



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
25 March 2010
English
Original: Arabic

Committee on the Rights of the Child

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

Second and third periodic reports of States parties due in
1999

Bahrain*, **

[12 February 2009]

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

** Annexes can be consulted in the files of the Secretariat.

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I. Introduction

1. The Kingdom of Bahrain is determined to provide a comprehensive and sustainable childcare services and to safeguard children's rights, since, as Don Herold said, "Babies are such a nice way to start people". The National Committee on Childhood was thus established in 1999, and was restructured pursuant to Cabinet Decree No. 46 of 2007. This decree provides for the Committee's members to be appointed from ministries, government institutions and civil associations concerned with children's issues, and places the Committee under the authority of the Ministry of Social Development. Bahrain's periodic report was prepared by the National Committee on Childhood, in coordination with other stakeholders.

2. This report follows on from the initial report (CRC/C/11/Add.24) which Bahrain submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on 3 July 2000 and which was considered by the Committee at its 769th and 770th meetings held on 28 January 2002 and, lastly, on 1 February 2002. This report will detail the achievements scored by Bahrain with regard to children through its government and civil society institutions – achievements of which it is justly proud. Bahrain has worked on many levels to implement the recommendations contained in the concluding observations adopted by the Committee following the two aforementioned meetings, the foremost of these recommendations being to raise awareness by various means in order to build an effective partnership within society.

3. In accordance with the guidelines issued by the United Nations Secretariat on the form and contents of periodic reports and adopted by the Committee at its thirty-ninth session, held on 3 June 2005, this report endeavours to avoid repeating the contents of the initial report, to which it refers only when necessary. The Committee's concluding observations on Bahrain's initial report will be discussed under the relevant headings. This report also contains new annexes. These include, inter alia, the text of the Constitution of Bahrain, as amended in 2002, as well as relevant new statistical and legislative information and other important material.

4. Since it became a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and the Convention entered into force in March 1992, Bahrain has striven to create a secure environment by enacting legislation to ensure that children enjoy safe and promising lives.

5. Our sense of resolve is boosted with the birth of every child. We endeavour, with the utmost seriousness, to follow up on and take account of the observations adopted by the international Committee on the Rights of the Child, and we seek to incorporate these observations in Bahrain's projects and future strategy. This report says much in this regard.

6. Children are the flame of life. We are determined to nurture that flame, calling upon God to grant us success and to lighten our path for the sake of the Bahraini people, and calling on Him to enable us to achieve our goals and protect our children from all evil. May God hear us!

Dr. Fatima bint Mohammed Al-Balushi
Minister for Social Development
Chairperson of the National Committee
on Childhood

Mechanism and methodology used to prepare the report

7. This report constitutes the second and third periodic reports on child-related issues as at 2008. It follows on from the initial report which was submitted in July 2000. It

contains 10 sections. The second section contains basic information and new population, economic, social and political data for the period since the initial report was submitted. The third section presents thematic information relating to the general guidelines, including details on the current difficulties and challenges faced by certain groups mentioned in the report. This section also presents the views of children on several issues which are set out in order of importance. These views were elicited at a series of workshops specifically designed to obtain children's feedback on issues discussed in the draft report. The issues were formulated around a set of agreed themes, based on the methodology used at the preparatory workshops.

8. This report was prepared in accordance with the general guidelines contained in document CRC/C/58/Rev.1, dated 29 November 2005, which were adopted by the Committee at its thirty-ninth session held on 3 June 2005. The report includes statistics and relevant new information not found in the initial report, together with recent data covering the period from 2001 to mid-2008.

9. The report contains a series of annexes. These include the texts of relevant new legislation, laws and ministerial decisions, in addition to a number of publications, brochures and compact discs which the report mentions. The report responds to the major concerns and recommendations set out in the Committee's concluding observations on the initial report.

10. This report was prepared by government and civil society representatives who were members of the committee established to draft reports due for submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1999 and 2004. The drafting committee was established pursuant to Decision No. 6 of 2007 of the Minister for Social Development. With a view to involving stakeholders and gathering information from reliable sources, the membership of the committee was expanded to include all relevant government, civil society and private authorities and institutions, in accordance with Ministerial Decision No. 3 of 2008, providing for the restructuring of the committee. The revamped committee consisted of 14 members instead of 6. It began its work with a series of meetings, in which tasks were distributed among the members. The relevant authorities were contacted in order to obtain the information needed for the report, in accordance with the above-mentioned guidelines. It took over one year to carry out research and compile information. During this period, the committee drew on the expertise of Mr. Ghassan Khalil, Chief of Child Protection for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in order to clarify certain binding principles on preparing and providing summaries on report items.¹

11. After the National Committee on Childhood began its work, the chairperson gave its members the task of reviewing the draft report and invited them to comment on it and raise any issues they wished to mention. In a meeting of the National Committee on Childhood held in October 2008, an advisory committee was appointed. The advisory committee, consisting of national experts concerned with children's issues in Bahrain, was tasked with providing feedback on the report, and returning the report to the National Committee on Childhood for approval once its comments had been incorporated, pending submission to the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

II. Basic information

12. This section aims to provide the Committee on the Rights of the Child with basic information on Bahrain, taking account of new developments and data since the initial

¹ Decision to form the report drafting preparation committee – minutes of committee meetings.

report was submitted (a period of approximately seven years), in order to ensure that the many factors pertaining to implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are understood and taken into account.

A. Land and people

Location and geography

13. The Kingdom of Bahrain is situated in the Arabian Gulf and comprises an archipelago of 40 islands which cover a total area of 747.4 km². The largest of these is the island of Bahrain, which covers an area of 605.23 km². The capital, Manama, is situated on this island. The island of Bahrain is linked by causeways to neighbouring islands, including Muharraq, Sitra, Umm Na'san and Nabih Salih. A causeway also links the main island to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The other large islands of the Kingdom of Bahrain include the Hawar archipelago, which is situated 25 km to the south of the main island and covers an area of about 52.1 km². The capital of Bahrain is Manama, and Bahrain's official language is Arabic.

Demographic indicators²

- According to the statistics provided by the Central Informatics Organisation, the population of Bahrain in 2007 was 1,039,297.
 - Males constitute 50.51 per cent of the population and females 49.49 per cent. Non-Bahraini males constitute 71.44 per cent and non-Bahraini females 28.56 per cent.
14. Other demographic indicators:
- Average life expectancy at birth was 74.8 years (77.3 years for women and 73.1 for men) in 2006
 - The under-5 mortality rate was 10.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2006
 - The maternal mortality rate was 13.3 deaths per 100,000 live births, as compared to 22.2 per 100,000 live births in 2002
 - The total fertility rate was 2.6 births per woman (aged 15–44) in 2005
 - The population growth rates for Bahrainis and non-Bahrainis were 2.5 per cent and 3.1 per cent respectively in 2001
 - The literacy rates for males and females were 93.7 per cent and 85.8 per cent respectively in 2001

Religion³

15. Article 2 of the Constitution of Bahrain states, "The religion of the State is Islam. The Islamic sharia is a principal source of legislation." Article 22 of the Constitution states: "Freedom of conscience is absolute. The State guarantees the sanctity of places of worship and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious processions and gatherings, having due regard to the customs observed in the country."

16. According to the 2001 census, the population is distributed according to religion as follows:

² Source: Demographic indicators – Central Informatics Organisation.

³ Source: 2001 census, statistics on religion in Bahrain.

Muslim: 81.22 per cent; Christian: 8.96 per cent; other religions: 9.82 per cent.

Social and economic indicators

17. Bahrain has a free-market economy and the national currency is the Bahraini dinar. The National Action Charter, which was issued in 2000, states: "The economic system of the State of Bahrain is based on individual initiative and the free investment and movement of capital. Support for the role of private sector in developing resources and stimulating economic activity shall be assured."

18. Bahrain continues to update its economic legislation in ways which are consistent with its desire to create an investment climate that supports a liberal economy. In order to enhance its global competitiveness, Bahrain is furthermore using technology to simplify procedures, ensure transparency in transactions and improve services.

19. The Economic Development Board was established in April 2000. Its main tasks include formulating a future economic development strategy for Bahrain and monitoring implementation with the relevant ministries and State institutions. The Board is also responsible for integrating various areas of economic activity and creating a free economic climate. In formulating economic development strategies for Bahrain, the Board takes account of the activities conducted in the financial, business, health care, education, training, tourism services and other sectors and uses technology designed to keep pace with current needs. The Board also promotes efforts to make better use of Bahrain's main economic sectors, namely, petroleum, gas and aluminium.

20. The Financial Control Bureau and the Administrative Control Bureau were established to strengthen financial and administrative oversight, ensure equal opportunities for all citizens without exception or discrimination, guarantee transparency in public administration, eliminate overlapping responsibilities and streamline administrative procedures. A free trade agreement with the United States of America was concluded in 2004.

21. Bahrain has achieved major economic success as measured by gross national product (GNP) and per capita income. In 2003, gross domestic product (GDP) totalled 3,162 million Bahraini dinars (BD), reflecting economic growth of 13.7 per cent at current prices and 6.8 per cent at 2003 prices. In the same year, GNP at current prices was BD 3,416 million, up from BD 2,979 million in 2002, reflecting economic growth of 14.7 per cent at current prices and 7.7 per cent at 2003 prices.

22. GNP per capita at current prices rose from BD 4,432.5 in 2002 to BD 4,955 in 2003. This resulted in a rise in government expenditure per capita from BD 1,533.9 in 2002 to BD 1,567.1 in 2003. Government spending on educational services per capita also increased, from BD 906 in 2002 to BD 1,077 in 2003 (excluding sums transferred to the University of Bahrain).

23. Moreover, Bahrain has successfully diversified its sources of income, reducing the petroleum sector's contribution to GNP/GDP at constant prices to 15.7 per cent in 2003.

24. Bahrain has also lowered domestic inflation rates (-0.7 per cent in 2000, -1.2 per cent in 2001, -0.5 per cent in 2002, and 1.6 per cent in 2003), as a result of reductions in the prices of water, electricity, housing services, university tuition fees, etc. Bahrain's general budget deficit totalled 2.5 per cent of GDP at current prices in 1999. The budget realized a surplus of BD 5.3 million in 2000, a surplus of BD 3.1 million in 2001, a deficit of BD 4.1 million in 2002 and a surplus of BD 13.6 million (rounded off) in 2003.

25. These results are reflected in international reports, including the 2003 Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The report ranks Bahrain first among the Arab States and thirty-seventh out of 175 countries

when measured against the human development index. In the 2004 report, Bahrain was still first among the Arab States and fortieth in the world. In 2006, Bahrain maintained its top Arab and international ranking, being classified among the high-scoring countries in human-development terms. Other international reports draw attention to Bahrain's economic growth and many other positive indicators reflecting the Government's policies in different sectors. In 2003, Bahrain was ranked sixteenth in the American Heritage Foundation's index of economic freedom. This index is based on a number of economic freedom measures, the key ones being financial, monetary and trade policies, Government consumption as a proportion of output, foreign capital and investment flows, and protection of intellectual property rights.

26. In recent years, Bahrain has adopted a human-oriented social development policy, which is designed to foster and promote the realization of human potential. An investment has been made in various areas of social development and social welfare with a view to resolving social problems at the root. Attention has furthermore been focused on aspects of social protection including welfare and rehabilitation, in order to deal with the symptoms and consequences of social problems. This is a policy that goes beyond the mere delivery of social assistance. Indeed, the Ministry of Social Development was established as a separate ministry which is responsible for implementing the policy.

B. General political structure

27. After Bahrain obtained its independence in 1971, it joined various organizations and bodies including the United Nations and the League of Arab States and became a member of many Arab and international forums. The political authority, with the consent of the people, embarked on the establishment of a new State based on modern principles and the creation of a constitution for Bahrain. In 1972 elections were held for the first constituent assembly, which adopted Bahrain's Constitution on 6 December 1973.

28. When His Majesty the King, Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa became ruler in 1999, he decided to promote active civil society institutions and to increase popular participation. He held a series of meetings with the various popular groups and civil sectors in Bahrain, which resulted in the drafting of a document called the National Action Charter. An absolute majority of 98.4 per cent of the Bahraini people, representing diverse groups, faith communities and concerns, approved the National Action Charter in a general referendum held in 2000.

National Action Charter⁴

29. The National Action Charter is an important document, which paved the way for key political, constitutional, and legal changes, the most salient being the amendment made to the Constitution on 14 February 2002, the holding of the first free parliamentary elections for the Council of Representatives, the enactment of numerous laws reflecting political, economic, and constitutional developments and the start of a new era in Bahraini history. Bahrain also acceded to many human rights treaties and conventions.

The Constitution⁵

30. As stated above, Bahrain's first Constitution following independence was promulgated on 6 December 1973. However, in order to achieve the goals of the National

⁴ "National Action Charter".

⁵ Selected articles of the Constitution which are relevant to the Convention.

Action Charter and to carry out the people's wishes, as expressed in the endorsement of the principles embodied in the National Action Charter, Bahrain's Constitution was amended on 14 February 2002 to reflect the political, economic, and legal developments that had occurred in Bahraini society and to mark the start of a new era in Bahraini history.

31. Article 1 (e) of the amended Constitution of Bahrain states: "Citizens, both men and women, are entitled to participate in public affairs and to exercise political rights, including the right to vote and to stand for election, in accordance with this Constitution and the terms and conditions laid down by law. No citizen shall be deprived of the right to vote or to stand for election, except in accordance with the law."

Regulation of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government

32. The Bahraini Constitution stipulates that sovereignty in Bahrain is in the hands of the people, from whom all three branches of government originate. The Constitution provides for a system of government which is based on the separation of and cooperation among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

The legislative branch

33. Legislative power is vested in the King, the Consultative Council, and the Council of Representatives. Under the constitutional amendments of 2002, the Consultative Council and Council of Representatives together constitute the National Assembly. Under part V of the National Action Charter and these constitutional amendments, Bahrain shifted from a unicameral to a bicameral parliamentary system.

The executive branch

34. Executive authority is vested in the King, the Prime Minister and Government ministers. The executive branch formulates and implements the general policy of the State, oversees the Government apparatus and safeguards the interests of the State.

The judicial branch

35. The judicial branch is independent of the other branches in the State. The Higher Council of the Judiciary oversees the work of the courts and their support mechanisms, while the law establishes the different levels of courts and defines their functions and areas of jurisdiction.

36. The right of legal recourse is recognized as an essential right and a fundamental principle in the Constitution of Bahrain. The Constitution guarantees this right to all men and women on an equal basis and without discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, gender, or religion.

37. The judicial branch is one of the three powers of the State. It is dealt with in articles 104 to 106 of the Bahraini Constitution, which affirm the judiciary's independence, impartiality and the equality of all who stand before it. The Constitution affirms that no person or authority may interfere in the work of the judiciary or influence the course of legal proceedings, under pain of criminal sanctions. As stated in the Constitution, the Office of the Public Prosecutor is a division of the judicial branch.

Jurisdiction of the administrative justice court of Bahrain

38. Bahrain's Constitution emphasizes the separation between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Each branch discharges its duties without interference or pressure from any of the other branches. Given the special nature of the judiciary, the framers of the Constitution were particularly careful when drafting provisions on the judicial branch,

believing as they did that justice must be the foundation of any State. This point is spelled out in article 5 of the Constitution, which reads: "Justice is the basis of Government. Cooperation and mutual respect create a firm bond between citizens. Freedom, equality, security, trust, knowledge, social solidarity and equality of opportunity for citizens are the mainstays of society and are safeguarded by the State."

39. The Bahraini legislature has passed a separate law on the judiciary, stipulating the conditions of appointment and the responsibilities, powers and duties of judges. The Judicial Authority Act, issued by Decree-Law No. 42 of 2002 clearly reflects the concern of the legislature of Bahrain to support the judiciary and enable it to play its role in the smooth delivery of justice for all citizens, both men and women alike.

40. In 2005, a division was established to hear administrative cases. Previously, the civil courts had jurisdiction for administrative cases in which the Government was a party. Sharia courts are divided into Sunni courts and Ja`fari courts. Personal status issues of non-Muslims are dealt with by the civil courts on the basis of non-Muslims' own laws.

41. The Supreme Constitutional Court verifies the constitutionality of laws and regulations, i.e. their compatibility with the Constitution. The Court is an independent branch of the judiciary.

III. Thematic information

A. General measures of implementation (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6)

Follow-up on recommendations

42. The information hereunder details the specific measures taken in response to the concluding observations on the initial report which the Committee adopted on 1 February 2002, following its 770th meeting held on 28 January 2002.

Legislation

43. The Committee expressed concern that since the sharia court system lacked basic and minimum international safeguards and procedures and remained uncoded, the judgements handed down could be arbitrary, inconsistent and lacking in uniformity and there could be disparities with the decisions of secular courts. The Committee recommended a comprehensive review of Bahrain's domestic laws, administrative regulations and procedural rules, including the sharia, to ensure consistency with international human rights standards, including the Convention. It also recommended that Bahrain should ensure that its laws were sufficiently clear and precise, were published and were accessible to the public.

44. Bahrain should like to recall that the Government took meaningful action in this regard, submitting a draft personal status code with provisions on the family to the legislature. However, the draft code was not adopted owing to opposition from certain religious leaders. The Supreme Council for Women and many political and civil society associations active in the field of women's and children's issues are nevertheless continuing to press for the creation of a social environment favourable to the adoption of a family code.

45. The legislature in Bahrain has reviewed the legislation to bring it into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The changes which have been made in this area include the following:

(a) Decree-Law No. 26 of 1986, concerning litigation proceedings before the sharia courts, was issued. Substantial changes were made to Act No. 40 of 2005 in order to facilitate proceedings before the sharia courts and expedite them in certain types of cases, especially those involving child maintenance payments and child custody;

(b) Under Act No. 34 of 2005, a maintenance fund was established to pay maintenance awarded by the courts to beneficiaries, including children, when the party ordered to make payment is unable to do so. The fund is also responsible for monitoring the collection of maintenance payments. Pursuant to a decision of the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs issued in 2008, this Act also applies to the children of any Bahraini woman married to a foreign man;

(c) A decision of the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs was issued on 23 September 2007 regulating the procedures for marriages of girls under 15 years of age. The decision states: "A marriage may not be contracted and shall not be recognized if the bride is under 15 or the groom is under 18 when the contract is concluded, unless there is a compelling need which justifies the marriage of persons below these ages, in which case a permit must be obtained from the competent court";

(d) The time allowed for mothers to breastfeed their babies was increased from two hours a day for a six-month period to two hours a day for a two-year period, and maternity leave was extended from 45 to 60 days;

(e) The amended Constitution of 14 February 2002 contains many safeguards pertaining to human rights and public freedoms. It provides for the establishment of both houses of the legislature, affirms the right of women to vote and stand for election and provides for the establishment of the Supreme Constitutional Court to monitor the constitutionality of laws and regulations.

46. In addition to the constitutional and legislative provisions on the observance of human rights, the other remedies which help to promote and protect human rights and related domestic legislation are listed hereunder:

(a) The new Act of 1 December 2001, concerning municipalities and the regulation of municipal elections, provides for administrative decentralization and the establishment of several municipal councils instead of one central council. The Act grants women the right to vote and to stand for election and encourages municipal councils to work with government institutions to propose legislation, identify priority projects and consider citizens' grievances and complaints;

(b) Several laws and measures were introduced to strengthen the judiciary, including through the creation of the Higher Council of the Judiciary in 2000, the abolition of the State Security Court in February 2000 and the establishment of the Supreme Constitutional Court in April 2005;

(c) Decree-Law No. 14 of 2002, concerning the exercise of political rights, allows citizens, both men and women, to exercise their political rights by expressing their views in every referendum held in Bahrain in accordance with the Constitution and by standing for, and electing members of, the Council of Representatives in accordance with the relevant conditions;

(d) Efforts to strengthen gender equality include, for example: acknowledging the right of women to participate in politics; appointing 10 women to the Consultative Council; ensuring women access to senior positions (women have, inter alia, served as ministers, ambassadors and deans of universities); and promoting women's civil rights by, inter alia, amending article 13 of the Passports Act to remove the requirement for women to obtain their husband's consent before being issued with a passport;

(e) For the first time, permission was given to establish private newspapers, radio and satellite television stations, and an association to defend the rights of journalists and journalistic freedom was formed in August 2000. In early 2002, following changes made to the association's statutes, the Ministry of Information gave its approval for the association to become a trade union, pending the promulgation of the Associations Act;

(f) Decree-Law No. 47 of 2002 regulates the press, printing and publishing and royal directives have been issued prohibiting the imprisonment of journalists;

(g) Under Decree-Law No. 33 of 2002, on trade unions, the holding of strikes in accordance with the regulations laid down by law is recognized as a legitimate means of defending the rights and interests of workers. The General Federation of Trade Unions in Bahrain was established on 12 January 2004 as an umbrella organization for all unions in Bahrain. At the Federation's inaugural congress, which was held on this date, representatives from 40 trade unions were elected to the Federation's secretariat;

(h) The Bahraini Institute for Political Development, which is attached to the Consultative Council, was established and is regulated under Decree No. 39 of 2005. The Institute was set up to disseminate a culture of democracy, to promote adherence to democratic principles and to raise political awareness among citizens in keeping with the Constitution and the principles embodied in the National Action Charter. The Institute also supports the parliamentary system by explaining its mechanisms and working methods and clarifying its legislative and oversight functions;

(i) Bahrain's hosting of the "Forum for the Future" on 11 and 12 November 2005 was a positive sign of the evolution of the democratic process in Bahrain, in that the event brought together government and civil society organizations in a single forum. Indeed, an international consensus had emerged that Bahrain should host this event, given the prestige which Bahrain enjoys on the world stage, due to its political stability, economic growth, respect for the rule of law and observance of human rights;

(j) Act No. 26 of 2005, concerning political associations, recognizes the right to form and join political associations and regulates their activities. There are currently 18 such associations, 3 of which are represented in the Council of Representatives;

(k) Under Act No. 18 of 2006, concerning social security, the Government is required to provide the basic necessities for a decent life to the Bahraini citizens and families provided for under the Act. This assistance is to be delivered in kind or in cash;

(l) Act No. 32 of 2006 amended Decree-Law No. 18 of 1973, concerning public meetings, demonstrations and gatherings. The Act authorizes the holding of peaceful gatherings and demonstrations, subject to notification of the authorities by three of the organizers. The authorities must provide the necessary protection for these peaceful demonstrations and gatherings. The Act imposes a number of rules limiting administrative authority to ban such gatherings, including a rule that a ban is subject to judicial scrutiny;

(m) Under Act No. 74 of 2006, concerning the welfare, rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, ministries and other institutions are required to liaise with the Ministry of Social Development on the delivery of regular, integrated and continuous services for persons with disabilities, particularly in the areas of health, social welfare, education, culture, sports, rehabilitation, employment, communications, housing, etc. The Act furthermore regulates the establishment of centres, welfare homes and workshops for persons with disabilities, as well as retirement pensions and leave for employees with disabilities;

(n) Decree-Law No. 78 of 2006, on unemployment insurance, is the first law of its kind to be enacted in any member State of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Its enactment has spared a large number of unemployed persons the hardship caused by losing their jobs.

The Decree-Law has also helped to reduce unemployment, which is a growing social problem of considerable importance at the present time, and to provide the unemployed with a decent standard of living until they are absorbed by the labour market;

(o) Solutions are being found for stateless persons; citizenship has been granted to thousands of the so-called “Bidun” and measures have been taken to facilitate the return of the “Bidun” who live abroad and have relatives who are Bahraini nationals;

(p) The new Labour Market Act was issued on 22 March 2006. It eases the restrictions imposed on foreign workers under the sponsorship system, allowing them to change jobs without needing permission from their original employer, provided that they have completed the period of employment stipulated at the outset in the contract with the original enterprise. This is the first time in a Gulf State that workers have been allowed to change employment without needing permission from their original sponsor or the employer that recruited them;

(q) Parliamentary elections were held on 25 November 2006, in which 220 candidates, including 18 women, stood for election. Voter turnout was high, reaching 73 per cent (and 69 per cent in the run-off elections), compared with a turnout of 43 per cent in the elections in 2002. Pro-Government parties won 22 seats, while the opposition won 18 seats. As a result, a strong opposition was returned to the Council of Representatives, unlike the situation obtaining in the previous council. The one woman in the Council was elected by acclamation in an electoral constituency;

(r) Further to a decree of 5 December 2006, the (appointed) Consultative Council was reformed. Twenty-four members of the former Consultative Council were reappointed, while 16 new members, including the current President of the Council, were appointed for the first time. Moreover, compared with the previous council, in which 6 women had seats, the new Council has 10 female members;

(s) Act No. 1 of 2008, on combating trafficking in persons, reflects Bahrain’s commitment to the relevant international conventions on combating trafficking in persons. Bahrain is the second Gulf State to promulgate such a law.

47. Paragraph 49 of the initial report of Bahrain lists all the conventions and treaties to which Bahrain had acceded as of 2000. Below is a short list of all the new legislation which has been enacted in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with new decrees on conventions and partnerships concluded with international organizations:

(a) Decree-Law No. 12 of 2001, approving Bahrain’s accession to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (No. 182);

(b) Decree-Law No. 5 of 2002, approving Bahrain’s accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(c) Act No. 19 of 2004, approving Bahrain’s accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography;

(d) Act No. 56 of 2006, approving Bahrain’s accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(e) The cooperation agreement concluded on 21 November 2006 between the Ministry of Social Development and UNICEF;

(f) Bahrain did not enter any reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Thus, all the provisions of the Convention must be included in new legislation and

existing legislation needs to be amended, having due regard for the Islamic sharia and national customs and traditions.

Challenges

- A personal status code is required
- The law on the welfare, rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities needs to address the issue of rehabilitating public buildings and facilities in Bahrain

Coordination

48. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the National Committee on Childhood and the Consultative Council's Human Rights Committee and about the combination of tasks assigned to the National Committee on Childhood. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Bahrain should establish an effective body to coordinate the activities of government ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the implementation of the Convention, with a clear mandate and adequate power, a legal framework, and a general secretariat with sufficient human, financial and other resources. The Committee also recommended that Bahrain should complete and implement its comprehensive national plan of action for children, ensuring that it had been prepared through an open, consultative and participatory process, was human rights based, and included the implementation of the Convention.

49. To address these concerns, Bahrain is endeavouring to mobilize and coordinate efforts at the national level and ensure that the various bodies and institutions providing services for children liaise with one another to provide integrated and complementary services, and ultimately, that they prioritize the best interests of children, enabling Bahrain to fulfil its obligations towards its children in accordance with the instruments to which it is committed.

50. Moreover, in July 2005, the Cabinet approved the transfer of responsibility for juvenile issues to the Ministry of Social Development, as the institution responsible for dealing with family-related matters, in order to expand the focus on children as members of the family.

51. The National Committee on Childhood was restructured pursuant to Cabinet Decision No. 46 of 2007. It is entrusted with the task of coordinating the activities of government ministries and civil society organizations in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee draws its members from ministries, government institutions and civil society organizations concerned with children's issues and promotes the development of activities for all age groups. The Committee also seeks to provide legal protection for children in various fields, monitoring and assessing children's basic needs and the problems that they face and proposing appropriate solutions. The National Committee on Childhood has a significant impact in overcoming the difficulties confronting those who work on children's issues. It has established a clear and representative mandate framework for a governmental-civil society partnership to address children's issues. The main objectives of the National Committee on Childhood are listed in the section of this report which deals with comprehensive national programmes.

52. In addition, there is full cooperation between the National Committee on Childhood and the human rights committee, as evidenced, inter alia, by the interest taken by the committee in reviewing the current report.

Monitoring mechanisms

53. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that the Consultative Council's Human Rights Committee does not fully reflect the Paris Principles and does not have a child rights-sensitive procedure for dealing with complaints under the Convention.

54. In this connection, in November 2007, the Cabinet issued a decision on the establishment of a national human rights institution. Once the institution has been established, it is expected to design a national action plan for the promotion and protection of human rights in Bahrain, taking into account the relevant United Nations resolutions and, in particular, the Paris Principles. Bahrain is currently considering the possibility of establishing a comprehensive national plan on human rights and is taking steps to create an inter-ministerial human rights mechanism to implement the recommendations issued by the international treaty bodies pursuant to the instruments to which Bahrain is a party. Moreover, Bahrain, in conjunction with the relevant authorities and bodies in Bahrain and with expert input from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is exploring the idea of drafting a national action plan on human rights education.

Data collection

55. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that efforts should be continued to establish a data collection system to gather detailed information on all persons under 18 years for all areas covered by the Convention, including the most vulnerable groups, and to ensure that the data was used in assessing progress and designing policies to implement the Convention. The Committee also recommended seeking technical assistance from, among others, UNICEF.

56. In this connection, Bahrain wishes to draw attention to the fact that the general population census which is carried out every 10 years by the Central Informatics Organisation gathers data on persons under 18 years of age. This data is disaggregated by geographical area and information is provided on the social characteristics of young persons, including age group, gender, nationality, education and, if applicable, their disability status.

57. The most recent census was carried out in 2001 and the next one will be carried out in 2010. Census data is used to produce population estimates and projections disaggregated by age group, gender and nationality. This data is made available in various forms, including printed materials and CD-ROMs, and is published on the website of the Central Informatics Organisation. It is also distributed to government and private bodies, researchers and decision makers on request.

58. With regard to requests for technical assistance to design programmes for data collection systems, Bahrain participates in General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) of the International Monetary Fund, which helps Fund members to develop their statistical systems.

59. The National Committee on Childhood is in the process of preparing a joint programme with UNICEF to establish a database on children in Bahrain.

Challenges

- There is a need for a database on children

Resource allocation

60. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about increasing trends towards the privatization of the health and education sectors and the potentially negative consequences on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by all children in

Bahrain. The Committee recommended that efforts should be continued and strengthened to allocate the maximum amount of available resources — human and financial — to health, education, culture and other social services. It also recommended that similar efforts should be undertaken to ensure the full implementation of the Convention and identify the amount and proportion of the State budget spent on children in the public and private sectors in order to evaluate the impact and the quality, as well as — in view of higher fees — the accessibility of services for children.

61. In responding to the above, it should be noted that, under articles 7 and 8 of the Constitution, all citizens have the right to education and comprehensive health care which are free of charge. In keeping with this constitutional right, Bahrain continues to guarantee access to educational services, preventive health care and medical treatment, which are free of charge for all citizens. Neither the executive nor the legislative authorities have any intention of privatizing these essential public services. As it strives to develop these services, Bahrain is also developing the skills of those who work in these sectors, allocating a budget for continuous education and sending staff abroad to study and train at the world's best universities and specialized hospitals. Details on the health and education budget are outlined later on in this report.

62. A draft bill on waiving fees for government services is now before the Consultative Council. In it, the Women's and Children's Affairs Committee has included some key amendments to exempt the children of Bahraini women married to foreign men from paying health care, education and residency fees.

Cooperation with civil society

63. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that insufficient efforts had been made to systematically involve civil society, particularly in the field of civil rights and freedoms, in the implementation of the Convention. The Committee recommended that consideration should be given to a systematic approach to involving civil society, especially children's associations and human rights non-governmental organizations, throughout all stages in the implementation of the Convention, including with respect to civil rights and freedoms. The Committee also recommended that Bahrain should ensure that the 1989 law on cultural, social or sports societies, clubs and organizations was brought into conformity with article 15 of the Convention and other international standards on freedom of association, as a step towards strengthening their participation.

64. In this connection, it should be remembered that what distinguishes the constitutional order of Bahrain from that of other States is reflected in the wording of article 31 of the Bahraini Constitution, which provides as follows: "The public rights and freedoms provided for in this Constitution shall be regulated or restricted only by, or in accordance with, a legislative enactment. Such regulation or restriction shall not detract from the essence of the right or freedom concerned." A decision was taken, indirectly, to monitor the constitutionality of laws and regulations affecting public rights and freedoms. The Constitutional Court was given jurisdiction to rule on whether or not rights and freedoms are being regulated or restricted in a manner that affects them negatively or detracts from their very essence. A bill will be deemed unconstitutional, if it impairs any right or freedom enshrined in the Constitution. In other words, in this regard, the public rights and freedoms enshrined in the relevant part of the Constitution are to be viewed as a minimum set of rights and freedoms.

65. At the present time, there is a marked tendency among members of the legislature in the Consultative Council and the Council of Representatives to propose legislation designed to safeguard rights and freedoms and to widen the scope of such protection. Examples of proposed legislation approved by the Consultative Council include a draft law on civil

society and non-profit organizations and proposals on the regulation of the press, printing and publishing and on the creation of an administrative oversight office.

66. Bahrain is making great efforts in this connection. For example, a joint committee bringing together various ministry departments and civil society institutions helped to draft the Children's Bill. Prior to the committee's formation, the General Organization for Youth and Sports held a broad-based workshop involving all segments of society. The participants discussed ideas on the elements to be included in the Children's Bill, in the light of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

67. Since His Majesty the King ascended to the throne, a series of measures have been taken to strengthen the role of civil society organizations in Bahrain. These measures have included approving the establishment of trade unions and allowing certain civil society associations and organizations, such as the Workers' Union and the Bahrain Journalists' Association, to become trade unions; the Journalists' Association became a full member of the International Federation of Journalists in October 2003. Numerous professional associations and voluntary, charitable, cooperative, women's, social and Islamic institutions have been licensed, as have charitable funds, other voluntary institutions and private institutes and associations for persons with disabilities and older persons. Information about what the Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with civil society organizations has done and has accomplished in dealing with children's issues is provided later in this report.

Training on the Convention

68. The Committee expressed its concern that the Convention had not been published in its entirety, in particular, that articles 11, 21, 22, 38 and 41–54 had been deleted in the published text. The Committee was also concerned that Bahrain was not undertaking adequate awareness-raising and training activities in a systematic and targeted manner.

69. In this connection, it should be noted that Bahrain ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child without entering any reservations on 13 February 1992. Bahrain is unaware from whence the Committee on the Rights of the Child obtained information stating that the Convention had not been published in its entirety. Moreover, the articles of the Convention were reviewed and published on 4 September 1991 in issue No. 1971 of the *Official Gazette*; the aforementioned articles were not deleted but were published in full.⁶

70. In the framework of disseminating a culture of children's rights, the Convention has been integrated into the curriculum taught at the Institute of Judicial Training and Studies of the Ministry of Justice. The Convention is also an integral part of the curriculum for the training course which the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection runs for professionals in various disciplines and those working with child victims of abuse and neglect.

71. The Bahraini Society for Child Development has produced several publications and magazines on childhood, including the text of the Convention in booklet form.⁷ These publications are distributed to stakeholders actively involved in children's issues. In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has published the texts of the Convention and of all Bahraini legislation on children in a compilation entitled "Child laws and legislation in the State of Bahrain". This publication was distributed widely in 2002.⁸

⁶ *Official Gazette*, issue No. 1971.

⁷ A publication of the Bahraini Society for Child Development: "Our Childhood Magazine – Convention booklet".

⁸ Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs booklet entitled Child laws and legislation in the State of Bahrain.

72. Moreover, copies of the entire initial report submitted by Bahrain to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in July 2000 were distributed in 2004, in booklet form, to all stakeholders and experts working in Bahraini ministries and institutions and in civil society organizations which deal with human rights and children's issues. The booklet documented all the discussions held between the Bahraini delegation and the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the concluding observations adopted at the final meeting held on 1 February 2002. The booklet was republished and redistributed in 2005.⁹

73. The initial report, the concluding observations and the full text of the Convention were published on the website of the Ministry of Social Development; (http://www.social.gov.bh/portal/page/portal/MOSD_V2/mosd/TAB9123:TAB13791).

74. The principles of the Convention have been incorporated into the new integrated curriculum for children in the first cycle of primary education (from the first to the third grade). This is one of the new curricula of the Ministry of Education.

75. The Bahrain Centre for Child Protection has held a series of training workshops for professionals who work on children's issues in order to raise awareness of the Convention; the workshops focus on protecting children from psychological and physical abuse.

76. Copies of the full text of the Convention have been distributed to all learning centres, such as schools and public libraries, for use as a reference tool by students carrying out projects or research on this topic.

77. Bahrain and UNICEF renewed their commitment to joint action and a partnership, with the signing of their cooperation agreement in November 2007. This marked the beginning of a new period of cooperation on projects and programmes that support children and the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

78. Civil society organizations concerned with children's issues play an important role in disseminating the principles of the Convention. This subject is discussed in depth in the section on such organizations.

Comprehensive national programmes – monitoring

79. The following is a brief description of the main government and national bodies involved in children's issues, together with a summary of the key legislative, judicial and administrative measures that have been taken or are planned. Information is provided on the facilities and children's care homes which will be mentioned at various points in this report.

National Committee on Childhood¹⁰

80. The National Committee on Childhood was restructured pursuant to Prime Ministerial Decision No. 46 of 2007. It is chaired by the Minister for Social Development and its members represent ministries and governmental and civil society institutions. The Committee pursues all kinds of activities and issues that have a bearing on the educational, social, cultural and psychological development of children of all ages. In order to achieve its goals, the Committee undertakes the following activities:

- Devising a national strategy for children to help the relevant organizations to develop and promote projects and programmes which they have established to serve and protect children's rights

⁹ National Committee on Childhood booklet entitled *The Kingdom of Bahrain and the rights of the child*.

¹⁰ Decision to restructure the National Committee on Childhood.

- Seeking to provide legislative protection for children in various domains
- Liaising between different governmental bodies and civil institutions in order to achieve synergies and avoid overlap of mandates
- Seeking to strengthen ties and relations with all civil society organizations involved in dealing with children's issues in Bahrain
- Monitoring and studying childhood problems and proposing appropriate solutions, including by making recommendations to the competent government authorities in Bahrain
- Cooperating with the competent Arab and international organizations and bodies working on children's issues, and learning from their experience and their programmes in order to achieve its own objectives
- Establishing a database of detailed information on all child-related matters in Bahrain and updating this database in coordination with all relevant government and civil society organizations

Women's and Children's Committee¹¹

81. The Women's and Children's Committee was established pursuant to a decision adopted by the Consultative Council at the 14th meeting of its first ordinary session, held during the second legislative term on 2 April 2007. The Women's and Children's Committee is a special standing committee of the Consultative Council. Its tasks include the following:

- Studying and reviewing the extent to which current legislation on women and children is in conformity with ratified international conventions
- Reviewing all draft legislation, proposed laws and issues related to women and children which are referred to it, and submitting reports to the Consultative Council thereon
- Sharing its views with other committees on matters pertaining to women and children
- Following up on the recommendations and decisions of parliamentary conferences on women and children which are submitted to it by the parliamentary division

82. The achievements of the Women's and Children's Committee include the following:

- It drew up a plan to study, discuss and review all the laws in force on women's and children's issues in order to ascertain the extent to which they reflect current realities and to address any shortcomings in these laws
- It organized visits to certain organizations to explore amendments to the laws in force
- It identified the laws which it intends to review, beginning with the important ones
- It submitted its views on the draft law endorsing Bahrain's accession to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which had been submitted by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security
- It held a meeting with a representative of UNICEF to discuss the possibility of technical support on children's issues being provided to the Committee

¹¹ Decision to establish the Women's and Children's Committee.

National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons¹²

83. This Committee was established pursuant to Decision No. 1 of 2008. The National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons is chaired by the Assistant Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs responsible for coordination and follow-up. Its members represent government and civil society organizations which deal with human rights issues. The Committee performs the functions conferred on it under article 8 of Act No. 1 of 2008, on combating trafficking in persons. These functions include:

- Designing programmes to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and to protect victims of trafficking from revictimization
- Encouraging and supporting the design of research, information and media campaigns, together with social and economic initiatives to prevent and combat trafficking in persons
- Liaising with State authorities on information about trafficking in persons
- Involving the competent institutions in the preparation of reports for submission to international bodies on measures taken to combat trafficking in persons
- Following up on the implementation, by the relevant government authorities, of the recommendations and guidelines contained in the conventions and protocols on combating trafficking in persons to which Bahrain is a party, and submitting reports thereon to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

84. Reference is made at appropriate points in this report to several national committees, governmental and civil society organizations and institutions and centres which work on children's issues and rights.

B. Definition of the child (art. 1)**Follow-up on the recommendations**

85. The Committee expressed its concern that there was no defined minimum age for marriage and that there were inconsistencies in this regard. It recommended that Bahrain should continue to review and take steps to amend its legislation in order to ensure that the minimum-age requirements are gender-neutral, are explicit and are enforced in accordance with the law and that a minimum age is established for marriage for males and females.

86. In this connection, the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs issued a decision on 23 September 2007 regulating the procedures for marriages of girls under 15 years of age. The decision states: "A marriage may not be contracted and shall not be recognized if the bride is under 15 or the groom is under 18 when the contract is concluded, unless there is a compelling need which justifies the marriage of persons below these ages, in which case permission must be obtained from the competent court."

87. Paragraphs 61 to 74 of the initial report discuss the issue of the definition of the child in some detail. In this connection, the following points should be made.

88. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states: "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." According to this article, States parties to the Convention must set the age of majority at 18 years. However

¹² Decision establishing the National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

the article also allows scope for them to stipulate a lower age of majority in their legislation.

89. Bahrain has made tireless endeavours to bring its legislation into line with provisions on the higher age limit established in the Convention. As part of the major efforts made to define the age of majority, members of the Council of Representatives tabled some legislative proposals during the first legislative session, which began in 2002. The proposals were debated, approved and transmitted to the Government to prepare a draft law and send it back to the Council, together with a draft law on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the end of the first legislative session prevented any further progress on the draft bill. The proposed legislation was resubmitted but this time in the form of a law dealing both with children's rights and children's culture. This legislation is currently being debated in the Council of Representatives.

90. With regard to the definition of the child, article 4 of the aforementioned draft law states: "For the purposes of this Act, a child means every person under 18 years of age. Proof of age shall be provided by the child's birth certificate, identity card or any other official document."

91. In this connection, article 18 of the 2002 Constitution of Bahrain states that, "People are equal in human dignity, and citizens are equal before the law in regard to public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination among them on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed." This article thus underlines that, for all age groups, including children, no distinction is made between males and females in terms of their public rights and duties. Moreover, none of the legislation and regulations in force in Bahrain, makes any distinction between persons on the basis of sex, regardless of their age.

92. Through its government bodies, including the Supreme Council for Women established pursuant to Amiral Decree No. 44 of 2001, Bahrain continues to make every effort to enact a family code which will establish a minimum age for marriage. A section of the Sunni Family Act includes a number of articles which are favourable to girl children and provide for their protection. Article 8, for example, states that a girl below 16 years of age may not marry without the consent of a competent sharia court and only if this would be of definite benefit. This article clearly aims at protecting girls from being forced into marriage by their parents or guardians.

93. Bahrain is making concerted efforts, under a policy on the audio-visual and print media, to draw attention to the dangers of early marriage for girls and the adverse impact on children's health. This is in addition to the efforts made by civil society organizations in this regard.

94. Article 2/36 of the draft text states: "Ensuring that the spouses are compatible in age is a right afforded to the bride alone." It goes without saying that the purpose of the aforementioned articles is to protect young girls in marriage. However, discussion of this text was deferred following the first legislative term which ended in 2006, due to opposition to such a law from religious political groups.

95. Statistics on the age of marriage in practice in Bahrain are found below.*

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of married persons under 15 years of age</i>	<i>Total No. of married couples</i>
1994	4	2 573
1995	4	3 321
1996	1	3 632
1997	7	3 984
1998	6	3 677

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of married persons under 15 years of age</i>	<i>Total No. of married couples</i>
1999	4	3 673
2000	1	3 963
2001	4	4 504
2002	6	4 909
2003	4	5 373
2004	1	4 929
2005	1	4 669

* Table showing the number of marriages of persons under 15 years of age compared with the total number of marriages, 1994 to 2005.

96. Due to opposition from politically powerful religious groups, no family code which sets a minimum age of marriage for girls has been promulgated. The Government of Bahrain, as represented by the executive authority, nevertheless wishes to meet the requirements set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to implement the recommendations which the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted further to its consideration of Bahrain's initial report, and calling on Bahrain to set a minimum age in certain legislation and ensure that the legislation is gender-neutral. In order to meet this challenge, a decision was issued by the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs on 23 September 2007, regulating the procedures for contracting marriages of girls under 15 years of age. The decision states: "A marriage may not be contracted and shall not be recognized, if the bride is under 15 or the groom is under 18 when the contract is concluded, unless there is a compelling need which justifies the marriage of persons below these ages, in which case permission must be obtained from the competent court."

97. This decision, which prohibits authorized officials from officiating at marriages of females who are below 15 years of age and of males who are below 18 years of age, was taken to prevent children from being forced into marriage by their parents or guardians and also to protect their health from the adverse effects of early marriage.

98. The decision also allows for certain exceptions, where the competent courts may need to authorize a marriage between persons below the ages stipulated in the decision, if it is truly in their interests. Examples include cases where a female minor is subjected to a sexual assault or sexual relations outside marriage have occurred. In such cases, the negative effects of the offence may be mitigated and the offence extinguished by the two parties agreeing to a marriage.

99. From the legal standpoint, the promulgation of a child rights law which sets the age of majority at 18 years would affect all the legislation on children's rights, in accordance with article 2 of Decree-Law No. 19 of 2001 on the Civil Code.

100. Bahrain believes that a child rights law which stipulated the age of majority would serve two important goals: firstly, it would define a child as a person under 18 years of age and, secondly, it would provide persons under 18 years of age with safeguards under all legislation, eliminating discrepancies with regard to the age of majority.

101. With regard to criminal matters, under article 32 of Decree-Law No. 15 of 1976, concerning the Criminal Code, only persons under 15 years of age are relieved of criminal responsibility. The article stipulates that a person under 15 years of age cannot be held responsible for the commission of a criminal act. He or she shall be dealt with in accordance with the Juveniles Act.

102. The Office of the Public Prosecutor recently established a committee to consider how protection could be offered to persons up to the age of 18 and legislative and legal solutions could be found to the difficulties arising from the aforementioned legislation, under which persons between 15 and 18 years of age bear criminal responsibility. They can be arrested during an investigation, made to stand trial and sentenced as if they were adults, although minority may be taken into consideration by a court as a mitigating circumstance in the determination of the sentence, as provided for under article 70 of the Criminal Code. That article states: “Having due regard to such cases as are provided for in this Act, the youthful age of an accused person over 15 but under 18 years of age shall be taken as a mitigating circumstance”.

103. In practice, persons under 18 years of age are not placed in detention with other detainees but are held in designated areas in order to prevent them from mixing with adults on remand. This is also the case for convicted persons under 18 years of age.

104. Under article 344 of the Criminal Code, victims of rape and sexual assault who are under 14 years of age are presumed not to have consented to these offences. The penalties are increased if the victim is below 16 years of age. The article prescribes a term of life imprisonment for having sexual intercourse with a woman against her will and life imprisonment or death, if the victim is below 16 years of age. A victim who is below 14 years of age is presumed not to have consented to the offence.

105. Increased penalties for assaults on minors are also prescribed by article 345 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates a penalty of imprisonment of up to 20 years for consensual sexual intercourse with a female aged between 14 and 16, while a penalty of up to 10 years in prison is prescribed for having consensual sexual intercourse with a female aged between 16 and 21.

106. Likewise, article 346 of the Criminal Code prescribes a penalty of up to 10 years’ imprisonment in a medium-term facility for unlawful sexual contact with a person against that person’s will. The penalty is imprisonment in a long-term facility, if the victim is under 16 years of age. The article includes reference to the assumption that consent was not given if the victim was under 14 years of age.

107. Moreover, article 347 of the Criminal Code prescribes a penalty of deprivation of liberty for engaging in unlawful sexual contact with a person, with that person’s consent, if the person is aged between 14 and 21.

108. Article 251 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that in all cases in which a serious or major offence is committed against a minor who is not yet 15 years of age, an order may be given for the minor to be entrusted into the care of a trustworthy person who will pledge to supervise and look after him or her. Otherwise the minor may be placed with a recognized charity, pending the resolution of the case. The order may be issued by the Office of the Public Prosecutor or by the court hearing the case, as appropriate.

Challenges

- There is a need for a children’s act which specifies the same minimum age for marriage for both sexes

IV. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)

109. The Committee expressed concern that the principles of non-discrimination (Convention, art. 2), the best interests of the child (art. 3), survival and development (art. 6) and respect for the views of the child (art. 12) were not fully reflected in the national legislation and administrative and judicial decisions, as well as in policies and programmes

relevant to children. It recommended that the general principles of the Convention, in particular the provisions of articles 2, 3, 6 and 12, should be appropriately integrated in all relevant legislation concerning children and applied in all political, judicial and administrative decisions, as well as in projects, programmes and services that have an impact on all children. Those principles should also guide planning and policymaking at every level, as well as actions taken by social and health welfare institutions, courts of law and administrative authorities.

110. The laws of Bahrain do not in any way conflict with or impede the application of the aforementioned principles. There is no distinction between children or discrimination against any child on any ground mentioned in the Convention. Moreover, all State agencies and public and private child welfare institutions are committed to serving the best interests of the child, in accordance with the conditions and objectives laid down by law. The problem of stateless persons (“Bidun”) has been resolved. Article 8 of the Constitution provides: “All people are equal in human dignity and citizens have equal public rights and duties under the law, without any distinction on grounds of sex, origin, language, religion or creed.”

A. Non-discrimination (art. 2)

111. The Committee expressed concern that the grounds of non-discrimination contained in article 18 of the 1973 Constitution and chapter 1, section 2, of the National Action Charter did not reflect the grounds of non-discrimination contained in article 2 of the Convention. It also expressed concern that there was discrimination against females and children born out of wedlock under existing personal status law and that certain vocational courses at secondary level were restricted to one sex.

112. By way of reply, it should be stated that there is no personal status law such as that mentioned in the above concluding observation. In accordance with the national Constitution, Bahrain is an Arab country, the national religion is Islam and the sharia is the primary source of legislation. Therefore, all matters of personal status are governed by the Islamic sharia, which regulates the legal rights of the child, including inheritance, custody, guardianship and trusteeship rights.

113. Accordingly, a child’s right of filiation is established by the existence of a valid marriage between the man who begat the child and the woman who bore and gave birth to him. Filiation may also be established by acknowledgement, whereby a declaration is made at the outset by the father. In this way, the child so acknowledged acquires all the rights that the father must bestow on his children. Filiation may also be established through evidence. Here, the claimant must produce evidence of paternity based on the testimony of two witnesses. The court will rule on the matter and recognize the claimant’s legitimate filiation status, if the legal evidence is valid. The sharia courts in Bahrain have issued ruling to this effect.

114. Filiation may be established by the above means under Islamic law. The principal means of proving filiation is through the existence of a valid marriage; the other means are exceptional and serve to establish the filiation of those born out of wedlock and the consequent rights to inheritance, custody and guardianship.

115. Therefore, a child whose paternity is not established by any of these means is known as a foundling, who was abandoned by the family at birth for fear of accusation, to avoid expense or to escape a situation of force majeure that obliged them to abandon their child without leaving evidence of his or her identity. Foundlings are fully protected by law in Bahrain. Article 9 of Decree-Law No. 6 of 1970 provides: “A name shall be chosen for the

child and a fictitious name given to the parents; the child shall be registered as a Muslim and shall be deemed Bahraini by birth.”

116. No de jure or de facto distinction between males and females with regard to the age of majority for the purposes of civil or political rights is made either by the government authorities or any part of Bahraini society.

117. Moreover, the trend in Bahraini legislation is towards the elimination of discrepancies between the definitions of the age of majority. A legislative unit has been set up to eliminate these discrepancies, which will certainly have an impact on the way in which this issue is dealt with across society.

118. With regard to discrimination against girls and women, the statistics show that males and females have equal access to all stages of education. Bahrain is striving to attain gender equality and to prevent discrimination against women at all levels.

119. The following table shows the high ratio of female to male students in the various stages of education, underscoring the emphasis placed on learning and education as a means of empowering women in society.

Ratio of female to male students in all stages of education*

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Primary	1.28	1.05	1.009	1.015	1.021	1.028	1.034	1.041
Intermediate	1.039	1.024	1.005	0.987	0.968	0.950	0.932	0.914
Secondary	1.18	1.16	1.107	1.09	1.076	1.065	1.048	1.032

* Data from the website of the Central Informatics Organisation, Education and Educational Services Division, Bahrain.

120. These ratios are consistent with the female to male ratio of 1.612 in higher education across all universities. The University of Bahrain, which is the largest and longest-established higher education institution in Bahrain, has a female to male student ratio of 2.18, while the Arabian Gulf University has a ratio of 3.047 and the College of Health Sciences a ratio of 5.40. At the Bahrain Training Institute, however, the ratio of male to female students is 2.147. This could be attributed to a desire on the part of male students to acquire training in skills that would equip them for the job market. However, the Institute's regulations do not prevent women from enrolling in any discipline.

121. With regard to the participation of women in political life, 49 per cent of those who participated in the process of endorsing and ratifying the National Action Charter were Bahraini women. Under the Charter, women and men enjoy equal civil, economic, social and political rights.

122. Some 11.2 per cent of the candidates in the 2002 municipal elections were women, while 51 per cent of the voters were women. The ratio of female to male candidates in the 2002 election who stood for the Council of Representatives was 0.047, equivalent to 8 women and 169 men. The number of women parliamentary candidates doubled in 2006 to 16, and 1 Bahraini woman was returned to parliament by acclamation. The female participation rate in the voting was 47.7 per cent in 2002 and 50.2 per cent, as against 49.8 per cent for males in 2006.

123. The Supreme Council for Women was established in 2001. It formulated an integrated strategy to promote the role of women and to eliminate, by 2012, discrimination against women in paid and voluntary work, political and family life, education and training, health, the environment, decision-making and economic empowerment. The Council's

ambition is to increase to 30 per cent the level of women's participation in the legislature, which stood at 14 per cent in 2006. Although at present women do not participate in municipal councils, the Council has set a target of 10 per cent for female participation in these councils, which can be achieved at a minimum through appointments.

124. The Council supported women in obtaining 7 per cent of ministerial positions and seeks to increase the proportion of women in such positions to 25 per cent by 2012. Women represented 7 per cent of deputy ministers in 2006; the Council plans to raise that figure to 30 per cent. At present, 11 per cent of assistant deputy ministers are women; the Council hopes to bring that figure up to 35 per cent. In the public sector, women represent 16.3 per cent of directors of general directorates; the Council aims to raise that figure to 40 per cent. It also hopes to bring the proportion of ambassadors who are women up to 10 per cent.

125. Women hold all the leading positions in women's associations, but 5 per cent of such positions in political associations; the Council aims to increase the latter figure to 35 per cent. Women do not hold any positions in Islamic and youth societies; the target participation rate for women is 30 per cent. The plan is to bring the rate of women's participation in leading positions in civil society institutions up to 50 per cent from the present figure of 24 per cent.

126. The Supreme Council also aims to support the government ministries and civil society institutions concerned and the Bahrain Women's Union in bringing the female illiteracy rate, which was 14.4 per cent in 2001, down to 5 per cent by 2018.

127. The Supreme Council, in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Businesswomen's Association and government agencies and civil society organizations, plans to increase the proportion of training programmes specifically for women entrepreneurs from 1 per cent in 2005 to 5 per cent by 2012.

128. It should be mentioned in this connection that Bahrain is a peaceful Arab country that embraces all denominations and faiths and is in no way racist or xenophobic.

B. Best interests of the child (art. 3)

129. The Committee expressed concern that in actions concerning children, the general principle of the best interests of the child contained in article 3 of the Convention was not always a primary consideration. It recommended that Bahrain should review its legislation and administrative measures to ensure that article 3 of the Convention was duly reflected therein and that that principle was taken into account when administrative, policy, judicial or other decisions were made.

130. In accordance with the above-mentioned recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, a comparative study of domestic legislation and the Convention was made as a preparatory step to introducing amendments to the legislation. The study led to the drafting of a bill on children's rights in Bahrain. The bill was discussed by the Council of Representatives at a session held on 27 February 2005 and some amendments were introduced. The bill was merged with the Child Education Bill and resubmitted to the Council of Ministers in 2007 after having been renamed the Child Rights and Education Bill. At present, the Bill is pending enactment.

131. The subject of the best interests of the child was covered in some detail in paragraphs 77 to 83 of the previous report. The present report describes relevant new developments and associated measures and procedures.

132. The Consultative Council and the Council of Representatives adopted the Maintenance Fund Act, establishing a fund for all those including children, who need to be

paid maintenance. Under article 9 of the Act, part of the fund's resources are to come from general State budget allocations. The Government is committed to providing the necessary financial support for the fund during the first two years. This is certain proof of what the State is prepared to do in this regard and it has had a positive impact on the best interests of the child. The Consultative Council approved a bill at the second meeting of the second legislative session, stipulating that an annual budget would be allocated to the fund from out of the general State budget; the bill has been referred to the Government.

133. The judiciary in Bahrain pays particular attention to the best interests of the child. When children of parents who separate are entrusted to the care of the mother, the courts — as a matter of principle — will order parental visits by the father to take place at the mother's home. The purpose is to safeguard the child's psychological well-being. When this arrangement is not feasible, the visits will take place at the local community centre in the governorate where the child lives and will be supervised by a family social worker. The Ministry of Justice enforces court judgements. The fact that parental visits no longer take place in police stations, which was formerly the case, represents a major shift towards protecting the best interests of the child.

134. Moreover, article 2 of the same bill, stipulates: "The protection and best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration in all decisions, actions or measures affecting children, regardless of the issuing or implementing authority."

135. Article 346 of the 2002 Code of Criminal Procedure provides: "When a man and his wife who have not previously been imprisoned are sentenced to up to one year's imprisonment even for different offences, enforcement of the sentence of one of them may be deferred until the other is released, if they are responsible for the care of a child under 15 years of age and their known place of residence is in Bahrain."

136. Pursuant to Act No. 19 of 2004, Bahrain acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 May 2000.

137. January 2005 was an important moment for the process of social development in Bahrain. Pursuant to Royal Decree No. 29, responsibility for social affairs was taken away from the Ministry of Labour and reassigned to a ministry established in its own right. Dr. Fatima Mohammed Bint Al-Balushi was appointed as head of the ministry. Subsequently, pursuant to Decree No. 73 of 2005, the ministry was renamed the "Ministry of Social Development".

138. On 3 July 2005, the Council of Ministers approved the transfer of the Department of Childhood from the Public Authority for Youth and Sport to the Ministry of Social Development. The Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 46 of 2007 on restructuring the National Committee on Childhood, chaired by the Minister for Social Development, Dr. Fatima Mohammed Al-Balushi. In this way, a clear governmental mandate was established on the coordination of the work of ministries and non-governmental organizations with regard to implementation of the Convention.

C. The right to life, survival and development (art. 6)

139. This topic was discussed in paragraphs 84 and 85 of the previous report. Paragraph 78 of that report also cites article 5 (a) of the Constitution, which provides: "The family, sustained by religion, morality and patriotism, is the foundation of society. The law shall protect the legal structure of the family, strengthen family bonds and values, protect mothers and children, provide for the welfare of the young, protect them from exploitation

and shield them from moral, physical and spiritual neglect. The State shall show particular concern for the physical, moral and intellectual development of young persons.”

140. Article 343 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides: “When a woman in the sixth month of pregnancy is sentenced to deprivation of liberty, enforcement of the sentence shall be deferred until 40 days after delivery. If such a sentence is enforced and during enforcement it becomes apparent that a prisoner is pregnant, the prisoner must be treated as a person in pretrial detention until the term stipulated in the previous paragraph has elapsed.”

141. In order to protect children from hereditary diseases, Bahrain promulgated Act No. 1 of 2004 on premarital medical examinations. Such examinations include screening for hereditary, infectious and other diseases, as listed in a decree issued by the Minister for Health. Persons who infringe the Act, whether they be couples intending to marry or those responsible for officiating at marriages, are liable to a fine of up to BD 500.

142. Act No. 56 of 2006, approving accession by Bahrain to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, was promulgated. The Covenant provides in part III, article 6, paragraph 5, that: “Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant women.”

143. There are no statistics that would indicate that children under 18 years of age are sentenced to death or life imprisonment. In the statistics on cause of death, there is no record of any child having died as a result of being sentenced to death or subjected to extrajudicial execution. A single case of suicide was recorded in 2006. The following table contains figures on the cause of death among children under 19 years of age.

Deaths among children under 19 years of age

<i>Cause of death</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000</i>
Sudden death from unknown causes	2	0.8
Road traffic accident	19	7.3
Other accidents	9	3.4
Poisoning	2	0.8
Suicide	1	0.4
Other causes	196	75.1
Total deaths	229	87.7

* Total population includes those aged 19 years, as per available census data provided by the Central Informatics Organisation.

D. Respect for the views of the child (art. 12)

144. The Committee expressed concern that traditional attitudes towards children in society could limit respect for their views, especially within the family and schools, and that children were not systematically heard in court and administrative proceedings in matters that affected them. It recommended that Bahrain should continue to promote and facilitate, including through legislation, within the family, schools, institutions, the courts and administrative bodies, respect for the views of children and their participation in all matters affecting them, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention. Moreover, it recommended that skills-training programmes should be developed in community settings for parents, teachers, social workers and local officials so that they could assist children to express their informed views and opinions and learn to take those views into consideration.

Furthermore, it recommended that Bahrain should seek assistance from, among others, UNICEF.

145. We should like to recall that article 10 of Decree-Law No. 46 of 2002, promulgating the Code of Criminal Procedure, regulates the right of children to submit complaints. The article provides: “If the victim of the offences listed in the previous article is under 15 years of age or mentally infirm when the complaint is submitted, the complaint shall be submitted by the person with power of attorney for the child. If the offence committed is against property, the complaint shall also be accepted from the testamentary tutor or custodian. If there is a conflict of interest in the above cases between the victim and his or her representative or if the victim has no representative, the Office of the Public Prosecutor shall act as the representative.”

146. This topic was discussed in paragraphs 86 to 89 of the previous report. We wish to add that since His Majesty the King’s reform project was launched, the number of youth organizations has increased. There were 16 such organizations in 2007. The rules of youth associations allow for admission of so-called “associate members”, meaning young persons under 18 years of age whom the governing body accepts as associate members with the right to participate in various activities.

147. Moreover, all secondary schools have student committees. There are 28 active student committees and other State and private schools also have such committees, bringing the total number up to 88 across the different school districts for boys and girls in 2006.

148. Under Decree-Law No. 14 of 2002, Bahraini men and women can exercise their political rights by expressing their views in every referendum held in Bahrain, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, and by electing members of the Council of Representatives. Article 2 of the Decree-Law states that voters must be at least 20 years of age on the day of a given referendum or election; that article is the result of an amendment introduced by Act No. 26 of 2006; previously, the minimum voting age was 21 years.

149. Youth and political associations continue to demand that the age of political majority should be reduced to allow citizens to exercise political rights from the age of 18 years. This reflects the growing recognition by civil society associations of the need to eliminate the discrepancies between the age definitions for childhood and adulthood. However, the legislature still appears concerned that less mature young people could be exploited by political associations seeking more votes. Some legislators consider that there should be an interval between the age of civil majority and that of political majority so that young people can attain the maturity that would enable them to make sound decisions in political affairs.

Challenges

- The lowering of the age at which political rights may be exercised from 21 to 20 years only applies to the right to participate in referendums and elections and not to membership of political associations. Under article 5 (2) of the Political Associations Act, the minimum age for membership of a political association is 21 years, which creates a disparity as regards the age of political majority in respect of the right to participate in referendums and elections, on the one hand, and the right to be a member of a political association on the other hand.
- The fact that the Children’s Parliament project has been suspended.

Children's voices: freedom of expression¹³

150. A consultative meeting was held with children on a number of child-related issues in Bahrain. The children were asked whether their views as young people were taken into account in decisions affecting them.

Comments

- No decisions and projects on child-related issues are approved without consulting children or young people. Adults always assume the right to make decisions affecting children. For example, many associations, governmental and civil society organizations that specialize in children's issues have been established with no reference to the participation and representation of children.
- There is a lack of interest in establishing major projects for children. Even in the twenty-first century, there is no such thing as a national forum for children.
- Children are not involved in, and are not even informed about family rights in relation to problems such as divorce or underage marriage.
- No children subjected to physical or sexual abuse are afforded the right to express their views or to defend themselves; adults arrogate this right for themselves.

V. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8, 13–17 and 37 (a))

151. The Committee expressed concern at the lack of information provided in the State party report concerning the serious allegations of torture and arbitrary arrest of persons under 18 referred to in other reports. It recommended that all cases of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment by police officers or other government officials should be investigated effectively and the perpetrators brought to justice. It also recommended that full attention should be paid to the victims of those violations and that they should be provided with adequate compensation, recovery and social reintegration. Information on the above recommendations should be included in subsequent reports.

152. Bahrain is committed to upholding the rule of law and respecting human rights and takes as its point of departure the principles set out in the National Action Charter and the Constitution. Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy that seeks to strengthen State institutions and create new ways and means for citizens to better exercise their rights.

153. Since the very first months of his reign, His Majesty the King has introduced measures to enhance democracy. These include Decree-Law No. 11 of 2001, repealing the Decree-Law on State security measures; Decree No. 4 of 2001, revoking the jurisdiction of the special court for adjudicating offences against internal and external State security; and Decree-Law No. 10 of 2001, establishing a general amnesty for offences against national security and a general and unconditional amnesty for political exiles.

154. With regard to the promotion and enhancement of democratic awareness in the community, Bahrain has made sure to maintain freedoms and guarantee freedom of opinion and expression, having due regard to national and Islamic values, together with freedom of the press and the media. Licences have been issued to several Arabic and foreign language newspapers and magazines in order to strengthen the role of publishers and the press in the exercise of these rights.

¹³ Proceedings of the consultative meeting with children on child-related issues held in Bahrain in March 2008. See annex.

A. Name and nationality (art. 7)

155. The subject of name and nationality is discussed in paragraphs 90 to 93 of the initial report. We should add that under articles 2 to 9 of the Registration of Births and Deaths Regulatory Act of 1970 children have the right to a name and nationality and the particulars of each child must be registered to ensure that the parents will acknowledge the child as their own in the future. The procedures for registering children at birth are laid down in law.¹⁴

156. A number of measures have been taken in this connection. In accordance with his powers under the Nationality Act, His Majesty the King grants Bahraini nationality, by royal decree, to the children of Bahraini women married to foreigners. Efforts are being made to amend the current Nationality Act in order to ensure that Bahraini women married to foreigners have the right to transmit Bahraini nationality to their children.

157. As noted above, in various parts of the present report, steps have been taken to resolve the problem of stateless persons and to grant nationality to thousands of the “Bidun”.

Challenges

- Children born to Bahraini women married to foreign men are denied Bahraini nationality, while the children of Bahraini men married to foreign women are granted Bahraini nationality

B. Preservation of identity (art. 8)

158. The initial report took up the issue of the preservation of identity in paragraphs 94 to 97. In this regard, we wish to recall that article 9 of the Registration of Births and Deaths Regulatory Act of 1970 states: “Any person who finds a newborn baby shall hand him or her to the nearest police station and make a report on the circumstances and place in which the child was found and the date of the discovery. The police surgeon shall determine the approximate age of, and choose a name for, the child and a fictitious name for the parents and shall register the child as a Muslim. The report shall include the name, surname, occupation and address of the person who discovered the child, unless that person declines to provide a name. Police stations nationwide and institutions and refuges that are equipped to receive such children shall notify the Department of Health of every newborn child that is found or delivered to them in order to ensure that a birth certificate is issued for each child.”

159. Bahrain is a pioneer in the Middle East as far as the development of population registration measurement systems is concerned. In addition to the population cards issued to all citizens and residents, an electronic identity card was introduced in October 2005. This card is considered the safest means of verifying the identity of the bearer for the purposes of transactions and access to services provided by government and civil society institutions. The card is issued to persons of all ages, including children.

C. Freedom of expression (art. 13)

160. The previous report discusses this topic in paragraphs 98 and 99, which explain that children have the unlimited right to freedom of expression, opinion, religion or belief,

¹⁴ Number and percentage of children registered after birth, and date of registration. See annex.

without prejudice to the constitutional laws and regulations in force in Bahrain. According to article 23 of the Constitution: “Freedom of opinion and scientific research is guaranteed and everyone is entitled to express his or her opinion orally, in writing or by other means, subject to the terms and conditions set down in law.”

161. Bahrain, as represented by government and private institutions makes every effort to ensure that children have the right to freedom of expression. The efforts made by civil society organizations in this regard are described in detail in section VIII of the present report, on schoolchildren.

D. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14)

162. Paragraphs 100 and 101 of the previous report discuss this topic. In this regard, article 22 of the Constitution refers to these freedoms, stipulating that: “Freedom of conscience is absolute and the State shall guarantee the sanctity of places of worship as well as freedom to perform religious rites and to participate in religious processions and gatherings in accordance with the customs observed in the country.”

163. It follows that there is nothing in law to prevent children of any faith from exercising their right to learn about or to practise their religion or to express their views or beliefs, provided that they do not engage in any activity prejudicial to public order or public morals.

164. According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Social Development, in 2007 there were 48 foreign civil society organizations in Bahrain and 37 foreign cultural clubs, in addition to 19 churches and 1 spiritual group.

E. Freedom of association and of peaceful assembly (art. 15)

165. This topic is discussed in paragraphs 102 to 107 of the initial report. In this regard, we wish to recall that article 27 of the Constitution stipulates: “Freedom to form associations and trade unions at the national level, for lawful purposes and by peaceful means, shall be guaranteed in accordance with the terms and conditions laid down by law, provided that this does not encroach upon the precepts of religion or public order.” Article 28 of the Constitution provides that private and public meetings, processions and gatherings shall be permitted in accordance with the terms and conditions laid down by law.

166. In the present era of reform and political liberalization, developments in the legal and the political environment, combined with freedom of expression and transparency have helped to open up prospects for the development of civil society in Bahrain, paving the way for the establishment of an increasing number of civil society associations. Whereas there were 275 such associations in 2001, there were 304 in 2003, 376 in 2004 and 425 in 2006; in 2007, there were more than 460 civil society associations in Bahrain. In other words, the number of civil society associations in Bahrain has almost doubled over a period of seven years. This is not just a quantitative but a qualitative shift in the structure of civil society. In the past, charitable and religious associations were the main type of association in Bahrain. The qualitative shift that has occurred is evident in the aims and activities of civil society associations. In 2002, some human rights associations were formed, such as the Human Rights Association. In addition, a number of political associations representing various Islamic, national, leftist, liberal and other political groupings have been established. These are effectively political parties in terms of their activities and structure. At the same time, a number of issues-based associations have emerged, such as environmental associations,

associations for national manpower training, an association for social development and another for youth.¹⁵

167. The Ministry of Social Development continues to support civil society associations and voluntary work through its social development projects. These projects have a positive impact on society and form part of Bahrain's general social policy, which has two main thrusts. The first policy thrust consists in social investment in a variety of developmental and social spheres in order to resolve social problems at the root, while the second focuses on social protection, including welfare, rehabilitation and measures to deal with the symptoms and consequences of social problems.

168. Perhaps one of the most important projects that the Ministry of Social Development has launched is the Financial Grants Programme for social development projects run by civil society organizations. The Programme is administered through the Civic Social Action Fund. It reflects the Ministry's desire to encourage associations to work together on consolidated projects, having their staff cooperate with one another and sharing their expertise to design more targeted projects that meet the needs of the community.

169. Statistics issued recently by the Civil Society Organizations Department at the Ministry of Social Development show that Bahrain has donated land, real estate and buildings worth more than BD 120 million for use by civil society institutions to establish administrative premises and projects. Such institutions received BD 200,000 in financial support, representing an increase of BD 100,000 over 2006.

170. The Ministry of Social Development has turned to developing the legal framework regulating civil society activities in Bahrain. The current law on this subject was promulgated in 1989 and regulates the work of the country's established civil society associations, of which there are more than 460 at present. Some civil society associations have criticized the law for limiting the scope of their activities and freedoms. For its part, the Ministry of Social Development has collaborated with a number of international expert institutions to draft a new civil society organizations law in order to increase interest and involvement in civil society activities and to identify the real factors that would facilitate the transition to a more active civil society.

171. The Non-Governmental Organization Support Centre has opened its doors. It is the first such centre in the Gulf region and its mandate is to offer technical support to civil society institutions, including cooperative establishments and public welfare associations. The support that the Centre offers consists in developing the capacities of civil society organizations, providing them with the expertise and advice that they need and supplying material support such as training facilities and equipment. This support enhances the spirit of partnership between civil society organizations and the Ministry of Labour. It also enables associations to play an active role in society and transforms them; rather than offering material assistance and assistance in kind to needy individuals and families, the associations assume a developmental role and make an effective contribution to community development.

172. In accordance with royal directives on establishing stronger youth associations and providing them with the operational facilities that they need in order to achieve their aims, the Ministry of Social Development purchased premises for the main offices of such associations. The premises consist of two multi-storey buildings, containing 13 apartments and surrounded by sufficient space, in which associations may conduct their activities. The buildings were purchased at a cost of BD 570,000 and offer associations all the facilities

¹⁵ Statistics on the development of civil society organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2007.

necessary for them to function and achieve their objectives, in support of youth projects and initiatives.

173. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ministry of Social Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the use of experts from America's Development Foundation in Egypt to formulate a strategic plan of action for the NGO Support Centre over the coming three years. A field survey of civil society associations was conducted as an initial step, on the basis of which a plan for the Centre was developed. A scenario was elaborated on ways of building the capacities of associations to enable them to play a more effective role in the development process. An expert working group was set up and given more than 100 hours of intensive theoretical and practical training. Moreover, training materials on institutional capacity-building were developed and the documentation and mechanisms for the delivery of technical support and assistance were prepared and evaluated. Furthermore, in coordination with the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a training course on running and managing voluntary civil society associations and institutions in the GCC States was designed.

174. A volunteer unit has been opened up within the Community Services Section of the Ministry of Social Development as part of the Ministry's development projects and plans. The unit is currently working on a volunteer club project that aims to establish a wide pool of male and female volunteers and to orient their skills towards serving civil society organizations, offering workshops and training led by civil society specialists with the ultimate aim of forging a partnership between the community and the private sector. The project also aims to educate the next generation in the culture of volunteering and to highlight the significant role that volunteering plays in the overall development of societies.

175. The Ministry is currently considering a "young volunteers" project, which will focus on instilling the concept of voluntary work in children and young people in Bahrain and on strengthening their sense of belonging and citizenship using up-to-date methods which take account of the rapid changes that Bahrain is experiencing today.

F. Protection of privacy (art. 16)

176. The subject of protection of privacy is discussed in paragraph 108 of the initial report, which clarifies the contents of articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution in this regard. We wish to add that article 9 of the agreement by which Bahrain acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides: "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law." Article 19, subparagraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d), of the Constitution stipulate that personal freedom is guaranteed in accordance with the law. Article 26 of the Constitution furthermore provides: "Freedom of postal, telegramme and telephone and electronic communications shall be safeguarded and their confidentiality shall be guaranteed. There shall be no censorship of correspondence or infringement of its confidentiality, except in cases of necessity as provided for by law and in accordance with the procedures and guarantees specified therein."

G. Access to appropriate information (art. 17)

177. This issue was discussed in some detail in paragraphs 109 to 112 of the initial report. We wish to recall that article 7 (a) of the Constitution provides: "The State shall sponsor sciences, humanities and the arts, shall encourage scientific research and shall provide

educational and cultural services for citizens.” On this basis, Bahrain seeks to expand access for all citizens, primarily children, to information.

178. The Ministry of Education attributes great importance to children’s libraries, which it provides with books, resources, tools and equipment to enable children to read and to have access to whatever information that they seek. The purpose of children’s libraries can be summed up as being to foster a love for reading and studying in children and to develop their aptitudes in this regard, to teach them good values, habits and attitudes and acquaint them with techniques for utilizing library services and extracting information from various library resources.

179. The Public Libraries Directorate of the Ministry of Education oversees nine public libraries at different locations throughout the country and provides various services to all members of the different groups that constitute Bahraini society. The first public library in Bahrain, Manama Public Library, was opened in 1946. In keeping with the Government’s commitment to opening up more libraries, Muharraq Public Library was opened in 1969; it was subsequently rehoused in a modern, specially equipped building and renamed National Bank of Bahrain Public Library at Muharraq in April 1997. Issa Town Public Library was opened in 1972 and four public libraries were opened in 1976, in Sitrah, Al-Riffa, Al-Hadd and Judd Hafas, respectively. In 1979, Arad Public Library was opened, as was a branch of the public library at the Salmaniya Medical Complex.

180. Shaikh Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa Library was due to be opened in December 2008. It is the largest national library in Bahrain serving and supporting readers and researchers and is distinguished by its size and splendid architecture. Its halls and facilities house works on the arts, literature, culture, history, theatre and heritage; there is a children’s hall and theatre, a rare manuscripts corner, a museum of Islamic history, a hall for the acquisitions of the late Amir Shaikh Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, a space for Internet discussions and debates among members of associations, intellectuals, businessmen and other interested persons, a reception hall for seminars and lectures, a fine arts gallery and a hall for theatrical performances, in addition to other areas serving visitors of various kinds with different needs.

181. In addition, at the end of December 2008 Al-Riffa Views Children’s Library, at the Information Centre for Women and Children of the Children and Women’s Welfare Society was inaugurated with support from the Ministry of Social Development. The library contains a host of educational materials and audio, written, visual and electronic materials that can be used to develop children’s linguistic and intellectual skills and knowledge of culture.

182. Each public library has a well-stocked children’s section that contains children’s books, reference books and periodicals, in addition to audio-visual materials such as films, educational computer programmes and audio recordings of stories. The purpose of providing such diverse materials, information and activities is to encourage children to acquire the habit of reading, develop their love for reading and cultivate their taste for culture from an early age.

183. The salient feature of the National Bank of Bahrain Public Library in Muharraq is its use of computer technology. The library has more than 15 computers linked to a local area network and one device with an Internet connection. Researchers use this equipment to perform all kinds of operations swiftly and easily, from identifying and locating sources to borrowing. The Internet device can also be used to search for information.

184. The Ministry of Social Development approved the “mobile libraries” project in order to encourage children to read and acquire knowledge and, by bringing the service close to their homes to ensure that all children in Bahrain have access to information. The project which cost BD 100,000, was approved for inclusion in the 2009/10 budget. The mobile

libraries are buses, equipped with an electronic library, educational materials and games and a collection of children's books in several languages. They travel from district to district and town to town, providing scheduled services for children and young people throughout Bahrain.

H. The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 37 (a))

185. This topic is discussed in detail in paragraphs 113 to 118 of the initial report. We wish to recall that article 19 (d) of the Constitution stipulates: "No person shall be subjected to physical or mental torture, inducement or undignified treatment. The penalty for inflicting such treatment shall be specified by law. Any statement or confession proven to have been made under torture, inducement or other such treatment, or the threat thereof, shall be null and void."

186. The Bahrain Centre for Child Protection was established by Decree-Law No. 10 of 2007 and inaugurated on 23 May 2007. It is the central child protection authority and is responsible for assessing and monitoring children subjected to ill-treatment, physical and psychological abuse, neglect and sexual abuse. In coordination with relevant government and civil organizations, the Centre offers these children a range of services including assessments, examinations, treatment and follow-up.

The Centre's objectives are to:

- Protect children from ill-treatment in the family and in society
- Protect children from harm during investigations
- Provide psychological, social and legal services and liaise with the relevant authorities
- Rehabilitate the family by keeping children in their family environment, to the extent possible
- Find alternative families for children at risk of ill-treatment
- Raise awareness among children and in society of child protection and children's rights
- Monitor the implementation and application of laws and treaties on child protection

187. Moreover, Decision No. 20 of 2007, concerning the composition of the board of directors of the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection was issued. The board represents different government and civil organizations concerned and its functions are to:

- Formulate plans and programmes to ensure that children are protected against ill-treatment, and monitor and report on implementation
- Liaise with all government and civil organizations involved in protecting children from ill-treatment
- Oversee the activities and work of the Centre
- Advise the authorities on ways to protect children from ill-treatment
- Draw up plans for studies and research on the ill-treatment of children and monitor implementation
- Draft the internal regulations for the Centre
- Operate a hotline to receive communications and complaints relating to children

188. Furthermore, 86 cases were referred to the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection in 2007 by various governorates. The cases involved girls and boys of from 1 to 18 years of age who had been subjected to sexual harassment, beatings and severe ill-treatment by parents, family members or foreign workers.

189. Every child is interviewed by an officer of the women's police force, a social worker and a research psychologist at the Centre. The director of the Centre holds periodic meetings with the family (mother, father and any family members involved in protecting the child) and with the research psychologist and social worker to discuss how the family and the Centre can work together on treating the child, depending on the type of problem involved.¹⁶

Children's voices: the media*

190. At the consultative meeting held with children on certain child-related issues in Bahrain, children were asked the following questions:

- What are the most important challenges facing the young generation?
- What are your suggestions about ways of developing media programmes in respect of the media?

Comments

- State media programming and planning policy is not sufficiently geared to children
- Few radio and television programmes are designed for children and most television programmes are pointless cartoons that encourage violence
- Children are not consulted as they should be and are not involved as they should in the design of television or other media programmes
- Children have insufficient opportunity to contribute to children's columns in local government newspapers
- Educational and government media fail to provide sufficient guidance and advice on smoking and its harmful effects
- There is a need to hold book fairs exclusively dealing with children's books
- There is a need for a Bahraini children's magazine

VI. Family environment and alternative care

191. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that the best interests of the child were not always a primary consideration in actions concerning children. The Committee also expressed concern that there was insufficient awareness of the ill-treatment of children. The Committee therefore recommended that Bahrain should:

- Investigate and prosecute instances of ill-treatment, ensuring that abused children are not victimized in legal proceedings and that their privacy is protected
- Provide care, recovery and reintegration for victims

¹⁶ A table showing the number of children subjected to domestic violence and type of abuse in 2007, disaggregated by age group, is attached as an annex.

* Proceedings of the consultative meeting with children on child-related issues in Bahrain, held in March 2008.

- Establish effective child-sensitive procedures and mechanisms to receive, monitor and investigate complaints, including intervening where necessary

192. Bahrain has taken the following steps in order to implement these recommendations in keeping with articles 19, 34, 37 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

193. In September 2006, the Ministry of Social Development set up a planning committee for the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection. The planning committee, which includes representatives of all ministries and agencies concerned, conducted a situation analysis based on a critical review of how each ministry or agency dealt with cases of physical and psychological abuse.

194. The planning committee developed a response plan to tackle abuse based on its situation analysis. One of the key outcomes was the establishment of the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection which takes the phrase “Child protection is safeguarding the future” as its watchword. The Centre’s vision is expressed in the idea that: “All children in Bahrain must be raised in peace and security in a family environment that supports balanced socialization as well as normal physical and emotional growth.” The Centre’s mission is “to protect children and prevent all forms of abuse and neglect” and its target group are children from birth up to 18 years of age. The Centre, which is child-friendly, child-centred and community-based, provides and coordinates evaluation, examination, treatment and follow-up services for child victims of physical abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.

195. The Centre was established in order to meet the needs of child victims of abuse in a child-friendly environment, and to offer protection from abuse and appropriate services and support for children and families. The Centre protects children from harm during investigations, protects society from abusers by making sure that they are brought to book and puts the best interests of the child first. The Centre was officially inaugurated in May 2007. The Child Protection Committee at the Ministry of Health liaises directly with the Centre in responding to the health needs of child victims.

196. The composition of the board of directors of the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection represents government authorities and civil society institutions. One of the board’s main tasks was to formulate the national child protection plan based on the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the study on violence against children and to draw up and monitor the implementation of an annual plan of action for the implementation of the strategic plan. The board also coordinates the work of child protection departments in the ministries concerned, designs research projects and studies on child abuse and neglect and monitors their implementation. The Ministry of Social Development has furthermore established a refuge for battered women and their children.

197. The Committee on the Rights of the Child made the following recommendations:

- Legislative measures should be taken to prohibit all forms of violence, including corporal punishment in the family, school and other institutions such as juvenile welfare institutions
- Legislative measures should be taken to address the problem of child sexual abuse in the family, school and other welfare institutions

198. Bahraini legislation, in particular the Criminal Code, criminalizes all forms of violence including offences against the person, human life and physical integrity. The penalties for these offences are increased if the victim is a child and the perpetrator is responsible for the child’s welfare. Furthermore, a bill on domestic violence is currently before the Council of Representatives.

199. The National Committee on Childhood added an entire chapter on child protection to the Child Education Bill before the Council of Representatives. Under the Bill, violence

against children is prohibited and child protection procedures, including if necessary, placement with foster parents are envisaged. The Bill also contains an article that specifically prohibits the use of physical violence and humiliating or degrading treatment in schools.

200. The Committee on the Rights of the Child made the following recommendations:

- Public awareness campaigns on the negative consequences of the ill-treatment of children should be conducted and positive discipline should be promoted as an alternative to corporal punishment
- Teachers, law enforcement officials, care workers, judges and health-care professionals should be trained to recognize cases of child abuse and to report and manage them and to continue to seek assistance from UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO)

201. In order to ensure that these recommendations were acted on, a wide-ranging series of workshops and public seminars on domestic violence and child abuse were held in clubs, places of worship and youth and community groups and for pupils, parents, teachers and social workers in all public and private schools in Bahrain. These events were overseen by various agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education and civil society organizations which deal with childhood issues.

202. In addition, the topics of abuse and alternatives to corporal punishment have been discussed in newspapers, magazines and on the radio and television, while social skills development has been added to the school curriculum.

203. The Committee on the Rights of the Child made the following recommendations:

- A comprehensive study should be conducted in order to assess the nature and extent of child abuse, and the findings should be used for the design of policies and programmes to address the issue

204. Consequently, a study on child abuse was published in 2005, based on the cases reported to the Child Protection Committee of the Ministry of Health. Moreover, all cases referred to the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection are now registered to allow the Centre to publish annual statistics on the subject. Other authorities continue to monitor and refer all cases of abuse to the Centre.¹⁷

A. Parental guidance (art. 5)

205. This topic is discussed in paragraphs 119 to 120 of the initial report. We wish to add that, in Bahrain, the family consists of a couple, joined in a valid marriage, who are bound by family traditions and beliefs to take excellent care of their children's physical, mental and moral development in accordance with contemporary standards and to set them on the right path for the purposes of a sound social education. To these ends, the family acts in partnership with all the institutions that cater for children such as schools, colleges and universities, mosques, hospitals, children's and youth clubs overseen by the Ministry of Social Development and all civil society organizations concerned with children.

206. Since its establishment, the Ministry of Social Development has undertaken to provide family welfare and development services through programmes and activities

¹⁷ Statistics from the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection. See annex.

carried out at nine community centres across Bahrain. The Ministry has devised a plan to establish 20 new centres, or 1 centre for every 25,000 citizens.¹⁸

**Number of beneficiaries of community-centre training programmes by year
(2003–2006)**

<i>Number of programmes</i>	<i>Number of beneficiaries by year</i>			
	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>
42	5 946	8 586	7 538	3 932

207. The Ministry of Social Development has opened eight family advice offices in all the community centres to provide specific developmental and prevention services to all members of Bahraini families and to strengthen the family's ability to confront and deal with the challenges and problems of contemporary life. The offices deal with families which are experiencing social, economic or psychological difficulties and are at risk of breakdown. They review the situation of each family carefully in order to provide appropriate advice and solutions. The offices help individuals and families to reach mutual understanding and resolve conflicts, which brings greater stability and harmony to the family.¹⁹

208. In November 2006, the Ministry of Social Development opened the Dar al-Amman shelter, which offers various forms of assistance to persons at risk of domestic violence and to female expatriate workers, including accommodation, health, rehabilitation, psychological, advisory and legal services. The shelter also offers support and assistance to battered women and their children in order to restore their confidence and undo the harm caused by physical and psychological violence and abuse.

B. Parental responsibilities (art. 18, paras. 1 and 2)

209. This topic is discussed in paragraphs 121 to 125 of the initial report. We wish to add that parents are fully responsible under the law for raising and caring for their children and for bearing the cost of their children's housing, food, clothing, education, health and other needs. The State attaches great importance to establishing crèches as a way of helping parents to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children and to provide children with integrated care.

210. Bahrain enacted Decree-Law No. 25 of 1998 on private educational and training institutions in order to develop institutions and services for children and ensure that crèches are regulated and registered. Under article 2 of the Decree-Law, crèches are subject to oversight and monitoring by the Ministry of Social Development.

211. Accordingly, the Ministry of Social Development issued Decision No. 12 of 1999 on licensing conditions and procedures for crèches. In 2007, 50 crèches in different governorates throughout Bahrain were registered with the Ministry of Social Development. The department at the Ministry of Social Development which deals with these matters is responsible for, among others, the following tasks:

- Administrative and technical oversight of the work and activities of crèches

¹⁸ Social Services Centres' statistics, see annex.

¹⁹ Family advice offices' statistics, see annex.

- Constant checks on crèche premises to verify adherence to registration regulations and compliance with the conditions under which the crèches were established
- Periodic inspections of registered crèches and preparation of reports thereon
- Inspections of new premises for licensed crèches and consultations with the authorities (municipal, traffic and civil defence) on building approvals for crèches
- Improvement and development of the standard of educational services provided by such institutions
- Granting licences to those wishing to establish crèches
- Coordination and follow-up with the Department of the Family and Childhood, the Crèches Division, the Kindergartens Directorate and the Education Statistics Division at the Ministry of Education
- Taking action to deal with and close down unlicensed crèches
- Contributing to the organization by the Ministry of a training programme for crèche staff and conducting inspections of crèches to ensure compliance with licensing specifications and obligations

212. The Ministry of Social Development issued Decision No. 10 of 2006 on home-based crèches in order to ensure that such crèches offer a stimulating environment that provides children with everything they need to grow and to achieve comprehensive development for women and children. The Decision focuses on training nationals to take the helm when it comes to providing training in all matters relating to home-based crèches.

213. The services provided by children's and youth clubs under the authority of the Ministry of Social Development and the children's services offered by civil society organization are discussed in detail in part VIII, section C, of the present report on the subject of leisure, recreation and cultural activities.

Challenges

- Crèches and kindergartens need to be established in public and private institutions where parents work
- Crèches and kindergartens need to be included in the formal education system for children from the age of 5, given the high financial and administrative costs involved
- Conditions need to be improved at kindergartens, which should be sufficiently well-equipped to perform their duty to children to the full

C. Separation from parents (art. 9)

214. This topic is discussed in paragraphs 126 to 129 of the initial report. We wish to add that, through the Department of Social Assistance, the Ministry of Social Development provides monthly financial support to children in need, the children of prisoners and children with disabilities. In April 2007, a total of 421 children, from birth to 19 years of age, received benefits.

215. Since 2001, the Royal Charity Organization has furthermore paid a monthly stipend of BD 30 to all orphans; to date, this has benefited 4,827 persons, from birth to 23 years of age.

216. Since April 2004, divorced women and their children have been able to go to social centres on official holidays and see a social worker under a programme established in

accordance with instructions issued by Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, the wife of the King of Bahrain and Chairperson of Bahrain's Supreme Council for Women, and with decisions of the judicial enforcement courts. The programme continues to operate and had benefited 56 cases as of October 2007.

D. Family reunification (art. 10)

217. Paragraph 130 of the initial report states that there is no legal provision that prevents families from leaving the country or returning thereto for the purposes of family reunification or family gatherings. All Bahrainis and foreigners have the right to leave the country and return thereto, provided that they meet the stipulated legal requirements.

218. Furthermore, in keeping with Bahrain's concern for returning expatriates, royal directives were issued to make it easier for returnees to meet all their needs, to live in peace and stability and to be reunited with their families. These directives supported the aims of the royal amnesty issued in Act No. 56 of 2006, following Bahrain's accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In part III, article 6, paragraph (iv), of the Act, a blanket amnesty was issued consistent with article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with article 17 (b) of the Bahraini Constitution. Moreover, the Bahraini Criminal Code, as amended, allows for the facilitated repatriation and family reunification of citizens wishing to return to Bahrain. The Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with the relevant ministries in Bahrain, reviewed requests from 510 returnees seeking grants for employment, housing and social services as part of a project with an allocated budget estimated at BD 3,060,838.

219. According to statistics issued by the Central Population Registry, 39,848 non-Bahraini children from birth to 19 years of age were living in Bahrain with their families in July 2001.

E. Recovery of maintenance for the child (art. 27, para. 4)

220. With regard to this topic we refer to paragraphs 134 to 139 of the initial report. Furthermore, we wish to note that the State provides for the maintenance of children of unknown parentage. In cases where a child has a foster family, the foster family will undertake to shelter the child and cover maintenance costs, namely, accommodation, food, clothing, health and education.

F. Children deprived of a family environment (art. 20)

221. We wish to add the following remarks on this topic, which is discussed in paragraphs 140 to 141 of the initial report.

222. The Ministry of Social Development endeavours to protect children from temporary or permanent deprivation of their family environment, in order to safeguard their interests. It also seeks to keep children in a wholesome environment in which they can receive a proper upbringing and education. To this end, the Ministry:

(a) Established the Children's Home, which takes in orphans and children of unknown parentage and provides them with an alternative family environment until they reach 14 years of age;

(b) Opened the Boys' Home, which cares for boys of 15 to 21 years of age of unknown parentage, in 1996.

223. Pursuant to Decree No. 9 of 2006, regulating discharge of children from homes and aftercare, children who are too old to stay in a home are offered appropriate independent housing; their rent is paid in full for the first year, two thirds of the rent is paid in the second year and one third is paid in the third year. The accommodation is furnished and equipped and boys are issued with monthly coupons, during the first year, with which they can buy items that they need for their apartment. A programme is being developed to prepare children to adapt to society before their departure; help with wedding expenses, buying a car, obtaining stable employment and completion of studies is offered to those who seek it.

224. Furthermore, all orphans for whom the Royal Charity Organization provides, including foster children, receive this stipend from birth until they reach 21 years of age or start work.

Fostering (kafalah)

225. The State and numerous civil society organizations throughout the country encourage the fostering of orphaned, poor or gifted indigent children. Procedures for doing so are being finalized in accordance with the Fosterage Act in order to regulate the safeguards provided for the rights of the child and the foster family and to define their respective needs and duties. Foster families must undertake to care for and raise children, who retain their own names. Only Bahraini nationals in Bahrain may foster children; this is to ensure that the children concerned can be monitored and provided with appropriate care.

226. The rules and conditions for fostering children are described in paragraph 142 of the initial report.

227. Decree-Law No. 22 of 2000, regulating the fostering of children was issued in addition to Decision No. 7 of 2007, establishing the Fosterage Committee. The Decree-Law sets out the relevant rules and principles²⁰ and provides for the establishment of the Fosterage Committee to oversee the system and liaise with the child welfare authorities. The members of the Committee include representatives of various authorities, such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development. The Committee verifies the suitability of foster families, checks that they meet the required conditions and issues all documents and official identity papers for foster children, such as a birth certificate and a passport, in coordination with the relevant authorities.

228. The Royal Charity Organization was established on 14 July 2001 by order of His Majesty the King. Initially named the Orphans Sponsorship Committee, it was established to allow eligible families to foster Bahraini orphans. An order was issued on 4 November 2001 entrusting the Committee with the care of widows with no male provider. Royal Order No. 25 of 2005 was issued, establishing the Orphans Sponsorship Committee, the name of which was changed to the Royal Charity Organization by Royal Order No. 12 of 2007 on 27 March 2007.

229. The Royal Charity Organization:

- Attends to the welfare of indigent widows and orphans and monitors orphans to ensure that they are properly raised to become good, productive citizens who can make an effective contribution to the growth and prosperity of society

²⁰ Fosterage Act, see annex.

- Fosters closer relationships between widows and orphans and society and increases opportunities for them to interact with their social milieu, which contributes to their psychological equilibrium and social adjustment
- Seeks to strengthen ties and cooperation with public and private institutions working in the field of sustainable development
- Provides comprehensive support for orphans and widows in the forms described below

Material support

230. A total of 9,651 widows and orphans had been sponsored by the Royal Charity Organization as of 2006, representing more than 5,023 families in Bahrain. Of those sponsored, 4,827 were orphans and 4,884 were widows.

231. A monthly salary is transferred on a set date directly to the bank accounts of all orphans and widows sponsored by the Royal Charity Organization.

Educational support

232. An annual ceremony is held under the patronage of His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa in honour of orphans with outstanding academic achievements at various stages of education.

233. The Royal Charity Organization introduced the Faisal bin Hamad prize for academic distinction and the Faisal bin Hamad prize for the ideal mother.

234. All orphans sponsored by the Royal Charity Organization who attend schools and universities are given the price of a school bag fully equipped with all the necessary stationery and a school uniform.

235. By order of His Majesty the King, 50 scholarships were allocated to the University of Bahrain for orphans sponsored by the Royal Charity Organization who excel in their studies. The scholarships cover all university fees and include sums of money for the purchase of textbooks and university supplies. These royal scholarships have been awarded to 142 male and female students.

Social support

236. Numerous educational projects, activities, events and courses and national and social festivals are organized for the recipients of social welfare services and those involved in that field. One such event was the first Orphans Conference, organized on the theme "Towards a productive educational environment for orphans", which was held under the generous patronage of Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, Minister of the Royal Court.

237. The Royal Charity Organization is committed to ensuring that students use their leisure time in a profitable manner and endeavours to bring out their talents through numerous programmes and activities, including a leadership forum, summer activities, the Bahrain National Day and a Ramadan festival, in addition to the other educational and training programmes, courses and excursions organized for orphans and widows throughout the year.

G. Adoption (art. 21)

238. Bahrain does not have a system of adoption within the meaning set out in the Convention but it does have an alternative system of care (*kafala* or *hadanah*), which is applied in accordance with the Islamic sharia.

H. Illicit transfer and non-return (art. 11)

239. In this connection we refer to paragraphs 131 to 133 of the initial report in which the measures to prevent the illicit transfer of children abroad are described. Moreover, we wish to add that according to figures issued by the Office of the Public Prosecutor and the Ministry of the Interior, no cases such as those to which this article refers have ever been recorded.

I. Abuse and neglect (art. 19), including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

240. This topic is discussed in some detail in paragraphs 176 to 181 of the initial report, over the space of three pages. We wish to draw attention in the present report to the statistics on the number of students enrolled in rehabilitation, academic and vocational centres, attendance and dropout rates and the numbers and percentages of children who received special care, to facilitate their recovery and social reintegration.²¹

J. Periodic review of placement (art. 25)

241. This topic is discussed in paragraphs 174 to 175 of the initial report. We wish to add that, through the Children's Home and the Boys' Home, the Ministry of Social Development offers various types of accommodation, health, social, psychological and educational services, in addition to cultural and leisure programmes for orphans of unknown parentage.

Children's Home

242. The Children's Home is a social welfare institution that offers shelter and education. The Home, founded in 1984, belongs to the Ministry of Social Development and provides care for children of unknown parentage, orphans and children from broken families from birth to 15 years of age.

Boys' Home

243. The Boys' Home is a social welfare institution that offers shelter and education; it is an extension of and supplement to the service provided to children by the Children's Home. The Boys' Home has provided shelter and care to boys and youths over 15 years of age since 1996.

Aftercare

244. A programme for boys who are discharged from the Boys' Home after reaching the age of 18 has been designed to provide these boys with aftercare and guidance. In that connection, the Ministry of Social Development issued Decision No. 2 of 2006, providing for the formation of a committee responsible to oversee the procedures for discharging boys and providing them with aftercare.

245. The Social Welfare Department is currently developing a programme to prepare children who have reached the age of majority and are poised to leave the Home for entry into society. It seeks to promote social acceptance of such children and to integrate them

²¹ For statistics on rehabilitation, academic and vocational centres, see annex.

naturally into society by providing for their psychological, social and professional rehabilitation, in addition to care after they leave the Home, based on intensive awareness-raising programmes, close monitoring to help them to bear the burdens of life and support in adapting to their new lives and in living in safety and peace.

Batelco Child Care Centre

246. The Bahrain Telecommunications Company, Batelco, supported and contributed to the construction of the Batelco Child Care Centre on land owned by the Ministry of Social Development. The premises are fully equipped to serve children of unknown parentage of various ages; the move to the new building is expected to take place during the coming year, after the building has been refurbished.

Foster care

247. The aforementioned Decree-Law No. 22 of 2000 was issued. In order to provide security and protection and to ensure the future of this group, whether living in foster care homes or with foster families. The Decree-Law regulates the fostering process in order to provide children with a normal family atmosphere and ensure that they are issued with all their official documents and papers.

248. Moreover, the Minister for Labour issued Decision No. 7 of 2001 establishing the Committee on Fostering. The authorities responsible for monitoring the completion of formal fostering procedures, in coordination with the relevant ministries and authorities, participate in the Committee, which has helped to streamline the procedures and, consequently, has encouraged families to foster children.

249. A dedicated unit has been established at the Ministry of Social Development to monitor the implementation of fostering procedures in coordination with the Committee on Fostering and to follow up on foster children and their families to see how they are adjusting to one another.

VII. Basic health and welfare

A. Survival and development (art. 6)

250. Bahrain recognizes every child's inherent right to life and, as stated in article 5 of the Constitution (cited in the initial report), it guarantees to the extent possible the survival and development of the child. By Act No. 56 of 2006 Bahrain acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 6, paragraph 1, of which provides: "Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life." Paragraph 5 of the same article provides that the death sentence shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below 18 years of age.

B. Children with disabilities (art. 23)

251. As detailed in paragraphs 217 to 222 of the initial report, children with disabilities have the right to free special care which meets their needs and to other forms of care provided by governmental and civil society institutions.

252. Ministry of Social Development rehabilitation centres offer all kinds of welfare, rehabilitation, social, health and vocational services to young persons and children with disabilities. More than 640 persons with different kinds of disabilities utilize these services

every year. The following table shows how many centres and units there were for persons with disabilities in 2007.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Centre name</i>	<i>No. of users</i>
1.	National Bank of Bahrain Rehabilitation Centre for Handicapped Children	296
2.	Academic and Vocational Rehabilitation Centre	171
3.	Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait Rehabilitation Center	121
4.	Shaikhhan Alfarsi Centre for Total Communication	92
5.	Children's Day Care Centre	37

253. The Ministry of Social Development is committed to providing for the rehabilitation and social integration of children with disabilities and to offering access to employment to persons with disabilities who have undergone vocational and technical training. These services are supplied by governmental and civil sector institutions and centres. On 2 December 2008 the Higher Committee for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities and the Global Alliance organization signed a memorandum of understanding with the aim of facilitating access to the environment and to technology for persons with disabilities.

254. Article 3 of Decree-Law No. 74 of 2006, concerning the welfare, rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, states: "Ministries and other institutions, in coordination with the Ministry, shall provide continuous, integrated and regular services to persons with disabilities, particularly medical, social, educational, cultural, sports, rehabilitation, employment, communications and housing services, among others." A dedicated unit was established at the Ministry of Social Development to monitor employment of persons with special needs in the Government and civil sectors.

Disabled Services Center

255. This centre is responsible for offering jobs which are matched to the health and physical capacities of the disabled person. It liaises with the full range of institutions and private sector enterprises and provides trained assistants who accompany the person to work during the first six months of employment in order to ease the integration process.

256. The centre provides psychosocial, legal and vocational assistance to persons with disabilities and their families. A committee comprising all the State services ministries and civil society institutions which deal with disability issues was set up to assess and explore ways of meeting the needs of persons with disabilities. The centre receives requests from persons with disabilities for driving lessons, assistive devices and access to an electronic library.

<i>Type of disability</i>	<i>Total</i>
Auditory	111
Mental	113
Visual	36
Physical	141
Multiple	36
Total	437

257. The Ministry is currently engaged in the establishment of a complex in the Ali district for persons with disabilities. The complex is expected to provide different kinds of services in a single geographical location so that persons with special needs can have access

to an integrated package of care and rehabilitation assistance. The complex, which will cost an estimated BD 5.4 million, will house a diagnosis, assessment and testing centre, a centre for physiotherapy and psychotherapy, a learning and training resources centre, and a new Down's syndrome centre, which is to be the first of its kind in the region.

258. The Higher Committee for Persons with Disabilities was established with Dr. Fatimah Mohamed Al-Balushi, the Minister for Social Development, as its chairperson. The members are experts and officials from all the relevant ministries and civil society. The Committee drew up its rules of procedure and financial regulations. A Committee fund will be established to help meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

259. Further to Decree No. 20 of 2005, it was decided to provide persons with disabilities in different age groups with an allowance. In 2007, some 4,990 persons with various kinds of disabilities received the allowance. The purpose of the allowance is to help provide recipients and their families with appropriate living assistance, to supply their needs and to offset some of the costs of their care. An allocation of BD 4.1 million was budgeted to pay out the allowance to all applicants registered on waiting lists.

Number of recipients of the disability allowance, by request and sex, 2007

<i>Reason for application</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Visual disability	178	130	208
Physical disability	666	453	1 119
Mental disability	1 227	939	2 166
Auditory disability	399	369	768
Multiple disabilities	211	160	371
Autism	33	15	48
Cerebral palsy	121	89	210
Total	2 835	2 155	4 990

Recipients of the disability allowance, by sex and age group, 2007

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
0–9	470	364	834
10–19	821	598	1 419
20–29	698	492	1 190
30–39	406	352	758
40–49	313	256	569
50	127	93	220
Total	2 835	2 155	4 990

Efforts and input from governmental, civil society and private sector institutions which deal with persons with disabilities

Ministry of Education

260. The Ministry of Education supports persons with sensory and physical disabilities and those who have learning difficulties or are slow learners, integrating children into Ministry of Education schools at the basic stage of integration namely, location-based

integration. Children with special needs are taught in special classes or special learning units at public schools.

Social integration

261. Children enrolled in special classes or units join public school children in activities such as games, excursions, and arts and activities classes.

Classroom-based integration

262. This type of integration takes place after the previous two stages have been completed. Children with disabilities and children without disabilities study the same curricula and syllabus.

Ministry of Health

263. The Ministry helps to raise awareness about the prevention of disabilities. Its health centres have early screening units for expectant mothers and newborns, which provide vaccinations free of charge and test for disabilities.

Efforts and inputs from civil and private institutions

264. Institutions in the civil society sector are taking steps to improve their effectiveness in line with their aspirations and with the role that they ought to play in social welfare development. The following institutions contribute to the care and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities:

“Mobility blooms” kindergarten

265. This centre is run by Bahraini Mobility International and was opened in 1994. At present, around 35 boys and girls with physical disabilities are enrolled. The centre specializes in dealing with children with physical disabilities in the 3–6 age group. The kindergarten was set up to teach children the knowledge and skills that they need to help them integrate into society and to prepare them for enrolment in the primary stage in ordinary schools. The “Mobility Buds” kindergarten was founded in 2002.

Amal Institute for Special Education

266. The Amal Institute for Special Education is run by the Child and Maternal Welfare Association. It offers a series of educational, advisory, vocational, health and leisure services to help shape the capacities, skills and behaviour of persons with disabilities. The Institute trains children aged between 6 and 14, who are subsequently transferred to rehabilitation centres or regular schools, as the case may be. There are currently 122 students enrolled in the Institute.

Amal Early Care Centre

267. The Amal Early Care Centre is run by the Child and Maternal Welfare Association. It provides special care to children in the 3 to 6 age group with disabilities with a view to achieving a balance between the level of education of these children and that of their peers. It focuses on developing the children’s verbal skills and ability to participate in group activities among other skills, allowing for differences between individuals. The Centre is planning to expand its services to include those who are sight impaired and children with auditory and speech impairments and to prepare them to move on to special institutions once they reach the right age.

Amir Sultan bin Abd al-Aziz Centre for Hearing and Speech Development

268. The Centre is part of the Bahraini Society for Child Development and was established in 1994 to serve as a leading centre for the rehabilitation of persons with auditory disabilities in the Gulf region in particular, and the Arab region in general. In addition, it aims at producing specialized research and conducting studies on auditory disabilities and hearing and speech problems at the local, Arab and international levels. The Centre provides rehabilitation services for persons with auditory disabilities, delayed speech development and speech impediments. It does not use sign language to communicate with the hearing impaired but rather a method which uses oral, auditory and lip-reading techniques to teach children with auditory disabilities oral communication. The Centre uses the auditory-oral method to communicate with and teach the children. Fifty children are currently enrolled in the centre.

Al-Wafa Centre

269. Al-Wafa Centre is part of the Bahrain Association for Mental Retardation and was founded in 1993. The Centre works with children with different kinds of mental disabilities. It offers these children recreational social programmes which develop their capacities and build up their skills, helping to shape their personalities and to give them some independence.

Al-Rashad Centre

270. This Centre is part of the Bahrain Association for Mental Retardation and began operating in 2000. It caters for children with autism; 17 children are currently registered with the centre. The object of the Centre is to supply rehabilitation services to autistic children in the 13 to 19 age group, teaching them the skills that they need to be able to live more independent and dignified lives and offering them vocational training that will allow them access to employment opportunities. The Centre also assists and supports the families of the students who take part in these programmes.

Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind

271. The Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind is a model of fraternal relations between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. It is an extension of the former Al-Noor Institute for the Arabian Gulf. Its name was changed from Al-Noor Institute for the Blind to the Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind in January 1997 and it currently has 28 students.

Al-Rahma Centre for Youth Care

272. Al-Rahma Centre began delivering services in 1997. Part of the Bahrain Association for Mental Retardation, this special Centre operates on a non-for-profit basis, supplying a full range of services and programmes on a day-care basis to young persons of both sexes with severe mental disabilities. Fifty students are currently enrolled in the centre.

Hidd Rehabilitation Centre for Special Needs

273. The Centre was opened in 2001 and carries out diagnostic testing to assess children's mental, physical and sensory capacities. It runs care, educational and vocational programmes for children with disabilities (minor and moderate mental retardation) to prepare them for inclusion in Ministry of Education schools. It assists and advises families on how to accept their children, teaches children social adaptation skills, self-reliance and a sense of self-worth and offers an integrated programme of counselling, guidance and psychotherapy to help children gain a sense of psychological equanimity. Twenty-four students are enrolled in the Centre at present.

Friendship Nursery for the Blind

274. The nursery is part of the Friendship Society for the Blind and was founded in 1990 to train, educate and provide children with the grounding that they need to be able to enrol in the Friendship Society for the Blind schools and ordinary schools. The nursery develops the skills and capacities of children with visual impairments, advising their families on how to deal with them and running programmes and other activities to integrate children into society. There are eight children enrolled in the nursery.

Alia for Early Intervention Centre

275. The Alia for Early Intervention Centre belongs to the Bahrain Society for Children with Behavioural and Communication Difficulties and has currently 47 enrolled students.

Down's Syndrome Care Centre

276. Part of the Bahrain Down's Syndrome Society, the Down's Syndrome Care Centre was established in 2001 to provide: health, treatment, psychological and social services; a full range of care to young children with Down's syndrome; assistance with motor, mental, language and social skills development in order to allow children to be introduced into society under supervision; training for adults with Down's syndrome; training to rectify parents' negative attitudes towards children with the syndrome on the best ways of dealing with the children; and assistance with the integration of children with Down's syndrome in government schools. At present, there are 100 students enrolled in the centre.

Sneha Centre

277. This is a local centre, which is run by and part of the Indian Ladies Association. It was established in 1987 to provide, through targeted programmes and activities, for the care and rehabilitation of children with mental disabilities and cerebral palsy.

Bahrain Institute for Special Education

278. This is a non-for-profit civil society institution which was founded in 2002 to supply quality special education services and to raise awareness of methods for dealing with children with special needs. In addition to diagnostic and assessment services, the institute provides educational services, designs programmes and plans tailored to individual children's needs and offers educational advice for all children with special needs.

Bahrain Comprehensive Care and Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Special Needs

279. This centre plays an important role in helping children with special needs to develop their sensory and motor skills and physical balance, to look after themselves, to acquire socialization skills and to develop their verbal skills. The centre does vital work to raise awareness of the importance of involving the family in education and training for children with mental disabilities in particular. It offers beneficiaries the opportunity and the training needed to communicate and work in partnership with the training staff at the centre.

Rehabilitation Institute for Autism and Related Communication Disorders

280. The Rehabilitation Institute was founded in 1999 to provide correct diagnoses of autism and related disorders, together with training and rehabilitation for sufferers. It offers physiotherapy and medical services and trains staff to work with autism sufferers. It also provides training and rehabilitation for families, in cooperation with world-class scientific institutions specializing in autism. A trained team has been set up to carry out home visits to the families of autism sufferers.

National Institute for the Disabled

281. This is a private institution, which runs several programmes and activities to support the delivery of care for persons with disabilities.

282. National banks also establish centres to support institutions for persons with disabilities. For example, the National Bank of Bahrain built the National Bank of Bahrain (NBB) Home for Disabled Children, while the Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait established a rehabilitation centre.

Civil society associations which work on disability issues

283. The civil society associations which work on disability issues are listed hereunder.

Bahraini Association for the Parents and Friends of the Disabled

284. The Bahraini Association for the Parents and Friends of the Disabled was established in 2003. It works with governmental institutions on issues affecting persons with disabilities and their parents and makes proposals on the establishment of joint implementing mechanisms with these institutions.

Bahrain Disabled Sports Federation

285. The Bahrain Disabled Sports Federation was founded in 1987 to promote disabled sports and enable persons with disabilities to practise proper sports. It takes part in local, Arab and international championships and competitions. Approximately 300 persons with mental, visual, physical or auditory disabilities use the Federation's services.

Bahrain Mobility International Centre

286. The Bahrain Mobility International Centre opened its doors in 1995. Its object is to provide persons with disabilities with the chance to realize their potential and to take part in various programmes. The Centre has 316 members.

287. Some associations, such as the Bahraini Charitable Association, the Bahraini Red Crescent Society and a number of women's associations, take a special interest in disability issues. Governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health and the Public Authority for Youth and Sport contribute a great deal to the services for persons with disabilities.

Assistance for the blind

288. In 1974, Bahrain established the Noor Institute for the Blind, which is now known as the Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind. The Institute, which is run by the Regional Bureau of the Middle Eastern Committee for the Blind in the Gulf region, offers blind persons scientific, educational and cultural rehabilitation assistance, together with social, health and living support, in order to prepare them to become productive members of society and to share their skills and energies with the rest of society.

289. The Institute teaches blind students the Ministry of Education curricula for primary and intermediate education and then integrates the students into Ministry of Education secondary schools. The students are also enrolled in the fourth grade of primary school and in the intermediate stage and are provided with a full array of school supplies, such as textbooks printed in Braille and free stationery. The Institute offers health, social and psychological services and takes in all students between the ages of 6 and 18 years who are blind or have a severe visual impairment.

290. Blind students with multiple disabilities are also admitted. In 2007, a special welfare and rehabilitation unit was set up for students in this category. These students need care, rehabilitation, health and psychological services and some also need educational services. A special programme with curricula tailored to each group's needs was designed for students in the unit. The curricula include instruction in various life and social skills, in addition to computer training, music and sports.

291. The Friends of the Blind Association, which was established in 1981, is a private organization that caters for the needs of the blind. It pursues a number of objectives, such as making it easier for blind persons to get around, removing the obstacles that they meet on their way, taking meaningful action to afford them the opportunity to play their role in society and providing them with appropriate forms of care and rehabilitation.

292. Moreover, the Association supports indigent families with blind members and arranges treatment for blind persons who could recover their sight or improve their vision. To this end, it offers financial assistance, with the aid of institutions and private individuals, and organizes social, cultural, sports and information activities.

C. Health and health services (art. 24)

293. We recall that the initial report discusses in ample detail the subjects of health, health services, survival and development. We should like to add information here on several achievements that have been scored in the area of health in Bahrain, as reflected in the maternal and child health indicators set out in the following table.

<i>Health indicator</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>
Crude birth rate per 1,000 population	22.2	20.9	20.2
Premature birth rate per 1,000 live births	58.7	98.5	102.6
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 population	9.7	8.9	7.6
Under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 population	12.1	10.9	10.1
Maternal mortality rate per 1,000 live births	0.46	0	0.13
Percentage of children born weighing 2,500 g and above	92.09%	92.2%	92.09%

294. The following are the main child-oriented services.²²

Child health services

295. Regular check-ups have been available at all health centres since 1986. Specially trained doctors and community health nurses regularly measure and assess children's growth, from the age of 2 months up until the preschool stage (5 to 6 years of age). Children are vaccinated, their growth is measured and their health is monitored. If they show any signs of poor growth, they will be referred to a specialist. The following results have been achieved:

- A guide on regular paediatric check-ups was revised and updated to take account of the latest scientific techniques for early screening for mental disorders and disabilities in children.
- A booklet was prepared on the subject of the stages of children's growth.

²² Annex contains requested statistics on child health.

- A system was set up to capture statistical information on children with problems of various kinds.
- A proposal was put forward on the establishment of a centre to carry out comprehensive child assessments.
- Work was done to ensure coordination between primary and secondary care providers. A committee was set up to study on the causes of infant and child mortalities and designed programmes to bring down infant and child mortality rates.

296. An expanded immunization programme is being implemented, using the methodology recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). The following actions have been taken:

- A system was developed for the implementation of the immunization programme for 2003–2004
- A global and national strategy for the eradication of infant poliomyelitis was adopted and implemented
- Programmes to vaccinate against hepatitis B and to immunize children against meningitis, tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough were carried out with the aim of eradicating these diseases
- The hepatitis A vaccine was added to the vaccination programme
- A guide on immunization was published
- An information booklet on immunization was published
- A national immunization campaign on infant poliomyelitis was launched
- In 2005, the vaccination rate in Bahrain for the triple vaccine (diphtheria, polio and tetanus) was 98.2 per cent, as against 98.1 per cent for infant poliomyelitis, 100 per cent for the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine among 1 year-olds and 99 per cent for children of 6 years of age

297. The breastfeeding promotion programme was set up to support and encourage breastfeeding. The child-friendly hospitals project was extended to all hospitals and health centres in Bahrain, and a number of information activities and campaigns, including talks for expectant mothers who attend health centres, were conducted.

298. The school health programme is carried out under the national school health plan. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education work together on the programme, which aims at improving children's health and complements the "Health-Promoting Schools" programme and a programme on regular testing for children. New students undergo physical, mental and psychological examinations at all health centres, in addition to social assessments and checks to make sure that they have received all their vaccinations.

299. The oral and dental health programme is delivered at health centres. It includes:

- Prevention and information for children and schoolchildren
- The application of teeth sealants for schoolchildren to guard against tooth decay
- School talks
- Participation in exhibitions and various activities

300. Under the home visits programme, community health nurses visit mothers and children who are at risk, offering them advice and guidance. Home visits are carried out to assist persons with special needs.

301. The Ministry of Health, other governmental bodies and civil society organizations offer health promotion programmes women and children. Various health-related activities and exhibitions are organized to help promote better health for women and children.

Adolescent health services

302. The Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed information that adolescent health education had been proposed for inclusion in school curricula. It, nevertheless, expressed concern that insufficient information was available on adolescent health, such as access to reproductive health services and mental health counselling services. The Committee therefore recommended that Bahrain should:

- (a) Formulate adolescent health policies and programmes, including education, with the full participation of adolescents;
- (b) Ensure that adolescents had access to child-sensitive and confidential counselling services; and
- (c) Seek assistance from, among others, UNICEF and WHO.

303. By way of reply, in keeping with articles 6 and 24 of the Convention, Bahrain affords every child the inherent right to life and ensures to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. To that end, it consistently provides high-quality maternal and child services, with a special focus on maternal, child and adolescent programmes, which remain a priority for the Ministry of Health. It successfully delivers a high standard of free health care to all sectors in society, providing primary and secondary health-care services and specialized care at Ministry hospitals.

304. The Ministry of Health has adopted the improvement of primary health care as a strategic goal and has developed an administrative and human resources employment structure as part of the organizational framework for the delivery of primary health care. All the services on offer have been defined. A manual has been produced, together with all the protocols on available services, including advice on when it is appropriate to consult a doctor. Training plans have been designed for health practitioners, and specialist services are offered under a coordinated system for the administration of referrals by primary care providers to specialist care providers.

305. The Ministry pays special attention to improving health information systems on women's and children's care for the purposes of monitoring and follow-up and the elaboration of key health data for the design of future plans and the development of maternal and childcare services, depending on the priorities identified.

306. Bahrain has taken steps to safeguard adolescent health. For example, it signed the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, article 16 of which provides:

"1. Each Party shall adopt and implement effective legislative, executive, administrative or other measures at the appropriate government level to prohibit the sales of tobacco products to persons under the age set by domestic law, national law or eighteen. These measures may include:

"(a) Requiring that all sellers of tobacco products place a clear and prominent indicator inside their point of sale about the prohibition of tobacco sales to minors and, in case of doubt, request that each tobacco purchaser provide appropriate evidence of having reached full legal age;

"(b) Banning the sale of tobacco products in any manner by which they are directly accessible, such as store shelves;

“(c) Prohibiting the manufacture and sale of sweets, snacks, toys or any other objects in the form of tobacco products which appeal to minors; and

“(d) Ensuring that tobacco vending machines under its jurisdiction are not accessible to minors and do not promote the sale of tobacco products to minors.

“2. Each Party shall prohibit or promote the prohibition of the distribution of free tobacco products to the public and especially minors.

“3. Each Party shall endeavour to prohibit the sale of cigarettes individually or in small packets which increase the affordability of such products to minors.

“6. Each Party shall adopt and implement effective legislative, executive, administrative or other measures, including penalties against sellers and distributors, in order to ensure compliance with the obligations contained in paragraphs 1–5 of this Article.

“7. Each Party should, as appropriate, adopt and implement effective legislative, executive, administrative or other measures to prohibit the sales of tobacco products by persons under the age set by domestic law, national law or eighteen.”

307. The Adolescent Health Committee was established with the participation of institutions involved in adolescent health issues. Its many activities and programmes include the following:

- (a) Helping to formulate, and taking action to implement, a youth strategy (on the theme of health) with the Public Authority for Youth and Sport;
- (b) Running workshops on adolescent health, focusing mainly on:
 - (i) Identifying adolescent’s physical, psychological and social needs;
 - (ii) Techniques for dealing with adolescents;
 - (iii) Life skills for decision-making and problem solving; promoting continuous learning; and identifying the best way to success;
- (c) Preparations for a conference on adolescents;
- (d) Conducting research on adolescents;
- (e) The holding of three joint workshops with WHO on:
 - (i) Storytelling, how to formulate questions and how to conduct research;
 - (ii) Advice on reproductive health;
 - (iii) Adolescents and information;
- (f) Devising primary care plans involving the establishment of adolescent care clinics in all health centres;
- (g) Contributing to education programmes.

HIV/AIDS

308. The Ministry of Health of Bahrain has been trying, since the first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1986, to combat the disease in cooperation with international organizations and under the awareness programmes which it has instituted to protect Bahrainis and foreign residents in Bahrain. It is preparing to conduct a comprehensive study following the method used in a preliminary study of three target groups: expectant mothers, drug addicts and young persons. The study will be launched once a budget has been allocated for it next year and will focus on any changes that have occurred in the situation.

309. The preliminary study, which was launched in 1986 and completed at the end of October 2007, recorded data on 300 AIDS sufferers, of whom 107 died of complications associated with the disease, 160 were carriers of the virus and 23 were infected. Of this last group, 23 were adults and 3 were children, to whom the disease had been transmitted by the mother during pregnancy. The rest were carriers of the virus who died of various causes.

310. According to the findings of the study, in 69 per cent of cases AIDS had been contracted as a result of drug addiction and needle sharing among drug users. In 17 per cent of cases, the virus had been acquired through heterosexual transmission and in 3 per cent of cases through homosexual transmission. Children who had acquired the virus through transmission from the mother during pregnancy or birth accounted for 1 per cent of cases. As the mothers had only been diagnosed at a late stage, it had not been possible to intervene earlier on in order to prevent transmission to the foetus. Normally, the mother is given an injection at a certain point during the pregnancy in order to protect the foetus; the child is then given another injection after delivery. In 10 per cent of cases, which occurred before 1985, the transmission route for AIDS infection had been a blood transfusion.

311. In the 0–14 age group, only six cases of infection were recorded between 1987 and 2007, accounting for 4.5 per cent of all cases.

312. As at 2007, there were no cases of children maintaining their families for reasons related to HIV/AIDS.

313. No information is available on the prevalence of AIDS among expectant mothers, as the health policy for this group is to test only those women in the categories where the risk of contracting the virus is highest. Routine testing for the virus is only carried out in the presence of risk factors. In 2007, tests were conducted on 600 pregnant women at risk of contracting AIDS; none of them tested positive for the virus. Information on the prevalence of AIDS among pregnant women can be obtained from a survey carried out by the National AIDS Committee, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). None of the 450 women surveyed was found to be suffering from AIDS (Source: National AIDS Committee).

314. Some 99.4 per cent of university students aged between 18 and 25 who were questioned in a 2006 study conducted by the National AIDS Committee, in cooperation with UNDP and the Bahrain Family Planning Association, said that they had heard of HIV or AIDS. The study found high levels of awareness among those in the sample of forms of protection against AIDS such as using clean, unused needles (88 per cent) and avoiding having sexual relations with an infected partner (73 per cent). Sixty per cent of those in the sample said that having unprotected sex (i.e. sex without a condom) increased the chances of contracting AIDS.

315. Due to sociocultural factors and the lack of any political decision to break the taboo surrounding the subject, there is no information available on the use of condoms among those who engage in sexual risk behaviour.

316. The Ministry of Health is preparing a guide on health services for adolescents, in particular health prevention services, including education on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

317. Bahrain launched an experiment, in cooperation with UNDP, under the national anti-AIDS campaign which began in November 2006 and ran until January 2007. The results and a study of three important groups — expectant mothers, drug addicts and young persons — pointed to the existence of an information gap, resulting in confusion among the three groups about how the virus is transmitted. This also added to the social stigma associated with AIDS.

318. In order to correct this perception, an advertising company was contracted to print and distribute publications, booklets and materials of various kinds, describing for different groups which precautions to take to guard against AIDS and how the infection is transmitted. Efforts were coordinated with the persons concerned in media organizations to expand the scope of this campaign with a view to the prevention and eradication of this deadly disease.

AIDS challenges

- It is difficult to deal with AIDS victims and to ensure that they are accepted and integrated into society
- It is difficult to carry out accurate studies to pinpoint exactly how many cases of the disease there are
- There is a lack of awareness of AIDS risks and prevention

Health-promoting schools programme and school health

319. In order to implement the health-promoting schools programme and to develop school health programmes for children and adolescents in education, the Ministry of Health set up its own school health structure and formed a high-level coordination committee with the Ministry of Education.

Allocation of Ministry of Health resources

320. Ministry of Health expenditure for 2005 amounted to BD 103 million, representing around 7 per cent of the Government budget. The Ministry continues to provide its services free of charge to all citizens, and pursues the following aims:

- (a) The continuation of efforts to supply and make better use of available human and financial resources in support of programmes to improve the health of citizens and of Bahraini society at large;
- (b) The institution of child health programmes under existing and future plans, to be funded out of the Ministry of Health budget.

Other prevention programmes for children

Cochlear implants programme

321. A cochlear implants programme was introduced and has helped improve the quality of care delivered to deaf children, offering them treatment for their disability and enabling them to lead normal lives.

Premarital screening programme

322. This programme was established in 1992. A law was enacted introducing mandatory premarital screening in order to reduce the incidence of common hereditary diseases, in particular sickle cell anaemia, and to guarantee the health of future generations.

Implementation of a programme to prevent eye disease and blindness

323. A programme was implemented to protect children from eye disease and to diagnose sight problems from an early stage, identifying the causes of blindness and offering treatments. The following measures are included in the programme:

- Regular testing of children at birth

- Retina examinations for premature babies
- Regular testing of children at health centres during the early months of life (2, 4, 6, 18 and 24 months)
- Testing children before they start school
- Testing school children in the fourth grade of primary school and providing training to teachers

324. Moreover, a public health bill is currently before the Council of Representatives. The bill contains a section on mothers and children.

Health service challenges

- As demand for health services is growing, there is a need for more funding and for larger numbers of qualified personnel
- There is a lack of training among medical personnel and registered midwives, and these persons need to be paid more for their services
- Providing health care to expectant mothers in order to diagnose at-risk pregnancies at an early stage is difficult, as is helping mothers to follow a suitable diet
- It is difficult to improve the level of organization and to train medical personnel and ancillaries, especially in hospitals
- It is difficult to improve surveillance and monitoring systems and to gather and analyse data
- Insufficient care is paid to adolescent mothers and adolescent girls in general
- Insufficient care is paid to older mothers (aged 40 and above)
- Insufficient care is paid to mothers who are illiterate or have only got a primary education at best

Children's voices – health services²³

- Do existing health services meet the needs of younger persons?
- What is your vision for the future development of health services until 2010?

Comments

- Although the health services that are provided in Bahrain are free of charge, most of the time the quality of paediatric services and assistance is quite poor.
- Children receiving medical treatment are not paid any attention or shown any sympathy; most often, doctors will shout at a sick child.
- Insufficient attention is paid to providing preventive health information and advice, and there are few health education programmes for children and adolescents.
- Not enough health inspections are carried out in restaurants to investigate and check upon food preparation and the expiry dates on certain food products.

²³ Proceedings of the consultative meeting on children's issues which was held with children in Bahrain in March 2008.

- In children's wings in Government hospitals there are no rooms where mothers can stay with their children.
- There is no legislation banning smoking in public places, and it is easy for children to get the money they need to buy cigarettes. There is no monitoring of shops which sell tobacco products to children under the age of 18.

D. Social security and childcare services and facilities (arts. 18, para. 3, and 26)

325. Bahrain recognizes the right of every child to benefit from social services. Article 5 (c) of the Constitution provides: "The State shall provide appropriate social security for citizens in old age and if they are ill, unable to work, orphaned, widowed or unemployed. It shall also provide them with social insurance and health-care services and shall endeavour to shield them from the scourges of ignorance, fear and poverty."

326. In keeping with the Constitution, in 2005, the year it was established, the Ministry of Social Development launched a strategy articulating a clear vision in which all sectors, institutions and individuals work as partners in a single team in order to develop Bahraini society, to deliver sustainable social welfare provision and to ensure the social, economic and political advancement of Bahrainis as productive members of society. Political stability and economic growth cannot be achieved without social security. Hence, the Ministry has focused its efforts on providing welfare and rehabilitation services for special groups such as persons with disabilities, older persons and children of unknown parentage, in addition to those at risk of being subjected to domestic violence. Social security is offered to families in need in keeping with the objectives which underpin international norms and laws on the creation of a safe and secure environment. Programmes have been established to help citizens overcome the social and economic problems which they find difficult to deal with and to enable them to develop their own resources. The projects and programmes run by the Ministry include the following.

327. Study on the development of a social protection network: The Ministry of Social Development signed an agreement with the World Bank on evaluating the social protection network in Bahrain with a view to developing it and strengthening its performance. The study was launched in 2006.

328. Social assistance: This consists in the financial assistance which the Ministry of Social Development has provided to families in need since 1972. In the 2005 budget, the amount allocated for such assistance was doubled to BD 8.4 million, following the issuance of Act No. 18 of 2006, concerning social security. A special fund was then set up and allocated a budget of BD 20 million as the nucleus of a social security fund to provide all groups without an adequate source of income with a living. These groups include families, widows, divorced women, women who have been deserted, older persons, the families of prisoners, those who are unfit for work, persons with disabilities, unmarried girls, children and orphans. The amounts of social assistance by group were adjusted as follows: BD 70 for a single person; BD 120 for a family of fewer than five persons; and BD 150 for a family of more than five persons. As of 2007, a total of 9,856 families with 19,624 members had benefited from social assistance. Of these, 4,719 families had received old-age benefit. The table below shows the number of recipients of social assistance as of August 2007.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Prisoner's family	5	42	47

<i>Group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Widow	-	1 057	1 057
Family	688	500	1 188
Unmarried girl	-	386	386
Unfit for work	543	164	707
Older person	1 646	3 054	4 700
Divorcee	-	1 355	1 355
Person with a disability	45	44	89
Deserted woman	-	255	255
Child	21	8	29
Orphan	53	70	123
Total	3 001	6 935	9 936

Amounts disbursed and number of recipients of social assistance (2000–2007)

<i>Years</i>	<i>Sums</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Individuals</i>
2000	3 895 548	10 638	28 762
2001	4 231 158	10 749	26 485
2002	4 231 158	10 804	25 644
2003	4 097 849	10 768	23 593
2004	4 002 437	10 887	22 259
2005	8 007 660	10 295	20 960
2006	9 487 570	9 747	19 016
2007	13 591 760	9 936	19 759

329. Compensation for fire damage: Financial compensation is offered to families with limited incomes, should their homes be damaged in a fire. The annual budget for this form of compensation was increased, further to Cabinet Decision 1839-01 of 2005, to BD 100,000. As of July 2007, some 37 families had received compensation after a fire at their home.

330. Al-Saif property share certificates: A royal gift of 30 per cent of shares in Al-Saif Property Company, representing 138 million shares worth BD 13.8 million, was granted on 16 December 2001. Some 14,985 families on social assistance and recipients of assistance provided by associations and charitable funds benefited from this gift. In 2006, the general assembly of the property company decided to distribute 5 per cent of the company's capital — BD 146 million — in dividends. The profits distributed to shareholders in 2005 amounted to BD 2.3 million, with families receiving a 30 per cent share, or BD 690,000.

331. A study was carried out on public and private sector employees entitled to pensions disbursed by the Pension Fund Commission and the General Organisation for Social Insurance. The objective was to ascertain whether fathers or brothers of insured persons were entitled to the beneficiary's pension.

332. Exemptions from education and training fees are granted to children whose families are receiving social assistance or are in need. The purpose of this arrangement is to encourage children to continue their education and training and thus to have access to better employment opportunities. Applications from students for exemptions from fees for the

technical and administrative training programme are reviewed in coordination with the Ministry of Labour.

333. Benefit for persons with special needs (disabilities): Reflecting the interest taken by the Government in disability issues, Cabinet Decision No. 1807-3 of 12 September 2007 provides for the payment of BD 50 per month to each person with a disability. Reference is made to this matter in part VII B. of this report.

334. Financial assistance is provided to orphans and children whose fathers are dead and who do not have the means to support themselves, in addition to children of unknown parentage under the age of 18 or those who are over 18, until such time as they begin working. It is also disbursed to all persons with disabilities who are partially or completely unable to earn a living and to support their families as the head of household, because they do not have enough money. The recipient must be over 18 and must need special care, which it is onerous for the family to provide.

Child services and facilities

335. Project on home-based childminding: The Ministry of Social Development is in the process of setting up a system of childminding in private homes in order to provide for the development and care of young children in the 0–3 age group and to supply their essential needs in a comfortable and secure family setting. The project offers many women with suitable facilities in the home, in addition to women with experience in child raising and women with special knowledge of children's issues, the chance to provide such care. The service will be provided at a reasonable price, depending on the hours agreed by the parties, i.e., the childminders and the families which use this service. This system will increase the proportion of women in employment, as female childminders are considered productive workers. It will also help mothers who wish to work outside the home to find a suitable place to leave their children, in which Bahraini values are upheld and the negative impact of having a foreign childminder is obviated.

336. Details are found in part VIII C. of this report (Rest, leisure and recreational, cultural and artistic activities) on the range of child-centred activities run by the Ministry of Social Development and relevant civil society associations.

E. Standard of living (art. 27, paras. 1–3)

337. The reform and human development process to which observers and international organizations have drawn attention has continued apace. The 2006 Scroll of Honour Award in Urban Development and Housing was awarded to His Royal Highness Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain. This prestigious international award, which was initiated by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) in 2003, is often given to leaders and Heads of State in recognition of their efforts in urban development and housing, construction of human settlements, fighting poverty and improving citizens' living conditions. The award is granted based on a set of criteria, including outstanding achievement and efforts in housing and urban development, the improvement of living conditions for the poor, the establishment of policies and programmes to improve living conditions and the involvement of civil society in the development process.

338. To improve the economic and social welfare of families in need, the Ministry of Social Development organizes projects designed to increase the income of poor families and help them to secure a fixed and independent source of income. The Bahraini Productive Families Project is one such project. Its aim is to support and develop the enterprises of these families, by offering proper training and financing, specialized services such as

marketing and management assistance, and production units (productive kitchens, industrial tailoring and ceramics production). A design and innovation unit is available for product development, together with an information technology unit to support external marketing, and a number of sales centres. Permanent exhibitions are held in various governorates. A further aim of the project is to give these enterprises an official stamp and to ensure participation across the governmental, national and private sectors.

339. At Bahrain International Airport a permanent exhibition was set up to promote goods made by productive families to visitors and those departing from Bahrain.

340. A complex in the capital was established to promote and market the products of productive families, to shift the policy of supporting productive family enterprises away from the “incubation” stage to the “development” stage and to provide a unique commercial centre promoting traditional Bahraini products and marketing them at home and abroad.

Reduction of electricity and water charges

341. By royal deed, electricity and water charges were reduced for poor families receiving social assistance, at a cost to the budget of BD 1.2 million per year. The decision was implemented in 2000 and 8,440 families had benefited as of June 2007.

National strategy for the development of impoverished families

342. At a meeting held on 31 July 2005, the Cabinet authorized the formulation of a strategy to provide for the development of impoverished families and to meet the challenges which Bahraini nationals face as individuals and families. A wide-ranging study on low-income groups in Bahrain was carried out to measure the level of poverty against a set of criteria so that the findings could be used as a basis for action, the situation of this group could be mapped out, and adequate means and mechanisms could be put in place to mitigate the adverse effects of poverty and lift the target group out of poverty.

National plan to develop and support productive families

343. This humanitarian social project was designed to turn impoverished families into productive families by using and developing the skills of these families in an effective manner and by enabling families which receive assistance from the Ministry to become self-reliant and to benefit from opportunities to increase their income. The construction of centres such as the Capital Mall for Productive Families, which was opened in 2007 to sell goods made by productive families, offers encouragement to this group, as does the Productive Family Award inaugurated by Her Royal Highness Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa in 2007. The Ministry markets productive family products at fairs in Bahrain and abroad, during national events and in malls. It is in the process of opening a centre in the central governorate, specifically in the Sitrah district, to produce and market these goods.

344. In accordance with the applicable rules and regulations, the Ministry of Social Development signed a memorandum with the Ministry of Labour on 11 September 2006 on training for impoverished families registered with the Ministry of Social Development and for unemployed persons registered under the National Employment Project. The two parties agreed on the importance of cooperating to deliver training to persons with disabilities, offering them suitable work in the Government and private sectors and developing the skills of employees of civil society organizations so as to support and further the work of these organizations under the community partnership project run by the National NGO Support Centre.

Micro Start project

345. This project, which was launched by the Ministry of Social Development in cooperation with UNDP, is run in a number of States in Asia, Latin America and Africa and is currently under way in Bahrain, with input from several civil society associations. Approximately 10,000 clients, both men and women, had benefited from the project as of 2006. The Ministry is developing the project and increasing the amount of capital allocated to it and the number of beneficiaries. The Ministry signed a contract with the Ahli United Bank on 24 January 2008 on providing funding for microenterprises under the Micro Start project, which was set up to offer credit to microenterprises.

346. In order to bring women more fully into the economic development process and to increase the proportion of women in employment, which stood at 23.5 per cent in 2001, the Ministry of Social Development proposed some projects to promote women's empowerment and active participation in economic production in Bahrain. Some of these projects are listed below.

Decision on productive households

347. A decision by the Minister for Social Development is being prepared on assisting families which work from home — particularly women, as they are the ones who tend to be more tied to the home — to legalize work that they do which offers them opportunities for advancement and prosperity by granting them licences issued by the Ministry of Social Development. The Ministry is setting up a bureau whose core function will be to issue these licences. A coordinating committee was set up with members from the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Ministry of Municipalities and Agriculture Affairs, municipal councils and the Ministry of Social Development. The committee will rely for its work on a dedicated mechanism that will allow the Ministry to oversee projects, to develop productive households and to provide for the advancement of the individuals who work in them.

Growth initiative

348. The "Growth initiative" was launched, further to Cabinet Decision No. 14-1848 and Ministerial Decision No. 14 of 2006, under the National Plan for the Development of Families in Need, to improve the situation of recipients of social assistance in the economic, social, educational, vocational and health domains.

Aims of the initiative

349. The purpose of the initiative is to improve the socio-economic status of families which receive social benefits under an experimental programme designed to end their dependency on benefits. As stated in the cooperation agreement which the Ministry signed with the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research on 7 August 2007, the programme will be extended to others after being piloted with 100 impoverished families who are to be helped to develop self-reliance under the growth initiative.

350. Charities, meaning associations, charitable funds, certain women's associations and the Bahraini Red Crescent Society, contribute financial assistance to families in need with children.

351. The Ministry of Social Development has opened up many welfare centres and homes, including those listed below, to provide family protection and care services.

Welfare Home for Vagrants and the Homeless

352. In implementation of Act No. 5 of 2007, on combating vagrancy and homelessness, the Ministry fitted out a building which can accommodate up to 80 vagrants and homeless persons. It took this step in response to the growing number of cases of vagrancy and homelessness, which take many forms, such as exploitation of children in begging and the emergence of organized gangs, a phenomenon which has attracted condemnation among the public and in the press and added to the number of voices demanding action to tackle the problem. Persons admitted to the Home can stay there for up to 10 days, during which time their social, economic and health situation is assessed and solutions are found. A vagrant in need of financial assistance is offered social benefit. Older persons are referred to a welfare home, which will provide them with proper care. Young persons are referred to a juvenile welfare centre, while those with psychological disorders are referred to a psychiatrist. If, after the 10-day period, a person goes back to begging, he or she will be turned over to the Office of the Public Prosecutor to be dealt with as provided for by law.

353. Mention was made, in part VI F. of this report (children deprived of a family environment), of the fact that the Ministry of Social Development provides a varied range of day-to-day, health, social, psychological and educational services for children of unknown parentage, together with cultural and recreational programmes and activities. In the section above on periodic review of placement (paras. 241–249), mention was made of Decision No. 9 of 2006, regulating the process for discharging boys from the Boys' Home and offering them aftercare, and information was provided about a programme to prepare children who are poised to leave the Home.

VIII. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28, 29 and 31)

A. Education, including vocational training and guidance (art. 28)

354. The Committee expressed concern that education is still not compulsory, that pre-primary education is available only through private institutions and that human rights education, including the Convention, is not currently part of the curricula. The Committee recommended that steps should be taken to expedite the promulgation of the draft law on free and compulsory education, to provide free pre-primary education, to include human rights education, including children's rights, in the curricula, particularly with regard to the development and respect for human rights, tolerance, and equality of the sexes and religious and ethnic minorities and to seek assistance from, among others, UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

355. On the subject of education not being compulsory, article 7, paragraph (a), of the Constitution provides: "The State shall sponsor sciences, literature and the arts. It shall promote scientific research and provide educational and cultural services to citizens. Education shall be compulsory and free of charge in the early stages, as specified by law."

356. As stated in article 6 of the Education Act: "Children who have reached the age of 6 by the start of the school year have the right to a basic education. This right shall be guaranteed by Bahrain and enforced by parents or guardians for at least nine years of schooling. The Minister shall issue such decisions as are necessary to regulate and ensure compliance on the part of parents and guardians. Children below compulsory school age may be admitted to primary schools which have places available, subject to the rules and regulations laid down in a decision of the Minister."

357. Article 8 of the same Act provides: "A fine of up to 100 dinars shall be imposed on a parent or guardian who fails to enrol a child of compulsory school age in school or who, for

no good reason, keeps a child from school for 10 consecutive days or 10 days in total during the school year.”

358. One of Bahrain’s best achievements, as far as compulsory education is concerned, was the passing of the Education Act No. 27 of 2005, which introduced compulsory education for children from the ages of 6 to 15. In keeping with a plan to enforce compulsory education, four ministerial decisions were issued in 2006, establishing rules and regulations on enforcement, together with a committee to monitor compliance and an oversight unit. Records on Bahraini children born in 1999 and 2000 were checked, in conjunction with the relevant bodies in Bahrain (Central Informatics Organization, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Development), and cases where students had not attended school for over 10 days were investigated. A system of forms for use in bringing legal action against parents responsible for depriving their children of an education was established.

359. With regard to the comment about human rights education not being part of the curricula, article 3 of the Education Act states: “The purpose of education is to provide the learner with civic, scientific, vocational, cultural and ethical training” and, in particular, “to develop awareness of human rights principles and include them in educational curricula”. The next few paragraphs will summarize the contents of textbooks which cover human rights subjects.

360. With regard to combining preschool education with primary education, article 5 of the Education Act No. 27 of 2005 provides: “The Ministry shall deploy its human and financial resources to achieve the aims of educational policy and the future goals of educational development. It shall carry out its responsibilities as follows.

- “The Ministry shall support and encourage the establishment of private kindergartens and shall oversee their educational and administrative performance.” This means that the Ministry must encourage the private sector to set up kindergartens.
- Under article 7 of the Constitution of Bahrain: “Education shall be compulsory and free of charge in the stages specified by law and as provided therein.” If this proposal were to be taken up, it would mean that, in accordance with this article, this stage would be compulsory and free of charge. The introduction of compulsory kindergarten education would have the following implications in law:
- Children could be enrolled in primary education only if they had already completed the kindergarten stage.
- A guardian who failed to enrol a child in kindergarten would face legal action, as compulsory school age would be the age of enrolment in kindergarten.
- If, however, the aim of merging the kindergarten stage with the primary education stages were to provide free education at this stage, then the adoption of this recommendation would prove very costly from a financial point of view. The Ministry of Education conducted a study in 2003 of the costs (salaries, employment costs and buildings) of building an estimated 152 kindergartens over the period from 2003 to 2008. The total estimated cost was BD 156,176,678, and this figure is set to rise steadily.
- Moreover, if kindergartens were to be integrated into primary education, staff with the right academic qualifications and training would be needed to teach and carry out administrative, coaching and other functions. In addition, teaching material and textbooks would be needed and would either have to be purchased or designed and printed locally. All this would take a lot of time and money and accordingly the overall cost of merging preschool education with primary education would increase.

- In addition, very young children and children with special needs require a considerable amount of care in the form of educational, social and health services, which means that the financial cost of meeting the specific demands of children at this critical age are high.

361. Bahrain has made great progress in developing the education system since it was instituted in 1919. Major qualitative and quantitative achievements of a very tangible nature have been scored in the light of the considerable support and unwavering interest which Bahrain's wise leaders have lent to education. As a result, the enrolment rate in primary education is now 100 per cent, the illiteracy rate among target groups has fallen to around 7.2 per cent and educational services are available to all citizens, at different stages of schooling, and in all parts of Bahrain. Moreover, the average number of students per class has fallen to 30 in the primary stage and 32 in the intermediate and secondary stages, while school drop-out and truancy rates have fallen below 1 per cent in basic education, as reflected in a general improvement in public examination results and in the improved quality of educational outcomes.

362. In a UNESCO report issued in 2006, Bahrain was rated first among the Arab States in terms of achieving the basic goals of the United Nations Education for All Programme. This crowned the efforts made by Bahrain to develop education. According to the report, Bahrain's top ranking in the Arab world was based on the "Education for All" development index, which measures overall progress in education in a given country against four "Education for All" goals. The Ministry of Education is planning a series of initiatives under the national project for the development of education and training. These initiatives will undoubtedly effect a qualitative shift in education at all levels, providing for the establishment of a training college for teachers and school heads, a technology college, an independent quality control authority and the development of technical and vocational secondary education and of university admission systems.

363. Bahrain's most significant achievement in education has been its success in providing education opportunities for all. Bahrain has managed to accommodate all children of primary school age and to bring about marked improvements in access to, and the development of, the other stages of education. Not only was it ranked in first position among the Arab States in the 2006 UNESCO report on education for all, it has managed to meet the target set out in the Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal education by 2015: the enrolment rate in primary education, the net enrolment ratio in primary education and the proportion of students who complete the fifth grade of primary school are all close to 100 per cent.

Illiteracy rates among children and adults

364. A mid-decade review by the Ministry of Education in 2007 of education for all in Bahrain over the period 2001 to 2006 generated data on illiteracy in Bahrain based on the 2001 general census. The figures indicate that the illiteracy rate among Bahrainis fell sharply over the 20 years from 1981 to 2001, as a result of educational efforts. These figures are shown in the next table.

Change in the rate of illiteracy among Bahraini nationals (1981–2001)

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of illiterate persons</i>			<i>Illiteracy rate</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
1981	17 709	33 486	51 195	25.2	48.1	36.6
1991	12 707	27 438	40 145	13.3	28.7	21.0
2001	9 684	21 885	31 569	7.5	17.0	12.3

Source: Bahrain, Central Informatics Organisation, Statistics Department.

365. An analysis of the main quantitative indicators on illiteracy eradication and reading ability among adults yielded the following results (provided below) on the percentage of the population which knows how to read and write.

366. As shown in the attached table,²⁴ 97.7 per cent of Bahraini females and males aged 15 and above knew how to read and write in the reference year. Of this figure, 92.5 per cent were males and 83 per cent were females.

367. The figures show that these percentages had increased sharply compared to 1991, when 79 per cent of the Bahraini population in the same group knew how to read and write.

368. There has clearly been a marked improvement in reading ability among adult women (over 15 years of age) compared to 1991 (from 71.3 per cent to 83 per cent). This improvement is the fruit of the considerable efforts made by the Government of Bahrain to eradicate illiteracy and to increase literacy rates as a matter of top priority under Bahrain's educational plans. Bahrain hopes that, with the implementation of the Compulsory Education Act, even higher rates of literacy will have been attained by the time the 2011 general census is conducted. This improvement is also a measure of the effectiveness of primary education and adult literacy programmes, which allow a high proportion of the population to acquire the skills needed to use the written language (and perform simple mathematical calculations) in their daily lives.

369. Taking account of the improvements that have been achieved in reading ability, the absolute figures — in the aforementioned table — on those aged 15 and over who did not know how to write in 2001, may be explained by an increase in the illiterate population, owing to a change in the demographic structure. Around 31,569 persons (aged 15 and over) did not know how to write – 69 per cent of them women. Although this figure is lower than it was in 1991, when the total number was 40,415 (68 per cent of them women), this problem remains a major concern for the Government. Consequently, plans and programmes need to be put in place to achieve the target by 2015. Based on previous indicators, this proportion was expected to fall steeply during the period from 2001 to 2007.

Reading ability among the population in the 10 to 44 age group

370. Bahrain has adopted a broader criterion to define the target group for literacy promotion than the standard international criterion: persons aged between 10 and 44 years, instead of between 15 and 44 years. There were 6,436 illiterate persons in this category, according to the data for 2001. The objective is to devise measures to get this group into regular education. To neglect them would only add to the ranks of the illiterate in the future.

371. As shown in the attached table,²⁵ in 2001 the illiteracy rate among Bahrainis in the target group (10 to 44 years old) was 1.4 per cent for males, 4 per cent for females and 2.7 per cent taking both sexes together. This compares with figures of 2.4 per cent for males, 10.5 per cent for females and 6.4 per cent for both sexes in 1991, the steepest fall in the illiteracy rate among Bahrainis.

372. In the 15 to 44 age group, the figures for 2001 show that the number of illiterate persons was 6,306 in total, of whom 1,523 were males and 4,783 were females. As a proportion of the population, this means an illiteracy rate of 2.2 per cent for both males and females together and rates of 1.56 per cent for males and 4.88 per cent for females.

²⁴ Education, Table 2.

²⁵ Education, Table 3, Figure 1.

373. The following table contains information on reading ability among 10 to 44 year-olds, disaggregated by nationality and sex, for 2001.

Reading ability among 15 to 24 year-olds

374. According to the data in the attached table, as of 2001, 99.3 per cent of Bahraini males and females aged between 15 and 24 knew how to read. This figure can be broken down into 99.2 per cent for males and 99.3 per cent for females. The data point to a slight improvement over the situation prevailing in 1991, when the proportion of the Bahraini population that knew how to read was 98.6 per cent.

375. This increase can be ascribed to higher levels of participation and attendance in primary education and the effectiveness of primary education in imparting basic reading and writing skills. The enrolment rate and net enrolment ratio and completion rate for primary education are reflected in the data on reading ability among those in this age group.

Registration and attendance in primary and secondary schools

376. Bahrain provides educational opportunities for all. It has managed to absorb all children of school age in primary education and to expand and develop other stages of education to a marked degree, as shown in the figures set out below.

Total and net enrolment ratios in primary education

377. The total enrolment rate in primary education refers to the number of new students in the first grade of primary school, regardless of their age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the official age for enrolment in primary school (6 years). This proportion was 105.2 per cent in the 2001/02 academic year (107.9 per cent for boys and 102.5 per cent for girls). In 2005/06, the figure was 108.8 per cent (109.5 per cent for boys and 108.2 per cent for girls). This increase can be ascribed to enrolment by some 5 year-olds in primary school, together with the absorption of all children of compulsory school age in primary education and the integration of children with special needs (including children with Down's syndrome and minor mental impairments).

378. The net enrolment ratio in primary education refers to the number of children of official primary school age (6 years) who are newly enrolled in the first grade of primary school, expressed as a percentage of the population of the same age. The ratio was 87.2 per cent in 2001/02 (89 per cent for boys and 85.3 per cent for girls), as compared to 90.7 per cent in 2005/06 (91.4 per cent for boys and 90.1 per cent for girls).

379. The enrolment rate for 2005/06 may seem low, but this is because of the number of 6 year-olds who were enrolled directly in the second grade of primary school, possibly because they had already attended kindergarten and had undergone some form of assessment. Hence, all children of 6 are in fact enrolled in school.

380. The indicators on boys and girls compared to the total and net enrolment ratios were at parity for the 2005/06 academic year and slightly in favour of boys in 2001/02. However, the overall gender balance in education is more or less even.

381. We shall include in the annex a table on the total and net enrolment ratios for primary education for the years 2001/02 and 2005/06.²⁶

²⁶ Education, Table 5, Figure 3.

Total and net enrolment ratios in basic education (primary and intermediate) and in secondary education

382. The total enrolment ratio refers to the total number of students enrolled in primary, intermediate or secondary education, regardless of their age. It is expressed as a percentage of the population of the official age for primary education (6–11 years), intermediate education (12–14 years) and secondary education (15–17 years).

383. The net enrolment ratio refers to the number of persons enrolled in primary, intermediate or secondary education in the respective age groups (6–11 years, 12–14 years and 15–17 years).

384. The total enrolment ratio in primary education in 2001/02 was 108.7 per cent (109.8 per cent for boys and 107.6 per cent for girls), compared to 107.8 per cent in 2005/06 (108.5 per cent for boys and 107.1 per cent for girls).

385. The increase in the total enrolment ratio in primary education reflects a high level of enrolment among students, whether or not of official school age. The higher total enrolment ratio is a measure of the effectiveness of the education system in Bahrain in absorbing all those of primary school age.

386. The net enrolment ratio in primary education was 99.7 per cent in 2001/02 (100 per cent for boys and 99.5 per cent for girls), as contrasted with a figure of 99.1 per cent in 2005/06 (99.2 per cent for boys and 99.1 per cent for girls).

387. The net enrolment ratio in primary education fell in 2005/06. This may be because a number of students enrolled in educational institutions (public or private, such as private programmes in Bahrain or abroad), meaning that this ratio is closer to the real figure.

388. With regard to total and net enrolment ratios for boys and girls, the indicators point to a situation of virtual parity, meaning that boys and girls have equal access to education.

389. We shall include in the annex a table on the total and net enrolment ratios for primary education for 2001/02 and 2005/06.²⁷

390. In intermediate education, the total enrolment ratio was 103.9 per cent in 2001/02 (102.2 per cent for boys and 105.8 per cent for girls), as against 103.1 per cent in 2005/06 (101.8 per cent for boys and 104.5 per cent for girls).

391. The net enrolment ratio in intermediate education was 88.1 per cent in 2001/02 (86 per cent for boys and 90.2 per cent for girls), as contrasted with 88.3 per cent in 2005/06 (85.6 per cent for boys and 91.2 per cent for girls). The figures on the total and net enrolment ratios in intermediate education for boys and girls show a slight bias in favour of girls.

392. We shall include in the annex a table on the total and net enrolment ratios in intermediate education for the years 2001/02 and 2005/06.²⁸

393. The total enrolment ratio in secondary education was 89.7 per cent in 2001/02 (83.4 per cent for males and 96.3 per cent for females), as against 99.5 per cent in 2005/06 (96 per cent for males and 103.3 per cent for females).

394. The net enrolment ratio in secondary education was 73.4 per cent in 2001/02 (67.4 per cent for males and 79.7 per cent for females), as compared with 83.2 per cent in 2005/06 (78.5 per cent for males and 88.1 per cent for females).

²⁷ Education, Table 6, Figure 4.

²⁸ Education, Table 7, Figure 5.

395. The total and net enrolment ratios for both sexes in secondary education show that there is a slight bias in favour of sexes.

396. We shall include in the annex a table on the total and net enrolment ratios in secondary education for the years 2001/02 and 2005/06.²⁹

Total enrolment ratio in technical and vocational education and training

397. Technical and vocational education and training in Bahrain consist of a series of technical and practical streams in the secondary education stage only (grades 10 to 12), namely: the commercial stream; the industrial stream (boys only); vocational training (boys only); and the textiles stream (girls only).

398. Some 52 per cent of students were enrolled in these streams in 2005/06 (65 per cent for boys and 40 per cent for girls), as compared with 53 per cent in 2001/02 (67 per cent for boys and 40 per cent for girls). These figures are quite close to one another and show the interest that students take in applied learning and their wish to acquire technical and vocational skills in their respective areas of specialization.

399. We shall include in the annex a table on the changes in the number of students in secondary education and the percentage in technical and vocational education in 2001/02 and 2005/06.³⁰

Education completion rates and drop-out rates in primary and secondary education

Proportion of students repeating a class in basic education (primary and intermediate education), by grade

400. As shown in the annexed table,³¹ somewhere between 2 and 4 per cent of students in primary education repeated their year in 2005/06, whereas from 3 to 5 per cent of students did so in 2001/02. This means that the success rate has improved at this stage. The repeat rate for girls was much lower than for boys, particularly after the second grade.

401. As for intermediate education, between 7 and 11 per cent of students repeated in 2001/02. This proportion had fallen steeply by 2005/06, reaching between 2 and 4 per cent. The repeat rate is conspicuously high in the ninth grade, which marks the end of intermediate education. The repeat rate among girls is also much lower at this stage, especially in the third grade of intermediate school, as shown in the annexed table.³²

Promotion rate

402. The promotion rate refers to students who successfully complete a grade and move on to the next one the following year. The annexed table shows that the promotion rate for all grades in primary education was high — around 97 to 98 per cent — in 2005/06. The promotion rate was higher among girls than boys, on account of the repeat rate referred to here above.³³

403. As for intermediate education, the promotion rate ranged from 89 to 93 per cent in 2001/02, rising to between 91 and 96 per cent in 2005/06. There was a noticeable decrease

²⁹ Education, Table 8, Figure 6.

³⁰ Education, Table 9.

³¹ Education, Table 10.

³² Education, Table 11.

³³ Education, Table 12.

in this figure in the ninth grade — the final year of intermediate education — and the promotion rate was higher among girls than boys, as shown in the annexed table.³⁴

Drop out rate

404. The drop-out rate refers to the number of students who abandon their studies without completing a grade in a given year. Drop-out rates in Government schools are very low at the primary stage — less than 0.2 per cent of boys and girls — and are not more than 1 per cent in the intermediate stage.³⁵

Retention rate up to the sixth grade (percentage of students who actually reach the sixth grade as a proportion of the entire student cohort)

405. The retention rate up to the sixth grade of primary education has remained high. Indeed, it is very high, a measure of the quality of education in Bahrain. As shown in the annexed table, the drop-out rate before the sixth grade is very low.³⁶

Rate of transfer to intermediate and secondary education

406. As shown in the annexed table,³⁷ the rate of transfer from primary to intermediate and from intermediate to secondary education remains high, an indicator of the standard that education in Bahrain has reached and of the ability of the system to absorb all those who transfer to the next stage of education. The rate of transfer from primary to intermediate education was 96.2 per cent in 2001/02, rising to 98.3 per cent by 2005/06. Likewise, the rate of transfer from intermediate to secondary education rose from 88.5 to 91 per cent over the same timespan.

Student/teacher ratio

407. This ratio refers to the average number of students per teacher. The average had fallen in all Government schools to 12 by 2005/06, as against 15 in 2001/02, as shown in the attached table.³⁸

408. In primary schools, the student/teacher ratio was 13 in 2005/06, whereas it was 18 in 2001/02. This is clearly shown in the same table. Moreover, the higher the educational stage, the lower the student/teacher ratio.

Proportion of children enrolled in informal education

409. According to the data in the attached table,³⁹ the largest number of students are enrolled in literacy and adult education programmes in the reinforcement stage, due to enrolment by students who previously were excluded from, or dropped out of, intermediate education. The programmes give them the opportunity to return to regular education, once they have successfully passed this stage.

410. The table also shows the link between literacy and adult education programmes and regular education programmes and how they complement each other. Public and private education establishments in Bahrain offer places to all students in primary education and

³⁴ Education, Table 13.

³⁵ Education, Tables 13 and 15.

³⁶ Education, Table 16, Figure 7.

³⁷ Education, Table 17.

³⁸ Education, Table 18.

³⁹ Education, Table 19.

children continue their studies up to the end of the sixth grade of primary school. Hence, they will know how to read, write and do calculus.

411. As far as complementarity is concerned, children not attending primary school — and they are all girls — are admitted to adult education centres so that they can be transferred, after completing the literacy stage, to the primary stage of regular education. The idea is to prevent them from falling into illiteracy and becoming illiterate adults. Adolescents not attending regular schools are allowed to study in classes set up at morning primary schools. The heads and administrators of these schools have the authority to promote students to a higher grade, provided that the students spend at least four years in primary education. Adults forced by circumstances to abandon their studies when they were of school age can enrol in the same grade which they left and take tests to determine their level of educational attainment.

412. In terms of integration and coordination between regular education and adult education, students who are excluded from primary school because of repeated truancy can also enrol in literacy programmes in the grade corresponding to the one which they abandoned. Under the adult education system, specific measures are taken to facilitate and encourage the admission of students who pass the follow-up stage in the reinforcement stage and enrol students from the third (intermediate) cycle who drop out of or are excluded from school in this stage. These students are given an intermediate school certificate, which allows them to pursue a secondary education by one of two means: enrolling in regular secondary education, provided that they are not over 23 years of age, and pursuing home-based study, where the learner will attend evening classes at a secondary school.

Percentage of children enrolled in preschool education

413. In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the number of children enrolled in early childhood programmes in Bahrain. In 2001/02, the total enrolment ratio in such programmes was 44.7 per cent; by 2005/06, it had reached 50 per cent. The net enrolment ratio in early childhood programmes was 41.6 per cent in 2001/02 and 46.5 per cent in 2005/06 (see attached table⁴⁰). As the figures in the table show, there is a bias in favour of boys in the total and net enrolment ratios.

B. Aims of education (art. 29)/quality of education

Rights of the child in regard to the aims of education and school textbooks

Aims of education: awareness of human rights principles and their inclusion in educational curricula

Aims of primary education

414. The aims of primary education are derived from the principles of education and basically consist in ensuring the integrated mental, physical, spiritual, moral and social development of the child in a context where the right to learn and to receive an education is balanced with the right to enjoy one's childhood. These aims are pursued based on the realization of the following general objectives:

- Developing children's knowledge of their Islamic faith; strengthening their adherence to Islam and their belief in the values, principles and teachings of Islam

⁴⁰ Education, Table 20, Figure 8.

and in their impact on the structure of society and on the shaping of children's identity

- Developing children's pride in the language of classical Arabic and their appreciation of its status as a symbol of their Arab identity and a tool for thought and self-expression
- Boosting children's sense of pride in and loyalty to Bahrain; improving their awareness of their rights and their duties towards the nation and strengthening their pride in its accomplishments in different domains
- Raising children's awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and its beauty, protecting it from all forms of degradation and pollution and developing it
- Raising children's awareness of the history and the noble civilization and heritage of the Arab and Islamic community and improving their understanding of the contemporary issues which affect it
- Developing children's linguistic, mathematical, logical thinking and critical thinking skills so as to enable them to use these skills in daily life
- Teaching children how to use information and communications technology in a creative and mindful manner
- Developing children's capacity to think for themselves, using various strategies that will help them understand the issues or problems that they face and to look for solutions
- Developing children's self-knowledge and self-understanding in order to help build their self-esteem and foster their personal and social development, teaching them how to adapt to society and to achieve emotional balance and to guiding their behaviour consistent with their own needs and those of their families and communities
- Developing children's ability to take responsibility for their own health and personal safety, and encouraging them to practise sports and healthy activities as a way of life
- Developing children's ability to express their feelings and ideas and to communicate with and demonstrate respect for others
- Raising children's awareness of the importance of contributing to the development and enrichment of human knowledge, for the sake of mankind and in keeping with the principle of coexistence
- Developing children's skills in self-directed learning and their commitment to life-long learning as a means of achieving their goals
- Teaching children basic English language skills, as a tool for communication and establishing contact with foreign cultures
- Developing children's aesthetic sensibilities and their capacity for artistic expression in all its forms
- Developing children's sense of initiative and desire to discover, research and explore the world in an enjoyable manner, thereby creating a spirit of inventiveness and helping to shape independent personalities
- Teaching children planning and time management skills, together with techniques for balancing free time and work and for enjoying and making good use of their free time to pursue their interests and develop their talents

- Teaching children how to take the right decisions, in keeping with Islamic precepts and moral values, when faced with opportunities, issues and problems
- Inculcating the values of cooperation and constructive participation in group activities, together with solidarity, a belief in volunteering and the need to take the initiative and accept responsibility in order to achieve one's goals
- Cultivating students' skills and habits in the areas of work production and know-how; teaching students appropriate scientific and technical knowledge and developing their appreciation of the value of work in the lives of people and the community
- Enabling persons with special needs (the exceptionally gifted, those with learning difficulties, slow learners and children with Down's syndrome) to achieve their full potential, taking account of their mental, physical, spiritual and social resources and capacities, by integrating them into the school education process

415. Some additional educational aims might be included among children's rights, namely:

- Helping individuals to achieve spiritual, physical, mental and social growth, to the maximum extent that their capacities allow, bearing in mind individual differences; fostering the creative skills of gifted persons; and providing growth opportunities for those with special needs, to the extent that their capacities allow
- Developing the capacity of individuals to think scientifically and exercise sound judgement
- Enabling individuals to contribute to and benefit from the fruits of scientific and technological progress and acknowledging the importance of their independence and humanity and of openness to other cultures and of learning from their experiences

Aims of intermediate education

416. The aims of intermediate education include the following:

- Promoting awareness of the child's rights and duties; providing children with the training they need to play their role as balanced and aware citizens
- Strengthening children's ties to their families in order to create balanced family relationships
- Teaching children the value of dialogue and respect for the rules of coexistence with a group at school and elsewhere
- Deepening children's awareness of what it means to be an upstanding and balanced citizen and what it implies and demands both at the domestic and the international levels
- Increasing children's understanding of the principles of coexistence and the rules of mutual respect

Aims of secondary education

417. The aims of secondary education include:

- Developing the person from a holistic perspective, which embraces physical, ethical, mental, social, moral and spiritual growth, in order to enable him or her to achieve self-actualization and contribute to social progress

- Providing students with skills and a positive outlook on life so that they can live a decent life, with better opportunities in the areas of knowledge and work
- Enabling students to understand democratic principles, what they entail and how they should be incorporated into their attitudes and behaviour in the family and in community life
- Familiarizing students with rights and duties and teaching them to uphold the values of freedom, tolerance and respect for the ideas of others and to reject fanaticism and obscurantism

Educational aims in school textbooks

418. Students are taught about the concepts and values which underpin the children's rights enumerated in the Bahraini Constitution, domestic law and international conventions and covenants.

- Emphasis is laid on the rights of children in time of war, as provided for in international humanitarian law
- Action is taken to raise awareness of children's rights and duties and the efforts taken by the State in this domain

Contents of school textbooks

419. The annex contains statistical information on basic education textbooks for the subjects of social and civic education and sciences, in which children's rights are discussed, in addition to information on a family education syllabus for basic and secondary education and material on children's rights in the school curricula.⁴¹

Challenges

- Dealing with population growth and its impact on education
- Increasing the education budget to keep pace with rapidly evolving developments
- Training qualified staff to keep up with changes in regard to the growing use of an information technology strategy
- Focusing on quality in all stages of education, particularly in the early years of development, which are the foundation on which the system rests
- Developing educational curricula which take account of students' individual differences, different ways of learning, and differing developmental patterns among students in all stages of education, and eschewing rigid, traditional teaching methods based on rote learning and unidirectional learning, as opposed to practice and experimentation
- Offering psychological, educational and social guidance from the early stages of education and providing skilled staff to help students resolve their psychological and family problems
- Integrating students in special categories who suffer from learning difficulties and sensory or motor disabilities and paying greater attention to gifted students, using special methods of discovery and care; enacting legislation to provide for these

⁴¹ Contents of school textbooks.

students as a matter of rights, and supplying specialist staff in all areas relevant to persons in special categories

- Training teachers who are model educators to make qualitative improvements in the context of rapidly evolving changes
- The need for an integrated approach to adolescent reproductive health

Voices of children – education*

- Do academic curricula respond to the needs and interest of students?
- How far do academic curricula reflect real life issues?
- What are the main challenges that you face as students?

Comments

- The curricula in Government schools are superficial, except for the partial changes introduced to secondary school curricula (bringing the streams together), which went some way to meeting the needs of students.
- Academic curricula and lectures/talks are based on theory and ignore the practical side, focusing instead on rote learning and unidirectional instruction.
- Students are given little encouragement and are taught few social skills. In addition, the subjects and equipment in schools are limited, compared to those in European States where the emphasis is placed on developing students and training them to become upstanding and active members of society.
- The Government schools system does not provide good opportunities for developing a person's creativity and talents.
- Student councils in Government schools are merely there for the sake of appearances; no importance is given to their substantive function or the direction they take in terms of responding to the aims and aspirations of students themselves.
- Secondary school students are given very limited advice and guidance to prepare them for university and working life.
- The Ministry of Education focuses on academic education. It does not accord much importance to vocational and technical education. Hence, most of its educational outputs do not meet the needs of the labour market.
- The provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are not included in curricula in the way that they should be.

C. Rest, leisure, recreation and cultural activities (art. 31)

420. This subject is discussed in some detail in paragraphs 284 to 289 of the initial report, where information is provided on sports education, activities for scouts and girl guides, advisory services, local courses, meetings, special education and care for students with special needs and for outstanding and gifted students.

* Proceedings of a consultative meeting on children's issues held with children in Bahrain in March 2008.

421. With regard to leisure activities, we should add that various schools have adopted an extended-school-day scheme involving a new study plan for the first and second cycles of education (seven classes a day) broken down into classroom periods; students are given time for cultural and artistic activities.

422. The school day plan includes slots for practical and sports activities and there are breaks to provide time for competitions and other events. Some schools have introduced an educational development project – five girls' schools and five boys' schools (seven classroom periods a day). These are highly effective in improving students' educational performance, enriching their experience in different fields of knowledge, developing their values and modes of behaviour and preparing them to practise their hobbies and develop their creative capacities.

423. It was on this basis that the Ministry of Education, in the context of the basic education development project, adopted a two-part advanced study plan for school programmes, in which students may carry out a variety of activities.

424. The school programmes consist in a series of extracurricular activities which, in terms of their content and the strategy for implementation, are entirely separate from classroom teaching.

425. These programmes were set up under a study plan for the basic education stage in order to achieve several objectives in the context of developing the personality of students in a holistic manner, preparing them for life and training them to play their role in building up their community and serving their country.

Aims of school programmes

- Enriching the educational experience of students based on the knowledge, concepts, values and attitudes which they learn from the subjects that they study, so as to realize the aims of these subjects and to enhance students' skills
- Building the capacity of students to deal with various sources of knowledge (other than textbooks), using research, inquiry and problem-solving techniques to develop their capacity for self-directed learnings
- Teaching students how to analyse, check, gather, categorize, organize and present information effectively
- Teaching students how to turn theoretical information into practical knowledge, based on experimentation, thus helping to integrate what they learn and to ensure that training has a dynamic impact
- Encouraging students to participate in group activities and to cooperate with others and accept their views, thereby giving them a chance to exchange experiences and to strengthen their social bonds with each other
- Developing students' self-confidence and ability to take responsibility and rely on themselves
- Developing students' psychological and intellectual capacities so as to enable them to build on their critical, analytical and aesthetic faculties
- Encouraging students to be themselves, to pursue their own interests and to use their creative energies
- Promoting the values of productive work, such as proper time management and utilization, accuracy orderliness and excellence

- Creating a school environment which is attractive and pleasing; creating an atmosphere where students are free to think and are given a sense of fun, enjoyment and liberty
- Instructing students on the proper use of environmental raw materials and ecosources and on recycling
- Providing opportunities for students to practise and apply scientific thinking skills and to follow scientific method

426. The school programmes consist in the following: a literature programme; a religious programme; a social programme; a scientific programme; a mathematics programme; a health and safety programme; a family programme; an information and communications programme; and a sports programme.

427. Aims

(a) Aims of primary education

- Enabling students to make good use of their leisure time by encouraging them to take up voluntary social work and cultural, scientific and sports activities and to enjoy the arts and literature

(b) Aims of intermediate education

- Organizing a variety of practical activities that will help to ensure students' integrated physical, mental and aesthetic development
- Cultivating students' capacity to express themselves and to communicate the beauty of the world around them, using inputs and tools provided by the environment

428. In secondary education, great emphasis is laid on cultural and artistic activities for children, which are offered through the following:

- Creativity centres and development projects: Projects and programmes are run for students, consisting in workshops and activities in which practical mechanisms tailored to students' interests and wishes are used. Special certificates are issued for some of these programmes. Examples of projects include: school theatre; popular culture; microprojects; GLOBE, Trade Quest and i-EARN.
- Learning sources: Support is provided for no fewer than 90 mandatory classes for secondary school students, based on providing a learning environment with various sources of information in which the learner can profit from multiple modes of learning and opportunities for self-directed learning, and students' research and investigative skills are enhanced. New methods for designing, developing and evaluating educational subject matter are applied.
- Academic advice and careers counselling system: Support is provided for no fewer than 90 mandatory classes for secondary school students, who receive assistance with decisions on academic matters and careers, tailored to their talents, capacities and interests. Any problems and difficulties which students may face at school are addressed.

429. Cultural and artistic activities:

- Games of different kinds; sports events; scouting groups, community-based charities; reading; hobbies such as stamp collecting, handicrafts and tending the school garden; visits to art exhibitions; keeping up with cultural and theatrical events; drawing, poetry and writing competitions; book-reading competitions;

article-writing competitions; and science competitions (Olympia, mathematics and science)

Training programmes and workshops for those involved in children's issues⁴²

430. There is constant coordination with the Curricula and Training Department on the design of educational workshops to train teachers and students about children's rights. Most of these workshops focus on cross-cutting themes pertaining to the curricula, such as Islamic education, civics, life skills and family education. The topics covered include children's health, nutrition and clothing; dealing with daily expenditure; managing one's own affairs; and conduct and morals. Schools also initiate and run events and activities for children, involving:

- Participation in domestic and foreign education competitions which cultivate in children a spirit of fair competition and a willingness to take responsibility and make decisions
- Participation in national forums and events which develop children's love of, and allegiance to, the nation
- Preparation and organization of awareness and information seminars and talks to provide children with guidance and advice on the dangers of smoking, drug-taking and other practices
- Activities run by certain kindergartens pertaining to the social, health and psychological dimensions of children's rights⁴³

Student committees

431. All 28 secondary schools have an active student committee, as do other Government and private schools. There are a total of 88 student committees in the following education districts.

<i>Education district</i>	<i>No. of schools with student committees</i>
1/boys	11
2/boys	14
3/boys	14
1/girls	15
2/girls	17
3/girls	17

Centre for Gifted Students

432. The Centre for Gifted Students was officially opened on Thursday 11 December 2007. Its philosophy is consistent with Bahrain's educational policy, which stresses the citizen's right to a proper and integrated education that will provide for his or her physical, mental, social, moral and psychological development. The vision behind the Centre is that it should function as a specialized institution, cultivating the creative talents of gifted students in Bahrain, delivering a top-rate education and building on students' capacities in the areas of leadership, scientific research and innovative thinking so as to prepare them to participate more effectively in nation-building and be able to meet challenges. The Centre

⁴² Table on main programmes and training workshops for those involved in children's issues in 2007.

⁴³ See annex for information on certain activities of kindergartens.

also seeks to equip students with the skills that they need to be competitive in the Gulf region, the Arab world and the wider world. As of 2008, 2,923 students were enrolled in the Centre, where they were studying a full range of subjects, including drawing, written expression, public speaking, photography, computing, music and other creative arts.

Children's and youth clubs⁴⁴

433. Under article 7 (a) of the Constitution, the State is required to provide cultural services, while, under article 5 (a) of the Constitution, it is required to protect children and young persons, shielding them from moral, physical and spiritual neglect. This is in addition to all the principles contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Bahrain ratified without any reservations in 1992. Under article 31 of the Convention, children are entitled to rest and leisure, to play games and engage in recreational activities suitable for their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Since assuming responsibility for children's issues, the Ministry of Social Development has stepped up its efforts to provide opportunities for a larger number of children to make use of their leisure time and pursue activities all year long, with a particular focus on the summer period.

434. Over the 2006–2007 biennium, the Ministry, through the Family and Child Development Department, ran a series of summer activities and programmes, including a "Tech Kids" project in 2006, which was offered at all social centres and taken up by some 296 children. In 2007, the Ministry was able to achieve even greater success in this area. Around 29 summer programmes were run, with 3,041 children throughout Bahrain taking part. One of the most important programmes was the "Creative Juniors" programme. Run in conjunction with the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) in summer 2007, at a cost of BD 150,000, the programme was a great success in terms of developing the talents, innovative and creative abilities of some 500 children.

435. The success of these programmes prompted the Ministry to continue to offer these programmes all year round in the evenings. The Ministry has set up children's and youth clubs, which receive school children during weekdays in all social centres. The centres have special rooms for these clubs. Moreover, children's activities and camps are organized on all kinds of occasions. A full report on all the Ministry's achievements in this domain will be attached.

436. For summer 2008, the Ministry prepared the launch of a qualitative/quantitative initiative involving a huge array of summer programmes and activities without precedent in Bahrain, together with an active community partnership initiative. As a result, a comprehensive implementation plan for summer 1998 was adopted, with a view to developing children's creative spirit and communication skills, helping them to invest their energies and make the best use of their free time. In this way, the right to enjoyment, leisure and culture was ensured for most children, as these are factors which help with children's personal development and the development of society as a whole.

437. Activities run during summer 2008 included around 47 different programmes targeted at boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 18. A budget of around BD 90,000 was allocated and some 7,000 children from all the governorates of Bahrain took part.

438. Programmes and activities run by children's and youth clubs included the "Mad Science" programme, the first of its kind to be run in Bahrain in cooperation with the Mad Science corporation, an institution that has adopted a practical strategy for presenting science to children in a fun and amusing way. In addition, the second stage of the "Creative

⁴⁴ Annex to the report and statistics — Ministry of Social Development — Guides to summer activities and programmes and two compact discs with information on children's and youth clubs.

Juniors” project was launched; this is level 2 of the project which was introduced in 2007. A number of sports programmes were introduced for the first time in social centres, such as tae kwon do and swimming for boys and girls. The “I am the theatre” project was launched jointly by the Ministry and a civil society organization called “Visions of artistic production”, at a cost of BD 50,000. It is one of the main cultural and educational outlets for shaping children’s personal skills and behaviour. Its purpose is to create a pool of acting talent among children from across Bahrain and to select and train children with a view to developing their talents. There are also several special programmes run by children’s and youth clubs, such as origami courses, puppet theatre, a programme on the production of educational materials, a course on creative uses of cork, various computing, graphic arts, web design, drawing and colouring programmes, in addition to hairdressing, makeup and courses on how to make accessories. All these courses and activities are offered free of charge to all children living in Bahrain without any distinction.

439. The Ministry of Social Development is committed to establishing specialized institutes of learning for children in order to: produce a generation of creative young persons who are capable of innovating; to make young people aware of scientific, technological and cultural concepts and develop their sensory and mental capacities and interest in science and technology; to build on the talents of the young and give young people a sense of being connected to their environment. Accordingly, a building was purchased for a science centre, which should serve as a place in which children can practise their hobbies and give free rein to their vital intellectual and artistic energies, using the centre’s wide range of facilities, which will be designed specifically to take account of children’s interests and preferences. An international company specializing in the construction and management of science centres and cities is working with the Ministry on the installation of state-of-the-art scientific and technological equipment for the management of the project, under the Ministry’s plan to employ the best international expertise in this domain. The total cost of the project is BD 3.5 million.

440. The Ministry is in the process of establishing a children’s and youth club in East Rifa` park, in cooperation with the municipality of the central district. The club will occupy an area of around 9,000 m² and will be the largest children’s club, comprising science, culture, recreation and sports halls. The club will be open every morning and evening of the week, including at weekends and in the holidays.

Civil society organizations in Bahrain that deal with children’s issues

441. Some 32 civil society organizations deal with children’s issues in Bahrain, namely: the Bahrain Young Ladies’ Association; the Children and Mother’s Welfare Society; the Awal Women’s Association; the Riffa Cultural Charity Society; the International Women’s Association; the Fatat al-Rif Association; the Bahrain Women’s Association; the Association of Bahraini Women; the Madinat Hamad Women’s Society; the Bahrain Women’s Development Society; the Association of Women for Al-Quds; Muharraq Women’s Association; Contemporary Women’s Association; Barbar Women’s Association; the “New Dawn” Women’s Association; the Bahraini Women’s Union Association; the Bahrain Youth Association; the Bahrain Democratic Youth Society; the Children and Youth of the Future Society; the Bahraini Youth Forum Society; the Bahrain Youth Association; the Youth Welfare Association; the Youth and Environment Society; the Young Businessmen’s Association; the Young Entrepreneurs’ Association; the Friends of Bahraini Youth Association; Al-Amal Special Education Institute; Al-Husseini Society for Islamic Art; Al-Sanabil orphanage; the governing board of the Child Welfare Home; the Down’s Syndrome Association; and the Bahrain Society for Children with Behavioral and Communication Difficulties. What follows is an outline of some achievements.

442. The Youth and Environment Society has run various activities, including an ecotourism programme (young environmentalists) to develop children's environmental awareness and understanding of the importance of ecotourism, to train them in report writing and to sensitize them to the importance of environmental and nature conservation. On 1 March 2002, at Nadi Sar, and from 5 to 8 February 2003, the Society held the first children's conference to teach children life skills based on the observation of environmental issues and problems. The Society organized a visit to the nature reserves on the Hawar islands from 1 to 2 August 2004 to introduce children to nature reserves. It held a seminar on children and the environment to encourage children to take part in environmental programmes and to train them how to give talks on the environment. On 3 June 2008, the Society held a spring camp to raise children's awareness of environmental conservation issues and to allow them to exchange information about experiences in that domain. The camp activities were targeted at children between the ages of 9 and 16.

443. Al-Amal Special Education Institute organized several events, including one to mark Arab Children's Day on 20 November 2007. The purpose was to inform all students at the Institute about Arab Children's Day. The Institute celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, on 1 May 2007, to raise awareness among the public of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. On 25 January 2008, it set up a camp in the Emirate of Sharjah. Three female students from the Institute, escorted by an attendant, took part as a way of developing the social side of their lives. The Institute took part in the flower and garden show held from 22 to 24 February 2008 in order to allow students from the vocational education department to show the public what they were capable of doing. The Institute took part in a local disabled sports competition held on 28 March 2008, with 33 students participating. The event is designed to develop students' physical and social capacities. The Institute also organized a health awareness week for students on nutrition and dental care. From 20 to 24 April 2008, it ran a special reading week to draw attention to the importance of reading in our daily lives. Moreover, it held events on 28 to 30 April 2008 to mark the International Day for Deaf Children and raise awareness of auditory disabilities. These programmes were fully successful.

444. The "New Dawn" Women's Association held a show called "You live to give(1)!" on 26 June 2005, which was highly successful. The purpose was to prepare children for an active summer and to develop their artistic potential. A second show with the same name was held a year later with the aim of involving children in the organization and running of fun activities. A third event, a food for skills development festival, was held on 29 December 2007. These events are designed for all ages and groups.

445. The most important events run by the Riffa Cultural Charity Society are summer drawing and Koran memorization programmes, a children's storytelling day and a charity day which involves all kinds of games and competitions. The Society organizes the "Charity Bowl" event and annual competitions in the occasion of the "Qarqa'un" festival. These events were run from July to December 2007 for girls and boys aged between 5 and 15 years. The main recommendations emanating from these programmes point to the need for support to keep the activities going.

446. The Children and Mother's Welfare Society has organized numerous events, including a seminar on friendship and how to choose a suitable friend, which was held on 27 October 2007, and a programme on 3 February 2007 to teach children how to protect themselves from sexual abuse. These two events were targeted at 5 to 6 year-olds. The Society held an event on 5 October 2007 for 3 to 5 year-olds on the child's right to health care.

447. The "Be-Free" Center has organized many activities for children, including a children's rights programme launched in partnership with UNICEF. It has also produced a teacher's manual on educating children about their rights. The manual was tested on a

group of children. It was designed to teach them about their fundamental rights and their duties towards others and to present them with the information on their rights in a fun and enjoyable manner. Some 150 children took part in the programme and the main recommendations that were made concerned the need to add children's rights to the civics curriculum for children. The Center has run workshops, entitled "I am a clever, strong and safe child", for around 5,000 boys and girls, offering them training on how to protect themselves from abuse. A key recommendation made in this regard is that such training should be included in academic curricula. The Center ran a campaign entitled "Looking for Fatima", concerning a famous case of a girl of 11 years old who disappeared from home after being subjected to constant abuse by her father and his wife. The "Be Free" programme set up the campaign and appealed to the Prime Minister to act swiftly to take up the case and continue the hunt for the girl. His Majesty the King also intervened. The purpose of the campaign was to raise awareness of the fact that child protection is a collective social responsibility. The campaign on the impact of child abuse was run from April 2002 to 2004 in the local and international newspapers and on television and the radio. The recommendations made in this regard include the following: specialized training should be provided to those who work with children, for example, teachers, on how to deal with child victims of abuse; swift action should be taken to deal with child abuse and cases of children who disappear; and the laws on child protection should be developed. The Center has run basic life skills workshops for children on, among others, the topics of self-confidence, empathy, respect and taking responsibility. Some 4,000 boys and girls have attended the workshops and the most important result has been the inclusion of basic life skills in study curricula. The Center has also held workshops for adolescents on matters such as how to heal a toxic relationship, critical thinking, protection from Internet misuse, decision-making, solutions to protect adolescents from abuse in unhealthy relationships or from emotional blackmail, and meeting the challenges posed by globalization.

448. These programmes have been run in various centres, including governmental and non-governmental schools, community centres, religious community centres and cultural clubs. The main results obtained are found in the response that programmes for adolescents provide to the needs and challenges facing adolescents. In addition, seminars and workshops have been organized for parents on bridging the communication gap between parents and children, raising parents' awareness of their role in protecting their children from abuse, devising alternative methods of disciplining children and adolescents and dealing with the challenges of globalization and the media. Over 7,000 parents have been targeted in these events. In December 2004, with support from Batelco, the Center set up a hotline to assist parents whose children have been subjected to abuse and inform them of how to protect their children from abuse. The Center furthermore launched the first-ever interactive website for children in Arabic and English to help protect children from abuse. The launch was conducted with the support of the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson. The aim is to help protect children from abuse and from misuse of the Internet, building up their confidence in themselves and in their abilities. For five years, the Center has taken part in discussions on a programme called "The Family" which is broadcast on Radio Bahrain. The discussions focus on social issues affecting children, the root causes of these issues, prevention, child-rearing, teaching basic life skills, and awareness of the impact of child-rearing on the child's personality. Over the period 2002–2008, the Center took part in Gulf, Arab and international radio programmes (Sharjah Radio, BBC Arabic, Radio Monte Carlo), disseminating information about the groundbreaking work that Bahrain has done in protecting children from abuse and neglect and discussing children's issues and child protection. Over the same period, the Center took part in television interviews and programmes on Bahraini television and satellite channels such as the Abu Dhabi Channel and Al-Jazeera Children's Channel, among others, helping to raise awareness at home and in the Arab world about the issues involved in protecting children from abuse.

449. In June 2007, the Center launched a programme to protect children with special needs in the following categories from abuse: children with minor mental disabilities; profoundly deaf children; and children with physical disabilities. More than 200 children participated in the programme. A workshop was held to educate parents about how to help protect children with disabilities from abuse and ill-treatment. Over 330 parents took part. In 2007 a guide for children with visual impairments on ways to protect themselves from abuse was printed in Braille. In November 2004, some 5,000 copies were distributed of a children's publication entitled "I am a smart, strong and safe child", which focuses on the skills children need to protect themselves from abuse. A children's story called "Nasser's courage" was published in March 2008 to make children aware of their rights and help protect them from abuse. The Center marks international events which have some bearing on children. It has organized therapy sessions to help abused children or adults who were abused as children overcome their pain and begin the recovery process. The Center receives electronic mail messages via its website; this service has been running since 2002 and between 300 and 350 messages are received every month.

450. The Center works in partnership with governmental institutions such as schools, police stations and community centres. The main results achieved have been that the partnerships have endured and grown in strength. The Center offers advice to specialized agencies on child protection and the development of children's personalities. Under a strategic plan, specialized training is offered to professionals who work directly or indirectly with children in order to help institutions to provide for the protection of children and the development of their personalities and also to enable those who work with children to become more skilled in detecting and dealing with abuse and in developing children's personality and emotional intelligence under the programmes run by these institutions.

451. The Information Center for Women and Children has organized numerous events, including the presentation of the Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman bin Mohammed Al Khalifa VI Award to encourage Bahraini and Arab researchers to write about children's issues and to produce new studies and research on children, which will add to the holdings of Bahraini and Arab libraries. The Center instituted a children's library project to provide resources to hone children's skills. Children are encouraged to frequent the library and use its services, and the idea of continuous learning is promoted among children, boys and girls. The library serves the 7 to 15 age group. The winning entries for the research award will be announced in early 2009.

452. The Children and Youth of the Future Society ran numerous activities from 2003 to 2007, including a project called "Our children and world civilizations", which it ran as part of its summer programme in order to make children aware of other civilizations and cultures by paying visits to the embassies of Arab and foreign States in Bahrain. A children's theatrical performance, "Kalilah and Dimnah", was presented by the Society in the context of the first children's festival of culture and the arts on the stage of the Salman Cultural Centre. The Society also held the "Healthy children of the future" camp on World Health Day to sensitize children to health issues in daily life, such as nutrition, sports and so on. The children enrolled in a comprehensive, day-long programme, comprising mini-workshops and educational games. The Society organized a charity show on the occasion of Arab Children's Day; most of the proceeds went to children in Iraq and Palestine. A show called "We will not forget you" was held in the Heritage Village and the society participated in a project called "Make a child happy" which was run by the Mugata Charity Fund to collect new clothes and toys for needy children and present them to them on the occasion of Id al-Fitr. The Society took part in a 10-day book fair at the Exhibition Centre, holding various competitions to encourage children to read, engaging them in discussions and informing them of the Society's programmes. Lastly, a visit was paid to the children's ward at the Salmaniya Medical Complex, one of three annual visits which Society members pay on the occasion of the "Qarqa'un" children's festival, Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha. During

the 2004 summer holidays, the Society ran a “creative children” project. On the occasion of Arab Children’s Day, it held a forum on children of Bahrain. Over 150 children took part in the forum, which was named “The child as seen by the children of Bahrain”. The Society provided clothing and toys to 60 orphans from Al-Sanabil orphanage during a party which it organized to mark Family Day (which is still held every year). The Society furthermore ran a show called “Cultured Child of the Future”, in which competitions are held for Bahraini children in drawing, poetry, public speaking, music and so on. It also organized an Arab children’s forum.

IX. Special protection measures. Situations of emergency (art. 6)

A. Refugee children (art. 22)

453. We recall the information provided in paragraphs 300 and 301 of the initial report of Bahrain and should like to note that there were no reported cases of refugee children in Bahrain as of 2007.

B. Children in armed conflicts (art. 38), including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

454. We refer to paragraphs 302–304 of the initial report and should like to add that, by Act No. 2004/19, Bahrain implemented the recommendation adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in paragraph 49 of its concluding observations, concerning the ratification by Bahrain of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Thus, the provisions of the Convention are now binding on Bahrain.

455. As there are no cases of the kind dealt with in article 38 of the Convention, no executive or legislative measures have been taken to address them.

456. Having due regard to its international pledges, its status as a member of the United Nations and its statutory and constitutional obligations to work for peace and cooperation among nations and to honour international treaties, Bahrain complies with the norms of international humanitarian law as they apply to children in time of armed conflict. Its laws on the legal capacity, welfare and protection of children, to which reference was made previously, also ensure the observance of these rights, since to involve children in an armed conflict would infringe their right to protection, care, survival and development.

C. Children in conflict with the law (art. 40)

Department of Juvenile Justice

457. The Committee made several recommendations on the subject of juvenile justice, including the following:

- Ensure that deprivation of liberty is only used as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible time and is authorized by the courts
- Ensure that children have access to legal aid

458. In response, we should like to explain that, under article 6 of the Juveniles Act No. 17 of 1967, measures imposed on young persons begin with a caution and end with

placement in a governmental or private social welfare institution or a special hospital. Thus, deprivation of liberty is only used as a measure of last resort.

459. With regard to children's access to legal aid, article 6 of the Juveniles Act states: "A young person accused of a serious offence shall have a defence lawyer. If the young person has not chosen a lawyer, the court shall appoint one for him or her. The State shall pay the lawyer's fees, as assessed by the court, provided that the young person pays the money back, if he or she can afford to do so."

460. On 23 October 2002, the Code of Criminal Procedures was issued by Decree-Law No. 46 of 2002. In addition to the guarantees of rights and freedoms explicitly enshrined in the Code, there are also provisions referring to child welfare, as described below.

- Article 275 states: "Without prejudice to the provisions of Decree-Law No. 17 of 1976, concerning juveniles, orders for placement in a work institution or a treatment home shall be executed in a designated facility. Placement of a convicted person shall be effected pursuant to an order of the Office of the Public Prosecutor, which shall be written on the form designated for the purpose by the Minister of Justice. Placement in a treatment home shall be regulated under article 345, while placement in a work institution shall be regulated under articles 343–348."
- Article 251 of the Code states: "When necessary, a minor below the age of 15 years accused of a serious or lesser offence may be ordered to be placed in the care of a trustworthy person who pledges to supervise and maintain him or her or of a recognized charity, until such time as the case has been decided. The order shall be issued by the Office of the Public Prosecutor or by the court hearing the case, as the case may be."

461. In keeping with global trends, responsibility for the Juvenile Welfare Centre, pursuant to Cabinet Decision No. 70-1863, was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Social Development. The two ministries are working together to carry out the transfer process on a gradual basis, without affecting services. The move entails training of clerical staff and reclassification of the institution so that it can serve different categories of young persons, based on their age and the type of offence. The institution will be expanded to accommodate the growing numbers of young persons who are to be placed there following the raising of the age of majority from 15 to 18 years under the new law.

462. In Bahrain, there are two categories of juvenile care: institutional and non-institutional care.

(a) Non-institutional care

463. The responsibility for providing this type of care lies with the Juveniles Section of the women's police force at the Ministry of the Interior, which works in collaboration with the Juvenile Welfare Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. When a young person is at risk of delinquency, as in cases of begging, peddling, truancy and lack of parental control, a social worker from the women's police force will issue a written warning, instructing the parent or guardian to provide care and supervision in order to protect the young person from further risk of delinquency. A copy of the notice of warning is sent to the Juvenile Welfare Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. If the young person is again found at risk of delinquency six months after the warning is issued, the case will be referred back to the women's police force, which will take action, through the Juvenile Social Welfare Unit, to bring the matter to the attention of a juvenile court. A person is deemed to be at risk of delinquency, if he or she:

- Frequents persons at risk of delinquency, suspected delinquents or persons of notorious bad conduct

- Engages in activities associated with prostitution, vice, moral depravity, gambling or drugs, or works for persons involved in such activities
- Has no legitimate means of livelihood and no reliable provider
- Suffers from a mental or psychological disorder or a mental infirmity and is wholly or partially incapable of exercising discretion or making choices, such that he or she poses a threat to the safety of others or to his or her own safety

464. In such cases, the Juvenile Social Welfare Unit of the women's police force will assume responsibility for the juvenile's welfare. It may do this without applying to a juvenile court, unless it is required to do so.

465. If the case is to be referred to a juvenile court, the Unit's staff will make a comprehensive assessment of the juvenile's family circumstances, taking into consideration health and economic factors, the nature of the relationship between the parents, the size of the family, the juvenile's social history and academic status and the reasons for his or her delinquency, from the viewpoint of the family and the social worker. They will then recommend the measures that are best suited to reform of the young person. A report will be submitted, with the case file, to the juvenile court.

466. The staff of the Social Welfare Unit will provide the follow-up on juveniles on whom the juvenile court imposes a measure other than confinement. These measures are limited to the following: a reprimand; delivery into the custody of a parent or guardian; enrolment in vocational training; fulfilment of specified obligations; judicial probation.

467. If any of the above-mentioned measures is imposed, the social workers at the Welfare Unit will visit the juvenile's home, school or place of work at least every two weeks in order to monitor his or her conduct and help to overcome any obstacles that the young person may encounter. The Unit's social workers are required to submit a full report to the juvenile court every six months on any improvements in the juvenile's behaviour.

468. In the case of judicial probation, the juvenile court will terminate or extend the arrangement or replace it with another measure, depending on the juvenile's situation and responsiveness.

(b) Institutional care

469. This is the last resort for persons working with juvenile delinquents and young persons at risk of delinquency, since the aim is to avoid separating juveniles from their families unless it is in the juveniles' interests to do so.

470. The Juvenile Welfare Centre operates on the basis of a "family system", whereby juveniles are allocated to different families, depending on their age and the gravity of their offence. The Centre's female social workers provide juveniles with all types of social services, from the time they enter the Centre until they depart. In addition to this essential form of care, the Centre runs cultural, educational, recreational and after-care programmes.

471. The programmes offered at the Centre include carpentry, electrical engineering, electronics and agricultural courses for boys and training for girls in dressmaking, embroidery, hairdressing, domestic science and other useful activities. Training in painting, handicrafts, sculpture and other arts is also offered. Young persons take part in annual competitions organized by the Ministry of Education, and many have won prestigious prizes for outstanding work. As sport plays an important role in physical and moral education, the Centre organizes sports activities and holds sports competitions from time to time.

472. In order to afford young persons proper legal protection, a definition of the term "juvenile" and provisions on measures to deal with delinquency were written into the

Juveniles Act promulgated in Decree-Law No. 17 of 1976. The Act comprises 45 articles, which are applied when dealing with juvenile delinquents or potential delinquents. While the Act includes provisions on reform measures for juvenile delinquents or potential delinquents, it does not prescribe penalties, nor does it specify how long a young person should be held in a social welfare institution: this is intended to avoid such confinement being regarded as a form of punishment. Young persons remain in institutions or the Juvenile Welfare Centre until their conduct improves and, in any case, for not more than one year. The judiciary and the Office of the Public Prosecutor play an important role, by contributing consistently to the processing of children's cases, in keeping with our lofty aim of establishing acceptable standards for the protection of children and young persons in accordance with the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in all international treaties and with the aim of combating the harmful effects of crime and integrating these children more fully into society. In this connection, the establishment of the Office of the Public Prosecutor is one of the results of the reform project launched by His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa. The Office was established on 1 February 2003, pursuant to Decree-Law No. 2202/42, regulating the Judicial Authority Act, which states that the Office of the Public Prosecutor is an integral part of the judicial authority.

473. Since the Office of the Public Prosecutor began its work, its officials have been tasked with ensuring full access to criminal justice for children, in recognition of the ultimate humanitarian goal of society, namely, that of delivering justice to all, and of the importance of dealing with minors below the age of 15 in a manner that promotes respect for human dignity. The Office of the Public Prosecutor has taken several steps, as described below, to protect children in accordance with the relevant international treaties on the subject.

- The Office of the Public Prosecutor established a special juvenile prosecution service, headed by a female prosecutor, to investigate offences and cases of delinquency involving children below the age of 15. Prosecutors who are experts in international law and are trained to deal with children are employed by the service.
- The Office of the Public Prosecutor has deployed several social workers with experience in studying children and their social circumstances and personalities to provide young persons with reassurance and psychological support during questioning. A social background report is prepared to provide prosecutors with a picture of each child's situation during the investigation stage.
- The Office of the Public Prosecutor has set aside three rooms, equipped with the most modern electronic devices, to ensure that children being questioned during an investigation are afforded the protection of the law. The rooms are used for identity parades of defendants and suspects.
- The Office of the Public Prosecutor contributes actively to efforts by Government agencies to discuss children's problems and find legal solutions for them. These agencies include the National Committee on Childhood and the governing board of the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection at the Salmaniya Medical Complex, the members of which include officials from the Office of the Public Prosecutor. The fact that these officials play an important role in the discussions among these groups benefits children.
- The Office of the Public Prosecutor has taken particular care to improve data systems on children's cases and on the legal measures taken therein, in order to ensure follow-up, to draw comparisons with international indicators and to guarantee better legal protection for children, whether they are victims or alleged perpetrators of offences.

474. What follows is an analysis of the data on juvenile crime victims in 2007, as set out in the tables annexed to the present report.

475. The prosecution service in the central governorate dealt with the largest proportion of cases involving juvenile crime victims. These young persons were referred to social workers employed by the Office of the Public Prosecutor.⁴⁵

476. It is clear from the case classification data that most of the cases handled by prosecutor's offices operating out of premises occupied by the Office of the Public Prosecutor involved indecent assault. The central governorate prosecution service dealt with the largest proportion of such cases, followed by the southern governorate, and then the Muharraq and northern governorate prosecution services, which had the same percentage of cases. The prosecution service in the capital dealt with the smallest proportion of such cases. The central governorate prosecution services also dealt with the highest proportion of cases of sexual harassment of minors, while the juvenile prosecution dealt with the lowest. Only a tiny percentage of juvenile cases involved physical assault of another person or running away from home. These cases were dealt with exclusively by the juvenile prosecution service.⁴⁶

477. A breakdown of the figures on juvenile crime victims shows that most of the victims were male and most of the cases involved indecent assault, which accounted for 51 per cent of all the cases referred to social workers at the Office of the Public Prosecutor. The lowest proportion of cases by sex involved physical assault of another person – 4 per cent for males and no cases for females.⁴⁷

478. Most juvenile crime victims were Bahraini nationals. Bahrainis figured in 64 per cent of cases of indecent assault, as compared with 5 per cent for foreigners. No data on percentages of Bahrainis and foreigners involved in cases of physical assault were recorded.⁴⁸

479. In the largest proportion of indecent assault cases (22 per cent), the assailant and the victim did not know one another. In the smallest proportion of cases (5 per cent), the assailant was a relative of the victim.⁴⁹

480. In most indecent assault cases (35 per cent) the victim was between 12 and 15 years of age, while victims of sexual harassment tended to be between 8 and 11 years old. No data were recorded on children in the 4 to 11 age group involved in a physical assault or running away from home.⁵⁰

481. In most cases (51 per cent) of children subjected to indecent assault, the victim lived in an urban setting. Some 37 per cent of victims lived in a village. The 5 per cent of cases involving a child running away from home occurred in an urban centre; no such cases were reported as occurring in a village setting.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-1 shows the distribution of child victim cases across various prosecutor's offices.

⁴⁶ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-2 shows the types of cases processed by prosecution services and the victims.

⁴⁷ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-3 shows the distribution of juvenile crime victim cases by sex.

⁴⁸ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-4 shows the distribution of juvenile crime victim cases by nationality.

⁴⁹ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-5 shows the relationship between the assailant and the victim.

⁵⁰ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-6 shows the distribution of cases by the age of the victim.

⁵¹ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-7 shows the geographical distribution of victims' homes.

482. Most victims of indecent assault (40 per cent) were in the average category in terms of their economic status; while 28 per cent came from a poor background. No cases were reported among this category of physical assault or running away from home.⁵²

483. Most young persons who were victims of an indecent assault or sexual harassment (41 per cent and 14 per cent respectively) were not subjected to the offence a second time. A second indecent assault occurred in 27 per cent of cases and 1 per cent of children ran away from home again.⁵³

484. Most juvenile victims were not subjected to physical violence. An indecent assault was accompanied by physical violence in 22 per cent of cases, while, in 47 per cent of cases, physical violence was not used.⁵⁴

485. The central governorate's prosecution service dealt with the highest proportion of young offenders, who were referred to social workers employed by the Office of the Public Prosecutor.⁵⁵

486. Most cases brought against juvenile defendants involved indecent assault. The northern governorate prosecution service dealt with the highest percentage of these cases, followed by the central governorate. The capital governorate dealt with the lowest percentage of these cases. The central governorate prosecution service dealt with the highest proportion of cases of juveniles accused of sexual harassment, while the juvenile prosecution service dealt with the fewest cases.⁵⁶

487. From the figures on juvenile offenders, disaggregated by sex, it is clear that the highest proportion of reported cases involved males accused of committing an indecent assault. These cases accounted for 53 per cent of all the cases referred to the social workers' office at the Office of the Public Prosecutor. The figures, broken down by sex, show that the lowest percentage of cases involved traffic offences – only 1 per cent for males and none for females.⁵⁷

488. Most juveniles accused of offences were Bahraini nationals. In 41 per cent of indecent assault cases, the assailant was a Bahraini; the figure for foreigners, was around 10 per cent. In the 5 per cent of cases involving sexual harassment, the harasser was a foreigner, while in 1 per cent he or she was a Bahraini.⁵⁸

489. Juvenile defendants were mostly between 12 and 15 years old, accounting for 26 per cent of indecent assault cases and 17 per cent of robberies.⁵⁹

490. Most juvenile defendants lived in urban centres, accounting for 26 per cent of indecent assaults, 4 per cent of sexual harassment cases and 10 per cent of robberies.⁶⁰

⁵² Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-8 shows the economic status of juvenile victims.

⁵³ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-9 shows the number of repeat assaults against young persons.

⁵⁴ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 6-10 shows where physical violence was used in an assault against the victim.

⁵⁵ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-1 shows the distribution of defendants in juvenile cases across the different prosecutor's offices.

⁵⁶ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-2 shows the kinds of cases which are dealt with by prosecutor's offices where young persons are defendants.

⁵⁷ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-3 shows the distribution of defendants' cases by sex.

⁵⁸ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-4 shows the distribution of juvenile offenders' cases by nationality.

⁵⁹ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-5 shows the ages of defendants in juvenile cases.

⁶⁰ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-6 shows the geographical distribution of defendants in juvenile cases.

491. Most juvenile defendants came from an average economic background; only a tiny proportion were poor. They accounted for 14 per cent of cases of indecent assault and 8 per cent of cases of robbery.⁶¹

492. Most juvenile defendants were unmarried; in only 4 per cent of indecent assaults was the assailant a married person.⁶²

493. In only 5 per cent of cases had the victim of an indecent assault been assaulted on one previous occasion; in 2 per cent of cases the victim had been assaulted on more than one occasion. There are no figures about other cases involving young persons.⁶³

494. Some 22 per cent of defendants had no previous record of carrying out an indecent assault, while 5 per cent did.⁶⁴

495. The overall findings are set out hereunder:

- The Office of the Public Prosecutor dealt with 226 juvenile cases in 2007, 78 of them involving juvenile crime victims and 148 juveniles accused of crimes. The highest proportion of these cases involved indecent assault.
- The central governorate prosecution service, in cooperation with social workers, dealt with the highest proportion (28 per cent) of cases involving juvenile crime victims.
- Indecent assault cases were the most frequent type of case, accounting for 18 per cent of the juvenile cases handled by the central governorate prosecution service.
- The majority of the victims in juvenile cases (67 per cent) were males; 28 per cent were females.
- The annexed tables show that the majority of juvenile victims were Bahraini nationals (82 per cent); foreigners accounted for only 9 per cent of the total number of victims.
- Most victims had no connection to the assailant. The assailant was a stranger in 36 per cent of cases, a colleague in 21 per cent of cases, an acquaintance in 17 per cent of cases and a relative in only 7 per cent of cases.
- The age groups of victims were as follows: 48 per cent in the 12–15 age group; 41 per cent in the 8–11 age group; and, lastly, 17 per cent in the 4–7 age group.
- Most victims tended to come from urban centres (67 per cent); 40 per cent of juvenile victims came from villages.
- Most juvenile victims came from an average economic background (46 per cent), while 31 per cent came from a poor background.
- In most cases (59 per cent), the victim had been assaulted on just one occasion; in 28 per cent of cases, the victim had been assaulted on several occasions.
- Most victims of assault were not subjected to violence at the same time as the assault; in 26 per cent of cases, physical violence was used.

⁶¹ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-7 shows the economic background of defendants.

⁶² Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-8 shows the social background of defendants in juvenile cases.

⁶³ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-9 shows cases where a young victim was subjected to a repeat assault.

⁶⁴ Office of the Public Prosecutor, Table 7-10 shows the defendants with records for previous offences.

- The central governorate prosecution service, in cooperation with social workers employed by the Office of the Public Prosecutor, dealt with the largest share (32 per cent) of young offenders' cases.
- The northern governorate prosecution service dealt with the largest share of indecent assault cases (16 per cent), followed by the central governorate (11 per cent).
- The statistics in the tables show that most juvenile defendants were males (87 per cent); only 1 per cent were females.
- Most defendants were Bahraini nationals (76 per cent); 18 per cent were foreigners.
- The majority (53 per cent) of defendants were aged between 12 and 15, followed by those in the 16–24 age group (12 per cent) and then the 25–44 age group (2 per cent).
- Forty-seven per cent of defendants lived in urban centres and 36 per cent in villages.
- Most defendants came from an average economic background (29 per cent); 27 per cent came from a poor background.
- Of the defendants in juvenile cases, 4 per cent were married and 70 per cent were not.
- In 2 per cent of cases the defendant had assaulted a minor on more than one occasion.
- Of juvenile defendants, 6 per cent had a prior criminal record and 37 per cent had previous convictions.

Children deprived of their liberty, including any form of detention, imprisonment or placement in a detention facility (art. 37 (b) and (d))

496. On this subject, we refer to paragraphs 315–319 of the initial report and to the information provided earlier in the present report on the measures taken to guarantee children's liberty and prevent children from being subjected to unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

The annexes to the present report contained detailed statistical information on the numbers of children in detention, disaggregated by age group, governorate and reason for the detention.⁶⁵

Sentencing of juveniles including, in particular, the prohibition of capital punishment or life imprisonment (art. 37 (a))

497. As already explained, Act No. 2006/56, by which Bahrain acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, states: "Sentence of death shall not be imposed for offences committed by persons below the age of 18 years, nor shall such a sentence be carried out upon a pregnant woman" (art. 6, paragraph 5(c)).

498. Paragraph 320 of the initial report outlines the mitigating factors which are taken into account when a child is accused of an offence. There were no data on death sentences carried out on persons below the age of 18 years as of the date of writing of the present report.

⁶⁵ Comprehensive figures produced by the Office of the Public Prosecutor for the years 2003–2007 are found in the annex.

D. Physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

499. All the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration measures, including those taken by reform institutions, youth counsellors and the Office of the Public Prosecutor, are described above in the sections of this report which deal with institutional and non-institutional care under the auspices of the Juvenile Welfare Department.

Children in situations of exploitation

500. The Committee expressed concern that the minimum age for admission to employment (14 years) under article 50 of the 1976 Act is lower than the age for completion of basic education (15 years) and, furthermore, that article 58 of the Act exempts family enterprises. The Committee recommended that Bahrain should ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), implement ILO Recommendations No. 146 (Minimum Age Recommendation) and No. 190 (Worst Forms of Child Labour); and seek assistance from, among others, the ILO.

501. By way of reply, we should like to point out that the labour law regulating the civil sector is very old, was issued in 1976 and predates Bahrain's accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. Bahrain acceded to the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) by Decree-Law No. 12 of 2001 on 21 February 2001. A new draft labour code is being discussed by the legislature at the present time; it is to be hoped that the text will respond to the points raised in the Committee's concluding observations. The draft children's rights and culture law is still being considered by the legislature. As explained early on in this report, the draft text contains a definition stating that a child is a person below the age of 18 full years. It also includes provisions on legal protection. Once the law enters into force, it is likely to have an impact on all the laws which deal with children's rights, including labour law. In any event, no person below the age of 18 may be employed in the public sector or the military. As for the existing law on work in the civil sector, article 50 categorically prohibits the employment of persons below the age of 14. Article 5 regulates the employment, on an exceptional basis, of 15 year-olds. It is not possible to employ 14 year-olds, contrary to the claim made in the concluding observations. Article 51 of the law states: "Minors between 14 and 16 years of age shall only be employed under such conditions as are specified in the article." In particular, they must obtain authorization from the Ministry of Labour. In practice, work permits are not issued to anyone under the age of 15, except for apprentices or young persons working in the summer holidays. The exception provided for in article 58 of the Labour Code refers to work in the family, such as artisanal activities; it does not include licensed commercial enterprises. The fact of the matter is that these types of activity have become obsolete, if taken to refer to family-run agricultural concerns. Such activities are on the wane, and farm workers are recruited exclusively from abroad. It must be repeated, however, that there is a pressing need to amend the labour law on the civil sector and to implement the Committee's recommendation on this subject. It is to be hoped that this recommendation will be taken up by the legislature when it adopts the new labour code.

E. Economic exploitation, including child labour (art. 32)

502. On this subject, we refer to paragraphs 322–330 of the initial report. We should add that this phenomenon does not exist in Bahrain, although there have been a few cases of begging, in which some children were exploited. Bahrain takes rigorous actions in such cases. For example, the Vagrancy Act No. 5 of 2007 was passed to combat begging and vagrancy. Article 3 of the Act states: "No person, not even a person who has no work or is unfit for work, may engage in begging on the streets or in public or private places or

premises.” Article 4 states that beggars must be brought to a special welfare home, which will review their case and carry out medical and psychological tests to decide what measures to take with a view to offering them treatment, care or appropriate job training.

503. In implementation of the Vagrancy Act, the Ministry of Social Development established the Social Welfare Dignity Home on 29 November 2007. The Home provides care and services to beggars and vagrants in the first instance, in coordination and cooperation with relevant ministries and bodies. Article 8 of the Act prescribes a term of not less than three months’ imprisonment and/or a fine of from 50 to 100 Bahraini dinars for employing or handing a minor over to another person for the purpose of the minor’s engagement in begging, or for inciting a person to beg or forcing him or her into vagrancy. If the inciter is the minor’s guardian, tutor, a supervisor or carer, the penalty will be a term of at least six months’ imprisonment.

504. A ministerial decision was issued providing for the establishment of an anti-vagrancy committee, encompassing all relevant governmental bodies, to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the Act.

F. Drug abuse (art. 33)

505. This subject was discussed in paragraphs 331 to 333 of the previous report. We should add that 78 cases of drug or alcohol dependency had been recorded as of 2006.

G. Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (art. 34)

506. This subject is discussed in paragraphs 334 to 335 of the initial report. We should add that Bahrain issued Act No. 1 of 2008, concerning human trafficking. Article 1 (a) states that, for the purposes of the Act, trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or deception or the abuse of office, influence or power over another a person or any other unlawful means, whether direct or indirect. Exploitation includes the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. Article 1 (b) of the Act provides: “Trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person under the age of 18 or a person whose general or personal circumstances preclude him or her from giving consent or making a free choice, for the purpose of exploiting that person, even if the act is not committed using any of the means specified in the preceding paragraph.”

507. Under article 4 of the Act a higher penalty is prescribed if the victim of the offence is under 15, has a disability or is a female or contracts an incurable disease [as a result of the offence]. Article 7 provides for the establishment, by a decision of the Minister for Social Development, of a committee to be called “The Review Committee on the Situation of Foreign Victims of Human Trafficking”. Article 8 provides for the establishment, by a decision of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, of a committee to be called “The National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons”, consisting of representatives of several ministries and of three civil society organizations nominated by the Minister for Social Development. That committee will be tasked with developing programmes to combat human trafficking and setting up the aforementioned Review Committee.

508. Victims of sexual abuse and exploitation have access to the services provided by the Bahrain Child Protection Centre, which conducts assessments, provides treatment and offers physical and psychological rehabilitation services to victims of sexual abuse or neglect. Moreover, the Government added an entire section on the subject of child

protection, including provisions on sexual abuse, to the Children's Bill currently before the Council of Representatives.

509. As already mentioned in this report, Bahrain ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography by Act No. 2004/19, thereby implementing the Committee's recommendation as contained in paragraph 45 of the concluding observations.

H. Sale of, traffic in, and abduction of, children (art. 35)

510. There are no instances of children being sold in Bahrain, and cases of child abduction are rare. Over the past 10 years two children have been abducted: Fatima, an 11-year-old girl, who was taken at the end of 2002, and Badr, a 3-year-old boy, who was taken in July 2007. The governmental authorities and civil society organizations are doing everything possible to find these children.

I. Other forms of exploitation (art. 36)

511. There are no other forms of child exploitation, apart from those described in the section of this report on economic exploitation.

J. Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group (art. 30)

512. Bahrain is a Muslim country, which recognizes the other faiths and faith communities present on its soil. Neither its Constitution nor its laws express disdain for, or hatred towards, foreigners or minorities. On the contrary, everyone in Bahrain is afforded a full range of rights, including the right to preserve one's culture, to perform religious rites and to have access to employment and to health and education services. Bahrainis are distinguished for the considerate and courteous manner in which they deal with guests and with the minorities that work in Bahrain.

K. Children living or working on the street

513. The phenomenon of child labour is not one of particular concern in Bahrain as Bahraini society is tightly knit, the religion calls on all to seek knowledge and the laws which we have described above are in place. Moreover, there are no children working in the Government sector.

Voice of children – child labour*

- What challenges does child labour pose in Bahrain?

Comments

514. Children in Bahrain who work do so for the following main reasons:

- Poverty and low household income.

* Proceedings of a consultative meeting on children's issues held with children in Bahrain in March 2008.

- The head of household is disabled and there is no other breadwinner.
- Domestic violence, meaning ill-treatment, neglect and sexual abuse.
- Rising prices and falling wages.
- The child has free time because he or she often plays truant or has dropped out of school.
- Sometimes the school atmosphere is such that it encourages children to drop out and to abandon their studies, particularly when teachers are cruel or rude to students. Moreover, some schools pay no heed to children's personal and family problems, making it less likely that students will wish to keep up with their studies.
- Some social counsellors in schools lack the skill needed to identify students' academic or family problems, making it more likely that students will drop out of school.
- The State and public officials pay more attention to economic projects than they do to social and family issues.

Conclusion

515. **Bahrain confirms its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the full implementation of the Convention without any reservations. Bahrain is doing everything in its power to meet its obligations under the Convention, notwithstanding all the challenges described in the present report. Bahrain is firmly of the view that meeting these challenges and overcoming these difficulties will take time and that more concerted action on the part of the governmental and civil society sectors will be needed if the comprehensive development plans established to improve the situation of children in our beloved nation are to achieve progress.**
