



United Arab Emirates

Statement by

**His Excellency Dr Anwar Mohammad Gargash
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs**

*Adoption of the UPR Working Group Report on the UAE
10th Session of the Human Rights Council*

Geneva, 19 March 2009

Thank you Mr President,

Mr President and members of the Human Rights Council, good morning,

It is a great pleasure to be back here to present the conclusions of the United Arab Emirates' Universal Periodic Review three months after the UAE presented its UPR report.

The UAE reiterates its belief in this process as a promising United Nations General Assembly mechanism to constructively promote the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In tackling its human rights challenges, the UAE is resolute about improving its own record and contributing effectively at the global level. This aspiration stems from its cultural heritage and religious values, which enshrine justice, equality and tolerance.

I am honoured to present today the "UAE's Action Plan to Implement Voluntary Commitments and Accepted UPR Recommendations on Human Rights Issues", henceforth referred to as 'Action Plan'.

It is worth highlighting that apart from making nine voluntary commitments to better address human rights issues, the UAE received 74 recommendations in December, which were given due consideration. While 36 were accepted and 17 considered for detailed study, the rest did not enjoy the country's support because of several social, cultural and legal factors.

Through a process of interactive dialogue, involving a number of officials and organisations, including those

belonging to federal and local governments, and civil society organisations (CSOs), the Action Plan was designed to determine the scope of work, take follow-up action on the implementation process and submit periodic status reports on the work accomplished.

Mr President,

Among the steps taken to realise Voluntary Commitments and recommendations since December are:

- The UAE ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, in February.
- A study prepared by a government committee has been presented to the Cabinet to consider acceding to the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as protocols of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the additional protocol. These are in the process of being ratified.
- A series of human rights-related workshops has been initiated to benefit from international best practices. A two-day workshop was held in February in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration to improve the knowledge base of the UAE law enforcement officials dealing with human trafficking. The UAE is also working with the International Labour Organisation to tackle concerns

related to temporary contractual workers. One such initiative is the "Decent Work Country Program".

- The government has initiated a detailed study of human rights commissions in various countries to help formulate its own national institution, in line with the Paris Principles.
- A national media campaign to enhance public awareness about human trafficking is being worked out.
- Two new related institutions have recently been set up – the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior and the Dubai Community Development Authority.

Mr President,

The follow-up action on accepted recommendations mentioned under Paragraph 91 of the *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review* dated 9 December 2008 could be categorized as follows:

1. *In relation to Recommendations 2, 3, 6, 25, 32, and 36 dealing with strengthening human rights mechanisms*, the UPR Committee is studying various measures that are in line with its beliefs and traditions, particularly Islamic *Sharia*, and in coordination with the concerned authorities. These will be reviewed by the Federal National Council, the country's parliament. Further, workshops and training sessions would be conducted to draw up a concrete national strategy to spread a human rights culture.
 - An action plan to raise awareness on human rights-related labour issues was outlined by the Ministry of Labour in January. The new initiative

is coordinated by 17 government departments and includes the private sector too.

- Official invitations have been sent to special rapporteurs on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The visits are expected to take place this year.
2. *On Recommendations 4, 8, 19 and 34*, the UAE is actively considering introducing human rights education for students in Grades 1 to 12. Further, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Higher Colleges of Technology, in collaboration with the Embassy of Switzerland in the UAE, is organising a series of lectures that will continue until May. Other programmes are in the design stage as we speak.
 3. *With regard to dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) referred to in Recommendations 10 and 31*, the UPR Committee has encouraged their participation in both the build-up and compilation of the UPR Report, as well as the Action Plan. Further. The Ministry of Social Affairs will take advantage of the annual interaction with CSOs to establish a standing forum to facilitate dialogue and understanding.
 - In February, Du, the country's integrated telecom operator, and the Ministry of Social Affairs jointly launched *Musahama*, a comprehensive Web portal for CSOs in the UAE.

Mr President,

4. *With regard to rights of temporary contractual workers mentioned in Recommendations 7, 9, 14, 18, 21, 22, 27, 28 and 35,* the UAE Ministries of Labour and Interior continue to strengthen laws that improve the working and living conditions of expatriate workers. A domestic workers law, which will positively impact women, is in a very advanced stage.

- The UAE will proactively cooperate with labour-exporting countries and sign MoUs that enhance the welfare of all expatriate workers. A beginning has already been made with the launch of a pilot project that focuses on the difficulties faced by expatriate workers and ways of overcoming them.
- The government has created an agency to protect the interests of expatriate workers to monitor complaints about unpaid wages and regulate wage-related conflicts.

5. *On Recommendations 16 and 23,* the UPR Committee, in coordination with the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking, will strengthen Federal Law 51 and be part of all bilateral and international efforts to combat this crime. In other efforts:

- Fifteen law enforcement officials received training at the Belarus Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and in January, the Cabinet issued orders to add more prosecutors to the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking.

- In January again, 80 police and judicial officials held a brainstorming session to discuss the national strategy on human trafficking.
 - All these efforts are beginning to have an impact – at least 15 cases, with a minimum of six convictions, were registered last year as opposed to 10 cases in 2007.
 - Reflecting its international cooperation to combat human trafficking, the "Global Report on Trafficking Persons" – released in February by the United Nations Office on Drugs – was funded through a donation from Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.
 - On the issue of child camel jockeys, which the UAE considers it a closed case, the Ministries of Social Affairs and Interior, in coordination with the country's Special Committee for Rehabilitation of Camel Jockeys and UNICEF, continue to follow-up with the concerned countries.
 - In future, the UAE will invite special rapporteurs on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, to visit the country.
6. *On Recommendations 13 and 30*, the UAE will study ways of further protecting women's rights. This would be done in coordination with relevant authorities, especially the General Women's Union, a focal point for all women-related issues in the country.

- The Ministry of Social Affairs is also following up this issue and taking steps to ensure that women-related human rights issues are respected, particularly by launching awareness drives.
 - The resources of the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children and the Abu Dhabi Shelter, which were established in 2007 and 2008 respectively, are increasingly being tapped into.
7. *To realise Recommendations 11 and 12 pertaining to children's rights*, the Ministry of Social Affairs -- in consultation with the concerned departments and CSOs -- is in the process of studying a draft law to guarantee better protection for children as contained in Article 3 of the Child Convention. It also stipulates that the UAE should have juvenile courts.
- An initiative to create the first local CSO to protect the rights of children was announced recently.
 - A department has been set up for the welfare of orphans
8. *With regard to media freedom in Recommendations 1, 17 and 20*, a new draft law approved in February by the Federal National Council protects journalists from being imprisoned. It will be dealt with as a civil case, not criminal and does not make it mandatory for journalists to reveal their sources. The 45-article law replaces the 1980 law and specifically refers in Article 2 to the freedom of expression and opinion, whether written, verbal or by other means and, in Article 3, to the fact that there is no prior censorship of licenced

media. This draft law is awaiting constitutional clearance.

9. *On issues related to development of remote regions mentioned in Recommendations 15, 26 and 33*, the government has given due attention by implementing a number of vital projects. A committee set up in 2005 continues to study the infrastructure needs of remote areas and ways of implementing them, including projects related to construction of houses, roads, health centres and schools.
10. *On Recommendation 24 related to knowledge exchange* the UPR Committee, in coordination with government bodies, is working on the modalities of organising workshops and seminars with interested countries in order to share and learn from the experiences of others.

Mr President,

Further, following a review of 17 recommendations that were categorised as being 'under study', the UAE identified nine of them as being in direct contradiction with the UAE's Constitution, religious code, traditional values and national interest, hence not enjoying the country's support. These include Recommendations 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 17 mentioned under Paragraph 92 of the *Report of the Working Group*. The remaining eight recommendations – 2, 3, 4, 10, 13, 14, 15 and 16 – continue to be under study. Considering their importance, the government and CSOs are debating these issues to determine future course of action.

In order to translate the UAE's plans into action and further improve its human rights record, the UPR Committee will follow up on the Action Plan.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the UAE is proud of its human rights achievements in a short span of time. But, it also humbly realises that much more needs to be done, and is ready to do the same both individually and at the global level.

Thank you for your attention.

ANNEX

Mechanism adopted to draw up UAE's "Action Plan to Implement Voluntary Commitments and Accepted UPR Recommendations on Human Rights Issues"

- 1 The UAE distributed the voluntary commitments and recommendations to the relevant government bodies.
- 2 The concerned entities coordinated with their relevant departments in reviewing and prescribing ways of implementing the voluntary commitments and recommendations that have been accepted.
- 3 Ministries coordinated with the concerned bodies in order to chart out the following:
 - Set a timeframe to implement the Action Plan
 - Determine the course of action to implement the Plan
 - Prepare towards submitting periodic progress reports to the UPR Committee
 - Devise a way of consulting and incorporating the views of civil society organisations (CSOs) in implementing the Plan.
- 4 Government departments or ministries were instructed to implement the voluntary commitments and accepted recommendations under the supervision of the UPR Committee by adopting the following procedure:
 - Determine the scope of work
 - Follow-up action on the implementation process
 - Submit periodic status reports on the work accomplished
- 5 Effort under way to establish a central database – monitored by the UPR Committee – that will record the progress made on the voluntary commitments and recommendations.
- 6 An official body will determine the course for the CSOs to participate in the Action Plan