



STATEMENT

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**AT THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE
CHILD REGARDING THE CONSIDERATION OF THE INITIAL COUNTRY
REPORT OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ON THE SALE OF
CHILDREN, CHILD PROSTITUTION AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY**

Ms. Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Allow me to express my pleasure and gratitude to appear before the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child and on behalf of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to inform the Committee about the measures on implementation of the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The application and follow-up action of the Optional Protocol in Syria is being carried out with the involvement of competent ministries, private sector institutions and NGOs, which are Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Finance, Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, The State Planning Commission, and Civil Society associations. I would like to give a brief summary on some of the measures taken and concretely planned to be taken to implement the Protocol during the reporting period. I will limit my statement to the major recent developments and keep adequate time to fruitful dialogue with the Committee.

The Syrian Government, and since the signing of the Convention of the Right of the Child and its two optional Protocols, have been working hard along with relevant government and non-government institutions to thoroughly review the Penal Code, the Law of Criminal Procedures, and the Juvenile Law in order to incorporate the principles and the protective spirit laid out by the UN CRC, and to identify adequate legal pretext to reconsider reservations made by the Syrian Government. Just recently, we have completed a long series of round table discussions with all relevant

institutions to lift the reservations relate to articles 20-21 of the CRC as well as on the reservation on the optional Protocol. The Syrian Government has approved to lift these reservations and it has already been submitted to the Legislative Sector for final promulgation and implementation on due course.

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As you know, Syrian laws, by-laws, decrees, and legislations have defined the child in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Syrian Constitution, the Penal Code, and the Juvenile Law clearly defined sexual abuse and exploitation as a serious crime, and stipulated serious aggravated penalties for such crimes. Furthermore, penalties envisaged for sexual crimes and sale/kidnapping children have been clearly assigned maximum penalties vis-à-vis immaterial and physical damages suffered by the child victim. Also, children who are victims of such crimes defined in the Optional Protocol have also been granted social and medical care, as well as full protection under the Penal Code and as reflected in the submitted report.

It is worth mentioning that Syria is witnessing a revolution in term of reviewing and updating the national law in line with international standards and by virtue of international human rights laws. In this context, the Penal Code and the Personal Status Code (Family Law) are currently under in-depth review in order to ensure full and proper protection for child girl and women and to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against children and women. Special attention is being given to the

crime of honour. Further, the first draft of the child law; which reflect the spirit of the CRC Convention and its two protocols; is ready for discussion:

For the first time, the issue of child protection was raised on the national level during the first conference of childhood in 2003; which was conducted under the patronage of the First Lady of Syria: Consequently; the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, along with the above-mentioned institutions and ministries, have submitted a draft National Plan of Action for the protection of children from violence; neglect and abuse. This National Action Plan has been approved for implementation by the Council of Ministers in a meeting chaired by H.E. the President of Syria on October 2nd 2005. This Plan constitutes a solid framework which incorporates the protective spirit of the Convention on the Right of the Child and the two optional protocols. The Plan is considered to be a significant document to ensure the best interest of the child, the protection of children from violence and exploitation in all their forms. Financial resources were secured by allocating a 56 Million Syrian Pounds (apprx 1 Million USD) from the government budget for year 2006.

The SCFA made sure to work with a participatory approach with all relevant ministries, civil society associations and NGOs, in order to accommodate what the National Action Plan has stipulated. Therefore, the SCFA formulated local committee especially designed to work on child and women protection. This committee is composed of intellectuals, civil society organizations, government institutions and other concerned associations. The term of reference of this committee is to follow-up on the implementation of the national plan of child and women protection. In this regard, a comprehensive research has been carried out in two major cities in Syria,

Damascus and Aleppo, in order to identify reasons of child sexual exploitation. This study is aimed to be a policy indicator to help in tackling this issue. In addition, a qualitative research has been conducted by the SCFA on child and women prostitution and distributed to key officials and decision makers in the country.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has two centres to host delinquent girls. These centres offer psychological, medical, illiteracy alleviation, and capacity development. Further, two shelters for victims of violence has been established by one of the civil society associations, namely the Good Shepherd NGO. A gender-sensitive database for child protection is currently under the process to be created within the Central Bureau for Statistics. A help line is also under establishment by the Ministry of Social Affairs and it is expected to be ready by 2007. Child protection concept and child rights are being integrated in the school curricula and a manual on child rights is being produced for teacher and parents. A national conference on integrating these concepts in high education curricula will be conducted by the end of the October 2006 in cooperation between the SCFA and the Ministry of High Education. Also, a comprehensive national campaign has been launched to raise awareness on violence against children. Billboards, posters, songs, cartoons spots and TV spots were produced. A special programme for violence against children was life-broadcasted by the Syrian TV using real case studies. Competition for story writing for child has been organized, and three Prizes have been distributed to top three stories. Moreover, the international child day was also marked under the theme "*Protect the Child*". It is worth mentioning that Ministry of Religious Affairs is working to launch a campaign about child protection during the holy month of Ramdan.

On the legislative level, the SCFA in a joint initiative with UNICEF Syria and the Syrian People's Assembly (the Parliament), have organized a workshop for Syrian MPs to address issues brought by the National Action Plan for children in Syria. SCFA found that the MPs can always ensure the best application of the CRC and the National Action Plan, and to play the role of the legislative evaluation and monitoring role throughout implementation.

On the national strategic level, in June 2006 the Syrian People's Assembly has promulgated a Decree to approve the National 10th Five-Year-Plan. This plan is considered to be the turning point in Syria's economic and social system, by transforming into a social-market free economy. Fostering good governance, enhancing the status of the rule of law, strengthening the role of civil society and the private sector, are main pillars to the Plan. In Syria, the State Planning Commission allocates resources to be used for activities and plans implementation relate to the rights of the child.

Moreover, the Plan has dedicated a comprehensive programme to alleviate poverty in underprivileged regions, such as the Easter Region and the South of Syria. Development programmes, projects, and *ad hoc* resources have been already allocated to enhance the right of the child in these important areas.

In order to ensure the implementation of the child rights UN committee remarks and comments on the CRC, the SCFA has forwarded them to all relevant ministries, NGOs and civil society associations, and a series of workshops have been conducted to interpret these remarks into practice. Besides, a number of workshops

and trainings were held with UNICEF and UNHCR to disseminate the CRC and its two Protocols. Its contents were published in official newspapers and made them public through other media tools. All agencies concerned with its implementation were notified of the necessary actions and measures that should be taken for optimal application of the Protocol. In addition, a series of national, international panels, workshops, conferences, symposiums and trainings pertaining the implementation of the CRC and its two Protocols have been organized and tailored in Syria.

The SCFA and the Ministry of Information have initiated a broadcast programme designed to familiarize audiences with the Protocol. In March 2005, SCFA and in cooperation with UNICEF Syria, launched a campaign called (Where is My Right?), has been launched in most of the Syrian cities among school children. This campaign is disseminating the principles and spirit of the CRC and its two Protocols. A special focus was shed on the underprivileged areas of Syria, such as the Easter Region cities. This campaign also aimed at promoting the right to express child opinion and freedom of speech. The campaign has also selected leading children who lately constituted a Children Parliament. The campaign is still on going and its activities have received great welcome by children and their parents.

Further, the SCFA has launched a comprehensive campaign to promote a culture of peace and non-violence among children, in the framework of a UNISCO initiative aimed at supporting the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, with the participation of 70 children, both boys and girls. The first national strategy on early childhood was developed and is ready for submission to the Council of Ministers for endorsement. This was

prepared in participatory approach along between government, NGOs and private sector.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for national coordination on issues relate to trafficking of humans, human rights and other relevant matters. The Syrian Government is working closely with the International Organization for Migration in combating human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This cooperation covers areas such as assisting victims, strengthening institutional capacities and training for relevant institutions. A comprehensive research has been conducted in cooperation between the International Organization for Migration and the Syrian Ministry of Interior on issues relate to legal aspects of human trafficking and exploitation in Syria. Further; the Syrian Prime Minister has approved to formulate a National Task Force, represented by the Ministry of Justice, Ministry if Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs. This Task Force has already proposed a draft law regulating crimes relate to sexual exploitation and human trafficking especially for women and children, and is expected to be submitted to the People's Assembly very soon.

Syria has worked as a regional focal points for promoting the issue of child rights through hosting the regional meeting with the High Commission for Human rights in 2003 in a workshop to set mechanism on how to promote the recommendations of the CRC committee, this workshop was attended by higher representatives from different Arab countries. In May 2006, the Arab league technical advisory committee for childhood was also conducted in Syria and attended by delegation of eighteen Arab countries. High priority issues were highlighted such

as, children with no parents, the child victim and witness of crime and the UN standards to implement the CRC and the two optional protocol.

Ms. Chairperson,

Distinguished Committee Members,

The Syrian Government has dedicated fundamental time to study the accession process of all conventions, treaties and covenants in relations to international human rights instruments. During the reporting period to CRC, the Syrian Government has made the accession to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

At the end, it is worth mentioning that Syria faces many challenges that hinder the process of enhancing the rights of the child and promoting the principle of the best interest of the child. These difficulties include scarcity of capacities, lack of specialized expertise, the political and armed conflicts in Middle East, including having part of the Syrian land occupied (Golan Heights), are all major challenges that hamper our efforts in better implementing the CRC and its two Protocols.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic attaches great importance to the work of the Committee in the progressive implementation of children's rights worldwide, and we look forward to a positive and fruitful exchange of views with this Committee.

Thank you for your time.