



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Written replies by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to the list of issues (CRC/C/SYR/Q/3-4) in connection with the consideration of the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Syrian Arab Republic (CRC/C/SYR/3-4)*, **

* In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not formally edited before being sent to the United Nations translation services.

** Annexes can be consulted in the files of the Secretariat.

Part I

Paragraph 1 of the list of issues (CRC/C/SYR/Q/3-4)

1. In the past few months, several pieces of legislation have been enacted in the framework of the overall development and reform process. Most of the legislation is intended to help build upon and strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms, in keeping with the purposes and principles of the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic and with the international laws and instruments to which the State is a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following is a list of the legislation in question.

- Legislative Decree No. 49 of 7 April 2011, concerning the acquisition of Syrian Arab citizenship by non-Syrian Kurds.
- Decree No. 161 of 21 April 2011, concerning the ending of the state of emergency.
- Legislative Decree No. 53 of 21 April 2011, concerning the abolition of the Supreme State Security Court and the referral of pending cases to the ordinary courts in accordance with the rules and procedures laid down in the Syrian Code of Criminal Procedures.
- Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2011, amending article 17 of the Code of Criminal Procedures: the decree introduces a seven-day time limit for holding persons suspected of offences against State security without charge. After this time, the suspects must be presented to a court. For other offences under Syrian law, the Code of Criminal Procedures imposes a time limit for detention without charge of just 24 hours.
- Legislative Decree No. 54 of 21 April 2011, concerning the organization of peaceful demonstrations. This is a human right and a fundamental freedom that is guaranteed under the Syrian Constitution and international treaties, which recognize the need for a balance to be struck between the maintenance of national security and the right to demonstrate peacefully.
- Decree No. 174 of 5 May 2011, concerning the issuance of general secondary school certificates in science and vocational education — specifically in industrial, commercial and women’s vocational education and in Islamic law — for students in the 2011 cycle and for a supplementary cycle in the 2010/11 academic year.
- Legislative Decree No. 61 of 31 May 2011 and Legislative Decree No. 2011/72, granting a general amnesty for a wide range of offences, including most juvenile offences, that were committed prior to the date on which the decrees were issued. In this way, the young people involved and children living with family members in prison have been given the chance of a normal life.
- Decree No. 3 of 2010, concerning the prohibition of human trafficking, takes full account of international norms on access to special care and follow-up services for women and children who are trafficked and on penalties for committing trafficking offences. The provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography are reflected in the decree.

2. Instructions were issued on the implementation of the decree. These provide for: the delivery of special care for women and child victims of trafficking; the full observance of victims’ human rights; access to appropriate and confidential assistance; and the protection of witnesses and experts. Steps have been taken to create a legislative structure on which to

build a social and information culture that will contribute to the prevention of human trafficking. A regulation provides a definition of human trafficking in connection with the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery and trafficking in human organs. It identifies the mechanisms for having victims referred to welfare institutions through the courts. On an interim basis, the director of the department responsible for combating human trafficking is authorized under the instructions to refer cases to a competent court within five working days of being notified of them. The Syrian Arab Republic hosted the First INTERPOL Global Conference on Trafficking in Human Beings. Further information on the decree on human trafficking can be found in paragraph 6-5-3 of the updated report (CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1).

3. Act No. 17 of 2010, regulating labour relations in the private sector, contains a special section on youth employment. It prohibits the employment of young men and women before they complete their basic education or reach the age of 15 full years, whichever comes later. It defines working hours and rest breaks, prohibits young persons from working overtime or at night for any reason whatever and outlines conditions concerning leave, exceptions to the provisions of the Act and penalties for breaching the Act.

4. Under the Act the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour is responsible for issuing regulations on employment and working conditions for young people and on the jobs, occupations and industries in which young persons of different ages may not be employed. The Act furthermore defines the responsibilities of employers of young people.

5. Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011 introduced a higher penalty for so-called “honour crimes”: a term from 5 to 7 years’ imprisonment. This is the second amendment to increase the penalty in less than two years.

Social Assistance Fund

6. The Social Assistance Fund was set up to protect and provide for impoverished families, offering them regular or emergency assistance and assistance contingent upon their fulfilment of development-related obligations in the areas inter alia of health and education (recipients must make sure that their children do not drop out of education and must have their children immunized under the established programmes). The intention is to empower these persons in the economic, social, health and educational domains through programmes carried out by the Fund or institutions and under related empowerment schemes.

7. Recently, Legislative Decree No. 2011/40 was issued, raising State salaries. A series of legislative decrees were enacted to double salaries twice compared to the levels that obtained over the previous five years. This has had a positive impact on family income and thus on children.

8. Legislative and political reforms are still being pursued, and various pieces of legislative are being drafted and will be adopted, helping to promote the interests of children. The legislation includes the following:

Children’s Rights Bill

9. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs oversaw the preparation of this bill by a committee of academics and specialist judges. The committee submitted the draft text to the Commission, which presented it for discussion at a workshop attended by representatives of a wide range of public institutions, grass-roots organizations and associations dedicated to children’s issues. The Office of the Prime Minister invited stakeholders to submit comments, which the Commission then discussed with their representatives over the past

year. The text was finalized in preparation for submission to the new National Assembly when it is elected.

10. In furtherance of the best interests of children, the Children's Rights Bill includes all the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The bill comprises the following parts:

- Part I: Designations, definitions and general principles
- Part II: Children's rights in the family
- Part III: Human rights of children
- Part IV: Right to social welfare
- Part V: Right to protection and personal safety
- Part VI: Alternative care

Paragraph 2 of the list of issues

11. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is the institution responsible for dealing with matters relating to the rights of Syrian children, including the monitoring and coordination of efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With regard to the implementation of the Convention, the Commission carries out the following tasks:

- Following up on implementation of the Convention and the two optional protocols
- Following up on efforts to raise awareness of the Convention and the optional protocols
- Preparing periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention and the optional protocols
- Helping to have laws amended so as to improve the situation of Syrian children
- Preparing national reports for the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international bodies
- Monitoring the situation of children by conducting research and studies
- Helping with the running of children's programmes and activities nationwide
- Devising plans and strategies on children and forming follow-up committees to oversee their application

Paragraph 3 of the list of issues

12. As of March 2011, there were more than 100 registered children's associations and approximately 275 associations involved in issues relating to families, including children. The Government provides consistent encouragement and support to children's associations that apply for registration (see CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, paras. 2–3, particularly 2-3-1 and 2-3-2).

13. As stated in the Associations and Private Institutions Act No. 93 of 1958, as amended, associations and private institutions must be registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in order to be able to operate legally. The Government actively seeks to promote civil society associations, particularly those that take a close interest in children's issues. The number of civil society institutions and associations has increased markedly (by around 30 per cent) in the past five years: more than 1,240 today, as

compared with 518 in 2001. Some 275 registered associations work in areas that involve children (family, social and cultural issues).

14. The type of work done by associations depends on the goals being pursued. Some associations do charitable work, while others focus on cultural, medical or social services. The goals of children's and family associations usually include the following: education for mothers; the establishment of schools that deal with children in a holistic manner; child welfare and care; the establishment of orphanages; material and psychological assistance; kindergartens and facilities for children with special needs; rehabilitation, awareness and counselling programmes for children; publications on educational techniques; family rehabilitation programmes; and action to eliminate phenomena such as child vagrancy and begging, child labour, children dropping out of school, and stealing and juvenile delinquency.

15. Associations and grassroots organizations play a major role in disseminating the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They raise awareness of the Convention through talks, publications and the distribution of information posters to schools. They also use theatrical performances and songs to illustrate the contents of the Convention, and promote the inclusion of related concepts in national development plans. Associations seek to create a climate that will allow for the amendment of domestic legislation in the light of the international treaties on these rights which the Syrian Arab Republic has signed. They contribute to the preparation of national reports on the implementation of international treaties. Indeed, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs involved associations in the preparation of the State's fourth and fifth periodic reports. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), it has organized training for these associations on how to prepare State party reports using the models developed by international organizations. The plans adopted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in the framework of the tenth five-year plan (2006–2010) and the draft eleventh five-year plan (2011–2015) promote a proactive role for associations in the life of society. They focus on building the capacities of associations in general and on enabling their governing boards to play an active part in development in particular, by providing funding for their activities and projects and helping them to keep up with recent developments through attendance at training courses, workshops, seminars and meetings organized by the Ministry.

16. Associations also help to provide health-care services, especially to impoverished families. The Family Protection Association, for example, offers health services to children with thalassemia in addition to complex surgical operations to children with bladder and urinary tract problems. The "Milk Point" Association provides free health care at its clinics and elsewhere to children registered with it and distributes free milk to children. Founded in 1974, the Syrian Family Planning Association offers adolescents substantial assistance to improve their knowledge of health and health-care issues, bearing in mind prevailing social values. The association also runs AIDS programmes.

17. Building partnerships with associations and grassroots organizations is an important part of the efforts undertaken to deal with issues affecting children. For several years now, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has played an oversight role rather than providing care directly. Thus, it has delegated to associations many of the tasks that it used to perform in regard to *kafalah* and has established partnerships to provide health, social, educational, vocational and social reintegration and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. In practical terms, this has seen the Ministry conclude partnership contracts with associations on the management of social welfare institutions providing services to give effect to the rights of children in all domains in line with the objectives of the tenth five-year plan on partnerships between the Government and civil society. Based on these contracts, partnerships have been established with the *Bina'* Association, which provides

care and rehabilitation services for the visually impaired through the Special Education Institute for the Blind in Damascus; the Women's Advancement Association, which contributes to child protection initiatives, through the Social Education for Girls Institute in Damascus; the *Al-Noor* and *Al-Zuhur* associations, which offer educational and rehabilitation services to children with cerebral palsy through the Cerebral Palsy Institute in Damascus; the Child Rights Association, at the Ghazali Institute in Damascus; the Syrian Arab Association for SOS Children's Villages International, which helps orphans and children deprived of family care; the Rainbow Association, which provides educational, medical and cultural services for foundlings; the *Shabab al-Mustaqbal* Association, which manages the Ibn Rashd Institute for the Education of Boys, offering health care and social and educational services to destitute children; and the Amal Institute for the Disabled, which provides for the rehabilitation and social integration of children using techniques that recognize the humanity and dignity of these children and afford them their full rights to an education and to physical, mental and social care.

18. A number of associations working in Damascus and the Damascus countryside governorate are involved in a rural development project being run in the Haran al-Awamid area to improve cultural, health and training conditions across much of the Damascus countryside governorate. The idea is to increase employment opportunities in the area and conduct an experiment that can be replicated in and extended to other areas, with the involvement of other associations, so as to raise living standards among families and make a positive impact on all aspects of children's lives.

19. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is endeavouring to establish technical links between the activities of different associations with different and diverse goals so as to improve coordination and rationalize management and resource utilization.

20. The Government, in partnership with human rights organizations and non-governmental organizations, has taken steps to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the occupied Syrian Golan. As the Israeli occupation authorities do not allow the Syrian authorities to look after Syrian children in the occupied Golan, the State is prevented from meeting its obligations towards children there in line with the commitments that it made when it ratified the Convention.

21. As Syrian Arab citizens in the Golan are not allowed to establish social welfare associations, children of the Golan do not have access to welfare services. This violates their right to benefit from such associations, as provided for under article 26 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

22. The Syrian Arab Republic has long been engaged in intensive discussions with some States and with international humanitarian organizations that deal with health issues on the establishment, under the auspices of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, of three health centres and a specialist hospital in the occupied Golan. However, the Israeli authorities have not acceded to these requests.

23. The Government produces radio and television programmes for Syrian children in the Golan in an attempt to compensate for the difficulties that they have in gaining access to educational and cultural rights. It does everything possible to supply educational and cultural information that is tailored to all different age groups. The programmes are well received and closely followed.

Paragraph 4 of the list of issues

24. The national plan for the protection of children in the Syrian Arab Republic was evaluated by an international expert in 2007. The following is a summary of some of the activities that were undertaken.

Research and statistics on child abuse

25. Research on child abuse was completed, publicized, published and disseminated; several key recommendations were produced and are now being followed up. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is determined to carry out additional research on child abuse, drawing, inter alia, on relevant university research.

National database on cases of abuse

26. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is setting up a national surveillance mechanism to track domestic violence. An information system was established to connect domestic violence monitoring facilities in hospitals, police stations and associations to a central database at the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and to allow for information on reported cases of domestic violence to be entered into the database.

Public awareness campaigns

- Several public information announcements on child protection have been produced. They are aired regularly on Syrian television and shown at various workshops.
- A number of televised debates have been held on child protection.
- Articles on violence against children are published in local newspapers.
- The subject of child protection has been included in relevant higher education curricula.

27. The Ministry of Higher Education, in cooperation with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, organized a national conference on the inclusion of children's rights principles in university curricula. Action was taken to follow up on the recommendations that the conference adopted on reviewing the curricula of relevant faculty departments to take account of child rights issues. Examples are provided below.

- The Arts Faculty (Department of Sociology, Damascus University) decided to add child counselling and family counselling to the diploma course it offers to sociology graduates on counselling techniques and to create a child sociology syllabus for fourth-year students.
- The Education Faculty at Damascus University decided to include a module entitled "Strategies to protect children from violence" in the syllabus of the Special Education Department.
- The Nursing Faculty at Tishrin University included material on child protection in the Faculty's new draft study plan, which was launched in the 2007/08 academic year.
- The Arts and Humanities Faculty (Department of Sociology) at Tishrin University included lectures on the subjects of child abuse and domestic violence in the fourth-year sociology curriculum (definition — different types — prevention) and included the subject of child protection in the third-year syllabus on criminal sociology.
- The Educational Faculty at Tishrin University included the subject of protecting children from violence in the syllabus for fifth-year students. As a result, the number of master's and doctoral theses on subjects relating to children's rights has increased significantly.

28. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is conducting a study on the contents of higher education curricula in order to assess how far they take account of children's rights norms and to produce recommendations on material that should be included in line with such norms.

Developing relevant vocational skills

29. A training diploma on child protection was established, and two groups of officers, doctors, social workers, health workers and psychologists nominated by ministries have already graduated and been awarded the diploma. The training involved attendance at courses in the country and abroad. The graduates undertook training at the Family Protection Department in Jordan and at juvenile institutions and police departments in the Syrian Arab Republic (see CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, para. 5-8-9). The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs held three training courses on mechanisms for protecting children's rights and participated in a summer school on domestic violence. In order to develop this type of programme, a master's course on child protection was designed.

Establishment of a family protection unit

30. This is a centre that would receive and investigate complaints about ill-treatment of children and women and refer them to the competent authorities for action. It would have a dedicated freephone service for reporting child abuse or seeking legal, psychological or social counselling on all matters relating to child abuse. The delay in establishing the unit is due to the administrative procedures associated with the construction work, funding issues — the amount required is not inconsiderable — and work priorities. Premises have been purchased and remodelling work is now being done. Efforts are under way to develop statutes and operational regulations for issuance once a legal instrument on the establishment of the unit has been issued (see CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, para. 5-8-7).

Creation of a child helpline

31. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in cooperation with UNICEF, enlisted the help of an international expert on child helplines in December 2007. The expert defined the steps to be taken to set up a child helpline using available infrastructure. He also provided training for some of the teams involved.

32. The Commission, in cooperation with UNICEF, prepared a needs analysis focusing on children's problems, social attitudes and perceptions of the need for a hotline. A sample of 500 children in homes, at schools, on the streets and in employment was analysed and a qualitative study was conducted drawing on feedback from focus groups in a number of social welfare homes.

Establishment of shelters for children

33. Included in the investment plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour are projects on the establishment of two centres for child victims in Damascus and Aleppo respectively. Work is beginning on the Damascus centre and is expected to be completed by 2012. Land has been allocated for the construction of the shelter in Aleppo and the work is expected to be completed by 2014.

Paragraph 5 of the list of issues

34. Numerous mechanisms have been established to monitor the observance of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is the institution responsible for dealing with children's rights, including by monitoring and coordinating efforts to implement the Convention. The tasks of the Commission in regard to the implementation of the Convention include the following:

- Following up on the implementation of the Convention and the two optional protocols

- Following up on activities to raise awareness of the Convention and the optional protocols
- Preparing periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention and the optional protocols
- Working to have laws amended so as to improve the situation of Syrian children
- Preparing national reports for the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international bodies
- Monitoring the situation of children on the basis of research and studies
- Contributing to child-centred programmes and activities nationwide
- Devising plans and strategies on children and forming committees to oversee their application

For information on the Children's Parliament, please see document CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, para. 4-4-1-1.

35. A national committee on international humanitarian law was established pursuant to Prime Ministerial Decision No. 2896 of 2 June and is chaired by the Minister of State for Red Crescent Affairs. The committee is tasked with overseeing and coordinating national activities to raise awareness of international humanitarian law, bring domestic legislation into line with the international treaties ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic and identify human rights violations.

Paragraph 6 of the list of issues

36. Syrian laws make no distinction between males and females with regard to enrolment in education or access to health and social welfare services. Likewise, there is no discrimination between the sexes with regard to legal transactions or rates of pay. Any discrimination that may occur stems from a misinterpretation of the law or is the result of the actions of certain individuals that can be dealt with by the courts. In such cases, the injured parties are entitled to compensation.

37. On 25 September 2002, the Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979. Under the Constitution, citizens and those who acquire Syrian nationality have the equal right of access to public employment, in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 21 of which states: "Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country." Article 25 of the Permanent Constitution of 1973 provides: "The rule of law is a fundamental principle in society and the State. Citizens have equal rights and duties under the law. The State shall guarantee equality of opportunity among citizens."

38. Women in the Syrian Arab Republic exercise all the rights that are afforded to men. The Constitution does not discriminate between the sexes, rather it grants every citizen the right to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural life without any discrimination between men and women. The State offers women every opportunity to contribute actively and fully to political, social, cultural and economic life and seeks to remove the restrictions on women's advancement and participation in the development of society.

39. The Ministry of Education takes action to implement laws designed to eliminate discrimination against girls, such as the Free Basic Education Act. The Act states that education is compulsory from the first to the ninth grade of basic education and is free of charge from the first grade of basic education up until the third grade of secondary education. This law helps promote education for girls and its implementation is overseen by

the Directorate of Basic Education and by compulsory education departments in the Directorate of Education. Updated curricula are used from the first grade to the third grade of secondary education. The curricula contain no material portraying stereotypical roles for men and women. The State has taken steps to develop curricula so as to introduce the concepts underpinning gender equality (see CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, para. 4-1-2 and the matrix on the inclusion of children's and women's rights in the curricula). Several studies and workshops have been conducted on the subject in the light of the State's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The female enrolment ratios in different stages of education are important indicators of gender equity. Some 47 per cent of children in kindergarten in 2010/11 were girls. This is evidence of just how much attention is paid to education for girls at this stage. The enrolment ratio for girls in 2010/11 was 48 per cent, as compared with 47 per cent in 1999; this was the result of compulsory school age being raised by the Basic Education Act No. 32 of 7 April 2002. Under the Act, the primary and intermediate stages of education were merged into a single stage — "basic education" — and compulsory school age was raised to 15 years (the ninth grade). In 2010/11, girls accounted for 54 per cent of students in education, as compared with 47 per cent in 1999/2000. The female enrolment ratio in secondary vocational education was 40 per cent in 2010/11. This is the result of new areas of specialization (electronics and computing) that encouraged enrolment by girls being opened up in the industrial and commercial branches of vocational education.

40. A project was furthermore developed to eliminate the problem of girls dropping out of education, to get girls back into education and to teach them the essential skills that they need to prepare them for a better life. The project, which focuses in particular on rural and remote areas, especially the north-east of the country, involves the establishment of special classes for girls.

Paragraph 7 of the list of issues

41. Children's right to be heard is respected by the sharia courts and in court decisions on the interpretation of the law, consistent with the obligations of the State as a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, children are asked whether they wish to remain with their mother or to live with their father once the period of early care (*hadanah*) comes to an end.

42. The Associations Act allows students under the age of 18 to form associations in which they may make their views known. It provides exemptions from certain conditions on membership of governing boards. (For example, article 27, which states that members of governing boards must have the capacity to exercise their civil and political rights, does not apply to student associations in educational institutions.)

43. Many governmental and other organizations actively promote dialogue, mutual acceptance and coexistence among children and seek to develop children's social skills and capacities through summer camps where children take part in cultural, language, sports, scientific, educational, social and environmental activities. Activities are not just conducted in summer camps, however. During the school year, many extracurricular activities are organized, including leadership and gifted students' competitions, trips, scientific and educational discussions, and science, education and technology competitions and exhibitions. There has also been a revival of scouting initiatives in the Syrian Arab Republic. (For more information, see document CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, para. 4-4-1-1.) The State supports children's initiatives and has embraced the idea of a children's parliament.

Paragraph 8 of the list of issues

44. The Civil Status Code No. 36 of 1957, as amended, states that personality begins with the live birth of the child. The Code grants everyone the right to a name and states that names and births must be registered in the civil register within 15 days of a birth, if it takes place in the seat of a governorate, and within 30 days, if it takes place elsewhere. Penalties are imposed on parents or guardians who report a birth late or do not report it at all. Similarly, if the management of a clinic where a birth takes place fails to report the birth to the civil registrar, it will be subject to sanctions. The registrar must be given full information on the identity of the child.

45. For many countries, nationality is an issue of sovereignty. Nationality is generally acquired on the basis of established norms such as *jus sanguinis* (patrilineal descent) and *jus soli* (acquisition of citizenship of the State where the birth takes place) or on the basis of secondary, contingent factors (naturalization, marriage and a change of sovereignty and residence after birth).

46. In the national interest, *jus sanguinis* takes precedence over *jus soli* as far as the acquisition of Syrian nationality in the Syrian Arab Republic is concerned. Hence, the Syrian legislature draws primarily on *jus sanguinis* norms and views *jus soli* as a secondary frame of reference. Under the Nationality Act No. 276 of 1969, every child born in the Syrian Arab Republic to a Syrian Arab mother is entitled to Syrian Arab nationality, if the identity of the child's father is not documented.

47. In order to guarantee protection to all children, the Syrian legislature has taken action to ensure that children living in the Syrian Arab Republic, whatever their origin, receive the same type of protection without any discrimination and have equal access to health care and a school education.

48. In 2009 the Higher Education Council issued a decision allowing all children with a Syrian mother and a father who is a foreigner or a person considered as such to enrol in university and college via the general admissions process beginning in the 2009/10 academic year. Such children may also enrol in "parallel education", provided that they have completed basic education (second cycle) and secondary education in the Syrian Arab Republic and do not have another nationality.

49. In application of Legislative Decree No. 49 of 8 April 2011, on 24 April 2011, the authorities began work on granting Syrian Arab citizenship to those listed in the Hasakeh governorate register of foreigners. The Ministry of the Interior invited all those on the Hasakeh register (most of them Kurds) and on other registers of foreigners elsewhere to submit the necessary documentary evidence for naturalization, together with details of their national identity number and identity card. Some 36,000 families had applied for citizenship as of June 2011 (an average of six persons per family).

50. As for the situation of children born out of wedlock and the measures taken to ensure that those children are not stigmatized, there are no children in the Syrian Arab Republic without a family name. Moreover, as stated in article 40 of the Syrian Civil Code (Act No. 84 of 1949), if a child is illegitimate, the name of the father and/or the mother must not be mentioned in the register of births, except at the express request of one of the parents or by order of a court. Articles 34 and 36 of the Civil Status Code grant the civil registrar the right to choose two fictitious parental names for a child. Confidentiality must be assured in these cases. In any event, the Syrian Personal Status Code provides that a child's filiation to the mother must be recognized, even if the child is born out of wedlock.

51. The legislature takes account of the interests of the child. If a person declares that a foundling is his or her child, he or she is bound by the declaration, even if it is made just prior to death. Pursuant to article 134 of the Personal Status Code issued in Legislative

Decree No. 59 of 1953, as amended, the person is required to provide for the child's upkeep.

52. According to Legislative Decree No. 107 of 1970, particularly articles 2, 5, 6 and 7 thereof, care for children of unknown parentage must be provided by law. The decree assigns the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour responsibility for ensuring that foundlings receive care, protection and an education that enables them to learn self-reliance and to earn a living. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has a mandate to provide for foundlings up until the age of 18. Included in this mandate is the exercise of authority with respect to general and vocational education, monitoring of health and social well-being and various other matters concerning the material welfare of the foundling. Minors of unknown parentage are treated as orphans. Their property is placed in trust or their guardian is subject to the provisions on guardianship set out in the Personal Status Code. The decree provides for the establishment of welfare homes offering foundlings care and health, educational and social services that will allow them to learn self-reliance.

53. Further to a decision by the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour, a foundling may be placed with a family or a woman wishing to care for the child, provided that the carer is able to look after and raise the child, to offer family-based care and an education and to pay for the child's upkeep. Also further to a decision by the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour, foundlings may be placed in a non-governmental institution that has the means to care for them. For example, the Rainbow Association looks after foundlings. In partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour it has commenced work on the construction of a 20,000 m² residential complex offering these children the chance to live in a homely atmosphere more akin to that found in a normal family setting. The association offers appropriate and comprehensive medical, educational and cultural services to these children. It also provides a solid foundation for their integration into society, guaranteeing their dignity, safeguarding their rights and prioritizing their best interests and making them the primary consideration.

54. In 2010, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and UNICEF launched a project to assess the alternative care provided to children without parental care, including children of unknown parentage (foundlings). International experts were engaged to devise a more effective system of alternative care. A report on the project was recently finalized and will be used as a basis for ongoing work to formulate an alternative care strategy and provide for the introduction of legislation and regulatory standards for alternative care institutions and programmes.

55. The Syrian legislature has taken care to ensure that every person born in the Syrian Arab Republic is given a national identity card upon reaching the age of 14, pursuant to article 70 *et seq.* of Legislative Decree No. 26 of 12 April, as amended by the Personal Status Act No. 376 of 1957. Reference is made to paragraph 5-1-3 of document CRC/C/SYR/3-4/Add.1, which states that a civil registrar is to name a foundling and that the fact that the child is of unknown parentage must not be mentioned on the birth certificate or in the register of births.

Paragraph 9 of the list of issues

56. The Ministry of Education has issued several directives prohibiting teachers from using violent methods which are incompatible with education. All violence in schools is prohibited, no matter who initiates it. Sanctions are imposed on teachers who resort to violence. Indeed, several teachers have been dismissed for using violence to deal with students.

57. The Criminal Code contains provisions on all forms of child abuse, whether perpetrated in or outside the home. It imposes higher penalties when the abuse is committed by an ascendant of a child (for example, sexual intercourse and indecent acts) and raises the penalty for killing a child to capital punishment, if the perpetrator is an ascendant of the child. Article 508 of the Criminal Code was amended by Legislative Decree 2011/1. More details are provided in the reply concerning paragraph 11 of the list of issues.

Paragraph 10 of the list of issues

58. The minimum age for marriage is 17 years for girls and 18 for boys. The State intends to raise marrying age and the authorities are currently running campaigns to win over the public to this change. As part of its health education efforts, the Ministry of Health organizes information sessions at health centres. Midwives and reproductive health specialists help to raise awareness among women who attend the centres. Information is also provided elsewhere, in cooperation with other entities (the Ministry of Agriculture, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, the Women's Union, civil society associations and the General Union of Agricultural Workers), to raise awareness of the risks to the health of the mother and the child of early marriage and early childbearing. According to data from the Reproductive Health Programme, there has been a marked fall in the number of pregnant women attending health centres who are under the age of 18: from 2.75 per cent in 2004 to 1.9 per cent in 2010. Moreover, according to the 2009 Family Health Survey, in 2009, 8.6 per cent of married persons in urban areas were under the age of 15, as compared with 8.1 per cent in rural areas (2009). The breakdown for married persons between the ages of 15 and 17 was as follows: 0.4 per cent males and 7.9 per cent females in urban areas and 0.2 per cent males and 5.6 per cent females in rural areas (2009).

59. Female genital mutilation is not practised in the Syrian Arab Republic; no cases have been recorded or uncovered. Nevertheless, severe penalties have been prescribed for performing this procedure. Article 543 of the Criminal Code states: "If the act results in the severance or removal of an organ, the amputation of a limb, the impairment of a sensory function or the infliction of a physical deformity or any other permanent disability or appearance thereof, the perpetrator shall be liable to a penalty of up to 10 years' imprisonment with hard labour."

60. Syrian criminal law makes no reference to so-called "honour crimes". If what is being referred to is article 508 of the Criminal Code, then it should be noted that the article was amended by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 3 January 2011. It is no longer possible for a person to evade punishment. In cases of manslaughter, the perpetrator may only benefit from consideration of mitigating circumstances. The penalty for intentional killing is from 5 to 7 years' imprisonment (text of decree attached).

Paragraph 11 of the list of issues

61. Article 508 of the Criminal Code was amended by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 3 January 2011 to introduce a penalty of at least 2 years' imprisonment for rape, even where there is a valid marriage contract between the perpetrator and the victim. This means that the perpetrator will only benefit from consideration of mitigating factors, as provided for in article 241 of the Code. If the marriage ends with the unjustified repudiation of the wife or with the convicted person being divorced in the interests of the victim less than five years from the date that the marriage was concluded, the perpetrator will be liable to the full penalty; the time already served will be taken into account. If a valid marriage is contracted between the perpetrator of a lesser indecent offence and the victim, the prosecution will be suspended. If a suspended sentence has been handed down in the case, the prosecution will

be resumed or the full penalty will be imposed, if the marriage ends with the unjustified repudiation of the wife or with the husband being divorced in the interests of the victim less than three years from the date of the marriage; the time already served will be taken into account (text of decree attached).

Paragraph 12 of the list of issues

62. A total of 7,846 boys and 11,045 girls (18,891 children in all) under the age of 15 were enrolled in sharia institutions in 2010/11 (i.e., 59 per cent girls and 41 per cent boys).

63. The curricula taught at these schools are verified by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Endowments. The two ministries liaise with one another and both ministries send advisers to visit sharia schools across the country in order to observe the teaching process and report back on their findings.

64. In sharia schools, classes begin at the seventh grade and run up to the end of the secondary school stage. The curricula are those developed by the Ministry of Education, with the addition of some sharia science subjects that are chosen by the Ministry of Endowments. Students who complete their education at these schools can enrol in the same university faculties (humanities) as those who graduate with a general secondary education. Students at sharia secondary schools are not studying outside the compulsory education system; they follow the basic education curriculum and, in addition, study sharia sciences.

Paragraph 13 of the list of issues

65. Reference is made to the reply concerning paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

66. A project was launched on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. This is a joint project involving the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Its purpose is to integrate efforts to combat child labour in national policies and to provide related capacity-building support to Government institutions, workers and employers. Prevention measures and activities to rehabilitate and reintegrate child workers are also included in the project.

Paragraph 14 of the list of issues

67. Article 9 of Cabinet Decision No. 9 of 108, concerning the regulation of agencies that recruit and employ childminders and domestic workers who are not Syrian nationals, states: "The prospective employee shall have full legal capacity (i.e. shall be over the age of 18)". This means that there are no child workers in the Syrian Arab Republic from the countries concerned or any other country.

Paragraph 15 of the list of issues

68. The Ibn Rashd Institute for the Education of Girls in Damascus provides a wide range of health, social and educational services to protect homeless children and help to return them to their families. It is currently being managed in conjunction with the *Shabab al-Mustaqbal* association. In 2010, the institute looked after 35 individuals. The overwhelming majority of street children are beggars rather than homeless persons.

Paragraph 16 of the list of issues

69. The Syrian legislature takes due account of human rights principles and related guidelines, in conformity with recognized international norms. It seeks to build on the general principles enunciated in the International Bill of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the optional protocols to the Convention, the Arab Framework for the Rights of the Child, endorsed by the Council of the League of Arab States at the 2001 Arab Summit, and the Tunis Declaration adopted on 14 January 2004 at the Third Arab High-Level Conference on the Rights of the Child.

70. Under Syrian law, the death penalty cannot be imposed on anyone under the age of 18 (Juvenile Offenders Act, art. 29 (a)).

71. In keeping with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the standards relating to juvenile justice, the Syrian legislature views detention of children as a measure of last resort. The Syrian Juvenile Offenders Act No. 18 of 1974 lists a series of procedures as an alternative to court proceedings. Even if a case is sent before the courts, a young person will be released subject to a security being provided by the parents. Legislative Decree No. 52 was issued on 1 September 2003. The decree contains an amendment to article 2 of the Juvenile Offenders Act No. 18 of 1974 raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 7 years to 10. A young offender who is over the age of 10 but under the age of 18 will be subject only to the reform measures set out in the Juvenile Offenders Act.

72. Article 4 of the Juvenile Offenders Act No. 18 of 1974 lists the reform measures that may be imposed with respect to young persons, namely: supervision by one or both parents or the legal guardian; placement with a family member; placement with an institution or with an association that is licensed to care for young people; placement in a supervised facility or a reform institution; placement in a guarded facility; supervised release; a residence ban; a ban on frequenting places of ill-repute; a ban on performing work of any kind; a care order.

73. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is preparing a document on a juvenile justice development project to be run in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF. The aim is to review the legislation on juvenile offenders and assess conditions in reform institutions and the care services on offer with a view to making adjustments to take account of recent developments in juvenile justice.

74. A number of associations are involved in the administration of juvenile justice, specifically in the management of certain juvenile institutions. The authorities seek to promote involvement by these associations, which make an effective contribution to the development of society, the prevention of lesser and serious juvenile crimes and the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

75. Training courses are organized for juvenile court judges. The judges are invited to take part in all events pertaining to the workings of the juvenile justice system and some have enrolled in diploma courses on child protection.

Paragraph 17 of the list of issues

76. Syrian law does not allow children to be enlisted in or to volunteer for military service. The system in place is very clear in this regard and operates in line with the full range of Syrian legislation and with international law, human rights instruments and the treaties to which the State is a party. The Syrian Juveniles Act defines a child as "every male or female below the age of 18". The definition of the child in article 1 of the Convention is echoed in the Syrian Constitution (art. 54) and in prevailing law, including

the Civil Code (art. 64) and the Personal Status Code (art. 162). The Compulsory Military Service Act states that military service is only compulsory for Syrian nationals over the age of 18 — i.e. in the phase after childhood — and that the same age criterion applies to volunteers for military service.

77. Military service is defined (Military Service Act No. 115 of 1953, art. 6) as “a national duty imposed on any Syrian of legal age. Legal age begins on the first day of January for an enlisted man who is 19 years old or over. In time of war or an emergency, legal age shall begin on the first day of January for an enlisted man who has reached the age of 18”.

78. The offence of the “sale of children” is not known to have occurred in the Syrian Arab Republic and no cases involving this offence have ever been set before the domestic courts. However, the Syrian legislature recognizes the “sale of children” as a human trafficking offence in Legislative Decree No. 3 of 7 January 2010, based on recognized international norms. These norms include the following:

- Special attention must be paid to children and women who are victims of human trafficking and to victims with special needs, such as persons with disabilities and those in related categories, with a view to guaranteeing their social rehabilitation.
- Protection and appropriate care must be offered to the victims of human trafficking, whose human rights must be fully respected.
- Measures must be taken to provide appropriate protection to the victims of human trafficking and to meet their needs for physical, psychological and social assistance, if necessary in cooperation with governmental institutions, grass-roots organizations, trade unions and relevant associations.
- Female staff must be deployed to conduct investigations into cases of trafficking of women.
- Victims must not be placed in facilities that are unsuitable for them given their status as victims.
- Confidentiality must be assured; victims’ names and whereabouts must not be disclosed and no information is to be released that would identify them or their family members.
- Advice and information must be dispensed to victims of human trafficking, particularly on their legal rights. This information must be proffered in a language that the victim understands.
- Protection must be afforded to those who report human trafficking offences, as well as witnesses and experts and their family members.
- Action must be taken to strengthen international cooperation in order to deal with the perpetrators of human trafficking offences.
- A legislative framework must be established to provide the development of a social culture that will help to prevent human trafficking and to deal with its consequences more effectively.

Instructions on the implementation of the law on this subject were issued at the beginning of 2011 and the law has now entered into force.

79. With regard to the dissemination of the Convention and the optional protocols and the training instituted by the State in line with the Committee’s recommendations regarding the second periodic report, a series of steps have been taken to disseminate the principles of the Convention and the optional protocols. For example, the texts of these instruments have

been distributed in large numbers to the authorities concerned and published in the media, and posters, information material and publications have been prepared and distributed to schools and to institutions that work on children's issues. Short messages informing the public about the contents of the Convention are broadcast on television and radio programmes for children. The general principles of the Convention have been incorporated into school curricula and modified curricula. Moreover, training courses on the Convention have been arranged; meetings for large groups of people have been held; briefings have been delivered; television and radio programmes have been aired; literary and cultural competitions have been staged to publicize the Convention; articles have been published in local newspapers and the press; and studies have been conducted.

80. On the subject of information and training to raise awareness of the Optional Protocol [on the involvement of children in armed conflict] among all relevant occupational groups, including those that deal with child asylum-seekers and child refugees from conflict-torn countries, such as teachers, health workers, social workers, the police, lawyers and judges, the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF have run joint training courses to familiarize juvenile court judges with the contents of the Convention and the optional protocols and to train them how to deal with juvenile offenders in conformity with these instruments.

81. The Ministry of Health has trained staff at 20 health centres to provide a broad range of preventive health services and treatment to Iraqi refugees living in areas with the highest density of such refugees. The training covers delivery of primary health care, treatment of well-known diseases, and health education for parents. For this, health centre staff and school doctors are given communications training and health centres are supplied with publications and information materials that are then distributed to Iraqi refugee mothers who attend the centres and to school children.

82. As for [the recommendation on] carefully assessing the situation of refugee and asylum-seeking children and providing them with culturally sensitive and multidisciplinary assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration, in accordance with article 6, paragraph 3 of the Optional Protocol [to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict], the Syrian Arab Republic is the country with the largest number of refugees from Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. These refugees do not usually live in isolated camps but are considered part of the social fabric of the nation. They receive all the services that are provided to Syrian nationals (for more information, see the reply concerning paragraph 3 of the list of issues).

83. The Children's Culture Directorate at the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with UNICEF, established a leisure and arts programme consisting of theatre and arts shows, popular arts exhibitions and drawing workshops for groups. Exhibitions of works done by child refugees during the Israeli assault on Lebanon from 13 July to 20 August 2006 were staged. Events to support Iraqi child refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic were held on 1 October 2007. Paper aeroplanes were launched in Unknown Soldier's Square and a group drawing workshop was held in Ummayad Square. In 2008, a joint project of the Ministry of Culture and UNICEF was launched to support Syrian children and adolescents and all children in the Syrian Arab Republic. Implementation began at the start of 2009: trainers were provided with training on the conceptual issues involved in adolescent development and participation. Workshops were run on promoting participation by adolescents in the governorates and training was given to office managers and children's culture officials in the concepts underpinning adolescent development and participation.

84. Child- and adolescent-friendly spaces were created in cultural centres, where multipurpose rooms were installed (with a library, Internet facilities and a cinema). Preparations are under way to equip and furnish child-friendly spaces in cultural centres respectively in Dariya and Bayrud in the Damascus countryside governorate. This work

will then be replicated in other centres in the other governorates in the coming years. In 2010, multipurpose rooms (with a library, Internet facilities and a cinema) were opened up, in cooperation with UNICEF, at a cultural centre in Manbaj and a centre in Bab al-Farj in the Aleppo governorate in order to provide facilities for Syrian and Iraqi children and adolescents.

85. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the national authorities run activities in all areas to support and offer care to refugees. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees, in cooperation with and with support from the Government, also run numerous events for refugees.

Peace education

86. Since independence, the Government and the people of the Syrian Arab Republic have created a society that is a rich mosaic of ethnic, religious, confessional and intellectual elements coexisting in a climate of peace and tolerance without any discrimination in the nation or among citizens. This state of affairs has been supported through legislation and, in operational terms, through the delivery of school, social, media, physical and arts education designed to teach children tolerance and to eliminate violence. The State takes the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols seriously. Since the beginning of this millennium, it has instituted a range of legislative and institutional measures to inform children of their rights, develop their personalities and allow them to learn about freedom of thought and expression through discussions and children's parliaments. Its purpose is to promote dialogue, coexistence, tolerance and harmony.

87. For decades, the efforts of the authorities and the people to promote a culture of peace and tolerance and to combat violence across the nation have been hampered by external shocks. These shocks have become more powerful with each passing day, because of an adverse international climate dominated by policies of aggression, violence, extremism, foreign occupation and Israeli State terrorism. It is important not to overlook the continuing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Israeli attacks against southern Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008, together with the United States occupation of Iraq in 2003, all of which occurred in parts of the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic or in neighbouring States. Nor should we forget the double standards at work, the action taken to spark off a clash between religions and civilizations, the issue of cultural globalization, the interference in the domestic affairs of States that has occurred and the resulting encroachment on national sovereignty. This has also taken place in the United Nations context, in flagrant violation of the Charter, the instruments and resolutions of the United Nations and international law norms. These actions undermine the peaceful efforts of the State to liberate part of its territory and its citizens from the clutches of occupation and from subjugation to practices that have been condemned by the international community.

88. The Syrian Arab Republic has been committed in word and deed to a culture of peace, non-violence and tolerance and to international cooperation and friendship, ever since it participated in founding the international system and in establishing, ratifying and implementing the Charter, United Nations resolutions and instruments on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the right of self-determination, political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights and the rights of women and children. All the actions that it has taken in this regard are consistent with the nation's history, traditions, legislation and *modus operandi*. The State is determined to preserve this culture at the national level in the face of an adverse international climate. It will do its utmost to build and promote such a culture at the international level, in cooperation with the United Nations, its agencies and funds and the States Members. Such a culture cannot survive and flourish at the national level, if action is not taken to create and support a similar culture at

the international level that is capable of resisting aggression, occupation, fanaticism and hegemony and ensuring respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States, and their freedom to make their own decisions and have their own cultural identity.

Arms exports

Introduce a specific prohibition with respect to the sale of arms when the final destination is a country where children are known to be — or may potentially be — recruited or used in hostilities

89. The Syrian Arab Republic does not produce weapons, it imports them. Consequently, it cannot export arms to a country where children are recruited or used in hostilities in contravention of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Syrian Arab Republic is a party to the Optional Protocol and thus it applies its provisions as part of its domestic law.

Part II

Part II of the list of issues

New bills

90. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs has prepared several bills (children's rights – family courts – maintenance guarantee fund – amendments to the Personal Status Code – repeal of article 508 of the Criminal Code) to promote the development of an enabling environment for children and to further the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

91. Several other bills are being developed (Political Parties Bill, Elections Bill, Public Information Bill and Local Government Bill). These bills will be discussed this year and, once adopted, will offer citizens an enabling environment, human rights, democracy and opportunities for participation. This will have a positive impact on all Syrians, including children.

Recently introduced policies, programmes and action plans and their scope and financing

National plan on disabilities

92. The national plan on disabilities, which was adopted by the Government in 2008, was an important step towards improving the situation of persons with disabilities, supplying their needs and introducing the changes that need to be made with respect to disabilities and related issues. The national plan was drawn up to engage the Government and civil society — led by the Syrian organization for disabled persons (*Amal*) — in the delivery of care and rehabilitation services to people with disabilities. The focus of the plan is on improving prospects for rehabilitation based on civil society engagement, supporting and improving health and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities and their families and subsidizing, developing, producing and supplying assistive technologies. The disability plan was included in the eleventh five-year plan in order to provide it with additional support and make sure that its results are evaluated. There are institutions serving persons with disabilities in every governorate. There are also centres for outstanding students that provide access to a better educational environment and a high quality education in the secondary and tertiary stages.

93. The eleventh five-year plan includes several programmes aimed at the implementation of policies to improve the situation of children in the Syrian Arab Republic in the areas of health, education, protection and participation. These programmes are funded by the Government and carried out by governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Information on human rights instruments that have recently been ratified

- The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, opened for signature at Rome on 14 December 2000 (Act No. 14 of 2008)
- The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 2000 (Act No. 14 of 2008)
- The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries of 4 December 1989 (Decree No. 52 of 2008)
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol (Decree No. 12 of 10 February 2009)

Part III

Paragraph 3, part III, of the list of issues

94. A total of 1,083 students with disabilities have been integrated into 70 Ministry of Education schools operating in different stages of education, from kindergarten to the secondary stage. The disabilities of the students include: sensory disabilities such as auditory and visual impairments and blindness; mental disabilities, including autism: motor disabilities, including infant paralysis, having a disabled limb, an amputation, or a congenital defect in a limb; and cerebral palsy.

Paragraph 4 of the list of issues

95. A total of 3,450 children with disabilities have used rehabilitation services provided by governmental institutions and civil society associations.

Paragraph 5, part III, of the list of issues

96. In addition to the information about Palestinian, Iraqi and other refugees provided in part X (“Special protection measures”) of the State’s periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we should like to present the following data:

- A total of 485,476 Palestine refugees are registered with the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic. These persons were forced off their land and compelled to flee from Israeli terrorism in 1948. The above figure can be broken down by sex as follows: 245,164 males, or 50.49 per cent of the total number, and 240,312 females, or 49.5 per cent. The number of males aged between 0 and 5 years is 28,919, while the number of females is 27,735 females (making a total of 56,654 persons).
- There are 24,661 males aged between 5 and 10 years, as compared with 23,654 females (a total of 47,726).

- There are 14,199 males aged between 15 and 20 years, as compared with 13,574 females (a total of 27,773).
- Approximately 70 per cent of these persons live in the capital, Damascus, specifically in districts like Yarmuk and Rukn al-Din, Birzeh, Qabun and Jawbar. They also live in camps in the Damascus countryside governorate (Khan al-Shaykh, Khan Danonun, Sbeineh, Jaramana, Al-Sayidah Zaynab and Al-Ramdan).
- The remaining 30 per cent live in the governorates of Latakia (Al-Raml al-Junubi camp), Aleppo (Al-Niran, Ayn al-Tall and Handrat camps), Hamah (returnee camp), Homs (returnee camp) and Deraa (returnee camp) and in other parts of Jalin and Al-Mazirib in Deraa. These refugees do not live in isolated camps, but rather in districts where Syrians also live.

97. The General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees, which was established by Act No. 450 of 1949, oversees and regulates the affairs of Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic. It provides services to them, which are funded out of an annual budget assigned to it by the Government. The refugees have access to exactly the same public services as Syrians, in conformity with Act No. 260 of 1956. The refugees will retain their nationality, pending their return to their homeland. UNRWA supplies them with additional health, educational and social services.

98. In 2010, the Syrian Arab Republic spent \$225,806,915 on services for Palestine refugees registered with the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees; the budget for UNRWA did not exceed \$40 million. Thus, the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the largest donors to UNRWA and for Palestine refugees.

99. In addition to the half a million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA, the Syrian Arab Republic hosts refugees from many different countries, principally Iraq, and smaller numbers from Afghanistan, the Sudan and elsewhere. The refugees in this latter group are dealt with under the mandate of UNHCR. According to official estimates, there are more than 1 million Iraqi refugees, in addition to refugees from Asia and Africa.

100. According to the High Commissioner's report of April 2011 on the situation of Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic who are considered persons of concern to UNHCR, when the United States occupation began, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis fled to the Syrian Arab Republic in search of refuge and protection. More than 270,000 Iraqis registered with UNHCR. Some resettled in third countries or left for a third country by other means. Others decided to return to Iraq, mostly voluntarily and on their own initiative. In a few cases, limited help was provided by UNHCR. As the report indicates, the overwhelming majority of these refugees have remained in the Syrian Arab Republic. According to the data for 2011, some 157,141 refugees are registered with UNHCR in the Syrian Arab Republic. The report explains that these are figures only for those Iraqi refugees who have turned to UNHCR for the purposes of registration or gaining access to some other form of assistance. The Government estimates the true number of Iraqi refugees in the country to be over 1 million.

101. The report shows that UNHCR continued to register new refugees in 2010 (18,719 as at the end of October 2010). In approximately 80 per cent of these cases, the refugees came to the Syrian Arab Republic mainly because of intimidation or a lack of security in the areas where they lived in Iraq. The other 20 per cent are people who have been living in the Syrian Arab Republic for longer and who have registered with UNHCR because they need special assistance or protection. A total of 7,663 new Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR between the beginning of 2011 and the end of May 2011.

102. The number of Iraqi refugees (141,157) registered with UNHCR in the Syrian Arab Republic can be broken down by sex as follows:

- 0–4 years: 5,663 females and 5,974 males, making a total of 11,637 persons (8.2 per cent)
- 5–11 years: 10,056 females and 10,675 males, making a total of 20,740 persons (14.7 per cent)
- 12–17 years: 8,827 females and 9,303 males, making a total of 18,130 persons (8.12 per cent)
- 18–59 years: 36,890 females and 43,608 males, making a total of 49,880 (57 per cent)
- 60 and above: 5,059 females and 5,093 males, making a total of 10,152 persons (7.2 per cent)
- Most Iraqi refugees (77.3 per cent) are living in Damascus and the Damascus countryside governorate or in the Aleppo governorate (6.4 per cent), Hasakeh (4.8 per cent) and Homs (3.2 per cent). There are smaller numbers living in the remaining governorates.

103. UNHCR relies on three durable solutions for refugees across the world: voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. The UNHCR bureau in Damascus has stated that it has received 45,000 applications for voluntary repatriation. As the High Commissioner's report shows, the number of refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic whom the bureau has helped to return to Iraq remains low. The bureau helped 1,456 individuals to return to Iraq between January and October 2010; these persons were facing economic difficulties in the Syrian Arab Republic. Since 2007, UNHCR has referred approximately 50,000 cases for resettlement, and upwards of 23,972 Iraqi refugees have resettled in over 12 countries. The others are waiting to be issued with visas for host countries.

104. UNHCR also resettles non-Iraqis. As stated in the 2010 UNHCR report, a total of 733 resettlement applications were received from non-Iraqi refugees in 2009–2010. Some 275 such refugees departed from the country. According to information provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 553 (Iraqi, Somali, Ethiopian or Indonesian) refugees were resettled (United States of America, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Australia, Ethiopia, Indonesia) in May 2011, in cooperation with the UNHCR bureau. The vast majority of non-Iraqi refugees live in Damascus and the Damascus countryside. A small number of these persons who came on study missions to the country, live in Latakia, Tartus and Aleppo.

105. Persecution of Palestinians in Iraq began in 2003, when hundreds of families were forced to flee. Thousands were arrested and detained, publicly vilified, abducted, tortured, attacked and killed. According to UNHCR figures, there are currently 433 Palestine refugees in the Al-Hul camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, and 2,507 are registered with the UNHCR Damascus bureau as having come to the country from Iraq. Over 1,500 of the refugees have been resettled out of a total of 2,000 who originally applied for resettlement.

106. The Syrian Arab Republic assisted Lebanese refugees and families following the Israeli military aggression against Lebanon in 2006. Assistance, including lodging, food and clothing, was provided to tens of thousands of Lebanese families. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour opened up several centres in the governorates of Damascus, Homs, Tartus and Damascus countryside. The authorities have worked with civil society institutions to provide the necessary support to these families.

107. Although the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has not signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the State is considered to have one of the best records for dealing with refugee situations and supplying refugees with their needs and protection. The State provides for Iraqi refugees who have been in the Syrian Arab

Republic since 2003, in cooperation and coordination with the authorities and with local and international organizations, in particular UNHCR. For example, in 2010 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour signed a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR on providing better services and living conditions for Iraqi and non-Iraqi refugees living in the Syrian Arab Republic and on the reception that the refugees are given at Ministry-run institutions.

108. With a view to providing humanitarian support to refugees and maintaining the focus for future development on improving the quality of existing basic services such as education and health care, the relevant Government ministries concluded agreements with UNICEF based on a country programme document concerning cooperation between the Syrian Arab Republic and UNICEF (2007–2011). UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) are working on a school meals project in 1,245 schools in the north-east of the country. Support is provided for additional classes, remedial education and vocational training to help Iraqi refugees. Moreover, new partnerships forged with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and UNICEF have led to community centres being set up to offer psychological support to both Iraqi and Syrian nationals.
