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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of fourteen members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 6 October 2013 from the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

The Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and has the honour to refer to the candidature of Saudi Arabia for election to the Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016 (see annex), and to resolution [60/251](#), paragraph 8, regarding the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto. It also has the honour to transmit herewith the voluntary pledges of Saudi Arabia (see annex).

The Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations requests that the present note verbale and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 115 (c).



**Annex to the note verbale dated 6 October 2013 from the
Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations
addressed to the President of the General Assembly**

[Original: Arabic]

**Candidacy of Saudi Arabia for membership of the Human Rights Council for the
period 2014-2016**

1. Saudi Arabia, in view of its right conduct that is based on the Islamic sharia, which urges cooperation in all matters that promote the welfare of humanity; cognizant of its humanitarian responsibility at both the national and international levels; desiring to support the work of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council, of both of which it is a founding member; and aspiring to build on its achievements and the contributions it made during its two consecutive membership periods from 2006 to 2012, hereby presents its candidacy for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2014-2016.
2. During its two consecutive terms of membership, Saudi Arabia supported and complied with the resolutions of the Human Rights Council and participated in the drafting of some resolutions. It has also cooperated with Human Rights Council mechanisms, particularly the universal periodic review mechanism, in a manner that reflects its relentless pursuit of the realization of human rights on the ground. Saudi Arabia has also cooperated closely with special procedure mandate holders by responding promptly to their enquiries, clarifications and guidance. It has also cooperated with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in matters that the Human Rights Council had referred to the Office.
3. Following is a review of Saudi Arabia's commitments and efforts with regard to human rights at both the national and international levels. This is followed by a review of Saudi Arabia's contributions in support of human rights and a listing of the country's voluntary human rights commitments for its potential forthcoming membership of the Human Rights Council.

Recent human rights efforts of Saudi Arabia at the national level

Human rights regulations, instruments and institutions

4. The Islamic sharia, from which Saudi Arabia derives its regulations, stresses the protection of human rights and prohibits the violation thereof. Accordingly, it is the State's responsibility to protect and promote human rights. The Constitution of Saudi Arabia, article 26, expressly provides that the State shall protect human rights in accordance with the Islamic sharia.
5. Acting on the basis of Saudi Arabian law, which is derived from the sharia that guarantees human rights to all, and Saudi Arabia's unwavering belief in human rights and the State's duty to give effect to and strengthen such rights in accordance with the country's international obligations, the Government established the Human Rights Commission. The mandate of this governmental body, which reports directly to the King in his capacity as Prime Minister, is to protect and promote human rights in accordance with international human rights standards. The Commission monitors implementation of the instruments to which Saudi Arabia has acceded and annually submits a report on the human rights situation in the country.

6. In addition, the National Society for Human Rights, an independent non-governmental organization that protects and defends human rights, was established, along with several other non-governmental human rights organizations.

7. Saudi Arabia also established a permanent National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Its responsibilities include, inter alia, following up on the status of victims of human trafficking, developing a policy that emphasizes the need to seek out victims and training law enforcement officers in methods of identifying them.

8. Saudi Arabia has acceded to the following significant international instruments:

- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography;
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

9. At the regional level, Saudi Arabia acceded to the Arab Charter on Human Rights. It also participated in the drafting and adoption of the following instruments:

- The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam;
- The Declaration on the Rights and Care of the Child in Islam;
- The Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism;
- The Riyadh Declaration on Human Rights in Times of Peace and War;
- The Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam;
- The statute of the Women's Development Organization and the statute of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

10. Saudi Arabia has adopted several significant laws that protect human rights, including the Judiciary Law, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Board of Grievances Law, the Code of Legal Procedure, the Legal Profession Law, the Labour Law, the Law on Caring for the Disabled, the Law on Combating Human Trafficking, the Law on Protection against Abuse and the Ordinance on Domestic Workers and Others Performing Similar Jobs.

11. Human rights departments and commissions were established in a number of ministries and other governmental agencies, including the Commission on Human Rights and Petitions of the Shura Council.

Women's and children's rights

12. Acting on the basis of the principle of fair equality between the sexes, which, in turn, is based on the principle of complementariness in rights and duties, and desiring to increase women's participation in decision-making, a royal decree was issued amending article 3 of the Shura Council statute. Under the amended article, women are considered full members of the Shura Council and must hold a minimum of 20 per cent of its seats. It was also decided that, starting with the next round of elections, women can be candidates for municipal council seats and vote in municipal council elections.

13. With regarding to increasing access to education, particularly for women, it should be noted that, in 2011, the number of women enrolled in higher education institutions reached 473,725, while male enrolment stood at 429,842. By contrast, in 1961, only four Saudi Arabian women were enrolled in such institutions.

14. The number of women holding Government jobs increased by 7.85 per cent from 2010 to 2011. The number of women employed in education reached 228,000, while the number of males employed was 224,000. The number of women who are members of university faculties or employed as university lectures increased from 11,000 to 13,000.

15. The number of students on scholarships to study abroad grew to 24,851. It should be noted that, between 2007 and 2011, the rate of growth in the number female students receiving such scholarships was 389.4 per cent, compared to an increase of 30.47 per cent for males.

16. The Implementation Law, part IV, chapter II, includes provisions related to personal status matters, such as custody, alimony, visitation and marital issues. In order to reconcile families, mediation units were established in the courts and civil institutions to facilitate the reconciliation of families and promote family welfare. Those units play a leading role in ensuring familial cohesion.

17. The Shura Council approved the Child Protection Law, which protects children from all forms of violence. This Law is aimed at realizing the best interests of the child and raising awareness in society of the child's rights. It prohibits the taking of any action that might be detrimental to the child's safety or health. It also serves to fulfil in part Saudi Arabia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the country acceded in 1996. The Law defines a child as anyone who is younger than eighteen years of age and prohibits the employment of children under the age of fifteen. The Council of Ministers ratified this Law on 24 December 2012.

18. Saudi Arabia was able to achieve many of the targets it had established with regard to child health care. In accordance with the Millennium Development Goals, by the end of 2011, the immunization rate for targeted diseases stood at 98.2 per cent and the mortality rate among children under five years old had decreased by two thirds.

Combating human trafficking

19. Given that the Islamic sharia prohibits all forms of human trafficking and in view of the country's international obligations as a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized

Crime, Saudi Arabia enacted the Law on Combating Human Trafficking. Under the Law, the penalty for this crime is imprisonment for up to 15 years and a fine of up to 1 million Saudi Arabian riyals. These penalties are increased in cases where the victim is from a most vulnerable group.

Promoting a culture of human rights

20. The second phase of the programme to promote a culture human rights was completed. Several Government agencies participated in the implementation of the programme, with each agency designing its own plan based on the following principles: the plan must help Saudi Arabia fulfil its obligations under the instruments to which it has acceded; it must address social issues related to human rights violations and inappropriate conduct; and it must focus directly on the essence of human rights and human rights standards.

21. The Human Rights Commission holds workshops for members of the judiciary, including judges, and members of the Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution (the public prosecutor). These workshops focus on the essence of human rights and human rights standards and familiarize participants with Saudi Arabia's international human rights obligations.

22. With regard to human rights education, Saudi Arabia has established the National Commission for Human Rights Education. In addition, a national plan for human rights education has been adopted and, along with a reference guide for human rights education, was disseminated to all institutions, schools and universities. A matrix guide on human rights has been integrated in schools' curricula, and studies have been conducted to determine how curricula address the question of human rights. Training programmes have been developed for persons who are involved in human rights education, and higher education institutions now teach human rights as a distinct subject matter.

Saudi Arabia's human rights efforts at the international level

23. Saudi Arabia's firm commitment to the protection of human rights and the need to develop national institutions, regulations and mechanisms is clearly reflected by its cooperation with international human rights treaty and non-treaty bodies. Saudi Arabia considers the role of these bodies to be of great importance in assisting States to develop the mechanisms and personnel they require to fulfil their human rights obligations. In that connection, it should be noted that the charter of the Human Rights Commission provides that it should cooperate with national, regional, and international human rights associations and organizations in a manner that enables the Commission to achieve its objectives and strengthen its relations.

24. The visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Saudi Arabia in 2010 and her meeting with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, reflects the importance Saudi Arabia attaches to strengthening its relations with international human rights mechanisms.

25. A memorandum of understanding regarding technical cooperation between Saudi Arabia, represented by the Human Rights Commission, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was signed in 2012. Among the goals set out in that memorandum are: strengthening the capacity of Saudi Arabian specialists in the field of international human rights law, particularly with regard to United

Nations mechanisms and the work of the relevant international organizations; developing and implementing specialized human rights training programmes in Saudi Arabia and abroad; developing guides for the staff of agencies that are concerned with human rights; and conducting specialized seminars and courses on human rights.

26. In 2013, in the framework of the United Nations Associate Expert Programme, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations signed a memorandum of understanding concerning the provision of associate experts in the field of human rights. The aim of this arrangement is to build the capacity of Saudi Arabian experts working in international human rights law, particularly with regard to United Nations mechanisms.

27. Saudi Arabia has always strived to participate in the work and the sessions of the Human Rights Council, and has supported many Human Rights Council activities and resolutions aimed at promoting and protecting human rights.

28. Aware of the magnitude of the humanitarian catastrophe that has befallen the Syrian people, as evidenced by the death of more than 100,000 civilians and the regime's use of chemical weapons, Saudi Arabia, together with several members of the Human Rights Council, has supported the adoption of resolutions concerning the human rights situation in Syria. In addition, Saudi Arabia has provided humanitarian aid and relief to Syrian refugees.

29. As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Saudi Arabia supported the adoption by the Human Rights Council of resolution 16/18 on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief.

30. In the Third Committee of the General Assembly, Saudi Arabia supported the draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, which addresses the situation of minorities in Myanmar, particularly the Rohingya people.

31. Saudi Arabia has participated in the work of and supported human rights treaty mechanisms, particularly through the membership of Ms. Aseil Al-Shehail in the Committee on the Rights of the Child, of which she is the Vice-Chair.

32. At its fourth session in 2009, the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review reviewed the first report of Saudi Arabia on human rights. The States members of the Human Rights Council made 53 recommendations to Saudi Arabia, of which 45 were accepted.

33. Saudi Arabia has already submitted its second report to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, and it is scheduled to be reviewed at the Group's 17th session on 21 October 2013.

Saudi Arabia's contributions at the international level

34. Saudi Arabia's nomination for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period of 2014-2016 is in line with its efforts and contributions at the international level. These efforts and contributions have been aimed at promoting peace, tolerance and dialogue, fostering and protecting human rights, and supporting international development and prosperity. Saudi Arabia is of the view that cooperating with international institutions and supporting their objectives and

activities is the best way to achieve the above-mentioned goals. Saudi Arabia has launched a number of initiatives in that regard and provided support to many relevant international institutions.

35. In November 2012, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue opened in Vienna. The opening of this institution was the culmination of the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, to promote dialogue among cultures and the adherents of religions. The Centre strives to promote understanding, peaceful coexistence and tolerance, strengthen common denominators among peoples and make the differences between cultures and religions a basis for understanding, not confrontation.

36. Saudi Arabia has launched many initiatives to counter terrorism while preserving human rights. It has also denounced all conduct or actions that give rise to terrorism. The first practical step it took in that regard was to convene the International Conference on Counter-Terrorism, which took place in Riyadh in 2005. The most important outcome of that Conference was the decision to establish the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. In 2011, Saudi Arabia concluded an agreement with the United Nations to establish the Centre, and the General Assembly supported the establishment of the Centre in its resolution [66/10](#) and called on States to cooperate with it. At that time, Saudi Arabia pledged to contribute \$10 million over a three-year period in order to establish the Centre. This was followed by an additional contribution of \$100 million in 2013 to support and operationalize the Centre and help it achieve the goals for which it was established.

37. Saudi Arabia has contributed \$200,000 to the trust funds administered by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Those funds included the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations.

38. In 2012, Saudi Arabia contributed \$1 million in support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

39. Saudi Arabia supports developing countries. It has given economic aid totalling \$103 billion to 95 developing countries around the world. Saudi Arabia has also provided material and moral support to several Arab, regional and international multilateral development institutions by contributing capital and providing them with administrative and technical support. These institutions play an active role in advancing the economic and social development of developing countries. Saudi Arabia's contributions to many of these bodies, in particular regional ones, exceed the contributions of other countries; the sum of its contributions is more than \$24 billion.

40. With regard to debt relief for heavily indebted countries, Saudi Arabia has cancelled more than \$6 billion of debt owed by a number of least developed countries. In addition, Saudi Arabia has provided debt relief to eligible countries under the international debt relief initiative.

41. In 2008, Saudi Arabia made a contribution of \$500 million to the World Food Programme.

Voluntary pledges

42. Should Saudi Arabia be selected as a member for the period 2014-2016, it pledges to continue to support tirelessly the work of the Human Rights Council. It will continue to adhere to Human Rights Council resolutions, cooperate with its mechanisms and actively participate in its work during its regular and special sessions and in the session of the Social Forum.

43. Saudi Arabia furthermore affirms its commitment to:

- Continue to shoulder its humanitarian responsibility to protect and promote human rights at the national level by enacting legislation and establishing mechanisms that strengthen the institutional framework for human rights, and by adopting best practices in the field of human rights;
- Support the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by contributing \$1 million over a period of five years, starting 2012, in order to enable the Office to carry out its work and activities, including work referred to it by the Human Rights Council;
- Support the human rights bodies and mechanisms of the United Nations and cooperate constructively with them, particularly the Human Rights Council and its subsidiary mechanisms, including the universal periodic review mechanism, so as to ensure their continuation and success. These bodies provide assessments of the human rights situation in the world that call on States to cooperate with one another and benefit from each other's experience, and constitute a single forum for dialogue among States that is conducive to the exchange of best practices and experiences in the field of human rights;
- Cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the specialized agencies of the United Nations with regard to meeting the country's training needs in the protection of human rights, building national capacity and identifying additional ways of protecting and promoting human rights.
