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National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21*

Oman

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I. Introduction

1. In accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006 concerning a universal periodic review of States' human rights obligations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman has prepared a report containing a complete review of the human rights situation in the country. The report was drafted in cooperation with official and non-official bodies as well as with civil society organizations. A list of names of the organizations consulted is to be found in Annex 1.

2. Human rights are respected and protected in Oman, where they are underpinned by an array of fundamental guarantees which ensure that they can be effectively exercised. The most important of those guarantees is the Basic Law of the State (the Constitution) which is the main legislative instrument guaranteeing the protection of public rights and freedoms in all areas of political, economic, social and cultural life. The Basic Law of the State is consistent with human rights principles and relevant international treaties.

3. Oman has ratified most international human rights treaties and national legislation has been harmonized with the provisions thereof. The country is diligently working to complete its accession to the remaining human rights treaties.

4. In accordance with the general principles enshrined in the Basic Law of the State and in international treaties, Oman is seeking to protect human rights through its national legislation.

5. Oman submitted its first national report to the Human Rights Council under the universal periodic review mechanism on 26 January 2011. The report was adopted on 7 June 2011 when Oman accepted 103 voluntary commitments, noted 51 recommendations for further examination and rejected 12 others as being inconsistent with divinely revealed religions and with its national legislation and cultural values.

6. Oman views this second report as the continuation of a plan of action which began with the adoption of the first report. The country is continuing to promote and protect human rights and is interacting positively with international practices in this regard.

7. Oman is submitting the present report on the basis of the outcome of the first report that it submitted under the universal periodic review mechanism and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 and Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 19/21. The text is the result of numerous consultations between ministries and civil society organized by a steering committee chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report covers the efforts made by Oman to follow up on the outcome of the earlier review and highlights the ongoing measures being taken to promote and protect human rights.

II. Methodology for follow-up to the universal periodic review and report preparation process

A. Methodology for follow-up to the universal periodic review

8. Since the adoption of its first report, Oman has been working to implement the outcome of the review. A ministerial steering committee to prepare the country's report under the universal periodic review mechanism was established by a decree of the Council of Ministers in 2012.

B. Report preparation and consultation process

9. The ministerial steering committee took various steps and organized a number of meetings as part of the consultation process for the preparation of the second national report. It also worked with civil society organizations and government agencies and studied their proposals concerning the best way to follow up on the outcome of the review and prepare the second report.

10. A draft version of the second national report was posted on the ministerial steering committee's web page, within the portal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to solicit proposals and comments from the public, including civil society organizations and competent national institutions. To inform the public of the nature of the review mechanism and its outcome, the web page also included excerpts from the first national report, the universal periodic review and the resulting recommendations and pledges.

III. Constitutional and institutional developments to promote and protect human rights

A. The Basic Law of the State

11. The Basic Law of the State (the Constitution) was amended pursuant to Royal Decree No. 99/2011.¹ The amendments give the Council of Oman (Parliament) the following supervisory and legislative powers:

(a) Development plans and the State's annual budget are drawn up by the competent authorities and submitted to the Council;

(b) Draft legislation drawn up by the Government is referred to the Council for approval or amendment and then presented directly to the H.M. the Sultan for promulgation;

(c) The Council makes draft legislative proposals which are then referred to the Government for examination;

(d) Draft social and economic agreements which the Government intends to conclude, or to which it intends to accede, are referred to the Consultative Council.

B. National legislation

12. Under Royal Decree No. 25/2011, the Office of the Public Prosecutor is independent, both administratively and financially. Under the Public Prosecution Act, the Public Prosecutor has the same powers as those accorded to the Inspector General of Police and Customs.

13. A consumer protection agency was established under Royal Decree No. 26/2011.²

¹ The consultative process is important, being in the interests of both the nation and of citizens, and all members of society must participate in integral development which responds to national needs. The first amendments have therefore been made to the provisions of the Basic Law of the State (the Constitution), granting the State Council and the Consultative Council legislative and supervisory powers which enhance their existing prerogatives.

² In view of the importance of consumer protection, the authorities were careful to ensure that the agency — which had previously been a department of the Ministry of Trade and Industry — had

14. Under Royal Decree No. 27/2011, the name of the State Audit Institution was changed to “State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution” and its powers were extended.

15. Under Royal Decree No. 104/2011, Oman acceded to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its fifty-fourth session in December 1999.

16. The Military Code of Justice was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 110/2011. It covers war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and offences against prisoners of war or wounded persons and stipulates that such offences are not subject to a statute of limitations. These provisions are consistent with the relevant international humanitarian law instruments.

17. Under Royal Decree No. 54/2011, Oman ratified the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.³

18. Under Royal Decree No. 9/2013, membership of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary is restricted to persons holding judicial posts.⁴

19. Under Royal Decree No. 10/2012 which regulates judicial matters, the judiciary was made independent of departments within the executive which formerly managed its administrative affairs. Departments within the judiciary itself currently manage their own administrative and financial affairs.

20. Under Royal Decree No. 30/2013, Oman acceded to the Convention on Nuclear Safety of June 1994.⁵

21. Under Royal Decree No. 64/2013, Oman acceded to the United Nations Convention against Corruption.⁶

22. The Children’s Act was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 22/2014. The Act ensures that children in Oman are able to exercise all their rights in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its two Optional Protocols and other relevant legislation.

23. Under Royal Decree No. 26/2014, Oman acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.⁷

sufficient powers. It was therefore endowed with all the material and human resources needed to perform its functions and achieve its desired goals.

³ Oman’s accession to the Hague Convention was motivated by the country’s desire to promote international humanitarian law, of which the Conventions is an important component, especially in light of the fact that Oman is rich in cultural property which needs to be safeguarded from any armed conflict.

⁴ The Supreme Council of the Judiciary seeks to ensure the independence of the judiciary and promote its professional values and ethics. It also deals with other matters such as establishing general judicial policy, streamlining the operation of the courts and the work of the public prosecution, facilitating judicial proceedings and building bridges between the judiciary and persons who have recourse thereto.

⁵ This important Convention seeks to ensure that nuclear power is used in a regulated and environmentally safe manner through measures designed to promote security and emergency response readiness at nuclear installations.

⁶ This is one of the most important anti-corruption treaties and has been ratified by all States. Having acceded to the Convention, Oman considers it to be part of its own national legislation and will take measures to implement its provisions.

⁷ This Convention is one of a number of international humanitarian law instruments which aim to prohibit the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines in view of the extreme danger that they pose to human life and the fact that they cause unjustifiable disability and

24. Under Royal Decree No. 27/2014, Oman ratified the Arab Convention on Combating Money-Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism.⁸

25. Under Royal Decree No. 28/2014, Oman ratified the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention.

26. Under Royal Decree No. 5/2015, Oman ratified the Arab Convention on Combating Information Technology Offences.

27. Under Royal Decree No. 6/2015, Oman ratified the Arab Convention on Combating Transnational Organized Crime.

IV. Government departments and official institutions concerned with human rights

28. Policies and legislation have been put in place by the Government in order to promote the human rights enshrined in the international treaties to which Oman is a party. The following ministries are involved in the implementation of those measures:

The Ministry of the Interior

The Omani Nationality Act, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 38/2014

29. The Omani Nationality Act No. 38/2014 was enacted pursuant to the international treaties to which Oman is a party and in token of the country's commitment to promote human rights. The Act contains a number of new provisions which, as far as possible, closed loopholes which had previously exposed certain persons to the risk of statelessness. Those provisions are contained in article 11, paragraph 3, of the Act under which Omani citizenship is granted to the children — whether born in Oman or abroad — of a foreign woman married to an Omani man even if the latter has lost his citizenship.

30. Under article 12 of the new Act, Omanis who have renounced their Omani citizenship can recover it. Furthermore, under the conditions stipulated in article 17 of the Act, a foreign widow or divorced wife of an Omani man may obtain Omani citizenship.

31. Article 18 of the Act allows Omani citizenship to be granted to a minor child of an Omani woman married to a foreign man who is still alive but has left and abandoned her, or of an Omani woman who is widowed or divorced from a foreign man. Under this provision such children are able to receive Omani citizenship and all its associated rights.

32. The Act regulating the election of members of the Consultative Council was promulgated under Royal Decree 85/2013 pursuant to certain amendments made to the Basic Law of the State under Royal Decree 99/2011. Under article 5 of the new Act, the task of monitoring the election of members of the Consultative Council and of ruling on any electoral appeals falls to an independent and neutral committee chaired by a vice-president of the Supreme Court. The powers and prerogatives of the committee are set forth in article 6 of the Act. Thus, the Act removes responsibility for monitoring elections and ruling on electoral appeals from the executive (as had previously been customary under the regulations for electing members of the Council

suffering beyond what may be required for military advantage.

⁸ In view of the adverse consequences of money-laundering and the financing of terrorism, the Convention seeks to combat those phenomena and, as part of the country's efforts in that regard, a legislative enactment was promulgated under Royal Decree 79/2010.

which were abrogated by this Act) and, out of respect for the principles of transparency and justice, vests these functions in an independent body the chairperson and membership of which are all members of the judiciary.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

33. The following committees were established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012: the ministerial steering committee chaired by the H.E. the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the executive working group chaired by the H.E. the Secretary-General and the legal committee chaired by the adviser to the H.E. the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of establishing these new bodies was to ensure that Oman was able to fulfil its commitments vis-à-vis human rights mechanisms and engage in effective bilateral and international cooperation as a means to promote, protect and guarantee the exercise of human rights.

The Ministry of Manpower

34. The Ministry of Manpower regulates the labour market with tripartite participation (Government, employers and workers), the goal being to make the private sector a primary source of employment opportunities. In order to ensure that the private sector remains an attractive option for workers, laws and regulations have been promulgated to protect both them and employers and guarantee the legal rights of all the parties involved in the production process. The Ministry has recently issued a package of laws and regulations to develop the labour market in a manner consistent with national requirements and international labour standards.

Laws regulating the labour market

35. Under Royal Decree No. 61/2013, which made certain amendments to the Social Insurance Act, pensions were increased by 5 per cent. The Decree also regulated the proportional contributions of private sector workers to the Public Authority for Social Insurance and increased their pension entitlements after their retirement.

36. The following laws and regulations were recently issued to develop the labour market in a manner consistent with national requirements and international labour standards:

- Ministerial Decree No. 656/2011 concerning the circumstances, occupations and occasions in which women may be employed on night shift and the conditions for such employment;
- Ministerial Decree No. 111/2013 under which plans were formulated and a supervisory committee set up to establish and monitor an electronic interface between the Ministry of Manpower and the Central Bank as part of an integrated system for wage payments to private sector workers;
- Ministerial Decree No. 570/2013 regulating the formation, operation and registration of trade unions and of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions, the statute and powers of which are specified therein;
- Ministerial Decree No. 72/2014 of 31 March 2014, concerning the restructuring of a social dialogue committee comprising representatives of the three parties involved in the production process (Government, employers and workers).

Protection of workers

37. Oman shows great concern for the well-being of all elements of the workforce without exception or discrimination and regulations have been enacted to protect the rights of both workers and employers. The Ministry of Manpower's Directorate General of Labour Welfare monitors working conditions, settles labour disputes and raises awareness concerning relevant laws and regulations.

Inspection

38. Private sector workplaces are subject to the Labour Code and monitored through inspections. During the period 2013-2014, 12,328 private sector facilities were inspected and 47 of them were prosecuted for violations of laws and regulations.

39. The inspections cover between 40 and 49 per cent of the labour force in private sector workplaces each year.

40. The inspections also serve to monitor the application of occupational health and safety regulations by private sector employers. During the period 2013-2014, 3,046 workplaces were visited and 147 were found to be in violation. If employers persistently fail to meet their obligations, they are referred to the Office of the Public Prosecutor so that the appropriate legal action can be taken against them.

Settlement of labour disputes

41. In principle, labour disputes are resolved by due process of law. Exceptionally, amicable settlements may be sought by the Ministry of Manpower in the presence of employers and workers. During the period 2013-2014, a total of 12,694 complaints were received.

Awareness-raising on labour issues and the work of trade unions

42. The Ministry organizes awareness-raising programmes for workers and employers alike on labour legislation and regulations and a total of 916 such programmes were conducted during the period 2013-2014. In 2014, the number of registered trade unions amounted to 211, representing a 15 per cent increase as compared with 2013.

Wage Protection System

43. An electronic wage protection system has been set up to verify whether employers are paying their workers on the day their wages fall due. Implementation of the first phase of the new system began in June 2014 and covers a total of 4,676 top-ranking, international and consultancy firms employing 574,967 workers. Efforts to implement the system at other workplaces are still ongoing.

The Ministry of Social Development

44. The Ministry of Social Development has made respect for human rights one of the main components of its policies and programmes. It is endeavouring to introduce human rights principles, especially as they relate to children, women and persons with disabilities, into its quinquennial and annual development plans and is monitoring the implementation of treaties in this regard.

45. Working alongside other human rights and development institutions in Oman, the Ministry's first concern is to ensure that certain social groups, namely children, women, persons with disabilities, young people and the elderly, enjoy social

protection. To this end, its programmes and projects are geared to meet the needs of those groups and ensure that they are able to exercise their rights.

Mechanisms and programmes

46. The Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities was established under Royal Decree No. 18/2014, while the Family Protection Department was set up under Ministerial Decree No. 330/2012. The latter operates the *Dar al-Wifaq* centre which is a shelter offering protection and assistance to women and children who are victims of violence or human trafficking. The Department for the Elderly was created under Ministerial Decree No. 15/2015. The Ministry has also established a number of other care institutions:

- The Child Welfare Centre;
- The Social Care Home for Elderly Persons;
- Guidance and reform facilities for juvenile delinquents;
- The *Wafa* centres for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities;
- A rehabilitation and correctional centre;
- The *Dar al-Aman* shelter for persons with disabilities.

47. The Ministry has organized conferences and seminars on the rights of specific categories of persons, such as women and children, and has begun to prepare a number of strategies including the following:

- A draft strategy for social work 2016-2025;
- A draft national strategy for children 2016-2025;
- A draft national strategy for women 2016-2025;
- A draft strategy for persons with disabilities 2016-2025.

48. The Ministry has issued a series of laws and decrees to protect certain categories of persons the care of whom falls within its jurisdiction, as illustrated by the following:

- The Children's Act, issued under Royal Decree No. 22/2014;
- Ministerial Decree No. 212/2012 establishing regulations for kindergartens;
- Decree No. 21/2011 of the Minister of Social Development setting forth rules and procedures to combat the phenomenon of mendicancy;
- Ministerial Decree No. 72/2014 establishing regulations for social assistance benefits;
- Ministerial Decree No. 228/2013 regulating the *Dar al-Aman* shelter;
- Ministerial Decree No. 235/2014 regulating the provision of compensatory and assistive devices.

49. The Ministry has set up various programmes to improve the situation of families, women and children. They include:

- A financial assistance programme for elderly persons, persons with disabilities, orphans and widows, pursuant to the Social Security Act;
- A social protection programme for families, including family and marital counselling and guidance hotlines;
- A legal awareness-raising programme for women;

- A support programme for Omani women's associations;
 - An alternative care programme for children who lack parental care;
 - A care programme for orphaned children;
 - A care programme for elderly persons and persons with disabilities.
50. The Ministry is represented on several national human rights bodies and committees such as:
- The National Human Rights Commission;
 - The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking;
 - The National Committee to Combat Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

The Ministry of Education

51. Oman has conducted a pioneering experiment in the field of human rights education, culminating in the promulgation of Royal Decree No. 22/2014 under which education is both compulsory and free. Measures have been taken to implement the Arab Plan for Human Rights Education 2009-2014 which seeks, inter alia, to incorporate human rights concepts into academic curricula, provide human rights training for teaching staff, propagate a human rights culture and encourage civil society to participate in the dissemination thereof.

Children with disabilities

52. Pursuant to Royal Decree 121/2008, the Ministry of Education is endeavouring to protect the interests of persons with disabilities and, in particular, to ensure that all children in Oman enjoy equal educational opportunities without discrimination. This programme was expanded to include 627 schools in the academic year 2013/14. A programme to integrate persons with mental and hearing disabilities in basic education schools has also been developed and, in the academic year 2013/14, it covered 182 schools and 1,390 pupils. A programme to treat speech and communication disorders, which began in only one school in the academic year 2004/05, was extended to all educational districts in the academic year 2010/11 and, in the academic year 2013/14, it covered a total of 72 schools and 648 pupils under the supervision of 31 school inspectors.

53. The Ministry is seeking to ensure that these students, like their peers, continue their studies up to the level of the general certificate of education. They are then enrolled in the Ministry of Higher Education's standard admission programme and assigned to academic programmes appropriate to each category, depending on the conditions and grades required. Students with visual and hearing impairments are admitted to university-level education in the Sultan Qaboos University as well as in various private universities in Oman such as the Gulf College. A number of deaf students who graduated in the academic year 2013/14 were sent to complete their higher education in the United States of America and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Following graduation, deaf students have been enrolled in administrative and vocational training institutes.

Compulsory education

54. In view of the vital importance of education and its status as a human right, article 36 of the Children's Act promulgated by Royal Decree No. 22/2014 makes education compulsory up to the completion of the basic level. The children's

guardians are responsible for their enrolment and for ensuring their regular attendance at school. Statistics show that the average net enrolment rate for the academic year 2012/13 was 98.2 per cent in State schools for grades 1 to 6, while the average net enrolment rate in the educational system for grades 7 to 9 was 95.5 per cent in the same academic year.

55. The Ministry of Education runs adult education centres in which persons who have spent three years in the illiteracy eradication programme or who dropped out of regular education but know how to read and write can complete grades 7 to 12. It has been noted that the majority of the students at those centres are women. The illiteracy rate in Oman amounted to 9.18 per cent in 2013.

Human rights education

56. A number of good practices have been observed in the field of human rights education at all levels. Those practices include the following.

57. Oman has incorporated the concepts of human rights and the rights of the child into the national academic curricula at all stages of education. A draft “charter” for the inclusion of these concepts in the curricula was adopted and teaching staff have been trained in its implementation. A number of officials have been enrolled in internal and external human rights training courses in order to acquire new skills and precise knowledge on human rights education, especially in regard to child development and protection.

58. Developers of curricula on all subjects have been trained as part of an integrated plan to train teachers and school inspectors in the use of the charter for the inclusion of the concepts of human rights and the rights of the child in school curricula. That training is supplemented by brochures and training packages to help teachers to apply those concepts and values and organize educational activities to instil them in their students. The self-learning process is also facilitated by workshops, written materials, images, drawings and classroom and extramural activities on children’s rights.

The Ministry of Higher Education

59. Since the beginning of the new era in 1970, the Government of Oman has been devoting great attention to education. The Ministry of Higher Education focuses on the culmination of the educational itinerary and on producing a generation qualified to serve the labour market and meet the requirements of development in all its facets. The Ministry’s plans and programmes offer an advanced higher education consistent with modern educational developments and contemporary needs and also strive to address human rights issues.

60. Human rights terminology has been introduced into the syllabuses studied by students in higher educational institutions, covering aspects such as intercultural dialogue, tolerance, personal rights and freedoms.

61. During the period 2012-2014, many Omani academics in higher educational institutions attended seminars and conferences on human rights issues both at home and abroad.

62. Human rights concepts have been promoted through annual student activities and exhibitions organized by student affairs offices and student service centres in higher educational institutions.

63. Higher educational institutions offer language courses in which students can study languages such as Chinese, French and German.

64. Student delegations from a number of countries around the world have participated in activities at higher educational institutions. In recent years, delegations have been welcomed from, inter alia, Taylor's University in Malaysia, the University of Pennsylvania and the People's Friendship University of Russia.

65. Omani students have participated in international cultural days, including one celebrated in the American State of Florida on 18 March 2014. They also participated in the Asia-Pacific International Model United Nations Conference held in the Thai capital, Bangkok, from 20 to 24 September 2012.

66. A student summer exchange programme was run from 10 June to 5 July 2013 in cooperation with the American Middle East Institute based in Pittsburgh. The aim of the initiative was to teach Arabic to American students and to develop the English-language skills of Omani students.

67. A committee was formed, pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 31/2013, to run the student exchange programme and, in the academic year 2013/14, 107 students were sent for training in various foreign and Arab States including the United Kingdom, Australia, Finland and Morocco.

68. The Omani Programme for Cultural and Scientific Cooperation is effectively a system of grants accorded by higher educational institutions to Arab and non-Arab students. Between the academic years 2011/12 and 2014/15, a total of 52 grants were disbursed, including 14 by the Sultan Qaboos University, 11 by colleges of applied sciences, 20 by technical colleges, 5 by the College of Banking and Financial Studies and 2 by the Sharia College.

69. In accordance with Ministerial Decree 71/2014, a guide for student advisory councils was introduced in the academic year 2014/15 and is due to come into effect as of the academic year 2015/16. It is seen as a way to ensure democracy among students in higher educational institutions.

70. In order to further human knowledge, encourage the international community to live in peace, promote mutual understanding and tolerance and support academic research, His Majesty the Sultan has endowed a number of chairs in renowned universities around the world. They include the Sultan Qaboos Professorship of Abrahamic Faiths and Shared Values at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom and the Sultan of Oman Professorship of International Relations at Harvard University in the United States of America.

V. National mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights

The National Human Rights Commission

71. The National Human Rights Commission was established in 2008 pursuant to Royal Decree No. 124/2008. It enjoys independence, its relationship with the State Council being purely administrative. It has received a B grading from the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions.

72. The Commission's main functions are to monitor the protection of human rights and freedoms in Oman in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and international treaties, record any cases of violations or abuses and help to resolve them, and propose an annual plan comprising measures that need to be taken at the national level in order to disseminate a culture of human rights.

The composition and mandate of the National Human Rights Commission

73. *Appointment of members of the Commission and guarantees of pluralism:* The provisions regulating the role and mandate of the National Human Rights Commission are annexed to Royal Decree 124/2008. Under article 1 of those provisions, the Commission is to be composed of 14 members, taking due account of the guarantees set forth in the Paris Principles concerning the composition of such bodies in order to ensure the pluralistic representation of civil society. Article 1 states that the Commission is to consist of the following:

- A member from the State Council;
- A member from the Consultative Council;
- A member from Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- A member from the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions;
- A member of the legal profession;
- Three members from civil society organizations: the Omani Women's Association, the Journalists' Association and the Bar Association;
- Six members representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Civil Service.

Decreeing that the Commission should be composed in this manner is a way of ensuring that it has access to the various areas of expertise needed, and to ensure that the membership is drawn from a broad range of civil society, State institutions and national human rights associations.

74. *Mandate:* The mandate of the Commission is as follows:

- Monitoring the protection of human rights and freedoms in Oman in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and international treaties;
- Investigating observations made by foreign Governments, international organizations and NGOs regarding human rights in Oman and coordinating with the relevant authorities to respond to and address the issues raised;
- Advising the State authorities on matters relating to human rights and freedoms, and assisting in the drafting of reports in that regard;
- Proposing an annual plan setting forth the measures that need to be taken at the national level in order to disseminate a culture of human rights, submitting the plan to the Council of Ministers for adoption and subsequently coordinating with the authorities to ensure its proper implementation;
- Performing any other tasks assigned to it in connection with its mandate.

75. *Financial independence:* The Paris Principles emphasize the importance of human rights institutions being financially independent as a guarantee of their impartiality and effectiveness. Accordingly, article 8 of the annex to the aforementioned Royal Decree stipulates that the financial resources of the Commission shall consist of funds allocated from the general State budget in addition to any other resources approved by the Council of Ministers.

76. *Annual report:* Article 11 of the annex to the Royal Decree stipulates as follows: The Commission shall draw up an annual report on its activities, including such proposals as it deems appropriate within the scope of its mandate and shall submit the said report to His Majesty the Sultan through the President of the State Council.

77. *Lobbying for the ratification of or accession to international human rights treaties:* In accordance with the Paris Principles, the National Human Rights Commission has established a group composed of two members which works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to underscore the importance of ratifying human rights treaties and monitoring the implementation of treaties already ratified.

78. Forums for strengthening cooperation with international human rights mechanisms.

- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and its regional office in Beirut;
- The United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region in Doha.

The Commission aims to increase its cooperation with national institutions and with regional mechanisms of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to develop a capacity-building programme on human rights values and principles for officials and other stakeholders in Oman.

Field visits to learn about other experiences and best practices

79. The Paris Principles urge national human rights institutions to forge enduring links of cooperation with all human rights bodies in order to cater fully for any situation that may arise. In order to fulfil its role and strengthen its links with civil society, the Commission has organized a number of dialogues with civil society organizations, including the following:

- The Association of Disabled Persons;
- The Omani Women's Association;
- The Cancer Awareness Association;
- The Commission has held discussions with heads of relevant administrative agencies such as the Minister of Civil Service, the Minister of Health, the Public Prosecutor, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Royal Office, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Social Development, the President of the State Council and the President of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking;
- It has also held meetings with senior members of the Directorate General of Prisons.

Formulation of a national strategy to disseminate a culture of human rights

80. One of the functions of the National Human Rights Commission is to draw up an annual national plan for human rights education and awareness-raising. To that end, the Commission has undertaken a number of field visits to educational institutions and youth centres, including the following:

- Various Omani universities, youth centres and UNICEF;
- A delegation was received from the Asia-Pacific Forum to evaluate the Commission's performance;
- Summer camps.

The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking

81. In order to supplement national legislation and bring it into line with the international efforts being made to combat this crime, the legislature drafted a Human

Trafficking Act which was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 126/2008. Article 22 of the Act made provision for the establishment of a National Committee comprising representatives of a number of stakeholders.

82. The Committee is responsible for the formulation of a plan of action to combat human trafficking, the compilation of a database in coordination with local, regional and international agencies, and the implementation of programmes for the care and rehabilitation of victims. Despite the limited extent of human trafficking in Oman itself — which is a transit country — State institutions are making diligent efforts to combat the phenomenon through legislative, regulatory and other procedures, taking account of relevant international treaties and with regional and international cooperation.

Working group for the preparation of the report submitted by Oman under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

83. Oman acceded to the Convention in 2002 pursuant to Royal Decree No. 87/2002. Notice of ratification was published in the Official Gazette on 26 October 2002 and the Convention thereby entered into force as part of the national corpus juris pursuant to article 76 of the Basic Law of the State. The provisions of the Convention have been examined in a number of seminars and workshops by various bodies in Oman and the country presented its second to fifth periodic reports (2006 to 2012) in a single document.

84. *Maternity and childhood:* As part of its efforts to protect children, the Ministry of Social Development in cooperation with partners such as the Ministries of Health and of Education and with the support of UNICEF and the participation of civil society organizations, has prepared two separate strategies, one for children and one for women, which focus on developing policies and programmes in that regard.

VI. Civil society associations and associations of public benefit

85. The Basic Law of the State guarantees freedom to form national associations for legitimate objectives and using peaceful means. The Non-Governmental Associations Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 14/2000, allows natural persons to form associations for non-profit motives for the purpose of undertaking social, cultural or charitable activities.

86. Membership of such associations is voluntary. The Act does not distinguish between members and grants them the right to choose who will represent them on the administrative board. Foreign communities also have the right to establish associations in accordance with the Act. The Ministry of Social Development has been designated as the administrative body overseeing such associations, and a new bill of law on non-governmental associations is currently being examined.

87. The Act allows associations to hold festivals, celebrations, gatherings and marches in accordance with their stated aims. They must first obtain approval from the Ministry of Social Development and coordinate with other bodies in order to ensure that the safety of participants is not compromised and that no harm is caused to persons or public property.

88. The following table lists associations according to type and number of members in 2014. The information is drawn from the annual report published by the Ministry of Social Development.

<i>Type of association</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Number of members</i>
Omani women's associations	60	10 291
Charitable associations	30	2 643
Occupational associations	30	8 344
Social clubs of foreign communities	16	4 970

The Oman Charitable Organization

89. The Organization has launched seven national programmes. One focuses on the care of orphans and grants a basic monthly allowance, as well as another allowance on special occasions, to an estimated 2,400 orphans. The other programmes focus on providing care for families, cash assistance, medical treatment, education, food and housing.

90. The Oman Charitable Organization also stepped in to help citizens affected by Cyclone Gonu, donating a total of 80 million Omani rials (RO) in aid.

91. At the international level, the Oman Charitable Organization provides assistance in the form of relief and aid to disaster-stricken countries. It also contributes to infrastructural rehabilitation in such afflicted Arab, friendly and other countries.

92. The Organization also runs the following special annual programmes in a number of countries:

- A well-digging programme;
- A programme offering bursaries for students to study in colleges and universities in Oman;
- A rehabilitation funding programme for charitable organizations;
- A programme for the restoration and furnishing of places of worship;
- A housing construction and maintenance programme;
- A support programme for orphans;
- A food aid programme;
- A programme for the supply of water storage tanks.

VII. National policies and strategies

National strategies

93. These strategies are based on a number of general principles. The main priority is to ensure that citizens enjoy a decent standard of living by improving education and health-care systems, with emphasis on social development and the enhancement of governmental services. They include:

- The Omani Health Vision 2050 rests on the framework approach of the World Health Organization and its six main building blocks: leadership/governance, financing, health workforce, service delivery, information and medical products, vaccinations and technology;
- The 2008-2016 national plan to combat human trafficking;
- The 2016-2025 national strategy for childhood;

- The 2016-2025 national strategy for the advancement of women;
- The 2016-2025 national plan for elderly persons.

VIII. Voluntary pledges and recommendations accepted during the first universal periodic review in 2011

94. Pursuant to Council of Ministers' Decision No. 24/2015, Oman agreed, in principle, to accede to:

- (a) The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966;
- (b) The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 10 December 1984;
- (c) The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

95. Accession is conditional upon completion of the legal procedures set forth in the Basic Law of the State for accession to international treaties.

(a) Pursuant to Council of Ministers' Decision No. 24/2015, Oman agreed, in principle, to withdraw its reservation to article 15, paragraph 4, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which stipulates that: "States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile". The Omani Passport Act was amended to allow women to obtain a passport without needing permission from their legal guardian. The amendment gives women greater freedom to travel without having to request permission. The reservation has thus already been withdrawn in actual practice.

Recommendations being examined

96. Priority is being accorded to accession to the international treaties listed under paragraph 94 above but the following treaties are also currently being evaluated and studied by the relevant authorities:

- (a) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966.
- (b) The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- (c) International Labour Organization (ILO) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention of 1948 (No. 87) and Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention of 1949 (No. 98).

Efforts made by Oman to promote and protect human rights

Promotion of political participation

97. This includes the rule of law, the administration of justice and the penal system. Royal Decree No. 99/2011 gives the two chambers of the Omani parliament, the State Council and the Consultative Council, broad legislative and supervisory powers. They can pass laws, oversee the functioning of the executive and express views on international treaties.

98. The administration of justice is covered by the Basic Law of the State which makes provision for a judicial council to oversee the smooth operation of the courts

and their auxiliary institutions. There is also a judicial inspectorate which monitors the work of judges and submits reports thereon. Penalties are based on the principle of reform and deterrence and there can be no punishment except as prescribed by law.

Promotion of the role of women (empowerment)

99. Oman has been successful in increasing the proportion of girls in schools to 50 per cent, while 55 per cent of university students are female. According to the statistics for 2012, women constitute 43 per cent of the workforce in the public sector and 20.3 per cent in the private sector.

100. In the political sphere, women have the right to vote and be elected to the Omani parliament — which is made up of two chambers, the Consultative Council and the State Council — and to municipal councils. Three women currently hold ministerial rank, two of whom have a minister's portfolio, while in the diplomatic service three women hold ambassadorial posts. Under Royal Decree No. 125/2008, women have the right to receive government land grants on a par with men. Women also have the right to obtain a passport without having to seek the permission of their husbands. The Labour Code protects women from arbitrary dismissal in case of illness, pregnancy or childbirth and gives them the right to 50 days of paid maternity leave and up to one year of unpaid maternity leave.

Information

101. The Ministry of Information keeps abreast of the latest developments in the field of communications and information technology and endeavours to update the legislation governing the work of the media to ensure that it remains in step with advances in modern interactive communication devices.

102. The Ministry of Information is working with the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Sultan Qaboos University to review the following laws which govern the work of the media: the Press and Publications Act, the Censorship of Artistic Works Act and the Radio and Television Act. A committee of experts and academics has been formed to draft a single bill of law covering all media activities.

103. The draft is taking some time to prepare as it requires the coordinated efforts of many different departments. The amendments being made are radical and comprehensive because the new Act will have to address many different areas which have never been accurately covered before, especially in the field of electronic communications.

104. Given the importance of ensuring citizens' participation, gauging public opinion and ascertaining the demands and expectations of the target public in regard to media services, the Ministry of Information has been working with the Sultan Qaboos University on field research in a number of governorates to identify and respond to needs in regard to public awareness-raising.

105. One indication of the existence of this environment of press freedom and freedom of expression is the fact that Oman has — at the time of writing this report — 9 daily newspapers, 4 of them in English, and more than 80 periodicals, magazines and other publications which appear weekly, monthly or quarterly. The number of press institutions has increased to 24 and there are 99 printing houses. The Muscat International Book Fair is one of the largest book fairs in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the most recent Fair was attended by 633 publishing houses from 24 countries and exhibited 180,000 titles of which 65 per cent were new publications. Participation in the Fair has increased year after year and it is now considered to be one of the best venues for the free circulation of printed works.

106. His Majesty the Sultan has issued direct orders regarding the importance of training journalists with the aim of improving their professional performance and ensuring the quality and objectivity of articles and media output in general. The Ministry of Information is working with the Oman Journalists' Association to organize training courses for journalists both at home and abroad.

107. The Oman Journalists' Association is a civil society organization, independent of the Ministry of Information. Nonetheless, the two bodies cooperate closely on all matters regarding the improvement of professional standards and the updating of regulations. The Association currently has more than 450 members.

108. The Ministry is continuing to hold courses, with an average of 70 training programmes a year.

109. Training and compliance with rules of professional conduct are, without doubt, extremely important, especially in the current age of open skies and high — sometimes excessive — levels of freedom entailing the risk that professional standards may decline. This has in fact already happened in a number of societies as a result of abusive misconduct, infringement of the rights of others through slander and libel, and incitement to hatred. Thus, training to improve quality and professionalism is a way to ensure that everyone can continue to enjoy freedom of expression.

Achievements and best practices

Oman in international rankings

- The gender-gap ranking of Oman in 2013 was fifty-sixth in the world and sixth among Arab States;
- The happiness and well-being ranking of Oman in 2010-2013 was twenty-third in the world and second among Arab States;
- The global competitiveness ranking of Oman in 2014-2015 was forty-sixth in the world and fifth among Arab States;
- On the corruption perceptions index Oman stood at sixty-first in the world and fourth among Arab States in 2013.

Principal educational indicators

- Illiteracy eradication programmes and educational policies in Oman led to a drop in the illiteracy rate to 9 per cent in persons between the ages of 15 and 79 in 2013;
- Educational outcomes have shown that there is no quality gap in school education between males and females, reflecting the belief that education is a universal right for men and women alike;
- Oman has encouraged its citizens to enrol their children in school education, which is provided free of charge. As a consequence, the net enrolment rate in primary education has reached 98 per cent;
- Oman has a good student-teacher ratio, with 10 students per teacher.

Principal health-care indicators

110. Since health care is one of the most important individual rights in any country, Oman is making enormous efforts to improve its ranking on health-care indices and to develop health-care services of a high standard. The indicators currently stand as follows:

- There are 19.5 doctors and 43.1 nurses for every 10,000 of the population;
- The number of hospital beds currently stands at 6,373, making an average of 16 beds for every 10,000 of the population.

111. One hundred per cent of children under the age of 1 were vaccinated in 2012, as part of the efforts to improve children's health and minimize the dangers of infectious diseases in the future.

Best practices

112. The best practices in Oman, as put into effect by the Housing Bank and by civil society, include a distress relief project which aims to ease the financial burden on certain citizens by relieving them of their mortgages or personal debts. Another project involves a shelter (*Dar al-Aman*) providing rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. The Royal Oman Police have a website to receive reports from victims of human trafficking and help to combat that phenomenon. A fund has also been set up to support small and medium-sized enterprises and implement the programme to incorporate human rights concepts in academic curricula.

Development standards

113. Human development is the mainstay and the aim of comprehensive development in Oman. Human beings are the ultimate target of development and not merely a means for its realization as in the traditional view of development. Oman has become one of the world's leading countries in regard to speed of development, as reflected in United Nations human development reports.

114. The Supreme Council for Planning is responsible for formulating a comprehensive long-term national development strategy, setting a vision for the future and laying down general guidelines for its implementation, depending on the natural and human resources available. The Council periodically evaluates the strategy in the light of economic, social and other changes. It also develops strategies for physical development and for statistics and information and sets standards for development projects and planning methods in order to balance the economic and social aspects of development and ensure economic cooperation. The development standards include the following aspects:

- Green economy, which includes sustainable energy, agriculture, investment and transport, so that Oman can become a centre for the exportation and re-exportation of green products and green technologies;
- A renewable energy programme;
- A fund for small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Banks have been directed to allocate a minimum of 5 per cent of their credit portfolios for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Capacity-building

115. In recent years the Ministry of Civil Service has been implementing a distance learning (computer-based training) programme to build human capacity in Oman, and a regulatory structure has been created in that regard. It is hoped that this form of training will lead to an increase in the number of trainees, save time and costs and enable officials to undergo training without having to interrupt their work. In 2013, the Ministry of Civil Service, in partnership with a number of specialized foreign institutions, implemented programmes for more than 90 participants, all of whom were supervisors in government offices. The aim was to improve performance, train middle management and study other successful administrative and capacity-building

experiences and practices in such areas as the training of government administrators, strategic planning, performance evaluation, human resource development and the improvement of government services. Officials in Oman have been trained to deal with cases involving human rights, human trafficking and violations of the rights of women and children. Police, public security and judicial officials all receive training on ways to treat prisoners and differentiate between accused and convicted persons. The following measures are being taken in this regard:

Prison visits and inspections

116. Visits to and inspections of prisons and places of detention are carried out in accordance with the rules and powers stipulated in the Prisons Act and its implementing regulations, the statute of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Public Prosecution Act. The judiciary and the Royal Oman Police cooperate in organizing the visits.

Code of Police Conduct

117. Since its establishment, the Royal Oman Police has applied the Code of Police Conduct in accordance with the Police Act and its implementing regulations which specify the objectives that the police should pursue, their powers and obligations and acts in which they are prohibited from engaging. The regulations also explain their role and national duty to protect the security and stability of society and make them answerable for any violations that they might commit.

Police complaints department

118. The Royal Oman Police has a number of departments and offices which can receive complaints and grievances against police officers. These include the office for the filing of claims which is part of the Office of the Inspector General of Police and Customs, the complaints section of the Directorate of Legal Affairs and the Military Judiciary Directorate. These bodies carefully examine the complaints that they receive and take the requisite legal action thereon.

IX. Challenges and priorities

119. Oman combines transparency with gradual progress, harmonizing national and international practices and taking both regulatory and legislative measures. It faces a number of challenges, the most significant of which are:

- Strengthening the role of human rights mechanisms;
- Continuing to develop laws and legislation;
- Continuing to build capacity and train national staff.

120. Oman is evaluating its strategies in regard to women and children. It is taking steps to combat human trafficking while re-evaluating and examining the extent to which strategies have been successful in attaining their goals. It is also compiling a statistical database on all aspects of its human rights practices.

121. Despite the challenges that it is facing, Oman always strives to ensure calm and stability both within its own national territory and in neighbouring States. It has managed to build its credibility and thorough trustworthiness in the eyes of Arab and friendly States in the region and throughout the world. By way of example, Oman hosted the tripartite discussions between the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the European Union and emphasized the principle of the mutual interests of all the parties.

X. Conclusion

122. Oman attaches great importance to human rights, the promotion and protection of which it regards as a national priority. The competent authorities — the ministerial steering committee and the National Human Rights Commission — consider the human rights situation in Oman to be good and, though aware of the challenges that they are still facing, are continuing to work within a constitutional framework and on the basis of reports and recommendations received. Oman is diligently seeking to further improve the human rights situation in the country. The measures taken over the last few years in all the areas mentioned in this report highlight the significance of the policies that Oman is pursuing in the field of human rights. In this context, the universal periodic review will provide an opportunity to assess the endeavours made during the first cycle and to evaluate the remaining challenges.

123. Preparations for the second cycle of the universal periodic review have given a new impetus to the thinking of various government agencies and have created an opportunity which must be seized, especially in regard to the implementation and monitoring of international commitments. The universal periodic review has also helped to stimulate dialogue among all the parties.

124. The Government is endeavouring to increase its achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights and to draw positive lessons from its practical experiences in that regard.

125. Respect for human rights constitutes one of the fundamental values of Omani society. The country has made great progress as a result of tolerance, cooperation, respect, family cohesion, fraternity, trust and confidence and the rejection of all forms of extremism, differentiation or discrimination. The justice and equality stemming from its historical and cultural heritage further consolidate those values.

Annexes

- Annex 1** Names of institutions consulted
- Annex 2** The Basic Law of the State and its amendments
- Annex 3** International human rights treaties signed or ratified by Oman
- Annex 4** Table showing how the Ministry of Education supports human rights through academic curricula
- Annex 5** A list of important legislation referred to in the report

Annex 1

Names of institutions consulted

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
 2. Ministry of the Interior.
 3. Ministry of Higher Education.
 4. Ministry of Manpower.
 5. Ministry of Education.
 6. Ministry of Legal Affairs.
 7. Ministry of Social Development
 8. Ministry of Information.
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