



ngo group for the crc

STATE PARTY EXAMINATION OF BAHRAIN'S SECOND AND THIRD PERIODIC REPORT

57TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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Contents

Opening Comments	1
General Measures of Implementation	2
Definition of the Child	6
General Principles	7
Civil Rights and Freedoms	8
Family Environment and Alternative Care	9
Basic Health and Welfare	10
Education, Leisure and Cultural Activities Education	12
Special Protection Measures	13
Concluding Remarks	15

Bahrain ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 13 February 1992. On 1 June 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) examined the second and third periodic reports of Bahrain. It was last examined on 3 July 2002.

Opening Comments

The delegation of Bahrain was led by Dr. Fatema Mohamed Yousil Al Balooshi, Minister of Social Development. She was supported by representatives from the Ministry of Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prosecution Division of Juvenile Prosecution, the Legal and Finance Committee of the National Children's Fund, the National Committee for Childhood, the Curricula Directorate, the Child Protection unit at the Salmanya Medical Complex, the National Foundation for Human Rights and the Permanent Mission in Geneva.

Dr. Al Balooshi expressed pleasure at meeting the Committee. She summarised the recent achievements of Bahrain noting that the State was progressing in the process of democratisation, freedom and prosperity. Dr. Al Balooshi emphasised the State's commitment to protect children, childhood, mothers, and to provide complete care in accordance with article five of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Some achievements of the State included high levels of education, increased access to education and health, as well as the attainment of all the Millennium Development Goals related to children.

Dr. Al Balooshi noted attempts by protesters, in the recent demonstrations, to exploit children as objects of violence and prevent them from attending school. The State took firm steps to re-establish peace and security for all citizens including children. Dr. Al Balooshi said the State maintained a relationship of transparency and collaboration to achieve the objectives of the Convention. The State Report included basic indications on economic, social and political aspects of the population and the challenges facing Bahrain. There was an increase in

childcare by 98.4 per cent. Dr. Al Balooshi added that in accordance with the Convention, the constitution of Bahrain was amended in 2002, prohibiting the exploitation and abuse of children. The care of children in the State was moved to the Ministry of Social Development. In addition, the National Committee on Childhood was reformulated to include members of various ministries as a mechanism for development and cooperation. Dr. Al Balooshi emphasised that the State worked seriously to develop a mechanism for the protection of children. There were special agencies and clubs for children and youth including offices for family counselling. Education and healthcare was free to all children and civil society received support from the government. Children with disabilities had special services to include them in regular or specialised schools.

Dr. Al Balooshi summarised that there were special programmes to lower the mortality rate, care for children and protect children from physical and sexual abuse. There was no discrimination in the provision of services between Bahraini children and foreign children. The State encouraged the participation of children in internal and external organisations and was working on the Children's Bill, which would be promulgated shortly. The Children's Bill contained chapters on health, physical and sexual abuse and protection of children with disabilities. Dr. Al Balooshi also added that there was a clear budget for programmes concerning children in Bahrain. Dr. Al Balooshi concluded by saying the State was not immune to gaps in the implementation of the CRC in the country, but would work to provide a prosperous future for children and protect children from any form of physical or psychological abuse.

Ms. Hadeel Al-Asmar, the co-Rapporteur, welcomed the delegation. She noted that the State Report was helpful as it included the challenges met by the State and the opinions of children regarding the services they needed. Bahrain was ranked first in the Arab Region and 40th in the world in regards to free economy, high rates of investment and the protection of intellectual property. Ms. Al-Asmar was pleased that the delegation had a positive attitude and an open mind for a fruitful dialogue.

General Measures of Implementation

The Committee asked whether there was evidence or any statistics regarding the injuries or deaths of children during the recent demonstrations.

The delegation said the children were involved in demonstrations because the constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and association. There were legal steps to demonstrate although these were not followed. Children were utilised as shields during the demonstrations. Bahrain went into a national state of emergency – which has since been lifted – and closed schools to protect the children. The delegation said the Ministry on Social Development was working on unity cohesion and raising awareness amongst children in schools. Also, the Ministry on Social Development was working towards a preventive method of protecting children from the demonstrations.

The delegation said the demonstrations began peacefully but became violent due to some extremist groups. These groups did not represent the entire Shiite population. Accusations of Sunnis attacking the Shiites were inaccurate claims, although it acknowledged that the majority of the victims in the recent demonstrations were Sunni students. The State had always been a peaceful nation with a broad representation of different sects of Islam and other religions. The island State hosts 19 churches, 2 temples and hundreds of mosques for both sects. In the Bahrain Centre for Child Protection there are nine cases of Sunni students that were harmed physically and psychologically and were receiving treatment. The delegation

added that the State had implemented programmes through the media and the Ministry of Development to address the harm caused by the demonstrations. The delegation emphasised that the international media was biased in the portrayal of the demonstrations. The delegation added that the distinction between Shiites and Sunnis was not made during the demonstrations but rather by international sources, such as when the international organisations were collecting individual statements, they asked interview candidates to identify themselves as belonging to one Islamic sect or another.

Legislation

The Committee acknowledged the adoption of amendments to the State constitution in 2002, which influenced the drafting of legislation in the spirit of the Convention. The Committee expressed concern that the adoption of bills of law had been delayed in an exaggerated manner noting that from 2002, the Children's Bill had not been promulgated despite ratification of the Convention. The Law of Publication and Journalism, The Family Code, and the Law on Civil Society were also delayed.

The delegation agreed that there had been a delay in the promulgation of legislation. The delegation noted that the democratisation process had recently begun and the opinions of all relevant parties were being sought. The government would present the bills to the legislative council and, after discussion, the Legislative Council would return the laws with a decision on promulgation. The delegation added that the public was resisting the codification of the Personal Status Law and the Press Code, because the public preferred the *Sharīah* codes. The delegation stated there were continued efforts to raise awareness and further dialogue with protesters opposed to the adaptation of the Personal Status Law.

The Committee said there was a need for the State to raise awareness in Bahrain about the need to make a cultural shift towards a rights-based approach to policy formation and implementation. The Committee asked for an explanation regarding the steps taken to implement the concluding observations of the Committee of 2002.

Budget

The Committee asked for information regarding budget allocation and subsequently the prioritisation of funding programmes and policies related to children. The Committee commended the workshop held by Bahrain on child-friendly budgeting and asked whether the National Committee on Childhood had a specific budget. The Committee asked when the 'comprehensive national plan of action for children' would be implemented and if it would be part of an overall development plan for the country or an independent plan. The Committee inquired whether the 'comprehensive national plan of action for children' had an allocated budget.

The delegation said the National Committee on Childhood drafted policies and monitored the activities of the government and civil society, and also worked in collaboration with UNICEF. The budget for the National Committee on Childhood and other Ministries were established in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance to determine focal points in areas of health, disabilities, and children. The delegation hoped that in two years, there would be clear budget lines for children.

The Committee expressed concern that the resources of the National Committee on Childhood were drawn from different ministries. The Committee inquired how the National Committee on Childhood could develop a strategy with no secretariat or specific budget that allowed for the gathering of statistics and research. The Committee also wanted to know how often the National Committee on Childhood met.

The delegation answered that the Ministry of Social Development supported the National Committee on Childhood with the secretariat and a budget of 40,000 US dollars per year. The National Committee on Childhood met monthly, and its executive board met on a weekly basis. The delegation added that the government had established a 150 million US dollar budget for the Bahraini Development Bank and 15 million US dollars for the Family Bank for Entrepreneurs, to support children.

Data Collection

The Committee expressed concern regarding the collection of data as there was no special database established for data on children within the national statistics. The Committee inquired about steps that were being taken to establish a system of data collection using DevInfo or Multiple Index Cluster Survey (MICS) 4. Data collection was critical to understand the situation of children in the country in various contexts.

The delegation answered that the State had developed an electronic map with up-to-date disaggregated data on the population. This was utilised to provide the necessary services for children in areas of social development, education, health and economic objectives. The delegation added that the Ministry of Education had a database which contained all the relevant information on children, until their date of death. The delegation said the State was working in collaboration with UNICEF to collect and disseminate all the data on children. The State was also working with UNICEF to implement the MICS 4 which began in 2001. The Committee commended the database established by the State as an important tool for planning purposes.

The Committee asked for data from the Human Rights Centre in Bahrain regarding attacks on schools, removal of children from classes, torture of children in police stations, as well as the recent practise of trying adolescents in specialised military courts where Marshall Law applied and the indirect effects on children due to deaths, arrests or disappearance of parents.

The delegation said statistics on children, disaggregated by gender and age, were available. Statistics on sexual attacks on children and child victims of domestic or social violence were also available.

Dissemination and training

The Committee asked whether an integrated human rights plan had been implemented. The Committee asked which methods were utilised to raise awareness on the views of the child to the relevant professionals that dealt with children.

Monitoring

The Committee expressed a need for the establishment of an institution that monitored activities carried out in relation to children's rights. The Committee asked how the Ministry of Social Development managed and monitored the National Committee on Childhood and requested information on the coordination of activities by the Ministry of Social Development with all national committees in the field of childhood, at the local and institutional levels. The Committee asked for information regarding the composition and operation of the National Human Rights Institution. The Committee wanted to know whether the National Human Rights Institution was in line with the Paris Principles.

The delegation responded that the National Committee on Childhood developed an analytical report on the situation of Children in Bahrain focused on the gaps in implementation of activities concerning children. The report included a recommendation for the promulgation of the Children's Bill. The delegation added that a strategy for the National Committee on

Childhood was drafted and would be transmitted to the Committee upon finalisation from the Ministry of Social Development.

International cooperation

The Committee asked to what extent the State met the internationally agreed upon United Nations target of investing 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product in international cooperation. The Committee asked whether the State had bilateral relations offering assistance to other states for the realisation of children's rights in those countries. The Committee inquired about the possibility of a UNICEF office in Bahrain.

The role of civil society and non-governmental organisations

The Committee asked whether there were laws that required government authorisation of civil society organisations. The constitution stated that the law governing civil society did not restrict the freedom of civil society. However, the Committee had received reports that a number of members of civil society organisations had been prosecuted for expressing their views through television and on the internet.

The delegation responded that Decree-Law No. 18 oversaw the development of activities and workshops in Bahrain. Decree-Law No.18 was adopted after consultation with international organisations and training courses on drafting laws, which led to the draft Law on Civil Society. The Committee asked whether the draft law provided for the raising of awareness among relevant authorities, related to social responsibility concerning children. The Committee also asked what measures were in place to ensure that private foreign companies maintained corporate social responsibility and upheld international human rights standards and the rights of the child in all corporate activities.

The delegation answered that the text of the law was general and applicable to all society including those that cared for children. The delegation added that since 2006, there was a support centre in the Ministry of Social Development for civil society and non-governmental organisations. The support centre focused on good governance, implementation of projects and provided a fund to support civil society. The delegation also said the draft law included a provision allowing for children under the age of 18 to participate in civil society. The delegation stated that two thirds of the budget for civil society was from the private sector banks and local enterprises. There was collaboration with the companies to participate in corporate social responsibility. The private sector had a specific programme and funded certain projects.

Ratifications

The Committee commended the State for the promulgation of various laws and the ratification of a number of international conventions. The Committee asked whether any measures had been taken to adopt the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and to follow up on children of migrant workers. The Committee asked whether the ILO Convention 138: Minimum Age Convention was implemented. The Committee noted the reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women and inquired whether the State was raising awareness with civil society organisations regarding discrimination against women.

The delegation answered that the State was working with the International Organisation on Migration to develop a law that would protect the rights of domestic workers.

General Principles

The right to privacy

The Committee asked the delegation to explain how children's privacy was respected by the media.

Respect for the views of the child

The Committee noted the views of the children were not heard in cases of divorce, physical and sexual abuse, nor, early marriage. The Committee noted the Children's Parliament and student councils that were established for children to express their views but were not always put into practice. The Committee asked the State to explain how the views of the child were respected and taken into account. The Committee asked how child participation was guaranteed. The Committee recalled the constitutional provision concerning the right to freedom of expression and noted the State report did not mention any legal provisions regarding the freedom of expression. The Committee asked whether this was an omission or there was a legal lacuna.

Civil Rights and Freedoms

Access to appropriate information

The Committee asked the delegation whether children had access to information on sexual and reproductive health that could be accessed confidentially. Thirty-three per cent of the children had access to computers and internet.

Early marriage

The Committee was concerned that the definition of the child varied in national legislation and was not always in harmony with the Convention. The Committee noted the minimum age for marriage should be 18 for both boys and girls, instead of the current situation, which was set at 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys. The Committee added that a judge could allow marriage for girls before the child reached 15 years, which exposed young girls to the risk of being traded or trafficked by their parents. The Committee said a report from the Minister for Religious Affairs indicated an increase in early marriages for girls under the age of 15 and asked for statistics regarding marriages of children between the ages of 15 and 18, as well as on what grounds a judge typically sanctioned these marriages.

The Committee was amazed that the court could authorise marriage for a child under the age of 15, arguing that this was not in the best interest of the child. The Committee noted that early marriages may be a method of avoiding criminal sanction, for example if a man had sexual relations with a minor, he could avoid criminal sanction if he married the girl. The Committee added that early marriage inferred that the offence of sexual abuse did not take place and noted that this practice served the interests of the adult perpetrator and went against the best interests of the child principle. The Committee asked for information regarding the provision for repercussions for male abusers who married their victims instead of being punished

Corporal Punishment

The Committee inquired about legislative provisions regarding corporal punishment within the families.

Child abuse

The Committee asked for clarification on whether there had been an increase in child abuse or an increase in the reporting of child abuse cases. The Committee also asked about mechanisms in place to support victims of rape and other forms of violence. The Committee

was concerned that child abusers received large sentences but were rarely jailed and urged that criminals be punished according to the gravity of the offence.

The delegation said there was an initiative called Project 999 that addressed cases of child victims of violence. There was also a hotline available through social services, which was open 24 hours. During 2010, 200 cases of abuse had been reported through the hotline, and by early 2011, 65 cases had been reported.

The Committee asked for information about whether there was a comprehensive framework to monitor family and child protection. The Committee asked about the legal framework on the prevention, identification, investigation and treatment of child violations. The Committee also asked how the authorities identified children in need and under what conditions a case of child abuse was brought before the law. The Committee asked whether the best interests of the child principle had been codified in domestic legislation in order to guarantee the best interest of the child in judicial processes. The Children's Bill did not include mental violations or child neglect. The Committee asked whether the Children's Bill protected children against all forms of violence in compliance with article 19 of the Convention.

The delegation said judges were trained to deal with child victims of abuse. Children's opinions during trials were heard in private meetings with the presence of a social worker and judge so as to prevent further traumatising of the child. Children or their guardians could request a change of judge through their counsellor. If the child could not afford a lawyer, the State covered the costs. The delegation added that court decisions could be appealed.

Nationality

The Committee asked whether there were safeguards protecting children from discrimination based on religious identity. The Committee also asked whether children born to Bahraini mothers with foreign fathers had equal rights to Bahraini citizenship as children born to Bahraini fathers with foreign mothers.

The delegation said children born to Bahraini women had the nationality of the father but received the same services as their mother in Bahrain. In the case of divorce, the mother received some welfare assistance from the State.

The Committee noted that the King of Bahrain had awarded 300 children Bahraini nationality and exclaimed that the Convention provided for the guarantee of nationality by law, not for the possible or ad hoc granting of nationality by decree. The Committee asked whether children born to unknown parents or an unknown father would be granted Bahraini nationality. The Committee stated that Bahrain could not give children of foreigners the nationality of another country. The Committee stated that children denied nationality could potentially become stateless. The Committee asked if the child was granted nationality in divorce cases where the mother was Bahraini but the father was foreign.

The delegation said that children were awarded the nationality of their father in accordance with Bahraini law. Children were able to obtain nationality through ministerial decrees and exemption by His Majesty the King. The delegation said children born with unknown parents were granted Bahraini nationality. The State denied nationality to children whose parents were nationals of other countries. The delegation also said the number of children with unknown identities was low. The Ministry of Social Development guaranteed families for children with unknown identities where they received a name and care.

Family Environment and Alternative Care

Adoption

The Committee noted that the Bahrain had not ratified the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoptions, which provided civil authority and guaranteed the arraignment of perpetrators and return of children taken out of the State. The Committee asked how the State ensured the return of children to Bahrain.

Parental Responsibility

The Committee asked how the State empowered parental laws and parental responsibility. The Committee wanted to know how the best interest of the child was applied in the case of divorce. The Committee noted that a mother was granted custody of her children up to the age of seven for boys and nine for girls. The father was granted custody for children above this age. The Committee was concerned that the opinions of children were not being heard.

The delegation added that the State provided community centres for children of divorced parents and a Counselling Bureau for parents going through divorce. The delegation said the Counselling Bureau and social workers took into account the best interest of the child. The delegation said the children could also go to the Centre for the Protection of Childhood. The State was also in consultation with the Ministry of Education to assess the child's progress in school. A fund was created to provide monthly assistance for women and children in divorce cases.

Family reunification

The Committee asked whether there were new developments regarding family reunification. The Committee also asked whether foreign workers had the right to bring their children into Bahrain.

The delegation responded that there were no laws preventing family reunification. The State has facilitated reunification of some families, especially those with children. The delegation added that the children of domestic workers had access to all public and private schools in Bahrain.

Alternative care and waiting lists

The Committee asked whether there was a substitute to institutional care for orphans. The Committee noted male children deprived of families were able to stay in alternative care until the age of 14. There was a separate home for boys aged between 15 and 21. The Committee asked why there was no home for girls aged between 15 and 21. The Committee also wanted to know which alternative methods were available for children in dysfunctional families or vulnerable situations such as disabled children, refugee children and child labourers. The Committee asked whether girl children were favoured in foster families and whether there were programmes to educate the society to accept boy and girl children equally in foster families. The Committee noted that the state report said familial affiliation was not guaranteed in the case of adoption. Also, the child had the right to search for his or her biological parent in the future.

The delegation said the State was working on the creation of a better family environment. The Ministry of Social Development worked in collaboration with non-governmental organisations to provide joint and individual counselling. The delegation added that a foster care system, under the Ministry of Social Development, had been established for neglected children. The delegation said there were no girl children above the age of 14 in alternative care. Girl children above the age of 14 were freely married. The State provided housing, monthly allowances and transportation for children up to the age of 18. The delegation also added that the Social Security Law allocated 25 million dinars for orphans to receive allowances.

The Committee asked whether being an orphan was a reason for girls over the age of 14 to marry, adding that this was in contravention with international law. The delegation clarified that the State did not let girl orphans get married at the age of 14. The majority of the girls in the orphanage were adopted immediately. Families were trained to become foster families for specific time periods. It was not a method of adoption.

Basic Health and Welfare

Children with disabilities

The Committee stated that there was an ample amount of information available regarding children with disabilities. However, Bahrain had not acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Committee noted that integration of children in mainstream schools required particular and specific steps, including training of school personnel and public awareness raising on inclusive education.

The delegation said Bahrain had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and that it was working towards ratification. The delegation added that there were arts and sports programmes delivered through the Ministry of Education, as part of a plan to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools. There were seven centres for children with medium to high mental disabilities supervised by the State and 13 centres for disabled children that were administered by NGOs. The delegation added that the State had mobile units that trained families and children about how to deal with children with disabilities. The State was also working with UNDP to develop a strategy for people with disabilities in Bahrain. The State supports children with disabilities with a monthly allowance of 200 US dollars and the provision of equipment such as wheelchairs, hearing aids and glasses for middle and lower income families. The State has also provided computers with specific programmes to children with disabilities.

Health Services

The Committee requested information regarding immunisation of children. There was no evidence of efforts made to address stigmatisation of children living with HIV/AIDS. The Committee inquired whether there was a strategy to educate citizens on different methods of contraceptives to avoid unwanted pregnancies. The Committee noted the prevalence of sickle-cell anaemia and asked whether the pre-testing before marriage prohibited those with the disease from marrying.

The delegation answered that mandatory testing for sickle-cell anaemia was intended to increase awareness. Couples could marry afterwards if they chose. The delegation said the mandatory testing reduced the number of cases of sickle-cell anaemia. There was a mandatory counselling session delivered to couples before marriage and a mandatory counselling before divorce.

The Committee acknowledged the free access to health and education for all citizens but was struck by the draft law which made exceptions to access to such services by children of foreigners and inquired about how this differential treatment functioned in practice.

The delegation answered that all foreigners were provided with government health insurance. Domestic workers were required to pay a nominal fee, not exceeding eight US dollars, to visit any health centre. The delegation said the State was looking to follow up on the health of children before they began school between the ages of four and six. The delegation added that there were teenager-friendly health services. The State was working with the GCC countries on a regional strategy for health of teenagers. The delegation added that the Ministry of

Health pharmacies and clinics dispensed medicine for free. There were several programmes and prevention measures to encourage good health, including free immunisations.

Breastfeeding

The Committee acknowledged the initiatives taken by the government to promote breastfeeding of infants, but noted shortcomings regarding breastfeeding rates and lack of awareness in this area. The Committee asked whether policies were in place – and whose implementation was consistently monitored – to regulate advertising of breast milk substitutes, particularly in hospitals. In this regard the Committee inquired about the availability of child-friendly hospitals. The Committee was concerned that despite the facilities and provisions made, women were not breastfeeding due to lack of space and distance from home.

The delegation said the Ministry of Health launched a national campaign to promote the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of a child's life. For women who returned to work within these six months, the law granted women two hours each day to breastfeed their babies up to the age of two. The delegation also said there were strict regulations on breast milk substitutes to ensure they were in accordance with standards established by the GCC and the State, which is a party to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

The delegation said the State had tried to encourage and set up day care facilities in strategic areas to reduce the commute for mothers. The State had also encouraged organisations to open day care facilities. The delegation added that advertisement of breast milk substitutes was rare and women were mostly selecting breastfeeding over breast milk substitutes.

Children with mental disabilities

The Committee acknowledged the policy regarding the availability of iodised salt but noted that the utilisation rate was 85 per cent. Lack of iodine in the diet can cause mental disabilities in babies. The Committee asked whether the State had considered universal provision of iodised salt.

The delegation stated that all the salt was iodised. Flour was also iron fortified.

Drug and alcohol issues

The Committee asked whether there were programmes for adolescents on issues involving alcohol, tobacco, drugs and contraceptives. The Committee asked whether the same sexual education curriculum was provided for boys and girls in schools.

The delegation added that the Ministry of the Interior had several campaigns to raise awareness on substance abuse. On sexual health of adolescents, the delegation answered that life skills education was started in 2007 and was implemented primarily for the sixth grade. Boys and girls received the same education. There was a curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Health on reproductive health and pregnancy. Psychological counsellors were available at all schools. Nine community centres were available including family counselling bureaus that provided life skills education.

Education, Leisure and Cultural Activities Education

Vocational training

The Committee asked for information on professional and vocational training, noting that vocational training was only available for boys. The Committee stated that there was a need for opportunities and encouragement of girl children in this field. The Committee expressed

concern at the prevalence of illiteracy amongst girls. It noted that there was one teacher for every thirteen students but expressed concern that in some cases, particularly in more rural settings, girls were educated, until a certain age, in informal settings by older women. The Committee felt this was discriminatory against girls. The Committee wanted to know whether vocational training was available for students who were unable to attend higher education.

The delegation said there were no quotas on vocational training. The system was open to all living in Bahrain. The delegation added that there was a cultural tendency to stereotype in vocational education. Children had freedom of choice in the selection of vocational education but emphasis was put on the specialities needed by the State. The delegation added that there was a special school for girls and transportation to and from the school was provided. The delegation added that there were academies and community colleges available for children to go directly into the workforce. The Ministry of Labour also provided retraining for students with no skills to introduce them into the job market. The delegation said the State provided unemployment benefits and insurance benefits. There were programmes in schools on the establishment of businesses.

Education

The Committee asked whether there human rights education was included in the national curriculum and encouraged the government to cooperate with the media to spread human rights concepts and a culture of peace, acceptance and tolerance. The Committee asked what measures were being taken to ensure that children were not exploited by political groups or removed from schools to form marches or allies with their agendas. The Committee asked whether there was a plan to address the current 17 per cent illiteracy rate among women.

The delegation said human rights education was taught gradually from primary school, through secondary school and up to the tertiary level. The delegation also said peace education was available from first grade to twelfth grade, which covered children's rights and human rights. There was cooperation with UNESCO and the Ministry of Education to re-establish unity lost during the demonstrations. The delegation answered that the State's literacy rates were almost 100 per cent.

Preschool education

The Committee asked whether preschools were available to all children, noting that the attendance rate for private preschool education was 50 per cent. The Committee said all children should have access to preschool education.

The delegation said the Ministry of Education monitored the registration of children in day care facilities between the ages of three and six. For children between the ages of one and three, the Ministry of Social Development monitored the availability of child care facilities or nurseries. The government focused on supervision and training teachers for nurseries, day care facilities and preschools. The delegation emphasised that preschools and nurseries were run by the private sector. There was free preschool education for children from poor families.

Special Protection Measures

Asylum seekers

The Committee noted the lack of information on refugees.

Trafficking of children

The Committee said there was a gap between the definition of trafficking in persons provided by the State and the definition in the Convention. Offenses such as forcibly using young

children as camel jockeys, trafficking of organs, exploitation of children on the internet and early marriage were omitted from the State definition, as reasons why children are often trafficked in the region. The Committee asked whether there was a specific law which protected children from trafficking and exploitation.

The delegation answered that the State worked to protect nationals and expatriates from human trafficking. There were two committees that worked to combat trafficking through evaluations and offering shelter to victims of trafficking. The delegation added the law on trafficking in persons was being reviewed by United Nations agencies, International Organisations and legal personnel.

Children in prisons

The Committee was concerned to see that the penal code and the criminal procedure applied to children from the age of 15, and that there were children aged 15 to 18 detained in prison with adults. The Committee asked whether a child between 15 and 18 years had ever been sentenced to life imprisonment and emphasised that protection of children under the Convention is from birth until the age of 18. The Committee reminded the delegation of the Committee's General Comment number 10 on juvenile justice.

The Committee asked for statistics regarding how many children had been detained due to the demonstrations that had occurred and as such how many were still currently detained. The Committee also wanted to know if children were discriminated against and detained based on their religious identity. The Committee also asked whether parents and guardians were always informed of the detention of children and provided with the necessary support and assistance.

The delegation emphasised that no children had been sentenced to life imprisonment and assured the Committee that measures were taken to prevent children from falling into delinquent activity. The delegation further assured the Committee that the State complied with the Convention. The delegation hoped the Children's Bill, which considered children as all those under the age of 18, would be promulgated soon. The delegation responded that the person sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering a police officer, Risa Ali Salhan, was born in 1991. The delegation added that Risa Ali Salhan was 19 years old when he committed the offense in 2010. The Committee asked if the offense and the conviction both occurred in 2010. The delegation said the case began when Risa Ali Salhan was 19 years old and offered to provide additional information to the Committee. The Committee asked for additional information concerning this offense to be provided in writing.

The Committee wanted to know whether prison guards were trained against the use of abusive language towards children and whether children had access to education while detained. The Committee was concerned that the education available in juvenile facilities was discriminatory. Boys were able to select electronics, carpeting, agriculture and girls had the choice of domestics and sewing. The Committee recalled the visit made to Bahrain by a group of United Nations officials in 2001, the outcome of which recommended that the care of detained children be moved to the Ministry of Development. The Committee asked why this recommendation had not been implemented.

Child labour

The Committee noted that the rights of domestic employees were not included in the Labour Code. The Committee asked for statistics regarding children working in private homes and the circumstances these children lived under. The Committee was concerned that there was a contradiction as the mandatory age of education was 15 years whereas the minimum age of

employment was 14 years; the Committee was concerned that this would encourage children to leave school early.

The delegation stated that there was no child labour in Bahrain. A program was started with the private sector to prevent the importation of goods from countries that utilise child labour. The delegation said the minimum age for domestic work was 18 years and that all foreign domestic workers were aged 18 or over. The delegation added that the legislation followed the ILO Convention and allowed for child labour at the age of 14.

The Committee clarified that the ILO Convention established minimum age of child labour at 15 years. The Committee stated that reasons for child labour included poverty, dropping out of school and families that were dysfunctional. The Committee asked what measures had been taken with regards to children begging in the streets and whether there were preventive measures taken to address begging and to protect children.

The delegation repeated that there was no child labour in Bahrain. Children below the age of 14 worked in summer vacation jobs, following regulations prohibiting heavy work. The delegation added that the prohibition of begging was intended to protect children from exploitation by their families and other perpetrators of such exploitation. The delegation added that a shelter was created for children, to prevent mobs or other individuals from using children to beg. The delegation emphasised that children worked due to poverty. The State established a strong allowance system which included unemployment insurance to prevent children and persons with disabilities from begging. There was a programme to train unemployed people to become entrepreneurs. Through the Micro Finance bank, 200 million US dollars was reserved each year to provide allowances to vulnerable families in Bahrain.

Resource allocation

The Committee asked for information on the guaranteeing of resources for children in the context of the present socio-political crisis. The Committee was concerned that funds previously allocated for the implementation children's programmes and policies might be shifted to cover security and other related costs during the emergency situation. The Committee emphasised that human rights standards never ceased to apply and that children should not be ignored while the current emergency situation is ongoing. The Committee asked for statistics regarding resources dedicated to children from each sector and activity.

Juvenile justice

The Committee stated that the proposal to increase the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years had been refused creating a problem for children. Children between the ages of 16 and 18 were treated as adults before the law. The Committee asked whether there were specific provisions in the Penal Code applicable to minors. The Committee asked for the criterion applied in differentiating crimes. The Committee also asked which methods and facilities were provided for rehabilitating young offenders and asked for more information on who was responsible for appointing judges and if nationals had the option of selecting the judge for their case. The Committee also wanted to know whether judges working with children were specially trained juvenile judges. The Committee asked about the procedure when the court issued unfair awards. The Committee was concerned that disobedient children were referred to the police and subject to government reports and judicial procedures.

The delegation said there were detention centers for children between the ages of 15 and 18. There was a juvenile center for children under the age of 15 under the authority of the Ministry of Social Development, which provided rehabilitation and training for children.

There were special provisions for children between the ages of 15 and 18 which included detention places and light sentences. The delegation added that children between the ages of 15 and 18 were not fully responsible criminally. Children in this category were placed in separate detention centers and not with adults. The delegation said there was a special code for juvenile judges and workers. The juvenile system was aimed at rehabilitating children. Families were allowed to visit children on a weekly basis and in some specific cases, children were allowed to attend regular schools with other children.

The Committee asked what the age of responsibility was. The Committee also wanted to know which code was applied to juvenile children.

The delegation responded that children under the age of seven were not held criminally responsible. Children between the ages of 7 and 15 were not sentenced and received no penalties. The rehabilitative measures were intended to prevent children from falling back into delinquency. The delegation added that the Juvenile law was applied to children under 15 and the criminal law was applied in a lighter manner to children between the ages of 15 and 18.

Concluding Remarks

Ms. Hadeel Al-Asmar, the co-Rapporteur, thanked the delegation for the fruitful discussion, noting that it was open and frank. She stated that there were some questions which were not answered clearly and would thus need further clarification and that the manner in which the State had addressed some particular issues was not seen as in accordance with the Convention. Ms. Al-Asmar noted the determination of the State party to comply with the Convention and stated that the Committee looked forward to further information on the Convention and the laws which had been adopted, their effects on children and statistics concerning draft laws. She commented that there was a need for a national plan for coordinated implementation of the Convention, as well as for the establishment of an independent monitoring institution which complied with the Paris Principles. Ms. Al-Asmar added that there was a need to revise the current definition of the child, the age of criminal responsibility and the minimum age of child labour. The Committee emphasised that the best interest of the child should be a primary consideration in all matters affecting children and that children should be viewed as rights holders and not solely as objects of protection. In closing, Ms. Al-Asmar noted the need to empower children in awareness of their rights and increase children's participation; she hoped the remaining issues would be resolved in the best interest of Bahraini children.

The Head of delegation, Dr. Al Balooshi thanked the Committee for the fruitful discussion and input. Dr. Al Balooshi reassured the Committee that Bahrain would work hard to honour children's rights and emphasised that Bahrain would create the first human rights organisation in accordance with the Paris Principles.