



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
2 September 2011
English
Original: Arabic

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention

Third and fourth periodic reports of States parties due in 2009

Syrian Arab Republic*, **

Addendum

Submission by the Syrian Arab Republic modifying certain paragraphs of the third and fourth periodic reports

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

** The modified paragraphs are contained in the updated third and fourth periodic reports of the Syrian Arab Republic, available in the files of the Secretariat.

The modified paragraphs of the combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Syrian Arab Republic

Explanatory introduction

1. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is pleased to submit its combined third and fourth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in accordance with article 44, paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and wishes to draw attention at the outset to the importance of this introduction. The present report follows on from the second periodic report (CRC/C/93/Add.2), which was submitted on 15 August 2000 and considered by the Committee at its thirty-third session in June 2003.

2. We should like to stress that the principle of the best interests of the child provides the underpinning for various policies and measures that have been adopted by the State. The care and protection of children are central aspects of family life in the Syrian Arab Republic, as reflected in the concerted efforts made by the State and various sectors of society in the health, educational and legal domains. This is clearly illustrated by the Government's decision, taken at a meeting held on 2 October 2005 that was chaired by the President of the Republic, to endorse the National Plan for the Protection of Children. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs was entrusted with overseeing the entire implementation process. The Syrian Arab Republic provides access to health care and education to all male and female children in rural and urban areas, with a focus on protection and care for those with special needs. There are no restrictions on the exercise by children (or adults) of the right to freedom of expression or opinion. Children in the Syrian Arab Republic have access to all kinds of information and ideas with input from the family, schools, the media, cultural centres, clubs and access to public and private libraries that are open to all children and have huge collections of children's books.

3. In accordance with the general guidelines regarding the form and content of periodic reports (CRC/C/58/Rev.1) adopted by the Committee at its thirty-ninth session in June 2005, the Syrian Arab Republic decided that the present report would not reproduce the contents of the second periodic report but simply refer to it when addressing certain topics, as and where necessary. Moreover, it decided to reply to the Committee's concluding observations on the second periodic report (CRC/C/15/Add.212) by discussing the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Convention. The present report furthermore cites new statistical information and relevant legislation, copies of which can be found in the annexes. It refers to bills that are well on their way to being adopted and provides full information on events that have taken place since the issuance of the second periodic report, i.e. between August 2000 and February 2009.

4. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the international treaties, conventions and charters which it has signed and ratified. With ratification, these instruments acquire the force of domestic law and take precedence over Syrian laws, in accordance with article 25 of the Syrian Civil Code and article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, to which the Syrian Arab Republic acceded by Legislative Decree No. 184 of 1980. In line with its commitment to observing all the rights enshrined in the Convention, subject to the reservations that the State has entered to the Convention and consistent with the principles and values upheld by Syrian society, the Government reaffirms its belief in the importance of continuing a meaningful dialogue in order to achieve a common understanding with the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

5. In its concluding observations on the second periodic report, the Committee recommended that the Syrian Arab Republic should study its reservations with a view to

withdrawing them. It is very important to note that the Syrian Arab Republic withdrew its reservations to articles 20 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Decree No. 12 of February 2007 (annex 1), and that only one reservation, concerning article 14, still stands.

Report preparation process (participating entities)

6. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is responsible for dealing with matters relating to the rights of Syrian children, including the preparation of the report which is customarily submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Commission duly turned to the Prime Minister's Office and relevant Government institutions and non-governmental organizations for assistance with the preparation of the report. The Prime Minister's Office established a national steering committee comprising representatives from the relevant Government agencies and non-governmental organizations to oversee the preparation of the present report. Care was taken to include a number of specialists, concerned individuals and children themselves. Another committee was established to do the drafting. The Commission wrote to all Government agencies and non-governmental organizations, to ask them for key data for inclusion in the report. The Central Bureau of Statistics, for its part, submitted all the data requested for the report and helped to check all the statistics and figures reproduced herein. Moreover, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), helped with the delivery of training to civil society actors on the preparation of international reports, and a representative from the UNICEF office in the Syrian Arab Republic explained how the national report should be prepared based on the United Nations model. Furthermore, in cooperation with UNICEF, an international expert trained the drafting committee members on how to draft the national report in accordance with international standards, and met with representatives of civil society associations. Six workshops were held with Syrian children and teenagers in the governorates to get their feedback on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Annex 2 contains a summary of the views expressed by children on the educational and health care that they receive, the subject of violence against children and other matters that were discussed at the workshop with children in a completely free atmosphere.

7. Once the first draft of the report had been prepared, meetings were held with specialists, legal experts and representatives of Government agencies and non-governmental organizations to discuss the contents and proposed changes. A national workshop was then held, attended by these stakeholders, to approve the final draft. Annex 3 lists the bodies that provided information and data to the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and those that attended the meetings and workshops.

8. In January 2010, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs asked a national expert to undertake a comprehensive update of the report, in coordination with Government agencies and participating non-governmental organizations, so as to take account of achievements in the human rights domain since February 2009; this is the updated version. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs will distribute the report to all Government agencies and non-governmental organizations for use in planning in relation to children's issues.

1. Demographic and economic indicators

Paragraph 1-1 – The human factor

9. The estimated total population of the Syrian Arab Republic in 2007 was 19,644,000, 10,042,000 males and, 9,602,000 females. In the same year, there were 2,533,000 children in the age group 0–4 years, as compared with, 2,508,000 in the age group 5–9 years and, 2,301,000 in the age group 10–14 years (annex 4). Some 46.5 per cent of the total population lived in rural areas and 53.5 per cent in urban areas. The average annual growth rate between 2000 and 2008 was 2.45 per cent. The average fertility rate between 2001 and 2005 was 3.58 live births per woman of reproductive age.

Paragraph 1-2-2-4

Addressing social justice issues

10. The results of the 2007 National Household Income and Expenditure Survey, which tracked changes since the 2004 survey, were used to calculate the upper and lower poverty lines. Clear criteria were used to identify priorities for improving living standards under development programmes for the most deprived regions and direct-cash remittance programmes for impoverished families. The indicators of family size and average household income were used to measure household poverty. The purpose of these programmes is to raise awareness of reproductive health and family planning methods. In January 2011, Legislative Decree No. 9 was enacted on the establishment of the National Social Assistance Fund to support impoverished households.

Paragraph 1-2-3

11. The eleventh five-year plan builds on the indicative planning process established in the social market economy framework. It focuses on programmes to boost the realization of the objectives of the ninth and tenth five-year plans, in particular:

- Safety nets and social welfare provision that includes health, social and retirement insurance.
- The use of a participatory approach involving the three powers of States, community-based organizations and private sector institutions.
- Measures to address negative social phenomena, particularly begging, through programmes designed to improve living standards and household income. Particular emphasis is laid on improving conditions for children in target groups under human, health, educational and social development programmes.

12. During the course of the 2011–2015 five-year plan, the economic growth rate is expected to reach 5.7 per cent. With this, the plan is intended to reduce the proportion of the population living in poverty, as measured according to the upper national poverty line, from 33.2 per cent (1997) to 16.5 per cent and to reduce the proportion of the population living below the lower poverty line from 14.26 per cent (1997) to 7 per cent by 2015. Other objectives in the plan are to: bring the unemployment rate down to 7.4 per cent; reduce the illiteracy rate in the 15–45 age group from 10.4 per cent to 2 per cent; bring down the infant mortality rate from 18 to 16 per 1,000 live births; and reduce the under-five mortality rate from 22 to 19 per 1,000 live births by the end of the plan.

Paragraph 1-2-4

13. A partnership agreement with the European Union was initialled on 19 October 2004 and amendments to the agreement, which were introduced to reflect economic

changes in the Syrian Arab Republic, were initialled on 14 December 2008. An agreement establishing a free trade zone with Turkey was signed on 1 January 2007, and the Government has taken a number of measures to support income diversification, promote social equity (amendment of the Income Tax and Tax Evasion Act) and abolish a number of indirect taxes (agricultural machinery duty, the Inheritance Act). On the spending side, salaries and wages have been raised in order to improve living standards among the population at large. Act No. 28 of 2001 provided for the establishment of private banks, and the Damascus Securities Exchange went into operation on 10 March 2009.

Paragraph 1-2-5

14. According to the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2009, gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices was 6 per cent higher than in 2008, while growth at current prices was up 3 per cent, over the same period. Moreover, average national income grew by 20.5 per cent in 2008 and 3.2 per cent in 2009.

Paragraph 2 – General measures of implementation

Paragraph 2-2

15. The main quantitative goals for the two consecutive five-year plans to 2015, which reflect the firm commitment of the Syrian Arab Republic to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, include reducing by half the proportion of families living below the poverty line from 14.26 per cent in 1997 to 7.1 per cent, taking action to completely eradicate illiteracy, and reducing the unemployment rate from the current figure of 12.3 per cent to around 8 per cent in 2015. The Syrian State Planning Commission conducted a midterm evaluation of the tenth five-year plan in order to monitor the progress being made. It found that significant progress had been made on some goals, while there had been delays with others. This will be discussed in greater detail elsewhere in the present report.

Paragraph 2-3 – The role of non-governmental organizations in the development process

Paragraph 2-3-1

16. Successive five-year plans have placed particular emphasis on expanding the role of this sector in development. It is anticipated that non-governmental organizations will play a major part in shaping collective efforts to develop local communities and in proposing programmes and projects to realize the goals on poverty reduction, employment generation, women's empowerment, access to greater educational opportunities for women, family planning, and environmental protection. The role that this sector can play has been defined as follows:

- Help to achieve quantitative poverty alleviation goals and targets
- Assist with the design and delivery of programmes on social reform, training and support for women's and children's rights
- Participate in the delivery of services in remote areas and areas where the public and private sectors do not make any tangible contribution and establish professional associations for that purpose
- Contribute to the implementation of regional development plans and participate in local planning board meetings in order to monitor the implementation of projects established under the five-year plans and those for the development of the regions with the lowest levels of growth

Paragraph 2-3-2

17. The Syrian Arab Republic attaches increasing importance to partnerships with non-governmental organizations and civil society associations, in particular those devoted to the empowerment of women, and to strengthening the role of civil society associations in national capacity-building for associations on women's empowerment and gender equality issues. There has been a marked increase in the activities of civil society associations in recent years; the number of licensed associations increased from around 450 in 2000 to more than 1,200 as of early 2007. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour supports the major role of civil society associations in providing services to complement and boost those offered by the Government, inter alia, to assist children with different kinds of disabilities and their families (for example, the provision of hearing aids, wheelchairs, cochlear implants and corneal transplants). Some of the key contributions made by non-governmental organizations are listed below:

- The national plan on disability, which was drafted with guidance from the AAMAL Organization for the Disabled, was adopted. It sets out the procedures for providing services to children with disabilities and their families.
- Several associations, including the *Rawad al-Shabab* (Young Pioneers) Association, are actively involved in providing microenterprise loans.
- A microfinance bank was established by the Agha Khan Development Network and Ebdaa Bank.

Paragraph 2-5-3 – Children's Rights Bill

18. The Children's Rights Bill was drafted up by a committee of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs consisting of academics and judges with relevant expertise. On 22 October 2006, the committee submitted a preliminary draft of the Bill to the Commission, which presented it for discussion at a workshop attended by 65 persons representing public institutions, mass organizations (including the Women's General Union) and civil society associations. Following the workshop, a small committee was formed to discuss the feedback on the draft preliminary text. The comments of ministries were discussed with representatives of those institutions and incorporated, where possible, into the text, in preparation for submission of the document to the authorities for adoption.

Paragraph 2-5-4-3

19. The Syrian Government takes a close interest in the needs of children with disabilities and has organized a series of activities and events to draw the public's attention to the particular and pressing needs of this group and to rally support for measures to address the issues that affect the most vulnerable children. The establishment in 1994 of the Syrian Special Olympics was a turning point. This independent organization for persons with mental disabilities showcases the special abilities of children in this category, and seeks to encourage civil society to invest in them. Damascus, which is where the regional headquarters of the Special Olympics World Games is located, was chosen as the venue for the first regional medical symposium on the international Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa Regional Games. The symposium, which was entitled "A better life for persons with mental disabilities", was held in September 2005 and attended by more than 350 physicians and researchers from 16 Arab and other States and from international organizations. The main objectives of the symposium were to: raise awareness about health care and social welfare provision for persons with mental disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa region; focus on the needs of these persons and identify the difficulties involved in providing health and social services; propose appropriate solutions to reduce gaps in the volume and quality of health care and social welfare services made available to

this group; involve non-governmental and civil society organizations in this effort; and, lastly, highlight the role of the Special Olympics World Games.

Paragraph 2-5-7 – Legislative and other legal measures

(a) Education is free of charge at all stages. According to Act No. 35 of 1981, as amended by the Basic Education Act No. 32 of 7 April 2002 (annex 7), education is compulsory up to the age of 15 years;

(b) Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2004 (annex 8) regulates private institutions which provide education at the pre-university stage;

(c) Under Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour Decision No. 1736 of 30 December 2004 (annex 9), the minimum working age was set at 15 years. With the issuance of Ministerial Decision No. 12 of 2010, it is now unlawful to employ young men and women before they have completed their basic education or reach the age of 15 full years, whichever comes second (see paragraph 9-3-3-3 below);

(d) The age of criminal responsibility was raised from 7 to 10 years under Legislative Decree No. 52 of 2003 (annex 10);

(e) The Personal Status Code was amended by Act No. 18 of 25 October 2003 (annex 11) to grant mothers the right to retain custody of their sons beyond the age of 9 (up to the age of 13) and of their daughters beyond the age of 11 (up to the age of 15 years). The Children's Rights Bill introduces a further amendment, setting the age of custody at 18 years for both boys and girls;

(f) The Agricultural Relations Act No. 56 of 2004 (annex 12);

(g) The Persons with Disabilities Act No. 34 of 2004 (annex 13);

(h) The Military Service Act was amended by Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2007. Article 3 was amended by Act No. 16 of 2008 to reduce the length of compulsory military service from 24 to 21 months for all, except for those who have not completed the fifth grade of basic education. This is intended as an incentive to pursue education;

(i) The National Social Assistance Fund was established by Legislative Decree No. 9 of 13 January 2011 and tasked with establishing and implementing assistance programmes that offer regular or emergency aid to the poor under conditions that ensure transparency and accountability and are consistent with State policies and plans. The aim is to provide for the empowerment of beneficiaries in the economic, social, health and educational spheres through programmes carried out by the Fund or institutions and through empowerment schemes (annex 14). According to article 3 of the Decree, the goals of the Fund are the following:

- Protect and provide for impoverished families by offering them regular or emergency assistance under conditions that ensure transparency and accountability and are consistent with State policies and plans
- Foster the development of and investment in human capital based on the principle of co-responsibility, by making assistance for beneficiaries contingent upon their fulfilment of development-related commitments in the areas of health and education (making sure that their children do not drop out of education and having their children fully immunized)
- Empower recipients in the economic, social, health and educational domains through programmes that are carried out by the Fund or institutions and through empowerment schemes

(j) By Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011, the penalties for a number of offences such as rape were increased. For example, article 508 of the Syrian Penal Code was repealed and the penalty for rape was increased. The penalty applies, even if the perpetrator marries the victim; in such cases, the perpetrator benefits only from consideration of mitigating factors (provided that the penalty is at least 2 years' imprisonment). The perpetrator will be made to stand trial again, if the marriage ends less than five years from the date on which it is contracted with the wife being divorced for no good reason or the culprit being divorced in the interests of the victim. The time already served will be deducted from the sentence (annex 15).

Paragraph 2-6 – Measures taken to disseminate the principles and provisions of the Convention

Paragraph 2-6-7

20. The Vanguard Organization distributes brochures and information posters in schools (Vanguard units) to familiarize all children of school age with the contents of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also uses theatre performances and songs to illustrate the articles of the Convention.

Paragraph 3 – Definition of the child (Convention, art. 1)

21. This issue was addressed in some detail in the initial and second periodic reports (paras. 27–47 and 28–34, respectively). In Syrian legislation, the terms “child”, “minor” or “juvenile” are all used to refer to a person below the age of 18 years. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Syrian Arab Republic should raise the minimum age of marriage for girls to that of boys and should do more to ensure adherence to the minimum age rule, particularly in rural areas. It has to be said that the Children's Rights Bill takes this principle into account and fixes the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys at 18 years in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Paragraph 3-1

22. The term child, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, means “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. The corresponding text in Syrian legislation is the Juveniles Act No. 18 of 1974, which defines a child as any male or female below the age of 18 years. Prime Ministerial Decision No. 903 of 28 February 2005 affirms that a child is any person below 18 years of age. Moreover, the law distinguishes between children who have not reached the age of discretion and those who have.

Paragraph 3-3-1 – International cooperation

Paragraph 3-3-2 – Some international human rights treaties to which the Syrian Arab Republic has acceded since 2000

23. The Syrian Arab Republic is a party to a considerable number of international instruments that establish a set of rights and obligations to ensure respect for human dignity and fundamental human rights. It has continued to pursue this course of action and, since 2000, has signed the following international instruments:

- Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, concluded on 22 September 1998 (2002)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (18 December 1979, 28 March 2003 (Annex 17))

- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict – (17 October 2003 (Annex 18))
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography – (17 October 2003 (Annex 18))
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – (1 July 2004 (Annex 19))
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (10 April 2005 (Annex 20))
- United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (by Act No. 14 of 2008 (Annexes 21 and 22))
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (by Act No. 14 of 2008)
- Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (by Act No. 14 of 2008)
- International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic pursuant to Decree No. 52 of 2008 (Annex 23))
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (ratified by Legislative Decree No. 12 of 10 February 2009)

Paragraph 4-1-1 – Right to protection against discrimination

Paragraph 4-1-1-2

24. All children, whether they are Syrian nationals, treated as Syrian nationals or resident aliens in the Syrian Arab Republic, can enrol in basic education institutions. They are afforded equal treatment in terms of the care and supervision that they receive and due consideration is given to differences of background, social environment and religious affiliation. The Syrian Government provides basic health and education services in rural and urban areas to all boys and girls at all stages of education.

Paragraph 4-1-2 – Non-discrimination on grounds of gender

Paragraph 4-1-2-2

25. There is no stereotyping of gender roles in educational curricula, as the Syrian Arab Republic has made sure to design school curricula to include the gender equality principle. A number of studies and workshops on this topic have been conducted since 2000, when the Syrian Arab Republic ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (with some reservations).

Paragraph 4-2

Best interests of the child (Convention, art. 3)

26. This matter was addressed in some detail in paragraphs 40–48 of the second periodic report, which explains how the State ensures the right to life, survival and development for all children without distinction.

27. The best interests of the child are a fundamental consideration when it comes to the selection of health, social services, educational and other policies and measures in the Syrian Arab Republic. In its policies and laws, the State has taken the best interests of the child as the foundation for the development of the person and a healthy society. The care and protection of children are at the very core of family and community life; this is clearly reflected in various domains, including the areas of health, education and legislation. Family benefit for public employees was raised pursuant to Decree No. 23 of 2003, while the Social Insurance Act was amended by Decree No. 78 of 2001 (annex 32) to grant heirs the right to inherit the retirement pension of a female relative who is a civil servant; previously, this right was only granted in respect of male civil servants. Furthermore, working women are entitled to paid maternity leave under Syrian law, and the principle of the best interests of the child underpins the Children's Rights Bill. Most of the provisions of the Maintenance and Social Solidarity Fund Bill are devoted to children (see paragraph 6-6-1 below). The Cabinet issued Circular No. 15/7418 of 2010 following the issuance of Ministry of Justice Circular No. 2010/62, which recognizes the right of the person with official custody of a child, whether or not that person is the mother, to open an account for the child in a public or private bank and to make deposits into the account. The circular also states that the child may be enrolled in kindergarten or school or move to another one without needing the consent of the other parent or the sharia court responsible for dealing with these matters. This is a change from the previous situation.

Paragraph 4-3 – Right to life, survival and development (art. 6)

28. This subject is taken up in paragraphs 49–52 of the second periodic report. As the report states, the Syrian Criminal Code prescribes higher penalties for offences committed against children. The report explains how the State seeks to protect children from various dangers.

Paragraph 4-3-1

29. The Syrian legislature considers the right to life to be the most basic of the rights inherent in the human person and stresses the importance of protecting this children's right, from the embryonic stage of life until the age of majority. The legislature, domestic law and national policy therefore ensure the right to life of all children and adults through a number of measures and mechanisms. Various new pieces of legislation and ordinances on the right to life, survival and development have been introduced, notably Ministerial Decision No. 39/2001, article 2 of which prohibits and punishes the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products to anyone under 18 years of age, and Decision No. 4334 of 8 July 2007, establishing the National Anti-Smoking Committee with members representing the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and relevant Government agencies. Legislative Decree No. 62 of 2009 prohibits smoking in public places (annex 33).

Paragraph 4-3-2

30. While legislative measures, policies and development plans have been introduced to create a more favourable environment for the survival and development of children, we are not able to extend our programmes and plans to the stolen part of our territory in the occupied Syrian Golan, because Israel obstinately refuses all and any interventions, even by international organizations, to improve the situation of children there.

31. The human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remains grave. Children there are not spared the arbitrary practices of Israel, which pays no heed to the rights that Syrian Arab children should enjoy in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Indeed, Israel has violated the rights of Syrian Arab children in the Golan by imposing Israeli nationality on them and denying them their Syrian Arab nationality, in violation of

article 12 of the Convention. In addition, it has denied Syrian Arab children in the Golan free access to ideas and information by imposing restrictions on and limiting the mobility of the population, including children, in violation of article 13 of the Convention. Israel has furthermore imposed Israeli culture on children in the Golan, preventing them from engaging in intellectual and artistic activities. The occupying authorities have abolished Syrian Arab curricula in all schools in the occupied Golan and replaced them with Israeli curricula in an attempt to raise a generation that has no intellectual or cultural ties to its homeland. Furthermore, there is a dearth of suitable classrooms and school buildings in the Golan. Classrooms are overcrowded, and parents pay high rates of tax, purportedly for education. With regard to health, Israeli violations of the Convention are reflected in the acute shortage of health centres, clinics, emergency rooms and doctors in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and the failure to provide basic information on child health issues. Israel violates article 37 of the Convention by subjecting children to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, denying them their freedoms and illegally and arbitrarily detaining them in inhumane conditions in Israeli prisons. The Israeli authorities pursue a policy of physical and moral coercion of children and deny them their most fundamental human and social rights.

32. Israeli landmines pose a constant threat in the Golan, as they have been left in areas close to villages, fields and pastureland belonging to the local inhabitants. There have been 531 victims of Israeli landmines in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, including 202 fatalities, mostly among children, and 329 persons who have sustained permanent multiple disabilities.

33. It is our children's right and the responsibility of the distinguished Committee on the Rights of the Child to demand that Israel, the occupying power, respects international conventions and children's rights in the occupied Golan, in conformity with the resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council, in particular resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council declares the decision of Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan to be null and void and without international legal effect and demands that Israel rescind its decision to annex the Golan forthwith.

34. It is incumbent on the international community, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to take urgent international measures to bring an immediate end to the grave violations committed by Israel, the occupying power, in the occupied Syrian Golan and to offer the Syrian children of the occupied Syrian Golan immediate protection in line with international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This would be consistent with article 45 of the Convention, which provides for the institution of various measures to support its effective implementation and the promotion of international cooperation in the domains that it covers.

Paragraph 4-4-3 – Early childhood care

Paragraph 4-3-3-1 – Health care

35. The Ministry of Health provides a range of child health services ranging from premarital services to adolescent and youth health programmes. All the programmes on offer are run in conjunction with mass organizations (notably, the Vanguard Organization, which deals with child health issues in schools and camps and participates in national immunization campaigns and the dissemination of health education), local communities and associations. The growing interest in health issues has led to the establishment of numerous non-governmental organizations, such as the Basma Association, which help to raise awareness of pressing and critical health issues, such as AIDS.

Paragraph 4-3-3-1-6-2 – Measles and German measles

36. The National Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) Vaccination Campaign, which achieved a coverage rate of over 95 per cent, was conducted in the following three stages:

- Stage 1: Children from 10 months up to the age for admission to school (March 2007)
- Stage 2: Children in the second, third and fourth grades (third quarter of 2007)
- Stage 3: Children in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades (fourth quarter of 2008)

Paragraph 4-3-3-1-7 – Programme to control diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections in children

37. The Ministry of Health instituted this programme in 1988 and has sought to ensure good case management of diarrhoea by health workers and to educate mothers about the importance of increasing fluid intake and continuing to feed and breastfeed during a diarrhoea episode. To that end, the Ministry has held workshops, courses and seminars and meetings with public and private sector physicians. Moreover, it has conducted awareness and information campaigns in the broadcast and print media. Based on monthly reports issued by selected reporting health centres and hospitals, the high-risk areas were identified as being in the north-east of the country (Raqqah, Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah and Idlib) and the governorates of Dar`a and Damascus Countryside. Consequently, health personnel in these governorates are given training on how to control diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Official letters were sent to all the governorates instructing them to follow the programme strategy on disease management, and a national training team with members drawn from the governorates of Damascus, Damascus Countryside, Quneitra, Dar`a, Suwayda', Tartus and Hasakah was established for the programme. Efforts to raise awareness of the programme are carried out by health centres, in cooperation with grass-roots organizations, and through the media.

Paragraph 4-3-3-1-8 – Healthy child programme

38. This programme is designed to offer regular check-ups to children below 5 years of age. When children visit a clinic, their height, weight and head circumference are measured and their nutritional status is assessed. The aim here is to promote children's health, growth and development through proper nutrition and to check that children are afforded proper treatment and enjoy a safe living environment. To prevent accidents and disease, steps are taken to follow up on vaccinations, diagnose diseases from early onset and identify problems of delayed growth and development and disabilities. Periodic tests are conducted and the results are forwarded to the doctor. Children's growth is monitored and their development is assessed. Annual and ad hoc tests are conducted, and mothers are given advice on how to provide their children with care that constitutes an important factor in a child's survival and development. However, it should be noted that few parents bring their children in for tests, whether at private sector or Government institutions; parents tend to bring their children in only when sick. To address this problem, steps are being taken to raise awareness among parents of the need to have their children monitored at a health centre, even if the children are not complaining of any illness.

Paragraph 4-3-3-2-4-2 – Vitamin A distribution programme

39. Since 1998, the Ministry of Health has pursued a strategy of distributing vitamin A capsules to target groups, in order to limit or reduce the prevalence of serum retinol deficiency. The target groups are:

- Children between the ages of 10 months and 5 years, who are given a single dose of 100,000 IU or 200,000 IU (international units) of vitamin A, together with the measles or MMR vaccine
- Women during delivery, who are given 200,000 IU of vitamin A as a precaution

Paragraph 4-3-3-3 – Educational and pedagogical care

Paragraph 4-3-3-3-1

40. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, together with all relevant partners, drew up a strategy for early childhood based on an analysis of the situation of children in the Syrian Arab Republic at the present time. In defining proposals on childcare, the national team used a rights-based approach, rather than a needs-based approach. Moreover, it included positive discrimination measures in the proposed programmes for the most vulnerable children. An entire section was devoted to sources of funding and a budget to ensure the quality and credibility of the programmes and activities to be implemented. The strategy was developed in partnership with a majority of Government ministries and bodies, mass organizations (including the Women's General Union), relevant international organizations and various non-governmental organizations. Action plans for early childhood were finalized and included in the eleventh five-year plan.

Paragraph 4-3-3-3-2

41. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), established the first early childhood development centre to offer training to all those involved in caring for young children. The centre was opened in 2009, and UNESCO has recognized the regional status of the centre. The goals of the centre are to:

- (a) Create an enabling environment and provide leadership training in the field of early childhood;
- (b) Improve the quality of curricula to take account of the specific developmental requirements of young children and of new trends in the pedagogical domain;
- (c) Monitor the situation of young children and all relevant national and international data, information and documentation, and develop databases and sources of information for this purpose;
- (d) Conduct research and assessments on young children and their development and prepare and issue regular and ad hoc publications on this subject, in coordination with private institutions;
- (e) Facilitate communication and disseminate a culture of investment in young children among relevant ministries and institutions or in relevant areas of activity;
- (f) Participate in the design of policies and programmes to improve the situation of children and children's rights; comment on monitoring and follow-up processes; and make proposals on ways to improve the situation of young children in the Syrian Arab Republic and the protection that they receive;
- (g) Organize training courses and related events.

Paragraph 4-3-3-3-5

42. Kindergartens cater to children aged between 3 and 5 years. The number of kindergartens grew from 1,180 in 2000 to 1,533 in 2006 (i.e. by 32 per cent) and 1,737 in 2008, as (official) approvals for kindergarten licences continued to be given to mass

organizations, professional trade unions and the private sector. This is evidence of the importance of the kindergarten stage in preparing children for basic education. The number of children enrolled in kindergarten remains low, however, as does the enrolment ratio. In the 2001/02 school year, 121,289 children enrolled in kindergarten. This figure increased slightly each year, reaching 149,811 in the 2005/06 school year and 155,841 in the 2005/06 school year before falling to 145,871 in the 2006/07 school year and then rising again to reach 150,235 in 2007/08. The goal established in the tenth five-year plan was to increase the intake in kindergartens from 10 to 30 per cent of children between 3 and 5 years of age.

Paragraph 4-3-3-3-6

43. Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2004 (annex 8) was enacted to regulate private institutions that offer education at the pre-university stage. The decree was amended by implementing directives of 2 May 2006. The number of private schools rose from 302 in 2000 to 1,479 in 2008. Under the decree, it is possible to establish private kindergartens and Ministry of Education kindergartens in accordance with ministerial directives. Directives on the establishment of Ministry of Education kindergartens were issued on 1 June 2006. The new kindergartens have been supplied with the latest equipment and materials. Kindergarten sections and schools are managed by specialist teachers under programmes developed by the Curricula and Instruction Department. Sixty-five new kindergartens were established in 2006/07, as compared with 46 in 2007/08 and 21 in 2008/09. Competitive fees for licensed private kindergartens are set under ministerial directives and are payable in two or three instalments. Article 44 of Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2004 was amended by Legislative Decree No. 35 of 13 July 2008. Under the amendment, private educational institutions that are found on inspection to be unable to meet their financial obligations will be closed down, if evidence is found of moral corruption attempts to fuel national strife. As at the end of 2009, the Ministry had issued 987 new licences to private educational institutions in accordance with Legislative Decree No. 55 of 2004.

Paragraph 4-3-3-3-8

44. Performance criteria for kindergarten teachers have been elaborated with a focus on quality standards (annex 40). In addition:

- Kindergarten teachers are offered training at Ministry of Higher Education teacher training colleges; the first group of trainees graduated in 2007.
- The Ministry of Education provides training to those who run kindergartens and has drawn up a timetable for replacing existing teachers with graduates of teacher training colleges or qualified kindergarten teachers.
- The Ministry of Education has completed its work on the establishment of national standards for modern, up-to-date kindergarten curricula that are based on active learning and has produced teaching and cultural programmes for these curricula.
- Steps have been taken to improve the skills of teachers who specialize in the educational management of kindergartens.
- During the period from 2005 to 2006, the General Women's Union, in cooperation with the Aga Khan Development Network, carried out a plan in the governorates of Damascus, Tartus, Hamah, Quneitra and Damascus Countryside to provide childminders with training on early childhood concepts.
- The General Women's Union, in conjunction with the Aga Khan Development Network and SPANA, carried out a local capacity-building programme on caring for young children that was targeted at teachers and childminders. After the Ministry of Education and the Agha Khan Development Network had prepared a training

manual for trainers of kindergarten teachers, a total of 127 persons in the governorates of Homs, Aleppo, Latakia, Damascus Countryside and Damascus were trained.

- Awareness-raising seminars and educational talks have been held in cultural centres and in the governorates for all kindergarten supervisors and parents; children's summer clubs, exhibitions and drawing workshops have been organized; and a toolkit (environmental education for the kindergarten stage) has been assembled and delivered.

Paragraph 4-4 – Respect for the views of the child (art. 12)

45. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Syrian Arab Republic should continue to promote and facilitate, within the family, the school, institutions and the courts, respect for the views of children and the participation of children in all matters that affect them, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention, and that it should develop skills-training programmes in community settings for parents, teachers, social workers and local officials to support children to express their informed views and opinions and to take these views into consideration.

Paragraph 4-4-1 – Right to free expression of opinion

46. This subject was addressed in some detail in paragraphs 72–75 of the initial report, where the State explained that under the laws in effect in the Syrian Arab Republic all persons have the right to communicate information about their state of mind, personality or place in society using all means of expression. In paragraph 62 of the second periodic report, the State explained that it encourages children to express their views.

Paragraph 4-4-1-1

47. As a matter of social custom, children's views are treated by the family with the same respect as the views of adults. There is no restriction on a child's (or adult's) exercise of the right to express his or her views, provided that there is no conflict with the laws which prohibit acts that fuel discord, division or discrimination or contravene public order or public morals. The measures and procedures adopted by the State encourage children's initiatives and respect for children's views. In September 2005, for instance, the Syrian Government embraced the idea of establishing a children's parliament, in the governorate of Dayr al-Zawr. This was a ground-breaking experiment. The children's parliament has held nine sessions and received a visit from the President of the Republic. Conducted under his auspices, the experiment provides opportunities for the 100 and more child parliamentarians concerned to participate, discuss their views and aspirations, engage in objective criticism and immerse themselves in the decision-making process through workshops involving decision makers such as governors and Government ministers. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs has developed a proposal on replicating the children's parliament on a wider scale, following the success scored in the governorate of Dayr al-Zawr. The legal aspects of the proposal are currently under review.

Paragraph 4-4-1-3

48. Article 27 of the Associations and Foundations Act of 1959 states that children have the right to form their own associations.

Paragraph 4-4-2 – Right to participation**Paragraph 4-4-2-2**

49. The Baath Vanguard Organization is made up of children between the ages of 6 and 12 years, for whom it organizes activities at vanguard units (schools), activity centres, applied education schools and annual festivals. It offers its cultural, social, arts, sports and science facilities free of charge to all Syrian schoolchildren without distinction and hosts approximately 100,000 children a year in its camps. It also organizes the following activities:

- An annual event in the governorate of Tartus aimed at developing the creative talents of over 500 child vanguards.
- An annual Vanguard festival: in this unique experiment in the Arab world, children (Syrians, Arabs and foreigners) are hosted by Syrian families. This experience helps to expand their social horizons.
- The monthly magazine *Vanguard* discusses a range of topics and seeks to improve children's culture, knowledge and skills.
- *Qisas wa lawhat*, a series of short stories written and illustrated by children, has been published.
- Weekly children's radio and television programmes are broadcast.
- The organization is stepping up its cooperation with all those organizations that deal with children at the local, Arab and international levels, with effective participation from children and the educational leaders in the organization. It seeks to involve Syrian children in international competitions such as Shankar's International Children's Competition. Indeed, Syrian children have been awarded several prizes in this connection.
- Children who are members of the organization take part in a full range of social and national events and provide outstanding services on specific days when they honour public service employees (environment, health, hygiene, traffic safety, civil defence).
- The organization runs annual events and a festival to support the positive messages that it or other organizations try to send ("don't smoke", "sport for life", "the environment is our friend" ...).
- The organization has set up 16 websites, most of them interactive, for children to use to communicate with others and exchange messages and information.
- The organization respects the views of children. It gives children complete freedom to express their opinions and wishes by electing their representatives in Vanguard units and participating in self-run seminars and meetings to discuss thematic issues without any interference on the part of adults.

Paragraph 4-4-2-4

50. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is making concerted efforts to ensure that the participation of children in the design and implementation of all child-related activities and programmes becomes a deep-rooted tradition. Children were involved in the preparation of this report; six workshops were held in order to assess the extent of their knowledge about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and canvass their views on the rights that they enjoy (annex 2 sets out the main points covered in these workshops). Children also participated in an analysis of the current state of childhood in the Syrian Arab

Republic. The analysis was conducted by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, the State Planning Commission and UNICEF in 2007. Children took part in hearings and consultations, putting questions to officials representing the Government agencies responsible for dealing with different issues concerning childhood. They also took part in consultations held in a number of governorates to solicit adolescents' views on important issues relating to their standard of living, education and health (annex 43). The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs hosted the Arab Youth Forum, which was held on 27–29 July 2010 in preparation for the Fourth Arab High-Level Conference on the Rights of the Child. Training workshops were held in May 2010 for facilitators who took part in the Arab Youth Forum. The trainees were briefed on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the two optional protocols to the Convention and the Second Arab Childhood Plan. At the end of the Arab Youth Forum, important recommendations were adopted and submitted to the Fourth Arab High-Level Conference on the Rights of the Child, which was held in Morocco. A high-level delegation representing various organizations that deal with children's issues attended the latter conference.

Paragraph 4-4-2-7

51. Associations contribute to efforts to promote participation and involvement in voluntary work. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (annex 44), for instance, runs a cub scouts project, which encourages volunteering among children between 9 and 14 years of age and teaches first aid and the principles of international humanitarian law. Children over 16 years of age are accepted as youth volunteers and help to provide psychological support to children in emergencies and disasters, as well as children with special needs. The organization "Rainbow for a Better Childhood" established a voluntary teenage task force to carry out promotional activities and rally support to address issues of a pressing nature. An environmental project entitled "Our green planet" was adopted in 2009 as a pilot project. Children designed and began implementing their own schemes under the project. The *Masar* project (run by the Syrian Secretariat for Development) helps to cultivate the spirit of voluntarism and community service, particularly among young persons. Other examples are the paper recycling project in Latakia and a project to plant flowers in the municipal gardens in Damascus, etc.

Paragraph 5-1 – Name and nationality (arts. 7 and 8)

Paragraph 5-1-3

52. The Syrian civil registrar names foundlings (Personal Status Code, arts. 34–36). The Personal Status Code states that health institutions must notify the competent authorities in order to find a family to care for such children. There must be no reference in the birth certificate or the register of births to the fact that a child is of unknown parentage or bears the name or family name of a male or female head of household.

Paragraph 5-3-1 – Right of the child to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, regardless of frontiers

Paragraph 5-3-1-5

53. In 2007, the Directorate of Children's Publications was created as part of the Book Authority attached to the Ministry of Culture to produce children's books on all kinds of subjects. It also publishes *Usamah*, a general magazine on early childhood, and various series. The Directorate sends people to attend book fairs and participate in cultural activities. This institution complements the academies created by the Ministry in 2000, which include the Sulhi al-Wadi Music Academy, the Ballet School, the Children's and Puppet Theatre, and the Adham Ismail Centre for Visual Arts. The objectives established in

these two areas were furthered with the issuance of the Ministry's Circular No. 7018/400/T of 23 March 2006, under which an officer with responsibility for children's cultural activities was designated for all directorates of culture operating at the governorate level. Links were established between these directorates and the central directorate, and instructions were issued to organize activities along the lines of those run by the central directorate.

Paragraph 5-8 – Right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 37 (a))

Paragraph 5-8-3

54. In the framework of the National Child Protection Plan, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is establishing a national observatory on child abuse. A database for domestic violence monitoring points in hospitals, police stations and associations has been created and hooked up to a central database of the Commission to allow the monitoring points to record reported cases of child abuse. Training courses have been held to sensitize personnel in the monitoring points to the importance of recording data on domestic violence and to show them how to extract information for the questionnaire that those involved in the national monitoring pilot project must fill in to keep track of domestic violence incidents.

Paragraph 5-8-6

55. A child protection diploma course was established to train qualified personnel for work in the family protection unit. The first and second groups of students graduated with a diploma in child protection. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is rounding off their capacity-building training by having them take specialist training courses, including some offered at the Family Protection Department in Jordan, so as to equip them for work in the family protection unit.

Paragraph 5-8-7

56. Projects under way include a project to establish a family protection unit at the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs to receive and investigate complaints of ill-treatment of children and women and refer them to the competent authorities for action. Premises have been assigned for the prospective unit and restoration work is being done on the building. A legal instrument on the work of the unit is being drawn up, and a national committee is preparing the terms of reference. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs have developed a joint project to set up a family advice line with a freephone number that can be used to report cases of child abuse or to obtain legal, psychological or social assistance in connection with any aspect of child abuse. Once this groundbreaking project has been implemented and assessed, the Government (through the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs) will gradually extend the experiment to all the governorates. Work is under way to establish two residential centres in Damascus and Aleppo to house and care for child victims of violence and mitigate the physical and psychological effects of the violence that they have endured.

Paragraph 5-8-9

57. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, in cooperation with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights, has held three training courses on mechanisms for protecting children's rights. The courses were attended by representatives of the ministries involved in children's issues. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, Damascus University, Aleppo University, and the Hamburg Institute of Forensic Medicine jointly

organized a summer school on domestic violence that was held in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. The seminars, talks and workshops that were held focused on medical, legal, social, educational, psychological and information-related themes.

Paragraph 5-8-11

58. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is preparing public information messages on family and demographic issues for television broadcasts, together with a television programme to be screened in four parts a month on family and community issues. It is also exploring the possibility of running a workshop for judges, legal practitioners and clerics, as well as representatives of the People's Assembly, the Syrian Association of Internet Service Providers and civil society organizations working in the field of child protection. The aim of the workshop would be to draft a bill on protecting children from trafficking and the sale of children, child pornography and Internet crimes, so as to harmonize the law with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Paragraph 6-4 – Family reunification (art. 10)

59. This subject was addressed in detail in the initial report (paras. 117–119). It must be pointed out that the Syrian Constitution emphasizes the importance of family cohesion. It states that no citizen can be expelled from the country and recognizes that all citizens are free to move around the State territory, unless they are subject to a travel ban issued by a court or imposed in implementation of laws to protect public health and public safety. The Syrian legislature grants persons the right to leave the Syrian Arab Republic and return thereto using passports or travel documents that are legally valid.

Paragraph 6-5 – Illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad (art. 11)

Paragraph 6-5-3

60. Legislative Decree No. 3 of 2010, concerning human trafficking offences, prescribes penalties for participating in, instigating or being an accessory to a human trafficking offence or for failing to report such an offence or belonging to a criminal band whose objective or one of whose objectives is to traffic persons. The intention behind the enactment of this decree is to prohibit and combat human trafficking and to offer women and child victims access to special care. Article 8 states that higher penalties will be imposed if the victim of the offence is a woman or a child. A child is defined as any person, male or female, below the age of 18 years. Article 5 of the decree states that the sexual exploitation of a child by means of any type of practice or the photographing of a child's genitals or the direct or indirect offer of lewd images of a child in exchange for any direct or indirect consideration constitutes trafficking. The decree spells out the obligations of the authorities to provide victims of trafficking with adequate protection and physical, psychological and social assistance. Steps have been taken to establish modalities for international cooperation aimed at combating this offence and to set up a special department at the Ministry of the Interior to deal specifically with human trafficking. This department — the Department to Combat Human Trafficking — is attached to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

Paragraph 6-5-5

61. The Syrian Arab Republic hosted the First INTERPOL Global Conference on Trafficking in Human Beings, which was held in 2010 and organized by the Ministry of the Interior.

Paragraph 6-6-1

62. Mothers are generally entrusted with the care of their children and fathers are required by law to pay maintenance when the mother has custody of the child. The Maintenance and Social Solidarity Fund Bill is being drafted jointly by the General Women's Union, the Ministry of Endowments and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs.

Paragraph 6-7-3

63. Cooperation and partnership between the Government and civil society organizations capable of running childcare centres and institutions is instituted subject to the condition that no partnership should breach Government laws or detract from the general framework in which such institutions operate. Hence, SOS Children's Villages, a Syrian Arab non-for-profit organization, provides continuous assistance in the field of family care and children's rights. It helps orphans and children deprived of a family environment by creating a family setting that offers these children security, love and a decent life. The organization Rainbow for a Better Childhood takes care of foundlings. In partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, it built a 20,000 m³ housing complex, in which children live in an intimate family environment modelled on that of a natural family. The organization also provides the children with comprehensive medical, educational and cultural services that take account of their interests, abilities and mental and physical aptitudes. In this way it provides a sound basis for their integration into society by means that preserve their dignity, safeguard their rights and prioritize their best interests.

Paragraph 6-7-4

64. In 2010, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour launched a project to assess alternative care arrangements for children without parental care. International experts were recruited to devise a more effective system of alternative care. When foundlings cannot be placed with suitable civil society institutions, they are placed with one of two centres for foundlings, namely, the Childcare Institution in Damascus and the Child Foster Home in Aleppo. The two centres provide children with shelter, food, education and vocational skills training. In 2007, some 130 children benefited from these services. The Childcare Institution in Damascus provides foster care for foundlings, in cooperation with the Rainbow for a Better Childhood organization.

Paragraph 7-1 – Disabled children (art. 23)**Paragraph 7-1-1**

65. The Syrian Arab Republic pays considerable attention to people with special needs. It endeavours to integrate them into society, to enhance their capacities and to protect them. The Persons with Special Needs Act No. 34 was promulgated in July 2004 to elucidate the role of different sectors and ministries in addressing disability issues and to identify ways of promoting cooperation between them. Moreover, by Legislative Decree No. 12, promulgated on 10 February 2009 (annex 49), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the optional protocol were ratified.

Paragraph 7-1-2

66. The National Plan to Combat Disability, which was adopted by the Government in 2008, is an important step towards improving conditions for persons with disabilities, meeting their demands and needs, and bringing about changes in dealing with disability and related issues. The plan was drawn up to provide persons with disabilities access to care

and rehabilitation services delivered by the Government and by civil society organizations led by the Syrian Organization for the Disabled (AAMAL). It was discussed on 3 December 2007 at workshops held during the First Conference on Ways of Assisting People with Special Needs in Syria. The plan focuses on enhancing rehabilitation services based on community participation, supporting and improving health-care and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities and their families, and boosting the development, production and provision of assistive technology. In this context, by Legislative Decree No. 46 of 2009, a stamp duty was introduced to subsidize activities and programmes for those with disabilities. As further evidence of commitment to this issue, a national conference on disability, with the slogan “Disability – reality and aspirations”, was organized jointly by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, AAMAL and the United Nations. The plan on disabilities was included in the eleventh five-year plan in order to facilitate its implementation, the assessment of progress made and the expansion of institutions that provide a service to persons with disabilities in all the governorates.

Paragraph 7-1-4

67. In accordance with Act No. 34 and the National Plan to Combat Disability, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour provides free preventive and therapeutic services to persons with disabilities and helps to build the capacities of physiotherapy and rehabilitation units to provide specialist therapies and rehabilitation services. The Ministry oversees 60 institutes and centres, run by governmental and non-governmental bodies, specializing in caring for children with disabilities across the various governorates. It also ensures that young children with disabilities have access to preschool education, together with basic education either at regular schools or at institutions, based on criteria established in coordination with the Ministry of Education. Last but not least, it provides sports facilities for persons with disabilities and encourages disabled sports in schools and institutions. Internal regulations have been established for institutions that provide social services for people with disabilities. Educational establishments for persons with auditory disabilities were established in Raqqah and Hasakah. Specialized staff were appointed for these institutions, which went into operation in the 2007/08 school year. An educational institute for persons with mental disabilities was established in Tall.

Paragraph 7-1-7

68. The delivery of care for persons with disabilities is the area in which grass-roots and civil society organizations are perhaps most actively involved. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, together with the Syrian Secretariat for Development, contributed to the *Rawafid* Project, by holding workshops on the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the governorate of Aleppo. The titles of the workshops were “Training for producers of culture who have disabilities” and “Other voices from the city”. A project for the blind was run by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society to help teach blind persons academic subjects and various skills. These persons are given psychological support and assistance and carers and family members are trained how to deal with them, assess their abilities and help them to plan their future. The Executive Office of the General Women’s Union decided to admit children with mild to moderate disabilities, free of charge, to its kindergartens, in cooperation and coordination with the “Drop of Milk Society”, which sends lists of children eligible for admission. The General Women’s Union has organized many workshops, in cooperation with the Karim Rida Said Foundation, to train kindergarten teachers on how to deal with children with special needs and provide them with services that are geared to their individual requirements.

Paragraph 7-1-9

69. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour celebrated Disabled Persons Day on 3 December 2006 at Al-Amal School for the Physically Disabled. The event was also celebrated in all social affairs and labour departments in the governorates. In December 2008, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour marked Disabled Persons Day by convening the first special Syrian forum for people with special needs; the slogan used for the event was “We are all responsible”. In 2009, the Directorate of Children’s Culture organized a special celebration to mark Disabled Persons Day. Groups of singers took part and there were theatrical performances involving children with disabilities. To open the event, a piece of dance theatre entitled “Charm of love: ... love charms us, so we move, we get together to spread joy and we dance and sing” was performed by children from the Ajyal Group, with the participation of children from the Institute for the Rehabilitation of the Blind, the Special Education Centre for the Speech Impaired and Al-Amal Education Institute for Persons with Motor Disabilities. This shows that persons with special needs are capable of being integrated into ordinary life and helps give these children a sense of well-being. In 2010, the Directorate of Children’s Culture announced a drawing and storytelling competition for children with disabilities. Moreover, a digital photography workshop was held, together with an exhibition that was put on at the Adawi Cultural Centre in Damascus during the celebrations to mark Disabled Persons Day. The Directorate produced publications for children and, at the beginning of August 2010, a book printed in Braille as a supplement to *Usamah* magazine. The Ministry of Culture has special printing equipment that can be used to produce books for the blind.

Paragraph 7-1-10 – Special education and care for persons with disabilities**Paragraph 7-1-12**

70. The Integration Unit at the Ministry of Education has been involved in awareness-raising aimed at protecting children from abuse. It also produced a code of conduct and circulated it to all schools in the compulsory education system. The vision and mission of integration today is founded essentially on international standards that call for education to be provided to all in integrated education schools in order to ensure equality of opportunity for everyone, having due regard for diversity. The Ministry of Education is furthermore taking a variety of measures on behalf of children with disabilities who are automatically integrated into schools in all the governorates. These measures entail the:

- Appointment of an integration coordinator in each governorate to monitor children with disabilities at school, in cooperation with the teaching staff
- Conduct of a statistical study on children with disabilities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic
- Publication of ministerial circulars, leaflets and directives to provide teachers with assistance in this area (annex 52)
- Production of a teachers’ handbook on special education
- Establishment of criteria for admitting pupils with disabilities to regular schools
- Development of the skills of staff in the central Integration Unit and those of local teams dealing with integration issues and learning difficulties
- Elaboration of an engineering code
- Organization of training courses for school administrators and teaching staff on using the integration handbook

- Issuance of instructions for dictation committees on running examinations for children with disabilities in transition classes so as to take account of the children's aptitudes and needs
- Establishment of a Ministry of Education educational integration group chaired by the Minister of Education
- Establishment of criteria for admission and integration of children with disabilities in regular schools and kindergartens in every governorate
- Implementation of a Ministry-led plan, established in the context of the national disability plan, during the midterm holidays: the plan involves training for teachers in the governorates of Quneitra, Dar`a, Suwayda', Hasakah, Raqqah, Tartus and Idlib
- Fitting out of 32 resources rooms in all the governorates
- Assistance for schools in designing an annual plan, based on their priorities, to develop integration cultures, policies and practices for the creation of a school that is advanced from the human, structural and educational point of view and can welcome all children
- Creation, in the framework of an automation process conducted by the Ministry of Education, of an accurate database providing information on the number of children with disabilities in schools nationwide
- Training of 400 teachers on integration and learning difficulties

71. One of the outcomes of the integration experiment has been that, for the first time, people with disabilities have been allowed to participate in teacher selection processes. Indeed, a number of them have been appointed to Ministry of Education teaching and administrative posts. Their experiences have also been cited as examples of success stories.

Paragraph 7-1-14

72. The Minister of Information chairs the Information Committee on Disability, which was established by a decision of the Prime Minister and includes representatives from all the governmental or non-governmental bodies that deal with disability issues. The Ministry of Information (as represented by the Under-Secretary) has a seat on the Higher Council for Disabled Affairs and contributed to the formulation of the national plan on disabilities. It developed a five-year information plan on disability issues and, in cooperation with AAMAL, ran workshops to train journalists on how to approach disability issues. It subsequently set up a special media team with representatives from all the national media to discuss these issues.

Paragraph 7-1-15

73. The Ministry of Endowments helps to mobilize support in the community for those with disabilities. From 4 July to 9 September 2009, it ran workshops for preachers in mosques in the southern and central regions, curators of Assad institutes and some students of sharia schools in order to familiarize families and communities with the rights of children with disabilities. It also runs similar talks, on an ongoing basis, jointly with Al-Razi Charitable Society for Persons with Cerebral Palsy.

Paragraph 7-2 – Health and health-care services (art. 24)

Paragraph 7-2-1

74. The Government is endeavouring, in cooperation with grass-roots and civil society organizations, to guarantee access to health services for inhabitants of desert regions and remote areas by increasing the number of mobile clinics, expanding the network of health centres and hospitals, planning for the wider application of the health insurance regime, and promoting health awareness and health education among all age groups, particularly through mother and child health-care programmes. It is also encouraging communities and other sectors to participate in such efforts.

Paragraph 7-2-4

75. Civil society organizations help to deliver health services, especially to poor families. For instance, the Family Protection Association (annex 54) has provided health care for children suffering from thalassaemia and complex surgical operations for children with bladder and urinary tract problems. The “Drop of Milk” Society offers thousands of health services free of charge at its dispensary and elsewhere for children registered with the Society. It also distributes free milk to children (annex 37). The Syrian Family Planning Association, which was founded in 1974, offers valuable services to adolescents to improve health education and health care for members of both sexes in a manner that is consistent with social values (annex 38).

Paragraph 7-2-6 – Adolescent health programme

Paragraph 7-2-6-2

76. The Ministry of Health has provided many health workers in governorates with training and education on techniques for dealing with adolescents. Three adolescent health centres, each equipped with a reference library containing books for users of all ages and a computer training room, were set up respectively in the towns of Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah and Idlib.

Paragraph 7-2-6-3

77. The Ministry of Education contributes to awareness-raising activities designed to protect adolescents from drug dependency. To this end, it organizes public talks and seminars, conducts workshops and produces publications for mosque teachers.

Paragraph 7-2-6-4

78. The Ministry of Health focuses on national capacity-building in the area of health education to prevent AIDS. In cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Ministry encourages participation by the private sector, civil society organizations and associations in the delivery of a national response to AIDS which includes free, voluntary testing, confidential high-quality counselling for young people, and skills development for health workers to help prevent mother-to-foetus transmission of the disease. A national strategy was established for a five-year programme to improve adolescent health. Lastly, a committee bringing together representatives of relevant agencies was set up recently to review the legislation on AIDS and support the National Coordinating Committee in preparing a proposal on an AIDS project to be funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, in cooperation with international organizations. Mention should furthermore be made of the contributions of other governmental and non-governmental organizations to these efforts, in particular the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Endowments, which took part in the

preparation of the Syrian version of the “Facts of life” book and in workshops held in the governorates to educate young persons on AIDS prevention. They also took part in the formulation of a national strategy to prevent mother-to-foetus transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Paragraph 7-2-12

Desert health services

79. This programme, which was launched in 2000, is designed to boost preventive health and treatment services and meet the health needs of desert inhabitants by the most straightforward and least costly means. The aim is to achieve sustainability by:

- Improving health behaviours among families and promoting community and sectoral participation
- Shaping health practices in local communities and increasing levels of expertise and skills in the areas of prevention, emergency interventions and improving environmental conditions (245 individuals trained)
- Strengthening the role of health care by providing integrated, high-quality and appropriate health services, increasing the number of permanent and mobile health centres and improving the quality of the services that they supply (80 women received tetanus vaccinations during hands-on training)

Paragraph 7-2-14 – Healthy villages programme

80. Children’s health is one of the focuses of the healthy villages programme overseen by the Ministry of Health. As at the end of 2010, the programme covered approximately 505 villages. The purpose of the programme is to improve health, raise awareness of the risks associated with harmful traditional practices and safeguard the environment and sustainable development in partnership with all sectors and local communities. The Children’s Culture Directorate of the Ministry of Culture, which dedicated Environment Day to children with diabetes, carried out a project in cooperation with the Ministry of Health to protect animals in the country. The project comprised a range of environmental and cultural activities (drawing and colouring workshops, face painting, presentation of art and music works by children from the Sulhi al-Wadi Academy, theatrical performances, and activities involving animals). The purpose of this initiative was to help children with diabetes to become accustomed to using such activities as part of their health treatment plan. This helps to improve their psychological well-being and involves them in mental and physical activities that improve the circulation of sugar in the body. These children are also involved in all events and celebrations staged by the Directorate.

Paragraph 7-4 – Standard of living (art. 27, paras. 1–3)

Paragraph 7-4-2

81. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour launched a project on the establishment of a national social assistance fund with the following aims:

- Protecting and providing for persons in need by offering them regular or emergency cash assistance, and promoting the development of and investment in human capital by making the delivery of cash payments from the fund contingent upon the achievement by the recipient of health, educational and other developmental goals
- Promoting the economic empowerment of recipients through the establishment of links with employment institutions and programmes and with small businesses, microenterprises, financial institutions, etc.

82. The project took concrete form with the enactment of Legislative Decree No. 9 of 2011, endorsing the establishment of the fund. The fund began disbursing financial assistance in early 2011. The Ministry follows up on anti-begging and social assistance programmes in cooperation with civil society organizations.

Paragraph 8-1 – Education, including vocational training and guidance (art. 28)

83. The Ministry of Education allows all Syrian and non-Syrian children living in the Syrian Arab Republic the right, without any discrimination, to enrol in basic education. It provides a full range of educational facilities, including school premises, furniture, books and administrative, educational and managerial support, to cater for all children, even those in remote and desert areas, and for different kinds of schools (tents, caravans). Its aim is to ensure that the right to education is enjoyed by all children. Accordingly, the share of the State's general budget allocated to the Ministry of Education was raised from 10.47 per cent in 2000 to 13.15 per cent in 2007, and spending on education as a proportion of the State's general budget was raised from 16.1 per cent in 2005 to 16.7 per cent in 2007 and then to 18.4 per cent in 2008. The number of academies also increased – from 66 in 2005 to 109 in 2008.

Paragraph 8-1-5

84. The dropout rate in basic education, which was supposed to be reduced by 1 per cent under the plan, in fact fell from 12 per cent in 2000 to 8 per cent in 2001 for the first six grades of education. It rose after middle school education and primary education were merged, because many students did not continue their studies after the sixth grade and thus were now considered to have dropped out of school. The dropout rate then fell – from 3.8 per cent in 2005 to 2.8 per cent in 2008. This reduction exceeds the interim target set in the tenth five-year plan and is a result of awareness-raising among students and their families about the importance of children continuing their basic education until they receive a leaving certificate in the ninth grade.

Paragraph 8-1-6-1 – Boarding schools for children from desert areas

85. Three boarding schools were opened up for children from desert areas, in Homs (2002/03), Damascus Countryside (beginning of the second semester of 2002/03) and Dayr al-Zawr (beginning of the 2003/04 academic year). In addition to school supplies, these schools provide free textbooks, paper, lodging, food and care. After the experiment proved successful in keeping students at school and stopping them from dropping out, similar schools were established in Hama and Raqqah at the start of the 2004/05 academic year, bringing the total number of boarding schools for children from desert areas up to seven by 2008/09. The schools in Hama and Raqqah were set up to absorb all children who had dropped out of school. A total of 1,409 desert schools which operate out of prefabricated buildings have been established (see annex 56).

Paragraph 8-1-4-6 – Girls' Education Project

86. The Ministry, in cooperation and coordination with UNICEF, instituted the Girls' Education Project in the light of field studies that showed that there were particularly high dropout and illiteracy rates among girls in the northern and eastern governorates (Dayr al-Zawr, Raqqah, Hasakah, Idlib and Aleppo). The objectives of the project are to eliminate dropout rates, get girls back into school, and enrol children aged from 10 to 17 years who have either never attended school or have dropped out of education and to teach them the basic skills needed to equip them for a better life. These endeavours focus in particular on children in rural and impoverished areas. At the beginning of 2001/02, special classes were opened up for groups of from 10 to 25 students and were run both during and outside

official school hours (informal education). Intensive education curricula were designed for four levels, together with textbooks for female students and teacher's handbooks. The curricula give female students the option of taking two years in one (from first grade to eighth grade in four years), based on a study plan tailored to their individual needs. After completing four years of study, the students can sit an examination for a basic education certificate (see annex 57). Although the project has been a success, some problems remain. These problems include in particular: early marriage among girls; certain customs and traditions that discourage girls from returning to school; poverty; agricultural seasons which interrupt girls' school attendance; students of different levels being placed in the same class; and, last but not least, the lack of incentives for girls and female teachers.

Paragraph 8-1-6-6-4

87. In the past two years, the Ministry of Culture has published an educational magazine on illiteracy as a means of providing guidance and information on particular and general issues for those involved in literacy development. As a result of intensive endeavours, the illiteracy rate among those aged between 15 and 45 years fell from 19 per cent in 2004 to 14.2 per cent in 2008, exceeding the interim goal of 16.8 per cent set under the tenth five-year plan. By the end of 2008, three Syrian governorates, namely, Tartus, Suwayda' and Quneitra, had been freed of illiteracy, as had 555 villages and communities in the north-eastern regions. As at the end of 2010, illiteracy had been completely eradicated among persons in the 15–45 age group in the governorates of Idlib, Dar'a and Hama and in the areas of Palmyra and Thawra. Popular culture institutes in cultural centres complement the role played by the Ministry of Education: they offer all kinds of courses (computing, English, French), including arts courses, at nominal prices. Cultural centres across the country organize cultural, leisure and awareness activities. For example, in 2009, 267 talks and cultural evenings, 89 seminars, 188 film screenings, 1,383 screenings of television programmes and video material, 227 theatrical performances and 60 competitions were held. In 2010, there were 182 talks and cultural evenings, 113 seminars, 111 film screenings, 708 screenings of television programmes and video material, 191 theatrical performances and 44 competitions.

Paragraph 8-1-7-1 – National curriculum standards project

88. National curriculum standards were drawn up for all stages of education, including the kindergarten stage. This project was introduced to: establish standards for curriculum design and produce a document that would make it easier for designers to prepare textbooks in accordance with these standards; develop a teaching manual and a guide to practical activities and exercises; develop indicators for assessing curricula; and improve the mechanisms for designing textbook content and products. An international competition for textbook writers was announced in July 2007.

89. In the 2009/10 academic year, new curricula for the first, second, third, fourth, seventh and tenth grades (to be updated in 2012) were piloted in five governorates (Dayr al-Zawr, Homs, Latakia, Aleppo and Damascus) after training had been given to teachers and instructors on applying the new curricula in all governorates in the 2010/11 academic year. During the 2010/11 academic year, new curricula for the fifth, eighth and eleventh grades (to be updated in 2013) will be introduced, while in the 2011/12 academic year new curricula will be introduced for the sixth, ninth and twelfth grades (to be updated in 2014). By Act No. 28, the Ministry of Education was authorized to task its staff with designing and writing series, books and periodicals to support the school curriculum. These staff are afforded the same treatment as teaching staff in Syrian universities or university authors in terms of the remuneration that they receive for authoring books. The Ministry has drawn up a complete set of national standards for 36 occupations to use in vocational education.

These standards take account of the realities of the labour market. The Ministry has also begun work on the preparation of books based on these standards.

Paragraph 8-1-7-7 – Information technology investment project for education and education management

90. This project involves the following:

- Using the information technology network developed by the Ministry; introducing new technology in education and learning; and meeting international standards with regard to the number of students who use computers
- Developing essential computer skills for use in education and other areas of life
- Adding to the Arabic language content of the education network and updating it constantly
- Exchanging information and knowledge among teachers and students both locally and around the world
- Turning textbooks into interactive electronic materials
- Automating administrative functions at the Ministry (central and local administration); training educational and school administrators; and using educational and administrative standards in the selection of all administrators in central administration, education directorates and school administrative boards
- Using the education network to exchange data on:
 - Examination results
 - The educational data management programme
- Internal electronic mail
- Electronic archiving in central and local administration
- The establishment and training of a dedicated working group (information technology emergencies)
- Videoconferencing
- Online education (teacher training diploma)
- Training teachers to use computers for educational purposes (550 teachers were trained in 2006, 1,000 in 2007, 10,000 in 2008 and 7,000 in 2009)
- Connecting schools to the Internet (1,368 schools were connected in 2008, rising to 3,000 in 2009)

Paragraph 8-1-7-12 – Project for a centre for exceptionally gifted children

91. This project was set up to:

(a) Establish a centre for exceptionally gifted children and create a better educational environment in which to offer such children a distinctive form of education at the secondary and tertiary stages;

(b) Cultivate talent and creativity: the centre is different from schools for high performers, in terms of the criteria that it uses for selecting students, the curricula, the evaluation process and teaching methods.

92. In 2006, a study of the centre's curricula and academic plans was completed and in 2007 the building was refurbished. The centre's internal regulations were drawn up by

special committees, equipment was supplied, the curricula were finalized and teacher training was delivered. On 27 July 2008, Legislative Decree No. 45 was issued, providing for the establishment of a national centre for gifted children with legal personality, administrative and financial autonomy, and headquarters in the governorate of Homs. The centre is linked to the Minister. Teachers were given training in 2009 and the first grade of the secondary stage was established.

Paragraph 8-1-9

93. Sharia schools, which begin teaching from the seventh grade onwards and are overseen by the Ministry of Endowments, contribute to girls' education and help reduce dropout rates among girls in basic and secondary education.

Paragraph 8-1-10 – Public Printing Corporation project

94. The Public Printing Corporation was established pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 15 of 2008 to achieve the following objectives:

- Print good quality textbooks in a timely manner.
- Add more modern printing presses to the stock of existing equipment used for printing textbooks. The Public Printing and Textbooks Corporation currently produces around 48 million textbooks. The Corporation prints just 7 per cent of this large number of books at its own presses; 68 per cent are printed by public sector presses (mostly using antiquated machinery that is not suited to textbook format) and 25 per cent by the private sector. The Ministry is planning to build a new headquarters for the corporation and to import modern printing equipment.

Paragraph 8-2 – Leisure, recreation and cultural activities (arts. 29 and 31)

Paragraph 8-2-1

95. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture (particularly the Children's Culture Directorate) are committed to carving out an appropriate space for recreation in educational and cultural activities. The basic education curricula include arts, music and sports education, and extra-curricular activities are scheduled. The Children's Culture Directorate endeavours to run its programmes and activities in a fun atmosphere that allows children to mix without being subject to any restrictions on their freedom or mobility. Culture is presented in an enjoyable manner and to a certain degree indirectly through hobbies that children wish to pursue. For this purpose, the directorate either stages events or participates in activities with other directorates and children's organizations. Recreational events include:

- Drawing workshops, usually accompanied by reading workshops, "space and the universe clubs", and excursions. Announcements for festive events are prepared at drawing and calligraphy workshops. Children produce large posters, which are displayed on the streets of the governorate concerned and at the cultural centre where the event will be held.
- Workshops on Arabic calligraphy, at which children are given the chance to use coloured pens freely without having to follow set rules. The children can write whatever phrases they like and adorn their pictures with the script and forms that they choose.
- Clay modelling workshops, at which children work with material that is usually to hand to make shapes that they like. This helps to develop their imagination at many different levels.

- A doll's theatre workshop entitled "Theatre in your home". The workshop organizers provide children and families with information about how a doll's theatre for the home can be made by a child with the help of the family. The demonstration begins with making a dummy and learning how to make it move and ends with presenting a mini-theatre show written by children and staged for family members and relatives. This workshop was first held in 2008 in the governorates of Raqqah, Idlib, Damascus, Aleppo, Tartus, Dar`a and Suwayda'. A total of 11 workshops had been held by the end of 2010.
- During events that focus on environmental issues, animals such as camels, cows, horses, sheep, rabbits, donkeys, hens, white mice, cats and so on may be brought in and children may be allowed to play with them, where possible.
- The construction of toys (puzzles) measuring 3 x 2 that depict favourite animals. The object is then turned to standing position and used as a background for photographs.
- The use of large dummies of children's favourite characters, like Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, for children to play with.
- Children's theatre and shadow plays, dolls and puppet shows, and musical performances.
- Launching paper aeroplanes and teaching those who are interested how to make them.
- Excursions to the countryside and archaeological sites, with games to make the trip a fun and valuable experience for children.
- Astronomy evenings, where children observe the night sky through a telescope.

Paragraph 8-2-6

96. Armed Forces clubs offer a variety of recreational activities for children, including language and computer courses, trips, parties, and events to honour gifted children whose parents are members of the Armed Forces.

Paragraph 9-1-3 – Refugee issues

Paragraph 9-1-3-1

97. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is not a party to the 1951 United Nations Convention [relating to the Status of Refugees], which is a fundamental instrument on refugee issues. Nevertheless, as reports of international organizations have attested, the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the better States when it comes to dealing with refugee issues and affording refugees rights and protection. This is clear from the treatment that the Syrian Arab Republic extends to refugees in its territory, who account for around 10 per cent of the population. It is particularly clear from the treatment extended to Palestine and Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic. For example, a memorandum of understanding between the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was signed on 25 July 2010. The objective is to house persons with special needs, including orphans, children of unknown parentage and those with disabilities, in Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour institutions and to offer better services and living conditions to Iraqi refugees living in the country.

Paragraph 9-1-3-3 – Measures taken with respect to Palestine refugees

98. A number of laws and statutes have been passed to provide legal protection to Palestine refugees. The first such measures were administrative decisions exempting these refugees from having to meet the nationality condition in order to pursue most liberal professions and gain access to jobs in the State administration and State institutions. Examples of the occupational areas where this applies are: fishing in Syrian territorial waters; sworn translation; petition writing; and employment in the customs administration. It is to the credit of the Syrian Arab Republic that it has treated Palestinians exactly like Syrians, while refusing to naturalize these refugees under any circumstances. In this way, the State has ensured that these refugees retain their Palestinian nationality and yet enjoy virtually all the same rights as Syrian nationals. Palestinians in the Syrian Arab Republic can own more than one business, enjoy tenant's rights and have the right to join Syrian trade unions (for example, the Medical Association, the Bar Association and the Contractors' Association). Palestinians have the same trade union rights and obligations as Syrians, including the right to put themselves forward for the leadership or membership of all Syrian trade unions. They also have the right of legal recourse and the same right as Syrian nationals to employ the services of a lawyer. They have absolute freedom of movement and travel in the Syrian Arab Republic and can live in any Syrian village, town or city. The Syrian Government granted them these rights of its own volition, in keeping with the national principles that it espouses and its humanitarian obligations. The General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees, a special Government institution established by Act No. 450 of 1949, deals with day-to-day issues facing Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic. It has been serving the refugees for a long time and strives to meet their needs, help them find suitable work and suggest ways of improving the conditions in which they live.

Paragraph 9-1-3-4 – Measures taken with respect to Iraqi refugees

99. When the United States invasion of Iraq began, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis headed for the Syrian Arab Republic in search of refuge and protection. The report entitled "Assessment on the situation of Iraqi refugees in Syria", which was produced by the Damascus bureau of UNHCR, states: "Most of the Iraqis who left Iraq since the Gulf war of 2002 have been attracted by Syria's open door policy, its tolerance and generosity towards refugees. Hence in less than three years, a silent and steady exodus has made of Syria the host of the largest number ... of Iraqis in the region." The Syrian Arab Republic is the only Arab country to have allowed Iraqi refugees to enter freely and take up temporary legal residence for a period of six months without being subject to any restrictions, conditions or discrimination on religious, confessional or ethnic grounds.

Paragraph 9-1-3-4-5 – Cultural services for Iraqi refugees

100. The Children's Culture Directorate at the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with UNICEF, developed a cultural and arts programme which involves the staging of theatrical and popular arts shows, together with group drawing workshops. Exhibitions have been held showcasing the work of children who fled from the Israeli attack on Lebanon that began on 13 July and ended on 20 August 2006. Events to support Iraqi child refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic were held on 1 October 2007: paper aeroplanes were launched in "Unknown Soldier" Square and group drawing workshops were held in Umayyad Square. In 2008, the Ministry of Culture and UNICEF signed an agreement on a joint project to support Syrian children and adolescents and all children in the Syrian Arab Republic. The implementation phase began in 2009 with the following activities:

- Training of trainers on the conceptual issues involved in adolescent development and participation

- Organization of workshops to strengthen the participation of adolescents in the governorates
- Training of library staff and children's culture officials on the concepts of adolescent development and involvement of adolescents through the organization of training courses

101. Following these steps, child- and adolescent-friendly spaces were created in cultural centres, where multipurpose rooms (a library, Internet facilities and a cinema) were set up. Preparations are under way to equip and decorate child-friendly spaces in cultural centres in Dariya and Bayrud in the Damascus Countryside governorate. This work will then be replicated in other centres in the other governorates in 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 at another centre at Bayab al-Farj in the Aleppo governorate for Syrian and Iraqi children and adolescents.

Paragraph 9-1-3-4-6

102. The Syrian Government is to be credited with treating Iraqi refugees well, often just as well as its own citizens. It has opened up its cities, schools and hospitals to these refugees, rather than pushing them into isolated camps on the fringes of the desert. While this is a humanitarian approach, it has imposed considerable costs and a heavy burden on Syrian society, as detailed in the paper that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic presented at the International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries held in Geneva on 17 and 18 April 2007. The paper describes some of the economic, health, educational, social and security burdens involved, together with the costs associated with a heavy Iraqi presence in the Syrian Arab Republic. It should firstly be stressed that the figures provided are not the final ones, but largely estimates calculated based on the assumption that there are 1.2 million Iraqis in the Syrian Arab Republic. In fact, recent figures suggest that there are at least 1.5 million Iraqis in the Syrian Arab Republic at the present time.

Paragraph 9-2 – Children under the Juvenile Offenders Act

Paragraph 9-2-4

103. Children in conflict with the law are subject to various reform measures, including placement in reformatories, if this is in their best interests. These institutions make sure to separate children by age group and type of offence. They offer care, educational, vocational training and psychosocial rehabilitation services to the children to help them to get on with their lives or to earn a decent living. Young persons aged 15 and over who commit serious offences (those classified as the gravest crimes under Syrian law) face very light punishments. They are placed in reformatories, where they are looked after by professionals of proven experience and moral rectitude. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs is working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF on the implementation of a project to support juvenile justice development. The aim is to revise Syrian legislation on juvenile offending and study conditions in reformatories with a view to ensuring that the changes taking place in this domain are taken into account.

Paragraph 9-2-6 – Juveniles

Paragraph 9-2-6-3

104. The Ministry of Culture organizes literacy courses at youth centres in the governorates, and the Children's Culture Directorate is a constant presence through the

events and activities that it organizes at these centres. The Directorate seeks to promote culture at youth centres by organizing: literacy courses to train young persons and open up a new future for them; regular activities such as drawing, music and other kinds of courses; therapy sessions to help raise young persons' awareness; theatre workshops to involve young people in learning about the details of producing creative work and to make them more aware; and awareness-raising discussions to explore the reasons why some people offend, with a view to prevention, and to consider the role of society in combating crime.

Paragraph 9-3-3 – Preventing child exploitation

Paragraph 9-3-3-1

105. There are no up-to-date or accurate statistics on child labour in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, the interim assessment by the State Planning Commission of progress achieved by the tenth five-year plan showed that the proportion of child workers in the age group from 6 to 17 years fell from 8.2 per cent in urban areas and 10.11 per cent in rural areas in 2004 to 6.37 per cent and 8.2 per cent respectively in 2007. The assessment showed that the main determinant with regard to child labour is household income.

Paragraph 9-3-3-2

106. The Syrian Government is taking steps to eliminate child labour by implementing a range of international laws and treaties. Moreover, the new Labour Code of 2010 prohibits the employment of young persons who have not completed their basic education or reached the age of 15 full years, whichever comes second. It specifies which occupations and industries are barred to young persons in different age groups and states that a young person may not be employed in authorized occupations for more than six hours a day. It also prohibits young persons from working at night and prescribes fines for breaching the Code that are intended to serve as a deterrent.

Paragraph 9-4 – Children belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minority groups (art. 30)

107. In the Syrian Arab Republic, there is no such thing as a “minorities problem”. The Permanent Constitution of 1973, the Unified Workers Act and other Syrian laws and legislation make no distinction between Syrian Arab nationals with regard to their rights and obligations. As far as education is concerned, equality is guaranteed under the Constitution and the law, without any discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, racial or social origin, wealth, descent, or any other consideration. Children who belong to minorities enjoy all the rights and privileges accorded to Syrian children. They can learn their own languages and traditions, in addition to studying Ministry of Education curricula at Ministry-run schools. They also learn everything that they need for harmonious coexistence, without prejudice to the specificities of their cultural identity.