an individual, uneducated behaviour or act stemming from the narrow personal characteristics of some husbands, who are unable to determine the psychological or physical state of their wives. Such husbands are few and do not constitute a phenomenon. The General Women's Federation, in collaboration with the concerned governmental and non-governmental bodies, has been preparing a national strategy to fortify women. The strategy was expected to be completed in 2011. However, circumstances in the country have delayed the launch of the strategy, which will occur after the Government approves it.

49. Regarding the exemption of rapists from punishment if they marry their victims, Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011 [article 9] (see annex 17) strengthens the penalties for numerous crimes, e.g., honour crimes, whereby, for example, the provision of article 508 of the Syrian Penal Code, exempting rapists from punishment if they marry their victims, was repealed and replaced by a provision to strengthen the penalty for a rapist to imprisonment of at least two years, even if the perpetrator marries the victim, whereby the perpetrator may only avail of the mitigating circumstance. Moreover, a perpetrator that marries his victim must be retried if he terminates the marriage without legitimate grounds, or a divorce is adjudicated in the interest of the victim within five years of the marriage, including the sentence served by the perpetrator.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 22 of the concluding comments**

50. It is vital to provide shelter to women and girls who are subjected to domestic violence and abuse and have no one to take them in and to see that

justice is done for them. The overwhelming majority of women subjected to violence resort to the family environment to resolve problems; kinship relationships remain important and useful in this regard. In addition, non-governmental organizations and clerics provide advice and guidance to women and girls and foster means of protection and problem-solving. Our culture continues to seek solutions that do not tear a woman away from her family. According to our society's values, tradition and identity, it is more advantageous for a woman not to go to a shelter unless her problems elude our society's means of resolution and justice. The need for shelters in Syria is limited, compared to other societies. There is no consideration in the Committee's comment of the special cultural features of societies in which the magnitude of the need for shelter differs. There are a number of shelters run by non-governmental organizations in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and by the Good Shepherd Order. Efforts to establish new shelters are ongoing.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 24 of the concluding comments**

51. The Committee's comment that the draft law on trafficking in persons treats female victims as criminals and punishes them for prostitution is inaccurate. The Suppression of Prostitution Act No. 10 of 1961 imposes the strongest penalties for facilitating travel abroad to work in prostitution. Decree No. 3 of 11 January 2010 Prohibiting Trafficking in Persons clearly defines trafficking in persons. Articles 14 and 15 of the decree establish the rights of victims. The decree attaches special importance to women and children victims, whom it does not consider criminals. Many major activities have been held in the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Social Affairs and Labour, Religious Endowments and Information, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the General Women's Federation to introduce the law and its benefit for women. Section 4 of the decree provides for care of victims, witness protection and the State's civic responsibility to strengthen protection, care, training and reintegration into society. The decree also provides for the establishment of a specialized Department to Combat Human Trafficking, whose authorities were established with respect to both sexes under Decree No. 505/S of 11 March 2010 of the Ministry of Interior. A national committee comprising all of the relevant bodies was formed to formulate the necessary plan. Also, the first INTERPOL Global Conference on Trafficking in Human Beings was held in Syria in early 2010.

52. The promulgation of this law in Syria meets the needs engendered by multiple factors, including the overwhelming nature of globalization and increasing speed of communications and means of transportation. These factors are promoting the spread of cross-border crime, wars, foreign occupation, aggression and interference in the internal affairs of the country. This has resulted in killing, destruction, pillaging of resources, loss of security and stability, displacement of peoples and the infliction of all types of harm on human beings in general and women in particular, inasmuch as the violation, rape, trafficking and exploitation of prostitution of women accompany all stages of foreign occupation inside and outside the country. Additional factors include: Syria's geopolitical position, which makes it a transit region for fugitives, escapees and refugees; and the increase in demand for foreign domestic workers.

53. The Penal Code strengthens penalties for persons who commit offences against women, children or persons with special needs (art. 8, para. 1). Firms that violate the law are also subject to strengthened penalties of a fine of millions of Syrian pounds and imprisonment of up to 15 years. The Office of the Prime Minister issued Decree No. 108/M of 24 November 2009 to regulate the activity of private firms that recruit non-Syrian female domestic workers and the

conditions and rules for the employment of such workers in Syria. The Ministry of Social Affairs issued Decree No. 1144 of 26 June 2011 to lay out the rules of procedure for facilities that care for human trafficking victims. Syria's anti-trafficking law is one of the best laws in the region, as recognized by international organizations active in this area. The Department to Combat Human Trafficking also engages in significant training and awareness-raising activity in this regard.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 26 of the concluding comments**

54. The Committee expresses its concern about low levels of representation of women in public and political life and in decision-making positions. The representation of women depends on many cultural, political and economic factors. It is not purely an issue of quantity, but also one of quality. Progress has been achieved through the following:

- An increase in the percentage of women in the executive authority from 7 per cent in 2005 to 9 per cent in 2011. In the judiciary authority, a woman assumed the post of Public Prosecutor for the Syrian Arab Republic. She remained in that post until 2009.
- A female judge was appointed to the highest post in the judiciary, that of Public Prosecutor for the Syrian Arab Republic. A woman was also appointed to the post of Attorney General in the governorate of Ladhīqiyah and in Damascus.
- In 2006, a woman was appointed Deputy to the President of the Republic for Cultural Affairs.
- In 2006-2007, a woman was appointed Policy and Media Advisor and another woman was appointed Literary Advisor to the President of the Republic.
- A woman was elected in 2005 to serve as a member of the Regional Command of the Arab Socialist Baath Party (the ruling party). Another woman was elected to the chairmanship of the Audit and Inspection Committee. In 2010, women were elected to head the Dentists Union at the national level, the Artists Union and the Engineers Union. In 2012, a woman was elected to head the Agricultural Engineers Union.
- In the elections for the tenth legislative term of the People's Assembly, women obtained 12 per cent of the seats. This is a decline relative to the large number of female candidates who stood for election for the ninth legislative term. This decline may stem from the decline in the percentage of women voters due to current events in Syria.
- The number of women at the helm of political parties rose from one to three.

55. The political role of women is expected to grow in 2012 and 2013, particularly following the promulgation of the Parties Law and the Elections Law. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, General Women's Federation and United Nations Development Fund for Women cooperated to provide training for more than 480 women on the mechanisms for nomination, election, preparation of electoral programmes and ways for communicating with the public.

56. The obstacles precluding a high level of representation for women in public life stem primarily from the prevailing patriarchal culture and stereotypes about the roles and burdens which women are generally compelled to assume, which limits their active participation in public life.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 20 of the concluding comments**

57. Since 2000, education has undergone changes at all levels. Many concepts have been introduced regarding the environment, law, health, population, equality, justice and human rights. Curriculum changes have been made over the years, including limiting negative stereotypes about the roles and responsibilities of women and men. These changes are designed to encourage women to engage in public affairs. They show the importance of shared decision-making concerning marriage, reproduction and medical treatment and the importance for women of obtaining an education and employment and actively contributing to the development process and national renaissance.

58. Regarding family roles, women generally bear the burdens inside the family, handling daily tasks and activities and bearing and raising children. However, this image is not absolute. Women are being educated and employed. They help bear the burden of materially supporting their families. This has compelled husbands and sons to play a cooperative role, which differs from one family and region to another. Such sharing will continue as long as employment opportunities for women continue to grow amid academic empowerment, technological developments and child-rearing concepts that take into account the family's full sharing of the burdens of managing the family's affairs.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 30 of the concluding comments**

59. Regarding recommendation to improve primary health-care services for women, such services are constantly being developed, as reflected in the opening of many health centres in districts, villages and neighbourhoods and in the training of workers and expansion of counselling offices. Particularly noteworthy, is the rural community's awareness of the importance of health care, family planning, pregnancy care, safe delivery and breastfeeding.

60. The lack of access mentioned in the Committee's comment has its risks. This inadequacy is limited geographically to sparsely populated, generally rural areas that are distant from the city and district centres in the governorates of Hasakah, Dayr al-Zawr, Raqqah and Aleppo. The State is moving to provide these areas with more quality programmes. The achievement of universal coverage requires considerable material and human resources. However, it is increasingly difficult to provide such resources given Syria's limited resources and economic crises, particularly under the sanctions and economic blockade imposed on Syria.

61. A married couple jointly decides whether to reproduce. The couple agrees on the number and spacing of children and birth control. In Syrian society, the institution of the family and life itself is a consensual partnership. It is not desirable for one partner to act separately or to dominate or control the other partner. Accordingly, Syrian society differs from many other societies with respect to the culture and concept of the family.

**Response to the recommendation in paragraph 32 of the concluding comments**

62. Regarding the labour market and wage gap between men and women mentioned in the Committee's comments, absolutely no law mentions or permits a lower salary or wage for a woman. Salaries and wages depend on academic qualifications and experience. There are rules and conditions that apply to both sexes. Equal employment opportunities are available on a competitive basis. Wages are equal and depend on grade, education and experience. Because women in the 25-45 age group are occupied with their reproductive role, they are excluded from many qualification and training opportunities, hence



opportunities for promotion and increases in wages and benefits. Nonetheless, this picture is relative and not absolute.

63. Labour Law No. 17 of 2010 (see annex 18) affirms the need for social security. Article 93 (m) of the law requires an employer to register all workers, both male and female, for social security. A field study conducted by the General Women's Federation in cooperation with labourers, farmers and tradesmen shows that 96 per cent of female Syrian workers are registered for social security. Of this group, 88 per cent are in the public sector and 12 per cent are in the informal sector. In the private sector, a number of workers of both sexes was laid off in 2011 due to the sanctions and unjust blockade imposed by countries calling for democracy and respect for human rights.

64. The Committee expresses concern that the labour laws do not prohibit sexual harassment. However, the reality is otherwise. Sexual harassment is a punishable act wherever it occurs, including the work place. Any complaint in this regard results in punishment of the perpetrator. The reticence to bring legal action against a harasser is attributed to the prevailing culture and the social consequences of alleging sexual harassment. However, this has not precluded numerous cases of resort to the judiciary and punishment of perpetrators of sexual harassment. Law No. 17 of 2010 (art. 64, para. 7) explicitly provides for the protection of working women from harassment of various types. The Syrian Penal Code (arts. 510 and 511 in particular) also criminalizes harassment in all fields.

#### **Response to the recommendation in paragraph 34 of the concluding comments**

65. The Personal Status Law in Syria guarantees many rights. What are needed are knowledge and the ability to exercise these rights. The Personal Status Law harmonizes with the country's Constitution with respect to freedom of faith based on social and cultural diversity for all religious denominations and sects for both males and females. Some articles of the law are derived from religious texts which are quite difficult to amend in a conservative, largely religious society. While international conventions supersede national laws, they do not supersede divine law and what it stipulates in this regard.

#### **Response to the recommendation in paragraph 36 of the concluding comments**

66. A law on private associations and organizations is in the process of being promulgated. A national committee formulated a draft law over a period of more than five years. The draft law, designated the "Law on Non-Governmental Organizations", was then posted on participatory electronic sites to allow any interested party to suggest modifications of the draft, which was then approved by the Office of the Prime Minister. Hence, major activity in this regard actually started in 2002, as evidenced by the growth in the number of associations to more than 1,406 and by dozens of licence applications under review.

## **V. National body concerned with monitoring all Convention issues and other tasks**

### **Syrian Commission for Family Affairs**

#### **Research and reports**

67. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in cooperation with stakeholders, conducted a number of studies and research, in Arabic, including:

- A draft “National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, 2006-2010”, prepared in cooperation the General Women’s Federation and a number of governmental and non-governmental bodies;
- A study on “Syria’s reservations to the Convention from the standpoint of Islamic jurisprudence”, 2007;
- A study on “Women’s health empowerment and obstacles thereto”, 2007. The study was conducted by female stakeholders and activists in women’s issues. A key strength of the study is its application of a new research methodology based on confidential in-depth interviews and focus groups. This approach made it possible to ascertain key dimensions and aspects of women’s empowerment in general and women’s health empowerment in particular;
- “The attitude of women on family planning issues”, 2007. This study is based on a sample of nearly 10,000 married women of reproductive age in rural and urban areas in different governorates of Syria. It seeks to define contraceptive use patterns. It describes women’s understanding of contraception and explores impediments to the use of contraceptives;
- “Syrian family opinion survey on living conditions under the economic-social reforms”, 2007. This study seeks to ascertain the current economic, health and educational living conditions of Syrian families and how economic and social reforms have affected these conditions;
- “Quantitative study on domestic violence”, 2008. For this study, a complete database was constructed on the magnitude, prevalence, methods, manifestations and different causes and effects of domestic violence against women in Syrian society; the family environment’s association with violent behaviour against women; and reactions of battered women;
- “Empowerment of women to obtain civil services, and support of the capacities of public institutions that provide services to women”, 2008. This study examines services provided to women in three countries, including Syria. It evaluates services and presents recommendations for upgrading them. The study was conducted in cooperation with the Centre for Arab Woman for Training and Research (CAWTAR);
- “National Strategy to Support Syrian Youth”, 2008. A quantitative study conducted in 14 Syrian governorates based on a sample of 6,000 young men and women representing rural and urban areas and both sexes. A qualitative study was conducted in three regions comprising all Syrian governorates. In 2008, an in-depth analysis of the data provided by the quantitative and qualitative studies was conducted to shed light on five topics, each relating to youth: general and reproductive health, education, living conditions, gender equality and community participation;
- A study entitled “Towards the political empowerment of Syrian women” was conducted in cooperation with the United Nations Development Fund for Women. Topics included women and political development in Syria, elections for the recent legislative term, obstacles to increase in women’s participation in parliament, ways to surmount these obstacles and the outlook for the future;
- “The empowerment of women from the standpoint of Islamic jurisprudence”, 2008. The study systematically reconciles the national demands of Syrian women with the aims of Islamic law. It demonstrates that Syrian women can obtain their full rights and legitimate demands in

the framework of Islamic law based on the guidance of the noble Koran and honourable Sunna of the Prophet;

- A study on “The abuse of children in Syria”, 2008 concerned with different forms of abuse to which children are subject, e.g., physical violence, psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect;
- First and second national reports on the status of the population of Syria in 2008 and 2010, entitled “Opening the demographic window: challenges and opportunities”;
- Publication of a book on Syrian women in 2009 to honour outstanding, innovative Syrian women who have left their mark on women’s culture;
- National Report of the Syrian Arab Republic on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+15), 2000;
- A study on “The conditions and needs of the elderly in Government-licensed social care facilities in Syria”, 2010 provides precise data on the conditions and needs of the elderly in social care facilities located in most Syrian governorates. It also treats the conditions of care providers employed in these facilities and the condition of the facilities themselves;
- A study on “The situation and needs of the elderly and mechanisms for improving their conditions”, 2010 examines the situation of the elderly and social and economic conditions in Syrian society. Based on the results of a field study, areas of future activity were determined and a programme was formulated to promote quality services and care for the elderly;
- Preparation of a “Code for the elderly”, 2010 was done to compare the legal status of the elderly in Syria to the status of the elderly under international conventions ratified by Syria, with a view to addressing legislative lacunae, if any, consistent with the State’s protection and care for the elderly and infirm;
- The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs also prepares an *Elderly Care Guide* that covers social, psychological, health and legal aspects. It is intended to enhance awareness of the issues of the elderly, particularly elderly women;
- A study on “The use of contraceptives in the governorate of Idlib”, 2010. The study determines the extent to which the husbands and wives use contraceptives. It examines the reasons for prior and current refrainment from the use of contraceptives by husbands and wives in the studied villages and ascertains the subjects’ information sources;
- An in-depth, qualitative study on “Violence against women”, 2010 that traces the causes of violence against women in the home and society in an in-depth manner through a case study and focus groups;
- Preparation of an executive matrix of projects that incorporate gender issues and strengthen gender equality in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, 2010. A workshop was held with stakeholders to discuss these projects, which were subsequently included in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2011-2015);
- A study on “Legal frameworks pertaining to the Syrian family”, 2010, conducted with a view to creating a legislative, social and cultural system that supports women and the entire family;

- A study on “The role of men in reproductive health”, 2011 that seeks to shed light on the role of men in reproductive health issues, particularly issues relating to family planning;
- Preparation and discussion of the third and fourth combined reports of the Syrian Arab Republic on its implementation of the provisions of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- *Guide for Persons Approaching Marriage*, 2011, providing scientific information to educate Syrian youth about the decision to marry and its repercussions. It also deals with the duties, rights and responsibilities of which youth should be aware when they undertake marriage.

68. Most of the aforementioned studies were released in workshops in which many governmental and non-governmental bodies participated. The workshops discussed the results of the studies which were also released to the public and presented on radio and television programmes, in the press and on the electronic site of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs.

69. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs also completed, in cooperation with UNICEF, a *Guide to Early Childhood Development and Care*, which is a comprehensive training manual that treats early childhood development issues and topics. The guide contains sections on the family, teachers, non-family alternate care providers and information specialists, programmers and planners concerned with very young children.

#### **Protection of the family from violence**

70. The work begun in 2007 to establish a Family Protection Unit continues. The building assigned to the unit is being renovated and a legal instrument for the unit’s operation has been issued. The unit will receive and investigate complaints of the abuse of children, women and men and will refer cases to the competent authorities for handling. The Commission is training a group of workers with multiple specialties to work in the Family Protection Unit, including officers, judges, health workers, social affairs workers, psychologists and social workers. They will receive a Childhood Protection Specialist Diploma. In 2011, a Family Protection Master’s Degree was introduced by the Higher Institute for Demographic Studies and Research, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Higher Education.

71. A National Observatory for Domestic Violence was established in 2010 and a system has been instituted to link domestic violence surveillance points in hospitals, police departments and non-governmental organizations to a centralized database created in the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. This will enable the surveillance points to record cases of violence that come to their attention. Training courses have also been organized for the personnel operating the surveillance points in the participating bodies to familiarize them with the concept of domestic violence, raise their awareness of the importance of surveillance of domestic violence and other forms of violence and train the personal in filling out the necessary forms.

#### **Workshops, conferences and meetings**

72. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in cooperation with local administrations and the General Women’s Federation, trained 420 women from various governmental, non-governmental and private bodies on political empowerment machineries with the support of the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The training, which was provided in all Syrian governorates

during 2006-2008, was designed to increase the participation of women in the upcoming elections for the People's Assembly and local administrations. This activity falls under the efforts of the United Nations Development Fund for Women to promote the political empowerment of Arab women in the framework of a regional project involving Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq. The project aims to enhance the capacities of Arab female parliamentarians to bring about change through their participation in political activities.

73. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs also helped organize activities concerning domestic violence in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, Damascus University, Aleppo University and the Institute of Legal Medicine, University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf during 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. These seminars were interspersed with specialized lectures and workshops on medical, legal, social-educational, and psychological and media topics.

74. Since 2007, The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs has organized a Women's March for Peace to shed light on key issues relating to land, women and children. The main goal of the marches is to spread peace and love among different peoples.

75. A conference on Women in Public Life was held in 2007 in cooperation with the Arab Women's Organization and the Middle East Research Programme. The discussion centred on methodologies for treating women's issues in research and in national and international reports, the political participation of women, women between religious discourse and women's movements, economic participation and violence against women.

76. A conference was also held on the Effect of Wars and Armed Conflicts on the Arab Family in 2007, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information and the League of Arab States (Department of Family and Childhood). During the conference, various Arab countries presented papers on: the economic, psychological and social effects of wars and armed conflicts; international conventions; and civilians in wars and conflicts.

77. A workshop was held on the fact-finding tour of centres for the protection of women from violence in Turkey that was undertaken in 2007. During the workshop, lessons derived from the tour and available resources were analysed and proposals were defined and presented.

78. The first National Meeting on Honour Crimes was held in 2008 to discuss honour crime issues from legal, religious, social and economic perspectives. It produced recommendations that were submitted to various executive and legislative bodies. Article 548 of the Penal Code was amended to repeal the permitted circumstance and to increase to five years the minimum penalty for an honour crime committed in the mitigating circumstance of adultery committed in flagrante delicto (Decree No. 1 of 2011).

79. A meeting concerning "The Syrian and Turkish Woman" was held in 2008 under the slogan, "Towards development of the social role of women". The conference underscored the need to develop joint efforts to promote and implement laws on policies for strengthening gender equality and to conduct comparative studies of current legal standards in Syria and Turkey and the mechanisms for enforcing them.

80. The second international conference on "The Law and Women" was held in 2009. The conference recommended continued support of the efforts of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs to protect the family and amend legislation.

81. The Arab Adolescents Forum was hosted in 2010 to prepare for the Fourth Arab High-Level Conference on the Rights of the Child. Training workshops were held for facilitators participating in the forum. The facilitators were familiarized with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the two Optional Protocols to that Convention and the second Arab Action Plan for Childhood. The forum formulated key recommendations that have been incorporated in the resolutions of the Fourth High-Level Arab Conference for Childhood held in Morocco.

82. A Committee to Strengthen Gender Inequality, comprising governmental and non-governmental bodies, was formed in 2010. The Committee coordinates all bodies active in women's issues, collaborates in building a database on women and reviews the executive plan for the incorporation of gender equality in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. The Committee has held periodic meetings.

83. A workshop on the "Role of Parliamentarians in Promoting Youth Activity in Society" was held in 2010, in cooperation with the People's Assembly to present and discuss the results of five in-depth studies on youth that are based on the data of the quantitative and qualitative studies conducted by the Commission.

#### **Capacity-building and awareness-raising**

84. Seminars, workshops and lectures were held on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 2008.

85. A group of social workers was trained by the Family Protection Unit team and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Damascus on methods for protecting women from violence in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2008.

86. As part of the Project for Building and Enhancing the Capacities of Media Workers Concerning the Family, media workers were trained in 2008 in gender equality, violence against women and the Convention in cooperation with ESCWA.

87. Training courses were held on the dissemination of reproductive health concepts in the northeast region, in cooperation with Centre of Arab Woman for Training and Research in 2008 to train health and social workers in the northeast region to serve as trainers in the dissemination of reproductive health concepts in their fieldwork during 2008-2009.

88. Courses were held in 2009 on gender equality analysis and measurement, in cooperation with ESCWA, to build capacities and enable male and female workers in different ministries and concerned bodies to incorporate gender equality in plans and policies based on knowledge of a set of techniques for measuring indicators and statistics, which they are required use to analyse gender equality systematically, with a focus on applied aspects, particularly statistics, measurement of indicators and analysis of results.

89. Training courses were held in 2009 on gender equality, violence against women and the Convention for media workers and attorneys in the northeast region. The courses were designed to strengthen media workers' knowledge of laws protecting women from violence, international conventions and treaties concerning the rights and duties of battered women and the Convention. This was done to encourage media workers to support women in their struggle against discrimination-based violence and to help raise the topic of violence in all fields.

90. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs collaborated with the Ministry of Information and other bodies in a family planning awareness-raising

campaign under the slogan “If mom is fine, all of us are fine” in the north-eastern areas (Dayr al-Zawr, Aleppo and Idlib).

91. An agreement was signed between the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture (Rural Women Empowerment Department) in the framework of the Commission’s preparation of a population policy programme and implementation of targeted programmes that include three components: education, training and employment, and reproductive health. Under these programmes, activities will be implemented in the target areas to build capacities, raise awareness and grant loans to women in rural families in selected governorates.

92. In 2009-2010, many bodies participated in tours of Turkey and Tunisia to study the experiences of those countries regarding gender equality promotion, the media’s role in family planning and support for population policies.

93. Training courses on population issues were held in 2010 for a group of youth to prepare a team of youth trainers capable of raising the awareness of university students and non-university youth regarding key population issues.

94. Courses were held in 2010 to prepare trainers on “tools for incorporating men in the struggle against violence against women” in cooperation with the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East to develop the skills of organizations and institutions in using methods and approaches for efforts by both males and females to eliminate violence against women, taking into account the positive role of men in opposing domestic violence.

95. Campaigns to raise awareness and build capacities in the area of women’s rights were organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Endowments, Ministry of Information, People’s Assembly and Lawyers Union. In addition, 14 workshops were held in all Syrian governorates to raise public awareness about the empowerment of women and the Convention.

96. Training courses on children’s rights machineries were held in collaboration between the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the Geneva Institute for Human Rights. The third session was held in Geneva with the participation of representatives from governmental and non-governmental bodies.

97. The Commission sponsors a weekly television discussion programme on population policy topics and social and family issues (population growth, population policy, early marriage, marriage to relatives, girls’ education, working women, etc.). In addition, a number of media productions (films, songs, media spots, cartoons, posters, etc.) on the rights of women and children were produced and broadcast repeatedly on different occasions.

98. Training courses on women’s rights protection machineries were held in cooperation with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights in 2010. Representatives of governmental and non-governmental bodies active in women’s issues attended two courses in Damascus and a third course in Geneva. The courses were designed to build national capacities for preparing Syria’s national report on the Convention.

99. The Syrian Trust for Development collaborated with the Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria (FIRDOS) on a campaign to encourage reading in designated rural areas. Workshops were held to train facilitators and librarians in reading club activity. A number of interactive reading, mobile cinema and storytelling sessions were held. Two workshops were held in 2010 in the governorate of Aleppo, one entitled “The Culture of Persons with Disabilities” and the other “Other Voices of the City”.

100. A course was held to provide gender equality and fairness training for faculty members in the colleges of education, economics, political science and literature/sociology department, law, Islamic law and medicine. The course was designed to promote the communication of gender equality concepts to the largest segment of society possible through lectures by university professors and encouragement of students to treat gender equality issues in their research.

101. Training courses were held in cooperation with the Centre of Arab Woman for Training and Research (CAWTAR) on strengthening the capacities of providers of care and health and legal services to women. The courses were designed to prepare a national team comprising members from all concerned ministries and non-governmental organizations active in this field. CAWTAR experts in Tunisia conducted the training. Two trainees were sent on a mission to attend a specialized course in Tunisia.

102. Media campaigns were launched to raise awareness of women's, children's and population issues. Over a number of years, national campaigns were held on the International Day of Families, and ceremonies were held on International Women's Day in many governorates.

## **VI. Articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

### **Articles 1-3**

#### **Legislative and legal framework**

103. Syrian's 1973 Constitution provides for gender equality and makes no gender distinction regarding rights and duties and the exercise of freedoms. Moreover, it affirms in a number of places the rights of women in all realms of political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, including in articles 25, 26, 27 and 45, which were mentioned in the first report. Moreover, Syria's national laws, policies and programmes contain no form of discrimination between men and women, as affirmed by laws recently promulgated in Syria, e.g., Labour Law No. 17 issued in 2010, which regulates the rights of workers and labour relations in the private, cooperative and joints sectors; the Parties Law<sup>1</sup> promulgated in 2011; the Elections Law<sup>2</sup> promulgated in 2011; the Media Law;<sup>3</sup> and the Local Administration Law.<sup>4</sup> All these laws guarantee women the right to work and equality with men. Syria's efforts in this regard have crystallized in dozens of legislative developments which are treated below, including the issuance of Legislative Decree No. 37 of 2009 (see annex 19), which repeals the permitted circumstance in article 548 of the Penal Code, under which circumstance punishment is waived in an offence of homicide and battery [committed by a person who surprises his wife, an ascendant, a descendent, or a sister in the offence of adultery or adulterous sexual relations with another person in flagrante delicto and sets five to seven years as the minimum term of punishment for the offence of homicide in the aforementioned case (mitigating circumstance).

104. Article 33 of the new Constitution of 2012 stipulates the equality of citizens without discrimination. Articles 20, 22 and 23 guarantee the rights of

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 100 of 8 March 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 101 of 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 108 of 23 August 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 107 of 22 August 2011.



the family and women in particular. Articles 29, 30 and 31 guarantee the right to education and health and provide for: the State's supervision of private educational institutions; the right to prepare a generation that is physically, morally and intellectually fit; and the State's support of scientific research and all requirements thereof. Articles 33, 34, 36, 40, 42 and 43 cover rights and duties, the right to freedom, the right to participate in public life, the right to work and freedom of belief and the press.

### **Obstacles**

105. The obstacles consist of the following:

- The mechanism for amending laws remains slow because the laws to be amended affect large segments of society. To ensure a participatory process, numerous bodies must express their opinions about amendments before the amendments are submitted to the legislative branch.
- Women lack knowledge of many of their rights, as reflected in their failure to exercise many rights, including political, economic, cultural and intellectual rights.
- The persistence of negative customs and traditions that marginalize the efforts of limited segments of women in certain areas.
- The intensity of the burdens on women inside and outside the family. Women perform many roles – reproductive, child-rearing, organizational, social, political and economic – which limits their ability to participate in public life and exercise all their rights.

### **Envisaged measures**

106. Envisaged measures include the following:

- Continued vertical and horizontal action to amend legislation, enable women to exercise their rights, develop executive machineries and train cadres, including parliamentarians, judges, lawyers, media workers, counsellors and advocates, concerned with action in this regard.
- Efforts to: demonstrate the extensive development effort made by women, whether in fortifying the family and improving the family's resources or in developing and promoting society; expand the participation of women in various spheres of public life; enhance legal awareness; and conduct ongoing training to strengthen the development capacities of women.
- More seminars and courses to provide additional knowledge and expertise to women who hold legislative, executive, judicial, media, religious and educational decision-making positions.
- Continued action to enhance awareness of specialized cadres and train them to defend women's issues. A number of bodies have held workshops for this purpose, including a workshop held in 2009 as part of a "Project to Strengthen the Institutional Capacities of Governmental and Non-governmental Organizations to Incorporate Gender-Based Violence in National Strategies and Plans". The Ministry of Information and the United Nations Population Fund collaborated in holding this workshop, which covered benefits for formulating media messages for television producers. The topics included:
  - o The concept of gender equality and fairness in the media.
  - o The general concept of reproductive health in the media.

- Continued holding of workshops for scenario writers and programme producers on methods for treating women's issues in drama and preparing radio shorts entitled "family planning". The goal of these activities is to promote the role of the media and media workers in spreading awareness by communicating positive, effective messages, which is a major responsibility and key role that complements the role of all other social, cultural and economic institutions.

107. A minimum of 50 per cent of all female media workers have participated in all of the aforementioned training workshops. In addition to the official and private media, there are print, audio and visual media belonging to popular organizations and professional unions. Many of the series, periodicals and publications which they produce are devoted to covering this type of activity. These organizations include the General Women's Federation, workers, youth, students, tradesmen, farmers, the Writers' Union, the Journalists' Union, the Teachers' Union, lawyers, engineers and physicians.

108. The activities implemented in meetings, courses and seminars and the films and exhibitions about the development efforts of women illuminate vulnerabilities and obstacles affecting the advancement of women, thereby helping to eliminate injustices against women wherever they are. They also highlight the stature, capabilities and active presence of Syrian Arab women.

109. Syria's reservation to article 2 does not preclude the Syrian Government's continued study of the status of women based on either the retention or withdrawal of the reservation. Intensive efforts will continue to achieve the greatest measure of women's rights, eliminate injustice to women and integrate the provisions of the Convention with legislation and laws to that end. When the Syrian Government deems that the withdrawal of its reservation achieves a greater interest than the interest achieved by maintaining its reservation, it will pursue what is most beneficial.

#### **Laws and decrees issued during 2006-2011**

110. The following laws and decrees have been issued:

1. Catholic Personal Status Law No. 31 of 2006 (see annex 20).
2. Legislative Decree No. 12 of 2007 on the Withdrawal of the State's Reservations to Articles 20 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3. Trade Law of 2007 (see annex 21), under which a woman enjoys the full right to engage in commercial activity of all types upon reaching the age of 18 years without being required to obtain a licence or permission from anyone.
4. Law on the Regulation of Legal Procedures of 2007, which ensures convenience for citizens and facilitates the conduct of transactions.
5. Review of penalties with respect to duration and compensation consistent with the reality of life, 2009.
6. Repeal of the permitted circumstance in article 548 of the Penal Code concerning honour crimes and increase in the prison term adjudicated where there is a mitigating circumstance under Law No. 37 of 2009. Civil society played a prominent role in galvanizing public opinion to regard a crime motivated by honour as a regular crime of homicide even before the issuance of the decree repealing the article.

7. Law No.17 of 2010 Regulating Labour in the Private Sector.
8. Law No. 62 of 2011 to grant temporary workers permanent employment; 120,000 males and females benefited from this law (see annex 22).
9. Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011, which strengthens penalties for crimes, such as honour crimes. For example, the provision of article 508 of the Syrian Penal Code exempting rapists from punishment if they marry their victims was repealed and replaced by a provision to strengthen the minimum penalty for a rapist, even if the perpetrator marries the victim, whereby the perpetrator of the act may avail of the mitigating circumstance and is subject to imprisonment of at least two years. A perpetrator who marries his victim must be retried if he terminates the marriage without legitimate grounds, or if a divorce is adjudicated in the interest of the victim within five years of the marriage, including the sentence served by the perpetrator.
10. Legislative Decree No. 161 of 2011 Ending the State of Emergency.
11. Legislative Decree No. 54 of 2011 Regulating the Right to Peaceful Demonstration (see annex 23).
12. Legislative Decree No. 49 of 2011 (see annex 24), which grants nationality to Syrian Kurds. More than 69,014 persons, including a significant number of females, have obtained the right to nationality and a national identity card as of end-March 2012.
13. Legislative Decree No. 100 of 2011 (Parties Law) and Legislative Decree No. 101 of 2011 (Elections Law) were issued to strengthen the democratic edifice, general freedoms and participation of all segments of society, including women, in the administration of State institutions and building of the country. Under article 4 of the Elections Law, all Syrian citizens, male and female, who have reached the age of 18 years enjoy the right to vote.
14. Legislative Decree No. 107 of 2011, which includes the Local Administration Law, intended to respond to economic, social and service developments and provide quality services to all citizens, including women.
15. The Media Law pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 108 of 23 August 2011.
16. The new Constitution of 2012.
17. Law No. 19 of 2012 on Combating Terrorism, which defines a terrorist act, a terrorist organization and terrorism financing and stipulates penalties for committing or promoting a terrorist act.

#### **Article 4. Temporary special measures**

111. Syria's national plans and policies include what is required to promote the role of women and to place women on a par with men with respect to rights and duties. The Tenth Five-Year Plan devoted a full section to the economic, social and political empowerment of women to ensure women's effective participation in the societal development process. This occurred in response to the ambitions of organizations and bodies active in the area of strengthening women's capacities. After the plan was evaluated, incorporation of the empowerment of women in all fields was approved, though not in a special section. Moreover,

such empowerment also appears in the plans and budgets of all agencies with respect to training, promotion, missions, appointments to posts, elimination of all forms of gender discrimination and treatment on the basis of full citizenship with respect to rights and duties.

#### **De facto situation**

112. The role of the business women committees in the Chamber of Industry and Chamber of Commerce has been strengthened. The bylaws of these committees have been completed and women freely select their leaders. Women have participated in many international conferences and regional activities. National meetings have been held concerning support for the renaissance in Syria. This is in addition to strengthening networking among businesswomen and female skilled labourers, job creation, support for small household enterprises in some governorates and the holding of periodic exhibitions. These measures have been transformed into operating plans and permanent projects.

113. The Ministry of Agriculture has granted soft loans to more than 20,000 rural women and girls over the past five years as a preliminary measure to establish the capacity of women to manage, expand and diversify projects with a view to the adoption of this formula by the Government and by popular and non-governmental organizations.

114. The benefits granted to the private sector under Labour Law No. 17 of 2010 are an administrative measure that differs from one employer to another.

115. Special courses have been held for women in all locations and fields, particularly on technical subjects and language learning. Students at universities and colleges have also been permitted to transfer temporarily from one university to another, due to the circumstances in Syria in 2011 and concern for their future. At least 40 per cent of these students are female.

#### **Obstacles**

116. The obstacles consist of the following:

1. There are difficulties in adopting temporary measures to boost the number of women in decision-making positions or assigned major tasks. For example, there may be a shortage of qualified personnel or a desire to employ persons with certain capabilities and specific specialties. This requires corrective action at times, perseverance at other times or a retreat from this measure when it proves unfeasible.
2. Women bear heavy burdens in the family and society.
3. The material resources needed to train women to engage in the democratic process, which is open to both sexes without restriction, are sparse.

### **Article 5. Behavioural and social patterns of men and women**

#### **Legislative and legal framework**

117. The following laws and legislation regulate behavioural and social patterns:

- Article 33 of the new 2012 Constitution provides for the following:
  - o Freedom shall be a sacred right and the State shall guarantee the personal freedom of citizens and preserve their dignity and security;

- o Citizenship shall be a fundamental principle which involves rights and duties enjoyed by every citizen and exercised according to law;
- o Citizens shall be equal in rights and duties without discrimination on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed;
- o The State shall guarantee the principle of equal opportunities among citizens;
- Article 42 of the new 2012 Constitution states that every citizen has the right to freely and openly express his views whether in writing, orally or by all other means of expression.
- Article 43 of the new 2012 Constitution, under which the State guarantees freedom of the press, printing and publishing and the media and the independence of the media in accordance with the law.
- Media Law No. 108 of 2011 and the High National Media Council.

### **De facto situation**

118. The performance of the media has developed with respect to all national issues, presenting a shining picture of the structure of Syrian society in terms of:

- Moral values that testify to Syria's civilization, which is over 10,000 years old.
- Guaranteed right to freedom of expression and the right to hold positions and participate in parties and associations.
- Existence of an official and private print, audio and visual media.
- Complete equal opportunity for men and women regarding training, employment, promotion, wages, leave, missions and participation in delegations.
- Growth of the role of women in media decision-making positions (writers, journalists, producers, actors, programme preparers and scenario writers).
- Humanitarian dimension embodied by Syria as the cradle of religion.
- Family solidarity and national cohesion produced by the totality of the social and cultural diversity that characterizes and enriches Syrian society.
- Complementary roles of men and women, which redound to the family, which is society's basic unit, thereby ensuring the exercise of rights and performance of duties.

119. Ideological and cultural practice is constant and intractable. When necessary, the alteration or modification of a behavioural pattern requires efforts extending over many years. Many intergenerational, customary behaviours can be attributed to the patriarchal social system (which is present in many societies). Nonetheless, cohesion and cooperation within the family, the rule of mercy, tranquillity, great respect, kindness to the small, tolerance and altruism are values of which we are proud and which form our national identity. Syria has focused on preparing directed media messages designed to change negative stereotypes concerning the roles of women. These roles are treated in weekly television dramas concerning women's issues that address violence against women, the adverse effects of early marriage, reproductive health, the role of men in supporting women's issues, family planning methods, women's participation in societal development and images of creative women in the home and workplace. These programmes include, for example:

- *The Other Half*.
- *The Red Line* (the name of which was changed to *Hamzat al-Wasl [The Link]* starting in 2011), which is sponsored by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs.
- *Let's Talk Frankly*.
- *The Nun Programme*.
- *The One Half of Society Programme*.
- *Under the Light*.
- *Working Mothers*.
- *Golan Mothers*.

In addition, the following publications concerned women's issues:

- *For You*, a twice weekly radio and television programme prepared by the General Women's Federation.
- The monthly *Arab Woman* periodical published by the General Women's Federation since 1967. Both men and women contribute rich, integrative content that strengthens and embodies equality.
- The *Family and Population* periodical published by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Information.

120. Attention is devoted to family education through direct communication, seminars, courses and meetings that seek to reinforce the individual's abilities and successes. Gender discrimination and previous negative stereotypes of women and men are avoided. An effort is made to encourage athletic, musical and literary talent and to inspire women to follow the example of other women who work as aircraft and ship pilots, tractor drivers, electrical shop workers and members of the Army and security forces. Women are also gaining influence in the judicial and diplomatic fields. The role of women in the chambers of industry and commerce is growing and many enterprises managed by women have excelled. A new curriculum is being developed and adapted to treat the current roles played by women, including their expanded role in environmental protection and their shared role with men in all issues of reproductive health. Both men and women play important roles in family education. Women participate actively in contributing resources to the family. Rural women play roles in all stages of work. Women have increased their role in associations and organizations, on the Internet and in religious organizations. Women hold two out of five positions of adviser to the Ministry of Religious Endowments. Women are also involved in advertising. Their presence in decision-making positions in all fields has clearly grown.

### **Obstacles**

121. Due to the prevailing patriarchal (male) culture, women customarily give of themselves in silence, without waiting for reciprocity. They relinquish their own needs to provide for the needs of their families, giving top priority to their children and brothers. Consequently, women are taken for granted.

122. The media continue to only marginally treat women's contribution to household income, without reflecting the reality of women's effort in this regard. Moreover, positive laws regard women's contribution to household income as merely an optional donation.

123. The unjust sanctions on Syria have affected many Syrian media organizations, both public and private, which is incompatible with democracy and respect for others' opinions among countries that claim to be concerned about democracy and human rights. Also, numerous armed terrorist groups have targeted radio and television stations in several governorates, causing major human and material losses.

### **Progress achieved**

124. Progress has been achieved in the following areas:

1. The role and status of women have grown in many new positions.
2. Women's relative presence in the media and image in advertising have improved. It is not permitted to exploit women as females.
3. Women undertake numerous development efforts in the family and in society.
4. Greater light has been shed on negative practices constituting violence against women and on the means of combating such practices in studies, field research, films, media spots and posters.
5. Society accepts the new occupations practised by women.
6. All Syrian laws concerning gender equality and non-discrimination have been strengthened.
7. The percentage of women participating in decision-making positions in the print, audio and visual media has increased (as mentioned below in connection with article 7 of the Convention).

## **Article 6. Prohibition of the exploitation of women**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

125. Syrian laws, particularly the Penal Code, criminalize all acts that may be committed against women and impose, for such acts, penalties considered virtually the strongest in the world.

126. Legislative Decree No. 3 of 2010 on the Crimes of Trafficking in Persons strengthens the penalties for crimes committed against women, children and persons with special needs and for a perpetrator who is the victim's husband or parent or a law enforcement official (art. 8).

127. Labour Law No. 17 of 2010 protects working women from sexual harassment (art. 64, para. 7).

128. Article 508 of the Penal Code was replaced by the following provision: "If a valid marriage is conducted between the perpetrator of a felony and the victim, the perpetrator of the act may avail of the mitigating circumstance and shall be subject to imprisonment of at least two years". The new provision also provides guarantees favouring the victim.

129. Article 548 of the Penal Code was repealed and replaced by the following provision: "A person who surprises his wife, an ascendant, a descendent, or a sister in the offence of adultery with another person in flagrante delicto, and who kills or harms one or both of them without premeditation, may avail of the mitigating circumstance and shall be punished by imprisonment of at least five-seven years".

**De facto situation**

130. Acts of exploitation of women are criminalized and subject to strengthened penalties. The problem lies in women not being sufficiently interested in filing complaints against such acts due to socio-economic upbringing. In any case, such crimes do not constitute a phenomenon in Syria, given the nature of society, the religious, moral and educational values of Syrian society and the harshness of the law in dealing with such offences.

131. Syria has ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families.

132. There is a law prohibiting trafficking in persons, including women. In addition, the Prime Minister has formed a national committee to prepare a national plan to suppress human trafficking crimes. There is also a centre for human trafficking victims in the city of Damascus, which is run by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in partnership with the Association For Women's Role Development.

**Progress achieved**

133. Progress has been achieved in the following:

1. The battered women shelter subordinate to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has been upgraded. Another shelter is supervised by The Good Shepherd Order.
2. Stakeholders, including Government, non-governmental and popular bodies, conduct numerous quality activities, including familiarization with laws and conventions through seminars, media programmes, studies and meetings.
3. The Ministry of Religious Endowments cooperates with the Ministry of Social Affairs to provide the Welfare Home for Beggars and Homeless Persons with social workers and religious counsellors who spread awareness and provide care to the Female Section.
4. Expansion of the functions of the Inmates Welfare Association and the participation of numerous concerned State agencies in providing material and moral support for inmates and their families.
5. Provision of academic, health, psychological, social and moral care for children housed in the Ministry of Religious Endowments' Safe House for Orphans, which houses 173 females. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour also provides care to institutions for the care of orphans, in partnership with non-governmental organizations associated with it.
6. Continued action to train the Family Protection Unit.

**Article 7. Women's participation in political and public life****Legislative and legal framework**

134. From a legal, constitutional and legislative perspective, men and women are equally entitled to citizenship and full, effective participation in political, social, cultural and economic life. Key political rights include the right of women to hold senior posts, perform public functions, vote and be nominated for parliamentary and union organizations and local administrations, as provided in the Constitution of 1973 (arts. 26, 27 and 45) and the new Constitution of 2012 (arts. 20, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 33 and 34).



135. Syrian women obtained the right to vote in 1949. The Constitution of 1953 grants women the right to stand for Parliament (conditionally). The first Syrian woman entered the People's Assembly in 1971 on an equal footing with men.

136. The Judicial Authority Law issued under Legislative Decree No. 98 in 1961 (see annex 25) does not discriminate between men and women. Women may hold positions in the judiciary just as men do, inasmuch as the aforementioned decree does not require a judge to be a male. Women are subject to the same terms of appointment, promotion and compensation and have the same rights and duties as men.

137. Under the civil laws, provision is made for full equality and women are deemed to have the same legal capacity as men. Article 46 of the Syrian Civil Code stipulates that any person who has attained the age of majority, who is in full possession of his mental faculties and is not subject to any form of guardianship is fully competent to exercise his civil rights. Thus, women enjoy full rights of citizenship; they are entitled to engage in all economic activities and exercise full civil rights in concluding contracts, managing companies, buying and selling and benefiting from loans and all economic, social, health, cultural and educational services provided by the State. The new Constitution also provides for these rights (art. 23).

138. Commercial Code No. 33 of 2007, article 15, requires that "legal competence in commerce shall be subject to the provisions of the Civil Code and provisions pertaining to commerce. A number of businesswomen active in commerce and industry have formed committees in the chambers of commerce and industry called "business women committees".

139. Labour laws, including State Employment Statute No.52 of 2004, require that men and women in the public and private sectors be treated equally with respect to wages, leave, allowances, promotion, health insurance and social security.

#### **De facto situation**

140. The trend of women participating in political and public life took shape at the time of Syria's independence. Since then, women have held public positions and have been involved in all spheres of life. Participation of women in the People's Assembly has increased over successive legislative terms. In the first legislative term in 1971, only four women (2 per cent of all members of the People's Assembly) served. In the ninth legislative term, 31 women (12.4 per cent) served. Candidates for the ninth legislative term included 8,801 males and 982 females. Female candidates for the eighth legislative term totalled 852. In the elections for the tenth legislative term, 710 females stood as candidates for political parties and blocks or as independents out of a total of 7,000 candidates, and 30 of them entered the 215-member People's Assembly (12 per cent).

141. Female members of the People's Assembly during the ninth legislative term (2007-2011) were distributed according to electoral district as follows: four women for the governorate of Damascus, three for Rif Dimashq, three for Homs, three for Hamah, three for Aleppo, two for the districts of Aleppo, two for Idlib, two for Ladhīqiyah, three for Tartus, one for Raqqah, one for Dayr al-Zawr, one for Hasakah, one for Dar'a, one for Suwayda' and one woman for Qunaytirah.

142. All women in the People's Assembly participate in 1 or more of the 12 standing committees, each comprising 30 members. During the ninth legislative session, women, who account for close to one third of total members of some committees, are distributed as follows: four women on the Constitutional and

legislative affairs committee, seven women on the Budget and accounts committee, one woman on the Fiscal laws committee, six women on the Arab and foreign affairs committee, nine women on the Guidance committee, six women on the Planning and output committee, two women on the Services committee, one woman on the National security committee, two women on the Interior and local administration committee, two women on the Complaints and petitions committee, two women on the Agriculture and irrigation committee and eight women on the Environment and population activity committee.

143. Women have also been elected to local and municipal councils. In the 2007 elections for city councils and governorate councils, women won 19 per cent of the seats on the councils. In the 2011 elections for local councils, the percentage of women members declined to 2.6 per cent, which may be due to the conditions in Syrian.

144. Regarding women's participation in the judiciary, as of 2011, Syria's 1,508 judges included 240 female judges (15 per cent), including 10 in the Court of Cassation, of whom 2 are Chamber Presidents, 57 are appeal counsellors and 15 are Appeal Chamber Presidents. There are 87 female judges in the Court of First Instance and Magistrate's Court (18 per cent). Twenty-eight females are in the Public Prosecutor's Office (17 per cent); 2 of them hold the post of Attorney General in Ladhqiyyah. A woman serves as a member of the Supreme Constitutional Court, pursuant to Decree No. 173 of 2012. (The Supreme Constitutional Court is an independent judicial authority that issues judgements in the name of the Arab people in Syria. Its functions include supervising and organizing the procedures of presidential elections, trying the President of the Republic in the event of high treason, trying anyone who is complicit in or abets high treason, adjudicating appeals by losing candidates for the People's Assembly concerning the validity of the election of the winning members and adjudicating the constitutionality of laws, legislative decrees, etc.) (see annex 27).

145. Regarding the administration of affairs of State, women comprise 37.5 per cent or 150 of the 400 attorneys in the Department of Affairs of State.

146. Regarding the legal profession, the old law regulating the legal profession and the new law, Law No. 30 of 2010, do not discriminate between males and females with respect to the practice of law. As of end-2010, Syria had a total of 25,046 attorneys, including 4,765 female attorneys (20 per cent).

147. Statistics indicate that women working in the judiciary hold key, sensitive, leadership posts, which points to the State's ongoing efforts to strengthen the role of women in decision-making posts.

148. Women continue to be appointed to posts in the Government, with a woman serving as Vice-President of the Republic since 2006. In 2007, two women were appointed to serve as advisers to the President of the Republic, one on political and media affairs and the other on literary affairs. During 1992-2009, women accounted for 6 per cent of the Syrian Government (holding portfolios of culture, higher education and social affairs and labour). In 2010, the number of female ministers in Syria increased to three, or nine per cent of the members of the Syrian Government. Currently, women hold three ministerial portfolios not traditionally held by women: Tourism, Housing and Construction and Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs. Women have held other portfolios not traditionally held by women, such as economy and housing.

149. In diplomacy, 15 per cent of the ambassadorships are currently held by women, compared to 11 per cent in 2005. Thirty-five per cent of the members of the Diplomatic Corps were female in the 2007 rotation, compared to 30 per cent

in the 2004 diplomatic rotation. The first female member of a diplomatic corps in the Arab world was a Syrian.

150. The Government has been focusing on promoting women's status and active participation in political and public life. As a result, the number of women in administrative and leadership positions in the ministries and public authorities has been growing constantly. Statistics for 2009 show many women holding the post of deputy minister, for example, in the Foreign Ministry and in the Ministries of Higher Education, Health, Communications, Economy, Housing, Irrigation and Education and in the Planning and International Cooperation Commission. In addition, many female advisers serve in various ministries.

151. Women have held posts in the Ministry of Culture. Three women have served as directors in the central administration. A woman was appointed dean of one of the two colleges subordinate to the ministry. A woman holds the post of director-general of Dar al-Asad for Culture and Arts. Females account for 44.9 per cent of the employees of the Ministry's central administration, 54.5 per cent of the employees of the Cultural Centres Department, 18 per cent of the employees of the Public Cinema Enterprise, 18 per cent of the employees of the Al-Asad Library and 56.5 per cent of the employees of the Public Commission for the Book. Women comprise 28 per cent of artists in the plastic arts, 33.5 per cent of artists in the arts, 25 per cent of actors in drama and 12 per cent of musicians in music.

152. In recent years, the Ministry of Interior has seen improvements in the employment of women in police work and the transcending of stereotypes and negative social customs that discourage women from police work. Numerous courses have been held for policewomen in the School for Female Police Officers in Damascus. A large number of women have graduated from the school, including 799 non-commissioned officers and 822 policewomen. Women have enrolled in officer courses in the Police College, graduating with the rank of lieutenant. Special courses have been held for physicians, including a number of female physician-officers of various ranks, some of whom who have been appointed to administrative posts, e.g., as chiefs of branches and medical sections. A number of female officers hold senior ranks (brigadier general) and women have received leadership posts, serving for example as Director of the School for Female Police Officers and as administrative branch chiefs. Most of the employees in the Ministry of Interior's General Civil Affairs Directorate are women, of whom two serve as department chiefs and 23 serve as division chiefs.

153. In the Ministry of Religious Endowments, two of the five advisers to the ministry are women, including the adviser for administrative affairs and the adviser for women's religious instruction affairs. Fifty-six per cent of the engineers and 30 per cent of the central administration employees in the Ministry are women.

154. In the Ministry of Education, women head three of the 29 directorates in the central administration (10 per cent). In 2011, a woman was appointed assistant minister and one as adviser to the minister. In academic year 2010/11, women accounted for 21.1 per cent of specialist instructors, 63.86 per cent of the teachers in pre-university general education and 44.8 per cent of the engineers in vocational education. However, women are still weakly represented in central education decision-making positions.

155. In the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, since 2005, a woman has served as adviser to the Minister of Social Affairs and women have been appointed to head five of the central administration's 12 directorates.

156. The number of women in higher education faculty positions rose from 2,281 in 2006 to 3,051 in 2009. In State universities, women in decision-making leadership positions, such as deputy minister for higher education, university vice-president, college dean, assistant dean and department head, have made important contributions. A woman held the position of vice-president of Damascus University during 2008-2012. During 2009-2012, the post of college dean was held by four women at Damascus University, two women at Aleppo University and three woman at Tishreen University.

157. The Ministry of Economy and Trade has seen an increase in its female workforce. Women in administrative leadership positions in the Ministry rose from 9 per cent to 16 per cent during 2005-2007. A woman served as Assistant Minister for Supply and Internal Commerce (2000-2005) and another as Assistant Minister for Economy and Trade and then as adviser (2005-2007). The Ministry was headed by a woman in 2011. Since 2009, five women have served as directors. Women accounted for 31 per cent of the Ministry's employees sent abroad on missions for training and exchange of expertise in 2008 compared to 25 per cent in 2005. In 2009, 53 woman accounted for 29 per cent of the 231 employees sent abroad and, in 2010, 43 women accounted for 24 per cent of the 180 employees sent abroad.

158. In the Ministry of Health, 37.1 per cent of the employees were female in 2010. A woman held the position of assistant minister and eight women were directors in the central administration.

159. According to statistics of the Central Bureau of Statistics, females accounted for 24.6 per cent of the employees of the Ministry of Agriculture for 2010. A woman has served as director of the Directorate for the Development of Rural Women since 2006.

160. In the Central Bureau of Statistics, 46.8 per cent of the employees are female and there are nine female directors (24.3 per cent) compared to 28 male directors.

161. In the Ministry of Information, the percentage of women in administrative posts has grown. In the past five years, women have been appointed as editors in chief of newspapers, magazines and public and private broadcasts. Women have held key positions in the media, including Director of Television in the Radio and Television Authority, Director of the General Programme Channel and Terrestrial Channel Department, General Manager of the Radio and Television Production Organization, External Information Director in the Ministry of Information, Director of Commercial Broadcasts in the Ministry of Information, Director of the Voice of Youth and Voice of the People (Government broadcasts) and director of the Ministry of Information's Internet site. Women represent 40 per cent of all Syrian journalists. In addition, female media professionals participate in all training workshops held by the Ministry of Information, accounting for no less than 50 per cent of the participants in all activities.

162. In the Planning and International Cooperation Commission, the head of the Commission has three assistants, including one woman. Women also hold decision-making positions, with 12 women serving as directors (35.3 per cent of the 34 directors). Females account for 51.3 per cent of the employees in the Commission's central administration. Data indicate that the female-male ratio increases as the educational level of females increases. Fifty-four per cent of the staff in the planning directorates in the governorates is female.

### **Political participation**

163. Syrian women participate in all Syrian political parties. The Tenth Congress of the Arab Ba`th Socialist Party (the ruling party) devoted great

attention to the advancement of women, adopting a recommendation to open broader opportunities for women to expand their participation in the party and the State. The number of females in the party branch commands, people's commands and party divisions has grown. Females account for 20 per cent of the party's central committee members after having been 17 per cent. They account for 35 per cent of the party's ranks. In 2011, licences were issued to establish nine parties in which females constitute 20-30 per cent of the membership; three of these parties are headed by women.

#### **Situation of women in unions**

164. Regarding representation of women in student unions and other unions, females constitute 45 per cent of the members of the National Union of Syrian Students, 45 per cent of the union's administrative bodies at the college level, 30 per cent of the members of the leadership bodies of internal and external branches and 20 per cent of the executive office. A woman heads the union's Tishreen University branch. Women held 2 of the 11 leadership positions in the Youth Union in 2010 and constitute 40 per cent of the union's members. In labour unions, women participate in all committees, bodies and councils at all levels, constituting 12-35 per cent of the members thereof. In the Engineering Union, a female engineer was appointed union head, and 10 per cent of the members of the union council are women. Women comprised 8 per cent of the General Congress (2006). A woman headed the Syrian Engineering Union (currently the Minister for Housing). Women have also headed the Artists' Union, Dentists' Union and Agricultural Engineers' Union. The Teachers' Union for primary, secondary, intermediate and university teachers has 332,162 members, including 182,674 females (54.99 per cent). The Teachers Union for other educational stages has 362,525 members, including 209,206 females (57.71 per cent) according to statistics in the 2011 report which the union's executive office submitted to its central council.

165. During the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2006-2010), the percentage of female workers in the public sector was greater than the percentage of females in the private sector, according to the Economic Report on the Government's Performance for 2009. The percentage of females employed in the Government sector relative to all females employed in the national economy increased from 31.8 per cent to 54.6 per cent, because Government employment provides security for women. The percentage of females employed in the private, regulated economic sector fell from 56.3 per cent to 7.2 per cent. The percentage of females employed in the unofficial private sector rose from 11.6 per cent to 27.7 per cent. This is attributed to a number of factors, the most salient being that women have started up workshops and small enterprises, a process which has been facilitated by obtaining loans and financial independence.

#### **Progress achieved**

166. The Ninth and Tenth Five-Year Plans, covering 2001 through 2010, focused on empowering women by achieving specific goals that increase women's participation in economic development, in the executive, legislative and judicial authorities and in different decision-making positions in public life by:

1. Increasing the percentage of females in the Syrian labour force and expanding the number of enterprises managed by women.
2. Promoting women's participation in the executive, legislative and judicial authorities.

3. Promoting the empowerment of women and enhancing their practical skills through ongoing and specific training.
4. Increasing equal opportunity for men and women.
5. Focusing on the family and increasing concern for women.

167. A National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women (2005-2010) was formulated, covering action to monitor and follow up on the application of constitutional provisions that establish equality and equal opportunity between the two sexes. It also covers the adoption of measures to boost equality and women's participation in key positions in the legislative, judicial and executive authorities. Based on the strategy, the Economic Committee issued Recommendation No. 26 of 26 June 2004 requiring the allocation of 25,000 investment credits to the ministries and public agencies of the State to support and promote the activities of women and to increase women's participation in the development process during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2006-2010). Women's Empowerment Units were established in several establishments and ministries to monitor implementation of the National Strategy to Promote the Participation of Women. Population units were also established in the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. These units are concerned with raising awareness of issues relating to population, women and development through workshops and training courses. A National Strategy to Fortify Women against Violence (2012-2016) was formulated by the General Women's Federation in collaboration with stakeholders with the support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

168. The labour laws provide for equality between men and women and entrench the rule of equal wages. Female labour is covered in Labour Law No.17 of 2010, section 3, articles 119-127. These articles regulate work by women, avoidance of jobs that harm the health and morals of women, maternity leaves and the provision of day-care centres for their children. Section 4 contains provisions on the employment and training of persons with disabilities, including women (arts. 128-140 of the Law). The Syrian Civil Code, Commercial Code (amended), Agricultural Relations Law and other relevant laws and decrees cover different aspects of the promotion of the role of women in economic life, such as:

- One hour daily for nursing for one year.
- Provision of assistance to working mothers and children through the opening of day-care centres at workplaces and provision of all supplies needed for such centres.
- Female employees' membership in social assistance, solidarity and association funds for the provision of health and medical services to working women and their families.
- Banking facilities for commercial and industrial businesses.
- Formulation and implementation of programmes to empower women economically and socially and to reduce poverty, especially among rural women.

169. As for the rights of women living under foreign occupation and their participation in all areas of life, the Syrian Arab Republic is committed to providing women in the occupied Golan with everything that they need to improve their situation. It disburses grants to dozens of male and female students from the Golan who study in Syrian universities and higher education

institutes and provides these students with housing and a stipend. Under Decree No. 42 of 2001 (see annex 28), teachers and employees dismissed by occupation authorities receive salaries from the Syrian State. Syria works tirelessly to strengthen links between the people of the Syrian homeland and the people of the occupied Golan on national and social occasions, particularly Independence Day and Mother's Day, when civil society and Government organizations arrange meetings, where possible, with the people of the Golan. Syrian women in the occupied Syrian Golan suffer from adverse psychological, social and physical effects of an odious occupation that has been imposed on them for more than 40 years and prevented them from participating in all spheres of life.

170. The Government issued Legislative Decree No. 100 of 2011 (Parties Law) and Legislative Decree No. 101 of 2011 (Elections Law) to strengthen the democratic edifice, general freedoms and the participation of all segments of society, including women, in the administration of State institutions and building of the country. Under article 4 of the Elections Law, all Syrian citizens, male and female, who have reached the age of 18 years are entitled to vote.

171. Legislative Decree No. 107 of 2011, which includes the Local Administration Law, was issued in response to economic, social and service developments with a view to providing quality services to all citizens, including women.

172. Legislative Decree No. 442 of 17 October 2010 was issued to increase the staff of the Ministry of Justice by more than 100 per cent, from 2,077 to 4,186, which provides greater opportunities for women in this field and a better capacity to administer justice.

173. The Prime Minister issued Decree No. 6721 of 17 May 2011 to form a committee to formulate an integrated judicial reform strategy, amend laws and establish rules for the independence of the judiciary and mechanisms to regulate the judiciary and increase the number of courts and judges. These developments will strengthen the presence and role of women in the judiciary.

174. The Prime Minister issued Decree No. 6080 of 5 May 2011 to form a committee to define and describe the offences of corruption, mechanisms for promoting integrity and anti-corruption rules to achieve equality, equal opportunity and fairness.

175. A national legal political committee, comprising 28 members, including three women, was formed to review the entire Constitution and submit recommendations for formulating a new Constitution for Syria that: guarantees political pluralism, social justice, the rule of law and basic human rights; empowers and promotes the role of women; is concerned with youth and children; and defines the duties of citizens based on equality for all. A constitutional referendum was held on 26 February 2012 and the new Constitution became effective on 27 February 2012.

176. The number of females in administrative and leadership positions in the ministries and authorities continues to grow through training and qualification courses held by the following institutions to promote participation of all male and female State workers in political and public life.

#### **National Institute of Public Administration**

177. The National Institute of Public Administration is a public academic institution that prepares, qualifies and trains cadres holding university degrees in various public administration specialties. The Institute's graduates work in developing plans, upgrading administration and organizing ministries and public establishments and authorities. The Institute provides the same opportunities to

males and females for training to obtain a public administration diploma. The percentage of women attending the Institute has increased. The Syrian Government pays the salary of students, male or female employees, throughout the two-year training period.

#### **Higher Institute for Administrative Development**

178. The Institute's bylaws were issued by Decree No. 35 of 19 July 2009 of the Minister for Higher Education. The Decree establishes the Institute's goals, namely to prepare licentiates from all specialties academically and practically to promote administration and the productivity of public, joint and private sector entities. The Institute holds different training and qualification courses for employees of ministries, State establishments and the public, private and joint sectors.

#### **Higher Institute of Business Administration**

179. The Higher Institute of Business Administration is a public, academic institution for the development of human resources and general staff in the public, private and joint sectors through specialized academic instruction in the administration sciences and the qualification and training of licentiates from different specialties and at different levels in the business administration sciences.

180. As of 2009, the Judicial Institute had held five courses. In the fifth course, 109 judges, including 13 women, participated. The Institute is currently holding its sixth course, in which 160 judges, including 30 women, are participating.

The following table shows the distribution of judges who have received training in the Judicial Institute according to sex during 2002-2012. During that period, females accounted for 27.3 per cent of the judges who received training at the Institute.

<i>Course</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
First	13	6	19
Second	23	12	35
Third	15	8	23
Fourth	39	19	58
Fifth	96	13	109
Sixth	130	30	160

Source: Ministry of Labour.

181. The Government continues to take numerous measures to ensure women's participation in formulating and implementing development planning at all levels, including the involvement of the General Women's Federation and relevant non-governmental organizations in all national committees.

182. Many bodies are active in training and educating women to elevate their social, political and economic status. The Ministry of Local Administration, in cooperation with the European Commission, has prepared plans to enhance the decision-making and leadership capacities of women through a programme to promote and formulate plans to develop the role of women in municipal administrations.

183. Action is also being taken with the United Nations Development Fund for Women to formulate a plan to develop the role of women in elections. A Good Governance Project has been established in the southern Syrian governorates of



Dar'a , Suwayda' and Qunaytirah. In this project, popular and civil-society organizations promote good governance in municipalities and non-governmental and popular organizations. They also raise the local community's awareness of women's rights as provided in the Syrian Constitution and regional and international conventions which Syria has ratified.

184. During 2006-2008, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs collaborated with local administrations and the General Women's Federation to provide political empowerment training for 420 women from various Government, popular and non-governmental bodies in all Syrian governorates. The training was supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

### **Training and qualification courses held by popular and non-governmental organizations**

#### **General Women's Federation**

185. The General Women's Federation is a popular organization concerned with improving and developing the situation of women, training and qualifying women and reducing violence against women. The Federation is present throughout the Republic in both rural and urban areas. Its members number more than 0.5 million women in 114 women's associations at the district level. These associations are subordinate to 14 administrative offices at the governorate level. The Federation supervises 375 day-care centres and kindergartens, 18 production workshops and 69 medical points that provide family planning and reproductive health services. It also oversees the monthly *Arab Woman Magazine* and the weekly *Women's Programme* on radio and television. It undertakes activities to eliminate reading and information illiteracy, qualify, train and enhance health, legal, environmental education, and cultural and political awareness. The Federation elects its leaders every five years, for its grass-roots and higher echelons. It has conducted many studies on women's issues, including divorce, early marriage, violence against women, the employment of women in the public and private sectors, the concept of gender equality within the family and society and the history of Syrian women. It publishes a number of periodicals to enhance health, environmental and legal awareness.

186. In 2006-2011, the Federation held 4,081 literacy courses benefiting 53,358 female students and 3,708 awareness-raising seminars, and it conducted 4,765 field visits to provide information on the seriousness of illiteracy.

The following table shows the accomplishments of the General Women's Federation in eradicating illiteracy during 2006-2011:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of courses</i>	<i>Number of studies</i>	<i>Number of female graduates</i>	<i>Number of seminars</i>	<i>Home visits</i>
2006	791	14 412	8 999	927	1 039
2007	879	15 090	9 765	766	824
2008	521	8 531	6 169	1 019	951
2009	428	7 109	3 607	573	988
2010	1 363	6 105	4 722	232	600
2011	99	2 111	2 093	191	363
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 081</b>	<b>53 358</b>	<b>35 355</b>	<b>3 708</b>	<b>4 765</b>

Source: General Women's Federation.

187. The governorates of Suwayda', Tartus and Dar'a were declared free of illiteracy in the 15-45 age group according to the international standard.

188. In 2009, the Federation held a workshop on violence against women on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, marking the 30th anniversary of the Convention.

189. In 2011, the Federation, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, held a workshop to present the results of a study on the stance of the Sharia and the law on honour crimes, with a focus on articles 548 and 192 of the Penal Code. Work is continuing to identify discriminatory articles requiring amendment.

190. The Federation, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, held workshops in a number of governorates on a law to prevent trafficking in persons. The International Organization for Migration had previously participated in the national committee formed to prepare the law. The committee's work continued for more than a year and a half during 2008-2009.

191. Regarding the development of rural women, during 2002-2011, the Federation provided material support in the form of small loans to establish 217 projects, particularly projects that continuously create new jobs. These loans benefited 1,350 women and girls.

192. The Federation has been implementing a Human and Social Development Project in the most needy regions. During 2008-2011, 14 villages were selected each year. Training courses were held in all industries compatible with the environment and in nursing and accident prevention. The courses also included a reading and information literacy component.

193. Women continue to be trained to stand for election, prepare election programmes and organize campaigns. Training sessions benefiting 90 women were held in Tartus, Aleppo and Damascus during 4-21 October 2010.

194. The Federation's plan for 2010-2012 covers important items, including a media campaign to provide information on laws being promulgated and conventions with which Syria complies.

195. The Federation participated in a participatory meeting of adult education experts in Damascus in 2007, a meeting of organizations concerned with education for everyone in 2006, a meeting on capacity-building in Sharm al-Shaykh in 2007 and at Ayn Shams University in 2006, the Sixth Conference of the Adult Education Centre in 2008 and a meeting on informal education planning and administration in Morocco in 2008.

196. Many Syrian non-governmental organizations (the Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria (FIRDOS), the businesswomen committees in the chambers of commerce and industry in Syria, the Syrian Family Planning Association, the Nada Development Association, the Syria Trust for Development/FIRDOS and other non-governmental organizations) are working to empower Syrian women socially, economically, politically and culturally through:

- Training to enable women to enter the labour market and improve their educational level by easing administrative procedures for registration of women's economic enterprises consistent with the labour market's needs and by activities designed to integrate women with disabilities.
- Support of small and medium enterprises to reduce unemployment and improve families' standard of living.

- Support of information centres by providing information on educational changes, especially regarding females; and provision of a database to enable researchers to obtain necessary information to conduct analytical studies, particularly on significant changes in labour market demand.
- Establishment of training and development centres; boosting competencies and skills, especially in small business occupations; expanded entrenchment of economic cooperation principles for women's groups; establishment of joint projects that respond to the immediate needs of the market; and provision of appropriate loans.
- Ongoing projects to provide training in "leadership in decision-making" in a number of Syrian governorates. These programmes target female social, cultural and political activists and unions.
- The participation of women in all national committees that are formed in the ministries and authorities.

197. The MAWRED (Modernizing and Activating Women's Role in Economic Development) Foundation has built a network of business incubators covering Syrian cities to stimulate latent capacities of Syrian businesswomen and translate them into competitive economic activities. During 2005-2008, 23 projects received the necessary technical advice and expertise and were implemented. The Foundation conducted a survey and evaluation of the projects that have been implemented and provides project feasibility studies.

198. The Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria financed projects directly through rural business incubators in Ladhqiyyah and Idlib, in collaboration with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. In 2010, the Syria Trust for Development/Rawafid Project held two workshops in the governorate of Aleppo entitled "Training Culture Producers with Disabilities" and "Other Voices of the City".

199. The Syrian Women's League carries out activities to raise awareness of women's issues and rights. It provides recommendations to amend laws that discriminate against women. It was hoped that the League would demonstrate better cooperation regarding the preparation of this report. However, it declined to provide any information on its activities, despite being repeatedly invited to do so. Its electronic site did not provide any information. It was thus not possible to fully cover its activities in this report.

200. The Syrian Women Observatory site carries out numerous activities concerning women's rights, particularly on violence against women. It collaborates with a group of activists to mount campaigns against discrimination.

### **Obstacles**

201. The obstacles include the following:

1. Women's interest in becoming involved in political, non-governmental and cultural activity has yet to rise to the desired level. It does not reflect Syrian women's capacities and the political will that supports and incentivizes their active presence.
2. Women continue to bear concentrated burdens, and society continues to attach primary importance to women's functions in the home (which they perform almost singularly). However, the reality is that these burdens and functions are a responsibility that should be shared by all family members.

3. Women are generally weak financially, which limits their broader participation, especially in the democratic process.
4. More training is needed to enhance women's capacities and empower them.
5. Coordination and networking among women who hold decision-making positions and are qualified to be nominated to posts are weak, as is political parties' adoption of women's rights and support of women's participation.
6. There is a lack of research and statistics needed to form a basis for adopting programmes and projects relating directly to women, such as:
  - Women's household work and the extent of its effect on the income and general resources of the family and society are not taken into account.
  - Women's unpaid agricultural work of all types in all fields is not taken into account and is not described as a national resource despite its extent and utility.
  - Women's entry into the People's Assembly and local councils is for the most part not based on an electoral programme that provides a clear venue for women's issues.

#### **Envisaged measures**

202. Women's participate in the People's Assembly, discussing and legislating objective laws that meet society's needs, whether general laws or laws on the family (women and children). We therefore find it useful to adopt the following quick measures to increase the percentage of women in the People's Assembly:

1. Provision of an objective database on women who are activists and leaders in the women's movement.
2. Preparation of programmes to train such women to conduct campaigns, hold negotiations and develop communication skills (the electoral programme includes a special section on women's issues).
3. The nomination of women employees at senior grades to participate in administrative development courses and the assignment of the most competent of these women to leadership positions.
4. Creation of mechanisms of communication between women in decision-making positions and women's movements.
5. Highlighting the role of women in all media, raising societal awareness through programmes dedicated to this purpose and support of women in election campaigns.
6. Establishment of service centres to provide legal advice to female activists and candidates.
7. Holding courses that train male and female members of the People's Assembly in leadership and decision-making skills.
8. Action to empower women economically and socially by linking macroeconomic policies with poverty-reduction and job-creation programmes. In this regard, the Ministry of Economy is cooperating with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs in formulating a programme to

be implemented in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) to increase women's participation in economic activity and achieve equal opportunity.

### **Article 8. Participation of women in diplomacy and international organizations**

203. Under article 45 of the 1973 Constitution and article 23 of the new 2012 Constitution, the State guarantees women the right to employment, equal opportunity and gender equality without discrimination. The State also guarantees women all available opportunities to participate fully and effectively in political, social, cultural and economic life. The Syrian Government acts to strengthen and develop the role and participation of women in development, particularly in decision-making. Legally, Syrian women have the same rights as men to obtain civil service positions, including diplomatic and consular positions.

204. Legislative Decree No. 4 of 2010 (see annex 29), which regulates the activity of the Ministry of Foreign and Expatriate Affairs, does not distinguish between men and women. For example, contrary to what was previously in effect, article 56 of the Decree treats men and women equally by granting special unpaid leave to both a man and a woman to join his/her spouse who is assigned to work abroad. It also counts such special leave taken by a male or female as actual service for purposes of promotion and pension.

205. The Decree also grants benefits for female ministerial employees sent on missions. For example, contrary to what was in effect previously, article 67 grants an expatriation allowance for the children of a female ministerial employee who supports her children. It also grants travel tickets to her spouse and children if she supports them. Thus, the spousal and family rights granted to female diplomats are the same as those granted to male diplomats.

#### **De facto situation**

206. The percentage of female ambassadors increased to 15 per cent in 2010 from 11 per cent in 2005. Female ambassadors or *chargés d'affaires* are appointed to embassies that are no less important in respect of bilateral relations with the host country than embassies to which male ambassadors are appointed. For example, female ambassadors were appointed to France, Italy, Malaysia, Greece, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain. Thirty-five per cent of the Diplomatic Corps in 2007 was women, compared to 30 per cent in 2004. The current staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs includes 720 males and 205 females (35 per cent). Among female contract employees, 55 per cent hold a university degree, 30 per cent hold a diploma from an intermediate education institution and 20 per cent hold a secondary school diploma. Sixty-five per cent of the participants in the diplomatic competition for 2010 were female.

#### **Progress achieved**

207. The Government has taken measures to ensure that women have the opportunity to represent the Government internationally and to participate in the proceedings of international organizations on an equal footing with men. A female ambassador is currently in charge of the administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Diplomatic Institute, which was established under Decree No. 97 of 6 January 2010.

208. Every two years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announces a competition for ambassadorial appointments to the rank of division chief or deputy division

chief. This competition, which is open to both men and women without discrimination, is based on the requirements and skills which the ministry deems suitable and announces. Women rise in the diplomatic ranks just as men do, from third secretary to ambassador.

209. When nominations for an international post are opened, the Government takes measures to ensure that women have an equal opportunity with men to be appointed to the post. For example, all applications for nomination are studied. A female or male candidate is nominated for the post based on merit and effort without exception. The nomination is put forth through Syria's representatives in the United Nations or through coordination with Arab and foreign groups to ensure the appointment of a Syrian candidate, male or female, to the post that needs to be filled.

210. Women participate effectively in representing Syria in international, regional and national meetings and conferences, especially those concerning women's issues. They also participate in formulating international and regional conventions, final international conference documents and resolutions concerning women and women's rights. They do so as members of Syria's participating delegations or as representatives in foreign diplomatic missions to such conferences. Since 2000, the Syrian Government has assigned six female diplomats to the permanent delegation in New York to monitor political, social, cultural, humanitarian and human rights issues put forth at the United Nations.

211. The Syrian Government promotes women as representatives of Syria in international organizations, agencies and bodies on a par with men. This is clearly seen in the Syrian Government's nomination of two women to represent Syria on the executive board of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women for 2007-2009.

212. Women also represent Syria in the United Nations Development Fund for Women. A Syrian woman currently participates on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Syrian women also hold administrative posts in the main United Nations organizations.

213. Syrian women are also employed in international organizations in Syria. Between 50 and 51 per cent of the employees of these organizations are women.

#### **Training and qualification courses**

214. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs trains women to enhance their capacities and qualify them for participation in local, regional and international conferences through policy decision-making courses, missions and studies financed by external grants. The Diplomatic Institute periodically holds courses in negotiations and other specialties and training courses for diplomats and administrators who are transferred to Syrian missions abroad. These courses cover:

- The goals of Syria's foreign policy, multilateral organizations, bilateral relations and legal matters, including public and private international law, particularly the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.
- Rules of protocol, etiquette and international custom (history, rules of protocol, diplomatic immunity and consular immunity).
- Communications and automation.
- Consular services.

215. The ministry sends female diplomats for training courses and scholarship study in Syria and abroad before they are transferred to foreign missions and after

they are transferred to the central administration. Graduates of courses and studies financed by external grants receive diplomas or master's degrees. External grants have been provided by Britain, America, Malta, Austria, China, Japan, India and Turkey.

216. Women constituted 35 per cent of the Diplomatic Corps personnel sent abroad on missions in 2010 and 30 per cent of the Administrative Corps personnel sent on missions in 2011.

217. By participating in conferences at all levels, Syria's female diplomats have acquired negotiating skills and competitive capabilities. They have thus become qualified, on a par with men, to make apposite, thoughtful, correct decisions based on an overarching strategic perspective in a way that serves the national interest. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continually sends female diplomats on missions representing the country to the United Nations, including in New York, Geneva and Austria. This allows these women to participate in international affairs and become qualified policymakers.

### **The future**

218. The continued participation of women in international conferences at all levels allows them to formulate policies and harmonize agreements consistent with the needs of Syrian women. It is difficult to meet these needs due to the challenges imposed on our country from abroad, such as those due to the economic blockade and the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan. It would be useful to adopt appropriate measures to boost the percentage of women in diplomacy and international institutions, including:

- Continued sending of female diplomats abroad in key diplomatic missions; and training courses and scholarships that enable female diplomats to acquire leadership, decision-making, dialogue, persuasion and public opinion forming skills.
- Continued promotion of female diplomats to policy posts (ambassador or chargé d'affaires).
- Continued promotion of Syrian women's participation in international organizations.

## **Article 9. Nationality**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

219. Regarding nationality, the Syrian Arab Republic has adopted the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) based on paternity. It accepts *jus soli* (right of soil) only in the case of a child of unknown parentage born on Syrian territory.

220. Under Nationality Law No. 276 of 1969, a Syrian woman retains her nationality even if she marries a foreigner, and she may hold dual nationality (see annex 30).

### **De facto situation**

221. The General Women's Federation formulated a proposal to grant Syrian nationality to children born of a Syrian woman and foreign father. The Federation submitted the proposal to the Office of the Prime Minister in 2006 with a view to amendment of the Nationality Law. It resubmitted the proposal in 2010, and a legal and policy committee was formed to study the proposal and to draft a legal formula to amend the law. The committee completed its work and

submitted it to the Office of the Prime Minister. Procedures for proper promulgation of an amendment are currently being followed up.

222. The Syrian Women's League submitted a proposal in 2007 to add a paragraph (f) to article 3 of the current Nationality Law. The proposed paragraph stipulates "the need to implement equality between men and women regarding the granting of nationality to their children". Article 3 of the current Nationality Law stipulates:

"The following shall be legally considered an Arab Syrian:

"(a) Anyone born inside the country to an Arab Syrian father.

"(b) Anyone born inside the country to an Arab Syrian mother but whose paternity has not been legally established.

"(c) Anyone born inside the country to parents who are unknown, of unknown nationality or stateless. A foundling discovered within the country shall be deemed to have been born at the place where he or she was discovered, unless proven otherwise.

"(d) Anyone born inside the country who, at birth, was not entitled to acquire foreign nationality by virtue of his or her filiation.

"(e) Anyone with ancestry in the Syrian Arab Republic who has acquired no other nationality and failed to apply for the option of Syrian nationality within the time limit specified in earlier decrees and laws."

223. In a related development, Legislative Decree No. 49 of 2011 was issued to grant Syrian citizenship to persons registered as foreigners in the records of the governorate of Hasakah in northeast Syria without any discrimination between men and women. Applicants for citizenship under the Decree totalled 105,631, of whom 70,443 were granted nationality. Action is under way to grant the remaining persons nationality once they submit all required documents (applicants have until 20 June 2012 to submit the required documents).

224. There is no contradiction between article 9 and Islamic law. There is a major difference between a blood relationship, which is paternal under Islamic law, and nationality, which concerns the relationship of an individual to the State under man-made law.

225. The Syrian Government recently initiated the promulgation of numerous decrees to ease procedures that have previously put pressure on Syrian mothers and their minor children of foreign fathers. The door to granting citizenship is virtually open in many cases, albeit with a great deal of thoroughness and exceptional study on a case-by-case basis. Syria's position, status, national identity and humaneness make it a sought after destination and refuge for many.

#### **Justifications for the reservation**

226. Syria's reservation to this article is based on patriotic, national considerations concerning Palestinian refugees' right of return to their homeland and need to preserve their identity. It is also based on the exigencies of the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and restrictions imposed by the occupation on citizens concerning marriage or contact with individuals under Israeli occupation.

227. Syria enjoys a prime geopolitical and strategic position and is a main transit centre between a number of continents. It is an open country that receives and embraces newcomers, immigrants, persons fleeing from the afflictions of wars and asylum-seekers. Many marriages occur as a matter of course. The impediment to granting Syrian nationality to the children of Syrian women and



non-Syrian fathers is related to sovereignty, not discrimination. However, the door is not absolutely shut regarding such cases. Rather, each case submitted to the concerned authorities is examined separately, and an appropriate decision is made. The grant of nationality in such cases is not mandatory, but rather has to date been permissible in exceptional cases.

### **Envisaged measures**

228. The promulgation of the new Constitution, whose article 3 stipulates equality among citizens without discrimination and the need to amend all laws that do not harmonize with the Constitution within three years, opens new horizons for amending the Nationality Law and granting women their right in this regard by force of the Constitution.

229. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs included, in the draft law on the rights of the child, an article stipulating a Syrian mother's right to the grant of Syrian nationality to her children without restriction.

## **Article 10. Education**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

230. The legislative and legal framework includes the following:

- The Syrian Arab Republic's Constitution of 1973. Article 37 of the Constitution of 1973 provides that: "Education is a right guaranteed by the State and it shall be free at all stages and compulsory at the primary stage. The State shall endeavour to extend compulsory education to other stages and to supervise and guide education in a manner consistent with the requirements of society and production."
- The new Constitution, which was approved in a referendum on 26 December 2012 and promulgated by Decree 94 of 28 February 2012. Article 25 of the new Constitution provides for the right to education, health and social services. Article 29, paragraphs 1 and 2, provide for the following:
  1. Education shall be a right guaranteed by the State and shall be free at all stages.
  2. Education shall be compulsory until the end of the primary education stage and the State shall endeavour to extend compulsory education to other stages.

231. According to article 31 of the new Constitution, "The State shall support scientific research and all its requirements, ensure freedom of scientific, literary, artistic and cultural creativity and provide the necessary means to that end. The State shall provide every assistance for the progress of the sciences and arts and shall encourage scientific and technical inventions, creative skills and talents and protect the products thereof." To translate this right into practice, the laws detailed below were issued.

232. Compulsory Education Law No. 35 of 1981 requires the guardians of all male and female children aged 6-12 to enrol their charges in primary school and prescribes penalties for guardians who fail to do so. This provision was updated in Law No. 7 of 2012, which requires guardians of all Syrian male and female children aged 6-15 to enrol those children in basic education schools (see annex 31).

233. Basic Education Law No. 32 of 2002 merges primary and preparatory education into one free compulsory stage lasting nine years, comprising an

initial period of four years and a second period of five years, thereby extending the basic education stage to cover children up to the age of 15.

234. Law No. 7 of 2012 and its implementing instructions, which pertain to compulsory basic education, require all guardians of male and female children aged 6-15 to enrol those children in basic education schools.

235. Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2004 (see annex 33) regulates pre-university educational institutions from kindergarten to the end of the secondary stage and the adoption of standards for improving the quality of education and the educational environment to achieve Syria's education goals.

236. Legislative Decree No. 45 of 27 July 2008 (see annex 34) establishes a National Centre for the Distinguished. The centre, an administratively and financially independent legal entity headquartered in the governorate of Homs, trains teachers. In 2009, it began by training first grade secondary teachers.

237. In 2009, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), established the first Early Childhood Development Centre to train and qualify early childhood care providers. With UNESCO's agreement, the Centre was established as a regional centre under Law No. 17 of 2012. The Centre has its main office in Damascus and is a financially independent legal entity (see annex 35).

238. Law No. 6 of 2006 on the Regulation of Universities and its implementing regulation issued under Decree No. 250 of 2006 (see annex 36) introduced substantive amendments to previous legislation on the administration and governance of higher education institutions. These amendments were designed to harmonize with major new developments in higher education, science and technology and new modes of higher education. The amendments provide a legislative basis and flexible legal foundations and components for modernizing and updating higher education, promoting universities and enabling them to improve their performance based on quality standards and new academic accreditation rules.

239. Legislative Decree No. 49 of 2009 was promulgated to establish a Scientific Research and Technological Development Support Fund for Higher Education (see annex 37).

240. The Syrian Virtual University was established as a Government university accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education in response to the global emergence of new modes of higher education. Its goal are to develop human resources in different academic specialties to meet the needs of economic and social development and the labour market and to keep pace with the requirements for access to the information economy, especially in the areas of information systems, business administration, marketing, information technology and Internet technologies.

241. Open education, which began in 2003, has succeeded in expanding opportunities for enrolment in higher education for persons hitherto unable to access formal education. It is considered the most widespread new mode of education, offering opportunities for admission to the higher education system.

242. Legislative Decree No. 203 of 2011 (see annex 38) includes key basic amendments to the mechanism for admitting students with disabilities to Syrian universities. It has had a major impact on the number of such students and the variety of specialties to which they have been admitted.

### De facto situation

243. Regarding the elimination of all forms of discrimination with respect to access to all areas of higher education, the number of female university students rose from 127,179 in 2006 to 175,526 in 2010. The percentage of females exceeds that of males in three universities: Tishreen University, Ba‘th University and Damascus University. The following table shows the number of registered students and graduates of Government universities during 2006-2010.

University	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Damascus	55 613	56 609	57 256	58 051	57 051	63 629	53 263	63 067	52 200	66 519
Aleppo	36 961	25 733	40 961	29 680	43 333	32 228	45 976	36 966	51 991	41 804
Tishreen	18 218	24 234	21 662	26 574	24 027	29 297	24 858	29 937	25 418	30 677
Al-Ba‘th	13 939	17 082	15 854	18 619	17 797	21 339	19 407	22 332	20 231	23 580
Al-Furat	3 724	3 521	5 648	5 360	8 566	8 092	11 640	11 135	13 301	12 946

Source: Ministry of Higher Education.

244. Female enrolment continues to be concentrated in colleges of literature and education and is low in science colleges, such as medicine and engineering, where males are clearly concentrated. Female enrolment in certain colleges, such health sciences, media and fine arts, is double that of males. Female enrolment in intermediate educational institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Higher Education (48.46 per cent) approximates male enrolment. The criteria for admission to universities and colleges is a passing grade on the general secondary diploma. The same criteria apply to males and females without distinction.

245. The child of a Syrian mother residing in Syria and a non-Syrian father is treated in the same way as a Syrian student in the general rating of students for admission to Syrian Government universities and colleges, provided the child has obtained a Syrian general secondary school certificate.

246. Government universities have gradually expanded horizontally since 2005, with the number of colleges in all Syrian governorates increasing from 51 to 224 in 2011. The expansion has contributed to an increase in female university enrollees, as students may live at home with their families while attending university classes nearby at low cost.

247. Open education and the Virtual University have provided females whose education has been interrupted with opportunities to continue their education. However, a gender gap continues to persist in this area, with females constituting 39.76 per cent of the students enrolled in open education colleges and only 25.48 per cent of the students enrolled in the Virtual University. This gap stems from costs that are beyond the means of some families, young women’s lack of financial resources and the need for computer and foreign language skills in this type of education. However, these difficulties can be surmounted upon completion of the current educational reforms, which will increase opportunities for coming generations of young women to enrol in distance learning.

248. The number of private universities licensed in the Syrian Arab Republic has grown to 17 as of academic year 2009/10.

249. The Syrian Arab Republic is concerned with the education of persons with disabilities and the provision of all possible facilities to enable them to continue their education. Students with disabilities are admitted to universities at admission rates lower than those of other students. They are admitted to most specialties that are compatible with their disabilities. In 2009, 240 students with disabilities, including 77 females, were admitted to Government universities; in 2010, 166, including 49 females, were admitted.

250. The number of female students sent abroad for graduate study rose from 134 in 2006 to 239 in 2009. Female lecturers sent abroad in 2009 accounted for 41 per cent of the total number sent abroad. Male and female students sent abroad are treated equally, and a married woman sent abroad is entitled to an allowance for her children while they reside with her at the location of her study.

251. Female graduate students account for more than twice the number of male graduate students in colleges of literature, education, fine arts and economics.

252. The number of women on Syrian university faculties increased from 2,281 in 2006 to 3,051 and 2009. Women are also involved in scientific research. The percentage of female scientific researchers, which is encouraging in view of the social reality, stems from the recent evolution of views concerning working women. The following table shows the relative distribution of researchers in research organizations and centres according to specialty and sex in 2009.

<i>Specialty</i>	<i>Master's degree</i>		<i>PhD</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Mathematics, modelling, physics, chemistry and the sciences	8	6	28	8
Economics and business administration	5	7	4	5
Human and social sciences	—	1	—	—
Legal and religious sciences	1	2	—	3
Engineering	16	8	23	14
Computers and communications	2	1	3	8
Agriculture	62	73	36	54
Medicine and health	—	—	2	3
Other sciences	6	2	4	5

Source: Ministry of Higher Education.

253. UNESCO fellowships for young women researchers in the life sciences were awarded to a female member of the National Commission for Biotechnology in 2010 and to a woman from Aleppo University in 2011.

254. A female university professor won second place for the Arab Culture Award given by the Arab League's Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization in 2007.

255. A female member of the National Commission for Biotechnology won a second-place grant from the Outstanding Scholarship Programme in Science and Technology in 2011.

256. During 2006-2010, there was an increase in the number of females serving as: college deans from none to two at Aleppo University and from two to three at Tishreen University; assistant deans from three to nine at Aleppo University and from 1 to 10 at Tishreen University; and department heads from 21 to 24 at

Damascus University, from seven to nine at Aleppo University and from 15 to 19 at Tishreen University.

257. The following table shows the number of women holding academic posts in Syrian universities during 2011-2012.

University	College Dean		Assistant Dean		Department head	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Damascus	27	4	48	7	115	22
Aleppo	26	1	49	2	109	14
Tishreen	23	2	34	11	78	15
Al-Ba'ath	17	3	35	2	83	5
Al-Furat	24	—	47	—	8	—

Source: Ministry of Higher Education.

258. The following entities were established:

- The National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education was established under Legislative Decree No. 15 of 2012 (see annex 39).
- Al-Sham Higher Institute for Sharia Sciences, the Arabic Language and Islamic Studies was established under Decree No. 48 of 2011 (see annex 40). The Institute has colleges of Sharia sciences and the Arabic language for males and females.
- The Intermediate Institute for Sharia and Arabic Studies was established in 2009 for males and females.
- The Office of Women's Religious Instruction was established in 2008 in the Ministry of Religious Endowments.
- The Centre for the Training of Male and Female Propagandists and Human Development was established in Damascus in 2009. Branches of the Centre, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Religious Endowments, have been opened in the governorates.
- A Women Studies and Development Centre was established at al-Ba'ath University. Considered the first of its type in Syrian universities, it has the following goals:
  - o Study of the situation of women; monitoring of women's role and contribution in scientific, social, economic and cultural fields; and collaboration in proposing solutions and policies for remedying the problems of women in these fields.
  - o Concern with the compilation, monitoring and classification of information and data on women to serve as a primary source for serious studies on women's issues.
  - o Collaboration with institutions from outside the university.

### Progress achieved

259. Progress was achieved through the following:

- Appointment of a female university professor to the post of Deputy Minister of Higher Education in 2012.

- Appointment of two female university professors to the post of Vice-President of Damascus University in 2008 and 2012.
- The launch of a National Plan to Develop Higher Education Programmes and Curricula, completion of the first stage of the development of national academic benchmarks in 2010 and the start of the second stage in 2012.
- Preparation of research on family issues in general and women's issues in particular by faculty members and students at the universities (see annex 41 for several paper titles).
- Participation in international cooperation programmes:
  - Appointment of a representative of al-Ba'th University to the Population Reference Bureau's International Programmes/Women's Programme, Washington, United States.
  - Participation in the membership of the Third World Organization for Women in Science.
  - Appointment of a female professor in the College of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering at Damascus University as the chairwoman of the Arab Institute for Electronic Business.
  - Participation in the Second International Conference on Women and Development at Aden University entitled "Features of the Empowerment and Participation of Women in Development in the Syrian Arab Republic".
  - Participation in the Fifth Conference on Women in Scientific Research and Development in southern Egypt, Asyut University, 2005.
  - Participation in the international conference held by the Third World Organization for Women in Science, Bangalore, India, 2005.
  - Participation in the proceedings of the Women in Business International Forum, Damascus, 2005.
  - Participation in the Conference on Women's Leadership in the Arab Countries, Kuwait, 2007.
  - Participation in the Arab Family Day Meeting, Damascus, 2005.
  - Participation in the Second Arab Women in Science and Technology Conference with the theme "Empowerment for the Development of the Arab World", 2010.
  - Holding of a seminar on postpartum depression for physicians and nurses to raise awareness of methods for treating postpartum women and providing them appropriate accommodations for their family, social and work lives.
  - Holding a Roundtable on Adolescence and Technology in 2007 in cooperation with the College of Architecture at Aleppo University and the Syrian Women's Association.
  - Holding of the College of Law's "Second International Conference on Law and Women" in 2009 at the College of Law, Aleppo University.
  - Holding of a population seminar on women and their role in the development process, 2010, at the College of Economics, Aleppo University.

- o The Higher Education Council, in cooperation with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, held the Fifty-First Knowledge Week, an international conference on “Population Changes in Syria and their Development Dimensions”, 2011. The conference treated topics, such as the empowerment and role of women in the development process.
- Women enjoy all rights enjoyed by men, including the rights of faculty members in all respects from hiring to retirement (procedures, leave, academic research, full-time status, etc.).
- Female students may obtain loans and grants for university study based on need and resources available to the Ministry of Higher Education, without gender discrimination.
- Discrimination favouring females is practised regarding university housing.
- The Teachers’ Union raises the health awareness of women and provides means of protection and treatment through health centres throughout most governorates of the country. Some centres have x-ray machines for the early detection of breast cancer. The Teachers’ Union supervises 12 centres.
- Faculty members and students at universities prepare research on family issues in general and women’s issues in particular.
- A Syrian Women’s Association of Science and Technology has been established to enforce women’s rights in higher education and technical education, incorporate physically disabled females in the development process, develop capacities, harness expertise and create jobs with the appropriate status for competent women.

### **Obstacles**

260. Obstacles include:

- Weak representation of women in university administrations relative to the percentage of female faculty members, administrators and graduates.
- Reluctance of a significant number of women to participate in foreign missions for social reasons (marriage, reproduction, etc.) and the preference of women for domestic missions.
- Social legacy concerning the priority attached to women’s family role over all other roles.
- Reluctance of a significant number of women faculty members to accept administrative positions due to the burdens of such positions and the preoccupation of women with household burdens.
- Heightened psychological pressure in workplaces and the effect of such pressures on women who also bear family burdens.
- Economic situation of families, particularly large families and the lack of resources, such that families prefer to educate males as future heads of household and providers.
- Output of research centres concerned with women’s issues is weak and small in number.
- Since academic year 2011-2012, al-Ba‘th University in Homs, its colleges in the city of Hamah and Aleppo University’s colleges in the city of Idlib have been closed, due to targeting and assassination of teaching staff and targeting of students. The State is taking measures to ensure the continuity of education

and compensate students. It has established a temporary arrangement for students to attend and take exams in other Syrian universities.

### **Envisaged measures**

261. Envisaged measures include:

- Propagation of the culture of gender equality and non-discrimination against women through workshops organized by local and international associations and organizations that support these goals.
- Boosting the rate of women's participation in academic and administrative positions by preparing and enabling and strengthening women's capacity to deal with the challenges they face.
- Increased media attention to women working in higher education.
- Promotion of the audio and print media's role in empowering women to participate in various fields of life.
- Holding workshops to provide information on the achievements of Arab women in academia and naming lecture halls and auditoriums after female scholars.
- Promotion of the role of clerics in urging women's attainment to the highest levels education because of the positive effect of doing so on the family and society.
- Raising men's awareness of the importance of women's work in all fields based on equitable sharing of household responsibilities.
- Formulation of policies that strengthen women's participation in the economy to thereby boost family income and socioeconomic advancement based on educational attainment.

### **Women in pre-university education**

#### **De facto application**

262. Based on Syria's Constitution and commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, which include achievement of universal education for males and females, strengthening of gender equality and empowerment of women, the Tenth and Eleventh Five-Year Plans attach special importance to women and education. They emphasize the adoption of a strategy to provide a "Good Education for All". Accordingly, we see that the Compulsory Education Law and the rules of procedure of basic education schools make no distinction between males and females. Rather, they require both male and female children to be enrolled in basic education, which is free and compulsory, until they obtain the basic education diploma.

263. The enrolment of girls in education has improved quantitatively and qualitatively based on the democratization of education and equal opportunity for all children of both sexes to obtain a quality higher education. The percentage of women receiving an education has increased, which has strengthened their participation in the development of society.

The following table shows the number and percentage of female students at the various educational stages.



Education stage	2007-2008			2009-2010			2010-2011		
	Females	Total	Percentage	Females	Total	Percentage	Females	Total	Percentage
Kindergarten	70 813	<b>150 235</b>	47.13	70 647	<b>149 110</b>	47.37	81 310	<b>171 506</b>	47.40
Basic	2 168 037	<b>4 514 801</b>	48.02	2 241 022	<b>4 661 872</b>	48.07	2 294 084	<b>4 774 276</b>	48.05
General secondary	193 945	<b>367 572</b>	52.76	210 269	<b>392 960</b>	53.50	230 899	<b>430 702</b>	53.60
Vocational secondary	39 789	<b>100 258</b>	39.68	42 528	<b>106 443</b>	39.95	49 731	<b>123 333</b>	40.32
College	16 772	<b>34 920</b>	48.02	10 586	<b>28 331</b>	37.36	16 582	<b>36 851</b>	44.99

Source: Ministry of Education.

The following table shows the number and percentage of female teachers according to educational stage.

Education stage	2007-2008			2009-2010			2010-2011		
	Females	Total	Percentage	Females	Total	Percentage	Females	Total	Percentage
Kindergarten	7 741	8 058	96.06	7 230	7 591	95.24	8 452	9 189	95.24
Basic	166 964	253 115	65.96	183 749	271 782	64.38	189 814	279 704	67.86
General secondary	19 984	41 758	47.85	24 747	48 956	50.54	24 046	48 161	49.92
Vocational secondary	81 00	17 945	45.13	9 810	20 058	48.90	8 910	18 607	47.88
College	2 211	4 581	48.26	2 608	5 756	45.30	2 353	5 061	46.49

Source: Ministry of Education.

264. In the framework of Syria's concern with the education of Bedouin children who move with their families in search of pasture for their sheep, the Ministry of Education has undertaken a mobile schools project called "Interior Schools for the Bedouin", which uses tents and caravans. Mobile schools were introduced to the Bedouin in 2002-2003 in the governorates of Homs, Rif Dimashq and Dayr al-Zawr. Measures are currently being taken to formulate a basic education curriculum for Bedouin to meet their aspirations and harmonize with their environment. These schools provide school books, stationery, school supplies, housing, food and health care at no cost. The dropout rate in these schools is low. There are 98 prefabricated schools, 59 mobile caravan schools and 42 tent schools for Bedouin children.

### Illiteracy eradication

265. The State is joining efforts with various sectors of society to free the country from illiteracy. Decree No. 16 of 2 April 2002 (see annex 42) is intended to eliminate illiteracy among all citizens above the age of 18 who lack Arabic reading and writing and basic math skills and are not enrolled in a school. The law assigns the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education the functions of the High Council of Illiteracy Eradication. The following table shows the number of enrolees in literacy classes during 2006-2010.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage females</i>
2006	16 564	43 574	<b>60 138</b>	72.5
2007	24 037	84 291	<b>108 328</b>	77.8
2008	18 080	59 192	<b>77 272</b>	76.6
2009	17 820	84 553	<b>102 373</b>	82.6
2010	17 072	69 855	<b>86 927</b>	80.4

Source: Statistical Series, 2011.

266. The percentage of females who have become literate rose from 75.7 per cent in 2006 to 82 per cent in 2010, as shown in the following table:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage females</i>
2006	9 841	30 609	<b>40 450</b>	75.7
2007	14 911	63 069	<b>77 980</b>	80.9
2008	10 229	41 773	<b>52 002</b>	80.3
2009	14 569	69 221	<b>83 790</b>	82.6
2010	14 872	67 613	<b>83 485</b>	82.0

Source: Statistical Series, 2011.

267. In 2007-2011, ceremonies to mark the eradication of illiteracy were held by the governorates of Qunaytirah, Tartus, Suwayda' and Hama and the districts of Hasham and Kasrah in the governorate of Dayr al-Zawr.

268. The Directorate of Adult Education and Cultural Development in the Ministry of Culture bears the biggest burden in combating illiteracy. It prepares the illiteracy eradication plan, provides recommendations to ensure its success and supervises its implementation. It also: monitors the literacy activities of the adult education departments in the governorates, popular organizations, professional unions and official bodies; prepares, prints and distributes books, publications and courses on illiteracy eradication; holds courses to train literacy instructors; and cooperates with the ministries and domestic, Arab, foreign and international bodies concerned with illiteracy eradication to coordinate their efforts and resources.

269. The illiteracy Eradication Programme aims to reduce adult illiteracy by 50 per cent by early 2015, especially among women, and to achieve equal opportunity in basic education and continuing education for all adults. This is achieved through:

- Mapping illiteracy rates in the governorates, which shows that the highest illiteracy rates are in the northern and north-eastern governorates, where efforts are therefore being focused.
- Holding literacy courses through the Adult Education Directorate's subordinate departments in the governorates.
- Development of literacy curricula consistent with current developments and the incorporation of new subjects and the concepts of population development, health and environment in literacy curricula.
- Reduction of illiteracy among adults, with emphasis on women.

270. The following curriculum was developed for the adult education programme supervised by the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education:

- Level I (foundation and follow-up). This involves 3.5 hours of daily instruction for six months. It aims to eradicate illiteracy and strengthen reading, writing and basic arithmetic skills.
- Level II (empowerment). This aims to consolidate reading writing and arithmetic skills and develop elementary education knowledge. It involves 3.5 hours of daily instruction for a period of three months.

### **Progress achieved**

271. The Teachers' Union held 50 literacy courses in 2008 in all governorates and 61 courses during 2009 in the Raqqah branches.

272. The Nada Development Association helped 90 women become literate by holding courses in the Ghazlaniyah district near Damascus Airport. The Association also established a launderette, whose revenues are used to develop literacy and it held a number of ongoing education and self-development courses for women.

273. The National Association For Women's Role Development held literacy courses for young women at the Institute of Social Education for Girls. It provided young women with basic and vocational education services suited to their ages and capabilities.

274. Syria is committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals according to the established schedules and affirms its responsibility to achieve universal education. The promotion of education and increased educational opportunities for women have resulted in higher rates of women's participation in the labour force and in economic and social life.

275. Progress achieved includes:

- The General Women's Federation prepared a film that tracks the success stories of women who overcame illiteracy. A booklet was also prepared as a companion to the film.
- In 2007-2009, loans were granted to a number of female graduates of rural literacy courses to enable them to establish enterprises.
- Women who overcome literacy are honoured annually in the centres and branches of the governorates, especially women who graduate with distinction, who are interviewed on television, so that their success stories can encourage other women. Exhibitions are held to showcase their artistic talents and efforts are made to broaden their participation in periodic exhibitions and to arrange visits and meetings.
- Educational and refresher courses are held for general diploma students, as are transition classes, to encourage these students, particularly females, to continue learning.
- Summer clubs are held for children of nursery school age to provide their mothers with an opportunity to participate in courses and perform general tasks.
- National criteria for educational curricula have been applied at all educational stages, resulting in comprehensive substantive changes in the education system. Basic curriculum approaches have been implemented to

strengthen the quality of student's learning and active participation and to improve academic and practical educational frameworks. This was achieved through the development of effective educational methods. These methods are emphasized in textbooks and activity books and teacher's guides to the new curricula.

- Major training courses on the new curricula have been held for all teachers and instructors. Population and environmental education have been introduced as subjects. Secondary students' awareness of reproductive health, protection from diseases, particularly AIDS, and human rights issues has been strengthened.
- The quality of education and training programmes has been improved through a programme to incorporate technology in education which has been propagated in all the governorates.
- A girls' education programme has been implemented in a number of governorates to encourage girls to continue basic education by raising awareness of the importance of education and prevention of dropout and early marriage.
- Concepts have been introduced in all new textbooks to change the negative stereotypes concerning women's roles. Textbooks currently being prepared will include subjects intended to continue this process.
- Psychological and social guidance programmes in schools are being expanded in all governorates.
- Programmes to mainstream children with disabilities in regular education are being expanded to cover all governorates.
- Kindergartens have been opened in all governorates of the country, especially in rural areas and villages, to help female teachers perform their educational duties. The fees are nominal and children of teachers receive a 50 per cent discount. The Teachers' Union has opened 330 kindergartens, most of which are attached to schools. Qualified educators supervise the kindergartens. The Ministry of Education will open 500 kindergartens during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (see the table below).
- In 2005-2006, the Ministry of Education implemented a plan to train educators in cooperation with the Agha Khan Development Network. A series of guides on environmental education for kindergartners was prepared. Qualified female and male educators were prepared for kindergartens, and the staff working in the kindergartens were given in-service training.
- The number of kindergartens increased from 1,533 in 2006 to 1,866 in 2010.
- The General Women's Federation has 375 nurseries and kindergartens throughout the country. It provides for low-income persons and reduces tuition in rural areas.
- The Ministry of Education cooperates with the General Women's Federation and the Japan International Cooperation Agency in holding courses and arranging study tours for development purposes.
- The National Association for Women's Role Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, prepared an integrated programme covering technical and vocational education, religious guidance and medicine and a group of diverse activities to enable young women to achieve economic independence after they graduate from the

Institute of Social Education, which admits an average of 25 young women per month and has the capacity to admit 45 young women per month.

- In 2008, the National Association for Women's Role Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, established the Oasis of Hope shelter for battered women. It takes in four women on average per month and can accommodate up to 25 women. The project provides diverse services, including technical and vocational education. Thirteen women currently benefit from this programme, which served 80 women during 2008-2011.
- The National Association for Women's Role Development established the "Oasis of Hope" project in 2008, which involved equipping a shelter for female victims of violence. The Association provides education at various levels and technical and vocational education.
- Islamic law curricula take into account women's issues, the family, marriage, divorce and inheritance in study courses.
- The Revolutionary Youth Union and the General Women's Federation cooperate to support female students and mothers by providing lectures to develop awareness of their integrative role in the family and society.
- Union centres, branches, divisions and units hold awareness-raising and ongoing education seminars emphasizing the complementarity between men and women and the need to protect, defend and adhere to women's rights.
- The cultural centres organize seminars and lectures on the Arab woman in all governorates and include these activities in their annual and monthly programmes.
- The Ministry of Religious Endowments presents lectures at mosques in all governorates to shed light on the status of women and the importance of their role in life (see annex 43).

The following table shows the distribution of kindergartens according to governorate for 2006-2010.

Year	Kindergartens according to affiliation					Total	Children			Teachers
	Ministry of Education	General Women's Federation	Teachers' union	Private	Other ministries		Males	Females	Total	
2006	155 731	73 700	82 031	1 533	48	901	197	196	191	6 541
2007	145 781	69 281	76 500	1 637	40	974	196	185	242	7 769
2008	147 935	69 655	78 280	1 737	32	1 055	212	173	265	8 018
2009	145 416	69 333	76 083	1 811	28	1 115	226	188	254	8 465
2010	149 110	70 642	78 468	1 866	20	1 176	228	180	262	5 403
<b>Governorate</b>										
Damascus	24 013	11 528	12 485	209	2	164	11	9	23	1 063
Aleppo	15 817	7 355	8 462	161	—	141	1	4	15	529
Rif Dimashq	31 880	15 272	16 608	293	3	210	5	62	13	1 471
Homs	14 846	6 929	7 917	180	—	138	2	22	18	773
Hamah	10 788	5 053	5 735	116	—	80	3	14	19	565
Ladhiqiyah	9 245	4 369	4 876	151	—	122	21	5	3	163

Year	Kindergartens according to affiliation						Children			
	Ministry of Education	General Women's Federation	Teachers' union	Private	Other ministries	Total	Males	Females	Total	Teachers
Idlib	5 874	2 788	3 086	65	—	53	—	3	9	70
Hasakah	3 242	1 436	1 806	36	1	24	1	3	7	75
Dayr al-Zawr	4 519	2 185	2 334	99	—	25	—	5	69	136
Tartus	12 323	6 012	6 311	324	1	94	165	18	46	241
Raqqah	2 254	1 025	1 229	28	—	9	—	3	16	95
Dar'a	7 094	3 268	3 826	107	13	64	12	10	8	99
Suwayda'	4 013	1 873	2 140	59	—	28	7	13	11	66
Qunaytirah	3 202	1 549	1 653	38	—	24	—	9	5	57

Source: Statistical Series, 2011.

### Obstacles

276. In the context of the painful events in Syria, armed terrorist groups have destroyed 1,500 schools in a number of governorates, abducted 24 teachers and students, assassinated 12 teachers and prevented a large number of students from continuing their education for months (the destroyed schools are currently being renovated). The cost of the damage in the educational sector is estimated at more than 800 million Syrian pounds.

277. Pre-elementary education must be expanded to include kindergarten. This requires considerable material and human resources, which are not commensurate with the large population increases.

## Article 11. Employment

### Legislative and legal framework

278. The following laws and legislation regulate the labour market in Syria:

1. 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was the subject of a popular referendum on 26 February 2012, as it pertains to labour and the rights of labourers. The 2012 Constitution was preceded by the Constitution of 1973.
2. Syrian Civil Code.
3. Bilateral and multilateral Arab and international agreements.
4. Basic Employees Law No. 35 of 1945 and amendments thereto.
5. Social Security Law No. 92 of 1959 and amendments thereto (see annex 44).
6. Law No. 84 of 1968 on the Regulation of Labour Unions and amendments thereto (see annex 45).
7. Law No. 50 of 2004 (Basic Law on Labourers).
8. Labour Law No. 17 of 2010 on the Regulation of Labour in the Private and Non-governmental Sector. Section 3, articles 119-127, are dedicated to the employment of women and the method for guaranteeing their rights.

9. Law No. 3 of 2010 Prohibiting Trafficking in Persons Offences.
10. Legislative Decree No. 62 of 2007 Regulating the Importation and Employment of Female Workers and Nannies in the Homes of Non-Syrians. This law guarantees the rights of such workers (see annex 46).
11. Decree No. 108 of 2009, which regulates the activity of private firms involved in the importation and employment of non-Syrian female workers.
12. Legislative Decree No. 9 of 31 January 2011, which covers the establishment of a National Social Assistance Fund intended to protect and care for poor families by providing periodic or emergency assistance. The assistance is conditional on the beneficiaries' commitment to development in the areas of health and education (including a zero educational dropout rate and participation in inoculation programmes for children). Such assistance is intended to empower beneficiaries from an economic, social, educational and health standpoint through programmes implemented by the Fund or competent empowerment organizations and programmes (see annex 47). As of May 2012, 439,000 persons had benefited from the fund.
13. Legislative Decree No. 62 of 2011 on the Rehiring of Temporary Workers, whereby State and public sector workers and some workers in the joint sector are subjected to Law No. 50 of 2004, while workers in the regulated private and non-governmental sector are subjected to Law No. 17 of 2010.
14. Agricultural Relations Law.

#### **De facto situation**

279. The Women's Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation Programme is carried out in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Government agencies and the United Nations Development Programme to empower women economically through the creation of income-generating enterprises and jobs. It is also designed to empower women socially through literacy training and health education. Under this programme, women are provided facilities to obtain loans to establish or support their enterprises. Facilities include exemption of borrowers from paying the entire 6 per cent mark-up on financing granted (under the Islamic murabaha system) if ownership of the enterprise is registered in the loan recipient's name. The borrower is also exempted from paying 2 per cent of the mark-up if she commits to repay the loan, and she can obtain a loan with soft guarantees without the need for guarantors.

280. The International Labour Organization and the Syrian Government, represented by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, concluded a "Decent Work Country Programme" agreement for 2008-2010. The programme helps women and men obtain decent, productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human decency. It provides jobs, strengthens relevant agencies' capacity and social protection, formulates effective policies for workers in informal economic activity and disseminates agreements concerning this programme by incorporating the programme in the worker education curriculum in the institutes subordinate to the labour organizations.

281. In order to boost working women's awareness and knowledge, popular and professional organizations have held educational courses on political, social, legislative and population issues through their associated specialized institutes (labour institutes).

282. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 25 July 2010 to provide basic services and improve living conditions for refugees in Syria through Government and non-governmental organizations in Syria.

283. In addition, 957 libraries have been established for workers in various governorates. These libraries contain books and publications concerning labour issues, women's issues and different sciences. Due to the concerned organizations' interest in the role of working women, they have acted through several media to present the issues of working women and the difficulties they face in becoming integrated in development. They have published the *Socialist Workers' Struggle* newspaper, which dedicates entire pages to the problems of working women and encourages female workers to contribute content. This interest is also reflected in Government agencies, which have become outfitted with nurseries for children of female employees. Some of these facilities lack physicians and specialist staff, but they fulfil the purpose and are following up to achieve the highest level of service. In addition, the private and non-governmental sector are opening nurseries and kindergartens and charging fees scaled to rural and urban living standards. Governmental and non-governmental bodies treat male and female employees equally with respect to the services provided to them, including housing and social solidarity fund services, as well as with respect to wages, promotion, leave, etc.

284. Official, popular and non-governmental bodies seek to create more jobs for women through training and qualification and by contracting with the industrial sector to employ women. In this connection, an agreement was concluded between the Women's Federation of Hamah and the Chamber of Industry to train, qualify and employ 2,000 women and girls between 2007 and 2010.

285. The General Federation of Workers implemented 50 training courses benefiting 2,303 female workers. The Federation encourages sports and periodic competitions among female workers and holds summer camps for the children of female workers. The Workers Theatre concerns women's issues through ongoing, major performances. All arts are encouraged, and a series of books is prepared for educational purposes. Working women participate in cooperatives, solidarity funds, fellowship funds, loan funds and housing saving funds.

286. The Young Entrepreneurs Association Programme provides 10,000 jobs every year for graduates and new jobs for youth. In addition, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan provides 50,000 jobs.

287. There is growing interest in the establishment of small and microenterprises. The State provides the necessary loans. Year after year, funds have been provided in what has become a national approach on which the Government relies to support and develop the national economy. This is apparent in the Tenth and Eleventh Five-Year Plans. In addition, institutions have been created to provide small and microfinancing to support these enterprises.

288. Regarding female foreign workers, Legislative Decree No. 62 of 2007 on the Employment of Female Workers and Nannies in the Homes of Non-Syrians was issued, as was Decree No. 108/M of 2009, which concerns agencies that import and employ female workers and nannies to work in the homes of non-Syrians. The Decree covers terms and rules for the employment of such women in Syria. Official agencies have been established and registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour to import female foreign workers according to



standard employment contracts that specify the obligations of the agency owner and the female worker to thereby secure the rights of all parties.

### **Obstacles**

289. Obstacles include:

- A small percentage of female workers, particularly in small workshops and rural labour, receive wages that are lower than the wages of men, owing to negative customs and traditions and the working conditions of some occupations, jobs and businesses. There is no gender discrimination concerning wages in public sector employment.
- Some female workers in the informal economy lack many of their rights and at times are subjected to blackmail and exploitation.
- In 2011, a large number of male and female workers in the private sector were laid off due to the tragic events and economic sanctions, which led to the closure of thousands of workshops. Public sector workers were not subject to any measures of this type.
- The unemployment rate is high for males and females in some specialties, though females are more affected in this regard.
- Some skilled workers and professionals are employed in jobs other than their specialties or in marginal work inconsistent with their educational level.
- There is a need to legislate and regulate the funding of Syrian banks, associations and organizations active in small financing to expand the scope of their services to include more urban and rural areas.
- Most banks require real estate guarantees, which is an obstacle for some women seeking to obtain loans.

290. The past decade has seen simplification of bureaucratic procedures. In addition, small, income-generating enterprises run by women have become acceptable as loan collateral and new financing institutions have been established.

### **Envisaged measures**

291. The envisaged measures include:

1. Adaptation of educational, vocational and training curricula at all levels to the needs of the labour market.
2. Implementation of an executive plan to effectively lower unemployment, which has been rising since the 1980s due to the crisis and ongoing blockade.
3. Propagation of a self-employment culture, and the strengthening of volunteerism among youth and the role of private and non-governmental sector.
4. The promulgation of additional laws and articles supporting micro, small and medium enterprises, which have been incorporated in the Tenth and Eleventh Five-Year Plans.
5. Development of the Social Security system by establishing an unemployment insurance fund to provide social support and a suitable income to the unemployed and their family members until an alternate job can be found. The concept of such a fund is based on the designation of the savings account for each insured member. The account would be

provisioned from the worker's salary and by the employer. An unemployment allowance would be paid from the fund's savings and investment revenues. A portion of the fund would be allocated to support maternity for working women. This insurance will encourage employers to employ women because it reduces the financial burdens borne by employers in maternity cases. It also provides a good opportunity for women to enter the private sector labour force. A portion of the fund would be allocated for retraining and qualification of unemployed persons during their unemployment to develop skills and capabilities (the new Constitution, articles 22 and 40 provides for this fund).

6. The integration of women in the labour force at the desired level, which would result in lower fertility and improved quality of life for families.

7. It is urgently necessary to implement the programme put forth to provide social services that support women in order to provide a better climate for women to participate in development.

8. The inclusion in GNP calculations of women's household work as productive work in every sense of the word.

9. The strengthening of the role of labour unions and women's committees in particular.

## **Article 12. Equality in the field of health care**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

292. Under Syria's 1973 Constitution, article 46, and the new Constitution, article 22, the State:

1. Guarantees every citizen health care in cases of emergency, disease, invalidity, orphanhood and old age.
2. Protects the health of citizens and provides them with means of prevention, treatment and medication.

293. Legislative Decree No. 111 of 1966 (see annex 48) states that the Ministry of Health has the following functions:

1. Supervise all health affairs and health institutions.
2. Develop, promote and expand the fields of health care and enhance public health, consistent with the needs and the social and economic development of the country.
3. Protect citizens from, combat and eradicate epidemic infectious and endemic diseases.
4. Provide medical services to low-income persons defined by decree of the Council of Ministers.
5. Operate according to a systematic plan to provide health care and make it accessible to all citizens.
6. Plan health curricula based on well-studied, scientific foundations.
7. Care for the health of workers, nursing children, children and students; provide medical supervision for workers, prison inmates, nurseries, convalescent facilities, facilities for the infirm and juvenile

offender observation centres; and established model institutions for mother and child care.

8. Provide medical input for physical and occupational rehabilitation institutions for persons with disabilities and diseases whose medical condition so requires.

294. The Eleventh Five-Year Plan provides for the following health objectives:

- Reduction of child and infant mortality rates.
- Reduction of the maternal mortality ratio to 45 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.
- Reduction of the disability rate by 25 per cent relative to the current rate.
- Raising the per capita share of total health expenditure to \$100 and reducing geographical and social disparities in health spending.
- An increase in health spending to 7 per cent of GDP.

#### **De facto situation**

295. Health is a primary pivot of human development. The health sector has a key effect on human lives and existence and is fundamental to enabling citizens to enjoy socially and economically fruitful lives. Improvement of the health situation and provision of the highest possible level of protection and care to the population is a basic development priority for domestic and global society.

296. Syria's basic health indicators show that the health sector has achieved multiple successes in the decade 2000-2009, including a drop in child mortality from 18.1 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 17.9 per 1,000 live births in 2009, a drop in maternal mortality from 65.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2001 to 52 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2009 and a rise in female life expectancy at birth from 72.1 years in 2004 to 74.4 years in 2009. The rise in female life expectancy is due to several factors, including relatively high standard of living, evolution of awareness, lower illiteracy rates, improved primary health-care service coverage, expanded provision of curative health care, availability of a first aid and emergency services system, an increase in the labour force working in the health sector and the diversity of health specialties. In addition, the number of hospital beds rose from 1 per 782 persons in 2005 to 1 per 734 persons in 2011 and the number of health workers per 10,000 persons in the population stands at 15.1 physicians, 7.8 dentists and 17.6 nurses.

297. According to statistics of the Ministry of Health for 2009, circulatory diseases are the leading cause of female mortality (45.6 per cent), followed by respiratory diseases (16.6 per cent) and cancer (7.1 per cent).

298. Accordingly, provision was made to build three private hospitals for cardiovascular disease and surgery in Dar'a, Dayr al-Zawr and Ladhqiyyah to provide access to services in the southern, eastern and coastal regions respectively. Construction is largely complete and the hospitals are expected to open soon.

299. The Health Promotion Programme enhances awareness of the risks of certain eating behaviours and the benefits of healthy living, such as physical activity, weight loss and stopping smoking. This is accomplished by holding activities, printing educational material and broadcasting health messages in the audio and visual media in cooperation with the World Health Organization.

300. The Ministry of Health's plans for 2010 provide for two cancer diagnosis and treatment centres, one in Aleppo and one in Homs.

301. According to the Syrian National Cancer Registry for 2009, breast cancer was the most prevalent cancer among females (30 per cent). Accordingly, efforts have been made to increase awareness of early detection. During 2010, a media campaign was launched to increase women's knowledge of this disease and methods of early detection. The provision of mammography services at health centres was announced for women wishing to obtain mammograms.

302. The Ministry of Health is focusing on increasing the number of mammography machines in hospitals and centres. There are 44 such machines distributed throughout the governorates. As of end-2010, 34,186 mammograms had been taken, compared to 14,484 at end-2006 in the Ministry of Health's hospitals. Services include instruction in self-examination, examination by service providers and referrals for mammograms at health centres.

303. The Ministry of Health also:

- Published many booklets and publications on methods for self-examination and the identification of high-risk women.
- Prepared a physician's guide on managing complaints and the presence of lumps in the breasts. The guide is the process of being printed.
- Builds the capacities of service providers (physicians and midwives) in an ongoing manner. Refresher courses are held at least every three years for service providers, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund.
- Is taking action to provide free Pap smears for early cervical cancer detection in most health centres. Women are referred as needed for additional tests, such as colposcopy. Cervical cancer is less prevalent than breast cancer.
- Builds the capacities of obstetric and medical staff through training that includes all health-care providers at various levels. More than 200 midwives are trained annually. A number of physicians are also trained annually in advanced techniques (colposcopy).
- Publishes numerous publications, health messages and brochures in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund to enhance women's awareness of early symptoms and the need for Pap smears for early detection.
- Cooperates with other bodies to raise awareness of disease and early detection methods through lectures, seminars etc.

304. Syria is committed to lowering maternal mortality as a Millennium Development Goal. A study of the causes of maternal mortality in 2005 showed that a large percentage of maternal deaths stemmed from lack of training and expertise on the part of the obstetrics staff and delays by women in seeking medical care. Hence, a plan was formulated to:

- Establish teams at the governorate level to provide training in emergency obstetrics care.
- Enhance women's awareness of the need to seek care as early as possible.
- Introduce a maternal mortality surveillance system in Syria in preparation for forming a higher national committee to ensure compliance with the maternal mortality surveillance steps.

305. In this context, the following has been carried out:

- Training 75 physicians and 70 midwives in emergency obstetric care with experts in attendance, in cooperation with the United Nations Population

Fund. Trainees are the nucleus for teams that will conduct training in the governorates.

- Holding seminars in cooperation with various bodies on danger signs during pregnancy and birth. Brochures and posters concerning this topic were also prepared.
- Specific, two-stage training with a British expert in attendance was conducted for physicians from hospitals and obstetrics departments in all governorates. Training focused on the method for investigating maternal mortality and near-death cases in hospitals.
- A comprehensive national guide to pregnancy and birth complications was prepared, based on the guidance of the World Health Organization. The guide is in the final review and printing stage.
- Ongoing training in natural birth skills, meconium, high risk births and the referral of high risk births is provided to midwives, who provide services in 42 natural birth centres throughout remote areas that lack obstetric services.

306. At end-2010, a strategic framework was established for combating AIDS for 2011-2015. Approval was also given for the submission of a round-10 proposal to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In addition, applied measures were tested and recommendations were formulated for making the measures more effective. Key measures include:

1. Effective monitoring of blood and blood products when they are transfused (only two cases of contamination were recorded between 1987 and 1995).
2. Promotion and application of premarital testing and testing foreigners who come to reside in Syria.
3. Continued mounting of awareness-raising and health education campaigns for the general population through all media.
4. The “If mom is fine, all of us are fine” programme.
5. Focus on preventing the spread of infection in vulnerable populations through multiple surveys and studies of these populations.
6. Formulation of guides and laws on AIDS, including *The Guide to the Prevention of Infection from Mother to Child*, 2010 and legislation on the rights and duties of persons living with the HIV/AIDS virus, 2011.
7. Publication, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, of a guide for media workers on the AIDS disease, protection methods and the media’s treatment of this disease.

307. With reference to the general recommendations appearing in paragraphs 15 and 24 of the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the incidence of this disease in Syria is low, due to a number of factors, including culture, morals, religious inhibitions and the effective supervision of blood transfusions (no cases resulting from contaminated blood have been recorded in Syria since 1995). Females account for one third of all cases. The prevalence of detected cases is 2 per 100,000 of the population as of end-2010. Most cases are transmitted from an infected husband to his wife. The transmission of the infection from mother to foetus was 4 per 100,000 as of end-2010. In 2007, a policy was adopted in a national workshop to prevent mother-to-foetus transmission of the infection. The policy focuses on:

- Avoidance of undesirable pregnancy through provision of guidance on the use of contraceptives.
- Protection from mother-to-child transmission of the infection.
- Provision of services and treatment to infected mothers and care for infected mothers and their families.

308. Regarding the media, television segments on how AIDS is transmitted and the importance of medical analyses for early detection of the disease were aired. *A Guide for Media Workers on Combating HIV/AIDS* was also published.

### **Health programmes targeting women's health**

#### **Healthy Villages Programme**

309. At end-2010, 513 villages were covered by this Programme, which is based on community participation in the achievement of goals and priorities that meet the basic needs of each population concentration through effective participation of women. The Programme aims to educate and train women in villages. Close to 6,500 female neighbourhood representatives, both youths and women, have been trained in health and development topics.

310. The following was carried out regarding manuals for training neighbourhood representatives:

(a) Publication of a manual for female medics in each neighbourhood and manuals on the child-friendly home and community, the female neighbourhood representative and the smoke-free village;

(b) Training female neighbourhood representatives in targeted villages on all the manuals.

311. Improvement of household incomes is a goal of the programme to elevate the economic level, which affects the health of the entire family. Families in target villages were granted loans during 2002-2008 to enable them to start income-generating enterprises, with financing from the World Health Organization and the European Union. The Agha Khan Development Network also helped finance a number of loans in the health villages.

#### **Adolescent Health Programme**

312. This Programme, started in 2006, has implemented the following activities:

- Training 110 trainers from various relevant bodies in multiple topics, including methods for dealing with adolescents, reproductive health, mental health and life skills.
- Holding training courses in the aforementioned topics for some 4,000 male and female adolescents from various localities.
- Training of 1,120 psychological counsellors in the schools in all governorates in first aid and emergencies, psychological first aid in crises and psychological changes in adolescents.

313. In addition, the following were published:

- Adolescent health trainer's manual.
- Adolescent mental health trainer's manual.
- Manual on adolescent smoking (being printed).
- Guide to reproductive health for adolescents (being printed).

- Printed health messages (18 messages), which were distributed to multiple bodies concerned with male and female adolescents.

Most of these activities were carried out in cooperation with UNICEF.

### **Health Programme for the Elderly**

314. The Health Programme for the Elderly has been involved in:

- Establishing health clinics for the elderly in health centres. As of end-2010, there were 702 such clinics which provide health education for the elderly, detect diseases and provide medications for chronic illnesses (diabetes, high blood pressure, joint diseases etc.) at no cost.
- The *Guide for Elderly Companion* was updated.
- A National Committee for Elderly Health Care and Social Care was formed.
- Nutrition problems of the elderly were incorporated in training for health staff working in the centres.
- The city of Hamah was declared an elderly-friendly city after efforts were made to meet the standards of the World Health Organization.
- Dayr Atiyah was added as another elderly-friendly city.
- In 2010, health centres provided 225,873 services, ranging from disease detection and treatment to health education and awareness-raising.

### **Premarital Medical Examination Programme**

315. Premarital medical examination is compulsory in Syria. Since 2008, the Programme has targeted the detection of inherited blood diseases, which pose a social and health burden, particularly because close to 40 per cent of all marriages are between relatives. The Programme also targets hepatitis B and C and AIDS, as these diseases can be transmitted through marriage.

316. Clinics associated with the Physicians' Union have been designated to conduct the premarital examination in all governorates. The examination includes a clinical component and a laboratory component. It is designed to detect sickle-cell anaemia, thalassaemia, hepatitis and AIDS. Both parties are informed of the results of the examination in a way that ensures privacy. A consultation is held if the results indicate a problem that could be transmitted to the children in the event of marriage. If the results showed that one of the parties is infected with AIDS or hepatitis, a referral is made, so necessary measures can be taken after a consultation is held with both parties.

317. Supervisory reports and visits to these centres indicate a positive response on the part of persons interested in marrying. Marriage plans in many cases were cancelled voluntarily when a clinical or laboratory incompatibility was indicated. A *Manual for Premarital Medical Examination Clinic Workers* was published in 2011 as part of the Programme.

### **Mental Health Programme**

318. In 2009, mental health services were incorporated in primary health-care programmes. The Mental Health Programme implemented the following activities, in cooperation with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund:

- Establishment of 23 mental health clinics in a number of health centres at the health district level.

- Training 57 mental health and social support trainers from various sectors.
- Training 131 physicians and 267 nurses and midwives who work in health centres in mental health and its importance for women of reproductive age in general and pregnant and postpartum women in particular.
- A total of 1,366 physicians, psychologists, social workers and health workers were trained in psychological first aid, psychosocial support, paediatric medicine, psychiatry, etc.
- Production of posters to counter the stigma of mental illness.
- Preparation of a draft *Guide to Mental Health*.
- Publication of a *Guide to Mental Health for the Community*.

### **Bedouin Health Programme**

319. The Bedouin Health Programme was started in 2010 to promote health and local community development for the Bedouin population. The following activities were undertaken in cooperation with UNICEF:

- Designation of health groups in 30 un-served localities that are distant from population concentrations. Women constitute 85 per cent of these groups.
- Training of these health groups (350 trainees) in first aid, environmental sanitation, nutrition and mother and child care.
- Publication of a *Bedouin Health Atlas* that specifies health units in the Badia (semi-arid range lands).
- Preparation of a spiral book to explain first aid (being printed).

### **Health Promotion Programme**

320. In 2009, a multisector national strategy to promote health was launched in cooperation with 17 ministries and non-governmental organizations concerned with health. Key achievements include:

- Issuance of Legislative Decree No. 92 (at end-2009) on Combating Smoking.
- Issuance of the aforementioned Decree was accompanied by a broad media campaign to introduce its provisions and explain the negative effect of the use of tobacco products on health.
- Annual community education activities through direct and indirect means of communication on World No Tobacco Day, 9 September, which is the Syrian day for combating tobacco use.
- Annual festival on World Exercise Day to promote physical activity and healthy behaviours, accompanied by ancillary activities in the governorates, educational seminars and lectures in the health centres and cultural centres.

### **Reproductive Health Programme**

321. Reproductive health services have been provided at no cost as part of primary health care in 1,509 health centres as of end-2010.

322. The Reproductive Health Programme provides pregnancy care and postpartum care, family planning services, early cervical and breast cancer detection and referrals. Natural birth services have also been added at natural birth centres.

323. In past years the programme has achieved the following:



- Training health service providers (physicians, midwives, etc.) in more than 140 courses held in all governorates. Training covered all reproductive health topics (pregnancy care, family planning, early cancer detection, consultation and communication).
- Raising community awareness by publishing a large number of brochures, written health messages and booklets treating reproductive health problems. These materials were distributed to health centres and other relevant bodies.
- In the past three years, radio and television competitions were broadcast on the ground channel and satellite concerning various reproductive health topics. These programmes won the claim of viewers and listeners.
- The following studies to improve health care were conducted:
  - A study on unfulfilled family planning needs (2007).
  - A study on anaemia in women of reproductive age (2007). Based on the results, the addition of iron to flour was studied and equipment for this purpose was purchased by the Ministry of Economy and is awaiting assembly.
  - A study on the calibration of the iodine dose for pregnant women (2010). Based on the results, the quantity of iodine added to food salt was increased.
  - A study on menopause problems and women.
- Publication of the following manuals:
  - *National Family Planning Means Manual.*
  - *National Sexually Transmitted Infections Disease Manual.*
  - *Emergency Obstetrics Care Manual.*
  - Poster on infection prevention in reproductive health clinics.
- In 2006, a project was signed with the Japan International Cooperation Agency to promote reproductive health in the Manbij district in the governorate of Aleppo.
- In 2009, the aforementioned project was extended for three additional years and expanded geographically to cover, in addition to Manbij, the district of Bab-Dayr Hafir in Aleppo and the district of Khan Shaykhun in Idlib. The project aims to enhance the local population's awareness of reproductive health topics and to provide high-quality care.
- The programme adopts the concept of health volunteers, a number of whom were trained in communication, consultation and the transmission of health messages.
- Heads of the health centres were trained in methods for managing the centres to efficiently provide services.
- Publication of a number of brochures and posters on reproductive health topics appropriate for the local population.
- Cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Endowments in publishing a guide for mosque preachers on family and reproductive health issues (2011).
- The trial distribution of motherhood cards to allow easy access to information on pregnant women wherever they seek services (public and private sector).

324. A new initiative in 2008 on violence against women in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund, accomplished the following:

- Building the capacities of the administrative staff responsible for reproductive health. This was done by defining violence, gender-based violence and psychological, clinical and preventive approaches for providing services to victims and by familiarizing participating staff with Syrian legal provisions on gender-based violence.
- Training 60 gynaecologists in the health centres on clinical management of violence (World Health Organization protocols).
- Publication of a guide for health care providers on methods for approaching victims of gender-based violence.

325. Regarding care provided to women of reproductive age, during 2010, services were provided to 110,457 pregnant women, 722,204 women received contraceptives and 691,996 women received tetanus shots. Regarding breast cancer prevention and Pap smears, mammography machines were allocated to several health centres; 68,921 Pap smears were performed and 195,353 breast examinations were performed in 2010, a noticeable increase compared to previous years.

326. When women of reproductive age (15-49) were asked to rate their health, 82 per cent responded that their health had not changed during this year compared to the previous year, 8.7 per cent said that their health was currently better than it had been the previous year and 3.1 per cent reported their health was currently worse than in the previous year (2009 Family Health Survey).

327. The People's Assembly held workshops on reproductive health issues and the improvement of the health situation of women. Members of the People's Assembly conducted familiarization tours at a number of non-governmental organizations concerned with women's issues (the Family Planning Association and the Association for Women's Role Development).

#### **Neonatal Resuscitation Programme**

328. A study of the causes of under-5 mortality conducted by the Ministry of Health in 2008 showed that 50 per cent of deaths in this group occur at the neonatal stage (the first four weeks of life), with females accounting for 46.4 per cent of the total, and that prematurity and birth asphyxia accounted for 44.10 per cent and 8.3 per cent respectively.

329. Since 2008, the Neonatal Resuscitation Programme has achieved the following:

- Training 60 physicians and 80 midwives from all governorates as neonatal resuscitation trainers in cooperation with Brigham Young University in United States of America.
- Retraining 24 trainers in 2009 by the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with Damascus University and Brigham Young University.
- Extensive training in all governorates of paediatricians, gynaecologists, midwives, anaesthesia technicians and anyone who may be present at the time of birth.
- As of 2011, 869 physicians and 1,236 technicians from all governorates received training.

- Posters providing instruction on steps involved in neonatal resuscitation and a *Neonatal Resuscitation Manual* for physicians and midwives were issued.

### **Health insurance**

330. Administrative sector employees are covered by health insurance. The State bears 62.5 per cent and the employee 37.5 per cent of the cost. Legislative Decree No. 46 was issued in April 2011 to provide health insurance coverage to retirees, the cost of which is borne entirely by the State.

331. Private health insurance systems also exist. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour issued instructions for private health insurance systems to cover private sector workers.

332. Health services mentioned above are provided through health organizations subordinate to the Ministry of Health. Other organizations also provide health services, including military medical services, teaching hospitals of the higher education system, clinics of the General Women's Federation, the Family Planning Association and specialized hospitals and clinics.

333. The Commission for Family Affairs signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Health in 2011 for the purchase and operation of six mobile clinics in the framework of the programmes targeted in the Population Policy Programme prepared by the Commission. The clinics will cover remote rural areas where the population growth rate is high. They will provide primarily contraceptives and reproductive health services in addition to other health care services.

### **Family Planning Association**

334. The Family Planning Association and its goals are more fully described in Syria's initial report. These goals are inter alia to:

1. Preserve the Syrian family and provide it with health, psychological and social care.
2. Advise on the amendment and enactment of laws and regulations to improve the situation of the family.
3. Assist in the preparation of studies on the conditions of families.
4. Establish centres to provide mothers and fathers with guidance concerning reproduction.
5. Collaborate in providing training and information on family planning issues.

335. In 2011, the Association had 980 volunteers (463 females), compared to 728 volunteers (361 females) in 2006 and 785 volunteers (372 females) in 2009.

#### *Outcomes of the Association's activity*

336. Following are the outcomes of the Association's activity:

- Participation in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals concerning health indicators.
- Opening six health points to provide health bases in villages and to assist pregnant women.
- A programme to raise the awareness of women who marry early through presentation of reproductive health topics in areas where this is needed.

- Incorporation of concepts relating to strengthening the role of men in reproductive health (2011).

### **Obstacles in the health-care sector**

337. Provision of health care in small and scattered population concentrations is a problem in some areas due to the poor distribution of health workers. Remote rural areas lack health workers, because few residents attain the educational level qualifying them to study the health professions (medicine, nursing, midwifery) and thus be able to provide services to the populations of their areas. The bringing in of service providers from other areas has neither succeeded nor been shown to be feasible.

338. Cultural and social background is a key factor in whether the population accepts health care, particularly if there are no female health-care providers in reproductive health and obstetrics.

339. Interest in preventive health care programmes (excluding children's immunization programmes) is not at the desired level. Programmes suffering from a lack of interest include early breast and cervical cancer detection programmes, the puerperal care programme and even the pregnancy care programme. This is shown in the Family Health Survey, which shows that, of the women who did not receive qualified care (12.3 per cent) during pregnancy, a large percentage (61 per cent) said the main reason for not receiving routine care was lack of problems requiring consultation. Efforts are made to raise the level of health awareness – based on cooperation among all sectors (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Religious Endowments, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and Ministry of Information), including official, popular and non-governmental organizations – to convey information to a large segment of the population through various channels of communication.

340. The health sector suffers from a severe shortage of several specialties required to provide services, such as anaesthesiology, psychiatry and geriatric medicine, because physicians are not interested in entering these specialties.

341. Acts of terrorism by armed terrorist groups in Syria since the start of the events through May 2012 have resulted in killing 22 and wounding 42 medical personnel and damage to 24 hospitals (3 hospitals are completely out of service), 84 health centres and 199 ambulances (95 ambulances are completely out of service). In addition, there have been campaigns of deception and lies regarding performance of the health sector, which has constantly and selflessly provided services to the wounded and injured and to citizens in general and continues to do so.

### **Envisaged measures**

342. In an effort to improve women's health and enjoyment of a better level of health during their lives, health centres are constantly being expanded according to the health map, which indicates needy localities, to achieve at least one health centre per 10,000 persons in rural areas and one health centre per 2,000 persons in urban areas.

343. The Ministry of Health's plans include construction of obstetrics and gynaecology hospitals in a number of governorates. These plans are currently being studied.

344. Health personnel are constantly being trained. Efforts are made to amend curricula for health support personnel (nurses and midwives), based on new developments. Efforts are also being made to try to serve remote areas by

providing them with female health support personnel equipped with the necessary knowledge and experience to motivate women to request services and care without feeling embarrassed.

345. The education of women and boosting of their educational level by enhancing their economic level and awareness are key ways to enable women to benefit from the health care that is provided.

346. Studies and research are being pursued to identify gaps. Health research is conducted consistent with needs. Training for health-care supervisors is being expanded in the area of research methods, especially operations research, which is an optimal tool for improving care quality and solving problems impeding the provision of care.

347. Efforts are currently under way to replace health sector assets that were destroyed by armed terrorist groups.

## **Article 13. Equality in other areas of social and economic life**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

348. Legislative Decree No. 15 of 2007 on Small and Microfinancing (see annex 49) was issued to help raise the income level of families. Loans provided under this decree are granted without gender discrimination. Likewise, laws concerning political or economic aspects and all other laws treat men and women equally.

349. Economic and social policies that provide for gender equality and the achievement of gender fairness and equality in the formal and informal sectors are included in the Tenth and Eleventh Five-Year Plans and in programmes and projects, which also seek to: increase the economic activity rate of women, strengthen the role and rights of women in economic life, support women facing the challenges of economic globalization, increase women's share of loans and funding for small and medium enterprises and offer women services that enable them to reconcile their family responsibilities with their economic development role.

### **De facto situation**

350. The Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade has prepared a programme entitled "Empowerment of Young Men and Women to Start up Economic Enterprises, and the Provision of Support Mechanisms for Women's Economic Activities", in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (2001). The programme's activities include:

1. Provision of financing services and mechanisms to facilitate increased job creation.
2. Holding training courses to enhance the capacities of young men and women.
3. Conduct of a survey to assign a value to women's work in the home.
4. Printing a *National Guide for Business Women and Outstanding Women Entrepreneurs*.

351. The Syrian Arab Republic has also joined the Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Women in the MENA Region consortium, which has been funded for three years by the European Union. This undertaking aims to economically empower women in Algeria, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco and Bahrain. A memorandum of understanding was signed between a Turkish family affairs organization and the Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria,

which is collaborating with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. Under the memorandum, a team will be prepared to train local trainers to implement advanced programmes for promoting healthy child-rearing and healthy relationships among family members based on neighbouring countries' experiences in several areas concerning women.

### **Obstacles**

352. Obstacles include:

1. Some women persist in using phones for activities recognized historically as being the stereotypical purview of women, e.g., spinning and weaving and the food and heritage industries. This entrenches the stereotypical role of women, who in practice fear innovation and risk with few exceptions.
2. The weak investment environment in general, which adversely affects investment opportunities for women and men alike.
3. Many enterprises managed by women produce more than what local markets can absorb.
4. The economic resources generated by women do not serve women's issues, but are channelled into the family to provide for its needs and betterment.
5. Some women are shy, which obscures their excellence and enterprise, particularly in investment projects.
6. Decisions in the family are based on economic expediency. The law continues to view women as consumers because housework is not monetized in national income calculations, whereas by all measures they should be viewed as producers, even if they perform unpaid work.
7. Many women are unable to obtain bank guarantees.

### **Article 14. Rural women**

353. Rural women play a fundamental role in the rural development process. Many view women's work in agriculture and related activities as an extension of their household responsibilities. No value is placed on their work, because it is customarily viewed as natural and not necessarily compounding the burdens that there. Hence, the disregard for women's roles and capacities in building society. Women have thus suffered from poor economic, social, health and educational conditions. However, this is being rectified through national policies and plans and through the plans of the concerned bodies.

#### **Legislative and legal framework**

354. The legislative and legal framework is provided by article 45 of the old Constitution and article 20 of the new Constitution, the State's guarantee, systematic national economic and social action plans and local management of sectoral development. Syria's rural population accounts for 46.5 per cent of the total population and women account for 54 per cent of the agricultural labour force.

#### **De facto situation**

355. A specialized Directorate for the Development of Rural Women was created in the Ministry of Agriculture under Decree No. 4/T of 9 January 2006. The directorate's functions are to:

1. Enhance the performance of rural women and develop their skills in agricultural work and in rural home economics.
2. Participate in raising awareness of rural women of their legal, economic, social and political rights in cooperation with competent agencies.
3. Train rural women to take advantage of income-generating activities and help them obtain the financing needed to establish enterprises in cooperation with the concerned agencies.
4. Conduct studies on the development of rural women and prepare the necessary draft documents for this purpose.
5. The Rural Development Directorate in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour performs most of the aforesaid functions on some level.

### **Women's Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation Project**

356. The State has allocated 1 billion Syrian pounds to support this Project, under which 14,160 rural women in 508 villages in all Syrian governorates have been granted loans on easy terms. The Project is intended to improve the incomes of rural women by enabling them to establish small, income-generating enterprises and providing financing for this purpose. The project focuses on agricultural projects linked to women's agricultural production activity (e.g., food processing, livestock raising, etc.). It offers the following programmes:

#### *Human Capacities-Building Programme*

357. This Programme involves:

1. Training local community members (male and female) in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local development projects; 508 local development committees with 3,048 members, half of them women, have been established in the targeted villages.
2. Training rural women in life skills pertaining to health, literacy, rural housing, child-rearing, nursing, first aid and rural household management in 430 courses benefiting 5,196 women.
3. Provision of specialized technical training to 16,146 rural women based on project type (cheese and dairy product production, sheep and cattle raising, home garden agriculture, exploitation of medicinal and aromatic plants).

#### *Small Income-Generating Enterprises Programme*

358. This programme involves:

1. Training female loan recipients in starting up their own enterprises through a programme called "How to set up your own enterprises", after which participants produce simplified feasibility studies for their enterprises; 15,000 female farmers have benefited from 508 courses.
2. Prompt provision of financing for enterprises on easy terms.
3. Supervision of borrowers' purchase of requirements for the enterprise and launch of the enterprise.
4. Quarterly monitoring of progress of the enterprise, and provision of assistance to solve problems that may arise.

*Project for 150 Villages Damaged by Drought in the Governorate of Hasaka*

359. Drought conditions in the governorate of Hasakah prompted the Ministry of Agriculture to take extraordinary measures through the Directorate for the Development of Rural Women to set aside 200 million Syrian pounds for loans to rural women without commissions or interest. About 3,000 rural women in 150 villages received loans. There are 150 local committees with 900 members, at least half of whom are women. This project is intended to:

- Create income-generating resources for rural women in villages damaged by drought, stabilize families in these villages and create alternate income sources.
- Fund small enterprises for rural youth centred around the products produced by women's enterprises, such as food processing enterprises.
- Support training in the start-up of enterprises, literacy, home economics, health, gender and specialized agricultural and trade courses.

360. A total of 17,160 females in 658 villages in all governorates have been granted loans under Ministry of Agriculture lending programmes.

*Urgent grants and assistance project*

361. This project is intended to improve the social and economic situation of rural families by providing production grants consisting of sheep, goats, cattle and poultry and bees to female heads of household in very poor areas and areas affected by drought, floods and the current events. These grants form the nuclei of small enterprises that provide stability for the beneficiary families, which number 7,640 in 375 villages. The following table shows the distribution of these grants.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of villages</i>	<i>Number of women</i>
2009	4	43
2010	28	205
2011	343	7 392
<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>7 640</b>

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform.

*Programme to Improve the Productivity of Rural Women in Agricultural Production (Plant and Animal)*

362. This Programme aims to enhance the skills of rural women in agricultural work, improve productivity, and increase rural women's use of current agricultural technologies. This is accomplished through awareness-raising seminars, practical demonstrations, training courses and field visits. The following table shows activities that have been implemented.



Year	Seminars		Demonstrations		Field visits		Training courses	
	Number	Participants	Number	Participants	Number	Participants	Number	Participants
2007	6 256	68 556	3 177	30 273	11 306	30 962	3	60
2008	5 927	60 743	3 395	33 597	13 065	35 760	35	628
2009	7 228	72 640	3 550	34 693	13 737	45 342	67	1 117
2010	7 477	75 920	3 696	37 252	14 783	49 765	79	1 318
2011	6 289	74 768	3 056	32 659	12 513	49 207	43	734
<b>Total</b>	<b>33 177</b>	<b>352 627</b>	<b>16 864</b>	<b>168 474</b>	<b>65 404</b>	<b>211 036</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>3 857</b>

Source: Ministry of Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform.

*Programme to Enhance the Effectiveness of the Staff of the Directorate for the Development of Rural Women in All Governorates*

363. This programme is intended to train the staff in local community development with the participation of women, the incorporation of gender equality in rural development curricula, establishment of small enterprises, specialized technical agricultural topics, marketing skills and rural food processing. The following table shows the number of training courses held for directorate staff.

Year	Number of courses	Number of female beneficiaries
2007	102	1 506
2008	72	1 061
2009	91	1 269
2010	85	1 166
2011	59	894
<b>Total</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>5 896</b>

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform.

364. The following scientific research was conducted for use in analysing and improving the situation of rural women:

1. A report on women's work in agriculture.
2. A research paper on women's work with medicinal and aromatic plants and the growing prevalence of such activity.
3. The economic and social effect of economic empowerment programmes.
4. A paper on migrants and the effect of drought-induced migration on rural families.
5. Social and economic research on villages participating in the Economic Empowerment Programme.

In other developments:

1. A female researcher of the Agricultural Research Centre won the Arab Women's Organization Award for research on the role of women in home economics.

2. In 2011, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in the context of its population policy, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture to implement programmes with education, training and reproductive health components. The programmes will implement activities to build capacities, raise awareness and grant loans to women in rural families. To date, 1,741 females have benefited from these programmes, which have granted 86 loans.

### **Obstacles**

365. Obstacles include:

1. Prevalence of illiteracy among rural women in some areas.
2. In some areas, women do not inherit land and therefore do not own land, despite the protection of this right under the Sharia and the law.
3. Work requires long hours due to lack of agricultural mechanization.
4. Women do not avail themselves of the resources and benefits.
5. The information base concerning rural women is inadequate.
6. Scientific research on rural women's issues is lacking.
7. The provisions of laws supporting women's employment in agriculture (articles of the Agricultural Relations Law) are insufficient.
8. Women are largely unpaid for their work in this sector because they work on family property.
9. Women's efforts in agriculture in some areas have been subject to threats, property theft and seizure of seed and fodder, which place additional burdens on the population and increase distress during the crisis imposed by armed terrorist groups.

## **Article 15. Equality before the law**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

366. Provisions of the Civil Code are generally consistent with the Constitution. They provide for gender equality in all rights and duties stipulated in the Code. Women enjoy full legal competence without discrimination in the framework of the Civil Code. Women are entitled to conclude contracts and acquire and dispose of property as they wish as established by the law. In addition, a woman has a first name and surname independent of the surname of her husband, which safeguards her independence. She also has independent financial liability. Syrian women enjoy all rights entrenched in the Syrian Commercial Code to engage in commercial business. The testimony of a woman before courts is equal to that of a man, with the exception of several Islamic law matters.

367. The Constitution guarantees citizens full equality with respect to rights and duties without gender discrimination (art. 33 of the new Constitution). The preamble to the Constitution establishes that "freedom is a sacred right and popular democracy is the ideal formulation which ensures for the citizen the exercise of his freedom, which makes him a dignified human being".

368. Article 45 of the Constitution of 1973 and article 23 of the new Constitution affirm that the State guarantees women all opportunities to enable them to make a full, effective contribution to all aspects of life, and it endeavours to eliminate restrictions impeding the development of women and

their participation in building society. These provisions have opened the field for women to enter political and administrative life. Women have been able to occupy the highest political, cultural and media posts. Constitutional articles that do not discriminate between male and female citizens form an uninterrupted succession. The new Constitution provides broader horizons and content that is fairer, more open and democratic.

369. Regarding practices that support women's rights, workshops have been held on women's civil and legal rights and the Convention. These topics have also been treated by television programmes. The Penal Code, excluding several articles still under study, affirms equal rights and duties. Labour laws affirm equal rights as set out in their required framework as do commercial and investment laws and various legislation. The Nationality Law is treated in the framework of article 9.

370. Judicial Authority Law No. 98 of 1961 affirms the rights of women in all litigation stages as plaintiffs and defendants and with respect to the functions and duties assigned to judges and attorneys and all necessary judicial procedures.

## **Article 16. Equality in matters relating to marriage and family relations**

### **Legislative and legal framework**

371. Article 53 of the 1973 Constitution guarantees all citizens freedom of belief and freedom to perform religious rites.

372. Article 45 guarantees the rights of women. Article 3 (4) of the new Constitution affirms that the personal status of religious communities shall be protected and respected.. Article 20 states that the family is the nucleus of society and the State shall protect and encourage marriage. Article 42 guarantees freedom of belief.

373. Civil Code No. 84 of 1949 establishes the "principle of equality with respect to legal competence to own and acquire rights and conclude contracts".

374. Syrian Penal Code No. 148 of 1949 (see annex 16) does not distinguish between men and women with respect to punishment for offences committed against persons. In offences of rape, the penalty imposed on the perpetrator is strengthened to up to 15 years (arts. 489-498).

375. Law No. 70 of 2001 (see annex 15) enables a working women to bequeath her pension to her legal heirs.

376. The Syrian Personal Status Law, articles 15 and 16, prohibit early marriage and set the minimum age for marriage. Articles 21-24 of the aforementioned law stipulate a woman's consent as a basic condition for marriage, without which a marriage cannot be valid. In the event of arbitrary divorce, article 85 et seq. guarantee compensation for the woman. Articles 137-140 and 147 grant women the right to the care and custody of her children. There are articles that permit divorce on the grounds of violence, which is called a divorce on grounds of discord (art. 112). The Personal Status Law has: 12 articles requiring a husband to provide his wife with a dowry, which is equivalent to a privileged debt and is not subject to limitation provisions; 5 articles requiring the husband alone to provide suitable housing for his wife; 14 articles requiring the man alone to provide alimony; and 48 articles (arts. 260-308) regulating inheritance, which grant women equal rights with men in some cases and rights that are greater or less than those of men in other cases (despite the existence of negative customs

that have weakened enforcement of these provisions). In addition, the Civil Procedure Code, articles 535-546, stipulate summary legal proceedings to decide marital disputes.

### **De facto situation**

377. Regarding article 16 (1) of the Convention:

- (a and b) The same right to enter into marriage: Men and women are free to choose their mates, break off an engagement and impose conditions each deem to be in his or her interest. The *Kafa'a* (suitability) condition for marriage is considered to be in the interest of the woman. A marriage contract is valid only with a woman's consent. It may be concluded only with the signature of the man and the woman. An adult at least 17 years of age may marry without a guardian's consent; there are cases of coercion and control by guardians, but they do not constitute a phenomenon.
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution: spouses may agree to terminate their marriage. Nonetheless, a man may terminate the marriage, which is considered arbitrary divorce (in the case of injustice and oppression), for which there are conditions and in which the woman has rights. Likewise, the law entitles a woman to request a separation or a divorce (*khula'*) in which she must pay the husband compensation.
- (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status: In practice, both parents are responsible from a childrearing and moral standpoint for raising and care of the children.
- (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children: The decision to have children is a joint decision of husband and wife (more than 63 per cent decide to have children, according to the Health Survey for 2009). Any mutual agreement to have children depends on the family's resources. In some cases, in a few areas, women have multiple pregnancies. Making this decision by one spouse alone is contrary to the Sharia and the law and is socially unacceptable except in rare cases.
- (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship and custody and trusteeship of children: The mother has custody and the father has guardianship. Trusteeship is assigned to male paternal relations and may be assigned to the mother with a judge's consent. Custody is granted for the most part to the mother, because she is concerned with the care of persons with special needs. Adoption is prohibited in Islam. It is replaced by *Kafala* under Islamic law. Christians undertake adoption pursuant to their constitutionally protected rights.
- (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife including:
  - o The right to choose a family name: This pertains to the father, because he is the extension of the lineage. The woman legally and in fact her surname after she marries.
  - o The right to choose a profession and an occupation: This matter is agreed based on the family's interest.
- (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership and acquisition of property: Syrian laws protect a woman's right to independent legal liability before, during and after marriage. A woman is fully entitled, without having to obtain permission from anyone, to acquire, supervise and

dispose of property. She is entitled to sell, purchase, mortgage, invest and manage. Any deficiency in this regard is attributed to women's ignorance of their rights. Both spouses may agree on a formula for joint ownership of property after marriage, and any agreement between them is binding on both of them.

378. Regarding article 16 (2) of the Convention, the betrothal and marriage of a child has no legal effect, as explained below:

(a) The Personal Status Law sets the age of marriage at 18 years for a male and 17 years for a female (see annex 51). The average age of marriage is 29 for males and 26 for females, based on the Family Health Survey conducted in 2009. Early marriage is more prevalent in some areas than others but is limited. The climate and type of nutrition accelerates puberty. Given the prohibition on sexual relations outside marriage, it has at times been necessary to grant permission for a young woman to be married in an exceptional situation.

(b) Regarding customary marriages (performed outside the court), the Personal Status Law includes seven articles requiring registration of marriage contracts, including customary marriage contracts, which are exempt from fees.

### **Obstacles**

379. Obstacles include:

- The influence of negative customs and traditions that violate Islamic law and the law.
- Training courses that make both husbands and wives aware of their rights and duties are not sufficiently available.
- Lack of family guidance centres.

### **Justifications for reservations to certain paragraphs of article 16**

380. Paragraph 41 of general recommendation No. 21 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women notes that many States Parties have expressed reservations to all or part of article 16.

381. Like many countries, Syria has entered a reservation, not to the whole article but to several paragraphs, namely paragraph (1), (c), (f) and (g) and paragraph (2).

382. Syria's reservations are consistent with the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic. Article 3 of the new Constitution considers Islamic jurisprudence a main source of legislation and provides for the protection and respect of the personal status of religious communities, which is consistent with article 42 of the new Constitution. Likewise, article 35 stipulates the State's guarantee of freedom of belief and freedom to perform all religious rites.

383. These reservations stem from the fact that Syrians are not subject to a uniform law concerning personal status. This has prompted the Syrian legislature to designate a religious court for each religion or sect out of respect for human rights. Syria's reservations take into account the differences that exist between sects and religions, governed by the religious texts of divine law, which are above conventions and international laws.

384. The preceding notwithstanding, Syria is keen on doing what is possible to harmonize its laws with international laws and conventions.

385. In conclusion, the Syrian Arab Republic understands well the desire of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to achieve gender equality in order to fully apply human rights.

386. We hope that the Honourable Committee reciprocates in understanding our desire to adhere to the application of international conventions consistent with our values, religions and what we deem to be consistent with human rights. Syria's reservations are the subject of ongoing study based on this perspective. Several articles of the personal status laws likewise need to be studied and reviewed concerning the possibility of amending or reformulating them so as to preserve the rights and dignity of women and to eliminate ambiguity that may harm women when these laws are enforced.

### **Article 29. Arbitration of any dispute between two or more States Parties concerning the Convention**

387. The Syrian Arab Republic registered a reservation to paragraph 1 of this article because the provision of that paragraph conflicts with the State's national sovereignty, which is impaired if the State is unwilling to submit to such arbitration. Therefore, Syria has a reservation to resort to the International Court of Justice in conformity with the Statute of that Court in the event of a dispute between it and another State, as no arbitration matter may be so referred without the consent of the two parties. In addition, given the private nature of family cases, it is advisable to resolve them at the national level, as transferring them abroad fragments the State's ability to exercise sovereignty and reflects negatively on the institution of the family.

#### **Women and violence**

##### **De facto situation**

388. Many measures have been taken to counter violence against women. In this regard, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs established a National Observatory to monitor cases of domestic violence and a Family Protection Unit to receive complaints.

389. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs conducted a quantitative study on domestic violence in 2008. The study was appended to an in-depth qualitative study on violence against women in Syria in 2010. Both studies show that some women are subject to physical violence to varying degrees.

390. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in cooperation with the Centre of Arab Woman for Training and Research, held training courses to enhance the capacities of providers of care and health and legal services to battered women. This was done with the goal of preparing a national, trained team comprising members of all concerned ministries and non-governmental organizations active in this field.

391. The General Women's Federation, in collaboration with concerned governmental, popular and non-governmental organizations, formulated a draft national strategy to fortify women against violence in 2010.

392. The Good Shepherd Order opened a Centre for Listening and Legal, Psychological and Social Guidance for Victims of Domestic Violence in 2007.

393. A Centre for the Development of Women was opened in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to train Syrian women and Iraqi and Somali women refugees to enhance their ability to achieve economic security.

394. Male and female attorneys, women's leaders, psychologists and social workers help run the counselling centres of the General Women's Federation, which are located throughout urban and rural areas. For this purpose, they:

- Listen to women who are exposed to domestic violence and help them understand their rights.
- Provide and follow up on psychological, social and legal support.
- Act, in cooperation with concerned bodies, to provide shelter for battered women who are victims of domestic violence and lack family members who can shelter them.
- Monitor and evaluate cases of violence in Syria in cooperation with concerned bodies.
- Train specialized staff to deal with domestic violence victims in Syria and provide vocational training to battered women.
- Implement vocational training and capacity development programmes to help victims achieve economic security.

395. In 2008, the Good Shepherd Centre began to operate a confidential hotline that receives calls from family members who are victims of domestic violence. Another hotline run by the Arab Syrian Red Crescent performs the same function.

396. In 2008, the National Association for Women's Role Development, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, established the Oasis of Hope shelter for battered women. Specialists provide psychological, social, health and legal assistance in addition to the following services:

- Temporary housing for women, children and young women.
- Clothing, food and all requirements of daily life.
- Listening and daily accompanying of women to all activities.
- Vocational training and courses in literacy, computers and English/French.

397. Some women benefit from training courses and programmes held by other organizations, such as UNHCR, the Danish Refugee Council and UNRWA. Children who live in the shelter with their mothers are registered in schools and kindergartens. Girls are assisted in continuing their basic and secondary education, in cooperation with the National Association for Women's Role Development.

398. The Ibrahim al-Khalid Centre was established in 2006 to provide assistance and services (in-kind, material, physical and psychological) to Iraqi families and their children based on cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and non-governmental organizations.

399. The Syrian Red Crescent has acted through its Gender Equality Committee to implement campaigns to raise women's awareness through televised seminars and visits to schools to raise the awareness of male and female students and to familiarize them with their rights and duties.

400. The Syrian Government, represented by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund, studied centres concerned with violence against women in several countries (Turkey and Tunisia) to benefit from their experiences in this area. Workshops were held on violence against women and the Convention, and studies were conducted on honour crimes and the position

of the Sharia and the law thereon. The General Women's Federation and civil society associations have played a role in this regard by providing many services and programmes directed at battered women. The General Women's Federation and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs have also submitted a draft alimony fund law that will save time, effort and money for women waiting for a divorce or alimony judgement.

401. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour partnered with the National Association for Women's Role Development to implement integrated programmes covering the following for the Institute of Social Education for Female Delinquents:

- Vocational training for girls in the institute to enable them to achieve economic independence and become integrated in work and family life following their release.
- Provision of legal advice, legal representation, periodic medical examinations and lectures to girls to enhance their awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.
- Formulation of appropriate educational and training curricula for girls and the holding of literacy courses.
- Training of girls in sports and music, and the development of their talents and skills.
- Provision of social, psychological, legal and health support for young Iraqi refugee women in the Institute. The Institute receives non-Syrian foreigners who are victims of trafficking in persons and provides various services to them.

402. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the International Organization for Migration and the National Association for the Development of Women's Role established a shelter for victims of trafficking in persons in 2008. The Ministry issued Decree No. 1144 of 26 June 2011 on the bylaws of facilities for the care of victims of trafficking. The shelter cares for foreign, non-Syrian female victims of human trafficking until their status is settled with the Department of Immigration and Passports in the Ministry of Interior. The shelter provides services, including medical treatment, food, legal advice and housing.

403. The Forensic Medicine Centre accepts cases of battered women, documents them and provides optimal treatment.

404. Women suffer from all forms of violence under the Israeli occupation. Syria endeavours to deal with this challenge and achieve its vital, national humanitarian goal of liberating the occupied Syrian Arab land in the Golan. Syria promotes efforts to build a just, comprehensive peace based on United Nations resolutions to end the suffering of women under the burden of the Israeli occupation. Syria seeks to put an end to the ongoing threat of aggression, which impedes development efforts, because it requires allocation of budgetary resources to defence at the expense of social development and efforts to promote the status of women, narrow the gender gap and achieve social and economic progress. Syrian Arab women of the Golan bear the compounded burden of coping with abuse, detention, the tourism slump, difficulty in travelling, the break-up of families and being distant from family and children. Israel persists unjustly in attempts to impose Israeli identity on Syrian citizens in the Golan, who strenuously reject such attempts, which violate international laws and which have been condemned repeatedly in United Nations resolutions, which Israel disregards by virtue of the American veto.



**Obstacles**

405. Obstacles largely consist of:

- Negative customs and social traditions, including prevailing customary law with the status of law, which views women's issues as private, family issues.
- A lack of shelters to assist women and girls who are victims of violence and have no family to whom they can turn.
- A lack of financial resources to cover shelter services.
- A lack of comprehensive official statistics and a failure to document and record all cases of violence committed against women and girls.
- Women's ignorance of their rights and duties, which impedes enjoyment of their full rights and contributes to the oppression of women and the imposition of major burdens on them.
- The media's treatment of women's issues and its efforts to dispel stereotypes have improved but still fall short of the desired outcome.
- The international community's indifference to its responsibility to women under the burden of the Israeli occupation regarding their enjoyment of their full rights, especially the right to self-determination.

**Envisaged measures**

406. The envisaged measures consist of:

- Continued conduct of comprehensive, in-depth field studies that monitor cases of violence against women.
- Creation of special sections in police departments run by females trained in the intake of cases involving women in general and victims of violence in particular.
- Promotion of a greater role for non-governmental organizations and fostering an environment suitable for the operation of these organizations, including provision of the necessary resources and requirements and encouragement of non-governmental and volunteer activity.
- Continued holding of courses for staff that handle cases of violence against women.
- Education of couples and persons interested in marriage in proper interactions and mutual respect for each other's rights through governmental, popular and non-governmental organizations and bodies, which have begun to perform this function.
- Support and promotion of women's roles by developing curricula that entrench gender equality and showcase women's efforts in their families and society.
- Development and strengthening of media treatment of women's issues.
- Promotion of the role of religious scholars because of their influence and effectiveness.
- Removal of the Israeli occupation, which will help Syrian women in the occupied Syrian Golan enjoy their full political, civil, economic, cultural and social rights.

**Women with disabilities****De facto situation**

407. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour runs institutions concerned with physical and mental disabilities in. These institutions have seen the various major developments, including:

1. Retraining of specialist staff, renovation of buildings, development of operating plans, and greater openness to society by persons with disabilities and participation in local, regional and international activities. Syria has hosted or participated in meetings and conferences, for which it has won admiration and prizes. The years 2008-2010 were particularly rich, with families competing to have their children with disabilities participate in athletic, artistic and computer activities without any sense of shame they may have previously felt.
2. Holding the Special Olympics round in 2007 and the international Arab Olympic conference in 2009.
3. Since 2006, efforts have been made to incorporate non-governmental organizations in tasks undertaken by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour based on partnership contracts. These organizations, which are capable of contributing to the comprehensive development process, include the Association for the Development of Women's Role, Syrian Association for Social Development, Al Birr Charity Society for Social Services, Anal Association, Shah amah Association for Humanitarian Renaissance, Afar al-Ruhr Association for Women with Disabilities and Mothers of Children with Disabilities, Association of Blind Girls and Association of Physically Disabled Girls.

408. The Afar al-Ruhr Association for Women with Disabilities and Mothers of Children with Disabilities was established in 2005 by a group of activists with disabilities and other activists in disability issues. Its bylaws include goals concerning women with disabilities, namely raising awareness of such women and changing society's negative view of them. The association guides and trains mothers of children with disabilities to help them work with and care for their children and deal with society.

409. In 2009, the Ministry of Local Administration prepared a manual of engineering requirements to facilitate access for persons with disabilities. The manual requires all administrative units to ensure compliance with the standards, conditions and technical, engineering and benchmark specifications that must be met in new public buildings and facilities when they grant licences for governmental or private construction. The Ministry of Local Administration also works with the United Nations Development Programme in natural disaster mitigation and the machinery for protecting citizens, with a focus on women and children during disasters. All of this is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning the dangers that may be posed to women with disabilities inside or outside the home, assurance that such women enjoy all basic rights and freedoms on a par with other women and the mitigation of the potential effect of poverty on women with disabilities by providing them with jobs to the extent possible. There is clear progress in this regard, as seen in the Government's designation of a greater percentage of admission slots in universities and colleges for this population.

410. Since 2006, the Syrian Scientific Society for Informatics, in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and Ministry of Communications, implemented a programme to provide training in computer

sciences and foreign and Arabic language learning in many rural areas. The programme, called “Internet Service Provider Penetration”, has opened 60 centres to date. This number will be increased to 85 in 2014. The quality of services provided to disabled persons, particularly youths of both sexes, is being improved continuously.

411. The Ministry of Health has prepared special measures to serve persons with disabilities in public and private hospitals and to expand the specialties that serve their needs.

412. The National Plan for the Prevention of Disability approved by the Government in 2008, is an important step to promoting the status of persons with disabilities, providing for their needs and generating the required changes regarding disability issues. A National Plan for the Care and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was prepared by the Government and civil society. The plan promotes rehabilitation based on society’s contribution. It supports and promotes rehabilitative health-care services for persons with disabilities and their families and supports development, production and evaluation of assistive technologies.

413. The Government has also adopted a process for employing disabled persons in suitable jobs according to the type and severity of their disabilities. It has emphasized the application of a law requiring at least 4 per cent of the ministerial labour force to be persons with disabilities. The Government is also encouraging the private sector to adopt a similar measure. Labour Law No. 17 of 2010 requires the private sector to fill at least 2 per cent of its employment positions with persons with disabilities in jobs suited to the type and severity of the disabilities. Regarding transportation, provision is made for the right of persons with disabilities to easily board and de-board means of transportation and have easy access to malls, airports, departure stations, parks and hospitals.

414. The Syrian Association for Persons with Physical Disabilities, which is supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, provides quality training services and essential equipment. It grants loans to students and provides hearing aids, canes and motorized and non-motorized wheelchairs to persons with special needs.

415. The State seeks continually to raise awareness of mines placed by Israel in the governorate of Qunaytirah that annually kill and disable dozens of citizens and children of both sexes, which points to the terrorism and terrible racism of this entity that increases costs for the State.

## **VII. Conclusion**

416. The preceding sets forth legislative, scientific and practical achievements, obstacles and envisaged measures in the Syrian Arab Republic with respect to the Convention during 2005-2011. Individuals, institutions, authorities, ministries, organizations and multiple governmental and non-governmental bodies have participated in efforts to promote Syrian women on all levels based on the belief that men and women are equal, that women are the sisters of men and that society can advance only when both are working to that end.

417. This report demonstrates the important place occupied by Syrian women in all fields and the central role played by Syrian women in maintaining the stability of the family, supporting society and achieving comprehensive, sustainable development. The political, economic, legislative and social gains achieved in Syria have made it possible to promote the integration of women in

society. There remains much to do, and many obstacles and challenges to ace and to surmount.

418. The Syrian Arab Republic is determined to continue efforts to give women, whose hearts, minds and arms are open to every equitable, constructive increment, their full rights in the context of family harmony and elevated social-moral discourse.

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