



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION

Second periodic report of States parties due in 2004

OMAN* **

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

** For the first report submitted by Oman, see CRC/C/78/Add.1, for its consideration by the Committee, see documents CRC/C/SR.727, 728 and CRC/C/15/Add.161.

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Introduction

1. The Sultanate of Oman is pleased to submit its second periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child under the provisions of article 44, paragraph 1 (b) of the Convention.

2. The present report follows on from the initial report of the Sultanate of Oman, submitted in July 1999 (CRC/C/78/1/Add.1), which was discussed at the 727th and 728th meetings of the Committee in September 2001.

3. In compliance with the general guidelines regarding the form and content of periodic reports (C/CRC/58 dated 20 November 1996), adopted by the Committee at its thirteenth session in October 1996, the Sultanate of Oman has intentionally avoided any repetition in the present report of the information provided in its above-mentioned initial report, to which it simply makes reference in connection with certain topics, where necessary. It has also replied to the concluding observations of the Committee on the initial report of the Sultanate of Oman (CRC/C/15/Add.161) through each topic and within the limits of the matter in question. The present report further includes relevant new statistics and legislation, copies of which are annexed. It also includes relevant new information pertaining to the period between the compilation of the initial report of the Sultanate of Oman in July 1999 and January 2004, as well as relevant information from before that date which was not mentioned in the Sultanate's initial report. The Sultanate of Oman takes this opportunity to affirm its fundamental commitment to the international treaties, conventions and instruments to which it has acceded and with which it is required to comply in accordance with article 10 of the Basic Law of the State. It also affirms its belief in the importance of continuing the purposeful dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child in order to achieve a shared understanding that matches its commitment to guarantee and respect all of the rights embodied in the provisions, substance and purposes of the Convention, within the limits of the reservations which it entered thereto, in accordance with the principles and values of Omani society.

I. GENERAL INDICATORS

4. These indicators aim to provide the Committee with essential information on the Sultanate of Oman, important as they are to understanding and taking into account many of the considerations relating to implementation of the Convention and the concluding observations of the Committee on the Sultanate's initial report.

5. *The official religion of the country:* Islam is the official religion of the country. Migrants of other religions have full freedom to practise their religious observances.

6. *Societal values concerning maternity and childhood:* These are derived from the Islamic Shariah, which urges the establishment of a family through valid marriage and emphasizes the importance of the union, cohesion and responsibilities of the family in providing the utmost care and protection for the children who are its fruit. It also emphasizes the responsibilities of Muslim society for the care and *kafalah* (alternative care) of orphans and children of unknown parents.

1.1 Geographical indicators

1.1.1 Geographical location

7. The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the far south-east of the Arabian peninsula and extends between coordinates 16° 40' and 26° 20' north latitude and 51° 50' and 59° 40' east longitude.

8. It has long coastlines stretching over 3,165 kilometres along the Arabian Sea, the entrance to the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman and the entrance to the Arabian Gulf in the Hormuz Straits. It has a number of small islands in the Gulf of Oman, the Hormuz Straits and the Arabian Sea and shares land boundaries with the Republic of Yemen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

1.1.2 Surface area

9. The Sultanate has a surface area of 309,500 square kilometres and its capital is Muscat.

1.1.3 Administrative division

10. For administrative purposes, the Sultanate is divided into three governorates and five demographic regions.

1.2 Population indicators (for 2003)¹

11. The following indicators set out population trends in the Sultanate:

- *Number of inhabitants of the Sultanate*: The total number of inhabitants of the Sultanate stands at 2,340,815, including 1,781,558 Omanis (76.1 per cent) and 559,257 migrants (23.9 per cent);
- *Gender ratio (number of males per 100 females)*: The number of males to females is 128 for the total population of the Sultanate, 102 for Omanis only and 282 for migrants;
- *Population growth*: The population growth rate in the Sultanate is 18.4 per 1,000, or 1.84 per cent;
- *Birth rate per 1,000 inhabitants*: The rate stands at 24.4;
- *Percentage of women of reproductive age*: The proportion stands at 25.01 per cent;
- *Children under 18 years of age*: The proportion stands at 49.12 per cent of Omani inhabitants, broken down into 49.3 per cent for males and 49.1 per cent for females;
- *Number of Omani inhabitants over 60 years of age*: The number stands at 88,958, which is 5 per cent of the population;

- *Population density (persons/sq. km.):* Table 1 shows that the population density is 7.6 persons per square kilometre for the Sultanate as a whole, rising to 161.2 in the governorate of Muscat and falling to 2.2 in the governorate of Dhofar and to 0.3 in the governorate of Wusta.²

1.3 Economic indicators (for 2003)

12. The following indicators set out economic trends in the Sultanate:
 - *Gross domestic product (GDP):* 8,277,800 Omani riyals (RO);
 - *Gross national product (GNP):* RO 7,995,800;
 - *Per capita share of GDP:* RO 3,430;
 - *Total government spending:* RO 3,188,900;
 - *RO exchange rate:* US\$ 2.6;
 - *Water production from desalination plants and wells:* 23,978,000 gallons;
 - *Water distribution:* 23,951,000 gallons;
 - *Electricity production:* 10,714 gigawatts/hour;
 - *Electricity distribution:* 10,303 gigawatts/hour;
 - *Infant mortality rate per 1,000 inhabitants:* 16.2.

1.4 Health indicators (for 2003)

13. The following indicators set out health trends in the Sultanate:
 - *Child mortality rate:* 16.2 per 1,000 live births;
 - *Maternal death rate (from pregnancy and childbirth):* 23.2 per cent per 100,000 live births;
 - *Average life expectancy:* 75.4 for females, 72.2 for males and 74.2 for both sexes;
 - *Infant mortality rate per 1,000 inhabitants:* 10.3.

1.5 Education indicators (for 2003)

14. The following indicators set out education trends in the Sultanate:
 - *Illiteracy:* 17.8 per cent;
 - *Reading and writing:* 19.8 per cent;

- *Basic stage-one certificate:* 20.9 per cent;
- *Basic stage-two certificate:* 17.5 per cent;
- *General education certificate:* 17.9 per cent;
- *Further certificates: Intermediate and technical college certificates:* 2.5 per cent; *Bachelor's degree:* 3.1 per cent;
- *Master's degree/doctorate:* 0.3 per cent.

1.6 Social indicators (for 2003)

15. The following indicators set out social trends in the Sultanate:

- *Proportion of female-headed households:* 14 per cent;
- *Proportion of married women (aged 15 and over):* 47.37 per cent;
- *Number of registered marriages:* 10,594;
- *Proportion of divorced women (aged 15 and over):* 2.88 per cent;
- *Number of divorces subsidized by the Ministry of Social Development:* 7,570, with an increase of 15.8 per cent in the social security provided to this group;
- *Proportion of widows (aged 15 and over):* 7.51 per cent.

II. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 Legislative measures (legislative enactments and laws)

16. The current laws in the Sultanate of Oman guarantee the protection of human rights, including the rights of the child, some of which were discussed in the initial country report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1999).

17. In addition to the legislative enactments guaranteeing legal protection of the rights of the child that were mentioned in the Sultanate's initial report, details of relevant new legislation and aspects of earlier legislation not covered in the initial report are set forth below.

2.1.1 The Basic Law of the State

18. Promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 101/96, the Basic Law of the State represents the constitutional framework of the Sultanate of Oman and defines the approach and principles of society, as well as the overall structure of the State and its system of governance. The preamble of the Basic Law states its objectives and purposes, including those of building a better society and establishing the foundations of peace, security, justice and cooperation among different States and peoples.

19. The Basic Law of the State supersedes all other laws, legislative enactments and measures. In articles 72, 76 and 80 of the Basic Law, it is stated that application of the Basic Law shall not prejudice the implementation of treaties or agreements concluded between the Sultanate of Oman and States or international bodies or organizations and that international treaties and agreements shall supersede domestic law and become part of Omani legislation upon their ratification.

20. Chapter I of the Basic Law of the State sets forth the nature of the State and its system of governance. Article 9 provides that: "Governance in the Sultanate shall be based on justice, consultation and equality and citizens shall have the right to participate in public affairs."

21. Chapter II of the Basic Law of the State spells out the guiding principles of the State policy. Those relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child include the following:

- Compliance with international and regional instruments and treaties and with the generally recognized rules of international law in a manner conducive to the promotion of peace and security among States and peoples;
- The family is the basis of society and the law shall regulate the means for protecting it, preserving its legal integrity, fostering its ties and values, caring for its individual members and creating the right conditions for the development of their aptitudes and abilities;
- The State shall guarantee assistance for citizens and their families in the case of accident, disease, incapacity and old age in accordance with the social security system and it shall seek to encourage public burden-sharing in the aftermath of public disasters and calamities;
- The State shall be concerned with public health and means of preventing and treating diseases and epidemics. It shall strive to provide health care for each citizen and shall encourage the establishment of private hospitals, clinics and treatment facilities under State supervision in accordance with the rules prescribed by law. It shall also strive to conserve and protect the environment and prevent environmental pollution;
- The State shall enact laws that protect workers and employers and regulate the relationship between them. All citizens shall have the right to engage in the work of their choice within the limits of the law. Compulsory labour may not be imposed on any person, except as required by law for the performance of a public service in return for fair pay;
- Education is a key element for the progress of society and is fostered by the State, which shall strive for its expansion and universal availability. The aims of education include that of creating a generation that is physically sturdy and morally strong. The State shall provide general education and shall seek to combat illiteracy and encourage the establishment of private schools and institutes under its supervision, in accordance with the provisions of the law.

22. Article 11 of the Judiciary Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 90/99 makes provision for a body tasked with the settlement of disputes relating to the consistency of laws and regulations with the Basic Law of the State and ensuring that the provisions of the latter are not contravened.

23. Chapter III of the Basic Law of the State provides for public rights and obligations, which include those relating indirectly to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as follows:

- They may not be waived or withdrawn, except within the limits of the law (art. 15);
- Citizens may not be expelled, exiled or prevented from returning to the Sultanate (art. 16);
- All citizens are equal before the law and in regard to their rights and obligations, in which there shall be no distinction among them on grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, creed, domicile or social status (art. 17);
- Personal freedom is guaranteed by law. No one may be arrested, searched, detained, have his residence limited or his freedom of residence and movement restricted, except in accordance with the provisions of the law (art. 18);
- No one may be detained or imprisoned in places other than those designated for such purpose in the prison laws governing health and social care (art. 19);
- No one shall be subjected to physical or mental torture, inducement or degrading treatment. The law shall prescribe punishment for those who perpetrate such acts. Any statement or confession proved to have been extracted under stress or threat of torture, inducement or degrading treatment shall also be invalid (art. 20);
- *Nulla crimen, nulla poena sin lege* (no crime, no punishment without law) and there shall be no punishment except for acts perpetrated subsequent to the entry into force of the law providing for such acts. Punishment shall be personal (art. 21);
- The accused shall be innocent until proven guilty in a court of law in which he is assured of the safeguards necessary for exercise of the right of defence in accordance with the law. It shall be forbidden to inflict physical or mental harm on the accused (art. 22);
- The accused shall have the right to appoint a person capable of defending him during trial. The law shall set forth the circumstances in which a lawyer for the accused must be present. Persons who are financially incapacitated shall be guaranteed means of recourse to justice and of defending their rights (art. 23);
- Any person who is arrested or detained shall immediately be told of the reasons for his arrest or detention and shall have the right to contact whomsoever he wishes to notify of the event or seek assistance from in the manner regulated by law. He must be promptly informed of the charge against him. He may lodge a complaint with the courts concerning any measure that restricts his personal freedom, as may his

representative. The law shall regulate the right of complaint so as to guarantee settlement of the complaint within a set period, failing which the detainee must be released (art. 24);

- Freedom of the press, printing and publication shall be guaranteed in accordance with the terms and conditions prescribed by law. Anything that is conducive to civil strife shall be prohibited, as shall anything that undermines State security, is indecent or offends human rights (art. 31);
- Citizens shall have the right of assembly within the limits of the law (art. 32).

2.1.2 The Omani Penal Code³

24. Under the Code, any person whose rights are prejudiced has right of recourse to the courts in order to claim compensation for any offence that has caused him injury. The contravention of laws is regarded as a offence for which compensation is awarded in accordance with the jurisprudential maxim of “no damage and no infliction of damage” and the rule that “damage is removed”.

2.1.3 The Civil and Commercial Code⁴

25. This Code guarantees rights to children in the case of legal proceedings relating to them or in which they are a party. Due regard for the interest of the child is clearly and explicitly provided for; proceedings may be instituted for maintenance, custody, joinder or visitation in his or her place of residence and temporary orders may be issued for maintenance or visitation (art. 284) or for the delivery of a minor child into the care of a person who will cater to his or her interests. The child must be visited in a place where he or she feels completely at ease (art. 289).

26. The Code covers all aspects relating to consideration for the rights and interests of children in terms of:

- Guardianship over them and the conditions and legal consequences thereof;
- The care, management and investment of their property and assets and the conditions and legal consequences thereof;
- Conditions precluding the imprisonment of civilian minors under 18 years of age or of any person with a child under 18 years of age for the purpose of debt recovery.

27. In all of its relevant articles, the Code seeks the best interests of the child. For instance, although applications or appeals are inadmissible if lodged by a person who is not a party in the proceedings or who is incompetent to engage in legal proceedings, the Code departs from this rule in the interest of a minor insofar as the minor may attend, or the minor’s guardian or legal guardian may attend on his or her behalf, in the context of the legal text regulating the matter, which is consistent with the recommendation contained in paragraph 30 of the Committee’s concluding observations on the Sultanate’s initial report. The Sultanate believes that the reasons for the concern expressed in that section of the concluding observations have been largely eliminated.

2.1.4 The Code of Criminal Procedure⁵

28. In addition to the information contained in paragraphs 221 and 222 of the Sultanate's initial report, we should state that insofar as there is no specific law applicable to children in dispute, it is the Code of Criminal Procedure that applies to all parties in criminal proceedings, whether offender, victim, juvenile or adult.

29. The provisions of this Code show due regard for the best interests of the child and all rights that are legally recognized and internationally prescribed or provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

30. Article 8 of the Code provides that complaints relating to an offence in which the victim is a child must be lodged by the person with guardianship over the child. If the offence involves property, a complaint from the legal guardian or custodian is admissible. If the child has no one to represent him or if the child's interests conflict with those of his representative, the Office of the Public Prosecutor shall represent the minor.

31. Under article 14 of the Code, in the event that public proceedings are brought against a person under 18 years of age, the court is required to order the person's guardian, legal guardian or carer to attend all proceedings with him or her in order to assist his or her defence. Where necessary, it may appoint a legal guardian for the child in the proceedings.

32. As prescribed in the Basic Law of the State, the essential principles of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Sultanate of Oman include the following: an accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty by a final court ruling; the right of defence is acknowledged; and the judiciary alone makes decisions with respect to offences. Under the Code, appeals and complaints against judicial decisions may be made before the courts of appeal or the Supreme Court, or may be reviewed before the same court. All procedures seek to respect the accused during trial.

2.1.5 The Employment Act⁶

33. We would point out that paragraph 52 of the initial country report discussed the employment of children and their protection against economic exploitation.

34. In addition to the above, the Employment Act devotes a special section (chapter V, section I) to the employment of juveniles, the provisions of which guarantee the following:

- The employment of juveniles of either sex is forbidden, as is their entry to the workplace before they attain 15 years of age. By a decision of the Minister of Labour, this age may be raised in certain industries and jobs that so require. The Act is therefore largely in conformity with paragraph 49 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and the recommendation concerning the minimum age for admission to employment. Under the Act, moreover, the Minister is permitted to raise this age in certain industries, subject to the best interests of the child and the conditions for the employment of children;

- The employment of juveniles under 18 years of age between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. is forbidden. Nor may they be employed for a period of more than six hours in any one day or be made to remain in the workplace for more than seven consecutive hours. Working hours must be interspersed with one or more periods of rest and refreshment amounting to a total of not less than one hour. All such periods are fixed so that juveniles are never employed for more than four hours consecutively (art. 76);
- Juveniles may not be assigned to work overtime or be made to remain in the workplace any later than their prescribed working hours. Nor may they be employed on rest days or during the weekly holiday (art. 77);
- An employer employing one or more juveniles is required to post a copy of the regulations on juvenile employment in the workplace, along with a list of the names of his juvenile employees, the date of their employment and the hours of work and rest, thereby giving them the opportunity to familiarize themselves with their rights and also enabling the monitoring and inspection authorities to ascertain that the regulations are being properly implemented;
- The regulations on juvenile employment are determined by a decision of the Minister, as are the terms and conditions of employment and the jobs, occupations and industries in which juveniles may work according to age group (art. 79). This article seeks to achieve the best interests of the child, having supplemented the previous rights with potentially new rights that take into account their age and working conditions;
- Under this Act, the safety and security of all workers, including children, must be taken into account insofar as they must be informed prior to entering employment of the risks of the occupation, the means of protection against injury to health, the dangers of the job and the hazards of any machinery. The Act also prescribes the measures to be taken in that connection and requires stipulation of the occupational health and safety measures to be applied in different types of workplace, including full or partial closure of the workplace or the stoppage of one or more pieces of machinery in the event of any risk to worker safety and health. Under the Act, employers are also required to have all workers medically examined prior to their employment in order to ascertain that they are medically fit for the job, after which periodic medical examinations must be conducted at least once annually;
- The Employment Act regulates the contract and terms of employment, supplementary pay, working hours, obligations of employers, termination of contract, minimum wage, rights of the worker and settlement of disputes, thereby catering for the interest of workers and safeguarding their rights. A worker may object to a decision for his dismissal and the courts are required to settle the case or stay execution of the decision until the matter is finalized;

- Under article 118, the Omani legislature prescribes punishment for any person who contravenes the regulations on juvenile employment and imposes multiple penalties depending on the number of juveniles employed. It also lays down other penalties in articles 111 to 122 for contravention of the provisions of the Employment Act;
- This Act goes conspicuously further than the articles of the Penal Code as far as narcotic drugs are concerned in that it prohibits drug production and trafficking and any activity linked with narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. It covers both adults and children and prohibits the use of children and others in such illicit activities. It also takes account of the best interests of the child by providing protection and serving as a deterrent to any such offence.

2.1.6 The Civil Status Act⁷

35. The General Department of Civil Status was established pursuant to article 2 of the Act and its areas of competence relevant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child include the following:

- A person's name, nationality and address must be recorded in the civil register and full details of the name and address must also be listed. A minor must be registered at the same address as the person who acts on his or her behalf (art. 4);
- Under the Act, notification of births must be given within two weeks of the date of birth and the particulars must be recorded within seven days of the date on which notification of the birth is given. The notification must include such information as the name of each parent and their tribe or family name, nationality, religion, address and occupation, in addition to the gender and name of the newborn child (arts. 14 and 17);
- Any person who finds a newborn child must take him or her to the nearest police station or post, together with any clothing or other items found with the child. For purposes of future reference, he must state the time at which the child was found and the circumstances of the find. The police must compile a factual report, including the apparent age of the newborn child, any distinguishing marks and the name, occupation and address of the person who found the child, and hand over the child and the report to one of the social institutions attached to the Ministry of Social Development. In such cases, the institution must name the child as soon as it is handed over and the civil registrar must be accordingly notified within the statutory period (art. 19);
- Every newborn child of unknown parents is guaranteed an entry in the civil status register after everything possible has been done with a view to later identification of the child's parents. The child is also guaranteed care by a social institution, which has the duty of naming the child. Illegitimate children are also entered in the civil register and acquire Omani nationality;

- Under article 51, information contained in records and documents is treated as confidential for the sake of dignity; the only information known is that contained in the identity card or other proof of name and identity, excluding the document from which the information first came. The existence of such a register is important in that it is vital to the settlement of any dispute that may arise concerning the child's parentage or a claim that the child belongs to a certain family, since the register is an aid to learning the truth. The fact that it is confidential eliminates the need for any prohibition relating to discrimination.

36. The Civil Status Act guarantees an identity for every child born in Oman or elsewhere to Omani parents or an Omani father. It also guarantees Omani nationality for all children of unknown parents on the basis of the name given to them by the social institutions entrusted with their care. A detailed report of the child's discovery (which remains confidential) must be compiled so that the parents or relatives are later able to find the child.

37. Under the Act, illegitimate children must also be registered. In other words, they must be given a name and Omani nationality as prescribed by the regulations on children in need of alternative family care, in accordance with the provisions of the Islamic Shariah.

38. The content of this Act is consistent with article 7 of the Convention in that the child has the right from birth to a name and to Omani nationality, as well as the right to know his or her parents and consequently be cared for by them, as is their duty under the law.

39. In view of the above, the Sultanate believes that paragraph 24 of the concluding observations on the initial report of the Sultanate of Oman is out of keeping with the legislation as it stands and that there is no justification for abolition of the text in question, since it does not conflict with the rules on discrimination, particularly since it takes into account the best interests of the child by maintaining the confidentiality of information indicating that he or she was born illegitimately. Here, we should like to point out that the entry of a vital fact in a confidential register is one thing and that any discrimination arising as a result of that fact is another. There is no discrimination in terms of rights and the judiciary is the authority to which reference must be made in establishing parentage. This principle is one of Islamic law: "No one who is already burdened shall bear the burdens of others". The Shariah essentially adopts the principle of non-discrimination towards an illegitimate child, since the child is not at fault. This is also in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 25.

2.2 Position of the Sultanate towards the Convention

40. The Sultanate affirms its commitment to the Convention and to its implementation, subject to the reservations which it entered thereto until such time as they are withdrawn or modified.

41. Pursuant to Royal Decree No. 82/2002, the Sultanate ratified the amendment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1995.

42. The Sultanate is endeavouring to harness all of its resources with a view to the full performance of its obligations under the Convention, despite the economic, social and statistical problems which it faces and which it needs time to overcome by way of the comprehensive plans elaborated and the mechanisms created, guided by the recommendations of the Committee and in compliance with its principles.

2.3 Contributions of the Sultanate to international instruments and treaties and human rights conventions and treaties

43. We refer to sections I.B.5 and VIII.C.3 of the Sultanate's initial report.

44. The Sultanate of Oman has been a Member of the United Nations since 1971 and is bound by its instruments. It makes an effective contribution to the agreements and treaties considered within the framework of the United Nations and is considering all of the international conventions tabled for ratification with a view to stating its position whenever feasible and appropriate. It also plays an effective part in the various stages of the preparation of such instruments.

2.3.1 Contributions of the Sultanate at the international level

45. The Sultanate has ratified several international instruments and treaties relevant to human rights, including:

- Ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 of 1999 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 38/2001;
- Ratification of the Framework Convention on Civil Defence Assistance, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 119/2001;
- Accession to the Agreement on the Establishment of the International Vaccine Institute, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 26/2000;
- Accession to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 87/2002.

2.3.2 Contributions of the Sultanate at the Arab level

46. The Sultanate of Oman is a member of the League of Arab States and plays an effective part in all stages of the preparation of Arab agreements and instruments relevant to human rights, including:

- The Arab Charter on Human Rights, which was endorsed by the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs (1983);
- The Charter for the Uniform Arab Personal Status Law (1988);

- The Arab Declaration of Family Rights (1994);
- The Arab Convention on the Employment of Juveniles (1996);
- The Model Law on the Care of Juvenile Delinquents and Juveniles at Risk of Delinquency (1996);
- The Arab Charter on Human Rights (1997);
- The Model Legislative Guide on the Rights of the Arab Child, adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice (2000);
- The Arab Framework for the Rights of the Child, ratified by the summit-level Council of the League of Arab States (2001);
- The Cairo Declaration entitled “An Arab World Fit for Children: Mechanisms for Joint Arab Action” (2001);
- The Decennial Plan of Action for Arab Children;
- Ratification of the Agreement for the Establishment of the Arab Women’s Organization, by Royal Decree No. 94/2002;
- The Arab Plan for the Care, Protection and Development of Children (2004);
- The Sultanate joined the Arab Family Organization, pursuant to Royal Decree 46/2004;
- The Arab Plan of Action for Arab Children (Tunis Declaration, 2004).

2.3.3 Contributions of the Sultanate at the Gulf level

47. The Sultanate is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council and plays an effective part in all of the agreements prepared within its framework, several of which it has ratified, including in matters of education, health and culture. The Sultanate cooperates with Arab States in the Gulf and elsewhere through programmes for visits and meetings relating to sports and to scouting and guiding activities. In the Asian and international context, it participates through sports meetings for young persons and through media cooperation with other States in the field of children’s programmes, including:

- The Muscat Charter for the Uniform Personal Status Law of the Gulf Cooperation Council States (1996, extended in 2000);
- The Abu Dhabi Charter for the Uniform Juveniles Law of the Gulf Cooperation Council States (2001);
- The Kuwait Charter for the Uniform Law on the Custody of Property of Minors and the Like (2004).

2.3.4 Contributions of the Sultanate at the level of international organizations

48. The Sultanate is engaged in ongoing and effective cooperation with all international organizations relevant to children, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), for the purpose of designing and implementing a number of child-specific programmes, thereby aiming to fulfil its commitments under international instruments and treaties and under agreements at the international, Arab and Gulf levels.

2.4 Measures to disseminate the principles of the Convention

2.4.1 Dissemination of the Convention

49. We should like to supplement the information contained in paragraphs 35 to 44 of the Sultanate's initial report with the information below.

50. Under existing law in the Sultanate, laws must be published in the Official Gazette, including those comprising the ratification of such international conventions as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

51. The competent authorities circulate large numbers of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the concerned bodies; during 2000, for instance, 1,000 copies were circulated during the Muscat Fair and 100 copies were circulated to judges, in addition to which 5,000 leaflets containing an introduction to the Convention were circulated to various competent authorities, schools, societies and associations for disabled children with the aim of involving children in a competition on the Convention.

52. All of the Omani media play an important role in disseminating the Convention (details are contained in section 2.4.3).

53. In cooperation with UNICEF, illustrated stickers and posters on articles of the Convention have been produced in Arabic and are displayed in all schools, care homes, nurseries and centres for the care of disabled persons, in addition to which short messages on the meaning of the Convention are screened on the children's television programme "Alwan" (Colours).

54. Using the following methods, the provisions of the Convention are to be disseminated in the Sultanate through the school curricula:

- The text of an article of the Convention will appear in a side frame (right or left) on pages dealing with subjects that are conceptually related to the article, making it easy for students to take note;
- Certain provisions of the Convention will be incorporated through educational activities, in particular projects and research carried out by students;
- School learning-resources centres and libraries will be supplied with full copies of the Convention to serve as a reference for students who are carrying out projects or research on the subject.

55. The Ministry of Education sought the assistance of a UNICEF expert on children's rights in incorporating the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into the school curricula for basic and general education. A workshop on the subject was held during the period 11-13 October 2004 and a task force was established in order to determine the extent to which the school curricula already encompassed ideas relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and propose appropriate ways and means of incorporating its provisions into the curricula. An analysis of the schoolbooks used in general and basic education clearly showed that all school subjects, without exception, embrace concepts of children's rights.

56. In order to ensure that the ongoing development of the school curricula keeps pace with global trends and that the provisions of the Convention are incorporated into the modified curricula, various mechanisms have been put in place, including a Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and bodies in the Ministry of Education with responsibility for preparing the curricula.

2.4.2 Activities relating to the applications of and information on the Convention

57. The Legal Committee (of the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) made several visits to places of juvenile detention and also had meetings with relevant officials.

58. The task force established to monitor the situation of children in camel racing held a number of meetings with race organizers and parties interested or involved in racing activities in order to learn more about the situation of children involved in such races.

59. A visit was made to the court complex in Muscat to learn how children's cases are handled.

60. A visit was made to the Wafa' social centre in Bidbid to learn how disabled children are cared for.

61. In collaboration with UNICEF and competent experts, the Legal Committee, through the Ministry of Social Development, made a comparative study of Omani legislation and the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child with the aim of fully comprehending the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

62. In collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, the Studies Committee of the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child carried out studies on children and how they are treated within the Omani family (qualitative first stage), in addition to a study on public awareness of children's rights, which is in its final stages.

63. During the period 2001-2003, the Ministry of Social Development implemented a project for a database of social indicators. Covering 15 subject areas, including children as one of the mainstays, the project comprises indicators that provide important statistical evidence on child-related issues, such as:

- Indicators on the size of the Omani population in the age groups of 0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-14 years and 15-19 years or, in other words, the various stages of childhood, which are useful in connection with the delivery of health, educational and social services to all children in Oman;
- Data on juvenile offenders, the number of social institutions for pre-school children and the number of children in such institutions;
- Data on the various special-needs categories.

64. This database of social indicators will further the elaboration of clear-cut plans and provide a vision for the country's policy-makers. The implementation of this project for a database on social indicators is in conformity with the recommendation contained in paragraph 17 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

2.4.3 Training in the Convention

65. In collaboration with training organizations, the Commission planned and held training courses in various bodies, including the Ministry of Information (section 1.8.6), the National Organization for Scouts and Guides (section 1.8.13) and the Ministry of Education (section 1.8.3).

66. In collaboration with the UNICEF Office in Muscat and the Media Committee of the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, two training courses on how to design children's programmes in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child were run for the benefit of women working with children.

67. An extended meeting was held with media personnel in the Sultanate in order to provide an introduction to the Convention and explore ways and means of communicating it to the public.

68. Introductory lectures on children's rights were delivered at cultural seminars held in the Sultanate's schools and attended by school students of both sexes from private schools in the governorate of Muscat.

69. A concentrated media interview on children's rights was aired (in three parts) on the television programme "Alwan" (Colours) and the radio programme "Huwar al-Ajyal" (Intergenerational dialogue), in addition to which numerous articles on children's rights were published in the daily press.

70. Literary and cultural competitions for school students were organized with the aim of disseminating the Convention.

71. Overall, 250,000 information stickers and posters on the Convention were circulated to all institutions engaged in work with children.

72. The Sultanate is clearly making efforts to disseminate the Convention in collaboration with UNICEF. In conjunction with women's associations and competent bodies, the Ministry of Social Development runs periodic programmes designed to increase dissemination of the Convention. During the meetings held in that context, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is reviewed and all competent persons and those working with children are familiarized with the Convention.⁸

2.4.4 Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Sultanate's initial report

73. All competent authorities were informed of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report, which were circulated to all concerned parties and bodies.⁹ The legislative amendments referred to in several parts of the present report consequently aimed to address those observations, affirming at the same time the wide dissemination of the Convention, the serious interest in its subject matter and the concern to address the observations made on the report.

74. Since the time when the initial report was discussed, the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has held 30 meetings at the Ministry of Social Development, attended by all those concerned from governmental and civil-society bodies, in order to review the observations.

75. The Information Committee of the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has held 16 meetings for the purpose of reviewing the observations and monitoring implementation of the Convention.

76. The Legal Committee of the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has held eight meetings for the purpose of reviewing the observations and monitoring implementation of the Convention. Two side meetings on the subject of legal liability were also held with the competent parties in the concerned ministries.

77. The Committee on Juveniles, which is tasked with discussing the draft juveniles act, has held a number of meetings on the subject of juvenile delinquents with the aim of conducting the necessary reviews in the light of the provisions of the Convention and the observations made in that connection.

78. Every stage of the Sultanate's present report was prepared in coordination with all concerned governmental bodies and civil-society institutions and scores of official items of correspondence received from all relevant bodies, organs, institutions and associations were used in the process.

2.4.5 Mechanisms and structures for coordinating and monitoring the Convention

79. Mechanisms and structures for coordinating and monitoring the Convention were reviewed in sections I.B and II.E.4 of the initial report. Together with its committees, the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is regarded as the official body for monitoring and coordinating the efforts to implement

the provisions of the Convention, a task in which it is assisted by a number of governmental bodies and civil-society institutions that participate through their representatives in the Commission and the other concerned committees. The mechanisms and coordination systems employed in the Sultanate are closely connected with the country's administrative system and are in keeping with the Sultanate's experience, regulations and resources.

80. National committees on specific child-related issues sometimes extend their activity to include adults, *inter alia*, the National Anti-Smoking Committee,¹⁰ the National Committee for the Protection of Breastfeeding, the Committee to Combat Child Malnutrition, the National Committee for Disabled Services, social development committees and the Anti-Narcotics Committee. These committees coordinate with the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through representatives of the Ministry of Social Development who sit on the committees and who are members of the National Follow-up Commission, as well as through other representatives of governmental bodies who also sit on these committees. All information and guidelines are thus shaped by the Ministry of Social Development, followed by the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which transmits the guidelines of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the other committees. The proposals and recommendations of the National Follow-up Commission are also submitted to the Council of Ministers, which considers them and takes such action as is necessary.

81. The National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Committee for the Care of the Child are pursuing the preparation and development of a comprehensive plan for implementing the Convention through a consultative and participatory process with the concerned governmental and civil-society bodies, each of which studies the child-related legislation and the findings of the comprehensive study carried out in cooperation with UNICEF and then makes the necessary proposals concerning the legislation or the implementing measures, in accordance with the recommendation contained in paragraph 13 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

82. The competencies of the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child include the following:

- Following up implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Preparing periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention;
- Monitoring awareness-raising of the Convention;
- Preparing the Sultanate's national report;
- Following up issues relating to child protection and promoting the implementation of child-related programmes and activities in the Sultanate.

83. During 2003, a technical secretariat was established to follow up national action plans relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ensure that they have the required human and financial support.

84. Civil-society organizations¹¹ very clearly cooperate with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in addition to which their representatives on the national committees and the National Follow-up Commission pursue coordination and participation in child-related activities, particularly those for the disabled. Associations for children and young people in schools and clubs play an active part in discussing the rights and freedoms articulated in the Convention, as does the Scout Movement, among others.

85. The Sultanate is studying those aspects of the recommendation contained in paragraph 15 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report that have not been implemented in order to remove the obstacles to implementation by creating the right conditions and developing resources.

86. Both the National Committee for the Care of the Child and the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child comprise representatives of civil society and the competent governmental bodies. Both are tasked with regularly monitoring and evaluating the progress achieved in implementing the Convention and both are fully empowered to study, explore and establish databases, prepare programmes and projects, coordinate ministry efforts, carry out projects and activities, regulate relations with the concerned bodies and organizations, review and propose the amendment of legislation, raise awareness of the Convention and follow up its implementation.

87. The database is particularly important for observing and following up all social aspects and for monitoring social indicators with the aim of taking positive action and allaying problems, particularly where families and children are concerned, which is consistent with the comment made in paragraph 16 and the recommendation contained in paragraph 17 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

88. These national committees conform with the principles relating to the status of national institutions (the Paris principles) within the limits of the resources of the Sultanate of Oman and the nature of its development and renaissance, which should eliminate the reasons for the concern expressed by the Committee in paragraph 18 of its concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and which is also in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 19 thereof.

2.4.6 Governmental and non-governmental bodies with direct competence to implement the Convention and carry out government spending

89. Several governmental and non-governmental bodies are linked with implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on account of their areas of competence and fields of activity. All of them work through the coordination and follow-up undertaken by the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which comprises the following: the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Sultan Qaboos University, the Royal Oman Police, and representatives of civil society.

90. The civil-society entities include associations for the care of disabled persons, Omani women's associations, children's crèches, child development homes and the National Organization for Scouts and Guides, brief outlines of which follow below.

A. The Association for the Care of Disabled Persons

91. This Association cares for disabled persons and provides health services for their benefit, as well as social and cultural services (section 7.1.4).

B. Omani women's associations

92. The Ministry of Social Development is greatly interested in and encouraging of Omani women, fostering in them the spirit of voluntary social work by publicizing Omani women's associations in all provinces of the Sultanate. There are now 45 such associations, whose main objectives and tasks are, *inter alia*, to:

- Offer family planning, guidance and counselling for women with a view to domestic happiness;
- Take part in studies, programmes and projects on child and maternal care;
- Cultivate traditions based on virtue and emanating from the social heritage, values and principles derived from the teachings of Islam.

C. Children's crèches

93. These are voluntary social establishments run as part of the children's activities offered by Omani women's associations and women's training centres in provincial towns and centres.

94. They aim to offer basic cultural, educational, cultural and recreational services for pre-school-age children and are run by non-governmental women's associations or local social committees (Omani women's associations and women's training centres).

95. Table 3 (see annex for tables) shows that, in 2004, there were 45 children's crèches in Omani women's associations in the whole of the Sultanate, comprising 4,574 children, including 2,314 males (50.6 per cent) and 2,260 females (49.4 per cent). Table 4 shows that, in 2004, there were 10 children's crèches in women's training centres in the whole of the Sultanate comprising 990 children, including 429 males (47.7 per cent) and 471 females (52.3 per cent).

D. Child development homes

96. These non-governmental homes run character-forming social activities for rural children and provide them with educational, social, cooperative and recreational services. They are run by non-governmental committees supervised by local community development centres.

97. Table 5 shows that, in 2004, there were 22 child development homes in the whole of the Sultanate, comprising 2,256 children, including 1,116 males (49.5 per cent) and 1,140 females (50.5 per cent).

E. The National Organization for Scouts and Guides

98. Established by Royal Decree No. 10/75 under the supervision of His Majesty the Sultan, this Organization aims to form habits of self-reliance, cooperation and participation in public service, provide an all-round spiritual, intellectual and physical education and create a spirit of faith, solidarity and involvement in promoting global peace based on justice.

99. Children's rights are incorporated into programmes for scouts and guides through a national technical committee for child development.

100. The tasks of the technical committee include those of:

- Establishing and formulating the general objectives of the activities and programmes of the National Organization for Scouts and Guides as far as children's rights are concerned, as well as proposing suitable activities and programmes for each age group;
- Proposing subjects for training both leaders and senior leaders in skills and techniques connected with children's rights and incorporating them into training courses and activities;
- Coordinating and cooperating with governmental bodies and international organizations concerned with children's rights;
- Organizing a competition in the scout and guide offices in the governorates and provinces of the Sultanate on a booklet entitled "Oman's children: successes and future outlook", published in 2002, and awarding prizes to the children who win the first places countrywide;
- Participating in the preparation and drafting of the booklet "Oman's children: successes and future outlook";
- Designing a wide range of varied games for scouts and guides that deal with children's rights in an interesting and appealing way;
- Providing the opportunity for children who are members of scout or guide units to participate in the councils which run the units, promoting the role of children who participate in the leadership councils of scout and guide units (consultative councils - supervisory councils), enabling them to undertake the tasks assigned to them and involving them in planning, implementing and decision-making, as well as forming committees of girls and boys to help in running the camps and activities for scouts and guides organized by the National Organization and its offices;
- Providing children who belong to the scout and guide movement with the opportunity of training in the skills of discussion, dialogue and decision-making by organizing 40 training courses for their natural leaderships, in which 1,600 males and females take part each year;

- Offering leisure facilities and games for children who belong to the movement by organizing 45 full day camps in the governorates and provinces of the Sultanate, from which 2,700 cubs and brownies benefit each year;
- Providing the opportunity for children belonging to the movement to exchange information and experiences with their peers from the other regions and form new relationships and friendships by organizing 50 friendship meetings in the regions and provinces of the Sultanate, from which 1,500 male and female participants benefit each year;
- Providing the opportunity for children belonging to the scout and guide movement to form new friendships with their peers from different countries of the world and play a decided role in promoting the slogan of fraternity and global peace adopted by the movement by involving them in scout and guide demonstrations (international/Arab/Gulf) and stimulating their motivation for self-learning and acquiring the knowledge and skills that will serve them and their communities by organizing a competition for the best scout and guide in each age group, in which over 10,000 males and females take part each year;
- Furthering the spiritual, social, physical and health capacities of children belonging to the scout and guide movement, helping them to make good use of their leisure time during school holidays and developing their awareness of their rights and duties by holding 10 scout and guide jamborees throughout the Sultanate, from which 2,500 male and female participants benefit each year.

101. The Organization integrates special-needs children into society by establishing scout and guide units in places where there are special associations and centres for such children and by giving them the opportunity to participate in the scouting and guiding activities organized by those units. The Organization has taken part in activities for disabled children at the Arab and international levels, such as the special-needs camp (for the visually- and speech-impaired) in Cairo in 2000 and the special-needs seminars held at the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts World Centre, Pax Lodge, London.

102. In regard to implementation of the Convention, the activities of the Organization include the following:

- The organization of a training course on children's rights for 27 leaders of scout and guide units in Ibra' province in the eastern region during March 1999;
- The organization of two courses on raising children's health awareness (child-to-child) for 82 scout and guide leaders held at the Education Training Centre in Nizwa during April 1999;
- The inclusion of human rights as a main subject in the studies and training activities for leaders and senior leaders;

- Participation in the workshop to prepare trainers in the field of children's rights, held in Muscat during the period 13-14 March 1999;
- Participation in a meeting organized in 2000 by the Ministry of Social Development to discuss and review the proposed strategy for the promotion of women's and children's health;
- Participation in the International Children's Conference held in England during the period 22-24 May 2000;
- Participation in the "Yes to Children" workshop held in Muscat during May 2001;
- The organization of eight annual workshops on peer education as part of the programme of scout and guide activities and camps dealing with issues relating to the unwholesome conduct to which children are exposed and the role of the scout movement in addressing those issues;
- Participation in the health workshops run by the General Directorate of Health Affairs in Muscat during October 2002 under the banner of "Together for young people's health and peer education";
- Participation in the workshop on promoting adolescent health held in Jordan during May 2002;
- Promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child through public scout marches organized in the regions and provinces, through the Muscat Fair and the Salalah Autumn Fair and through helping to publish and disseminate to members and their relatives the instructional materials prepared by bodies concerned with children's rights.

III. DEFINITION OF THE CHILD IN OMANI LEGISLATION (art. 1 of the Convention)

103. This subject was covered in some detail throughout section II of the Sultanate's initial report.

104. Depending on the circumstances, Omani legislation uses various terms to describe children, such as minor, young person, juvenile, infant, ward and so on. These terms all refer to the child, namely a person who has not yet attained 18 years of age. We should also like to point out that the minimum age for admission to basic education is five years and six months for private schools and between six and eight years for State schools. Basic education ends at 16 years and general education ends in the eleventh and twelfth grades (18 years).

105. On this same subject, we should also like to mention the information below.

106. Under the Employment Act (section 2.1.5), the employment of children under 15 years of age is prohibited.

107. Under article 196 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, witnesses over 18 years of age are required to swear on oath to tell the truth. Witnesses under that age are not required to swear on oath and their testimony is heard informally without oath. Article 105 of the Code also permits witnesses, including those heard informally, to refrain from testifying against their ascendants, descendants, relatives and in-laws to the fourth degree and against a spouse, even after the marriage has ended, except if the offence was committed against one of them and the prosecution has no other evidence.

108. There are two forms of child guardianship:

- Guardianship of the person, which includes the care of all matters relating to the person of the minor;
- Guardianship of property, which includes the care of all matters relating to the property of the minor.

109. Unless it is removed from him, the father has guardianship of both the person and property. If the father is absent, guardianship is divided; guardianship of the person is vested in a male agnatic relative, based on the order of succession, who must administer, invest and safeguard the property of the minor.¹² Children over 15 years of age who are authorized by their guardian or legal guardian or guided by the judge are deemed to be fully competent in those matters for which they are authorized. Consequently, they have the same right as adults to legal and medical advice, medical treatment, work and education, as well as the same right to lodge complaints with the judiciary, with the exception of acts which minors are prohibited to perform. The authorization of guardians and legal guardians is confined to those matters which they are in a position to authorize, not matters that are prohibited by law. As for minors under 15 years of age, they are not entitled to make such dispositions except through the guardian or legal guardian, as the case may be.

110. The judge acts as guardian for any person who is without a guardian and he is the competent authority for dealing with complaints about a guardian's arbitrary conduct. Where the interest of the guardian or legal guardian conflicts with that of the minor, the judge appoints a person to represent the minor.

111. The child has the same right as any citizen to lodge a complaint with the courts about dispositions made by the guardian or legal guardian that conflict with the interest of the child.

112. In practice, it is admissible for a child to seek medical advice without asking for the consent of his or her father, which is not obligatory except for a surgical operation. If both parents refuse consent, the child has the right of recourse to the courts in order to complain about their arbitrary conduct, whereupon the judge takes such decision as is necessary.

113. Under the (current) law, the provision whereby a minor may receive much lighter punishment applies even to those acting under authorization or guidance. These lighter punishments are never increased to the death penalty or life imprisonment and never exceed a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment in the case of those over 15 years of age. In this regard,

we further refer to section 2.1 *et seq.* We should also point out that the Penal Code stipulates certain ages for the application of its provisions and is not bound by puberty. Moreover, the legislation makes no distinction between girls and boys concerning the age of marriage.

IV. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

4.1 Non-discrimination (art. 2 of the Convention)

114. The Basic Law of the State¹³ guarantees rights and freedoms without any of the kinds of discrimination mentioned in article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 17 of the Basic Law provides that: “All citizens are equal before the law and are equal in public rights and obligations. There shall be no distinction between them on grounds of race, origin, colour, language, religion, confession, domicile or social status.

4.1.1 Non-discrimination between males and females

115. This subject was covered in section III.A.2 of the Sultanate’s initial report.

116. There is no discrimination between males and females concerning admission to education¹⁴ and there is no difference between children of either sex in regard to benefiting from health and social services. Nor is there any difference in regard to the age of marriage and other legal transactions.

117. Omani laws never discriminate between males and females, who have equal rights and equal duties. Any discrimination in violation of the Basic Law of the State is invalidated by the courts and the injured party is entitled to compensation.

4.1.2 Measures to minimize economic and social disparities, including between rural and urban areas

118. We refer to section III.A.2 of the Sultanate’s initial report.

119. The statistics on education, health and other matters annexed to the present report confirm that there is no discrimination between rural and urban areas.

120. Any disparity in services between rural and urban areas is attributable either to resources or to higher levels of non-governmental activity in the more populated areas. It is never attributable to a discriminatory attitude. Within the resource limits, the Government is also doing its utmost to eliminate any disparities that may exist. The general budget and governmental projects are divided among the different regions on the basis of feasibility and need.

121. The Sultanate affirms that discrimination between minorities or indigenous inhabitants is altogether non-existent, since it has none of either. There is no discrimination between the incapacitated and the able-bodied. On the contrary, the former receive more care.

122. Article 21 of the Basic Law clearly states that punishment is personal. Similarly, in accordance with the principle that “no one who is already burdened shall bear the burdens of others”, the social doctrine does not allow punishment based on the status, activities or views of a child’s family or legal guardians, since under the Penal Code, punishment is personal and includes only the offender, accomplice, abettor or inciter, none of whom acquires that capacity simply on account of his relationship. Any punishment or discrimination based on the status, activities or views of a child’s family or legal guardians is invalid and the party who is injured as a consequence is entitled to compensation.

123. Omani society has no hostile attitudes towards children; as a matter of social and moral custom, they are shown consideration and favour by both nationals and non-nationals. The views of children are also taken into account in the courts, in public opinion and the assessment of complaints, which is consistent with the recommendation contained in paragraph 26 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate’s initial report.

124. The Sultanate is considering the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, as recommended in paragraph 27 of the Committee’s concluding observations. In practice, the Sultanate largely applies this Convention, since the Employment Act is applied to migrants and nationals as far as health care and education is concerned. There is consequently nothing to prevent migrant children from enjoying their full rights.

125. The Sultanate of Oman is against racial discrimination and xenophobia, as is its Basic Law. Moreover, the Sultanate acceded to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by Royal Decree No. 87/2002. There is consequently no need to elaborate plans to address this issue, bearing in mind that provision for the protection of non-nationals and their property is made in article 35 of the Basic Law (recommendation contained in paragraph 28 of the Committee’s concluding observations).

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

126. This subject was covered in some detail in section III.B of the Sultanate’s initial report.

127. The best interests of the child are fundamental to the choice made in the various policies and measures adopted in the fields of health, social services and education, *inter alia*, in the Sultanate of Oman. They will be covered in some detail in section 8.1.4 of the present report.

128. The legislation mentioned in section 2.1 of the present report guarantees the legal protection of children, which is enshrined in the personal status laws, the Civil and Commercial Code, the Employment Act, the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Act and so on. As indicated in that legislation, the principle of the best interests of the child is a primary consideration in all actions and is applied by the courts of law, the administrative authorities and public and private social welfare institutions. This is confirmed by the statistics contained in the present report concerning the budgets allocated to items relating both directly and indirectly to children.

129. The basis of the housing policy is that families are given preference over single persons or married couples without children.

130. As already mentioned, care under the *kafalah* system is mandatory for those of unknown parentage under the provisions of the Civil Status Act and the regulations applicable to non-governmental organizations and child-care associations.

131. The social security system plays an important role in ensuring that the best interests of the child are paramount.

132. The fact that nurseries, schools and associations have social workers and psychologists who are moreover trained to take into account the best interests of the child effectively contributes to the realization of this principle.

4.3 The right to life, survival and development (art. 6 of the Convention)

133. This subject was covered under sections III.C and III.C.1 of the Sultanate's initial report.

134. Both the law and the national policy guarantee the right of the child to life, survival and development through a number of measures and mechanisms, including the following:

- Children may not be deprived of the right to life by legislation or implementing measures or by will. The death penalty is not imposed on children and children may not be killed, even for reasons of compassion, nor may they be incited to commit suicide. A mother who kills her child, even where the motive is to avoid dishonour, is punished and anyone who causes the death of a child by error or neglect is punished with the aim of protecting the child's right to life;
- The protection of children includes the foetus, which may not be aborted unless a legally qualified doctor determines that the life of the expectant mother is endangered and believes that abortion is the only way to save her life, provided that it is carried out before the seventeenth week of pregnancy. Any person who otherwise performs or assists in an abortion is punished;
- The first step in protection is enshrined in the principles prescribed under Omani legislation to ensure that the child is born into a legitimate family based on free and equal choice. The foetus and the expectant mother also have prescribed rights, the substance of which is indicated in the present report in the context of the review of the Personal Status Act, the Civil Status Act and other laws.

135. As for legislation and implementing measures concerning the right of the child to life, survival and development, we should like to mention the following:

- Ministerial Decision No. 3/2003 reconstituting the National Anti-Smoking Committee, in which WHO and UNICEF participate along with the relevant governmental bodies;

- Ministerial Decision No. 8/2002 reconstituting the Committee to Combat Child Malnutrition;
- Ministerial Decision No. 39/2001, article 2 of which prohibits the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products to anyone under 18 years of age and punishes anyone who contravenes that provision;
- Ministerial Decision No. 33/2000 establishing the Department for Primary Health Care in the Ministry of Health and a special family department comprising a birth-spacing section;
- Ministerial Decision No. 54/2000 constituting the National Committee for the Protection of Breastfeeding and Ministerial Decision No. 55/98 regulating the marketing of breast-milk substitutes.

136. The above legislative enactments, decisions and measures aim to guarantee life, survival and development to the child, as well as the best interests of the child. The statistical tables and data contained in the present report on the accomplishments of the Ministry of Health (section 7 *et seq.*) show the achievements made in this area. We refer here to the role played by the Ministry of Education through the health, social and educational services available in government and private schools in general and basic education (first to twelfth grades), as well as the role of the Ministry of Social Development through the nurseries which it supervises and the awareness-raising programmes and seminars which it offers.

4.4 Respect for the views of the child (art. 12 of the Convention)

137. In this regard, we refer to section III.D of our initial report.

138. The principle of respect for the views of the child is particularly visible in the management system in schools, nurseries, child development centres and the children's crèches attached to women's training centres in that children are given freedom of expression to the degree appropriate to their level of awareness and development. This will be covered in some detail throughout section 8 of the present report. The activities of the Ministry of Information relating to this subject will also be covered in section 7.2.18. We further refer to section 2.4.3.

139. Omani legislation stipulates matters which are prohibited and seldom mentions those which are permitted.

140. The awareness-raising programmes in the media and in schools, parent councils, the National Organization for Scouts and Guides and the Ministry of Sports Affairs, *inter alia*, are intended to continue providing guidance and raising awareness of the importance of listening to and discussing the views of children.

141. The right of children to lodge a complaint concerning an offence against them or the misconduct of a legal guardian has already been mentioned in section 2.1.4 of the present report.

V. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS (arts. 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 37 of the Convention)

142. These were covered in some detail in section IV of the Sultanate's initial report.

143. Civil rights and freedoms are provided for in the Basic Law of the State.¹⁵ They are protected under the provisions of the relevant laws, including the Omani Penal Code,¹⁶ which punishes infringements of such rights and freedoms; civil servants who arbitrarily curtail the freedom of individuals, for instance, are punished, as are those who disclose confidential information acquired during the course of their work, enter homes without the occupants' consent, abuse their power, extract confessions or information or engage in slander. Any person who violates the sanctity of a religion, burial ground or funeral is also punished, as is any person who leaves a child in a state of need, fails to provide maintenance for a child, interferes in a child's guardianship, neglects or indecently assaults a child or incites a child to engage in fornication. All offences against individuals or their property are punished in order to protect the rights of the persons concerned, including offences to dignity or privacy through incitement to suicide, compassionate killing, curtailment of freedom, servitude, slavery, threat, abuse or any prejudice of rights.

144. It is prohibited by law to prejudice any right or freedom provided for in such legislation and anyone whose rights or freedoms are prejudiced may seek redress through the courts, in addition to which the Office of the Public Prosecutor may institute public proceedings if such offences come to its knowledge, even if no one has lodged a complaint about them.

145. The legal texts recognise children's rights, as already mentioned in section 2.1 *et seq.* The application of the law and the fact that no provision of the law may contravene the rules on punishment and on victim compensation are based on the sovereignty of law as the essence of governance in the State (art. 59 of the Basic Law). Although there are no precise statistics on either the number of offences committed, the punishment handed down or the compensation awarded in this connection, we can confirm that they occur so rarely and infrequently as to be unworthy of mention.

5.1 Name and nationality (arts. 7 and 8 of the Convention)

146. This subject was covered in section IV.A of the Sultanate's initial report.

147. Under articles 14 and 19 of the Civil Status Act,¹⁷ births must be registered and children must be given a name. The elements of the child's identity must also be determined in order to ensure future identification of the child by the parents. This Act and the procedures which it comprises offer no leeway for abuse of the child on account of his or her name or place of birth.

5.2 Preservation of identity (art. 8 of the Convention)

148. Under article 2 of Ministerial Decision No. 96/88,¹⁸ any person who finds a newborn child must immediately hand him or her over to the nearest hospital, health centre or police station or to the regional governor. Those authorities must take the child and compile a report of the circumstances in which he or she was found, including the name and address of the person

who found the child and the time and date. Under article 3 of the Decision, the child must undergo an immediate medical examination, while under article 4, the health institutions are required to notify the competent authorities that a family must be made available to care for the child. Under article 8, the alternative family and the competent authority must agree on the choice of a four-element name for the child and the competent authorities must be asked to issue a birth certificate for the child. Under no circumstances may the birth certificate or birth register state that the child is of unknown parentage or that the child bears the name or title of the head of the household (so that he or she cannot then be adopted). The family's tribal name may be added at the end of the child's name. The birth certificate does not indicate that the child was born out of wedlock, thus addressing the concern expressed by the Committee in paragraph 24 of its observations on the Sultanate's first report.

149. The Omani Nationality Act¹⁹ does not allow for the possibility of dual nationality for reasons of principle connected with social values, traditions, experiences, interests, the sense of belonging to the homeland and its determining elements.

150. The Omani Nationality Act seeks to ensure that no child that could be established as belonging to Oman is left without Omani nationality. It therefore grants nationality to anyone born in Oman of unknown parents, to anyone with an Omani mother and an unknown father, to anyone whose father is Omani and has lost his nationality and to anyone born in Oman who adopts it as his normal place of residence and whose father was also born in Oman but had lost his nationality at the time of birth and remained in that situation.

151. Although the Omani Nationality Act does not recognize the nationality of a foreign mother in the case of her children from an Omani father, it equally does not bestow Omani nationality on the children of an Omani mother and a foreign father, as in both cases it is essentially the nationality of the father that counts. Consequently, the mother's nationality may similarly not be taken into account on one occasion and the father's on another.

5.3 Freedom of expression (art. 13 of the Convention)

152. This subject was covered in section IV.C of the Sultanate's initial report.

153. In Omani law, there is nothing to prohibit any person from expressing his or her opinion within the limits of the law, as guaranteed under articles 28, 29 and 30 of the Basic Law of the State.

154. Section 8 of the present report will shed more light on this subject in connection with schoolchildren and the role of the National Organization for Scouts and Guides.

5.3.1 The right of the child to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers

155. Omani children have ample opportunity to acquire various types of information and ideas.²⁰ This subject will be addressed in further detail in section 8 of the present report concerning children in schools.

156. Opened in November 1990, the Children's Museum assists in providing children with access to all sciences and technologies in simplified form. Further assistance is also provided by child development homes, children's crèches and public and private libraries. All children are entitled to make frequent use of such libraries, which are home to a large quantity of children's books. We also refer to the newspapers posted on school walls that are edited by children and express their views. We further point out the impact of the National Organization for Scouts and Guides established by Royal Decree No. 1/75, the regular cultural fairs and the role of non-governmental organizations through their activities, whether in Omani women's associations, associations for disabled persons or sports and cultural clubs, as well as the impact of science clubs and the role of the Ministry of Information, mentioned earlier.

5.3.2 Measures adopted to enable children at different stages of education to express their views within the school environment

157. We refer in this regard to section IV.C.2 of our initial report. As far as schoolchildren are concerned, this subject will be covered in detail in section 8 of the present report.

158. The regulations on private education schools,²¹ the regulations on general education schools²² and the regulations for nurseries²³ all mention the establishment of school science clubs and other summer clubs to follow up achievement of the educational objectives (art. 33 of the regulations on general education schools). Each of these regulations mentions the importance of providing children with information and building their all-round capacities, including the capacity to express themselves and their views.

159. Television and radio programmes, the press, the National Organization for Scouts and Guides and school newspapers all clearly and palpably assist in this context.

5.3.3 Restrictions on exercise of the right of expression

160. The only restriction on children's exercise of the right to express their opinions or religion is that it should not contravene those laws which prohibit the fuelling of strife, feuding, discrimination or anything that violates public order or morals.

161. There is no social tradition of limiting respect for the opinion of the child, just as there is no limitation on respect for the opinion of the adults in the child's family. The steps taken in the interest of children to set up parent councils and seasonal clubs, use social researchers at all stages of education and focus on developing the child's talents continue to achieve visible results in enshrining the right of children to state their views on matters of concern to them.

5.4 Right of access to appropriate information (art. 17 of the Convention)

162. We refer in this respect to the information contained in section IV.D of the Sultanate's initial report. This subject will also be covered in some detail in section 8 of the present report. The Ministry of Information provides a tremendous amount of information for children in its various programmes mentioned in section 2.4.3 of the present report and via its Internet site.

5.5 Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14 of the Convention)

163. The subject was covered in some detail in section IV.E.10 of the Sultanate's initial report and will also be covered in section 8.5.3 of the present report.

164. Article 28 of the Basic Law of the State guarantees the freedom of individuals to perform their religious observances. There are places of worship for all religions and confessions in Oman and followers practice their beliefs openly and in complete freedom.

165. There is nothing in law to prevent the right of children of any religion to learn about their religion, perform acts of worship or express the opinions and beliefs that pass through their thought or conscience, provided that they engage in no activity in that connection if their opinions or beliefs are such as to violate public order or morals.

5.6 Freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly (art. 15 of the Convention)

166. This subject will be covered in some detail in section 8 in connection with school students and their membership of activity groups. We also refer to the information concerning the National Organization for Scouts and Guides and the children who join it, in addition to the information on the Ministry of Sports Affairs.

5.7 Protection of privacy

167. This subject was covered in section IV.G of the Sultanate's initial report.

168. In addition to the comments already made, article 276 *bis* of the Omani Penal Code punishes any person who deliberately uses a computer to commit acts, including violation of the privacy of third parties or infringement of their right to keep their secrets.

169. Under articles 90, 91 and 92 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, correspondence, telegrams and conversations that take place in a private place are protected against monitoring, except in the event of an offence and with the legal authorization of the Office of the Public Prosecutor.

170. Under Article 177 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the court is permitted to examine a case *in camera* in order to preserve public morals, including non-disclosure of confidential family information or of information affecting the privacy of the individual. In many instances, the courts conduct trials *in camera* in order to protect privacy, particularly where the family, honour crimes and sexual assault are involved. We should also point out that the Civil and Commercial Code contains similar provisions.

171. In the same regard, we refer to the information previously stated concerning the registration of the birth of children of unknown identity and to the relevant ministerial decisions, pursuant to which registers are deemed confidential and it is prohibited to disclose anything that prejudices the child on account of his or her birth.

5.8 The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 37 of the Convention)

172. This subject was covered in section VII.D of the Sultanate's initial report.
173. Article 20 of the Basic Law of the State,²⁴ article 192 of the Code of Criminal Procedure²⁵ and the Omani Penal Code and the punishments imposed for abuse, torture or indecent assault were examined in that section.
174. Section 2.1 *et seq.* of the present report indicate the measures taken in this field. Section 8 covers the measures taken with respect to school students and section 2.4.3 covers the role of the Ministry of Information in this regard.
175. As for studies and procedures relating to this subject, we might mention the following:
- In 2003, in conjunction with UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Development carried out a qualitative study on the way children are treated in Omani society. The findings showed that some teachers might resort to disciplinary punishment, even though beating and corporal punishment are forbidden in schools. The study revealed no reports of any beating in schools, indicating that this method was mainly a form of discipline that was used only in a mild manner. The study also showed that teachers mainly employ other disciplinary methods, such as complaining to parents about a student's misconduct or temporarily banning the student from participating in certain activities;
 - Other studies showed that the methods of punishment in Omani families vary and are related to the schooling and educational attainment of the parents. Families who have some schooling and education, for instance, usually adopt appropriate methods of punishment, such as reprimanding the child, withholding spending money or temporarily denying the child's participation in recreational programmes. Families who have the least schooling and education resort to means of punishment that include shouting, chastisement and beating;
 - The Department of Family Guidance and Counselling is working hard to develop a strategy aimed at protecting children from all types of maltreatment. Mechanisms have been put in place to reduce maltreatment, receive complaints and take follow-up action. The Ministry of Social Development is joined in these efforts by the Ministry of Health and the Royal Oman Police. This strategy is now being progressively implemented and its results monitored;
 - Radio and television programmes that deal with social issues have been launched in order to enhance awareness of the negative results of maltreating children. They hear complaints about maltreatment from individuals and children, listen their views and have experts on hand who are university professors or doctors to respond to their queries. Examples of the programmes which play an active role in this respect include those on family matters, the radio and television programme "Khas Jiddan" (Extremely Special) and the television programme "Multaqat al-Saghir" (Young Meeting Place);

- An exploratory study was made of a sample of 50 families of varying educational and social levels in several areas of the governorate of Muscat.²⁶ The aim of the study was to look into how children are treated and how and why they are punished, including the number of abuses by type and sexual abuse in particular. According to the findings of this study, there was no sexual abuse, perhaps owing to the fact that Omani society adheres to its religion and traditions.

176. The National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is extensively studying the methods of punishment used within the family as a preliminary to stepping up the pace of protective and awareness-raising measures as a means of prevention.

177. The current law punishes physical and bodily harm with stringent penalties. Schools, parent councils and scout and guide associations also conduct campaigns to publicize the negative consequences of maltreating children. Furthermore, school regulations prohibit and punish any beating of students and the Ministry of Education monitors the conduct and behaviour of teachers.

178. Here, we should point out that violence against children is not substantially prevalent in Oman and that the measures already implemented, as well as those to be introduced, are in line with the recommendation contained in paragraph 36 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

VI. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

6.1 Parental guidance (art. 5 of the Convention)

179. This subject was covered in section V.A of the Sultanate's initial report.

180. Section 2.1.3 of the present report also deals with the provisions contained on this subject in the Civil and Commercial Code.

181. The Omani family is composed of a couple having contracted a valid marriage from which children are produced. Founded on long-standing religious, moral and cultural traditions, the nature of the family is one based on the provision of exceptional physical, mental and moral care for children, taking modern-day changes into account. Parents, guardians and legal guardians in Oman therefore have various sources of guidance and the schools and hospitals responsible for educating and caring for children are required to inform parents of their child's development and offer them guidance and, where necessary, assistance in that connection, as required by the current law.

182. Under the regulations on children in need of care issued by Ministerial Decision No. 96/88, heads of alternative families are required to care for the child's medical and social needs at all stages and treat the child as one of their own. Under article 16 of the same regulations, the head of the household is equivalent to the guardian.

183. Under the regulations on the Children's Care Home (attached to the Ministry of Social Development) issued by Ministerial Decision No. 91/99, the staff working in the Home are required to have a university qualification in psychology, education, sociology or teaching as a guarantee of their ability to care for children, offer them guidance, develop their aptitudes and abilities and safeguard their health.

6.2 Parental responsibility (art. 18 of the Convention)

184. This subject was covered in section V.B of the initial country report.

185. Under article 36, paragraph 5, of the Personal Status Act, parents are required to care for children and raise them in such a way as to ensure their proper upbringing. The Act also stipulates the conditions to be fulfilled by custodians, whether male or female, who are subject to monitoring by the courts and whose custody is removed for any breach of their responsibilities. The obligations of the guardian, who must fulfil specific conditions, are also prescribed. The courts may remove his guardianship in the interests of the child.

186. The failure of any father or mother to fulfil his or her responsibilities under the Personal Status Act may be reviewed by the courts in order to ensure such fulfilment. The Omani courts examine proceedings for maintenance, custody or removal of guardianship or legal guardianship that may be brought in order to oblige a parent to fulfil his or her responsibilities.

187. Under the law, child maintenance takes precedence over any other maintenance, including parental maintenance. The father is obliged to pay such maintenance, which covers food, housing, clothing, education, health and all other needs of the child, including breastfeeding.

188. Under the law, the debt of maintenance takes precedence over all other debts and must be taken on board. The maintenance provider may be forcibly detained and his salary attached as a means of obliging him to pay maintenance.

189. No distinction is made between the responsibility of either parent, although obligations differ where a dispute arises in that the husband is required to provide maintenance and preference is given to the women as far as custody is concerned.

190. Article 212 of the Omani Penal Code punishes any person who leaves his or her child, whether legitimate or illegitimate, in a state of need, either by refusing support or by neglecting to provide means of enabling such support. Non-payment of maintenance and neglect of a minor are also punished under articles 213 and 214.

191. The social security system²⁷ operates on the basis of the following definitions:

- *The family*: (art. 1) is composed of a husband and one wife or more, together with their children of up to 18 years of age in the case of boys and until the age when they marry or start work in the case of girls. A person over that age who regularly attends school continues to be defined as a child until the end of the secondary stage;

- *Orphans*: Males or females under 18 years of age whose father is deceased or whose father or parents are unknown. An orphan over that age who is still studying continues to be defined as an orphan until the secondary stage;
- *Vocational training*: A comprehensive social, medical, psychological and vocational care programme designed to restore in disabled persons the ability to perform their original job or any other job appropriate to their condition;
- *Social care homes*: Homes established or supervised by the Ministry of Social Development in order to provide shelter for the young girls under its jurisdiction. Article 2 provides for the right of orphans and the families of prisoners and persons incapacitated for work to receive a monthly allowance, as specified in the annex to the Social Security Act.

192. Ministerial Decision No. 54/90 issuing the regulations on assistance for disadvantaged families and individuals provides for the award of temporary assistance in cash or in kind to disadvantaged families and individuals who receive no allowances under the provisions of the Social Security Act.

193. Tables 6 and 7 indicate that, in 2002, the Ministry of Social Development provided funds in 12,249 cases of disaster and that the sum of emergency assistance amounted to RO 1,019,685, whereas assistance in kind was provided in 2,047 cases.

194. Annexed to the present report²⁸ are statistical tables showing cases of disaster by type and cause, amounts paid by month, governorate or region and assistance provided in cash or in kind by month, region and type during the period 2000-2003.

6.3 Separation from parents (art. 9 of the Convention)

195. This subject was covered in some detail in section V.C of the initial country report.

196. Article 214 of the Omani Penal Code punishes any person who takes a minor, even with his or her consent, for the purpose of removing that minor from the authority of the person holding guardianship or custody. The law permits guardianship to be removed from the father if his injury of the child is proven. In other words, separation from parents is not in conformity with the law except in the interest of the child and pursuant to a court judgement.

197. The agreement on implementing judgements, letters rogatory and legal declarations of the Gulf Cooperation Council States, in common with the Riyadh Arab Agreement on Judicial Assistance and other legal agreements, permits the enforcement of legal judgements relating to child custody and visits with a view to providing the necessary safeguards when the child is separated from his or her family.

198. In the Sultanate, there are no cases in which a government action against either or both parents has resulted in the situation where the child has no information on the whereabouts of an

incarcerated parent. The right to visit a prisoner is prescribed under the Prisons Act and the law also punishes the transfer of a child abroad against the will of his or her guardians. Consequently, the child's return is prescribed *ipso jure*. The available data makes no mention of any such cases.

6.4 Family reunification (art. 10 of the Convention)

199. We refer in this respect to section V.D of our initial report and section 9.1 of the present report.

6.5 Recovery of maintenance for the child (art. 27 of the Convention)

200. This subject is covered in section 2.1.3.

201. The maintenance of a child of unknown parents (a foundling) is the responsibility of the State if the child has no assets or if no one volunteers to provide maintenance for the child in accordance with article 69 of the Personal Status Act. The legal agreements to which we have referred guarantee the recovery of maintenance.

6.6 Children deprived of a family environment (art. 20 of the Convention)

202. This subject is covered in section 2.1.3 of the present report. It will also be covered in further detail in section 6.8.

6.7 Illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad

203. Under article 134 of the Personal Status Act, it is prohibited for the custodian of a child to travel outside Oman without the consent of the child's guardian. If the guardian fails to give consent, the matter is brought to court. If the child is transferred contrary to the above, the court may order his or her return. As already stated, the Omani Penal Code also punishes the removal of a minor from the Sultanate by the person holding guardianship over him or her.

6.8 Periodic review of child placement (art. 11 of the Convention)

204. Under Ministerial Decree No. 96/88 issuing the regulations on children in need of care, the fulfilment by alternative families of their obligations to care for the child is subject to monitoring and supervision by the competent government authorities. If those authorities note any neglect, they may warn the family that it must meet its obligations, failing which the child will be removed. The relevant government bodies periodically make impromptu visits to alternative families in order to check on the condition of the child. Hitherto, no breach of any undertakings has been noted.

205. Pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 91/99, the Children's Care Home is attached to the Ministry of Social Development. The regulations provide that the staff working in the Home must be highly qualified in specific scientific fields. The Home and its staff are subject to ongoing monitoring and follow-up by the Ministry.

206. Table 8 shows that, in 2003, there were 69 children and 21 carers in the Children's Care Home. Table 9 shows that alternative families took in 323 children, including 128 males and 195 females. Table 10 shows that, in March 2004, there were 69 children in the Children's Care Home, including 52 males and 16 females.

6.9 Maltreatment and neglect, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (arts. 19 and 39 of the Convention)

207. The Omani Penal Code punishes the dereliction of family duties, such as leaving a minor in a state of need, failing to provide maintenance, interfering in the guardianship of a minor or neglecting a minor or a person who is incapacitated (arts. 212 to 217).

208. The Omani Penal Code severely punishes indecent assault and the punishment is increased if the offence is against a child under 15 years of age or if the offender is an ascendant of the victim or a person responsible for the child's care, a person with authority over the child or a servant of any of those persons (art. 218).

209. The Omani Penal Code punishes incitement to prostitution, engagement in prostitution and the management of a place of prostitution. The punishment is increased if the offence of incitement is against a child under 18 years of age (arts. 220 to 222).

210. The Omani Penal Code punishes the commitment of open sexual scandals (art. 224) and severely punishes harm perpetrated against a person that damages his life, dignity or body, including incitement to suicide or assisted suicide. In such cases, the penalty is increased if the victim is a child under 15 years of age. Killing is also punished, even if done out of compassion at the request of the victim (arts. 240 and 241). The withholding of personal freedom, exclusion, violation of the sanctity of the home, threat, menace and abuse are severely punished (arts. 256 to 269).

211. The Omani Penal Code punishes offences against the property of the victim. We refer to section 1.5.10 of the present report, which sets forth the penalties imposed for offences involving narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The penalty is increased wherever children are concerned.

212. The crime prosecution services (the police and the Office of the Public Prosecutor) receive all complaints in connection with any offence and are obliged to pursue them. Anyone who suffers direct personal injury as the result of a crime may institute civil proceedings before the court which examines criminal cases (art. 20 of the Code of Criminal Procedure).

213. Under article 28 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, any person who witnesses an offence or who knows that an offence has taken place is required promptly to report the offence to the Office of the Public Prosecutor or its law enforcement officers. Under article 29, employees in general are required to do the same. Under article 30, law enforcement officers are required to investigate crimes and gather evidence.

214. Under article 33 of the same Code, law enforcement officers are under obligation to receive reports and complaints concerning any crime and to take the necessary action.

215. Guardians and legal guardians may submit complaints about any maltreatment of a child, a right which is also available to any child over 15 years of age. There is no legal provision to prevent persons under that age from seeking recourse through the courts. However, they must be represented before the courts or the Office of the Public Prosecutor by their legal guardian or guardian.

216. The obligation to report maltreatment of children includes teachers and doctors, both as public servants and as ordinary individuals. The Commission has no knowledge of any such crimes that have not been prosecuted or of any difficulties involved in their prosecution.

217. The regulations on private education schools, general education schools and nurseries lay down conditions for premises and teaching equipment in order to protect the child against injury, maltreatment, neglect or exploitation.

218. Legislative measures include the investigation and reporting of any crime. The competent authorities perform their work as required by the administrative measures currently in effect and also monitor and supervise enforcement. Already mentioned, the safeguards provided under the existing law make it possible to prosecute anyone who violates these laws. In the present circumstances and in the light of the available resources, there are no plans for any additional provisions on lodging complaints other than already mentioned, as the current provisions are presently adequate, particularly since Omani social traditions prohibit and disapprove of maltreatment of children.

6.10 Types and levels of awareness-raising, care and rehabilitation

219. The various types and levels of media play a prominent role in enhancing awareness as a way of preventing maltreatment or neglect (section 1.8.4). The National Organization for Scouts and Guides also plays a role in that regard, as do all child-related bodies.

220. Through the Department of Family Guidance and Counselling, the Ministry of Social Development is constantly seeking to investigate cases of child neglect and maltreatment, carry out in-depth field and library studies of cases and provide support, treatment and rehabilitation, where necessary, in swift and ongoing cooperation between the Department and the relevant health and social departments.

221. The homes for the care and development of children and the children's crèches referred to earlier are all elaborating plans and programmes involving provision of the necessary support for children, responsibility for their care and, where necessary, their rehabilitation.

222. Issues relating to disabled children will be covered in section 7.1 of the present report.

VII. BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE (arts. 6, 18, 23, 24, 26 and 27 of the Convention)

223. This subject was covered in some detail in section VI of the initial country report. The basic health of school students will be covered in section 8 of the present report.

7.1 Disabled children (art. 23 of the Convention)

224. Matters relating to the activities of the Ministry of Social Development for the benefit of disabled persons will be covered in section 1.4.6 of the present report.

225. The vocational training prescribed under the Social Security Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 87/84, as amended, includes disabled persons through the comprehensive social, medical, psychological and vocational care programme designed to restore in disabled persons the ability to perform and settle in their original job or any other job suited to their condition.

226. The Ministry of Social Development ensures the care of disabled children through:

- The Department for the Care of Disabled Persons at the General Directorate of Social Welfare;
- The Department of Rehabilitation Support for Disabled Children at the General Directorate of Social Welfare;
- Sections for the care of disabled persons in the regional directorates.

Care institutions for the disabled

7.1.1 The Home for the Care of Disabled Children

227. Established in Muscat by Ministerial Decision No. 27/2002, the Home offers care programmes for physically disabled children and subsequently provides appropriate rehabilitation on a case-by-case basis for children of both sexes between the ages of 3 and 14 years. These children receive social and medical care from physiotherapists and practical therapists in order to rehabilitate their motor and functional skills and help them overcome the difficulties which they face on account of their disability. The Home also provides services designed to show families how to care for their disabled children at home and trains volunteers from the Wafa' voluntary social centres.

228. The services and activities provided by the Home are as follows:

- Medical care, health care and periodic check-ups;
- Physiotherapy and motor-skills improvement on a case-by-case basis;
- Therapy for working on and developing the fine motor skills and autonomy;
- Social and psychological welfare programmes, psychological guidance and counselling programmes for children and their families, pre-school preparation for children, and housing and food services;
- Family care and child rehabilitation programme training for families;
- Help in gaining admission for children to general education schools on a case-by-case basis.

229. Table 11 shows that, in 2003, a total of 70 children benefited from the services provided by the Home, including 45 males and 25 females. Of these, 28 were residential clients and 42 were day clients.

7.1.2 The Wafa' voluntary social centres in regional areas

230. These are social institutions that provide voluntary services under supervision from the Ministry of Social Development. They are established either at the initiative of the Ministry in order to encourage voluntary work with the disabled or at the request of inhabitants.

231. These centres seek to provide support and care for special-needs children with the aim of enabling them to adapt to their environment through activities and programmes.

232. The aims of all these centres can be summarized as follows:

- To provide psychological and social rehabilitation services for disabled children in order to prepare them for integration into the community in accordance with their potential and abilities, as well as enable them to benefit from the available community resources with a view to achieving that end;
- To offer guidance and counselling for families with disabled children in all matters relating to the nature and requirements of the disability, and in how to adapt and channel their concern for the disabled child in the right direction;
- To promote the spirit of volunteering among members of the public, as well as their greater involvement, in order to deliver better services to disabled persons and prepare disabled children for admission to educational institutions.

233. These programme activities are dependant on voluntary work performed in the context of the social rehabilitation programme for disabled children.

234. Table 12 shows that, in 2003, there were 17 centres catering to 1,433 children, including 780 males and 74 females, supervised by 296 volunteers. Table 13 shows the distribution of centres and the numbers of children attending them in the different regions of the Sultanate during the period 2001-2003. Table 14 shows the number of those admitted to such centres in 2003 by type of disability.

7.1.3 The Khawd Care and Training Centre for the Disabled

235. Since its establishment in 1987, the Centre has been involved in vocational and educational training for disabled persons to enable them to enter the job market and integrate into society.

236. The aims of this Centre can be summarized as follows:

- To train disabled persons from the age of 16 years in occupations appropriate to their abilities;

- To offer educational programmes in support of the vocational training process;
- To help disabled persons by way of vocational training to secure a fixed source of livelihood through appropriate work or through individual or communal income-generating projects.

237. Table 15 shows that, during the training year 2002/2003, the Centre accommodated 55 disabled persons who received training in administration, computing, manual work and trades, smithing and welding, carpentry and decorating, tailoring and family education.

7.1.4 The Association for the Care of Disabled Children²⁹

238. Established in 1990 and with its main office in Muscat, the Association has six centres for the rehabilitation of special-needs children between the ages of 6 and 13 years. Its aims are to:

- Devote attention to and provide care for disabled children, as well as the best state-of-the-art services, by coordinating all efforts and energies towards ensuring that they have a life of dignity;
- Help disabled children to adapt and promote their vocational, psychological, social and cultural integration into their own communities, as well as stimulate non-governmental and international efforts with a view to providing appropriate assistance for disabled children and seeking ways of involving them in general activities for children worldwide;
- Support and encourage specialist scientific research and studies on child health care and the development of such care so that it is tailored to their daily requirements;
- Increase public awareness of the rights of disabled persons and of how to take care of their health and also prevent disability, organize a variety of national projects and activities throughout the provinces of the Sultanate so that disabled persons can benefit from its programmes, and urge the public and various bodies and institutions to offer voluntary services for disabled children.

239. Table 15 shows that, in 2003, 357 disabled children were registered with the Association and that 90 families benefited from the family counselling programme.

7.1.5 The Early Intervention Association

240. Established in Muscat in 2000, the Association specializes in providing care for newborn infants with disabilities until they are six years of age. It currently delivers its services through a specialist centre staffed by teachers and assistants who are qualified to deal with special needs such as blindness or severe mental disability.

241. The Centre delivers its services through the following programmes:

- *The kindergarten programme:* Based on the Montessori method in educational and recreational kindergarten activities;
- *The physiotherapy programme:* Provides check-ups, assessment and therapy for newborn infants with special needs;
- *The cognitive therapy programme:* Based on periodic visits by the child to speech and hearing specialists for checks and assessments, followed by any therapy sessions needed;
- *The Portage home visits programme:* Based on the mother as the main child carer and carried out through periodic educational home visits by specialists in the field with the aims of: (1) expanding the delivery of services to a larger number of children; (2) expanding the scope of service to all age groups catered to by the Association; (3) raising public awareness;
- *The family support programme:* Consists of family support groups formed by the Centre (one example being the Earth Angels), through which the families of children with disabilities (such as Down's syndrome) come and discuss their children's problems and hardships, exchange views and provide mutual support;
- *The programme to promote awareness of and support for the issue of disability:* Consists of awareness-raising campaigns through educational programmes and the media with the aim of increasing awareness among the different sectors of society and involving them in support for those with special needs;
- *The training programme:* Aims to develop and further the skills of civil servants, both male and female, in the context of the yearly training plans of the Ministry of Social Development.

242. Table 16 indicates that, in the school year 2003/04, a total of 138 children benefited from three of the Association's programmes providing kindergartens, home visits and physiotherapy services.

7.1.6 Disabled services provided by government agencies for the disabled

243. The Ministry of Social Development provides sports training for disabled children through the sporting activities of the National Disabled Sports Team and through training courses for volunteers.

244. In association with the other concerned bodies, the Ministry of Health cares for disabled persons by providing preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitation services in a series of programmes such as those for healthy vision and growth monitoring, accident reduction and

safety promotion, maternal and child care, and immunization, which achieved coverage of over 99 per cent in 2001. The Ministry also provides physiotherapy services, artificial limbs and other needs, depending on resources, in addition to treatment through the countrywide health services network.

245. The Ministry of Education devotes care and attention to disabled schoolchildren (section 8.1.3).

246. Under the regulations on parent councils issued by Ministerial Decree No. 10/99, the aims of such councils include the care of children with special needs and the proposal of programmes to develop their abilities and thus further their educational and social skills.

247. Article 7 of Ministerial Decree No. 54/90 issuing the regulations on assistance for disadvantaged families and individuals provides for defrayment of the cost of mobility aids, including wheelchairs and crutches, for persons subject to the Social Security Act and for persons in need. Article 8 also makes provision for defrayment of the cost of artificial limbs for such persons unless paid for by government hospitals.

248. Pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 195/2000, the National Committee for Disabled Services, which is a supervisory governmental planning institution chaired by the Minister of Social Development, was established. Its membership comprises eight representatives of the relevant ministries, two representatives of the governorates of Muscat and Dhofar and seven other representatives of relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies. The Committee aims to coordinate and strengthen plans and programmes for the prevention of all types of disability so as to detect disability early on and limit its impact. It also aims to prepare training programmes, rehabilitate disabled persons and integrate them into society. The Committee is empowered, *inter alia*, to gather, document, categorize, classify and facilitate the exchange of data and statistics on disabilities and disabled persons, as well as coordinate and cooperate with the concerned bodies in order to carry out studies and surveys that will achieve the aims of the Committee. This Committee submits its reports to the Council of Ministers and currently serves to coordinate matters relating to disabled persons.

249. Ministerial Decree No. 12/89 regulates charitable work for the disabled.

250. It is clear from the above that all-round plans and programmes for the care of disabled persons have been put in place to provide social security in accordance with the Social Security Act, as exemplified in the programme to provide home care services for disabled persons and adults in their own environment, which is in its initial stages. In addition, there are various publications for disabled persons, their families and the members of society, such as Al-Tahadi (*The Challenge*), which is produced by the Association for the Care of the Disabled. These publications cover the particularities, needs and perspectives of disabled persons, contain interviews with disabled persons, report on the views of officials and so on.

251. It is evident from the above that disabled persons have access to education, training, health care and rehabilitation services through programmes offered by various governmental and civil bodies, in which connection coordination is currently carried out through the National

Committee for Disabled Services. Through its technical agencies, the Committee also carries out case assessments so that the families concerned can obtain assistance for their disabled members. Public awareness-raising campaigns are also conducted through all of the audio-visual and print media in order to counteract negative attitudes towards disabled persons.

252. The legislature has prepared a law on the care and rehabilitation of disabled persons, which has been submitted to the Council of Ministers and is aimed at codifying all services provided by different bodies.

7.2 Health and health services

253. This subject was covered in sections VI.A, B, C, D and E of the initial country report and will be covered in some detail in section 7.4 of the present report. The Sultanate is additionally continuing to pursue its health plans in accordance with article 12 of the Basic Law of the State.

254. The Ministry of Health is implementing the third phase of its plan, which focuses on the promotion of health programmes that are more diverse, organized and mature in line with the concept of primary health care, decentralized management of health services and the need to address the specific nature of modern diseases that are a product of lifestyle changes and population growth.

7.2.1 Evolution of health indicators

255. The Sultanate has managed to achieve an appreciably rapid reduction in the infant and under-five mortality rates in a relatively short space of time, which is attributable to the quantitative and qualitative expansion of health services, with the focus on delivery. This has been further reinforced by the continuous rise in levels of education and health awareness and the success of various qualitative programmes, all of which is positively reflected in the increasing life expectancy and the falling mortality rates.

256. Diagram 2 shows the evolution of the expenditure of the Ministry of Health during the years 1970-2003. Table 17 shows health development indicators in the Sultanate during the years 2000, 2001 and 2002. Table 18 shows the evolution of the number of hospitals and private and government-run health centres during the years 2000-2002.

257. Residents of the Sultanate must be medically examined by the competent bodies in their own countries before they arrive in the Sultanate and must also have a medical check-up in the Sultanate when they arrive. They receive treatment in health facilities in accordance with their contracts of employment and those who work in the government sector enjoy the benefit of treatment that is free of charge. Most residents working in the private sector use private health facilities, although this does not mean that they are refused admission to government-run facilities. Supported by the Ministry of Health, the private sector is making tremendous efforts in the health field.

258. The Ministry of Health delivers health services to the majority of the population through a network of health facilities located throughout the Sultanate, a task in which it is assisted by other government bodies, such as the Ministry of Defence, the police and Sultan Qaboos University.

259. Alongside the government sector, the private sector assists in the delivery of health services, with encouragement from the Ministry of Health in the form of technical support. The Government also provides soft loans to the private health sector.

7.2.2 Child health care

260. The initiative of child-friendly hospitals has been ongoing since it was first introduced in all State hospitals in 1992 with the aim of promoting breastfeeding. The promotion and distribution of free samples of breast-milk substitutes in hospitals and clinics remains forbidden.

261. As a matter of policy, breastfeeding and supplementation with solids from the fifth month have been promoted since 2001 and efforts are still continuing to implement and monitor practices followed in and outside health facilities insofar as health workers are striving to increase public health awareness with a view to changing misguided infant-feeding practices. In 2000, a national committee was formed by Ministerial Decree No. 54/2000 with the aim of protecting and raising awareness of breastfeeding. In addition to the Ministry of Health, its membership comprises the Ministry of Social Development, UNICEF and experts from other government bodies, as well as the National Committee on Child-friendly Hospitals and social support groups.

262. The national health survey of 2000 showed that 98.6 per cent of children born during the two years preceding the study had been breastfed and that 84.8 per cent of mothers began breastfeeding less than half an hour after delivery. Data also indicate that 98.5 per cent of infants aged under four months are breastfed, indicating the progress which has taken place in breastfeeding. The survey also confirmed that the period of breastfeeding was no different for males or females and that the average nursing period was the same for both rural and urban areas.

263. Under Ministerial Decree No. 33/2000, a department for nutrition and a department for primary health care matters were established as part of the Ministry of Health in order to provide technical support for the community activities and primary health care services offered by health facilities in the Sultanate.

7.2.3 Low-weight births

264. There has been no conspicuous change in the numbers of low-weight births (under 2,500 grams) since 1999 and 2002, when the proportion amounted to 79 per 1,000 live births.

7.2.4 Perinatal deaths

265. In the past two years, there has been a noticeable improvement, albeit slow, in the reduction of perinatal deaths (see diagram 3), which is attributable to the fall in the number of stillbirths and introduction of the system for monitoring and reporting foetal deaths in 1999.

266. A data analysis shows that 20 per cent of stillbirths were the result of congenital deformity. The data also indicate the central role of maternal diabetes and the link with stillbirth. The parental relationship also played a prominent role in 30 per cent of cases recorded.

267. The introduction of a compulsory system for registering vital birth and death statistics is currently being finalized.

7.2.5 Pre-marital screening service

268. The pre-marital screening service began as a component of the programme to reduce genetic blood disease with a view to minimizing cases of the disease as far as possible. The national survey of genetic blood disease (1994) showed that 17.9 per cent of children under five years of age had sickle cell anaemia and that 5.73 per cent had beta thalassaemia.

269. This screening service is available in all areas of the Sultanate for future married couples and anyone wishing to be screened, in particular those with a genetic disease or whose family is known to have a genetic disease, such as sickle cell anaemia, thalassaemia or glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency.

270. In addition to detecting genetic blood diseases, providing advice and registering cases, the programme seeks to raise public awareness of these diseases, their transmission routes and the link with intermarriage, using media campaigns and all available means of communication to do so. It is worth mentioning that the book "Facts for Life" for stage-two students of both sexes includes a chapter on the consequences of intermarriage and the link with genetic disease.

271. A certificate of good health is a prerequisite for both partners in the case of marriage between an Omani man or woman and a non-Omani.

7.2.6 The support programme for maternal and child care services

272. The programme aims to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality rates by providing women with obstetric and post-natal health care and by encouraging delivery under medical supervision. In this respect, we refer to section VI.C of our initial report. Table 19 provides a summary of various indicators of maternal care.

273. The Omani family survey (1995) and the comprehensive health survey (2000) showed that approximately 98 per cent of pregnant women are covered by health care and that 73 per cent take iron tablets.

274. In 2002, there were 17 registered maternal deaths, or 37.5 per 100,000 live births. All the vital indicators mentioned in the report are, however, approximate figures estimated by indirect statistical methods recognised by the international community. Preparations are currently under way for introduction of the compulsory system for the registration of births, deaths and so on in the Sultanate.

7.2.7 The expanded immunization programme

275. This subject was covered in section VI.C of the initial country report.

276. The Ministry of Health is continuing efforts to maintain the high coverage rates achieved for immunization and to reduce morbidity rates. In 2002, coverage with the inoculations included in the expanded programme amounted to about 99 per cent.

277. In 2002, the expanded immunization programme started with inoculation against haemophilus influenzae type b meningitis. Since 2001, mothers have been inoculated against German measles within 40 days of delivery and once throughout their reproductive life. In addition, immunization is given against the six childhood diseases, as well as against hepatitis and mumps, measles and rubella (MMR).

278. The Sultanate is continuing to monitor transmissible epidemic diseases. It has been shown that the Sultanate remains free of poliomyelitis for the ninth year in succession and neither have any cases of congenital tetanus been recorded. The strategy to eradicate measles has also succeeded; only four cases were notified and confirmed by serous testing in 2001 and only five clinical cases were confirmed in 2002.

279. Diagram 4 shows the increase in coverage rates for the different inoculations for childhood diseases between when the programme started in 1981 and 2002.

280. As part of the Sultanate's strategy to control the spread and entry of transmissible diseases from epidemic areas, residents of the Sultanate are required to undergo testing before arriving in the Sultanate. A number of health centres in countries which export migrant labour have been selected to check that migrant workers are free of transmissible disease before they come to the Sultanate.

7.2.8 Combating diarrhoeal disease

281. The efforts of the Ministry of Health to combat diarrhoeal disease continued, showing a fall in the incidence of diarrhoea in 2002, when 77,166 cases were recorded compared with 81,376 cases in 2001. This represents a fall in incidence from 287 per 1,000 children under five years of age in 2001 to 266 per 1,000 in 2002. There was no change in the proportion of acute cases in 2002 (0.3 per cent) compared with 2001 and no deaths from such cases were recorded.

7.2.9 Combating respiratory disease

282. Efforts to combat and reduce the incidence of respiratory disease continued. Deaths from contagious respiratory disease accounted for 6.94 per cent of total deaths among the under-fives.

283. Diagram 5 shows the annual incidence of respiratory and diarrhoeal disease for every child under five years of age during the period 1990-2002.

7.2.10 Combating malnutrition

284. Malnutrition continued to present a hard fight and a strong challenge for the Ministry of Health. In December 2001, a central committee with a membership including 11 experts was formed in order to study the causes of malnutrition in the Sultanate of Oman, propose appropriate solutions and provide technical advice to the Department of Nutrition, created in 2000, which is concerned with this problem.

285. The Ministry is endeavouring to promote maternal and child health by protecting breastfeeding, banning the marketing of breast-milk substitutes and monitoring growth as part of the global initiative for the integrated management of childhood illness (IMCI), with support from international organizations.

286. The comprehensive health survey of malnutrition in 1999 showed that 18 per cent of children had a low weight-to-height ratio, 7 per cent were emaciated, 10.6 per cent had stunted growth and 1.5 per cent were severely malnourished. Signs of malnutrition generally start to appear during the period of supplementation with solids.

287. In 2002, a study found that child malnutrition was caused by:

- Lack of nutritional awareness;
- Successive pregnancies and repeated births;
- Recurrent diarrhoeal disease owing to the unavailability of clean drinking water in some regions.

288. A study also showed that increased risk factors for malnutrition in children under three years of age included low-weight birth (2,500 grams), recurrent diarrhoea, artificial feeding and lastly parental care.

289. Adopted in 2002, the integrated care strategy for the improvement of child nutrition includes growth monitoring of children under five years of age who attend health facilities and listing of cases of malnourished children so that they can be treated or referred for treatment to health facilities, as well as nutritional assessment for all children under two years of age who are regularly seen by the health services.

290. Special clinics have been established to see and treat cases of malnutrition in all primary health care facilities and work on their conclusion.

291. Special programmes to provide advice on breastfeeding and supplementary solids have been put in place.

292. Public awareness of the problem is being raised, especially given that it is multifaceted and that solutions often lie outside the Ministry of Health.

293. The outcome of the above efforts was that the incidence of malnutrition in 2002 amounted to 14 per 1,000 among the under-fives, of whom 13.6 per cent were severely malnourished and 82.7 per cent improved to recover their normal weight. No deaths from malnutrition were recorded among the under-fives.

7.2.11 Birth spacing

294. We refer to section VI.E of our initial report and wish to add that the Ministry of Health has continued to pursue its awareness-raising and service programmes in order to increase the use of modern birth-spacing methods and the adoption of health and cultural practices that reduce maternal and child pathology rates and improve maternal and child health.

295. Table 20 shows various indicators relating to the use of birth-spacing methods and diagram 6 shows fertility rates by age and the number of Omani women who attended birth-spacing clinics during the period 1995-2002.

7.2.12 Combating AIDS

296. By the end of 2003, the number of AIDS sufferers amounted to approximately 1,300 persons, 846 of whom are still surviving.

297. The key services provided in this area are:

- In 1987, a national AIDS committee with a membership including representatives from the concerned ministries and bodies was formed with the aim of enhancing awareness of the risks associated with AIDS and of AIDS prevention;
- In 2002, the committee completed the establishment of a peer education project targeted at young people and designed also to increase awareness among young schoolgoers, instil worthy behaviour and impart social values to help them adapt to contemporary changes.

298. This project is also being implemented in Omani women's associations, in particular the Omani Women's Association in Muscat and the National Organization for Scouts and Guides.

299. In 2003, a youth awareness-raising centre was opened, providing its services through a round-the-clock free hotline for all citizens in the Sultanate.

300. The number of children with AIDS has noticeably fallen each year owing to the fact that blood safety has been guaranteed since 1994, the Sultanate having refrained from importing blood from outside the country. Awareness-raising programmes for mothers with AIDS have also been successful in precluding the birth of children with AIDS.

301. In that connection, the following is being carried out:

- Medical and social counselling is provided for sufferers, particularly those who are about to marry or attempt pregnancy;
- Preventive and therapeutic services are provided, including the three-part treatment for sufferers and antiretrovirals for pregnant women with AIDS and infants whose mothers have AIDS;
- Work is under way to combat discriminatory measures against sufferers in schools.

302. Given the above, the Sultanate still faces challenges in connection with low-weight births, perinatal deaths, the high fertility rate, the prevalence of genetic blood diseases and malnutrition among the under-fives. Nevertheless, it is facing these challenges with strength and determination and developing plans for prenatal care services, awareness-raising and midwife training, in addition to expanding services relating to genetic blood disease, birth spacing and so on. It is implementing its plans with great resolve in line with the recommendation contained in paragraph 38 of the Sultanate's initial report.

7.2.13 School health

303. This subject was covered in sections VI.B.2 of the initial country report, to which we wish to add the information below.

304. The Ministries of Health and Education are continuing to pursue their plans in this regard, the coverage rate for the immunization of students in the first, sixth and eleventh grades having reached 100 per cent. Through the Oral and Dental Health Section, the Department of School Health provides treatment and preventive services to all first-grade students. Both Ministries also run annual competitions on the book "Facts for Life" and conduct studies. The health awareness of school students is also increased through seminars, lectures and health education materials.

7.2.14 Care of adolescents

305. This group accounts for some 30 per cent of Omani society.

306. In conjunction with a number of government bodies and with support from international organizations, the Ministry of Health carried out a comprehensive study in general education schools to determine the knowledge, attitudes and practices of young people of both sexes. A national information strategy was subsequently drafted to empower young people with knowledge and the strategy was fully adopted in the Sultanate's programme for population action, which is now in its final stages. It is hoped that a comprehensive information plan will be elaborated in order to implement the recommendations contained in the strategy.

307. Table 21 summarizes the results of the study conducted in April 2001 on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of adolescents in general education.

7.2.15 The programme for accident reduction and safety promotion

308. The programme aims to reduce traffic accidents, accidents in the home, falls, poisoning, industrial accidents, child accidents and cases of suffocation, suicide and drowning. It is essentially targeted at children under 15 years of age and the productive population groups aged 15 to 45 years.

309. The Ministry of Health provides services to these groups in its own hospitals, in addition to rehabilitation services in Khawlah hospital. We should point out here that, under the Traffic Act, it is prohibited for children under 18 years of age to drive vehicles in order to protect them and their best interests.

7.2.16 Mental and psychological health

310. In recent years, interest in mental health has increased; mental health services have been merged with primary health care services through a network of regional health facilities and hospitals and the Ibn Sina hospital (a consulting hospital).

311. School health services cover aspects of mental health care in order to allow the earliest possible diagnosis of problems and referral to the specialist in the regional hospital for the area. Field research preparations are currently under way with a view to studying the prevalence of mental and psychological problems.

7.2.17 Protection against traditional practices - female circumcision

312. The comprehensive health survey of 2001 indicated that 85 per cent of women agreed with female circumcision. Medical examinations showed that the proportion of female circumcision is as high as 53 per cent, with excision at 45.6 per cent, and infibulation at 7.5 per cent.

313. The adolescent health survey conducted in general education schools in 2001 indicated that approximately 80 per cent of male and female students agreed that female circumcision was imperative, thus indicating the gravity of the situation and the need to devote to it the attention deserved. This percentage, however, is noticeably lower among educated males and females; approximately 46 per cent of educated girls (general education and above) stated that they rejected this practice, compared with 17 per cent of girls with illiterate mothers. This is a positive indicator and it is accordingly expected that this practice will gradually diminish as health awareness and educational attainment increase, especially among mothers.

314. Practice of the medical professions, including obstetrics, is subject to monitoring by the Ministry of Health. Moreover, 95 per cent of births are attended by doctors. We should also point out that midwives still receive continuous training and that most of the women whose births are attended by midwives come from extremely remote areas, belong to nomadic communities or are emergency cases that cannot be transferred to a hospital or doctor.

7.2.18 Health awareness-raising

315. In this connection, we refer to section IV.B.3 of our initial report and add the information below.

316. Awareness-raising remains a prime concern of the Ministry of Health and various leaflets, booklets, stickers and posters are being designed, developed and printed, along with other educational materials covering various health topics, such as maternal and child health, prevention of poliomyelitis and AIDS, recovery and protection of the environment, birth spacing, smoking, treatment of fever, intermarriage, accidents, nutrition and so on.

317. Ongoing information and education activities are organized in the above-mentioned and other areas of health.

318. In order to disseminate its message in this connection, the Ministry of Health turns to the various media and also uses direct communication methods in health facilities, schools and associations, as well as mobile teams. In addition, it employs staff who have direct contact with the public, such as female health coaches and social support groups.

319. We should point out that there is no discrimination between males and females in the delivery and receipt of health services and that it is financial resources that prevent realization of many of the hopes of expanding the scope of action. Similarly, there is no distinction between urban and rural areas in these services where resources are available.

320. We should further point out that the Sultanate recognizes the right of the child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health in accordance with its traditions and values and the belief that this is fundamentally linked with its future. It also complies with its obligations under the Convention in this regard and, despite difficult circumstances, has continued to achieve significant success and thus produce the changes indicated by the figures cited earlier.

321. The Sultanate is continuing its efforts to collect and use health-related information in accordance with national plans and conduct comprehensive surveys, some of which we have mentioned in the present section, with particular reference both to persons under 18 years of age in urban and rural areas and to disabled children. The Sultanate will request technical assistance, where required, from the concerned organizations, including UNICEF, and confirms that it is allocating as many of its resources as possible to health services in order to achieve continuing success in increasing breastfeeding rates, improving birth-spacing indicators, reducing female fertility rates and strengthening nutritional measures.

322. Cooperation is ongoing between the Sultanate, WHO and UNICEF with a view to implementing wide-reaching priority health programmes.

7.2.19 Recovery of the environment

323. Potable water coverage rates increased from 15,050,000 gallons at the end of 1996 to 19,698,000 gallons at the end of 2002.

324. The Sultanate currently has over 100 non-uniform water-processing plants, 10 of which are main plants run by the municipality of Muscat, with an estimated total daily capacity of 35,000 cubic metres.

325. Clean water coverage rates increased by 6.2 per cent to 22,850,000 gallons.

326. The Sultanate has devoted a great deal of attention to completing the sewage network infrastructure; in 2002, the sewage network for the town of Salalah was completed and budgets were also drawn up for the construction of sewage networks in 14 provinces and major towns during the current five-year plan (2001-2005).

327. The absorption capacity of the sewage plant in Darsayt was further increased at an estimated total cost of RO 2,322,476.

328. The Sultanate is pursuing its efforts to install sewage networks countrywide, starting with the large population areas, to which end it has earmarked a large expenditure. Although work is continuous, full coverage has not yet been achieved owing to the absence of any infrastructure prior to 1970 (the start of the renaissance). This issue is regarded as extremely important, however, and is one of the State's top priorities, as clearly demonstrated by the projects in place, in process or under consideration, subject to resources.

329. The Sultanate devotes considerable attention to combating diseases transmitted by insects and other carriers, having adopted a pilot project to eradicate malaria from the Sultanate. Malaria is a disease that still kills millions of children around the world and adversely affects their health and development. The Sultanate plays a pioneering role in the reduction of toxic emissions in the air; it decided to use lead-free petrol in 2001 and also has pollution-monitoring stations to minimize the impact of emissions on child health in particular.

330. The Sultanate's internationally recognized concern for the environment is underscored by strict laws on environment protection and development, as well as by the number of protected reserves located throughout the Sultanate.

331. The Sultanate attaches great importance to the matter of the environment in accordance with article 12 of Basic Law (annex 2) and the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources is engaged in the following with respect to children:

- Schoolchildren participate in campaigns to clean up the coasts, plant trees and raise their awareness of ozone issues and various other environmental and biological matters, in addition to which interviews are conducted on both television and radio in order to educate mothers and children, raise their awareness of risks in the home environment and teach them how to deal with chemicals and other substances that pose hazards in the home;
- The children's magazine "Humans and the environment" publishes an environmental supplement called "Friends of the environment" to provide children with a simple introduction to ideas and information on environment and offer solutions to a number of environmental problems, as well as a series of colouring books for children in the 5-9 age group to familiarize them with the environment and nature in a way that is appealing;
- Special programmes aimed at all groups in society, including children, have been made, such as the television programme "Protecting the environment together" and the radio programme "Environment and life". A corner of the Ministry's Internet site is devoted to children and a number of children's environmental fairs have been staged, such as "Children, friends of the environment", which was organized in various provinces of the Sultanate.

7.3 Social security and child-care services and facilities (arts. 6 and 18 of the Convention)

332. The Sultanate continues to implement the provisions of the Social Security Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 87/84, as amended, in accordance with the obligation of the State under article 12 of the Basic Law of the State.

7.3.1 Right of the child to benefit from social security programmes

333. This subject was covered in section VI.G.1 of the initial country report.

334. The Social Security Act makes no distinction based on gender, origin or domicile. Moreover, it extends the inclusion of females under social security to the age at which they marry or start work. Regional coverage is based on the claims made by disadvantaged families. Under the Act, the families entitled to social security comprise a husband and one wife or more, as well as their male children up to the age of 18 years and their female children up to such time as they marry or start work. Any person over that age who regularly attends school is classed as a child until the end of the twelfth grade. Social security also covers orphans (male and female under 18 years of age), meaning those whose father is deceased or whose father or parents are unknown, including those over 18 years of age who are still in the final grades of general education. The Act thus upholds the right to social security for children who are from a disadvantaged family, orphaned (in accordance with the above definition) or disabled.

335. Table 22 shows that, in 2003, a total of 47,765 social security recipients received a grant for the two feasts and a royal gift, altogether amounting to payments of RO 24,530,665.

336. Article 2 of the Social Security Act provides for the payment of monthly allowances to orphans and families of prisoners and persons who are incapacitated for work.

337. Article 5 of the Social Security Act stipulates that claimants are entitled to the full allowance if they have no income. Temporary earnings from manual trades and cottage industries, spasmodic assistance from relatives, assistance and treatment provided by therapeutic and social institutions, and assistance and bonuses paid to students are not regarded as income. Article 7 of the Act prescribes the minimum allowance.

338. Article 1 of Ministerial Decision No. 54/90 issuing the regulations on assistance for disadvantaged families and individuals provides for the payment of temporary assistance in cash or in kind to disadvantaged families or individuals to whom no allowances are paid under the provisions of the Social Security Act or any other law, once it has been ascertained that the claimant is in need of such assistance.

339. Article 7 of the Social Security Act provides for defrayment of the cost of such items as hearing aids, wheelchairs, spectacles, dentures and crutches for those who are disadvantaged or under social security, as well as the cost of artificial limbs not paid for by hospitals. Electricity and water connection charges are also paid for families in receipt of social security if they are owner-occupiers. Article 13 further provides for the payment of monthly assistance in the case of illness, such as kidney failure or tuberculosis, and for special assistance in the event of personal or mass disaster or calamity.

340. Ministerial Decision No. 96/88 concerning children in need of care guarantees that the Ministry of Social Development shall provide the necessary assistance to alternative families caring for children if their circumstances so demand. The number of families having received assistance is 180.

341. A task force has been formed to monitor instances of begging in order to protect children. The task force operates with support from the Royal Oman Police and in cooperation with the concerned bodies, under the supervision of the General Directorate for Social Welfare.

7.3.2 Right to child-care services and facilities

342. In this regard, we refer to section VI.G.2 of our initial report. Efforts to provide child-care services and facilities are still continuing, as indicated below.

343. Ministerial Decision No. 19/90 containing the regulations on nurseries remains in effect. It covers building sanitation requirements, along with other requirements to be provided, such as a games and activities room, learning and recreational aids and apparatus appropriate to the age of the child, infant cots located separately from older children, a wide open area, a garden, shelter from the sun, a kitchen, a refrigerator and records and logs on the child's health and other aspects of the child's physical, cultural and educational development. Further stipulations include the need for scientifically qualified staff, a health visitor for the children's clinic and the preparation of full nutritional meals for the children, as well as other stipulations concerning the need for one carer for every six children between the ages of six months and one year, one carer for every 10 children between the ages of one and two years, and one carer for every 15 children between the ages of three months and three and a half years. The Decision also permits the establishment of nurseries for the non-Omani communities.

344. A summary breakdown of nurseries by region, gender and age is provided in table 23, which shows that, in 2004, there were 35 nurseries catering to 1,605 children, including 833 males and 772 females.

345. Ministerial Decision No. 85/1994 determining the principles and conditions for children's crèches and child development homes offering educational services remains in effect (section 2.4.6 *et seq.*). It lays down all the requirements for premises and staff in terms of health, education, recreation and mental attitude. Supervised by the Ministry for Social Development, these homes and crèches accommodate male and female children between the ages of three and a half and five years. Crèches naturally cater for the children of their own workers in addition to the children of members of women's associations and of trainers.

346. Table 24 gives a breakdown of the crèches, children's homes and nurseries in the main regions of the Sultanate.

347. The orphan sponsorship scheme, whereby individuals donate funds for the benefit of orphans being cared for in homes or in alternative families, continues to achieve an appreciably wide success. Orphans also receive indirect assistance in kind from members of the public, although no accurate statistics are available on the amounts received in cash or in kind, since the public tends to give in confidence in accordance with Islamic traditions.

348. Ministerial Decision No. 19/90 containing the regulations on nurseries prescribes rules for the monitoring and supervision of nurseries by the Ministry and lays down the sanitary, educational and scientific requirements relating to premises and staff, along with requirements concerning the number of health visitors and carers in proportion to the number and ages of the children. In compliance with that Decision, the Ministry of Social Development is currently seeking to encourage the establishment of nurseries in governmental and non-governmental institutions and companies in accordance with the prescribed conditions.

349. Established in 2001 at the Ministry of Social Development, the Department of Family Guidance and Counselling is constantly engaged in supporting the family entity, studying the social problems of the family and helping families and their members to find appropriate solutions to their problems, using scientific methods that maintain privacy and guarantee confidentiality for those concerned. The Department also runs various awareness-raising programmes for the public and for all family members. Furthermore, it examines problems by way of the scientific studies and seminars which it undertakes and endeavours to train those working with families by regularly running a series of special training courses. This Department cooperates with a number of child- and family-related bodies, such as the Children's Care Home, personal status courts, prisons, the police, and the various directorates and departments of the Ministry of Social Development.

350. The successes achieved during the period 2001-2003 are set forth below.

351. Guidance and counselling were provided in over 100 cases, most of which were finally resolved. Efforts to resolve the remainder are still ongoing. Members of the public also continue to contact the Department to request its services and assistance.

352. The Department is pursuing its training programme (special training courses) in family guidance and counselling whereby 50 males and females from the Ministry of Social Development and voluntary non-governmental associations receive specialist training. The ultimate goal of the training programme is to establish branch offices offering family guidance and counselling services in all regions of the Sultanate.

353. During 2003, the Department held a scientific seminar on the theme of the traditional role of the family in addressing the changes and challenges imposed by globalization and the rapid rise of technology and information. Participating in the seminar were various scholars, researchers and others with an interest in family matters, as well as personnel from governmental and non-governmental bodies working for the benefit of families. The seminar covered a number of current family issues, such as changes in the economic situation of Arab households as a result of globalization, the economic empowerment of the Arab family, psychological cohesion within the family, constants and variables in the Arab family upbringing and so on.

7.4 Standard of living

354. The national strategy for social development seeks to link the positive results of economic growth with the social development of the various sectors of the community with a view to achieving sustainable development.

355. In that context, the executive takes into account article 12 of the Basic Law, which provides that means of protecting the family and the well-being of its members must be regulated and that proper conditions must be created for the development of their aptitudes and abilities. The State guarantees assistance for citizens and their families in case of accident, illness, incapacity and old age in accordance with the Social Security Act. The State is also obliged to encourage public burden-sharing in the aftermath of public disasters and calamities. In the

previous section, we referred to the achievements of the Social Security Act in that connection, the regulations on children's homes issued by ministerial decisions, the regulations on children in need of care and the regulations on assistance for disadvantaged families and individuals, in addition to the free education and health care for such families.

VIII. EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES (art. 27 of the Convention)

8.1 Education (arts. 28, 29 and 31 of the Convention)

8.1.1 Right of the child to education

356. This subject was covered in section VII of the initial country report.

357. We should mention that the State, represented by the Ministry of Education, is continuing the effort to make education available to all school-age children from 6 to 18 years of age. Statistics show that the enrolment of children aged six years has increased; in the school year 2003/04, it stood at 100 per cent for males and 99.7 per cent for females, according to the results of the population census of 2003 and the data of the Ministry of Education for 2003/04.

358. On the basis of the outcomes of the Ministry's plans, the measures adopted by the Ministry to encourage regular school attendance have borne fruit in that school drop-out rates for the seventh to ninth grades fell to 3.3 per cent for males and to 1.7 per cent for females in the school year 2002/03. As for the tenth to twelfth grades, the rate fell to 2.7 per cent for males and to 1.6 per cent for females, which is in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 44 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report. The Ministry is currently seeking to adopt the measures needed to bring school-leaving rates to their lowest yet for both sexes.

359. There are no differences between males and females as far as school enrolment is concerned; in 2003/2004, the proportion of females was 48.95 per cent for the basic grades, 49 per cent for the first to sixth grades, 46.78 per cent for the seventh to ninth grades and 49.09 per cent for the tenth to twelfth grades.

360. The education system in the Sultanate is designed to achieve the objectives spelt out in article 29 of the Convention through the school curricula and through the class and extra-curricular activities run by schools.

361. In addition to the weekly try-out class for cultural, sporting, artistic, social and scientific activities, students have the opportunity to develop their abilities, talents, intellectual and social communication and self-expression through classes in sports education, the plastic arts and music.

362. The Ministry of Education has carried out the following activities in addition to those referred to in the initial country report:

- Determined the subjects to be additionally included in schoolbooks through joint working mechanisms of the National Commission on Follow-up of the Implementation of the Convention and the Curriculum Directorate at the Ministry of Education;
- Coordinated with Sultan Qaboos University and education colleges in the interest of familiarizing students with the articles of the Convention and supplying them with publications on the Convention before they graduate and enter employment in education;
- Supplied teachers with information guides and annotated school books on the listed subjects relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Formed a task force to carry out cultural, artistic and information activities aimed at following up the Convention in the school environment.

363. The General Directorate for Planning and Educational information systematically gathers and analyses data and statistics to monitor the results of the education process and the Technical Office for Studies and Development also carries out studies and research on the development of education in the Sultanate.

364. Parent councils are involved in the follow-up of educational matters and the Shura Council also follows up all educational subjects in its meetings with the Minister of Education, in addition to which it has formed a committee known as the Education Committee, as well as the Services Committee in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

365. The Sultanate is an active member of regional and international educational organizations, such as UNESCO, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Arab Education Office for the Gulf States, with which it cooperates on all educational matters. Expertise, information, ideas and views on future prospects in connection with all of the issues on the table are moreover exchanged through the agreements concluded between the Ministry of Education and various educational establishments at the regional and international levels.

366. The Sultanate has no compulsory education (but is currently considering the matter). However, it is committed to ensuring that every child who wishes to enrol in school has the opportunity to do so, as confirmed by the statistics on the fall in the proportion of out-of-school children, referred to earlier.

8.1.2 Non-discrimination in education

367. Schools are located throughout the Sultanate with no regional distinctions. Admission is granted to all male and female children who fulfil the conditions. The figures contained in the previous section show that there is no gender gap, as also demonstrated by the data contained in the present report.

368. Current practices endeavour to make education available to all groups, including adults, without distinction as to rural or urban location, gender or social status. The detailed statistics contained in the tables annexed hereto may be consulted for further clarification.

369. Non-national children are admitted to government schools under the same terms as students who are nationals, without disparity and free of charge. There are private schools for those who wish to attend them, as well as numerous schools for the children of non-nationals. Accordingly, nationals and non-nationals have a range of options available to them in education.

370. Diagram 1 (see annex for diagrams) gives a breakdown of schools, disciplines and students by region and diagram 2 gives a breakdown of schools, disciplines and students in private education by region. The present report also contains tables showing the number of private schools and the breakdown of students, schools and school administrators.

8.1.3 Disabled children

371. Education for special-needs children ready for it is provided in special schools and institutes in the Sultanate.

372. Students are also sent to special schools and institutes in a number of neighbouring countries.

373. Children who are physically incapacitated are admitted to general education schools unless they have a severe disability (mental or physical) which necessitates their transfer to schools for those with special needs. Diagrams 3 and 4 show the number of students by disability, age and country of study.

8.1.4 Best interests of the child

374. The Ministry is endeavoring to make education available free of charge to all children aged six years and above, regardless of colour, gender, nationality, geographical location or economic or social status, in the schools established and overseen by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented in the Ministry of Education.

375. The Ministry of Education provides all students with books, instructional and laboratory materials and transportation to and from home and school. Qualified teachers and administrators are employed in the schools and progress is monitored by supervisors and officials at the education directorates in the educational regions, as well as by experts from the Ministry. The Department for the Development of Human Resources and its regional sections supervise continuous on-the-job training for all those working in education, in particular school administrators, teachers and supervisors.

8.2 Respect for the views of the child

376. At the end of the tenth grade or the basic education stage, which provides a general education during which reading, writing and arithmetic skills are acquired, along with general knowledge and basic attitudes towards life, students have the opportunity to choose the course of

study that they wish to pursue, with help, advice and guidance from the competent school bodies. A vocational guidance service has been introduced into schools and social workers are trained to help students choose courses appropriate to their abilities.

8.2.1 Cultural activity

377. Cultural activities at school include: school press groups; school radio groups; photography groups; seminar and lecture groups and science club.

8.2.2 Social activity

378. Social activities at school include: travel groups; public service and friends of the environment groups; school health groups and cooperative groups.

8.2.3 Student councils

379. Schools have student governing boards and class councils.

8.2.4 Other student activities

380. Other student activities include: plastic arts groups, school theatre groups, school music groups and school sports groups.

8.3 Teacher training

381. A key requirement for applicants seeking employment as school teachers in the Sultanate is that they should have the appropriate educational qualification for the stage in question.

Anyone without a university certificate of education is not currently accepted. In other words, the applicant must be a graduate of a university or college of education, in addition to which migrant teachers must fulfil certain conditions of experience. The on-the-job training scheme applies to all those working in specialist areas and places of education so that they can acquire the pedagogical skills required to keep pace with developments.

8.4 The private sector

382. The private sector has taken on board the task of setting up child nursery centres with the supervision, guidance and technical support of the Ministry of Education. The number of private schools is on the rise according to the statistics annexed hereto, which show the number, locations and educational stages of such schools.

383. The Ministry of Education is seeking to expand the contribution of the private sector to the establishment of schools, since it believes that it is important to involve the sector in providing an education service for all citizens and residents of the country, subject to the conditions and regulations governing the establishment and management of private schools.

384. The private sector is subject to continuous monitoring and permanent supervision by the Ministry of Education. It is also bound by its methodologies and run in accordance with its criteria.

385. Under the implementing regulations issued by Ministerial Decision No. 59/96, private schools must fulfil health, educational and teaching requirements, including those relating to the need for social workers, and must use the curricula, syllabuses and books approved by the Ministry (diagrams 1 and 2 and section 8.1.4).

8.5 Civil rights and freedoms

8.5.1 Freedom of expression (art. 13 of the Convention)

386. In addition to the student councils and groups mentioned earlier, students may, through the school press, publish their school magazines and disseminate ideas, information and proposals that are of interest to them and appropriate to their ages and educational levels.

387. School radio is a forum through which students are able to broadcast news, information and ideas within their schools.

8.5.2 Restrictions imposed on freedom of expression

388. Students may not interfere in matters relating to confessions and religions or in the politics of other countries in accordance with the principles of peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the affairs of other States, in which the Sultanate believes and which it seeks to instil.

389. Students may discuss issues relating to social and cultural affairs, sports and art, as well as any educational issues which concern them, in a spirit of mutual understanding and shared activity based on respect for the opinions of others and respect for other cultures.

8.5.3 Freedom of thought and conscience (art. 14 of the Convention)

390. In government and private schools, non-Muslim students are excused from attending Islamic art classes and performing religious observances. Marks for Islamic education are not included in their aggregate marks.

391. No religious material is studied and nor are religious observances performed in community schools owing to the student mix of different nationalities and religious faiths.

8.5.4 Access to appropriate information (art. 17 of the Convention)

392. Means of access to information were mentioned in section 4.2.1.

393. The school curricula are constantly reviewed and assessed to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place in regard to student access to information appropriate to their academic levels and ages.

394. In accordance with the provisions of bilateral agreements signed between the Sultanate and various Arab and non-Arab countries, the Ministry of Education exchanges information, documentation, books and audio-visual tapes with the countries concerned, as well as with regional and international educational organizations.

395. All schools have libraries. Books, reference materials and compact discs supplied by school learning-resources centres are reviewed and examined by educationalists in order to preclude any infiltration of information that may be harmful to students.

8.5.5 The right not to be subjected to torture (art. 37 of the Convention)

396. This subject was covered in section VII.B.3 of the initial country report.

397. The regulations governing general education schools provide for the adoption of appropriate measures in regard to students who break the school rules. Such measures are commensurate with the type of deed perpetrated and are progressively escalated if the student repeats the same deed or carries out a different one. All such methods are designed to steer students in the direction of improving their behavior and abiding by the rules and laws in effect. At no time do these methods ever encompass cruel punishments, beating or degrading treatment.

398. Periodic meetings and discussions are held and publications and guidelines are issued during visits by supervisors and specialists on how to deal with improper conduct on the part of certain students and apply the relevant regulations. Emphasis is placed on the requirement for school administrations to comply with those regulations and monitor teachers in order to ensure that the regulations are correctly applied. Complaints lodged by students or legal guardians are investigated and appropriate action is taken on a case-by-case basis.

399. Specialists and all educationalists in schools work in conjunction with the student's family and treatment facilities in order to rebalance students where needed, both mentally and physically, so that they are able to integrate with their peers and recover their attainment levels on the basis of a treatment plan agreed with the family, which is consistent with the recommendation contained in paragraph 48 of the Committee's concluding observations on our initial report and eliminates the concern expressed in paragraph 47. This is in addition to the studies and measures already mentioned in that connection (section 7.4).

8.5.6 Measures to preserve the child's sense of dignity

400. Abuse and corporal punishment are not among the punishments sanctioned under the Code of Criminal Procedure. The fact is that in Oman there is high regard for dignity that does not allow for the imposition of any undignified punishment of the child.

8.5.7 Disabled children

401. The Ministry of Education has formed a committee, known as the Committee on Learning Difficulties and Special-needs Integration, which proposed a plan consisting of two programmes:

Programme I: Learning difficulties

402. Begun in 2000/2001, this programme is targeted at students in basic education who are experiencing difficulty in learning. It has continued to expand in that it now encompasses all educational regions and was being implemented in 60 schools during the school year 2004/05. The Ministry attaches great importance to training for the technical staff required by the programme.

Programme II: Special-needs integration

403. The competent committee proposed a plan that takes into account the size of the groups to which the programme will apply and the implementing measures for the programme, which was submitted to the competent authorities in the hope that it would be piloted during the school year 2005/06 in a number of general education schools.

404. There are three educational institutions for children who cannot be included in the integration programme owing to visual, cognitive or hearing disabilities. The general education curricula have been used in these institutions following the adaptation of certain school texts, particularly instructional media, to the abilities of those with special needs. These institutions have their own administrative personnel and special teaching staff.

405. These institutions have a section devoted to the development of education (the Special Education Section) that plays a supervisory role and participates in the programmes supported by regional and international organizations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, ALECSO and the Arab Education Office for the Gulf States. The financial and construction requirements of this section are included in the general budget of the Ministry of Education.

8.5.8 Health and health services (art. 24 of the Convention)

406. The Ministry of Education has sought to improve health services for school students by developing health and awareness-raising programmes aimed at students and their guardians. To that end, a section responsible for raising awareness of health and nutrition has been established as part of the Department for Educational Guidance and Awareness-raising and in every school the health supervisor is now responsible for the health awareness-raising programmes overseen by that section.

407. The competition for a clean and healthy school environment is an example of the Sultanate's concern to instil the right health and environmental awareness. The winning schools are awarded with His Majesty's Cup and with financial and other prizes. The Ministry is also developing training programmes for teaching and technical staff.

408. In order to implement its health programmes, the Ministry cooperates with other authorities, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources, and with the relevant municipalities, each within their respective area of competence.

409. The main health services provided by the Ministry are inoculations and comprehensive health care, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, comprising:

- A full medical examination for all students in the first, seventh and tenth grades, achieving an annual coverage of approximately 99 per cent;
- A general oral and dental check-up, as well as a dental cleaning programme, for all first-grade students, there being mobile dental clinics throughout the Sultanate in which dentists examine the students in the target group and carry out dental cleaning;

- A sight test for all students in the first, seventh and tenth grades during which the school health team examines students and identifies those with weak vision, after which the optometrist in the region is notified in order to follow up the case and prescribe suitable spectacles;
 - A general check-up for trachoma for all first-grade students and treatment for any cases detected;
 - A hearing test and a test to detect health problems for all first-grade students, there being approximately 40 mobile units in the Sultanate that offer hearing tests, achieving a coverage rate of about 95 per cent in 2003;
 - Simple treatment and essential first aid;
 - Follow-up of cases requiring special care, such as cardiac disease, epilepsy, asthma and diabetes;
 - Referral and follow-up of cases requiring a specialist opinion.
410. Health instruction for school students is aimed at:
- Raising student awareness of the need for healthy behaviour, raising student awareness of disease prevention and communicating sound health information to families and communities through their children.
411. Health instruction is provided by preparing a timetable covering all the subjects for discussion with students. Several awareness-raising programmes are being implemented in schools:
- The book entitled “Facts for Life”, which the Ministry of Health has been publishing in association with UNICEF since the school year 1996/97, is designed to give the reader an accurate picture of much of the scientific information that plays an important role in the life of individuals and society;
 - The book is distributed to all eleventh-grade students and the school health team, in conjunction with the school health supervisor, explains the subjects of the book to students. In order to encourage all students to read the book and give serious thought to health topics, an annual competition on the “Facts for Life” book is held. The students taking part are asked to produce a study on a health problem relating to one of the subjects in the book by conducting research and interviews or canvassing opinion through a questionnaire on the subject of the study. Following evaluation, the winning studies are chosen at the countrywide and regional levels. The winners are honoured in a large ceremony sponsored by the Minister of Education and attended by the Minister of Health and a large gathering of leading personalities in the field of education and health;

- An awareness-raising programme on oral and dental health for the basic first-grade (Colgate) and the fourth grade (Signal) during which free samples of toothbrushes, toothpastes and disclosure tablets are handed out to students. The school dentist or dental assistant teaches students how to use a toothbrush and toothpaste and the importance of using them properly;
- An awareness-raising program on puberty and adolescence ("I've grown up") for female students in the sixth and seventh grades in which they are made aware of the period of adolescence and how to take care of their bodies, especially during the monthly period. Free samples of sanitary towels are distributed, together with an educational booklet on the subject, which is in conformity with the recommendation contained in paragraph 40 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report, thereby eliminating the reasons for the concern expressed in paragraph 39 thereof;
- The AIDS programme through which students are made aware of the seriousness of the disease through school curricula, awareness-raising lectures and the circulation of leaflets and booklets to students in the seventh to twelfth grades.

412. The awareness-raising programmes implemented or to be implemented by the Department for Educational Guidance and Awareness-raising are as follows:

- *Programmes already implemented:* Television and radio interviews in which various subjects are discussed, such as the importance of breakfast and varied nutritional meals, and the school seminar on nutrition and numerous subjects such as improper conduct and how to prevent it;
- *Programmes to be implemented:* An information programme to raise awareness of various health matters such as the dangers of tobacco-smoking and tobacco products and the importance of breakfast, in addition to a complete and balanced diet, exercise and personal hygiene. The programme will be carried out by way of leaflets and booklets, brief television and radio messages, and awareness-raising lectures on the subject.

8.5.9 Budgets, financial burdens and monitoring mechanisms

413. Total financial credits approved for the school year 2003/04 amounted to RO 356,718,700, all of which were earmarked to cover current, capital and development expenditure for education (6-18 years of age) in all regions of the Sultanate.

414. The following measures are also being implemented:

- General education is free of charge in the first to twelfth grades for all males and females of school age, as already stated, meaning that the family pays only a token sum for the student's stationery, such as pens and notebooks, since textbooks are distributed free of charge to students, in addition to which the Ministry provides transportation for students to and from school;

- Measures are being taken and mechanisms created to ensure that all students, including girls, children with special needs and children in difficult circumstances in particular, have access to good-quality education geared to the age and maturity of the child;
- The general education system adopted for the first to tenth grades (basic education) is a modern system that seeks to integrate theory, practice, ideas and actions, as well as develop all aspects of the individual's character, impart the skills of self-learning and instil the values and practices needed for perfect teaching and learning;
- The Technical Office for Beginners' Education has been set up in order to review the curricula for the first to fourth grades (module 1) for the purposes of ascertaining that the content is appropriate to the child's level of physical, mental and interactive development;
- All ways and means of developing and improving the quality of education and keeping the student in touch with new developments in an age typified by a huge technological revolution are being made accessible;
- The school curricula are being developed in such a way as to promote the learner's religious, social, cultural and psychological development, bearing in mind that the curricula are required keep pace with advances and with modern development programmes;
- Schools are being provided with learning-resources centres and computer laboratories in order to develop and refine the student's abilities and talents to match the rapid upsurge in information being witnessed worldwide.

8.5.10 Measures to ensure an adequate supply of teachers

415. In the school year 2003/04, the number of teachers employed by the Ministry amounted to 32,345. There was one teacher for every 27 students in the first to sixth grades, one for every 25 students in the seventh to ninth grades and one for every 20 students in the tenth to twelfth grades.

416. The teachers appointed are graduates of universities or education colleges and have educational qualifications and training. The Ministry continuously monitors teachers and provides them with technical assistance through the school monitoring system (senior teachers) or the technical supervisors and educationalists who regularly visit schools.

417. The continuous training programme seeks to refine and further the skills and abilities of teachers and keep them up to date with new developments in education.

418. The Ministry endeavours to supply all schools in all regions with teachers for all academic stages. In that context, teachers are brought in from the country's six education colleges, to which 2,000 students are admitted each year to undergo training for a period of

four years. In addition, the college of education at Sultan Qaboos University takes in approximately 500 students each year. Some students are also studying in colleges of education at various Arab universities, in particular those located in the Gulf and Jordan.

419. New teachers are monitored by the school's senior subject teacher, by the educational supervisors in the regional education directorates and by supervisors and technical members working in the Ministry. They are also required to attend continuous training courses at the local and national levels in order to further their abilities and refine their skills.

420. The Ministry provides computer and all the equipment, books, audio-visual tapes, maps and scientific laboratory equipment needed by learning-resources centres. All school students benefit from such facilities on the basis of the subjects they are studying. We also refer to paragraph 189 of our initial report and to the ongoing implementation of these programmes, which is consistent with the recommendation contained in paragraph 44 of the Committee's concluding observations.

8.5.11 Measures to provide appropriate education facilities and make them available to all children

421. These measures entail the provision of learning materials and technological aids designed to facilitate student access to knowledge and information. Schools also have learning-resources centres, which are equipped with computers, books and numerous reference materials that serve to reinforce the various school curricula. In addition, computer laboratories are located in school premises in order to prepare students and keep their skills up to date with the technological advances of the day.

8.5.11.1 Illiteracy rate for young persons under and over 18 years of age and rate of attendance at literacy classes by age, gender, rural and urban region and social origin

422. Population estimates for 2000 indicate that the illiteracy rate in the 15-19 age group is 1.62 per cent for males, 4.89 per cent for females and 3.22 per cent overall, bearing in mind the five-year cohort and the fact that the literacy system in the Sultanate defines an illiterate as "any person over 10 years of age who does not regularly attend any school or educational establishment and has not attained functional literacy in the Arabic language, arithmetic and other skills". Literacy programmes are targeted at the 15-44 age group, which is the productive age group.

423. Reports of the Ministry of Education and the UNICEF office in the Sultanate state that illiteracy averages 68 per cent for women in rural areas, compared with 47 per cent in urban areas, and 40.2 per cent for males in rural areas, compared with 23.6 per cent in urban areas. Illiteracy is noticeably higher among the over-45 age group, since they were mostly born and brought up before the educational revival that began in 1970 and were then too old to be eligible for school. The Sultanate, however, has been intent on accommodating them in literacy programmes, as will be discussed in the next section.

424. Nonetheless, some young girls aged 6 to 12 years have not been enrolled in any kind of education for the following reasons:

- Workers from many of the Omani families living abroad (East Africa and South-East Asia), some of them born to non-Omani mothers, returned to the Sultanate in order to help build their country. They came unaccompanied by their families, with whom they are now reunited. Consequently, the young girls who attend literacy classes in certain places are absorbed into general education as soon as they complete the first and second literacy grades;
- Economic and social circumstances compelled some citizens, namely bedouins, to adopt a nomadic lifestyle and their failure to settle resulted in a lack of educational establishments. Once the country's infrastructure was in place, however, in particular the roads linking the various parts of the Sultanate, the State built schools along these roads and children were then able to reach school using the communal transport which it provides;
- Various groups live on mountain tops in small communities or families, for whom the State built administrative centres in the form of service complexes housing a school, hospital, post office, police station and market. Education has therefore been made available for the children in these communities.

8.5.11.2 Statistics on the number of students in literacy programmes

425. In the school year 2004/05, the number of students attending literacy centres amounted to 7,641. Between the start of literacy activities and the school year 2003/04, the number of those acquiring literacy skills amounted to 58,361.

426. Schools are located throughout the Sultanate in practically every place where there are sufficient numbers of children. In order to preserve these gains made during the auspicious years of the renaissance, the Ministry is striving to provide qualified teachers, highly developed school curricula, appropriate school premises and all equipment and materials free of charge to students in order to further and develop all aspects of education.

427. First introduced in 1997/98, the basic education system for the first to tenth grades is now operational in 353 schools throughout the Sultanate (school year 2003/04). The key method employed in the basic education system is that of continuous student assessment during the school year, eliminating the system of final examinations and consequently the drop-out that ultimately leads to the interruption of and failure to complete education. The sophisticated assessment system now widely used in schools aims to minimize drop-out and interruption of study, in parallel with which a more highly skilled teaching and administrative staff, updated books and curricula and the availability of class and extra-curricular activities will strengthen the Ministry guidelines aimed at reducing the rates of repetition and interruption of study. The above statistics confirm the achievements accomplished in this field.

8.6 Aims of education (art. 29 of the Convention)

428. In this regard, we refer to section VII.B of our initial report and add that education programmes are based on a number of key elements that are directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities through the following:

- The self-learning method, which accustoms the student to seek out different learning resources for the purpose of study and inquiry;
- Exercises in which problems are presented, rationally dealt with and realistically overcome;
- The inclusion in school curricula of various activities that are appropriate to the mental abilities of students in each individual stage and allow them to bring out their talents;
- The opportunity for students to express their ideas and state their views on all subjects of interest to them through reports and studies and by taking part in seminars, class councils and groups, writing in the school press, giving theatre performances or broadcasting on school radio, namely a range of options that is intended to offer wider scope for the positive involvement of students.

429. In addition, the education programmes and curricula are consistent with articles of the Convention in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms in that study materials incorporate subjects relating to individual rights and obligations, peace, the rejection of conflict and war, the pursuit of dialogue and understanding, and respect for other cultures and civilizations. Students also take part in art and cultural competitions by producing drawings and written work under those same headings.

430. The Omani curricula incorporate a number of the issues covered in the articles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are studied in the context of more than one school subject in the different stages of education, which is in conformity with the recommendation contained in paragraph 46 of the Committee's concluding observations on our initial report and eliminates the reasons for the concern expressed in paragraph 45 thereof.

431. Based on the agreement concluded in May 2003 between the Curriculum Directorate at the Ministry of Education and the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the articles of the Convention will be more widely incorporated into school subjects and explanatory leaflets will be published as guidance for teachers when teaching those subjects to students.

432. Issues relating to peace, understanding, tolerance, equality, justice and the rejection of conflict are widely covered under Islamic studies, reading and social education. As a result, students are imbued with these notions, which are handled in an interesting way.

433. As for life skills, students interact with their physical environment and understand the issues at stake, the imminent dangers and ways of maintaining hygiene and cleanliness in a healthy school environment that is damage-free. The Ministry cooperates with the other organs of the State, such as the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment, in organizing a regular art competition for drawings or advertising designs in which thousands of students participate to express their ideas and proposals on how to preserve and prevent damage to the natural environment and on anti-pollution measures.

434. Workshops and training workshops are constantly held to provide teachers at the national and local levels with information on all new developments and on how to treat the important subjects being incorporated into the school curricula. Leaflets containing guidelines are circulated to schools. Supervisors play a key role during their periodic visits to schools by meeting and holding discussions with teachers on practical methods of teaching the subjects in the textbooks in accordance with the abilities of students.

435. The Ministry employs a variety of methods to monitor and review the aims of education. In addition to continuous assessment, for instance, officials, supervisors and experts periodically visit schools for concentrated periods to learn more about obstacles in the way of progress of work in education. Since 1994, the Ministry has been implementing a programme for the monitoring of learning achievement (MLA), through which a field survey is conducted and the strong and weak points of students in the different stages of learning are determined. Field studies are also being carried out in order to monitor various aspects of work in education. Reports from the educational regions are being carefully studied and frequent seminars and meetings are held to discuss their content and agree on future aims and strategies for tackling any negative points and strengthening the positive ones.

8.7 Leisure time, recreation and activities

436. This subject was covered in section VII.C of the initial country report.

437. The school day is divided into two periods between which there is a 30-minute break and the opportunity to have a light meal from the school canteen. During the school day, students attend classes in science and literature and also engage in various cultural and sporting activities.

438. The activities consist of classes in art, music and sports, in addition to which students take part in the activities offered by science clubs, school groups, boy scouts, cubs, girl guides and brownies. The aim of these activities is that students should benefit from their leisure time, develop their skills and pursue their hobbies as they wish and in accordance with their abilities.

439. The Ministry supplies schools with the basic tools and equipment needed for such activities. Schools also use their share of the profits from cooperative societies (school canteens) to purchase any additional aids and materials which they lack, depending on the type of activities practiced in the school.

8.7.1 Sports activities

440. Competitions in different sports are organized among the schools in the region and among regions. In addition to the role played by the Ministry of Sports Affairs, schools specializing in this field supervise such activities.

8.7.2 Scouting activities

441. See section 2.4.6 E.

8.7.3 The Ministry of Sports Affairs

442. This subject was covered in section VII.D of the initial country report.

443. The Ministry, which has established a special section for girls' activities, provides its activities free of charge for both sexes without discrimination, including, for example, the following:

- The permanent training centre for communal games for girls aged 9 to 18 years;
- The youth football school for ages 9 to 13 years;
- The youth handball school for ages 9 to 15 years;
- The mini-basketball team for ages 9 to 13 years;
- The young basketball team for ages 9 to 18 years;
- The table-tennis championship for ages 12 to 18 years;
- The tennis championship for girls aged 12 to 16 years;
- The badminton competition for ages 14 to 18 years;
- The open coastal running championship for ages 12 to 18;
- The sports day for disabled persons from 10 to 18 years.

444. Covering all regions and governorates, the Ministry's activities take place at sports clubs, meetings and arenas, with no distinction between urban and rural areas.

8.7.4 Activities in the municipality of Muscat

445. The municipality stages a number of art, cultural and social activities that are repeated annually. The most important of these activities, on which work is ongoing, are as follows:

- Feast-day celebrations: The Feast of Breaking the Fast and the first, second and third days of the Feast of the Sacrifice, during which gifts are handed out and children share their joy on the happy occasion through competitions, exhibitions, plays and songs;
- Qaranqashwah celebrations: Children take part in these traditional festivities held on the fifteenth night of Ramadan, during which sweets, money and gifts are handed out and popular traditional songs appropriate for the occasion are performed;
- Charity festivities: The municipality of Muscat normally organizes annual competitions and activities for school students and children to mark the Day of the Tree, guidance and awareness-raising competitions during Ramadan and recreational programmes in parks and public fairgrounds;
- Summer festivities: In association with summer centres in the provinces of the governorate, the municipality organizes summer competitions for school students and children, as well as visits to tourist sites;
- The Muscat Fair: It is actively involved in the annual Muscat Fair, where there is a children's village, with face-painting, drawing and story-telling competitions, a children's games corner and live and recorded radio and television programmes;
- Awareness-raising: Children's cartoon strips appear in the print and visual media and leaflets, bulletins, advice booklets and television programmes are produced with the aim of curbing negative phenomena such as the vandalizing of public property and graffiti;
- Involvement in public activity: Conducting visits to raise awareness of and provide advice on health in schools, taking part in national, pan-Arab and religious events, arranging summer counselling camps where various educational, cultural and leisure activities and programmes are carried out, organizing processions to raise awareness and staging children's festivities in shopping malls and other public places;
- The Reading-for-All Fair: During this Fair organized during the summer by the municipality of Muscat, school students take part in cultural, educational and fun competitions, cartoons are shown and gifts and prizes are handed out to visitors;
- Seminars and lectures: These are given by the municipality's awareness-raising and guidance section, which visits schools in the governorate to raise awareness and provide guidance and instruction for children and students at all levels.

IX. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

9.1 Refugee children (art. 22 of the Convention)

446. We refer to section VIII.A of the Sultanate's initial report, to which we wish to add the information below.

447. Under article 3 of the Extradition Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 4/2000, it is prohibited to extradite a wanted person from another country in cases such as where the person wanted for extradition was granted the right of political asylum in the Sultanate before the extradition was requested and continues to enjoy that right after the request was made, or where the offence for which the person's extradition is requested is political or political in nature or where the extradition is for a political purpose. We would also point out that, under article 4 of the Aliens' Residence Act, the General Inspector of Police and Customs is permitted to exempt individuals from all or some of the conditions of residence for humanitarian reasons.

448. Under this Act, if a member of a married couple is granted residence, residence is also granted to the other spouse and any children under 21 years of age living with the person to whom residence is granted, as a result of which they are able to leave and enter the Sultanate. An alien who is resident in Oman (in any capacity) is granted an entry visa for his spouse and children under 28 years of age. He may also apply for a visitor's visa for relatives and friends. The submission of an application for any such type of visa has no prejudicial outcome for the applicant or for those included in the application. The departure of an alien from the Sultanate is subject to no restriction other than those imposed as a legal precaution on account of obligations or claims made against him. There have been no cases of political refugee children in the Sultanate, as there are no wars or disturbances in the surrounding countries. Consequently, there are no implementing or legislative measures dealing strictly with such cases.

9.2 Children in armed conflicts (art. 38 and 39 of the Convention)

449. The Sultanate acceded to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict by Royal Decree No. 41/2004, thereby accomplishing the recommendation contained in paragraph 55 of the Committee's concluding observations.

450. The cases addressed in article 38 of the Convention are not currently an issue for the Sultanate. Consequently, there are no special implementing or legislative measures on the subject.

451. As a Member of the United Nations, Oman has undertaken international commitments, in addition to which its Basic Law provides that it should strive for peace and cooperation among peoples and comply with international treaties and instruments. Consequently, it respects rules of international humanitarian law applicable to it in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child. Moreover, its internal laws on the legal competence, care and protection of children to which we have already referred also incorporate respect for these rights, since involvement in armed conflicts violates the rights of the child to protection, care, survival and development.

452. The current law does not permit the direct involvement of children under 15 years of age in any war, since they are incapable of discernment, as already indicated.

453. The current law does not permit the recruitment of any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into the armed forces. As for children between the ages of 15 and 18 years, they may volunteer for the armed forces. Preference is usually given to those who are oldest and they

are considered only for a specific and extremely limited number of branches of the armed forces. Derived from Islam, which is the source of legislation, Omani traditions protect the civilian population and its property and sources of livelihood in war, insofar as Islam proscribes the felling of trees in battle, as well as the killing of any invalid, woman or child, the destruction of property and any attack on defenceless persons.

9.3 Children subject to the juvenile justice system

9.3.1 The juvenile justice system (art. 40 of the Convention)

454. The Sultanate is still carefully studying the bill on juvenile liability which has been submitted to the Council of Ministers for its consideration and which regulates the administration of juvenile justice. The Code of Criminal Procedure promulgated by Royal Decree No. 97/99, however, contains provisions guaranteeing that children accused of an offence shall be treated differently than adults in order to preserve their sense of dignity, worth and respect with the aim of promoting their social reintegration.

455. The Omani Penal Code promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/74, as amended, contains provisions that take into account to the best interests of the child in various respects, details of which are set forth in the sections below.

9.3.1.1 The principle of no punishment for acts or omissions that were not prohibited at the time they were committed

456. We affirm that this principle is in effect, it being one of the fundaments of the penal legislation in the Sultanate, as stipulated in article 21 of the Basic Law of the State, which prescribes that there shall be no punishment except for acts subsequent to the entry into force of the law providing for those acts.

9.3.1.2 Safeguards for the accused child

457. *Presumption of innocence:* See section VIII.B.3 of our initial report.

458. *Being informed of the charge in the presence of his or her parents or legal guardians and access to legal assistance in the presentation of his or her defense:* In this connection, we refer to section VIII.B.4 of our initial report and wish to make a correction in that article 15 mentioned therein should instead read article 14. We should like to add that article 24 of the Basic Law of the State (section 1.1) upholds these rights and that an accused person must be informed of the charge from the initial stages of the investigation through to trial. Under article 114 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, when the accused is first examined, the member of the Office of the Public Prosecutor must inform him of the charges against him and hear his statements. Under article 188 of the Code, the court must make the charge against the accused and read out and explain it to him. Furthermore, under article 74 of the Code, the accused, the injured party, the civil plaintiff or the person responsible for him and any person defending any one of them has the right to attend the initial investigation proceedings. A person accused of a felony may be accompanied by his lawyer.

459. The Code gives every accused person (adult or child) access to legal and other assistance for the preparation of his defence at the different stages of the case, a right enshrined in article 181, pursuant to which adversaries and their representatives are permitted to attend hearings, even those held in camera, and none of them may be expelled unless he shows disrespect for the court or disrupts the hearing. These rights are enshrined in article 24 of the Basic Law of the State. Here, we also point out that under article 115 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the accused person may not be separated from his lawyer during the investigation and the lawyer must be informed of the investigation one day before the questioning.

460. *The right to be tried before a competent judicial body:* On this subject, we refer to section VIII.B.5 of our initial report, to which we add the information below.

461. Article 59 of the Basic Law of the State provides that the sovereignty of the law is the basis of governance in the State and that the integrity of the courts and the impartiality and fairness of judges are a safeguard of rights and freedoms. Article 60 provides that the judiciary is independent and that its authority is vested in the courts, whatever their type and instance, which pronounce their judgements in accordance with the law. Article 61 provides that there is no authority over judges in their decision-making other than the law and that they may not be removed except as prescribed by law. No one may interfere in cases of law or in matters of justice and such interference is an offence punishable by law. Article 71 also prescribes that any failure or delay by competent public servants to execute judgements is an offence punishable by law and that the judgement beneficiary in such cases has the right to bring criminal proceedings directly to the court.

462. The Judiciary Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 90/99 arranges the courts in order of instance, makes available all means for the independence of the judiciary, establishes a judicial inspection department to monitor the safety of justice and vest in judicial commissions the authority to appoint, promote, discipline and inspect judges, all in order to guarantee the independence, impartiality and fairness of the judiciary. Special juvenile courts, however, will be empowered only after the bill on juvenile liability bill has been considered and promulgated. Article 14 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, to which we referred in the previous section, permits parents or legal guardians to be present in addition to lawyers and the best interests of the child are taken into account in permitting the appointment of a legal guardian in the proceedings if it is not in the child's interest for the parents to be present.

463. Article 25 of the Basic Law of the State provides that the State shall guarantee the expeditious settlement of cases.

464. *Not to be compelled to give testimony or to confess guilt and the right to examine witnesses:* Article 20 of the Basic Law of the State provides that no person shall be subjected to physical or mental torture, inducement or degrading treatment and the law prescribes punishment for any person who commits any such act. Any statement or confession that is proven to have been made under pressure or threat of torture or assault is also invalid. Article 22 of the Basic Law of the State prohibits the infliction of any physical or mental harm on the accused. Article 181 of the Penal Code provides that any public servant who inflicts on person blows of a severity not permitted by law for the purpose of procuring a confession to a crime or information on a crime shall be punished in addition to any legally prescribed punishment for the infliction of degrading treatment, abuse or harm.

465. Article 189 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that the accused person shall in no way be made to take oath or be compelled or induced to give responses or make certain statements. Under no circumstances shall the silence of the accused person or his failure to respond be construed as a confession, nor may he be punished for false testimony in respect of statements which he makes in denial of the charge against him. Article 192 provides that any statement or confession made as a result of torture or coercion is invalid.

466. Article 104 provides that the Office of the Public Prosecutor must listen to the testimony of witnesses requested by the adversaries in order to prove guilt or innocence. In accordance with article 110, the adversaries may examine witnesses. Under article 194, the accused may at any time request that such witnesses as he deems appropriate be heard or request a specific investigation procedure.

467. Article 41 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that: “No person may be arrested or detained except by order of the competent authority and the person under arrest shall be treated in a dignified manner. It shall be forbidden for law enforcement officers and any person with public authority to resort to torture, coercion, inducement or degrading treatment in order to procure or prevent the making of statements during evidence-gathering, preliminary investigation or trial”.

468. *The principle enshrined in the procedural laws of the right to bring proceedings in all instances of court:* The accused has the right to appeal against judgements, seek their review and contest the impartiality of the judges.

469. *Access to the assistance of an interpreter:* The investigating authorities and the court are obliged to charge and hear the accused. His right to be heard presupposes his right to an interpreter if he does not speak Arabic so that he may exercise his rights and the court may perform its duties. This is the procedure in all courts.

Respect for privacy

470. Please refer to section 5.7 of the present report.

471. Article 26 of the Basic Law of the State provides that: “No medical or scientific experiment may be conducted on anyone without his consent”. Article 27 provides that: “Homes shall be inviolable and may not be entered without the permission of the occupants except as prescribed by law”. Article 28 provides that: “The freedom to perform religious observances in accordance with the observed custom shall be guaranteed, provided that in doing so there is no breach of public order or indecency”.

472. Article 30 provides that: “The freedom of postal correspondence, telegrams, telephone conversations and other means of communication shall be safeguarded and their confidentiality guaranteed. They may not be subjected to censorship, inspection, disclosure, delay or confiscation except as prescribed by law in accordance with the stipulated procedures”. Article 90 of the Code of Criminal Procedure prohibits the seizure or interception of correspondence or telegrams, the recording of conversations which take place in private or the monitoring or recording of telephone calls without a warrant from the Office of the Public

Prosecutor. Under article 79 of the Code, it is also prohibited to enter homes except: in the circumstances prescribed by law; in the event that assistance is requested from within; in case of necessity; or with a written warrant from the Office of the Prosecutor in which the grounds for its issuance are stated if a person residing in the house to be searched is suspected of having committed or acted as an accomplice in a felony or a misdemeanour or if there is evidence to indicate that he is in possession of items relating to such an offence. The search may not be carried out once seven days have elapsed since the date of issuance of the warrant unless a new warrant is issued.

473. Under article 77, the accused person may not be searched except in the circumstances under which arrest is permitted. Under article 78, where a search is permitted, females are to be searched by another female who, if not a law enforcement officer, must first take oath that she will faithfully and sincerely perform her duty. Under article 85, law enforcement officers must restrict their search of homes to the items or effects in respect of which the search warrant was issued. Article 86 also provides that if there are women in the house and the purpose of entry is not to search or arrest those women, the law enforcement officer must respect tradition and enable or facilitate their departure from the house, provided that the search is not thereby prejudiced”.

474. Under article 89 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which permits the impounding or placement of seals on anything connected with an offence, the accused or his representative must be present when the seals are broken or the seized items are exhibited. Under article 92, it is the exclusive prerogative of the Office of the Public Prosecutor to examine any correspondence, telegrams and papers seized, where such seizure is permitted, at which time the accused person and the holder or recipient of such documents must be present and their comments recorded in writing. Under article 87, the seizure procedure is subject to legal monitoring, failing which it may subsequently be contested.

475. Article 293 provides that: “Any person who, as the result of a search, comes into possession of information about the search items and discloses such information to any unqualified person or benefits from it in any way shall receive the penalty prescribed for the offence of disclosure of secrets”. Under article 95, the accused must be notified of any correspondence and other similar items seized or transmitted to him or he must be given a copy thereof as soon as possible, which also applies if he has an immediate interest in them. The return of seized items is subject to monitoring by the courts and the accused is entitled to petition for them to be handed over to him, in accordance with article 98.

476. As already mentioned, trials may be conducted in camera or certain categories may be forbidden to attend for reasons of public order or public morals. The legislative enactments and implementing procedures mentioned above and elsewhere in the present report, all of which are strictly applied, are aimed at guaranteeing the right to privacy and preserving confidentiality.

9.3.2 Strengthening of laws, procedures, authorities and institutions in connection with accused children

477. We have already stated that there are no special judicial bodies for children and that the matter is addressed in the bill on juvenile liability. We also affirm our earlier comment that judges fulfil all the requirements of competence, neutrality, fairness and impartiality guaranteed

by the Judiciary Act. As there are no laws specific to accused children, the procedures, measures and penalties in respect of such children are handled through the Penal Code and sentences handed down to them are served in segregation from adults.

9.3.2.1 Minimum age of criminal liability

478. Article 104 of the Penal Code provides that anyone who was under nine years of age at the time of perpetrating an offence may not be criminally prosecuted. Consequently, no allegation of violating the Penal Code may be made against any person under nine years of age.

9.3.2.2 Disciplinary and corrective measures

479. Article 105 of the Omani Penal Code provides that anyone over 9 and under 13 years of age at the time of committing an offence may not be sentenced to imprisonment or a fine but shall instead be placed by court order in a correctional institution designated by the judge for a period extending to no later than when he attains 18 years of age. The judge may reprimand him in the court hearing and deliver him thereafter into the care of his guardian in return for an undertaking from the latter that he will bring up the minor and prevent him from reoffending during the period stated in the judgment (and if the guardian fails to carry out his undertaking, he is liable to punishment for the neglect of a minor, whereupon the judge may, at his discretion, decide to place the minor in a correctional institution). Consequently, no criminal punishment is imposed on a juvenile of this age; disciplinary or correctional measures are imposed instead.

480. Article 106 of the Omani Penal Code provides that anyone over 13 and under 15 years of age at the time of committing an offence shall be imprisoned as a correctional measure. The Code provides for imprisonment of three to five years if the offence is punishable by execution or life imprisonment and of one to three years for other felonies. If the offence is a misdemeanour, he is punished with imprisonment of ten days to six months. As for a person who was over 15 and under 18 years of age at the time of the offence, he is punished with imprisonment of five to ten years if the offence is punishable by execution or life imprisonment and of three to seven years for other felonies. If the offence is a misdemeanour, he is imprisoned for a period of between ten days and one year.

481. Under article 292 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the penalty of execution may be stayed in the case of a pregnant woman until she gives birth. If the infant is born alive, the penalty is stayed for a period of two years so that she may nurse the child. If the child dies during that period, the penalty is stayed for 40 days after the death and if the child is stillborn, the penalty is stayed for 60 days after the birth.

482. Under article 301 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, a custodial punishment may be stayed in the case of a pregnant woman until three months after she has given birth. Under article 304, a custodial punishment may be stayed in the case of one member of a couple who have both been sentenced if they have (or are caring for under the *kafalah* system) a child under 15 years of age and have a known domicile in the Sultanate.

9.3.2.3 Special treatment for children in judicial proceedings

483. This is dependant on promulgation of the bill on juvenile liability currently under consideration.

9.3.2.4 Measures for dealing with children

484. In this connection, we refer to section VIII.B.5 of our initial report, to which we add the information below.

485. Juveniles in correctional institutions and prisons have access to literacy education and education to the end of the sixth grade only in the form of regular study under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. As for the stages of general education, there are no regular classes but the stages may be studied independently. We should also point out that the National Follow-up Committee on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child formed a working group to study the situation of juveniles in detention centres and prisons. The working group carried out an extended study in this connection in which it arrived at proposals that are being followed up by the competent authorities.

486. Article 22 of the Prisons Act guarantees to the prisoner or detainee that he may continue his religious observances and have the means to practice them and also that every prisoner shall have one spiritual mentor or more. Article 23 provides that detainees and prisoners shall enjoy free health and social care in prison and in places of remand. Under article 24, every prison must have a resident doctor in charge of health matters, as well as a number of assistants to help him. Under article 25, an adequate and healthy diet appropriate to the age and health of the inmates must be provided. Under article 26, appropriate clothing and covers appropriate for personal use must also be provided.

487. Under article 26, pregnant inmates must receive special medical treatment in terms of type of food and jobs assigned to them from the beginning of pregnancy until 40 days after delivery.

488. Juvenile offences are not such as to constitute a phenomenon in Oman. On the contrary, they are minimal; table 25 shows that, in 2003, 704 offences were committed by juveniles (9 to 18 years) who, in 97.2 per cent of cases, were male. The majority of these offences were simple misdemeanours, mostly theft, attempted theft, simple damage, brawling and illegal entry to the country. Annexed hereto are tables showing the age of juveniles, the number and type of juvenile offences and their breakdown by region during 2000-2003.

9.3.2.5 The child's mental and physical rehabilitation and social reintegration

489. All measures for psychological and physical reintegration, including those taken by correctional institutions, counsellors, mentors and teachers in prisons, have already been mentioned in the previous section.

9.4 Children in situations of exploitation

9.4.1 Economic exploitation

490. See section 2.1.5 of the present report.

491. The law makes no distinction between male and female, rural and urban, non-Omani and Omani, religion or gender. We should also point out that articles 80 to 86 of the Employment Act concerning the employment of women provide concessions in favour of females over males. Article 82, for example, prohibits the employment of women in jobs that are detrimental to health or physically strenuous and in other jobs specified by a decision of the Minister.

492. Through the Department for Labourers' Welfare and inspection campaigns, the Ministry of Labour ascertains that employers are compliant with the Employment Act and any individual who contravenes the provisions of the Act is questioned. The situation of children is monitored as part of the follow-up programmes and visits made by employment officers and inspectors in accordance with article 8 of the Employment Act. In the event that an employer contravenes the provisions of chapter V on the employment of women and juveniles, article 118 of the Employment Act is applied whereby the employer receives a fine of up to RO 100. Multiple penalties are imposed depending on the number of juveniles and women employed in contravention of those provisions. If the contravention is repeated within one year of the date of judgement, the employer may be punished with imprisonment in addition to the fine.

493. The employment of children in the Sultanate is not a phenomenon such as to raise concern owing to the social cohesion, the fact that religion encourages the search for knowledge and the laws mentioned. Children are not employed in government bodies. Table 26 shows that, in 2001, there were 1,390 child workers, of whom 1,223 were male and 167 were female. These children are employed as clerks, delivery boys, cleaners or messengers, all of which are light jobs.

9.4.2 Camel and horse racing

494. We should first point out that camel and horse racing are among the popular sports, such as swimming, horse-riding, football and wrestling, which have long been practiced in the region by both adults and children. Exclusively Omani, the children who race camels are the offspring of camel owners and do not work for an employer in return for pay. There are strict security and safety measures for jockeys, including helmets, straps, breathable clothing and receivers worn on the chest through which the jockey is able to talk. Children in the eastern regions in particular are pushed into racing as a matter of pride in their riding abilities because of the fame and bonuses won. Race courses are enclosed by earth barricades in order to prevent the camels from leaving the track. The jockeys are aged between 7 and 17 years and weigh between 12 and 22 kilograms. They are bright, clever, alert and easy to talk to and understand. No more than 200 or 300 children are involved in racing. It does not take long to train jockeys, since they all travel about on camels and belong to camel-breeding families. As such, training lasts for no more than one or two weeks before a race and daily consists of no more than five rides of

five minutes each. Child jockeys usually live in close quarters with the camels for two or three months before a race so that each becomes familiarized with the other. Their schooling is unaffected because these exercises are part of their lives and most races are organized during the weekly holiday and after study periods. They rarely take time off from school for racing.

495. This sport is no more dangerous than any other sport practised by children in other countries that has led to death or injury. In fact, the number of those involved in it is not highly significant compared with those involved in other sports elsewhere in the world. We therefore do not endorse the argument that it is child labour, as the reality is otherwise; if that were the case, the employment of such children would not be permissible under the Employment Act. The foregoing is a response to the Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph 51 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and the concern expressed in paragraph 52 thereof.

496. In accordance with the Committee's recommendations on this matter and decisions adopted in neighbouring countries, a decision was issued by the Sultanate's Union of Horse and Camel Jockeys to limit the age of camel jockeys to over 14 years. In accordance with the decision, jockeys competing in races must produce a copy of their birth certificate. In the absence of a birth certificate, they must produce a certificate that gives an estimate of their age. This decision is enforced at all races.

497. The National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has assigned a special team to monitor the issue. The above information is taken from the report produced after various field visits and interviews with race organizers, jockeys, camel-owners and owners of tracks.

498. Table 27 shows the number of horses in the eastern region and the number of children who are amateur horse riders.

9.4.3 Fishing

499. The National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has assigned a special all-party working group to monitor child labour in fishing and highlight the dangers. The team has conducted a number of fact-finding field visits and interviews, subsequent to which it submitted a report stating the following:

- Fishing is a traditional occupation, a sport and a leisure activity that has long been practised by many Omanis along the coasts of Oman, which are teeming with fish;
- Many families living on the coasts rely on this occupation for their livelihood;
- There are no children who pursue fishing as an occupation but some go fishing with their families during their spare time;
- Aged between 6 and 12 years, the children who go fishing receive no pay because they practise the activity with their families. No impact on schooling was registered during ongoing monitoring.

500. Child labour in other cottage industries is so limited as to be negligible. Children whose families are occupied in such activities do sometimes help them but their studies remain unaffected. Child labour is limited in such industries because they generate little revenue and require skill and patience in quantities which children do not have. Child farm labour in Oman is negligible. Some children work on family farms during their spare time.

9.4.4 Drug abuse (art. 33 of the Convention)

501. Promulgated by Royal Decree No. 17/99, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act has already been mentioned in the Sultanate's initial report and in the present report as evidence of consideration for the best interests of the child. We also earlier referred to anti-tobacco measures and committees, as well as the ban on the sale of tobacco to children, and further point out that the public consumption and commercial sale of alcohol are forbidden in Oman. Under no circumstances is alcohol offered to minors. In accordance with the social customs, which are rooted in religion, there is disapproval of smoking, the consumption of alcohol is prohibited and severely punished and those who drink alcohol are looked down upon. The Omani Penal Code may also punish with imprisonment any person who is found in a public place or venue in a state of obvious intoxication or causes a nuisance or disturbance to others while intoxicated. Similarly, anyone who manufactures, imports, trades or deals in alcohol or engages in any alcohol-related activity without licence is punished with imprisonment of up to three years and a fine (arts. 228 and 229). The statistics available for 2003 show that there were few cases of alcohol consumption, 10 of which involved male children.

9.4.5 Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

502. This subject was covered in section VIII.C.3 of the Sultanate's initial report.

503. Article 222 of the Penal Code punishes any person who runs a place of prostitution or fornication or who assists in setting up and managing such a place. Article 221 also punishes anyone who engages in prostitution or fornication, whether or not in return for payment. Article 223 further punishes homosexuality and lesbianism. Article 224 punishes open sexual scandals and the printing, circulation, acquisition or display of nude photographs, messages or other scandalous items unless for a scientific purpose or in a scientific context and not directed at anyone under 18 years of age.

504. In Oman, this phenomenon does not exist in any tangible sense. The use of children in pornographic displays and photographs in violation of public morals, traditions and religion is not permitted by law and perpetrators are punished for incitement to fornication. As already mentioned, the Sultanate has acceded to the Optional Protocol on the subject.

9.4.6 Forms of child exploitation and abuse (art. 36 of the Convention)

505. The culture of Omani society is traditional and conservative in that customs, traditions and conventions play a large role in forming the behaviour of its members. Being open the outside world, our society is now a small village and improper practices affecting the physical and mental health of the child have consequently appeared, as shown by the qualitative study on

how children are treated in Omani society. Cases of sexual exploitation of children have emerged, as well as cases of neglect by parents. Beating is still practised in some schools and families also still resort to beating as a form of punishment.

506. The qualitative study also showed that the media broadcasting through television satellite channels have an adverse cultural and social impact on the child's social integration in society, which is noticeable in child behaviour, particularly violence.

507. The improper practices mentioned also include those to which disabled children are subjected, particularly in rural communities, where they are inappropriately treated as an obvious result of their remoteness from specialist disability centres.

508. These practices, however, were shown as qualitative data, and the Sultanate (the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) is currently doing its utmost to complete the second part of the study, which will comprise statistical figures. These practices are being countered in coordination with the concerned authorities, each in accordance with its sphere of competence.

509. Other than the instances mentioned in the present report, there no conspicuous forms of child exploitation in Oman, since it is precluded by the Omani family, which advocates adherence to religion and the protection and care of children.

510. Compensation awarded to children who are subjected to maltreatment includes loss of profit and any other loss. It also covers physical and mental rehabilitation and social reintegration, although a family whose child has been exploited very largely takes and further pursues all the necessary action.

9.4.7 Sale of and trafficking in children

511. This phenomenon is non-existent in Oman and Omani law prohibits trafficking in or the sale of human beings, neither of which is appropriate for a financial transaction. The Penal Code covers these acts where they incorporate elements essential to the offence of assault, abduction, threat, servitude or slavery. The Sultanate has acceded to the Optional Protocol on the subject.

9.4.8 Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group

512. This phenomenon is non-existent in Oman, since all indigenous inhabitants have the same origin and religion and all persons in the territory of Oman enjoy every right to preserve their culture and perform their religious observances. Non-Omanis also benefit from all opportunities available, including in health and education.

CONCLUSIONS

513. The Sultanate of Oman affirms its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implementation (subject to its reservations thereto until such time as they are withdrawn or modified) and is endeavouring to harness all of its resources with a view to the full performance of its obligations under the Convention, despite the economic, social and statistical

problems which it faces and which it needs time to overcome by way of the comprehensive plans elaborated and the mechanisms created, guided by the recommendations of the Committee and in compliance with its principles. Its reservations undergo periodic review and thorough consideration (CRC/C/15/Add.161).

514. The present report was prepared in accordance with the general guidelines contained in document C/CRC/58 dated 20 November 1996. It contains relevant statistics, legislation and information that was not included in the Sultanate's initial report (post-July 1999 to January 2004) and responds to the Committee's observations on the initial report.

515. In order to provide an understanding of the current situation in Oman and the circumstances and difficulties involved in implementing some articles of the Convention, section 1 of the present report comprises essential information on the Sultanate of Oman in the form of geographical, demographic, economic, health, education and social indicators.

516. The current laws in the Sultanate guarantee the protection of human rights, including the rights of the child. Section 2 of the present report throws more light on some of the laws mentioned in the initial report and on new laws and legislative enactments promulgated after the initial report was compiled, including the Basic Law of the State, the Omani Penal Code, the Civil and Commercial Code, the Employment Act and the Personal Status Act, all of which cover the content of articles 4, 42, paragraph 6, and 44 of the Convention. The Sultanate is undertaking an ongoing detailed review of the existing legislation to ensure its conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is considering the possibility of incorporating the Convention into a uniform law on child rights, in accordance with the recommendation contained in paragraphs 11 (a) and (b) of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

517. The Basic Law of the State incorporates all of human rights principles and freedoms enshrined in international instruments, treaties and declarations. The Omani Employment Act vests the competent minister with the power to raise the age of employment for juveniles of both sexes (15 years) in certain industries, where required, which is largely consistent with the comment contained in paragraph 49 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and the recommendation concerning the minimum age for admission to employment.

518. The Civil and Commercial Code seeks to give primary consideration to the best interests of any child by or against whom actions are brought, in conformity with the Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph 30 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report. On that basis and given the content of the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Personal Status Act, the Sultanate believes that the reasons for the concern expressed in paragraph 29 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report concerning the best interests of the child are in many ways no longer justified. Furthermore, the content of the Civil Status Act is in conformity with article 7 of the Convention. The comment made in paragraph 24 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report is therefore out of tune with the legislation as it stands. There is no justification for rescinding such legislation and information indicating that a child is born out of wedlock remains confidential. Furthermore, the Islamic Shariah uses the principle of "no one who is laden shall bear another's load". The foregoing is thus in line with the Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph 25 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

519. In accordance with the recommendation contained in paragraph 23 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report, the Sultanate adopted a series of measures to disseminate the principles of the Convention, including wide circulation of the Convention to the concerned bodies and its dissemination through the media, as well as the preparation and distribution of stickers, explanatory leaflets and information pamphlets to schools and institutions working with children. Short messages have also been aired on children's television and radio programmes on the content of the Convention. The general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have been incorporated into the school curricula and the amended curricula. In order to provide training in the Convention, training courses have been arranged, extensive meetings held and introductory lectures given, in addition to which radio and television programmes and literary and cultural competitions have been organized for the purpose of disseminating the provisions of the Convention, articles have been published in the local press and studies have been conducted.

520. Together with its committees, the National Follow-up Commission on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child forms the official body that monitors and coordinates efforts for implementation of the provisions of the Convention, in which it is assisted by a number of governmental organs and civil-society institutions. The Commission and the National Committee for the Care of the Child are together drawing up a comprehensive plan for implementation of the Convention through a consultative and participatory process with the concerned governmental and civil-society bodies in which each of them studies the child-related legislation and makes the necessary proposals concerning the legislation itself or measures for implementation, in accordance with the recommendation contained in paragraph 13 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

521. Through their representatives in national committees and the National Follow-up Commission, civil-society organizations pursue cooperation and participate in child-related activities. Gatherings of children and young people in schools, clubs, the scout and guide movement and so on are actively involved in discussing the rights and freedoms articulated in the Convention, all of which is within the context of implementing the recommendation contained in paragraph 15 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

522. The existence of national committees is in conformity with the principles relating to the status of national institutions (the Paris principles) within the limits of the resources of the Sultanate of Oman and the nature of its development and renaissance of the Sultanate of Oman, which should eliminate the reasons for the concern expressed by the Committee in paragraph 18 of its concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and which is also in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 19 thereof.

523. During 2003, the Ministry of Social Development completed construction of the database of Omani social indicators, which is in line with the recommendation contained in paragraph 17 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and the comment contained in paragraph 16 thereof.

524. Section 3 of the present report deals with the definition of the child in Omani legislation (art. 1 of the Convention) and section 4 deals with general principles, including a review of the laws in the Sultanate that uphold non-discrimination (art. 2 of the Convention). Citizens are

equal before the law and have equal rights and obligations, which is a binding principle for adults and children, whether nationals, non-nationals, refugees or asylum seekers. There is no discrimination between males and females as far as the benefit of educational, health and social services and legal transactions is concerned. Efforts are being made to eliminate disparities, which are attributable to resources and the increasing activity in the large population centres. There is no discrimination between the incapacitated and the able-bodied; in fact, the former receive greater care. It is clear from the present report that there are no hostile attitudes towards children in Omani society, including both nationals and non-nationals. The report also sets out the laws and measures which confirm that there is no discrimination whatsoever among minorities or indigenous inhabitants in the Sultanate of Oman, since there are none of either. The Basic Law is against racial discrimination and xenophobia, meaning that there is no need to elaborate plans to address those issues. In addition, article 25 of the Basic Law prescribes protection for aliens and their property, all of which is in keeping with the Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph 28 of its concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report. While it is emphasized in the report that the Sultanate of Oman is considering ratification of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, it is at the same time also clear that the Employment Act is applicable to migrant workers and citizens in matters of health care and education. The situation as it stands in the Sultanate should therefore rectify the concerns expressed by the Committee in paragraph 26 of its concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and is in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 27 thereof.

525. The report also covers the best interests of the child (art. 3 of the Convention) in terms of health and social services, education, housing and the social security system, as well as the legislation guaranteeing legal protection for children. The principle of the best interests of the child is a primary consideration in all measures employed by the courts, administrative authorities and social welfare institutions, both public and private, as confirmed by the statistics contained in the present report.

526. The report reviews the national laws and policies and the arrangements and mechanisms adopted in order to guarantee the right of the child to survival and development (art. 6 of the Convention). Respect for the views of the child (art. 12 of the Convention) is guaranteed, together with such freedom of expression as is appropriate to the child's level of awareness and development.

527. Section 5 deals with civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 37 of the Convention).

528. The report points out that the Basic Law of the State and the Omani Penal Code incorporate civil rights and freedoms and that legal texts incorporate children's rights, including the right to a name and nationality (arts. 7 and 8 of the Convention) under articles 14 and 19 of the Civil Status Act and the preservation of identity (art. 8 of the Convention) under the regulations on children in need of care and the Omani Nationality Act. All of these laws and their accompanying mechanisms and measures respond to the Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph 25 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

529. Articles 28, 29 and 30 of the Basic Law of the State incorporate freedom of expression (art. 13 of the Convention). The report sets out various mechanisms and measures adopted at the governmental and non-governmental levels to ensure that children have freedom of expression, right of access to appropriate information (art. 17 of the Convention), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14 of the Convention) and freedom of association and peaceful assembly (art. 15 of the Convention). Article 278 *bis* of the Omani Penal Code and articles 90 and 177 of the Code of Criminal Procedure cover the protection of privacy (art. 16 of the Convention) in connection with computer use, correspondence, telegrams, conversations conducted in private and the confidentiality of trials in order to safeguard public morals and avoid the disclosure of private family confidences or the abuse of individual privacy.

530. In addition, article 20 of the Basic Law of the State, article 192 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Omani Penal Code, *inter alia*, incorporate the right of the child not to be subjected to torture or other forms of cruel treatment (art. 37 of the Convention). The report covers in some detail the measures adopted in that connection in regard to children and school students, as well as the role of the media. The report also examines the efforts made by the Ministry of Social Development, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and the Royal Oman Police, to develop a strategy designed to protect children from all forms of maltreatment. The report further covers a number of studies conducted on this subject and the conclusions drawn, including the fact that there are no reports of any beating in schools and that teachers generally employ other disciplinary methods, such as complaining about offensive students to their parents or temporarily denying them certain activities. The punishment methods used by Omani families vary and depend on the parents' background and education. There is no sexual abuse of children and violence against children is not a conspicuous phenomenon in the Sultanate, which is in line with the Committee's recommendation contained in paragraph 36 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report. There are no reports of any beating in schools.

531. Section 6 covers family environment, alternative care, parental guidance (art. 5 of the Convention), the role of parents in building and constituting the Omani family, the nature of which is rooted in long-standing religious, moral and cultural traditions, the entities which play a part in child-rearing, and care and the requirements under the existing laws. The report deals with parental responsibility (art. 18 of the Convention) for the rearing and care of children in order to ensure that they are properly brought up (art. 36, para. 5, of the Personal Status Act), separation from parents (art. 9 of the Convention), family reunification (art. 10 of the Convention), children deprived of their family environment (art. 20 of the Convention), the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad (art. 11 of the Convention), periodic review of child placement (art. 25 of the Convention), maltreatment and neglect, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (arts. 19 and 39 of the Convention), and awareness-raising, care and rehabilitation of all types and levels.

532. Section 7 covers basic health and well-being (arts. 6, 18, 23, 24, 26 and 27 of the Convention) and includes:

- *Disabled children* (art. 23 of the Convention): The report states that disabled children have access to education, training and health care and rehabilitation services under the programmes of various governmental and civil authorities. In that regard, coordination is carried out through the National Committee for the Care of the Disabled, a government supervisory planning committee whose membership includes

civil-society organizations. The report states that a bill on services for the disabled is currently under consideration. It also discusses the role of the Ministry of Social Development in ensuring care and sports training for disabled children, as well as its coordination with the Ministry of Health in regard to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for disabled persons and the role of the Ministry of Education in devoting attention to disabled children in schools. The report further discusses voluntary non-governmental organizations and their activities in caring for disabled children;

- *Health and health services (arts. 6 and 18 of the Convention) and standard of living (art. 27 of the Convention):* The report examines the Sultanate's efforts to implement the provisions of the social security regulations promulgated by Royal Decree No. 87/84, in accordance with the commitment of the State articulated in article 12 of the Basic Law of the State. Included are the right of the child to benefit from social security programmes, inter alia the payment of monthly allowances to orphans, families of prisoners and persons incapacitated for work, defrayment of the cost of mobility aids, electricity and water connection charges for owner-occupiers, the payment of monthly assistance in special cases of illness and in the case of individual or mass disaster or calamity. The report also covers the regulations governing nurseries and the orphan sponsorship scheme. Social problems are studied and attempts are made to assist families and their members to find appropriate solutions to their problems. The report highlights the approach of the national strategy for social development in seeking to link the positive results of economic growth with the social development of the various sectors of the community with a view to achieving sustainable development.

533. Section 8 covers education, leisure time and cultural activities (arts. 28, 29 and 31 of the Convention), specifically the Sultanate's efforts to provide free education to all children over six years of age, regardless of colour, gender, nationality, geographical location or economic or social status. It also covers the measures taken to provide appropriate educational facilities and make them available to all children, as well as the efforts of the Ministry of Education to provide books, teaching aids, laboratory materials and transportation to and from school for all students and supply qualified teachers and administrators, together with the measures taken to ensure an adequate supply of teachers. The report shows the successes achieved, including the success of measures taken by the Ministry of Education to encourage regular school attendance and reduce drop-out rates, in line with the recommendation contained in paragraph 44 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report. It examines the efforts to ensure that the system of education applied in the Sultanate complies with the objectives set forth in article 29 of the Convention and covers the mechanisms put in place by the Ministry and the National Follow-up Commission for Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the purpose of modifying the curricula, as necessary, and coordinating with Sultan Qaboos University and education colleges with a view to familiarizing students with the articles of the Convention and providing teachers with annotated textbooks on the subjects incorporated and relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report also covers the provision of education for children with special needs.

534. In addition, the report discusses the aims of education (art. 29 of the Convention) and states that education programmes in the Sultanate rely on a number of basic elements with a view to developing the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities. Omani curricula include various subjects covering the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which are divided among more than one academic subject in the various educational stages and are studied. This is in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 46 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and which eliminates the reasons for the concern expressed by the Committee in paragraph 45 thereof.

535. The report also deals with the efforts of the Ministry of Education concerning respect for the views of the child, teacher training, the role of the private sector in education, the activities undertaken by the Ministry in order to guarantee freedom of expression (art. 13 of the Convention) and discussion of social, cultural, sports and art issues and all educational matters relating to the child in a spirit of understanding and joint action based on respect for the views of others and for other cultures. Students may not interfere in matters relating to confessions and religions or in the politics of other countries, in conformity with the principles of peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the affairs of other States, in which the Sultanate believes and which it seeks to instil. In regard to freedom of thought and conscience (art. 14 of the Convention), non-Muslim students are excused from attending Islamic education classes and performing religious observances (governmental and non-governmental schools). Nor do marks for Islamic education count towards their aggregate marks. No religious subjects are taught and no religious observances take place in any of the schools for foreign communities in view of the student mix of different nationalities and religious creeds. As for access to appropriate information (art. 17 of the Convention), the report clearly indicates that the Ministry of Education constantly reviews and evaluates the school curricula in order to check that adequate guarantees are in place to ensure that students have access to information appropriate to their stage of education and age. The Ministry of Education exchanges information, documentation, books and audio-visual tapes with Arab and non-Arab States and with regional and international educational organizations. The books, reference materials and compact discs supplied by school learning-resources centres are also reviewed and examined by education experts to avoid the infiltration of any information that may be harmful to students. The report also covers the regulations governing general education schools and the articles that ensure the right of the child not to be subjected to torture (art. 37 of the Convention), which in keeping with the recommendation contained in paragraph 48 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and which eliminates the reasons for the concern expressed in paragraph 47 thereof.

536. In regard to health and health services (art. 24 of the Convention), the report examines the efforts of the ministry of Education to develop the health services offered to school students.

537. Section 9 covers personal protection, including refugee children (art. 22 of the Convention), children in armed conflicts (arts. 38 and 39 of the Convention), children under the juvenile justice system and children in situations of exploitation.

538. The report states that article 3 of the Extradition Act regulates the procedures for extradition from a third State and notes the Sultanate's accession to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and

on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, in compliance with the recommendation contained in paragraph 55 of the Committee's concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report. The report also explains that the Sultanate experiences none of the cases referred to in article 38 of the Convention. Consequently, there are no special implementing or legislative measures in place in that connection. Oman's international obligations as a Member of the United Nations and under the Basic Law of the State to strive for peace and cooperation among peoples and its compliance with international treaties and instruments consequently result in its respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to it in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child. Moreover, its internal laws on the legal competence, care and protection of the child, mentioned earlier, also respect those rights, since involvement in armed conflicts violates the right of the child to protection, care, survival and development.

539. Concerning the administration of juvenile justice (art. 40 of the Convention), it is clear from the report that the Sultanate is thoroughly considering the bill on juvenile liability and that the Code of Criminal Procedure comprises provisions to ensure that children accused of an offence are treated differently than adults in order to promote the child's sense of dignity and worth, as well as his or her respect, with the aim of promoting social reintegration. The Omani Penal Code also comprises provisions that take into account the child's age.

540. In regard to cases of exploitation, the report sets forth the efforts of the Ministry of Labour to protect children from economic exploitation. It also states that camel and horse-racing are among the popular sports in the region, such as swimming, horse-riding, football and wrestling, which have long been practised by adults and children. This sport is no more dangerous than any other of the sports practised by children in other countries and we therefore do not endorse the view that it is child labour, since that is not the reality of the situation. The Sultanate consequently believes that the Committee should discuss in that light its concern expressed in paragraph 51 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report and its recommendation contained in paragraph 52 thereof. As for fishing, the report states that many of the families who live on the coast rely on fishing for their livelihood. Children do not engage in fishing as an occupation but some go fishing with their families in their spare time. They are not paid for it, however, since it is done with their families, and fishing has no noticeable impact on the incidence of school drop-out.

541. The report also deals with drug abuse and indicates that the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Act takes every account of the child's best interests. The report also covers the anti-tobacco committees formed and the ban the sale of tobacco to children. The public consumption and commercial sale of alcohol are forbidden and alcohol is offered to minors. In accordance with the social customs, which are rooted in the religion, there is disapproval of smoking, the consumption of alcohol is prohibited and severely punished and those who drink alcohol are looked down upon. The Omani Penal Code also punishes with imprisonment any person who is found in a public place or venue in a state of intoxication or who causes a disturbance or nuisance to others while intoxicated. The report makes it clear that there is tangibly no sexual exploitation or sexual assault and that the exploitation of children in pornographic displays or photographs is contrary to public morals, tradition and religion. It is not permitted by law and offenders are punished for incitement to fornication.

542. As for other forms of exploitation (art. 36 of the Convention), the report indicates that in Oman there are no visible forms of child exploitation other than in the cases mentioned, as Omani family traditions advocate adherence to the religion and the protection and care of children, which precludes such behaviour. There is no sale of or trafficking in children in the Sultanate of Oman and Omani law prohibits the sale of and trafficking in human beings. These acts are covered under the Penal Code. There are no children in Oman who belong to a minority or indigenous group, since all indigenous inhabitants have the same origin and religion. All persons in the territory of Oman enjoy every right to preserve their culture and perform their religious observances. Non-Omanis also from all opportunities available, including in health and education.

Notes

¹ According to the findings of the population census of 2003.

² Annex 1 contains statistical tables providing a breakdown of homes and families (census of 2003).

³ See annex 3 - the Omani Penal Code.

⁴ See annex 5 - the Omani Civil and Commercial Code promulgated by Royal Decree No. 29/2002.

⁵ Promulgated pursuant to Royal Decree No. 97/99 - see annex 6.

⁶ Promulgated pursuant to Royal Decree No. 35/2003 - see annex 7.

⁷ Promulgated pursuant to Royal Decree No. 66/99 - see annex 13.

⁸ Subsequent parts of the report will cover the activities carried out by these bodies in line with the recommendation contained in paragraph 23 of the concluding observations on the Sultanate's initial report.

⁹ Overall, 1,500 copies of the Sultanate's initial report were distributed to concerned parties and bodies.

¹⁰ This Committee devotes particular attention to combating the phenomenon of smoking among children.

¹¹ Omani women's associations, associations for the care of the disabled, various sports, cultural and social clubs, the National Organization for Scouts and Guides and so on.

¹² The Personal Status Act (annex 15).

¹³ Annex 2.

¹⁴ This subject will be covered in detail in section 8 of the present report.

¹⁵ Annex 2.

¹⁶ Annex 3.

¹⁷ Annex 13.

¹⁸ Promulgating the regulations on children in need of care.

¹⁹ Section IV A 3 of the Sultanate's initial report covered matters relating to nationality in some detail.

²⁰ Section IV C 1 of the initial country report covered this subject in detail.

²¹ See Ministerial Decision 59/96 issued by the Ministry of Education.

²² See Ministerial Decision 21/93 issued by the Ministry of Education.

²³ See Ministerial Decision 19/90 issued by the Ministry of Education.

²⁴ See annex 2.

²⁵ See annex 6.

²⁶ The study covered Khawd, Ma'bilah, Amirat and Bushar.

²⁷ Based on the definitions contained in the Social Security Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 87/84.

²⁸ See annex 19.

²⁹ A voluntary not-for-profit non-governmental organization.

Annex

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION RELATING TO
CHILDREN'S ISSUES IN THE SULTANATE**

Table 1

**Population density in the regions and governorates
of the Sultanate**

Governorate/region	Muscat	Batinah		Musandam	Dhahirah	Sharqiyah		Wusta	Dhofar
		North	South			North	South		
Population density (persons/sq. km)	162.1	51.5	53.5	15.7	4.7	8.4	8.4	0.2	2.2

Table 2

**Amounts spent by UNICEF to implement children's programmes aimed at
fulfilling the Sultanate's obligations under international, Arab and Gulf
instruments and child-related programmes (2001-2003)**

Ministries	Amounts spent (US dollars)			
	2001	2002	2003	Total
Ministry of Social Development	141 734 09	144 415	222 501 03	508 650 12
Ministry of Health	241 300 52	242 446 58	238 888 48	722 635 58
Ministry of Education	46 819 44	79 720	70 313 11	196 852 55

Table 3

**Children's crèches in Omani women's associations in the regions of the Sultanate
and numbers of children (2001-2004)**

School year Governorate/region	2001			2002			2003			2004		
	Number of crèches	Males	Females									
Muscat	1	21	31	1	21	31	1	157	157	0	0	0
Dakhiliyah	3	1 097	177	5	143	206	9	707	707	9	604	591
Dhahirah	5	225	210	2	27	56	4	349	412	10	273	259
Sharqiyah	2	72	65	8	723	646	5	316	373	6	277	244
Batinah	8	723	682	3	40	30	13	830	844	14	997	1 015
Musandam	1	40	30	2	197	177	3	92	67	4	118	111
Dhofar	0	0	0	2	131	137	2	40	54	2	45	40
Total	20	2 178	1 195	22	1 282	1 283	37	2 491	2 615	45	2 314	2 260

Table 4

**Children's crèches in women's training centres in the regions of the Sultanate
and numbers of children (2001-2004)**

School year Governorate/region	2001			2002			2003			2004		
	Number of crèches	Males	Females									
Muscat	2	78	93	2	43	50	2	128	123	2	126	139
Batinah	0	0	0	4	46	56	1	22	23	1	23	22
Dhahirah	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	0	0
Sharqiyah	2	293	190	7	266	263	5	110	110	6	218	229
Dakhiliyah	1	63	52	1	46	52	1	61	61	1	62	81
Total	5	434	335	14	445	448	9	321	317	10	429	471

Table 5

Child development homes in the regions of the Sultanate and numbers of children (2001-2004)

School year Governorate/region	2001			2002			2003			2004		
	Number of homes	Males	Females									
Muscat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Batinah	10	461	508	10	514	549	3	214	218	8	402	483
Dakhiliyah	11	708	544	11	672	544	9	493	472	8	508	473
Sharqiyah	3	101	101	3	98	101	1	32	40	2	70	70
Musandam	3	78	79	3	78	79	1	27	29	0	0	0
Dhofar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wusta	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dhahirah	5	133	95	5	133	95	5	114	95	4	136	114
Total	32	1 481	1 327	33	1 495	1 368	19	880	854	22	1 116	1 140

Table 6

Breakdown of disasters and amounts of emergency assistance and assistance in kind during 2002

Item	Cash		Disasters		Emergency assistance		Kidney failure		Other		Assistance in kind		
					Electricity and water connection charges								
	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Tents	Blankets	Mats
Total	2 828	69 924	73	14 278	786	68 908	2 392	151 162	2 461	158 947	495	1 197	355

Table 7

Additional disasters and amounts of emergency assistance and assistance in kind

Item	Fire		Rain and flooding		Storms and gales		Other		Total	
	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts	Cases	Amounts
Total	167	51 950	3 349	469 086	11	1 645	182	33 785	3 709	556 466

Table 8
Number of children and carers in children's homes

Year	Number of children	Number of carers
2000	38	13
2001	51	15
2002	59	22
2003	69	21

Table 9
Number of children in alternative families in 2003

Males	Females	Total
128	195	323

Table 10
Number of children in the Children's Care Home by gender in March 2004

Males	Females	Total
53	16	69

Table 11
Number of children in the Home during the years 2001-2003

Year	Total	Breakdown of children by gender		Breakdown of children by type of care	
		Males	Females	Residential	Day
2001	113	75	38	29	84
2002	62	49	13	30	32
2003	70	45	25	28	42

Table 12
Number of children enrolled in Wafa' social centres during the years 2001-2003

Year	Number of centres	Number of disabled children		Total	Number of volunteers
		Males	Females		
2001	14	680	606	1 286	396
2002	15	703	667	1 370	370
2003	17	780	746	1 433	296

Table 13

Breakdown of centres and numbers of children accommodated in the different regions of the Sultanate

Centre	2001		Total	2002		Total	2003		Total
	Males	Females		Males	Females		Males	Females	
Bidbid	48	37	85	55	45	100	49	40	89
Nizwa	71	79	150	69	75	144	77	71	148
Rustaq	46	54	100	49	54	103	47	53	100
Ibra'	43	36	79	50	40	90	42	83	85
Sur	44	36	80	36	44	80	31	36	67
Buraymi	41	39	80	40	40	80	34	36	70
Ibri	76	44	120	61	59	120	62	58	120
Salalah	74	52	126	86	64	150	77	69	146
Sahar	73	59	132	81	58	139	73	63	136
Taqah	22	29	51	25	38	53	19	24	43
Mirbat	24	16	40	22	14	36	11	14	25
Mudaybi	35	32	67	29	38	67	31	31	62
Azki	38	38	76	38	37	75	37	31	68
Bahla	45	55	100	43	57	100	49	51	100
Amirat	-	-	-	19	14	33	15	15	30
Shanas	-	-	-	-	-	-	36	35	71
Suwayq	-	-	-	-	-	-	44	39	73
Total	680	606	1 286	683	677	1 380	734	749	1 433

Table 14

Breakdown of students enrolled in the vocational programme by disability, gender and occupation during the training year 2002/03

Occupation	Administration and computing		Manual jobs and trades	Smithing and welding	Carpentry and decorating	Tailoring	Family education	Total		Overall total
	Males	Females						Males	Females	
Type of disability			Males	Males	Males	Males				
Motor	10	1	-	-	-	5		15	2	17
Hearing	1	2	-	2	21	-	12	24	14	38
Other					1	1		1		1
Total	11	3		2	21	6	13	40	16	56
	14							56		

Table 15

Number of disabled children registered in the Association in the years 2001-2003

Training year	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Number of children	199	323	357
Family guidance	-	-	90 families

Table 16

Statistical data for the Early Intervention Association Centre (2000-2003)

Year	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Number of children in the Centre	24	24	26	46
Number of children in the home visit programme	-	-	27	65
Number of outpatient children receiving physiotherapy			17	27

Table 17

Health indicators for the years 2000-2003

Indicators	2000	2001	2002	2003
Life expectancy at birth	73.38	73.82	73.78	74.2
Crude mortality rate (per 1,000 inhabitants)	3.65	3.5	3.47	2.7
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	16.7	16.2	16.2	10.3
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	21.7	19.7	19.3	11.08

Table 18

Number of hospitals and private and governorate health centres during the years 2001-2003

Year	Number of government hospitals	Number of beds	Number of private hospitals	Number of beds	Number of clinics	Number of health associations	Health centres with beds	Health centres without beds
2000	52	5 139	3	51	560	9	52	100
2001	53	5 097	3	103	641	10	54	102
2002	56	5 056	3	112	631	10	58	104
2003	57	5 102	3	108	675	10	53	110

Table 19
Maternal health indicators

Indicators	2000	2001	2002
Coverage of pregnant women	99.6 per cent*		
Average number of prenatal visits	7.9	7.9	8
Births attended by health service providers	95.6 per cent*		95 per cent
Number of postnatal visits/registered pregnant women	1.3	1.24	1.24
Pregnant women registered in antenatal clinics	49 309	51 559	52 033
Abortion rate (per 1,000 women of reproductive age)	11.9	11.04	10.2
Stillborns per 1,000 births	10.0	9.0	9.0
Low-weight births (per 100,000 births)	81.0	78	79
Maternal death rate (per 1,000 births)	16.1	23.1	37.5
Anaesthetization owing to maternal illness per 10,000 women of reproductive age	478	455	428
Anaesthetization owing to childhood disease per 10,000 live births	1 290	1 325	1 268

Table 20
Indicators relating to use of birth-spacing methods

Indicators	2000	2001	2002	2003
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 inhabitants)	32.58	28.4	25.65	24.4
Overall fertility rate (births per woman in the 15-49 age group)	4.7	4.2	3.64	3.56
Use of modern contraceptive methods by women	40.4 per cent/ 31 per cent (comprehensive national survey 2000)			
Birth spacing:				
Fewer than two years	23.7	21.4	20.77	20.3
Fewer than three years	43.6	44.4	44.61	42.7
Three years and over	32.7	43.2	35.06	16 101
Number of new women benefiting from the birth-spacing programme	87 813 878	13 116	15 650	422
Number of miscarriages	329	403	410	10.2
Abortion rate	11.9	11.04	10.2	

Table 21

**Study of adolescent knowledge, attitudes and practices
in secondary schools - April 2001**

Indicators	Males (per cent)	Females (per cent)
Preferred marriage age	19.97	21.7
Awareness of risks of early marriage for girls	72.3	82.4
Preference for marriage to relatives	22.4	13.7
Average number of children	5.49	4.3
Knowledge of at least one modern birth-spacing method	93	94
Consent to use of birth-spacing methods	66.6	70.8
Knowledge of healthy birth-spacing period (two years or more)	73.2	77.9
Knowledge about AIDS	99	98.3
Attitude to female circumcision	80	80
Smoking rate	12.8	10.0

Table 22

**Social security cases and amounts disbursed (RO),
including feast-day allowances, during 2000-2003**

Year	Number of cases	Amounts disbursed
2000	46 032	23 255 677
2001	45 563	23 427 918
2002	46 743	24 139 145
2003	47 765	24 530 665

Table 23

Nurseries in the different regions of the Sultanate and number of children registered during the period 2001-2004

School year Governorate/region	2001			2002			2003			2004		
	Number of nurseries	Males	Females									
Muscat	31	680	600	26	498	1 252	28	615	524	30	750	673
Dhahirah	2	15	5	2	20	22	2	44	23	2	38	49
Sharqiyah	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12	9
Batinah	1	15	10	2	34	21	1	31	26	1	13	28
Dakhiliyah	1	10	10	1	12	17	1	29	24	1	2	13
Total	36	721	629	31	564	1 312	32	719	597	35	833	772

Table 24

Number and location of children's crèches, development centres and nurseries

No.	Region or governorate	Number of crèches	Number of children's homes
1	Muscat	2	-
2	Batinah	17	8
3	Sharqiyah	12	2
4	Dakhiliyah	10	8
5	Dhahirah	10	4
6	Musandam	4	1
7	Dhofar	2	
	Total	57	23

Table 25**Juvenile offences 2000-2003**

Year	Number of offences	Age group and number of offenders								Percentage of offenders	
		Under 9		9-15 years		15-18 years		Total		Total	Male %
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
2000	634	14	2	269	14	708	21	991	37	1 028	96
2001	744	10		297	11	820	27	1 127	38	1 165	97
2002	644	14	4	205	3	737	26	956	33	989	97
2003	704	5	-	240	9	775	20	1 020	29	1 049	97.2
											2.8

Table 26**Child workers under 18 years of age by gender 1999-2001**

Child workers under 18 years of age by gender during the period 1 January 1999 to 31 August 2001									
Age group	1999			2000			2001		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
13-15	282	33	315	19	4	23	41	12	53
16-18	3 033	429	3 462	479	56	535	1 182	155	1 337
Total	3 315	462	3 777	498	60	558	1 223	167	1 390
Overall total	5 725								

Table 27

**Number of horses in the region of Sharqiyah and number of children
who pursue horse riding as a pastime**

Province	Number of horses	Number of children under 18 years of age	Comments
Ibra'	12	20	Some are learners and some ride as a pastime
Mudaybi	40	50	5 of them assist in races
Badiyah	75	120	12 of them assist in races
Qabil	14	20	5 of them assist in races
Sur	20	30	10 of them assist in races
Ja'lan Bani Bu Hasan	30	50	7 of them assist in races
Kamil and Wafi	14	20	Pastime only
Total	205	310	39 assist in races

Diagram 1

Breakdown of inhabitants by gender and age (Sultanate of Oman, 2002)

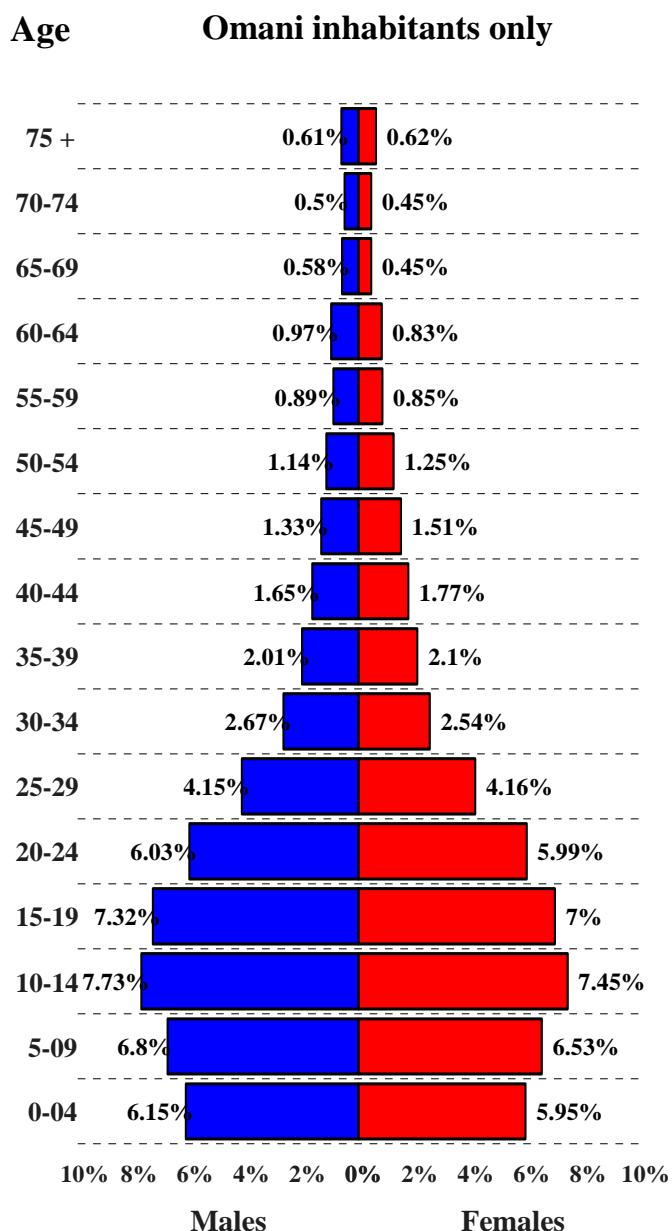


Diagram 2

Evolution of Ministry of Health expenditures during the years 1970-2003

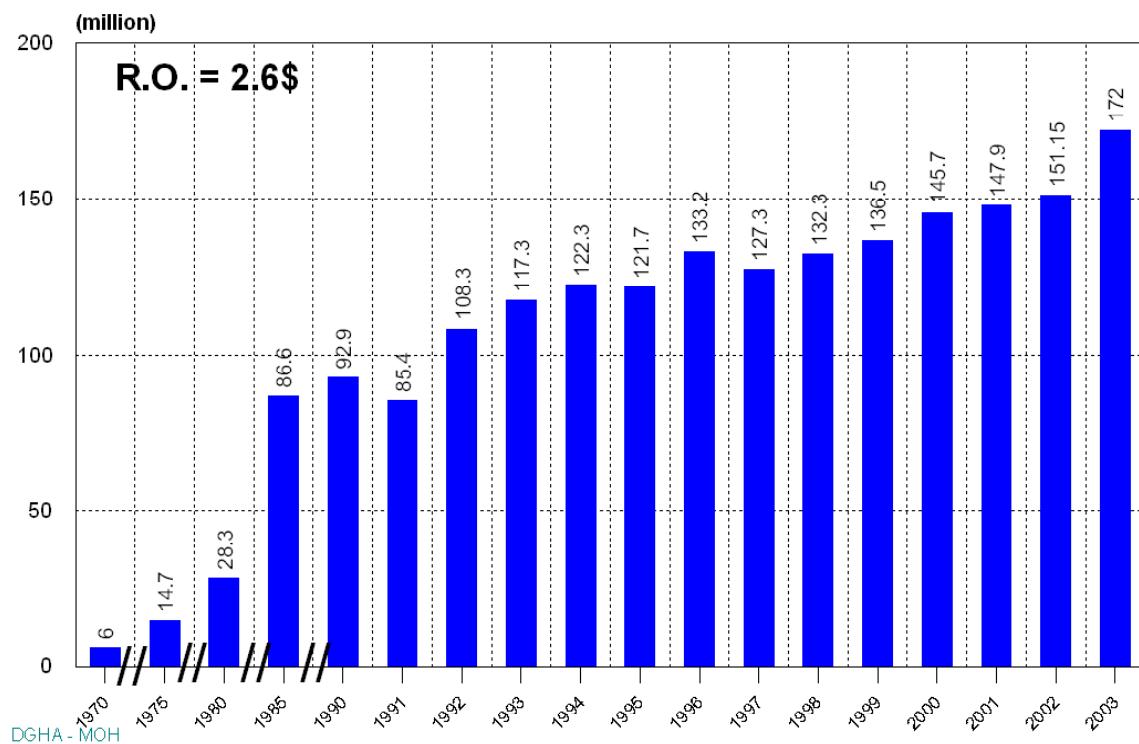


Diagram 3

Estimated perinatal mortality rate, Oman, 1980-2003

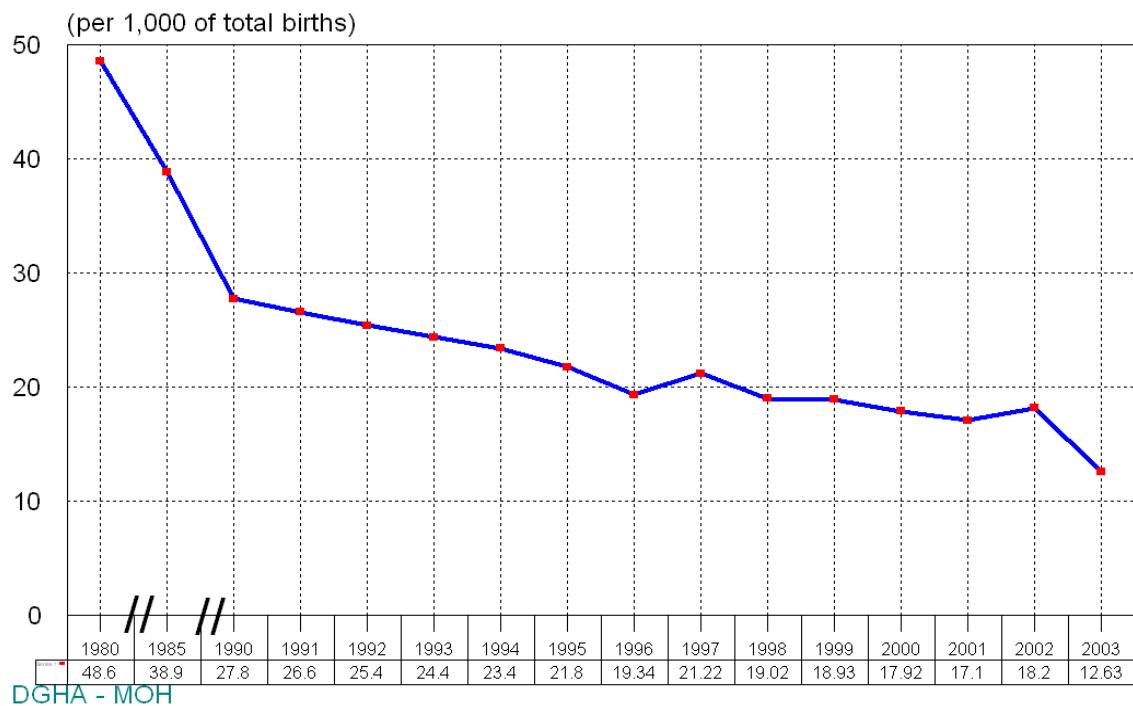


Diagram 4

**Increase in coverage rates for different childhood immunizations
since the start of the programme in 1981 until 2003**

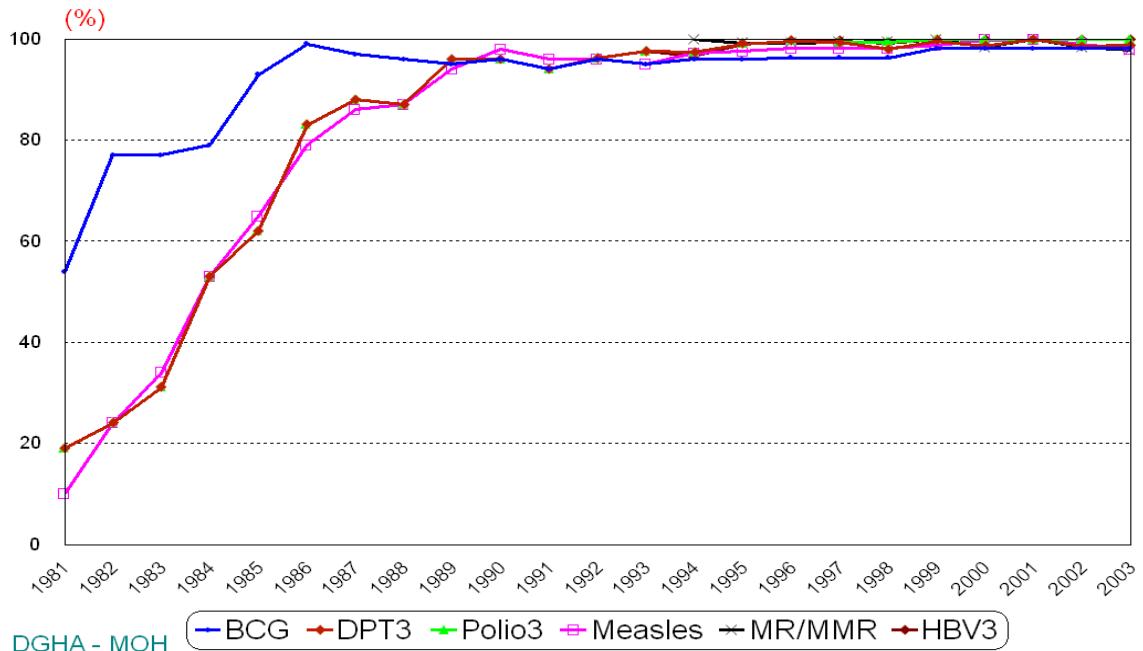


Diagram 5

**Annual incidence of respiratory and diarrhoeal diseases
during the period 1990-2003**

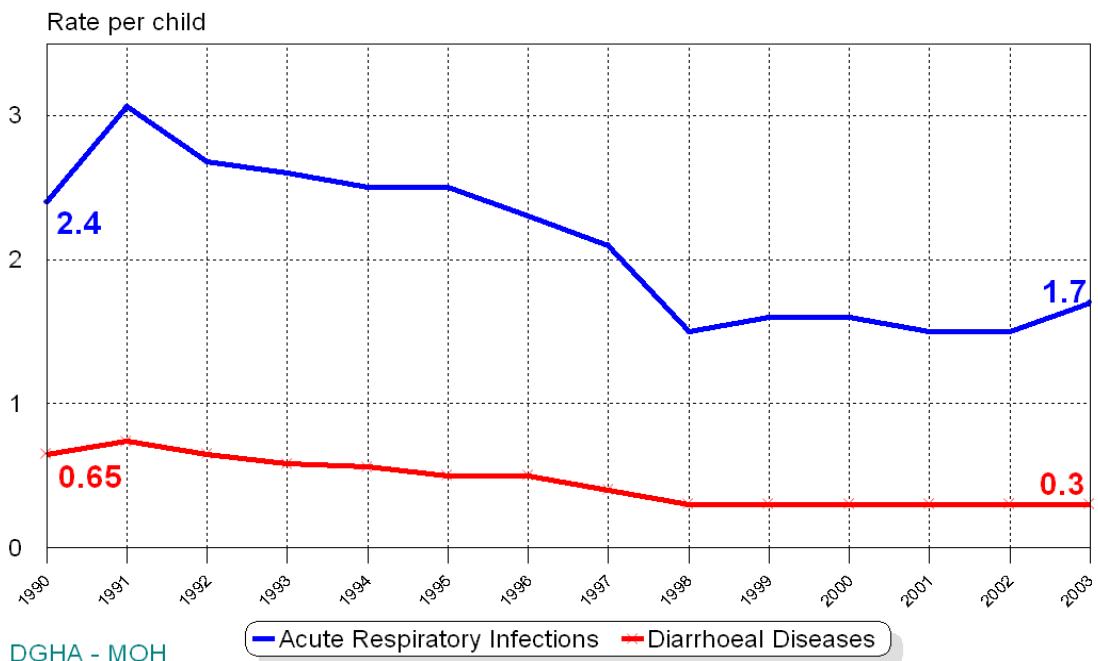


Diagram 6

**Age-specific fertility rates and number of new Omani female clients
at birth-spacing clinics during the period 1995-2002**

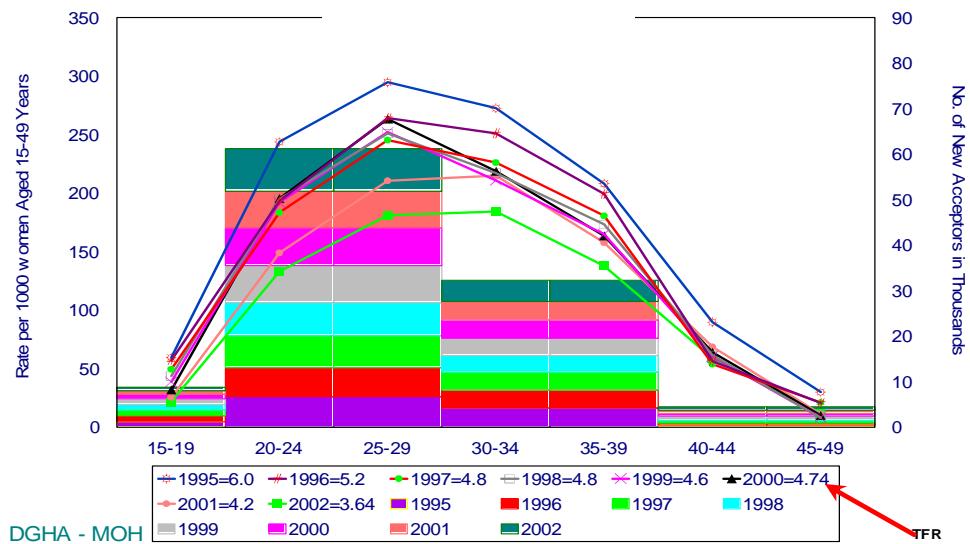


Chart 1

Total number of students in special education in the Sultanate and abroad by type of disability, gender and age during the school year 2002/03

Type	Students			Age	
	Male	Female	Total	From	To
Hearing and speech impairments	202	95	297	6	21
Developmental disability	180	104	284	6	21
Visual impairment	46	31	77	6	26
Paralysis	-	-	-	-	-
Total	428	230	658	-	-

Chart 2

Special education students by country of study, name of school or institute and type of disability during the school year 2002/03

No.	Country	Name of school or institute	Type of disability	Students		
				Male	Female	Total
1	Oman	The Amal School	Hearing and speech impairments	158	94	252
		The Umar bin Khattab Institute	Visual impairment	36	28	64
		The School for Intellectual Education	Developmental disability	180	104	284
2	Kuwait	The Amal School	Hearing and speech impairments	44	1	45
		The Nur School	Visual impairment	3	-	3
		The Raja' School	Paralysis	-	-	-
3	Bahrain	The Saudi-Bahraini Institute	Visual impairment	7	3	10
Total				428	230	658
