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Oman

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I. Introduction

1. Oman is submitting its third national periodic report, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251, with Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1, 16/21 and 17/119, and with the guidelines for drafting reports under the universal periodic review mechanism.

2. The report covers the developments that have taken place in the promotion and protection of human rights between 2016 and 2020, which reflect the fulfilment by Oman of its obligations as well as its follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations it received during the second cycle of the universal periodic review before the Human Rights Council on 5 November 2015. Those recommendations were adopted by the Council under resolution 31/111 during its forty-sixth meeting held on 17 March 2016. Of the recommendations it received, Oman accepted 233, partially accepted 169, noted 28 and rejected 36 as being inconsistent with its system of values and legislation.

3. The present report supplements the plan of action that Oman began to roll out after the adoption of its first report, the essential focus of which is how gradually but effectively to integrate a human rights system and harmonize it with the country's specific circumstances and challenges. Currently, Oman is continuing to add to its already outstanding record of achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights, both contributing to and interacting with international best practices in that regard.

4. The report is being submitted in the extraordinary circumstances that have arisen as a result of the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives across the world, threatened public health care and paralyzed economic, social and cultural life. For its part, Oman has not failed to implement any policies or measures that might serve to combat the pandemic and limit its impact. Acting in accordance with exalted human rights principles, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik – may God keep and preserve him – has formed a high-ranking commission made up of senior State officials to study a mechanism to deal with developments arising from the spread of coronavirus. The commission has taken a number of effective decisions intended to address the diffusion of the virus, providing free testing and treatment, both for Omanis and persons residing on national territory, and ensuring that all people without exception receive essential supplies free of charge during the period of anti-virus lockdown. The Ministry of Health has launched virtual clinics at the Royal Hospital to ensure that patients can continue to receive health care remotely. The Ministry has also opened a hotline to receive queries from pregnant women and has continued to expand its immunization programme, which has a coverage in excess of 99 per cent according to the latest statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, Oman has responded to a call from the United Nations to release prisoners and the State has met the costs of returning foreign inmates to their countries of origin in order to help contain the spread of coronavirus.

II. Methodology and consultation process followed to draft the national report

A. Methodology for following up on the review

5. Since its second report was adopted, Oman has been making every effort to act on the outcomes of the review. Pursuant to Council of Ministers Decree No. 22 of 2016, a legal committee was created to follow up on the recommendations Oman accepted following the submission of its second report. That committee has intensified its efforts to monitor the implementation of the recommendations made by the Human Rights Council. The membership of the committee includes representatives from a number of government agencies and civil society organizations, and the committee itself operates – in the context of a national plan and in cooperation with stakeholders – to monitor the fulfilment by Oman of its obligations under the universal periodic review.

B. Report drafting and consultation process

6. The committee was involved in the consultation process that surrounded the drafting of the national report. It held a series of meetings and organized a number of workshops and seminars with civil society institutions and government agencies in Oman in order to discuss proposals regarding the best ways to follow up on the review and to prepare the third report. That participatory approach is reflected in the form and content of the report.

7. For nearly five years Oman has been diligently striving to act on the recommendations it accepted, within the framework of a comprehensive national vision and of a number of basic parameters. A plan of action was adopted and rolled out after the adoption of the first report, the essential focus of which is how gradually but effectively to integrate a human rights system and harmonize it with the country's specific circumstances and challenges. Currently, Oman is continuing to add to its already outstanding record of achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights, both contributing to and interacting with international best practices in that regard.

III. Normative, constitutional and institutional developments relating to the promotion and protection of human rights

8. The concern of Oman to promote and protect human rights has emerged in its participation in discussions about human rights treaties and protocols at meetings of the United Nations and in the fact that it has ratified or acceded to numerous international human rights treaties and their attendant protocols. It has also fulfilled the concomitant international obligations by submitting initial and periodic reports on its commitments under those treaties and protocols then discussing the reports before the relevant human rights treaty bodies. It also monitors the implementation of the observations and recommendations issued by the treaty bodies.

9. Oman has sought to integrate human rights into its legislation and to bring domestic law into line with the international treaties it has ratified or to which it has acceded.

A. Normative developments and human rights treaties

10. Acting on recommendations it accepted when discussing its second national report under the universal periodic review in 2015, Oman has acceded to three important international human rights treaties:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, under Royal Decree No. 46 of 2020;
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, under Royal Decree No. 44 of 2020;
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, under Royal Decree No. 45 of 2020.

11. In accordance with pledges it made when discussing its second report in 2015, the reservation to article 15 (4) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was withdrawn under Royal Decree No. 3 of 2019. Moreover, the general reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as reservations to its articles 7, 9, 21 and 30, have all been withdrawn.

B. Constitutional developments for the promotion of human rights

12. The Basic Law of State (Constitution) guarantees the rights and freedoms of individuals within a framework of the rule of law, and it emphasizes justice, equality and fairness as fundamental principles that regulate and underpin State policy.

Smooth transition of power in Oman

13. One of the most important provisions, contained in article 6 of the Basic Law of State, is that of a mechanism for the transition of power if the position of Sultan (Head of State) falls vacant. In fact, the country has recently gone through a unique experience of the transfer of power under the provisions of that article as, on the morning of Saturday 11 January 2020, Oman and the world entire awoke to the news that His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said had died.

14. Oman and the international community witnessed a smooth transition of power as His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik was chosen to succeed the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. The transition attracted both local and international praise, which is an important indicator as to the effectiveness of institutions in Oman, the maturity of Omani society and the confidence it feels in the continuity of recent national development and the ability to meet future challenges.

15. The Basic Law of State envisages secure and effective protection for human rights, particularly in chapter III. Respect for international and regional treaties and for recognized rules of international law are among the guiding principles of State policy in this area.

16. Under articles 72, 76 and 80 of the Basic Law of State, international treaties ratified by Oman are considered as part of current domestic laws and acquire legal force after ratification or accession. No institution in the State may issue rules, regulations, decrees or instructions that violate the provisions of international treaties to which Oman is a party.

17. It should be pointed out that His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik – in the historic first address he gave when becoming Sultan on 11 January 2020 – stated that Oman will maintain its role as an active member of the United Nations Organization, one that respects the United Nations Charter and works with other Member States towards achieving international peace and security, as well as economic prosperity for all countries of the world. This is to take place on the basis of the great heritage left behind by the late Sultan, may God bless him, the essence of which is a commitment to friendship and cooperation with all and respect for charters, laws and treaties signed with other countries and organizations.

C. Legislative developments (royal decrees, laws, bills, regulations and decrees)

18. Acting upon the human rights principles constitutionally enshrined in the Basic Law of State and the international treaties and charters to which the country has acceded, legislators in Oman have ensured that such rights are protected in numerous pieces of domestic legislation. Many royal decrees, laws, regulations and decrees were issued in the period between 2016 and 2020, while other bills are in the course of being drafted, as outlined below:

(a) Royal decrees and laws already issued:

- Royal Decree No. 18 of 2016 to ratify a science and technology cooperation agreement signed between the Governments of Oman and of the United States of America;
- Royal Decree No. 23 of 2016 to change the name of the Human Rights Commission;
- Royal Decree No. 24 of 2016 to appoint the members of the Oman Human Rights Commission;
- Royal Decree No. 28 of 2016 to issue the statutes of the Institute of Public Administration;
- Royal Decree No. 30 of 2016 to issue the Anti-Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism Act;
- Royal Decree No. 41 of 2016 to approve the accession of Oman to the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions;

- Royal Decree No. 23 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of Royal Decree No. 48 of 2004 to establish the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Fund and issue its statutes;
- Royal Decree No. 7 of 2018 to issue the Criminal Code;
- Royal Decree No. 18 of 2018 to establish the Oman College of Health Sciences and the Higher Institute for Health Specializations, and issue their statutes;
- Royal Decree No. 22 of 2018 to introduce certain amendments to the Protection of Competition and Anti-Monopoly Act;
- Royal Decree No. 3 of 2019 to ratify the withdrawal of certain reservations Oman had to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Royal Decree No. 18 of 2019 to issue the Commercial Companies Act;
- Royal Decree No. 19 of 2019 to issue the Mineral Resources Act;
- Royal Decree No. 27 of 2019 regarding scientific fields and other specialized fields;
- Royal Decree No. 29 of 2019 to appoint the members of the Oman Human Rights Commission;
- Royal Decree No. 50 of 2019 to issue the Foreign Capital Investment Act;
- Royal Decree No. 51 of 2019 to issue the Privatization Act;
- Royal Decree No. 52 of 2019 to issue the Public-Private Sector Partnership Act;
- Royal Decree No. 55 of 2019 to issue the Statistics and Information Act;
- Royal Decree No. 66 of 2019 to establish the Tax Authority;
- Royal Decree No. 75 of 2019 to issue the Act regulating the exercise of the medical profession and auxiliary medical professions;
- Royal Decree No. 27 of 2020 to approve the accession of Oman to the Cooperative Agreement for Arab States in Asia for Research, Development and Training related to Nuclear Science and Technology (ARASIA);
- Royal Decree No. 44 of 2020 to approve the accession of Oman to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
- Royal Decree No. 45 of 2020 to approve the accession of Oman to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Royal Decree No. 46 of 2020 to approve the accession of Oman to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- Royal Decree No. 82 of 2020 to issue the Workers' Insurance Plan;
- Royal Decree No. 111 of 2020 to reconstitute the Council of Ministers following the appointment of three female members;
- Royal Decree No. 113 of 2020 regarding appointments, whereby four women were appointed to the position of Under-Secretary or to posts of equal standing.

(b) Draft legislation which is well advanced and which, it is hoped, will shortly be issued:

- A draft information act, into which existing laws on the media, publishing and printing have been integrated;
- A new draft labour code that includes more provisions and benefits consistent with international standards and practice;
- A draft domestic workers act setting forth the rights of that category of persons;
- A civil society associations act, which includes more explicit provisions regarding the formation and activity of such groups;

- Oman is playing an active part in the development of an Arab anti-hate law and may issue a national law in that connection in the future, if necessary;
- A new draft act for persons with disabilities that is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that takes account of international standards.

(c) **Regulations and decrees:**

- Decree No. 212 of 2016 to issue the regulations governing cultural initiatives;
- Decree No. 42 of 2016 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Printing and Publishing Act;
- Decree No. 29 of 2016 to issue the regulations setting forth the health requirements for public health-related activities;
- Decree No. 20 of 2016 to issue the regulations of the Environmental Affairs Department;
- Decree No. 38 of 2016 to issue the regulations regulating academic research in applied science faculties;
- Decree No. 140 of 2016 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing the provision of compensatory and assistive devices;
- Decree No. 140 of 2016 to issue the regulations governing the activity of social development committees;
- Decree No. 10 of 2016 form a committee to examine labour claims and define its terms of reference;
- Decree No. 217 of 2016 to regulate the employment of juveniles and the occupations in which they may be employed;
- Decree No. 330 of 2017 to establish the Oman Commission for International Humanitarian Law;
- Decree No. 26 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of Ministerial Decree No. 271 of 2006, which establishes the locations where rulings regarding visitation rights of minors can be enforced and the procedures relating to the enforcement of rulings and orders to hand over a minor or to exercise visitation rights, and the appropriate persons responsible;
- Decree No. 59 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Social Housing Act;
- Decree No. 234 of 2017 to issue the regulations governing matters relating to pupils at State-run schools;
- Decree No. 287 of 2017 to issue the regulations governing private schools;
- Decree No. 46 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing the establishment of habilitation centres for persons with disabilities;
- Decree No. 47 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing privately run family guidance and counselling centres;
- Decree No. 48 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing kindergartens;
- Decree No. 40 of 2017 to regulate part-time work;
- Decree No. 204 of 2017 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Foreigners' Residency Act;
- Decree No. 77 of 2017 to issue the implementing regulations of the Consumer Protection Act;

- Decree No. 1 of 2017 regarding procedures to implement Security Council resolutions issued under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and that concern the prevention and suppression of terrorism and the financing of terrorism;
- Decree No. 43 of 2018 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Printing and Publishing Act;
- Decree No. 172 of 2018 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing matters relating to pupils at State-run schools;
- Decree No. 95 of 2018 to issue the regulations governing the social solidarity account;
- Decree No. 179 of 2018 to issue the regulations governing human organ and tissue transplants;
- Decree No. 133 of 2018, dated 12 April 2018, to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing professional health and safety standards in establishments subject to the Labour Code;
- Decree No. 153 of 2018 to amend certain provisions of Ministerial Decree No. 40 of 2017 to regulate part-time work;
- Decree No. 270 of 2018 to issue the regulations governing the reporting of the absence from work of non-Omani workers;
- Decree No. 413 of 2018 to issue the regulations governing the electoral committees of the General Federation of Oman Workers;
- Decree No. 500 of 2018 regarding the system for the formation, registration and operation of trade unions, workers' federations and the General Federation of Oman Workers;
- Decree No. 129 of 2018 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Foreigners' Residency Act;
- Decree No. KH/3 of 2018 to establish a fund to assist persons who suffer physical injuries and the heirs of persons killed as a cause of vehicle accidents as well as to provide compensation for material damages arising therefrom, and issue its statutes;
- Decree No. 92 of 2019 to issue the implementing regulations of the Omani Nationality Act;
- Decree No. 105 of 2019 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing private schools;
- Decree No. 120 of 2019 to issue the regulations governing guardians' councils;
- Decree No. 247 of 2019 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing matters relating to pupils at State-run schools;
- Decree No. 57 of 2019 to issue the regulations governing studies at private institutions of higher education;
- Decree No. 120 of 2019 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing the National Council for Family Affairs;
- Decree No. 125 of 2019 to issue the implementing regulations of the Children's Code;
- Decree No. 35 of 2019 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Foreigners' Residency Act;
- Decree No. 20 of 2020 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Social Housing Act;
- Decree No. 115 of 2020 to regulate the employment of non-Omani workers to undertake cleaning work in private-sector facilities;
- Decree No. 127 of 2020 to regulate the employment of non-Omani workers in construction work and in brick factories;
- Decree No. 58 of 2020 to issue the regulations governing school transport facilities;

- Decree No. 157 of 2020 to amend certain provisions of the implementing regulations of the Foreigners' Residency Act.

D. National institutions for the protection of human rights

Oman Human Rights Commission

19. The Oman Human Rights Commission was established in 2008 under Royal Decree No. 124 of 2008 as a national institution with legal personality and administrative and financial autonomy. The State seeks to promote the Commission's activities to protect human rights, in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

20. The Commission examines observations regarding the country's human rights record made by other Governments, international bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and it coordinates with the competent authorities to take the necessary measures. The Commission also monitors any irregularities or violations and it receives reports relating to human rights in Oman, and seeks to address and resolve them in order to preserve the rights and freedoms of citizens and residents alike.

21. The Commission has set up a number of means whereby it can receive reports and complaints: a hotline, a WhatsApp account, the Commission's own website or in person at the Commission's headquarters.

22. The Commission plays an important role in the dissemination of a human rights culture throughout Oman via seminars, conferences and awareness-raising programmes in schools, colleges and universities. It also conducts studies and research, and it has run a number of human rights workshops in cooperation with civil society and the Government. The Commission is one of several remedial bodies – such as mediation and conciliation committees – that act alongside the courts.

National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking

23. Thanks to the role played by this Committee, Oman has made significant advances in the fight against human trafficking. The Committee is currently headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and its membership includes representatives from the competent governmental and non-governmental bodies. Since its creation in 2008, the Committee has played an effective leading role in combating this crime, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations inside Oman and with international organizations. Its most recent initiative is a national plan of action for the period 2018–2020. Thanks to these plans and strategies, Oman has been able to take several important steps over recent years, including:

- Awareness-raising campaigns, the largest of which was the "Al-Ihsan" campaign, launched in October 2017, which involved the dissemination of information via audiovisual media and printed booklets in various languages, as well as courses and lectures for groups most vulnerable to the offence of trafficking;
- Specialized training courses and workshops spread over the course of the year to instruct law enforcement personnel about how to combat human trafficking;
- An annual national symposium on human trafficking, held in in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and regional partners. The purpose of the event is to train and qualify officials and to build their capacity to deal with issues related to human trafficking, with the participation of various stakeholders;
- Establishing, inside law enforcement agencies, judicial and administrative divisions specializing in human trafficking offences;
- A recommendation to abolish the sponsorship system and to give foreign workers freedom to move from one employer to another, which led to a decision in that regard on the part of the Inspector-General of Police and Customs.

24. It should be pointed out that, under both law and practice in Oman, victims of human trafficking are guaranteed health care as well as legal and social support, free of charge. There is also a specially equipped shelter for such persons. The Royal Oman Police and other bodies run free hotlines via which victims are able to receive information, advice and support. Moreover, non-Omani victims are given leave to remain until all legal proceedings have been completed, if they so wish.

25. In order to support its partnership with the institutions of civil society, in December 2018 the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Omani Bar Association regarding free legal representation before national courts for victims of human trafficking, in order to help them obtain their rights. The Committee intends to continue to sign and implement such memorandums with other competent associations.

26. An anti-human trafficking task force was established in 2018 to ensure an immediate response and prompt support for victims. Moreover, under Decree No. 50 of 2017, a specialized anti-trafficking unit was set up in the Office of the Public Prosecution, as well as a human trafficking section in the courts and specialized units in the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour.

National Committee for Family Affairs

27. Oman attaches great importance to matters affecting the family and set up the National Committee for Family Affairs under Royal Decree No. 12 of 2007. The Committee is headed by the Minister for Social Development and members take a participatory approach to its activities. The Committee's remit covers a number of areas: coordinating the efforts made by State-run and voluntary bodies active in the field of family affairs; cooperation with other committees and commissions in the Arab world and abroad, and with family-related organizations; following up on the implementation of resolutions and recommendations emerging from international and regional conferences on the family; and expressing views on relevant international and regional treaties.

28. The rules of procedure of the National Committee for Family Affairs were issued pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 146 of 2012, which also included provision for a technical secretariat to support the Committee. The rules of procedure were updated under Ministerial Decree No. 120 of 2020.

Other national committees

29. A number of national committees responsible for monitoring the implementation of international human rights treaties ratified by Oman have continued to operate during the reporting period:

(a) **National follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.**

- This committee was established under Ministerial Decree No. 348 of 2005 then re-established under Ministerial Decree No. 130 of 2009 and Ministerial Decree No. 279 of 2012. It is headed by the Minister of Social Development and has a broad membership that includes representatives from various government bodies, the judiciary, the legislature and civil society. It not only follows up on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women but also drafts the periodic reports under that instrument. The department for women's affairs in the Ministry of Social Development acts as the committee's technical secretariat.

(b) **National committee for the welfare of persons with disabilities**

- The Care and Habilitation of Persons with Disabilities Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 63 of 2008 included provision for the establishment of a national committee for the welfare of persons with disabilities. The Act also guarantees that the committee is fully able to perform its tasks and functions through funding from the State Treasury.

- Ministerial Decree No. 193 of 2015 envisaged the creation of a technical committee for the welfare of persons with disabilities with a participatory membership drawn from the public sector, the private sector and civil society institutions involved with disability issues.

(c) **National follow-up committee on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

- A committee to follow up on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was set up under Ministerial Decree No. 56 of 2009, headed by the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development. That Decree was then amended by Ministerial Decree No. 127 of 2014. The committee has a participatory membership made up of representatives from governmental, private and civil society organizations concerned with children's rights.
- The committee has a range of tasks, which includes submitting proposals intended to achieve the principles enshrined in the Convention and following up on the comments and recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

(d) **Working group to monitor the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**

- A national working group has been established to monitor the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, pursuant to a decision by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs based on instructions from the Council of Ministers. The working group is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Convention, preparing periodic reports under the Convention, discussing those reports before the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and monitoring the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations. The working group makes recommendations and suggests measures intended to ensure compliance with the Convention.

(e) **Oman Commission for International Humanitarian Law**

- The Oman Commission for International Humanitarian Law was established under Decree No. 330 of 2017 of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is headed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and has a participatory membership made up of representatives from different government bodies.
- The Commission works to disseminate and spread awareness about the principles and objectives of international humanitarian law, both at the institutional level and among individuals, and to exchange information with other associations, organizations and groups that operate in the field of international humanitarian law. It also seeks to promote cooperation and ensure that the principles of international humanitarian law are duly applied in Oman, to coordinate between the competent bodies and to review legislation that has a bearing on international humanitarian law and make recommendations in that regard.

IV. Measures taken to implement the recommendations that emerged from the second cycle of the universal periodic review

30. As part of its implementation of the recommendations it received after submitting its second national report before the Human Rights Council on 5 November 2015, Oman issued the above-referenced royal decrees, which are linked to the country's accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In addition, Oman has pursued a policy aimed at the gradual realization of various human rights, and it has taken a number of steps and rolled out programmes and mechanisms aimed at achieving all human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights.

A. Economic, social and cultural rights

Right to work and to favourable conditions of work

31. Rules governing the right to work in the private sector – beginning with the relationship between the two contracting parties (employer and worker) – are all enshrined in the Labour Code. The contract itself covers all the rights and duties provided for in the Code, such as working hours, leave and periods of rest, all of which are consistent with the standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

32. The Workers' Insurance Plan was brought into being pursuant to Royal Decree No. 82 of 2020. It is an insurance system designed to address unforeseen conditions private-sector workers face and is one of the bulwarks to support and encourage work in that vital sector, and guarantees the rights of workers once their contracts of employment have expired.

33. Labour legislation in Oman makes no distinction between men and women in the guarantees it provides vis-à-vis the right to work and related matters such as wages and other financial benefits. Moreover, the legislation includes additional provisions to protect the interests of women, in view of their intrinsic nature.

34. The Labour Code ensures that women are protected from arbitrary dismissal on the grounds of illness, pregnancy or childbirth.

35. Oman has continued to take legislative and procedural steps to protect workers. To this end it has been rolling out policies and strategies designed to promote the rights of the workforce including, by way of example, applying a wage protection system for foreign workers; regulating contractual mechanisms by developing labour contracts that guarantee the rights of both worker and employer; regulating labour relations in coordination with the embassies of workers' countries of origin; and finding mechanisms and solutions that protect the rights of all parties, so that when workers arrive they are already fully aware of their rights and duties under the law.

36. Workers have the right to file a labour-related complaints with a view to settlement. If the parties involved in the dispute are unable to reach a settlement, the case is referred to the courts. No fees are applied in such cases.

37. Under the Labour Code, workers in private-sector facilities have the right to establish trade unions and independent workers' federations, in accordance with international labour standards. Moreover, workers in Oman have the right to strike and to participate in collective bargaining, in accordance with the law. Thanks to those provisions, as of the end of 2019 there were 271 trade unions and 6 workers' federations registered in Oman.

38. The Directorate General of Labour Welfare and the labour bureaus in the governorates are attentive to indicators that might signify the presence of forced labour or human trafficking. To this end, they monitor the labour market, check vocational health and safety standards and follow up on reports of workers' complaints. They also verify that correct procedures are being followed by conducting inspections in recruitment bureaus and they coordinate with law enforcement agencies and with insurers.

39. They also provide care to workers and seek to make them more aware of their rights and duties, as set forth in the Labour Code. They also receive queries and complaints, which they then seek to respond to and redress.

40. Article 45 of the Children's Code promulgated by Royal Decree No. 22 of 2014 prohibits the employment of children in activities or industries which, by their nature or the circumstances in which the work is conducted, are likely to be detrimental to their health, safety or moral conduct. Such activities and industries are determined by a decision of the Minister of Labour taken following coordination with the competent authorities.

41. In the same context, Ministerial Decree No. 217 of 2016 was issued to regulate the employment of juveniles and the occupations in which they may be employed.

42. For some time, the Ministry of Labour and other stakeholders have been working on a new draft labour code that includes more provisions and benefits consistent with international standards and practice, and on a draft domestic workers act, which sets forth the

rights of that category of persons and is likewise consistent with international standards. Oman hopes that the new laws will be completed and issued in the near future.

Contract workers

43. The rights of contract workers are protected under the laws and administrative procedures of Oman. A regulatory system is in place with inspections to private-sector facilities. There is also a system for the resolution of labour disputes and a system for making workers and employers aware of rules, laws and vocational health and safety regulations.

44. Labour relations between worker and employer in Oman are regulated by a clearly worded contract of employment that is signed by both parties in two languages: Arabic and English. The contract includes the fundamental legal provisions contained in the Labour Code and in the relevant ministerial decrees. Moreover, the contract is also used by the official national authorities.

45. Oman embraces the principle of the voluntary nature of work and the protection of workers' right to work of their own free will. The Foreigners' Residency Act and its implementing regulations include provisions for workers to transfer from one employer to another and, if either worker or employer suffer harm as a result of such a transfer, the worker has the right to file a complaint before the labour dispute resolution department of the Ministry of Labour, which will seek to settle the dispute amicably. If that proves impossible, the dispute is referred to the competent court for it to rule on the matter.

46. As regards the freedom of non-Omani workers to move from one employer to another, Decree No. 157 of 2020 was issued to amend article 24 of the implementing regulations of the Foreigners' Residency Act. Under the amendment, the requirement for a certificate of "no objection" to the transfer of a worker to another employer was revoked, thereby giving workers the right to move to the employment that suits them best.

47. Policies and practices regulating the recruitment of workers from abroad have developed to become fairer and more transparent. In that connection, Oman has taken the following initiatives:

- Ministerial Decree No. 328 of 2015 to amend certain provisions of the regulations governing the recruitment of non-Omani workers. The aim is to regulate the relationship between the employer and the employment bureau;
- The Ministry of Labour issued Decree No. 23 of 2018 to adopt criteria with which to evaluate working environments and standards whereby private-sector facilities can be treated as "model enterprises". Under the Decree, model enterprises can obtain preferential treatment in the administrative transactions they have to undertake at the Ministry of Labour. The Decree focuses on areas such as the employment of women and persons with disabilities and the provision of a decent and stable environment for workers;
- In the five years between 2015 and 2019, the Ministry of Labour ran programmes to raise awareness among workers and employers about their rights under current labour-related laws and ministerial decrees. In the period 2015–2019, 4,741 individual and 262 group awareness-raising programmes were run for a total of 9,171 beneficiaries. In the same context, the Ministry organized field visits to workers at their places of work, during which manuals in 12 different languages were distributed containing information on workers' rights and duties, awareness-raising guides were handed out and individual interviews were conducted with workers to answer their queries;
- A video has been produced and distributed to the embassies of the workers' countries of origin with the intention that it should become part of the awareness-raising programme for workers before their departure. The video addresses basic work-related rights and the mechanisms whereby workers can access the essential services they need.

48. Through its national programme for decent work, Oman constantly seeks to improve its systems and bring them into line with international standards, in cooperation with ILO. An agreement signed in 2017 to extend the memorandum of understanding between the three

parties involved in the production process and ILO is one of the basic principles underpinning the implementation by Oman of the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

49. From 2014 to the present 6 memorandums of understanding – out of a total of 20 – have been signed to regulate recruitment, develop laws and standards consistent with the future needs of the labour market and provide protection and care for workers.

Right to social protection

50. In accordance with the provisions of article 12 of the Basic Law of State and in the interests of social solidarity, the Social Security Act envisages a monthly allowance for individuals and families who have no source of income or whose provider is incapacitated. It also covers persons who do not benefit from the retirement system or whose retirement income is insufficient to meet the needs of all family members. Their entitlement is consequently topped up by social security. The groups benefiting from this system are orphans, widows, divorced women, unmarried girls, the incapacitated, older persons, abandoned women and the families of prisoners. In guaranteeing such protection for families with limited resources, legislators intended to create an environment conducive to bringing up children and protecting women in a manner that would be reflected in their education and health also taking account, when assessing the amount of benefits, of the number of family members.

51. As a way of augmenting social solidarity, Ministerial Decree No. 140 of 2016 issued by the Ministry of Social Development contains the regulations governing the activity of social development committees. The committees, whose work covers all governorates of Oman, propose and study social projects, support voluntary social work and the relevant institutions, raise public awareness, promote social work in the areas of disability and childhood and seek to involve citizens in meeting the needs of these groups and eliminating specific problems and social phenomena.

Right to health

52. Oman attaches great importance to the health sector and significant progress has been made across all health indicators. The country has also adopted a national health strategy 2050, which is consistent with global standards and protocols in terms of the provision of high-quality and effective health services.

53. Treatment and prevention services help not only to implement the strategic programme to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but also to ensure the highest standard of individual and community health. In 2019 there were in excess of 269 primary health care centres and health complexes in the country providing treatment and prevention services. This is in addition to school health services and to maternal and childcare services. There are 56 hospitals in Oman of which 50 are run by the State.

54. As of the end of 2018, health expenditure accounted for 2.7 per cent of overall government expenditure.

55. Numerous pieces of health legislation have been passed, including the following:

- Royal Decree No. 75 of 2019 to issue the Act regulating the exercise of the medical profession and auxiliary medical professions;
- In addition, the following ministerial decrees have been adopted:
- Ministerial Decree No. 29 of 2016 of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, to issue the regulations setting forth the health requirements for public health-related activities;
- Ministerial Decree No. 120 of 2015 of the Ministry of Health, to issue the regulations governing private health institutions for the treatment and rehabilitation of patients addicted to drugs and psychotropic substances;

- Ministerial Decree No. 135 of 2015 to issue the regulations governing treatment abroad, and which envisages the right to treatment outside Oman at State expense for various categories of person.

Right to education

56. Oman has attached great importance to the integration of human rights and children's rights into its system of education as a factor that helps to improve citizens' quality of life. In fact, education is one of the major elements that have helped the country reach a very high level of human development as reflected in the 2018 Human Development Report. Article 13 of the Basic Law of State reads: "Education is a cornerstone for the advancement of society. The State shall nurture education and endeavour to disseminate it and make it accessible to all."

57. Thus, there has been a great focus on education and a consequent improvement in education-related indicators. Illiteracy rates dropped to around 3.8 per cent in 2018 while, in the academic year 2018/19, net enrolment rates for year I rose to 97 per cent, while year repetition rates for classes 5 to 10 stood at 4.9 per cent. For the same classes, the dropout rate stood at 0.24 per cent and the promotion rate at 95.7 per cent.

58. Laws, regulations and ministerial decrees regarding education have all underscored the fundamental right to education, as enshrined in international treaties and charters.

59. Oman has become a global centre for higher education in terms of the number of universities, applied science faculties and technical colleges. Thanks to those institutions, more than 28,000 people were able to graduate at the end of the academic year 2018/19. According to the 2018 Global Innovation Index, Oman ranked first out of 126 countries as regards the proportion of graduates in engineering and scientific subjects.

60. In their pursuit of fairness and inclusiveness, schools have managed to achieve gender equality, with parity between the sexes standing at 0.99 per cent in 2018. Education in Oman does not exclude persons with disabilities, and the Ministry of Education is continuing to support special schools and education programmes. These services cover pupils with motorial, sight, hearing and mental disabilities; they also accommodate pupils with special needs, via the learning difficulties programme and the speech and communication difficulties programme. Moreover, since the academic year 2005/06, the Ministry of Education has been implementing a programme to integrate pupils with special needs into primary schools. For its part, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research annually allocates 50 scholarships for that category of student to study in private universities and colleges. Vocational colleges also provide training and qualification opportunities for persons with disabilities, in a manner consistent with their physical and mental abilities, talents, capacities and inclinations.

61. The Ministry of Education in Oman has been working to include concepts of human and children's rights into curricula and textbooks. It has drafted a document regarding human and children's rights at different levels of education. The Ministry also holds seminars, lectures and workshops on human rights in cultural and academic settings in institutions of higher education. One of these initiatives, held on 10 April 2018, was entitled "Human rights between international treaties and Omani cultural heritage".

62. Apart from laws and policies regarding education, a raft of regulations and ministerial decrees has also been issued to regulate the sector, including:

- The document "Philosophy of Education", which was adopted by the Sultan in May 2017, is the chief reference and the main engine for the development of educational policies and plans in Oman. It rests on a number of basic principles of which one of the most important is number five: "Education on human rights and duties". Likewise, the National Strategy for Education 2040 contains many recommendations that underline the right to education and the delivery and dissemination of high-quality education to all persons without exception, through an action plan that is consistent with the Oman Vision 2020–2040;
- Regulations governing matters relating to pupils at State-run schools, which were issued pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 234 of 2017 of the Ministry of Education.

They include a number of provisions to safeguard pupils' rights, such as protection against corporal punishment;

- In 2019, the Ministry of Education issued a decree to exempt children of Omani women married – with official consent and in accordance with law – to non-Omanis from payment of enrolment fees in State-run schools;
- Decree No. 58 of 2020 to issue the regulations governing school transport facilities in such a way as to protect pupils' health and safety.

Religious and cultural rights

63. Oman is characterized by the presence of many religious doctrines, local dialects and ethnicities, all of which have merged together into a single social and human fabric that has given rise to the formation of an authentic Omani personality. Alongside that, Oman also takes in migrant workers from many countries and cultures, which has led to the formation of a wide spectrum of cultures, beliefs and customs.

64. Oman has worked intensively to lay the foundations of social cohesion, the most important of which is religious freedom, enshrined in article 28 of the Basic Law of State. The Government seeks to facilitate the establishment of places of worship for different religions, to which end it provides plots of building land free of charge. All persons are free to practise their religious rites and rituals in an atmosphere of tolerance and coexistence, which is the true meaning of freedom of worship.

65. Following directives of the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Bin Taimur, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs – during celebrations to mark the International Day for Tolerance held in the Indonesian capital Jakarta on 16 November 2019 – announced the Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values. The Project aims to contribute to re-balancing interests while proposing a course of action that will help a troubled world to rise again and pursue an equilibrium in which people can live on the basis of dignity, fundamental rights and psychological serenity. The Project envisages three aspects, which are necessary if balance is to be restored. The first of these is the improvement of human life, the second is the adoption of a framework of global ethics while the third consists in nurturing human spiritual values. In the same way, the Project rests on three foundations: reason, justice and ethics, and it has three basic themes: promoting a culture of peace and understanding, respecting and appreciating life and reassuring people to preserve their own identities and lives while deepening community and social values.

B. Civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms

Political participation

66. In a second historic address he made on 23 February 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik underlined the importance of citizens participating in the decision-making process. He stated on that occasion "Citizens' partnership in moulding the present and future of the country is a bulwark of national action."

67. Oman has set in motion several initiatives to help citizens in various areas of work contribute to the development process. This includes involvement in political activity via elections to the Shura Council and municipal councils, and the provision of information about the roles of those bodies. Elections for the ninth term of the Shura Council, held in 2019, were more important than previous elections in view of the broad participation of citizens and of the increased number of members with respect to the past, without discrimination between women and men. These elections were also marked by a large turnout as Omani citizens chose the 86 members of the Shura Council, who represent all 61 provinces of Oman for a four-year term.

68. The Shura Council Elections Act, issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 58 of 2013, affirms the right of all Omanis who have reached the age of 21 by 1 January of an election year to present themselves as a candidate for membership of the Council and to participate in the election of members.

69. It should be pointed out that a total of 713,335 persons participated in the elections for the ninth term (2019–2023) of the Shura Council. Of them, 337,543 were women, meaning that female voters accounted for 47.3 per cent of all voters.

70. The same applies to Municipal Councils Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 116 of 2011, which envisages the creation of 11 municipal councils, one for each governorate. All persons without discrimination have the right to stand as candidates for municipal councils, as stated in the Act. Municipal council elections were to have been held in 2020 but they have been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

71. Election days, be it for the Shura Council or municipal councils, are considered as special days in Oman, in which precedence is given to shows of political participation from all sectors of society. This is a true expression of the freedom to participate in political life, which Oman grants to its citizens and which enhances their role in building the nation.

Freedom of expression

72. Article 29 of the Basic Law of State guarantees freedom of expression and opinion for all persons, through speech, writing or any other means of expression. In that connection, the laws that regulate the media, printing, publication and the press include provisions and procedures to protect the exercise of that right.

73. Oman is in the process of preparing a draft information act, which will include provisions to promote freedom of opinion and expression, independent journalism and the unimpeded flow of data and information. The issuance of the new law has been delayed by the rapid developments in the media and the ways in which opinions can be expressed; however, serious efforts are being made to complete it as soon as possible.

74. Press and media institutions that operate in Oman have reached agreement on a “code of media honour”. The document, which was signed in late 2017, is the first code of press and media honour in Oman. It should be noted that the Association of Journalists played an effective part in the creation of the code and in the drafting of the present report

75. In his second historic address of 23 February 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik clearly and explicitly stated: “We are proud that the citizens and residents of our cherished Oman live under the rule of law and institutions in a State built on the principles of freedom, equality and equal opportunity, a State rooted in justice and in the dignity of individuals whose rights and liberties are secured, including the freedom of expression that is guaranteed under the Basic Law of State.”

Freedom of association

76. Freedom to form associations is enshrined in article 33 of the Basic Law of State. The Civil Society Associations Act sets out the conditions and circumstances guaranteeing the right of persons to establish and institute such associations, which are considered as independent. It also empowers the Ministry of Social Development to supervise those associations without their independence being thereby affected.

77. The Act further guarantees the right of individuals to lodge grievances with the administrative courts against decrees of the Ministry of Social Development that affect civil society associations, and it gives the associations’ administrative boards the right to administer the associations in line with their own statutes and under the supervision of their general assembly.

78. The Government has facilitated the procedures for registering such associations in order to encourage the growth of a civil society that plays an active role in development and human rights programmes. There are 32 professional associations in Oman, with 8 branches at the governorate level, as well as 30 charitable and civil society associations. As of the end of 2019, there were 65 Omani women’s associations (of which 6 are branches of other associations). There were also 12 social clubs for foreign communities with 9 branches at the governorate level.

79. The Ministry of Social Development is working on a draft law civil society associations act that aims to enhance the effectiveness of civil society and its contribution to

nation building, and to involve associations in decision-making processes in areas that affect their activities.

Right to nationality

80. Article 15 of the Basic Law of State reads: “Nationality is regulated by law and it may not be revoked or withdrawn except according to law.” In enactment thereof, the Omani Nationality Act, which was issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 38 of 2014, includes new provisions intended to prevent anyone falling into a condition of statelessness. The relevant text – contained in article 11 (3) – states that Omani nationality may be granted to the child of a foreign woman married to an Omani man, even if the father has lost his own Omani nationality and irrespective of whether the child is born in Oman or abroad.

81. Moreover, the Act explicitly states that Omanis of either sex who renounce their Omani nationality may recover that nationality once again, under conditions set forth in article 12 of the Act. In addition, a foreign woman who is widowed or divorced from an Omani man may obtain Omani nationality under the provisions of article 17. Nor have legislators neglected the children of Omani women. In fact, article 18 of the Act contains a new provision whereby a minor child of an Omani woman married to a foreign man can obtain Omani nationality if the foreign husband has left or abandoned her or if she is widowed or divorced from him. In such cases, the minor children can obtain Omani nationality and all its concomitant rights. The Act further specifies that children born in Oman to unknown parents are entitled to Omani nationality as are the offspring, whether born in Oman or abroad, of an Omani woman and an unknown father, unless the child’s legitimate paternal filiation can be established. These provisions show that legislators in Oman have been at pains to provide the children of Omani women and foreign fathers with legal protection and coverage, and to ensure that they do not risk becoming stateless.

Effective remedies

82. The Basic Law of State envisages certain guarantees such as the right of individuals to have recourse to the courts (art. 25) and the right of accused persons to a defence in a fair trial (art. 23). In that regard, the issuance of the Criminal Code pursuant to Royal Decree 7 of 2018 constitutes a qualitative shift in penal legislation and the promotion of those safeguards. The Code, which replaces the 1974 Criminal Code, covers new areas that were not regulated in the old text, particularly vis-à-vis the fight against corruption, the protection of public assets and the attainment of justice. Indeed, an entire section focuses on criminalizing the disruption of judicial proceedings and interference with the course of justice.

Combating terrorism

83. The Anti-Terrorism Act, issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 8 of 2007, defines terrorist acts and crimes and envisages severe penalties for perpetrators. In order to supplement that Act, the Anti-Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism Act was issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 30 of 2016, during the period covered by this third national report. The latter Act includes provisions to criminalize money laundering and the financing of terrorism and envisages severe penalties for perpetrators, in line with international standards.

84. Oman attaches great importance to the fight against terrorism, and the Ministry of the Interior along with other national stakeholders participates in regional and international conferences, meetings and activities regarding respect for human rights in the context of counter-terrorism operations.

85. Oman has scored “zero” on the Global Terrorism Index, a ranking indicative of the highest level of security from terror threats. This is according to a report by the Institute for Economics and Peace in its third Global Terrorism Index issued in 2015.

86. In the 2018 Global Competitiveness Report, Oman ranked first in the world on the “terrorism incidence” component of the index, a position it maintained in the 2019 Report. The ranking reflects the fact that Oman has been free from terrorist incidents, which may be attributed to its security and political stability in the midst of a turbulent world.

Combating extremism, hate and discrimination

87. The Basic Law of State prohibits discrimination of any kind while domestic legislation also criminalizes all forms of extremism, hate and discrimination. This is set forth in article 2 of the Children's Code, which guarantees the right of children in Oman not to suffer discrimination on grounds of colour, sex, origin, language, religion, social standing or other reasons.

88. The accession by Oman to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women further underscores its adherence to the principle of equality and non-discrimination.

89. Oman is seen as a living model of tolerance, peaceful coexistence among all communities and races in society and rejection of hatred and extremism. This has become a dominant cultural norm in Omani society.

C. Promoting and protecting the rights of specific groups

Women's rights

90. With regard to the empowerment of women, the Basic Law of State makes it clear that women are to enjoy the same rights as men, and the Law includes provisions to reaffirm the principle of equality, social justice and women's full right to education, work and employment on an equal footing with men.

91. In his second historic address of 23 February 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik also focused on the empowerment of women, stating: "Citizens' partnership in moulding the present and future of the country is a bulwark of national action. We are determined that women should enjoy their rights as guaranteed by law, and that they should work alongside men in different fields to serve their country and their society. We will constantly uphold these national principles, which cannot be compromised or disputed."

92. Through its national strategies, Oman has continued to intensify its efforts towards women's empowerment. One of these is the Social Action Strategy (2016–2025) of the Ministry of Social Development, which constitutes a general reference framework and has six goals all of which accommodate gender perspective. They are: social protection, social welfare, development of families and society, rights of persons with disabilities, civil society groups and associations, and institutional support. Gender indicators and gender-responsive budgets are the basis of the action plans associated with the Strategy, which includes plans and programmes intended to ensure women can live dignified lives and to promote their participation in the sustainable development process.

93. Omani women have made many advances at both national and international level. They have come to occupy decision-making positions, including on the Council of Oman, and they are involved in both the State and private sector as well as being active in voluntary work and in economic empowerment.

94. On 18 August 2020, under Decree No. 111 of 2020, the Council of Ministers was reconstituted to include three female members. Moreover, under Royal Decree No. 113 of 2020 regarding appointments, one woman was appointed as head of an authority while three others were appointed to the role of Under-Secretary.

95. Fifteen places on the State Council are occupied by women and a woman holds the position of First Vice-President of the Council. At the same time, women have been successful in elections for the ninth term (2019–2023) of the Shura Council, where they won two seats. It should be pointed out that the 337,543 women eligible to vote made up 47.3 per cent of the total number of voters of 713,335. Women also have a share of seats on municipal councils.

96. The Government, in cooperation with civil society associations active in the field of women's affairs, has rolled out a number of programmes aimed at the political and economic empowerment of women.

97. Domestic legislation protects women against violence and ill-treatment of all kinds. Both the Criminal Code and the Children's Code state that women may not be subjected to verbal, physical or any other form of violence. Women who do suffer violence may seek legal protection before the competent courts and they receive free health care from the State.

Children's rights

98. The Children's Code, which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 22 of 2014, protects the fundamental rights of children, such as the right to life, survival and development, and it includes provision for all the elements necessary to facilitate that end such as care and protection against violence, exploitation and ill-treatment.

99. The implementing regulations of the Children's Code, which were issued pursuant to Decree No. 125 of 2019, detail the fundamental rights children have, particularly as regards protection and its associated mechanisms. It also includes provisions on alternative care, protection mechanisms and the activities of care institutions, such as kindergartens, that provide services for the welfare of children. It should also be pointed out that the implementing regulations include articles relating to security and safety measures aimed at protecting children in those institutions.

100. Article 4 of the implementing regulations of the Children's Code criminalizes traditional practices that are harmful to the health of children. These include female genital mutilation in any form, tattooing or branding, which mutilate children's bodies and affect their health. In addition, the implementing regulations prohibit the use of mercury and lead in ways harmful to children's health, prohibit obliging children to undertake acts harmful to their health and ban any other traditional practice that might damage a child's health. Persons violating these provisions are liable to a term of imprisonment of between 6 months and 3 years.

101. The regulations also contain a list of practices harmful to children while article 10 prohibits children under the age of 15 from working.

102. Child protection committees were set up at the governorate level pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 168 of 2015 then reconstituted under Decree No. 172 of 2019, in order to increase civil society involvement on the committees. A child protection guide has been drafted, a national task force of child protection trainers has been set up and, in January 2017, the 1100 protection hotline was launched.

103. Oman has achieved considerable success and progress in the area of children's rights and, in 2016, was praised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child as a child-friendly country under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Oman is currently striving to achieve further progress in this field through its Social Action Strategy (2016–2025) and its National Strategy for Children (2016–2025) as well as the national plan of action or country programme being run in unison with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). All these plans include projects and programmes aimed at addressing issues that affect children. The Ministry of Social Development is the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the two strategies (which incorporate the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals) and following up with the competent authorities.

104. The Office of the Public Prosecution issued Decree No. 49 of 2020 under which the name of the Public Prosecution Department for Cases Involving Juveniles was changed to the Public Prosecution Department for Cases Involving Families and Children. The Department, with a territorial jurisdiction that covers the governorate of Muscat, is responsible for investigating cases then taking action, launching a prosecution and pursuing it before the courts and implementing the sentence. Its remit covers offences punishable under the Juvenile Accountability Act and the Children's Code as well as offences against children punishable under any other law. It also deals with cases of domestic violence under the Criminal Code or any other law (defined as an act of physical, sexual, psychological or economic abuse between members of a single family) and with other domestic crimes defined in the Criminal Code.

Care for older persons

105. Older persons in Oman enjoy high social standing as they are seen as an essential part of the family and of the fundamental social, cultural and religious environment. All institutions in society are at pains to protect this category of persons and ensure their right to live in a natural family environment. The Government has striven to provide support for older persons who have no relatives of their own, providing them with social and health care, psychological support and leisure facilities, among other services and programmes, delivered via a social care home that offers comprehensive care to older persons. They also enjoy access to social security and numerous other services. A total of 43.6 per cent of older persons receive social assistance while the amounts paid out to them account for 44.8 per cent of all social security payments.

106. In 2015, a department for older persons was set up inside the Ministry of Social Development. The department, a new addition to the social work panorama, is currently working to provide older persons with carers and to meet their basic necessities.

107. The Ministry of Social Development has launched a programme of carers for older persons. The aim is to provide a secure environment that is appropriate for the care of older persons and to provide them with health care, psychological and social stability.

108. A national programme to provide older persons with home care has also been rolled out. Under the programme, the Ministry of Social Development provides the care in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Oman Friends of Older Persons Association within a framework that is regulated by approved operational mechanisms and wherein tasks are divided depending upon the competencies of the bodies involved.

Rights of persons with disabilities

109. Oman is currently drafting a new act for persons with disabilities that is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. All disability stakeholders are being involved in the process and a workshop has been held to discuss the bill with a number of associations for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the observations made by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities following the discussion of the initial report of Oman in 2018 have also been incorporated into the text. The bill is currently in its final stages and is expected to be enacted in the very near future.

110. National legislation and policies make no distinctions with regard to the rights of children with disabilities. In fact, the Children's Code reaffirms that children with disabilities are to enjoy all their rights under the law, without discrimination on the grounds of their disability. The State is working to unify and coordinate the various efforts being made to protect and care for children with disabilities and to provide them with every possibility and means to ensure their welfare, preserve their rights and empower them to become effective members of society on an equal footing with others.

111. The Ministry of Social Development coordinates constantly with competent bodies in the public and private sectors to ensure they follow best practices in promoting the rights of children with disabilities. For this reason, Ministerial Decree No. 190 of 2016 was issued to follow up on a project aimed at the professional integration of persons with disabilities.

V. Achievements and best practices

A. Achievements

112. Oman has occupied leading positions in international indicator tables, including but not limited to the following:

- (a) e-Government Development Index 2020

Oman has advanced 13 steps in the overall rankings to stand at fiftieth place globally in 2018 and 2019, and fifth in the Arab world. This progress is the outcome of efforts made by all the relevant State and private institutions.

- (b) Human Development Index

Oman was ranked fourth in the Arab world and forty-seventh globally in the 2019 Human Development Index published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) where it was listed among the States with very high human development.
- (c) Terrorism Index

Oman ranked first in the world vis-à-vis absence of terrorist incidents in 2019, which is a reflection of the security and political stability the country enjoys.
- (d) Transparency and anti-corruption index

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, Oman led other countries in the Middle East and North Africa region as the most transparent and the most successful in combating corrupt practices. The country occupies fifty-sixth place globally with a score of 25.
- (e) Competitiveness index

Oman occupied fifty-third place under the components considered in the 2019 Global Competitiveness Report published by the World Economic Forum. The country occupied sixty-fifth place globally and first place in the Gulf in the indicator regarding the rights of workers and was listed as being among the countries that protect workers' rights.
- (f) Global Innovation Index

In the Global Innovation Index 2019, the United Arab Emirates maintained its leading ranking of eighth in the Arab world and fifty-seventh globally.
- (g) Ease of Doing Business Report

Oman jumped 10 places globally in the Ease of Doing Business Report 2020, reaching fifth place in the Arab world and sixty-eighth place globally.

B. Best practices

113. A department has been created within the Oman Human Rights Commission to monitor, receive and respond to human rights reports. The department cooperates with competent national bodies in Oman to coordinate then reply, within set deadlines, to communications received from United Nations agencies and human rights mechanisms.

114. In 2017 the Ministry of Social Development launched the 1100 protection hotline, which is free of charge and can receive reports around the clock. Cases are handled with complete confidentiality and referred to the relevant authorities. Where necessary, shelter can be provided in the Dar al-Wifaq house.

115. The Family Protection Department includes separate units such as the Dar al-Wifaq, which provides care and protection to children who have suffered ill-treatment, women who have been subjected to violence, victims of human trafficking and, in general, social and psychological support for persons who have suffered any form of abuse. The Dar al-Wifaq also works to help children overcome difficulties they might be facing.

116. Omani women's associations exist throughout the country. They are social institutions that concern themselves with matters affecting women, children and the family, and they are present in all the governorates and provinces of Oman. In 2019, there were 654 such institutions and branch institutions working to help promote awareness among women and to build women's skills and capacities to participate in the development process.

117. A number of national strategies have been developed, such as the Social Action Strategy (2016–2025) of the Ministry of Social Development, the National Strategy for Children (2016–2025), the draft women's health strategy (part of the 2050 long-term plan for the Omani health-care system) and the draft 2040 strategy for sustainable agriculture and

rural development. Ministries and other stakeholders are taking steps to implement these goals within the framework of detailed five-year operational plans and programmes.

118. The first voluntary national review of Oman focused on four principal themes for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: human empowerment, building a competitive knowledge-based economy, promoting environmental resilience and peace as a pillar of sustainability.

119. The Government of Oman has been careful to integrate sustainable development factors and objectives into national development plans and strategies, first among them the ninth five-year plan (2016–2020) and the Oman Vision 2040. This is a reflection of the Government’s serious intention to achieve those goals through medium- and long-term policies to that end.

120. The Oman Vision 2040 was developed via extensive community participation. Scores of panel discussions and dialogue sessions were carried out with different development partners including representatives from government, the private sector, civil society and young persons. The first of the three main pillars of the Vision is “People and Society”, which emphasizes that Omani citizens are the basis and goal of the comprehensive development process and highlights the importance of a vibrant society in which citizens enjoy the best possible living conditions and social welfare.

121. The “Economy and Development” pillar highlights the priority of building a prosperous and diversified national economy, unleashing economic potential, producing employment opportunities for citizens and distributing development capacities among the various governorates of the Sultanate in order to achieve prosperity and development.

122. The “Governance and Institutional Performance” pillar focuses on the need to promote principles of good governance.

C. Cooperation with human rights mechanisms

123. Oman acts promptly to meet the periodic reporting obligations required by the treaty bodies, and is continuing its efforts to implement the recommendations issued by these bodies. The following periodic reports have been submitted in line with obligations arising from international human rights treaties:

- In January 2016 Oman submitted its combined third and fourth periodic reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, before the Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- In April 2016 Oman submitted its combined second to fifth periodic reports under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, before the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;
- In November 2017 Oman submitted its combined second and third periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- In February 2018 Oman submitted its initial report under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, before the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

124. On 9 May 2019 Oman submitted its common core document forming part of the reports of States parties.

125. In July 2020 Oman submitted its first voluntary national report on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

D. Capacity-building

126. A number of different groups in Oman have run training courses and workshops for government officials and the staff of civil society organizations to build their knowledge and

capacities in the following important human rights-related fields: international treaties, the rights of women, international humanitarian law, rights and freedoms, and combating human trafficking. This has been possible thanks to cooperation with United Nations agencies as well as with other States and NGOs active in that area.

127. The Government collaborates with international organizations to build national capacities and competencies in the field of women's and children's rights. The collaboration is regulated by approved plans and programmes and the organizations involved include UNICEF, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), WHO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Beirut bureau of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and a number of embassies.

VI. Challenges and priorities

128. Oman takes an approach that stands out for its transparency and graduality and that successfully reconciles the internal design of its legislative and regulatory framework with the country's international human rights obligations.

129. Oman, like all other States, is facing a number of human rights challenges, the most significant of which are:

(a) The country's heavy dependence on oil for its income, and it is no secret that oil prices have fluctuated wildly over recent years, falling to record levels. This has had an impact on the implementation of the strategies the country had previously prepared;

(b) The absence of effective and transparent cooperation mechanisms with certain countries of origin of migrant workers, such as would enable an effective approach to human rights.

129. Oman is set upon achieving certain priorities to support and promote human rights in the country. They include:

- Strengthening and developing the role of specialized national mechanisms to protect human rights, in order to keep pace with international developments;
- Creating a national human rights workforce and providing them with training;
- Disseminating human rights culture more broadly and strengthening its presence in various professional and academic fields.

VII. Voluntary pledges

130. In submitting its third national report under the universal periodic review, Oman makes the following pledges:

- To continue to cooperate in the area of human rights with agencies, mechanisms and committees of the United Nations in order to facilitate their activities and the implementation of their programmes, and to meet its obligations towards those agencies and mechanisms;
- To make comprehensive efforts at the national level to protect the rights of workers by taking the necessary institutional and legislative steps;
- To continue efforts to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those that have a bearing on human rights;
- To work to raise the level of political awareness and to disseminate a culture of political participation;
- To develop the operational mechanisms of human rights commissions and agencies in accordance with the best international standards;
- To work towards fulfilling the obligations arising from accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

- To work to expedite the enactment of the bill concerning persons with disabilities;
- To work to expedite the enactment of the information bill.

VIII. Conclusion

131. In submitting its third national report under the universal periodic review, Oman wishes to draw attention to its ongoing efforts to promote and protect human rights through legislation, laws and the fulfilment of international obligations. Oman is resolved to continue to move forwards and build on its achievements in the field of human rights, in which regard it engages positively and proactively with international best standards. The country looks forward to continuing its cooperation with the Human Rights Council, OHCHR and the universal periodic review mechanism with a view to further promoting and protecting human rights at the national level and across the world, in order to ensure that people everywhere can live safe, dignified and stable lives.
