



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

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

Pre-session working group

**Fortieth session**

14 January-1 February 2008

**Responses to the list of issues and questions contained in document  
number CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/2, A.H. 1428 (A.D. 2007)**

1. Please provide information on the process of preparation of the report, including whether non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations, were consulted, what Government departments and institutions were involved in the preparation of the report and the nature and extent of their participation, and whether the report was presented to or adopted by any designated high-level authority.

The combined initial and second periodic report was prepared by specialists on committees composed of men and committees composed of women in the following governmental sectors:

- The Ministry of the Interior
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Ministry of Justice
- The Ministry of Health
- The Ministry of Education
- The Ministry of Social Affairs
- The Ministry of Higher Education
- The Commission for Investigation and Public Prosecution

Immediately after it was established the Commission on Human Rights took part in preparing the report, in its final stages. The Committee was in charge of collecting the information and the full preparation of the report. The following steps were taken to supplement the report:

- The report was discussed with a number of relevant non-governmental organizations such as the National Organization for Human Rights, the King Khalid Charitable Foundation and the Women's Awakening Association and,

also, with a number of women interested in women's issues and the defence of women's rights.

- The report was discussed with a number of women advisors to the Consultative Council, which is the supreme consultative authority.

As a result of those discussions, the report was supplemented by several statements in response to the questions raised regarding the Kingdom's report.

**2. Please clarify the precise scope of Saudi Arabia's general reservation to the Convention on the basis of the norms of Islamic Law, and describe the impact of this reservation on the practical realization of the principle of equality between women and men as required under article 2 (a) of the Convention.**

The Kingdom made this reservation on the basis of its conviction that the Islamic sharia is compatible with the obligations contained in the general principles of the Convention, even if there is a small disparity with regard to some of the implementing provisions.

Judgements about whether or not such a disparity exists are made on the basis of the texts of the Islamic sharia and the relevant provisions of the Convention on a case-by-case basis. This demonstrates the extent to which the Government of the Kingdom is seriously committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention and ensuring women's rights. Legal interpretation of the provisions of the Convention is left to the judicial authorities, which take their decisions based on the facts in each case.

The general reservation made by the Kingdom does not affect the core of the Convention or detract from its legal force before the judicial and executive authorities. It is merely a precautionary measure at a time when human rights concepts are developing rapidly as a result of interpretations following the entry into force of international human rights instruments such as the Convention. Not only might these interpretations sometimes go beyond the literal content of the provisions, but the interpretation might, itself, become a core principle in the opinion of some of the subcommittee's experts. The reservation is thus primarily a precautionary measure against possible interpretations of the Convention that might contradict legal provisions in force in the Kingdom.

In any case, the Government does not believe that the wording of its reservation interferes with its obligations under the Convention. This is clear from the Kingdom's report, which lays out the sharia and legal provisions relating to women and shows clearly that there is no contradiction between the main provisions that form the basis of the Convention and Islamic sharia principles relating to women's rights.

**3. The report indicates that women of non-Saudi nationalities constitute a substantial portion of the country's population, but the report does not provide information or data on such women, or explain whether the country's population includes ethnic, religious, or other minorities. Please provide information, including statistics relating to the areas covered by the Convention, about women from ethnic or other minorities or non-Saudi nationalities, whether such women face multiple forms of discrimination and the measures that have been taken to address such discrimination.**

The civil records system in the Kingdom is free from any indications that discriminate among individuals on the basis of ethnic or sectarian affiliation. Saudi society is an Arab Muslim society with no religious minorities, but it does contain communities of different sectarian affiliations, including Sunni and Shi'ite. However, these have absolutely no effect on the rights of individuals at the level of the State system.

Saudi society accepts all ethnicities, inasmuch as it is a gathering place for all the world's Muslim ethnicities and sects who come to visit the Two Holy Mosques and perform the Hajj. The non-Saudi women mentioned in the report do not constitute a large proportion of those in the Kingdom, as has been mentioned. They include those who come to the Kingdom to work in the governmental or private sectors, or in private homes, or with husbands who work in those sectors. Their presence in the Kingdom is temporary in accordance with their employment contracts or those of their husbands. They are subject to civil service regulations, the Labour Code and other regulations. If they are subjected to any discrimination, they have the right of recourse to the same legal remedies that are available to Saudi women.

Like any society in the world, Saudi society is not free from some discriminatory practices. However, the State is trying hard to eliminate such practices and prevent them from affecting public order or the rights of any individual in society.

**4. The report indicates that the provisions of the Convention, ratified by Royal Decree, are considered to be a part of domestic law and may be invoked before Saudi Arabia's courts or other judicial or administrative authorities. Please clarify whether under the Saudi Arabian legal system, in situations of conflict between domestic laws and international treaty obligations, international treaty obligations take precedence over domestic laws. Also, please provide information on court or other judicial or administrative cases, if any, where the provisions of the Convention have been invoked and the outcome of such cases.**

In accordance with article 70 of the Basic Law of Governance, article 18 of the Consultative Council Statute and article 20 of the Statute of the Council of Ministers, international treaties and agreements are subject to the same approval procedures and promulgation measures (royal decrees) as other laws. Once international treaties or agreements are issued by such procedures they are considered part of domestic law, and the courts and judicial authorities are bound to apply them in cases brought before them.

Although there is no explicit constitutional provision giving precedence to the Kingdom's international treaty obligations in cases where they conflict with domestic laws, this is the rule that is followed in practice. This rule finds legal basis in article 81 of the Basic Law of Governance, which provides that "the application of the Basic Law shall not prejudice treaties and agreements entered into by the Kingdom with international bodies and organizations". In other words, if the application of the Basic Law of Governance is not to prejudice treaty obligations entered into by the Kingdom, then the primacy of such obligations over other domestic laws takes precedence.

When drafting or amending laws, the legal authorities strive to ensure that any proposed draft law or amendment is compatible with the Conventions to which the Kingdom is party. This is provided for explicitly in section 1 of Royal Ordinance No. 12661 of 17 Rabi` II A.H. 1424 governing the review and drafting mechanism for draft laws and regulations.

**5. The report indicates that the general principle of equality and non-discrimination is incorporated into the Basic Law of Governance and regulatory provisions. Please explain whether the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex is specifically articulated in the Basic Law of Governance, and provide information on the steps taken, or the steps being considered within a given time frame, to ensure that this principle is made fully applicable to all areas of law in accordance with obligations under the Convention. Please include information on any law review process that has been undertaken to reform or repeal provisions that discriminate against women.**

Article 8 of the Basic Law of Governance provides that governance in the Kingdom is on the basis of justice, consultation and equality. Equality under the Basic Law is absolute, and thus includes equality in all its forms, including gender equality.

Under article 26 of the Basic Law, the State must protect human rights in accordance with the Islamic sharia, which establishes the principle of equality in the following verse of the Koran: "O mankind, we created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you might know each other. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous among you." (XLIX: 13).

Laws and regulations undergo periodic review to make sure that they are compatible with the fundamental principles of the Basic Law.

**6. The report provides an overview of the means of redress available to women. Please provide statistical information about women's use of these means of redress of claims of discrimination based on sex. In addition, please indicate whether there are any specific procedures or mechanisms for dealing with claims of discrimination on the basis of sex.**

Gender discrimination law considers claims relating to women in the same manner as other claims, under the Code of Sharia Procedure and the Code of Criminal Procedure. The claim is considered to be more significant if the discrimination in question resulted in the woman being deprived of rights or the violation of her honour. In that case it is treated as a criminal matter under the jurisdiction of the Public Prosecution authority, which then advocates her claim and, in addition to restoring her rights, penalizes the accused. With regard to statistical information, the database of the judicial authorities is relatively new and does not contain detailed information. These authorities have shown themselves ready to enter such data into their database in the future, especially now that State institutions have introduced an electronic government system and started to expand databases.

**7. The report is silent on the ban on driving by women. It also does not discuss prevailing dress codes for women, their legal or other basis, and enforcement mechanisms, and the compatibility of these measures with the Convention. Please elaborate.**

There is no legal provision banning women from driving cars. However, this matter is the subject of study and requires time for implementation.

There do exist, however, sharia provisions mandating modest and chaste dress codes for women. Moreover, a variety of local customs and traditions exist in different parts of the Kingdom.

**8. Please provide information on the higher national committee specializing in women's affairs that has been created pursuant to Cabinet Decree No. 63, and the women's rights sections and units that have been created within government ministries and government bodies providing services to women. This should include information on the status, authority, role, objectives, actions, and human and financial resources of these entities. Are there women in the higher national committee specializing in women's affairs, and if so, what is the percentage of women in this committee?**

Sections and units have been created within some Government ministries and bodies that provide services to women. Their human resources policies follow those of the agencies to which they belong. The following measures have been taken pursuant to Cabinet Decree No. 63:

- The Higher Education Council is conducting a study to identify matriculation, graduation, curricula and courses of study in university education for women in order to meet development requirements and the needs of the labour market.
- The Civil Service Council is making arrangements to allow agencies employing women to exercise the option of employment by partial quota in agencies that have morning and evening shifts, and to make use of the posts of women who take long-term leave.
- The Civil Service Council is studying employing women in posts and departments that serve women.
- A study on opening new work horizons for women in the private sector is being expedited.
- Cabinet Decision No. 15 of 17 Muharram A.H. 1425 has been issued approving the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee formed pursuant to Royal Ordinance No. 7/ba' /20750 of 17 Safar A.H. 1422 on harmonizing the number of women graduating from educational and vocational institutions with the labour market.
- The Credit and Savings Bank has allocated six billion riyals to support poor women by granting them loans for home-based enterprises, in order to turn them into productive workers and end their dependency and reliance on aid from charitable organizations.

**9. The report is silent with respect to any national action plan for the promotion of gender equality, the implementation of the Convention and/or the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Please indicate whether such a plan of action is in place or is being considered.**

The Eighth Development Plan currently being implemented in the Kingdom includes the following:

*Overall goals*

The main goals relating to women in the Eighth Development Plan are as follows:

- New laws are to be enacted and those in effect amended in order to facilitate and encourage greater participation by women in economic activity.
- Women's contribution to economic activity is to be developed.
- The necessary facilities are to be provided in order to increase women's participation in the work force, and support services are to be developed.
- Women's sectoral contributions are to be expanded in order to ensure diversity.
- The status and role of women in the family and society is to be strengthened.
- Female enrolment in scientific, applied and professional specializations in secondary and higher education is to be developed and encouraged.

*Policies*

Achieving the main goals of the Eighth Development Plan in respect of women will be based on the following policies:

- Conducting studies of existing regulations and directives in order to determine the amendments needed in order to ensure women's participation in economic activity, or to make new proposals in this regard
- Increasing participation by women's sectors in studying laws and the need for amendments
- Conducting media campaigns by State agencies and non-governmental organizations to increase social acceptance of women's participation in the labour force
- Increasing the number of women working in Government institutions and ensuring that they are included in administrative and technical tasks in those institutions
- Adopting specific measures to address female unemployment and, in particular, long-term unemployment
- Provision by Government institutions and non-governmental organizations of advisory services to women on work
- Encouraging self-employment among women, providing facilities for them to obtain loans, easing savings and credit procedures and reducing investment and production risks
- Opening special avenues for loans to women in order to encourage investment in small and medium-sized enterprises
- Providing financial support to institutions that serve small- and medium-sized women's enterprises
- Providing support services, including encouraging the establishment and development of childcare facilities, in order to enable married women to take advantage of and continue with available job opportunities

- Developing support mechanisms to encourage women to expand their participation in the labour market and, in particular, the new economy
- Supporting the role of women in development in society, including educational curricula
- Developing the media with a view to enhancing women's role in development
- Expanding education and vocational training for women, particularly in appropriate areas
- Encouraging women, through educational counselling, to study the sciences in secondary school
- Adopting vocational education in young women's general educational curricula
- Developing higher vocational education institutes for young women, such as intermediate technical colleges and higher vocational institutes, in accordance with the needs of the Saudi labour market
- Opening more vocational training centres and secondary vocational institutes for young women and introducing new specializations, to meet the demands of development and the needs of Saudi women
- Encouraging the acceptance of women in higher education into specializations which are in demand on the labour market and serve development goals
- Increasing the access of young women to education in the sciences, mathematics, engineering, information technology and administrative sciences

**10. Please explain whether the Government has considered using temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention and general recommendations 23 and 25, such as the establishment of quotas or incentives to accelerate achieving equality, particularly in the areas of employment, participation in political and public life, and in the judiciary.**

The Kingdom is proceeding on a clear, step-by-step basis in empowering women. Several permanent measures have been mentioned previously, including the implementation of Resolution No. 120 on increasing opportunities and fields of work for women, which requires that all Government bodies which issue licences to pursue economic activities receive applications from women for such licences, and grant and issue them to women. In this connection, telecommuting programmes have been implemented by a committee comprising representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Civil Service. Productive family programmes have been implemented, with the necessary support they provided and sessions conducted by the social and economic authorities. These programmes contribute to the incorporation of women's initiatives in self-employment and productive activities. All of the chambers of commerce in the Kingdom have begun work in this regard.

**11. The report notes that the State is exerting considerable efforts to modify patterns of conduct and eliminate discriminatory practices. The report also notes that customs and traditions present obstacles to women's participation in education and access to the labour market. The report, however, does not elaborate on the discriminatory customs, traditions and stereotypes that**

**persist. Please provide an overview of the forms and manifestations of discriminatory attitudes, practices, and customs and their impact on women's equality. Please also describe the actions being undertaken to overcome these obstacles, including measures to address the societal attitudes underlying such practices.**

One means of achieving social development is through providing educational services and enabling all citizens equally to enrol in educational institutions and to take full and continuous advantage of them. On that basis, the Kingdom has focused on the education sector and has taken measures to make education available to all citizens. One of the most significant manifestations of discriminatory practices and customs was the complaint raised by many citizens to the King in the early 1960s, rejecting education for their daughters.

Women's participation in education has lagged in relative terms because citizens had disapproved of it, fearing the negative social consequences that co-education or immodest education had had in many countries. The State, consequently, was forced, gradually, to universalize education for girls and was unable to make it acceptable to the public until responsibility for their education was given to the religious establishment. At the outset, the education of girls was placed under the supervision of the Grand Mufti, which reassured citizens and led them to enrol their daughters. The Kingdom continued to gradually expand the education of girls until it became equal to that of boys in respect of curricula, systems and facilities. Responsibility for the education of both boys and girls was recently merged into the Ministry of Education.

Convinced that tribal society is affected by practices and customs and of its own need for time in order to change those customs and practices, the State did not initially make education compulsory. Instead, it opened the way to those who wished to educate their daughters. The State enjoyed considerable success in gradually convincing parents of the importance of this matter. Elementary education was made compulsory in A.H. 1425, when it was fully and completely implemented. Statistics from A.H. 1425/26 indicate that, at some stages of education, there were more females enrolled than males (see the statistics provided in the answer to question 20).

Another factor that contributed to the delay in women's participation in education is the vast size of the country, which presents an obstacle to the meeting of different cultures and affects social mobility and the transformation of a nomadic society into an urban one. The provision of various forms of communication has helped to close the gap between people and allowed for the development of the necessary awareness-raising plans.

Another obstacle to the exercise of a woman's right to education is the fact that some parents prevent their daughters from completing their education in order to marry them off or have them assist in domestic duties. Compulsory measures have been taken that limit parents' exercise of their authority in that regard.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, ever since its establishment in A.H. 1380, has made great efforts to raise women's level of awareness through its social development and service centres, which are located in cities and villages throughout the Kingdom. Those centres have contributed greatly to changing the negative perception of women's participation in education and the workforce by undertaking



training programmes and activities suited to society's needs. They have also undertaken, over the past years, awareness-raising programmes throughout the Kingdom in order to encourage girls and to eradicate female illiteracy, including the establishment of both night and day schools to eradicate illiteracy among primary and intermediate school-aged girls so that they subsequently might be able to enrol in public secondary schools.

**12. The report states that in 2004, social protection committees were established in 13 regions of the country under the Ministry of Social Affairs whose members are tasked with researching violence against women, investigating complaints, and submitting reports to the committee. Please explain what kinds of data are being collected on violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual violence. Please indicate what such data reveals regarding the incidence of and trends in violence against women. Please also indicate the rate of women's participation in the composition of the social protection committees.**

The concern of the government and private sectors with domestic cases is not new, nor did it start with the establishment of the Department of Social Protection in the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2004. Numerous services — including social, medical and security services — have always been available at all levels and appropriate measures have been taken to deal with such cases. Those services were provided and the measures undertaken in cooperation with the regional governments. Domestic cases were previously called “special cases” owing to their private nature and in order to ensure the secrecy for which families call, and which Saudi society preserves, when resolving their private problems.

After the establishment in 2004 of the social protection committees, which are attached to the Ministry of Social Affairs, in 13 regions of the country, its members were tasked with studying and researching the causes of violence against women and children as well as investigating and reporting, on a case-by-case basis, to the authorities responsible for dealing with such incidents.

The goals of the Department of Social Protection are to:

- Protect children less than 18 years old and other vulnerable categories from all types of harm;
- Spread social awareness of the importance of protecting family members from abuse;
- Strive to create a secure and safe social environment;
- Reinforce the principles of Islam, which urge moderation, kindness and compassion among members of society;
- Achieve those goals by taking the measures needed to shelter and provide legal and social protection and psychological support to vulnerable members of society, so as to provide for their social security and safeguard their interests.

The Department is responsible for creating mechanisms to mobilize efforts and to devise public and private policies and methods through the relevant authorities.

The regional social protection committees are responsible for the following:

- Reconciliation of the parties involved in a dispute, with a focus on reaching an amicable solution
- Social rehabilitation, in which efforts are focused on providing therapy and counselling to women who have been abused
- Psychological rehabilitation, in which efforts are focused on providing psychotherapy until the situation has stabilized
- Provision of shelter, which is the ultimate solution and is resorted to only after it has been determined that no family member can take care of the situation

In addition to the direct phone lines of the regional social protection committees, the Department has designated the telephone number (01) 4738002 and the fax number (01) 4736055 to receive reports of violence. The reports received on those numbers are referred to the social protection committees and the specialized authorities.

In 2008, the Department will launch a toll-free hotline with a short number to receive reports of abuse. Those reports will be forwarded to the regional social protection committees for urgent action.

The collection of data on violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence, is focused on the following areas:

1. Age of victim.
2. Victim's level of education.
3. Relationship of the offender to the victim.
4. Victim's social and material status.
5. Number and dates of incidents.
6. Standard of living and type of residence.
7. Number of times married.
8. Number of times divorced.
9. State of physical and mental health.
10. Number of children.
11. Victim's record of prior morals offences and measures taken in that regard.
12. Whether the victim is undergoing psychotherapy (behavioural therapy or drugs).
13. Whether the victim has received any material or social services from women's charitable associations.
14. Whether the victim would prefer to have her case dealt with through reconciliation or through the courts.

Statistics showed that wives were most likely to suffer from repeated violence, that the offender was most frequently the husband, and that there were various causes for the violence.

The attached regional statistics show that repeated incidents of violence are few in each region.

#### Incidents of violence against women in A.H. 1426 (A.D. 2005-2006)

<i>Regional social protection committee</i>	<i>Number of incidents reported</i>
Riyadh	60
Mecca	230
Ha'il	31
Eastern region	130
Asir	25
Medina	44
Al-Qasim	17
Tubuk	4
Al-Bahah	6
Najran	6
Al-Jawf	7
Jazan	6
Northern region	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>569</b>

#### Incidents of violence recorded by regional social protection committees in A.H. 1427 (A.D 2006-2007)

<i>Regional social protection committee</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Riyadh + Riyadh supervision	14	163
Mecca + Ta'if Reform for Women	13	136
Eastern region	9	57
Asir	3	22
Ha'il	1	2
Medina	3	21
Al-Qasim	9	13
Al-Jawf	1	3
Najran	1	7
Al-Bahah	1	6
Jazan	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>460</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>516</b>	

In view of the fact that the aim of the social protection committees, which are attached to the Ministry of Social Affairs, is to protect women who have been

subjected to violence and children under the age of 18, women constitute a good portion of those committees inasmuch as they participate, in cooperation with the appropriate authorities, in conducting and following up on studies, as well as visiting women and children who have been abused.

**13. Please explain whether a domestic violence law is being considered, and describe the legal remedies and health and social services available to women victims of violence.**

The regional social protection committees are informed whenever victims of domestic violence present themselves to police stations or hospitals so that they might initiate the necessary procedures, in cooperation with the regional governments. Cases that have a legal dimension are referred to the courts for judgement and the imposition penalties commensurate with the extent and type of abuse.

Victims are provided with physical and mental health services until they recover from the trauma of abuse. Those who need financial assistance are referred to charitable foundations and organizations and social security in order to receive the necessary assistance.

There are open channels of communication with family centres, either directly or by telephone, that provide family counselling free of charge in domestic cases.

With respect to domestic violence law, the Ministry of Social Affairs is currently drafting a law on protection against domestic violence. The national commission for the protection of childhood has also prepared a draft law on the protection of children from abuse, while the King Khalid Charitable Foundation has submitted a preliminary draft law on protection from abuse. Those draft laws are being considered by the legislative authorities in preparation for their promulgation.

**14. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in her report E/CN.4/2003/75/Add.1 (para. 815), indicated that foreign women working as domestic servants in Saudi Arabia have reported many cases of abuse in their work environments including forced confinement, withholding of food, beating and other physical abuse, and rape, and that they encounter severe obstacles in obtaining redress in the courts due to the strict evidentiary rules in the courts and the women's own fears of reprisals. Please explain actions taken to prevent such abuse and prosecute offenders, to ensure adequate legal protection and access to the courts for these women, to provide them with legal, judicial, health, and social services, and towards the consideration of these women as not being offenders.**

A law regulating domestic service will soon be promulgated. However, the Kingdom guarantees the rights of domestic servants through the regulations governing their recruitment. Domestic servants are also informed of the authorities to which they can turn when needed, such as the police, the regional government and the courts. With the cooperation of their countries' embassies and under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, female victims are also provided with shelter until their procedures have been completed.

Cases of abuse are treated in the same fashion as other criminal cases under the Code of Criminal Procedure: they are investigated and prosecuted by the specialized authority under the law and considered by the courts.

As for the abuse of domestic servants, the Ministry of Labour has presented a draft law on domestic servants and those in similar positions to the Cabinet for adoption.

**15. The report indicates that Saudi Arabia has taken measures to prevent and combat trafficking, and that these efforts have achieved considerable success. Please describe these measures, including the enactment or consideration of any specific legislation to combat trafficking, measures to provide specialized training on trafficking for members of the police, border guards, and the judiciary, including the training of women for these responsibilities, and give information on the effectiveness of these measures.**

Millions of men and women, particularly from South and South-east Asia, come to Saudi Arabia on fixed-term employment contracts. Some of those men and women are subjected to illegal treatment, including seizure of their passports and other restrictions on their freedom of movement, and non-payment of salaries. This illegal treatment extends, in some instances, to physical assault, as is the case in many countries. Children are smuggled from some countries in order to beg in the streets.

Inasmuch as trafficking in human beings, whether of workers, children, men or women, is a practice that is strictly forbidden in Saudi Arabia because it fundamentally contradicts the provisions of the Islamic sharia, which prohibits all forms of trafficking in human beings, the country is taking serious action to combat this practice. In that connection, the Kingdom has set forth a national plan to combat trafficking, consisting of the following elements:

## **I. Measures taken to combat trafficking in human beings**

### **1. The national plan to combat trafficking in human beings for the purpose of forced labour and other forms of exploitation**

The national plan is focused on continually combating the exploitation of trafficked persons, particularly women and children. Various initiatives are envisioned, including a statistical survey on combating trafficking in human beings. In that connection, Royal Decree No. 5539/*meem ba'* of 21 Jumada II A.H. 1428 ordered the establishment of a committee composed of government authorities directly and indirectly concerned in order to set forth a plan of action designed to address the issue and make recommendations that would ensure the protection of groups exploited by traffickers. The decree also charges the Commission on Human Rights with following up on the implementation of those recommendations and bringing to the King's attention any obstacles or remissness on the part of the authorities concerned.

### **2. The legal framework for combating trafficking in human beings**

a. The draft law on combating trafficking in human beings was approved at the meeting of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (the Jabir Summit).

b. A law on combating trafficking in human beings is currently being studied by the Panel of Experts, the authority which studies new laws, in conjunction with a number of other Government sectors concerned with the matter, including the Commission on Human Rights. It is expected that the law will soon be finalized. The adoption of this law is the key to ending trafficking in human beings.

c. A number of resolutions on combating trafficking in human beings have been promulgated, including:

- Cabinet resolution No. 166 of 2000 on the employee-employer relationship
- Resolution No. 738 dated 4 July 2004, issued by the Minister of Labour, banning all forms of trafficking in human beings.

**3. Domestic service regulation law**

On order of the Minister of Labour, a committee was formed to draft this law. The draft was submitted to the Cabinet and, God willing, will soon be approved.

**4. Training programmes for judges, public prosecution officials and others**

It is expected that, after the adoption of the law on combating trafficking in human beings, the committee on the question of trafficking in human beings will set forth a policy on the training of judges, investigators, public prosecutors and anyone connected with the matter.

**5. Information campaigns and awareness-raising**

The Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Council on Human Rights will launch information and awareness-raising campaigns, including the drafting of booklets in various languages informing workers of the steps to be taken when a problem arises. Employers will be informed of employees' rights and of the penalty for trafficking in human beings through various printed and audio-visual media.

**6. Identification and protection of the victims of trafficking in human beings**

The Ministries of the Interior, Justice and Labour, along with the Council on Human Rights, will set forth procedures aimed at systematically identifying and protecting the victims of trafficking, whether workers, child beggars or the victims of commercial sexual exploitation (if any), and monitoring them and preventing their forcible deportation before they have obtained all of their legal rights. They will also investigate all convictions for trafficking.

The Kingdom has ratified:

- The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

**16. The report states that women did not participate in the first municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, but that the Municipal Elections Law contains the word “citizen” which covers women and men equally, and that officials have made statements regarding women’s participation in the forthcoming elections. Please clarify whether women are ensured the same rights as men to vote and to be eligible for election at all levels, and indicate the legislative basis of these rights. Please also describe the concrete steps the Government has taken to**

**ensure that women are able to fully participate in the forthcoming elections as voters and candidates.**

Women have the same political rights as men and are ensured the same right as men to participate in the decision-making process. The law does not prohibit women from participating in elections, although, in practice, that participation is not completely possible. Women also have the right to participate in elections of the council of chambers of commerce and have won seats in a number of those councils.

**17. The report notes that the counsel of women has been requested during proceedings of the country's Consultative Council, and that women have participated as members of Consultative Council delegations to regional and international parliamentary meetings. Please describe the level and nature of women's participation in the Consultative Council and its delegations, including whether women have equal rights with men with respect to participation in the Council, and what measures the Government is taking to increase the participation of women in the Consultative Council and its delegations.**

The Consultative Council recently announced that six women had been appointed as part-time advisers to the Council. Those appointments came after the Council had created a permanent supreme national committee of a consultative nature devoted strictly to women's affairs, which is in the process of drafting regulations on women's participation in the labour force. The Council consults the committee when it considers issues that concern women. The committee reports directly to the President of the Council and its members are called "women's affairs advisers".

The Consultative Council has issued a number of resolutions on women, including:

- The Consultative Council studied a project regarding the establishment of a supreme council for family affairs in order to create an authority responsible for organizing and reforming all family affairs. The Council approved the project in its resolution No. 7/5 of 23 Dhu'lhijjah A.H. 1426.
- In respect of admission to university, the Consultative Council studied the matter and issued resolution No. 6/11 of 2 Safar A.H. 1423. The resolution encompasses various matters, including:
  1. The establishment of new applied specializations at the university level for women, suited to their nature and capabilities and to the jobs available to them according to the precepts of the Islamic sharia;
  2. The Ministry of Finance was urged to create new posts each year in the budgets of the universities for teaching staff, professors and lecturers. Those posts are to be created in accordance with the situation at each university in respect of quality, specialization and need so as to enable them to strengthen their teaching capacities and increase their admissions;
  3. The establishment of a permanent national committee in the Ministry of Higher Education, in which the private sector and charitable organizations participate, to administer the scholarships awarded to individuals, institutions, companies, organizations and States and to develop and guide women with a view to their participation in domestic and foreign study missions.

- The Council also issued resolution No. 31/35 of 3 Ramadan A.H. 1421 on the activities of the General Presidency of Youth Welfare. The resolution encompasses various matters, including:
  1. A study of the contribution of the Presidency to cultural, athletic and social activities for women in keeping with the strictures of the Islamic sharia;
  2. That the Presidency increase its contribution to the cultural and intellectual activities of youth by allocating annual prizes in those areas;
  3. The importance of concentrating on both the intellectual and physical development of young people and of allocating a sufficient portion of the Presidency's budget to so doing.
- In respect of early retirement for working women and their spheres of work, the Council, after studying the draft referred to it, issued resolution No. 7/5 of 18 Rabi` I A.H. 1421 approving the said draft. The resolution encompassed various matters, including:
  1. The importance of directing the education of women to applied specializations that need women and can benefit from them, and the importance of providing guidance to women's university supervisors;
  2. The reduction of the retirement age for women from 60 to 50. Women also have the right to take early retirement after 15 years of service;
  3. Women who have not completed 20 years of service can purchase up to five additional years of retirement;
  4. To expedite the feminization of all posts in offices that serve women exclusively, and to open new prospects for the employment of women in the private sector;
  5. To consider the creation of a permanent supreme national committee for women's affairs.

**18. The report indicates that the State has provided opportunities for women to rise to positions of leadership within its institutions, including to the level of deputy minister. Please provide statistical information on the number of women, including in leadership positions, at different levels and sectors of government. Please also describe the concrete measures that have been taken, including temporary special measures, to increase the participation of women in decision-making at all levels, including in the judiciary, in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations 23 and 25.**

There is nothing in the Civil Service Code, the list of appointments or the list of promotions that would prevent the appointment of women to leadership positions and some have, in fact, attained high grades, although their number remains limited.

Directives exist, based upon direct instructions from the leadership in the Kingdom, to bring about positive changes in this regard. The impact of these changes is becoming clear in the growing numbers of women assuming leadership positions and high professional grades. Although their proportion remains considerably less than that hoped for, their number continues to increase.



## Distribution of Government officials, by grade

### Public officials

Grade	Saudis		Non-Saudis		Total		Overall total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Saudi	Non-Saudi	
Minister	98	0	0	0	98	0	98
Undersecretary	111	1	0	0	112	0	112
Fifteen	325	0	0	0	325	0	325
Fourteen	431	2	0	0	433	0	433
Thirteen	935	8	0	0	943	0	943
Twelve	1 777	6	0	0	1 783	0	1 783
Eleven	3 082	22	1	0	3 104	1	3 105
Ten	8 488	93	11	0	8 581	11	8 592
Nine	10 053	226	81	0	10 279	81	10 360
Eight	15 728	551	116	9	16 279	125	16 404
Seven	23 224	1 177	534	41	24 401	575	24 976
Six	32 769	3 122	220	17	35 891	237	36 128
Five	27 990	3 119	224	11	31 109	235	31 344
Four	20 211	3 779	91	6	23 990	97	24 087
Three	7 000	586	56	4	7 586	60	7 646
Two	3 595	129	7	0	3 724	7	3 731
One	203	4	3	1	207	4	211
<b>Total</b>	<b>156 020</b>	<b>12 825</b>	<b>1 344</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>168 845</b>	<b>1 433</b>	<b>170 278</b>

### Education

Grade	Saudis		Non-Saudis		Total		Overall total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Saudi	Non-Saudi	
Level six	2 082	450	133	8	2 532	141	2 673
Level five	52 369	26 878	350	7	79 247	357	79 604
Level four	42 398	19 682	249	82	62 080	331	62 411
Level three	34 939	33 844	107	1	68 783	108	68 891
Level two	60 791	113 113	7 833	729	173 904	8 562	182 466
Level one	2 937	14 543	387	132	17 480	519	17 999
<b>Total</b>	<b>195 516</b>	<b>208 510</b>	<b>9 059</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>404 026</b>	<b>10 018</b>	<b>414 044</b>

**Health**

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Saudis</i>		<i>Non-Saudis</i>		<i>Total</i>		<i>Overall total</i>
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Saudi</i>	<i>Non-Saudi</i>	
Consultant doctor	1 073	462	489	66	1 535	555	2 090
Resident doctor	2 439	1 729	7 977	2 336	4 168	10 313	14 481
Pharmacist	921	533	143	48	1 454	191	1 645
Specialist	3 686	1 726	274	346	5 412	620	6 032
Technician	29 720	12 068	1 752	15 374	41 788	17 126	58 914
Health assistant (a)	1 434	99	2 171	5 854	1 533	8 025	9 558
Health assistant (b)	479	83	1 031	2 714	562	3 745	4 307
<b>Total</b>	<b>104 181</b>	<b>46 302</b>	<b>57 879</b>	<b>27 559</b>	<b>18 743</b>	<b>17 386</b>	<b>40 493</b>

**University teaching staff**

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Saudis</i>		<i>Non-Saudis</i>		<i>Total</i>		<i>Overall total</i>
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Saudi</i>	<i>Non-Saudi</i>	
Professor	849	45	375	74	894	449	1 343
Associate Professor	1 326	189	643	172	1 515	815	2 330
Assistant Professor	3 076	1 316	2 393	662	4 392	3 055	7 447
Lecturer	1 338	1 587	1 105	210	2 925	1 315	4 240
Assistant	3 080	2 743	369	71	5 823	440	6 263
<b>Total</b>	<b>9 669</b>	<b>5 880</b>	<b>4 885</b>	<b>1 189</b>	<b>15 549</b>	<b>6 074</b>	<b>21 623</b>

19. **The report states that Royal Decree No. M/54 (29 Shawwal A.H. 1425), amending several articles of the Saudi Nationality Act to affirm the principle of equality between men and women in all matters relating to Saudi nationality, is to be reviewed with the Ministry of the Interior. Please provide an update on the status of this Decree, and indicate how this Decree will affect Saudi Arabia's reservation to article 9 (2) of the Convention.**

Royal Decree No. M/54 (29 Shawwal A.H. 1425) contains a number of positive provisions concerning the legal consequences of the marriage of a Saudi woman to a foreign man or a Saudi man to a foreign woman and the resultant consequences with regard to the nationality of the husband and the wife in both cases.

However, the Decree does not affect the Kingdom's reservation with regard to article 9 (2) of the Convention. This reservation was based upon one of the most important foundations of the Saudi Arabian Nationality Act, namely, the principle of non-recognition of dual nationality.

20. **Please provide data and information on the education levels and access to education of women and girls from rural areas, ethnic or other minorities and non-Saudi nationalities.**

The following tables show enrolment numbers by educational stage in the various regions. The fact that girls and boys in remote regions receive material compensation for attending school has contributed to encouraging families in these regions to enrol children of both sexes in schools.

#### Government kindergarten data, A.H. 1426-1427

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Enrolled</i>	<i>Newly enrolled</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Workers</i>
Mixed	1 512	104 999	12 614	10 655	1 523	2 977

#### Primary stage data, A.H. 1426-1427

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Enrolled</i>	<i>Newly enrolled</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Workers</i>
Boys	6 603	1 257 277	201 196	104 171	3 023	10 294
Girls	6 714	1 175 783	196 883	111 851	6 505	16 399
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 317</b>	<b>2 433 060</b>	<b>398 079</b>	<b>216 022</b>	<b>9 528</b>	<b>26 693</b>

#### Middle stage data, A.H. 1426-1427

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Enrolled</i>	<i>Newly enrolled</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Workers</i>
Boys	3 844	584 547	198 086	52 302	2 031	3 934
Girls	3 452	515 803	176 350	54 058	3 264	5 388
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 296</b>	<b>1 100 350</b>	<b>374 436</b>	<b>106 360</b>	<b>5 295</b>	<b>9 322</b>

#### Secondary stage data, A.H. 1426-1427

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Enrolled</i>	<i>Newly enrolled</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Workers</i>
Boys	2 207	538 350	178 530	39 324	1 379	2 196
Girls	2 189	462 451	152 772	45 374	2 574	3 336
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 396</b>	<b>1 000 801</b>	<b>331 302</b>	<b>84 698</b>	<b>3 953</b>	<b>5 532</b>

#### Special education data, A.H. 1426-1427

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Enrolled</i>	<i>Newly enrolled</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Workers</i>
Boys	967	17 262	5 419	5 200	139	330
Girls	123	5 029	1 228	1 937	156	348
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 090</b>	<b>22 291</b>	<b>6 697</b>	<b>7 137</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>678</b>

21. The report indicates that curricula for girls and boys are at the point of being standardized between the sexes from kindergarten through secondary

school levels. Please provide further information on this standardization, and its content at the different levels of schooling. Please elaborate in particular whether any measures are being taken to eliminate stereotypical attitude about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in textbooks, curricula and teacher training, to encourage girls to participate in non-traditional educational, vocational, or professional streams, and to open to women and girls all areas of study in the scientific and technical areas.

Curricula and textbooks for boys and girls have been standardized, and the stereotyping which appeared in some subjects has been amended.

22. Please provide statistics on women's and girls' participation in different fields and areas of study, as compared to men's and boys', in colleges and universities.

**Student enrolment by educational level (Government), A.H. 1425-1426 (A.D. 2004-2005)**

<i>Educational level</i>	<i>Male students</i>	<i>Female students</i>
Intermediate diploma	67 049	17 943
Baccalaureate	178 450	327 482
Degree	1 351	319
Masters	5 562	3 579
Doctorate	1 139	893
<b>Total</b>	<b>253 551</b>	<b>350 216</b>

23. The report notes that Royal Order No. 651/M (8 Jumada II A.H. 1422) widened the scope of scholarship grants in areas in which women work and where the demands of work require qualification through overseas study. Please clarify whether women have the same access as men to scholarship grants or opportunities for overseas study in all fields or occupations in accordance with article 10 (d) of the Convention, and provide statistics disaggregated by sex and field or occupation on women's levels of participation in overseas study, and scholarships for such studies.

The following tables indicate the extent to which Saudi women have access to a good number of educational opportunities abroad.

**Newly enrolled students studying abroad, A.H. 1425-1426 (A.D. 2004-2005)**

<i>Studying abroad</i>	<i>Male students</i>	<i>Female students</i>
Government grant	1 454	659
Own expense	2 629	640
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 083</b>	<b>1 299</b>

**Enrolled students studying abroad, A.H. 1425-1426 (A.D. 2004-2005)**

<i>Studying abroad</i>	<i>Male students</i>	<i>Female students</i>
Government grant	4 648	2 231
Own expense	7 077	1 772
<b>Total</b>	<b>11 725</b>	<b>4 003</b>

24. **According to the report, the illiteracy rate for women (25.18 per cent) is more than double that of men (11.7 per cent). Please describe the measures in place to address illiteracy in women and the results achieved through implementation of such measures.**

In view of the high female illiteracy rate, the State has opened more schools for women in order to enable a greater number of them to enrol therein.

The following table shows this clearly.

**Adult education, A.H. 1426-1427 (A.D. 2004-2005)**

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Enrolled</i>	<i>Newly enrolled</i>
Male	944	22 637	6 942
Female	25 818	62 441	2 844
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 788</b>	<b>85 078</b>	<b>32 760</b>

25. **Please provide information and statistics on women's labour force participation in the informal sector, including non-Saudi citizens. Please also describe the types of legal, social or other services and protections available to women in the informal sector, and any measures to increase their availability and accessibility.**

With regard to the social and legal services and protection available to women in the informal sector, women enjoy — on an equal footing with men — all of the rights and guarantees conferred by the regulations and mechanisms in force and, indeed, are afforded special consideration.

It should perhaps be noted here that the new Judicial Code was recently enacted, providing for the establishment of labour courts competent to deal with the cases of workers in the unofficial private sector, to allow them to claim their rights.

Moreover, the Labour Code promulgated recently includes numerous positive provisions concerning male and female workers.

26. **The report indicates that the Social Security Act and Social Insurance Act apply to women as well as men, and that benefits are available to women, particularly women “with no male provider”. Please clarify whether women have the same rights as men to receive pensions or other benefits under these acts, and provide statistics disaggregated by sex regarding the provision of services and benefits under these acts.**

The Social Insurance Act refers to a number of considerations which contribute to the preferential treatment of women with regard to social insurance, through:

**The establishment of women's units and sections in the offices of the General Organization for Social Insurance**

Aware of the need to serve different groups of women, the organization established women's sections, starting with its three largest offices in Riyadh, Jiddah and Al-Sharqiyyah in which the main body of work is done. These sections started work on 1 Ramadan A.H. 1424, in implementation of Ministerial Decision No. 120 of 12 Rabi' II A.H. 1425 on increasing employment opportunities for women and the spheres of their employment. Paragraph two of the said Decision in particular requires all governmental authorities providing services relating to women to establish women's units and sections, on a needs basis. The organization adopted measures for the implementation of this Decision which are sensitive to the requirements and the growth in numbers of female clients and their geographic distribution throughout the Kingdom, such that women's sections will be established in the remainder of its offices according to a schedule and, ultimately, will provide services to women in all of its offices. To date, women's sections exist in four of the organization's offices. The measures also take into account the allocation of women's sections in the office buildings of the organization which are currently being established and those which will be established in the future.

**Legal rights particular to women under the Act**

The Act does not discriminate between men and women with regard to the registration of contributors and the applicability of the Act to companies. Any person covered by the Act, whether male or female, must be registered and the Act affords women the opportunity to obtain the benefits which it provides, once they are registered, on an equal basis. However, the Act respects the nature of women and gives them special benefits and compensations, the most important of which are the following:

- Whereas men, in order to receive a retirement pension, must contribute for 120 months and reach the age of 60, women have the right to request a retirement pension at the age of 55, after payment of 120 months of contributions
- Women have the right to request a lump sum payment at any time they wish when they leave work, whereas men must reach the age of 60
- With regard to family members, a number of differences between the entitlements of men and women exist, as follows
  - o The entitlement of a widow to her share of her deceased husband's pension continues without any conditions, whereas a widower is not entitled to the pension of his deceased wife, unless he is unable to earn
  - o Pension payments to female family members of the deceased continue without any conditions (unless they marry, in which case pension payments cease and they receive a marriage grant equivalent to 18 months of monthly pension income; in the case of divorce, they are entitled to restoration of their pension payments), whereas payments to

male family members cease when they reach 21 years of age and may be extended to the age of 26 if they are completing their studies

### Implementation of the Act

In order to implement the Act on behalf of those whom its provisions address and in an attempt to prevent employers from avoiding registration of their male and female employees, the organization has cooperated with the Ministry of Labour to the effect that an employer submitting a request to the Ministry for any service (recruitment) must present a certificate of insurance, which attests that he has registered all of his employees, male and female, in the system. This has led to an increase in the numbers of registered male and female contributors and, in particular, female employees in hospitals, medical centres and private schools. Moreover, the organization has cooperated with a number of other government authorities to implement comparable measures, which has raised the level of coverage.

### Statistics relating to women contributors to and beneficiaries of the system

- The number of female contributors to the system as of 30 Shawwal A.H. 1428 was 104,914.
- The average growth in the number of female contributors over the past three years is approximately 15 per cent.

### Number of beneficiaries receiving monthly pensions and the average value of those pensions as of 30 Shawwal A.H. 1428, corresponding to November 2007

<i>Type of benefit</i>	<i>Number of beneficiaries</i>	<i>Value of monthly pensions</i>
Retirement pensions	3 913	8 252 587
Occupational and non-occupational disability pensions	680	1 353 961
Female family member pensions	86 449	57 619 641
<b>Total</b>	<b>91 042</b>	<b>67 226 189</b>

- Approximately 3,000 women receive a marriage grant annually. The total value of these grants is approximately 25 million riyals annually.
- In addition, some female beneficiaries receive lump sum payments payable to beneficiaries (and their families) when they are ineligible for monthly pensions. In the last year (A.H. 1427), a total of 40 million riyals was paid to approximately 4,000 female beneficiaries.

### Grievances

- Any contributor or beneficiary (male or female) or employer may appeal against the decisions of the Organization before its governor, and against decisions of the governor to the Board of Directors.
- Any beneficiaries or contributors (male or female) may appeal against the decisions of primary medical boards to the Medical Appeals Board, which is a

neutral, independent committee on which the Organization is not represented and over which it has no authority.

**27. The report notes that the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry have been charged with studying maternity leave for working women in the private sector. Please provide an update on this study and indicate whether any legislation has been proposed or other actions taken to enhance maternity leave protections in the private sector, and provide statistical information on the prevalence and use of maternity leave in the public and private sectors.**

The study referred to in question 27 is in its final stages.

**28. Please provide information and data on the access to health services for women and girls from rural areas, ethnic, religious or other minorities and non-Saudi nationalities, including migrant women, and on maternal mortality and morbidity rates for all women, including trends over time.**

Rural women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enjoy the same benefits to which urban women have access. Rural areas in the Kingdom may be considered the same as urban areas in terms of availability of health and education services, including university education for both men and women. Rural areas also have branches of Government departments and banking services available depending upon the size of the community.

There is also a proliferation of development and social service centres and charitable associations and foundations in these areas which attend to the needs of women in particular and the family in general, by raising the health, social, psychological and educational awareness levels of women and teaching them various skills. This is covered in detail in the report.

Health services are provided to women and girls in rural areas through primary health care centres, of which there are currently a total of 1,925 throughout the Kingdom, most of which serve rural areas, in addition to services offered by nearby hospitals.

It should be kept in mind that primary health care centres provide comprehensive health services to women and girls without discrimination. The Kingdom is also now implementing a health insurance system for non-Saudis in order to ensure their access to integrated and comprehensive health services. The expansion of such services has had the effect of improving public health by lowering the rates of most diseases, which has had a positive impact on health in general and women's health in particular, in which area progress has been achieved in recent years.

Average female life expectancy: 74.1 years

Health care for pregnant women: 96 per cent

Percentage of births under medical supervision: 96 per cent

Maternal mortality: 1.46 per 10,000

Infant mortality: 18.6 per 1,000

Under-five mortality: 21.7 per 1,000



29. The report states that the Government implemented a rural woman pioneer project in 2000 which aimed to raise awareness of health and social issues among rural women, and assist them in acquiring certain skills. Please provide information on the situation of rural women in Saudi Arabia and the impact of this project, including data and trends since 2000 on rural women's education levels, health, participation in the formal and informal labour sectors, access to loans and financial credit, and participation in the country's social and political life. Please include data showing the rates of women's participation as compared to men's in the above areas.

### **The Rural Woman Pioneer Project**

#### **Origin of the project**

The idea of the Rural Woman Project arose in A.H. 1406 from the basic concept of the principle of social service (to raise the social level of all individuals in all regards, remove most obstacles and provide a major boost in awareness in all areas, in order to enable them to contribute, advance and, ultimately, innovate). Women's charitable associations operate on the basis of volunteerism, with some professional staff. No matter how active any association is, it is impossible to maintain complete coverage with its services. Therefore, the goal of providing services to a rural society comes up against the problem of delivery. The Women's South Association had no alternative but to implement the idea of training rural women to act as the link between their community and the Association, any Government agency, or the private sector.

#### **Project implementation**

The idea entered the implementation stage in A.H. 1409. The project met with great popularity among the local people and enjoyed good cooperation from the General Presidency for Girls' Education, which provide some female experts to teach the curriculum and open a number of schools in which the project could be implemented.

#### **Project goals**

1. Improving the health, social and family status of rural women.
2. Training a group of rural women pioneers to implement the awareness and education programmes of the project, and to serve as a link between the Association and its rural beneficiaries. In order to achieve this objective, the Rural Woman Pioneer Project has set a number of goals that may be summarized as follows:
  - Spreading religious awareness among rural women and girls
  - Informing people about Government and non-governmental services and how to benefit from them
  - Informing people about harmful health and social practices and how to avoid them
  - Encouraging rural women to make use of the resources of their environment, employ their time working in small crafts and develop new skills in sewing and handicrafts.

**Project assessment**

An assessment was made of the project at each stage in order to eliminate any shortfalls that might emerge in the course of implementing the programme. It became apparent during the later stages of programme implementation that it was not keeping pace with rapid social development. The Association's board of directors decided to develop the curriculum and assigned that task to the King Khalid University Social Research and Study Centre, which has focused on development of the curriculum with a view to strengthening and preserving balance within the family.

**The initial exploratory phase after development**

1. This phase took place at the Women's South Association headquarters in the Wardatayn neighbourhood in the region of Abha in A.H. 1427.
2. This phase graduated 39 women pioneers.

**Proposal for the implementation of the Rural Pioneer Woman Project**

After developing the project, we studied the extent of the change that occurred during the exploratory implementation of the project's initial phase, at the headquarters of the Association, its suitability to the current situation and synchrony with the development of society. In order for the largest segment of society to benefit from the project, we propose the following:

1. The implementation of the project in the villages in which it has already been implemented;
2. Implementation of the project in schools that are teaching the literacy curriculum;
3. Incorporation of the project — in terms of time only — into the literacy curriculum by setting aside a certain portion of the school day to teach the pioneer woman curriculum;
4. Only the basic elements of the rural pioneer woman curriculum are included in the literacy curriculum. However, after the rural pioneer woman curriculum was developed by the Social Research and Study Centre at King Khalid University those subjects were gone into in greater depth, with a view to benefiting the family and maintaining its stability;
5. The implementation of the programme by the Association, by women specialists in the aforementioned areas;
6. Conduct research and study that would contribute to the formulation of rural development plans in the future, and identify and solve problems facing women which prevent them from fulfilling their role;
7. To inquire into the situation of elderly and infirm women and to provide them with services through the Association or other organizations.

**The rural pioneer woman training programme includes the following curricula:**

**1. Social curriculum**

This includes courses on family, country, work and the socialization of children.

**2. Health curriculum**

- Understanding the various vaccinations for children;
- First aid;
- Understanding certain diseases and how to prevent them.

**3. Religious curriculum**

- Monotheism;
- Understanding what the greatest sins are;
- Providing children with a proper Islamic education.

**4. Home economics curriculum**

This includes the provision of essential information on home economics.

**Phases in the implementation of the project:**

By the grace of God, the project was implemented in 10 villages between A.H. 1411 and A.H. 1423 and graduated 296 pioneer women.

**Phase one**

The project was launched in the al-Sawda region at the headquarters of the Saqqa schools for girls. The villages served were al-Sawda, al-Saqqa, al-Aziza, Ayn al-Dhibah, al-Souq and al-Waljah. This phase graduated 17 pioneer women.

**Phase two**

The second phase took place in the al-Sha`af region at the headquarters of the al-Masqi schools for girls. The villages served were al-Masqi, Al Sarhan, Al Muray`, Tamniyah, Bani Jabrah, Adada, Al Mutayr and al-Qar`a'. This phase graduated 31 pioneer women.

**Phase three**

This phase took place in the villages of Al Ya`la. Literacy programmes were introduced and included the memorization of short surahs from the Koran, numeracy, reading and writing. This phase graduated 35 pioneer women.

**Phase four**

This phase took place in the Mahayil Asir region in view of its distance from the Association's facilities and because of the people's need for assistance. This phase graduated 45 pioneer women.

**Phase five**

This phase took place in the Tabab region and graduated 30 pioneer women.

**Phase six**

This phase took place in the al-Shalfa' region and graduated 30 pioneer women.

**Phase seven**

This phase took place in the city of Sultan and graduated 14 pioneer women.

**Phase eight**

This phase took place in the Wardatayn neighbourhood in the Abha region and graduated 38 pioneer women.

**Phase nine**

This phase took place in the al-Namis al-Asfal neighbourhood in the Abha region and graduated 35 pioneer women.

**Phase ten**

This phase took place in the al-Namis al-'A`la neighbourhood in the Abha region and graduated 21 pioneer women.

**Project benefits:**

1. The rural pioneer women became links between the Association and the inhabitants of the villages in which the project was implemented;
2. The infirm and elderly were identified and Association services were extended to them;
3. We were able to follow up on the cases receiving social services from the Association.

**Project benefits to the areas of implementation:**

1. A course on the memorization of the Noble Koran was given in al-Masqi and Mahayil Asir;
2. Requests were made to establish literacy schools in Al Ya`la, al-Shalfa' and Tabab;
3. Requests to pave certain areas and roads were submitted to municipal offices;
4. Cases that citizens brought to the attention of the woman pioneers were studied, and financial and in-kind assistance was given. Some cases were referred to the orphan support project;
5. Telephone services were extended to the al-Sha`af and al-Masqi regions;
6. Municipal services were improved in the al-Sha`af and al-Masqi regions;

7. A course on sewing and pattern-cutting was given in al-Masqi and Mahayil Asir.

There have been many other similar projects such as:

- The local communities development project (sustainable development to serve neighbourhoods and villages) in the al-Qasim region, the mother and child education programme and the revolving credit programme to support productive families;
- Projects to train and qualify young women for work and others to train them in certain traditional handicrafts were implemented in the al-Jawf region. Men, as members of the family, also benefit from those centres and associations inasmuch as the family is the focus of such centres.

The State is currently making great efforts at all levels, within the context of the Islamic sharia, to support and enable women and to raise their level of awareness in all areas of life.

**30. The report mentions the formation of “courts of personal status” with responsibility for ruling on all matters related to personal status. Please clarify the proportion of women judges in these courts. Please explain whether women have equal rights with men with respect to their legal capacity, and access to and participation in proceedings before these courts. Please also explain any distinctions between women and men in personal status law with respect to marriage, divorce, child guardianship and custody, inheritance, property ownership, the right to decision-making in the family and economic matters, and choice of residence and employment.**

Women enjoy the same rights as men, but there are no women judges in those courts. However, there is a programme to consult female social specialists in cases involving women. Those specialists study cases and prepare reports for the judge before consideration of the case begins. There are no distinctions between men and women in terms of rights and responsibilities. All of the issues raised in question 30 are addressed by the Islamic sharia and are not subject to interpretation, yet each provision is based on wisdom. For example, a man’s inheritance is twice that of a woman. However, he is responsible for supporting his family regardless of his wife’s financial situation; she is not obliged to spend on her family, even if she is wealthy or works. Yet this is not the rule in respect of inheritance; men do not always inherit more than women. There are many instances in which women have inherited more than men. Men and women are equal in respect of property ownership and they both have every right to work and engage in all economic activities. Women retain all of their rights in that regard and men have no right to impose any control over them in this area. Residence and employment are chosen through consultation within the family and there are no laws governing such matters.

It is worth noting that the regulatory measures of the judicial and dispute resolution systems recently approved by the King stipulate the creation of a high-level scholarly body to draft the law on business transactions and the Civil Status Code, in order that the courts might abide by them when considering cases.

**31. The report stipulates that “the Islamic shariah is the legal framework for the social laws and, accordingly, a woman has the right to choose a husband**

**and to enter into marriage only with her consent". Please clarify the role of the courts with regard to marriage and family practices and customs, and describe the measures, including training, in place to ensure knowledge about the Convention and compliance by the judiciary and the legal profession with Saudi Arabia's obligations under the Convention. Please indicate the minimum legal age of marriage for women and men, and whether the minimum legal age is the same for women and men and conforms with the legal age of majority as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

Under the Islamic sharia, a woman has the right to agree to an offer of marriage. In other words, her consent must be obtained. If she is forced to marry a man she does not wish to marry, then she has the right to request separation from that man. The courts have a large role to play in that regard. A woman who has good cause not to continue in matrimonial life should petition the courts, which will then determine if there are grounds to end the marriage.

In respect of training, matters of marriage and divorce are clearly defined in the Islamic sharia. A practising judge will have obtained a specific qualification, followed by three years of training in the courts in order to be able to consider such cases.

There is no minimum legal age of marriage for men or women, however, it is preferable that both spouses are of the age of majority. The Committee, when considering this matter, should bear in mind that each country has environmental and physiological particularities, and it is known that the age of majority in the hot Eastern countries is lower than it is in the cold Western countries.

Extramarital sex is prohibited in Islam and is an offence punishable under the law. It is inconceivable to force any young woman or man to refrain from sex before reaching a certain age, inasmuch as sex is a need that all humans have on attaining the age of majority.

It is worth noting that demographic indicators show that, as a result of social awareness and the demands of life, the age of marriage is now above the minimum age required, which is 15 for women and 18 for men. In fact, we see that the age of marriage is delayed beyond the age of 20 years; whether for men or women.

**32. Please indicate any progress made towards accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Please also indicate any progress made towards acceptance of the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.**

In respect of accession to the Optional Protocol, a committee within the Commission on Human Rights composed of numerous government authorities is studying all of the conventions and protocols to which the Kingdom has not yet acceded. The Optional Protocol is one of those and is still being studied.