



Opening Statement
of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
at the 17th Session to Discuss its
Second Universal Periodic Review
(UPR) Report

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In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace be with you and the Mercy and Blessings of God

I have pleasure in delivering the opening statement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the 17th session of the Working Group during the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. The statement will comprise a brief summary of the principal developments noted in the second UPR report that you will be reviewing today.

On this occasion, on behalf of my country's delegation, I would like to express our gratitude to H.E. the President of the Human Rights Council, the delegations of the participating States, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Secretariat, the members of the Troika, the representatives of civil society institutions and the States that transmitted their questions in advance for their presence to ensure the success of this review which will help to consolidate the Kingdom's achievements in the field of human rights.

I would like to take this occasion to reaffirm the Kingdom's firm commitment to respect and promote human rights and support the international mechanisms, and particularly the UPR mechanism which constitutes a forum in which all States can review and evaluate their positions in regard to human rights, hear the viewpoints of others and exchange opinions with a view to the promotion and development of human rights.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom was among the first States that contributed to the establishment of the Human Rights Council in the light of its belief in the importance of the Council's role and the noble aims for which it was established including, in particular, the promotion of universal respect for the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all, addressing violations and making appropriate recommendations thereon in an impartial, objective and non-selective manner.

During its 2006-2012 term of membership of the Human Rights Council, my country was given the opportunity to work with international human rights mechanisms and to adopt numerous national measures that contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights in various fields.

The Kingdom's endeavours within the Human Rights Council constitute a continuation of its endeavours and positions in support of all aspects of the human right to sustainable development and, in particular, the role that the Kingdom is playing under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques through its membership of the G20 as defender of the rights and guardian of the interests of the developing countries and advocate of initiatives to mitigate the adverse effects of the global economic and financial crises by enhancing human development programmes, especially in connection with the debt burdens of the developing countries. In fact, the Kingdom has waived more than US\$ 6 billion in debts due to it from the least developed countries and has donated an amount of US\$ 500 million to the World Food Programme to help these countries to meet the increased costs of basic food commodities, in addition to its donation of US\$ 500 million to education projects in the developing countries. The non-recoverable assistance and loans that the Kingdom has provided during the last three decades amounts to around US\$ 100 billion from which more than 87 developing countries have benefited. This amount is equivalent to 4% of the Kingdom's GNP. The Kingdom has also played a vital role in ensuring stability in the global petroleum markets in its capacity as a reliable source of energy, thereby contributing to international peace and stability.

God has honoured the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by enabling it to serve the Two Holy Mosques and provide appropriate facilities for pilgrims to practise their religious rites. The Kingdom attaches the utmost importance to the welfare of pilgrims to the Holy Mosque in Makkah where large projects have been implemented and huge achievements made including, in particular, the extension ordered by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, which is the largest extension ever carried out, to make it easier for Muslims from all parts of the world to practise their religious rites in safety, security and comfort.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom is today presenting its second UPR report which was prepared in collaboration and consultation with the relevant governmental authorities as well as academics, civil society institutions and active male and female members of the human rights community. The contribution and broad participation by these bodies were highly instrumental in supplementing and enriching the report which contains information on the principal human rights-related developments since the presentation of the Kingdom's first report in 2009.

Since the completion of the first review, the Kingdom has held many workshops and meetings, attended by numerous governmental and non-governmental bodies, to monitor the implementation of the recommendations accepted by the Kingdom.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always emphasized the importance of respect for and protection of human rights within the framework of the United Nations in keeping with its deep-rooted belief in the lofty principles and values enshrined in the Islamic Shari'a, which protect those rights and criminalize their violation, and in fulfilment of its international obligations in this regard.

The Basic Law of Governance, which is derived from the Islamic Shari'a, highlights the lofty principles and values that safeguard human dignity and protect fundamental rights and freedoms by stipulating that governance in the Kingdom is based on the principles of justice, consultation and equality. The Law also places the State under an obligation to protect human rights in accordance with the Islamic Shari'a; to guarantee rights in the event of emergencies, sickness, incapacity and old age; to support the social security system; to encourage institutions and individuals to contribute to charitable activities; to provide health care; to secure the right to work; to promulgate legislation for the protection of both workers and employers; to provide general education and to commit itself to combat illiteracy.

The protection and promotion of human rights is also ensured by the Kingdom's other national legislative enactments concerning the judiciary, criminal justice, health, education, employment, culture and

other regulations with a direct bearing on the guaranteed enjoyment by everyone living in the Kingdom's territory of their fundamental rights, including the right to a decent life.

The secured independence of the judicial authority is a firmly established principle and cornerstone for the protection and promotion of human rights since justice protects the lives, property, freedoms and rights of citizens.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, being the site of the Two Holy Mosques and the *qibla* to which more than one and a half billion Muslims turn in prayer, has consistently emphasized the importance of respect for human rights instruments, the promotion of a culture of dialogue and tolerance, rejection of violence and hatred and advocacy of moderation.

In this connection, I would like to quote from the address delivered by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, at the conference held in Makkah during the current month of October on the occasion of this year's pilgrimage season. In his address, entitled "Human rights in the Islamic Shari'a and international instruments", he reaffirmed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's commitment to international instruments and emphasized that human rights were fully safeguarded by the Islamic Shari'a. He went on to say that, far from being a newcomer in the field of human rights, the Kingdom had been applying them, since its establishment, within the framework of its application of the Islamic Shari'a and with due regard for the requirements of contemporary obligations. The Kingdom had unhesitatingly participated in the international forums that deliberated on the establishment of these rights and adopted the requisite instruments therefor to the application of which States committed themselves. In this way, it set a practical model example of harmonization between commitment to Islam and benefit from positive humanitarian experiences.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has acceded to several of the principal international human rights instruments, in addition to a number of regional instruments and conventions. During the period since the previous UPR, it has acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention

on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It has also acceded to International Labour Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and work and the competent committees in the Kingdom are continuing to study the question of accession to other international instruments including, in particular, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This may well answer the questions that were kindly raised by various states concerning the Kingdom's accession to more international human rights instruments. In this connection, I have pleasure in reaffirming that the Kingdom is respecting and fulfilling its international obligations arising from the treaties to which it is a party.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would now like to briefly review before your distinguished Council a number of important issues highlighted in the report and through which I can address some of the observations contained in documents A/HRC/WG.6/17/SAU/2 and A/HRC/WG.6/17/SAU/3 prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as a number of the questions that some States submitted in advance.

In the judicial field, the project initiated by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, to develop the judicial authority is one of the largest and most significant reform projects since it involves the adoption of statutes for the judiciary and the Board of Grievances, which are highly important for the development of the Kingdom's judiciary through the promulgation of written regulatory enactments as a basis for its restructuring process which, in turn, provides a fundamental guarantee of the protection of human rights.

With regard to women's rights, the Islamic Shari'a guarantees fair gender equality and the State's legislative enactments do not differentiate between men and women. Article 8 of the Basic Law of Governance, in particular, stipulates that governance in the Kingdom is based on justice and equality in accordance with the Islamic Shari'a. Hence, women are full citizens in their own right and are endowed with independent financial and full legal capacity under which they enjoy freedom to

dispose of their property and manage their affairs in a totally independent manner without seeking permission from anyone.

Many of the issues raised concerning certain practices affecting the situation of women in the Kingdom are attributable to misconceptions, information that is inaccurate or lacking in objectivity or erroneous practices and customs that are contrary to the provisions and principles of the Islamic Shari'a and national laws. In order to remedy such modes of behaviour, the State is intensifying its endeavours to promote educational enlightenment on human rights-related matters as an important and effective tool to raise social awareness of human rights, including women's rights, and tackle these erroneous practices at their roots. The programme for the dissemination of a human rights culture that the Human Rights Commission is undertaking in collaboration with numerous governmental and private bodies is one of the principal tools in this regard.

As a result of all these national endeavours, Saudi women have made significant progress and unprecedented achievements in numerous fields in recent years by virtue of the existence of a political will to enable women to enjoy all the rights needed for them to play the role to which they aspire while, at the same time, preserving their Islamic and Arab identity.

Saudi women are contributing to national decision making through their membership of the Consultative Council in which they are allocated a minimum of 20% of the seats, in addition to their right to vote and stand as candidates in municipal council elections. Women also hold senior posts in the governmental sector in which the number of female employees rose by about 8% during the last year alone and, in the teaching profession, women now outnumber men.

In this connection, Mr. Chairman, I would like to quote the words of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques concerning the role of Saudi women: "When speaking of the comprehensive development that the country is witnessing, we cannot omit or disregard the role of Saudi women and their contribution to the development process ... Saudi women have demonstrated their ability to shoulder responsibilities with great success ... We look forward to assigning women a vital and fundamental role in such a way as to serve the interests of this nation ...".

My country's Government affirms its commitment to respect and protect the rights of the child not only in its capacity as a party to the

Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols thereto but also, primarily, in fulfilment of its obligations derived from the provisions of the Islamic Shari'a which seek to ensure the best interests of the child in all circumstances. The National Commission for Childhood recently completed its formulation of a National Strategy for Children which is designed to safeguard all aspects of the rights of the child.

The State has taken further steps to protect women and children from violence and abuse through the adoption of numerous measures including promulgation of the Protection from Harm Act the purpose of which is to protect members of society from all forms of violence and harm and ensure that cases of violence are monitored and documented. Committees have been established throughout the Kingdom to enforce the Act and monitor measures taken to protect victims and punish offenders.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has established shelters for women, children, the aged and persons with special needs at which appropriate psycho-social treatment is provided to enable them to overcome their psychological or physical problems and ensure that they are not harmed again.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom is hosting in its territory about 9 million non-Saudis who have come to the Kingdom to work in various fields. The Kingdom is taking all the steps and measures needed to protect their rights and provide appropriate humanitarian conditions to enable them to perform their tasks. To this end, numerous ministerial decisions have been promulgated and control mechanisms have been established to help to improve the situation of those workers and safeguard their rights, including:

1. Promulgation of the Regulation on domestic workers and persons of similar status, which contains legal provisions that regulate all aspects of worker/employer relations and define the rights and obligations of both parties. One of the main provisions stipulates that a worker must not be required to perform work other than that agreed upon in his contract of employment or work that endangers his health or detracts from his dignity. The employer has an obligation to pay the worker's agreed wage at the end of every month and to provide the worker with appropriate

accommodation. The worker is entitled to a weekly rest period, ordinary and sick leave with pay and a separation from service indemnity. The Regulation also prescribes a number of penalties to be imposed for violations of its provisions.

2. Establishment of an electronic mechanism for the protection of workers' wages, consisting in a continuously updated database to verify that workers' wages are paid on time and in the amount agreed upon in their contracts of employment.

3. Employers in the private sector have an obligation to provide their workers with health insurance covering health care and occupational injuries.

4. Endeavours are being made to conclude bilateral agreements between the Kingdom and the countries of origin of workers, and particularly domestic workers, in order to further clarify their rights and help to provide a legal source of reference to regulate their status while they are in the Kingdom. Some agreements of this type have already been signed.

5. Enforcement and control of compliance with the ban on outdoor work in the heat of the sun between midday and 3 p.m. during the period from the beginning of June to the end of August of every year.

In this connection, Mr. Chairman, I would like to refer to the question that was directed to us concerning the measures taken by the Kingdom to ensure that workers are able to report violations and that the new Labour Law is being properly applied. I can confirm that the labour-related measures to which I have already referred and the enforcement and control mechanisms and penalties that they contain are being applied to offenders. Moreover, some violations, and especially cases of forced labour, constitute forms of trafficking in persons which are subject to the provisions of the Suppression of Crimes of Trafficking in Persons Act promulgated in 2009 and which is consistent with international standards since it prohibits all the forms of trafficking in persons referred to in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The deterrent penalties that the Act prescribes for perpetrators of these crimes can be as severe as a term of 15 years' imprisonment. In order to ensure that the provisions of this Act are enforced, a national Standing Committee has been formed to undertake a number of functions including monitoring the situation of

victims, establishing mechanisms to promote an active search for victims and training law enforcement officers in victim identification techniques.

In view of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's eagerness to ensure enforcement of the regulations governing the working environment and the protection of workers' rights, the Ministry of Labour has been assigned a greater role in labour market control and inspection.

The Kingdom's regulations prohibit, in particular, any religious discrimination in the field of employment. Article 61 of the Labour Law stipulates that employers shall refrain from any word or deed that detracts from the dignity or religion of workers. Employers are also obliged to allow workers the time needed to exercise their rights as provided for in the Law without deducting any amount from their wages in respect of that time. Article 104 of the Law further stipulates that employers must permit workers to perform their religious duties.

The Kingdom shows great concern for the category of expatriate workers for whom it is endeavouring to provide all the services that they need, in addition to safeguarding their rights and putting an end to any violations to which they might be subjected. It is grateful to them for their contribution to the completion of many projects and other achievements and regards them as partners in development whose needs it will continue to ascertain in order to take all the measures required to improve their situation and protect their rights.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The guaranteed enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is an important factor in the promotion and protection of human rights.

In the field of education, the Kingdom provides general and higher education free of charge and, being eager to ensure the quality of education, has established an independent commission to evaluate general education with a view to improving its quality and increasing its output. All academic curricula are subject to ongoing review in order to develop them and incorporate the fundamental principles of human rights.

With regard to the provision of employment opportunities and the reduction of unemployment, although there are still some challenges relating to the difficulty of attracting young persons of both sexes to the labour market, in recent years numerous governmental and non-

governmental initiatives have been adopted to create decent employment opportunities for both sexes, as illustrated by the wage subsidization programmes, the telecommuting, part-time employment and productive family programmes and the programmes to train the national labour force and increase its productivity in a manner consistent with labour market requirements.

With regard to the provision of suitable housing, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has promulgated numerous decisions and measures including the establishment of a Ministry of Housing, the allocation of 15 billion riyals to support housing projects, approval of the construction of 500,000 housing units at a cost of 250 billion riyals and capital support in the amount of 40 billion riyals for the Real Estate Development Fund.

Endeavours have continued in the health sector for which the amounts allocated in the State's general budget have been increased. More primary health care centres have been opened, numerous medical cities and specialized teaching hospitals have been established and support has been provided for the private health sector.

The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also shown greater concern for social welfare by supporting needy families and providing direct and indirect assistance through programmes targeting all sections of society and especially persons with disabilities. A number of measures have been taken including, in particular, the establishment of centres for the prevention and early detection of disabilities in children and medical rehabilitation centres. Programmes have also been implemented to include persons with disabilities in the general education system and provide them with financial support.

With a view to the promotion of cultural participation, support has been provided for literary clubs and the legislation pertaining thereto has been reviewed in order to encourage greater participation in decision making by granting the right to stand as a candidate for membership of their governing boards, elect board members and vote at general assemblies. In their capacity as an important component of civil society, the literary clubs are playing an active role in the promotion of human rights.

With regard to civil society institutions and associations, the governmental sectors are collaborating with them in all fields, including the field of human rights. In response to the question that was directed to

us, a draft Private Associations and Institutions Act has been drawn up and is currently being studied by the legislative authorities.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's firm commitment to the protection of human rights, with all that this entails by way of development of national institutions, regulations and mechanisms, necessitates closer cooperation between the Kingdom and international treaty and other bodies and mechanisms concerned with human rights-related issues in view of the Kingdom's belief not only in the role that these bodies are playing in the promotion and protection of human rights but also in the effect that this cooperation would have in enhancing national capacities to fulfil the Kingdom's human rights-related obligations. This is the framework within which a number of national periodic reports have been presented in connection with the instruments to which the Kingdom is a party and the Kingdom is currently in the process of completing the preparation of other periodic reports for presentation to the relevant treaty bodies. A number of Special Rapporteurs and other mandate holders have already been received and the possibility of inviting others to visit the Kingdom is under consideration

The visit by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Navi Pillay, to the Kingdom in 2010, her meeting with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and their exchange of views on numerous human rights issues was an important occasion that reflected the Kingdom's open-mindedness and its desire to establish closer relations with international human rights mechanisms and expand its cooperation with those mechanisms and, in particular, with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council.

This cooperation has taken numerous forms, such as the provision of support for United Nations treaty and other bodies closely concerned with human rights, and especially the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in addition to bilateral cooperation with United Nations human rights bodies with a view to benefiting from their expertise and resources in order to help to build and enhance national capacities.

Within this context, the Kingdom increased its contribution in support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights from

US\$ 150,000 to US\$ 1 million annually for a five-year period with effect from 2012. The Kingdom also contributed an amount of US\$ 1 million to support the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and made financial donations to some of the trust funds administered by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation, the UPR Voluntary Fund and the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations).

With regard to bilateral cooperation with the United Nations for the purpose of national capacity building, two Memoranda of Understanding have been signed. The first related to cooperation between the Kingdom and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in this field. The second fell within the framework of the United Nations Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme and concerned the placement of associate experts in the field of human rights in order to build and develop the capacities of the Kingdom's officials in regard to international human rights law and, in particular, United Nations mechanisms.

The initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques calling for dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures culminated in the inauguration of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna in November 2012. The purpose of the Centre is to further mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, promote dialogue and tolerance among peoples, strengthen the common denominators among the followers of religions and make religious and cultural differences a basis for mutual understanding.

The Kingdom has launched numerous initiatives to combat terrorism and denounce any behaviour conducive thereto while, at the same time, ensuring that human rights are respected. The International Counter-Terrorism Conference held in Riyadh, which adopted the proposal to establish an International Counter-Terrorism Centre, constituted a practical step towards the achievement of that goal. In fact, in 2011, the Kingdom signed an agreement with the United Nations to establish that Centre, donated an amount of US\$ 10 million for that purpose and, in the present year 2013, announced its donation of an additional amount of US\$ 100 million to fund the Centre's operations and further the achievement of the aims and objectives for which it was established.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to respect and promote human rights and to fulfil our obligations in this regard. We look forward to hearing your valuable comments on the human rights situation in the Kingdom and entering into a fruitful and constructive dialogue.

Before giving the floor to you, Mr. Chairman, I wish to point out that I will be speaking again on two occasions to respond to the comments of the distinguished representatives of Member States after which I will make a final statement at the end of the meeting.

I would like to reiterate my gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, and also to the participating States, and especially the States that transmitted questions in advance, for their positive interaction and cooperation in the promotion and furtherance of human rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.