**Persons with disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

**Submitted to:** Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Submitted by:** Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (In Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC).

**About:** Saudi Arabia

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**Preface**

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (Egypt) submitted this report in the context of its interest in promoting human rights in the Arab region, especially, with regard to the situation of persons with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia witnessed a remarkable development. It acceded to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in 2008. The report monitors the situation of persons with disabilities in Saudi Arabia, especially the elderly, and highlights the violations they are subjected to. As well as observing the steps taken by the Government to integrate them into its national plans.

1. **Legislative framework for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities**

On 13 December 2006, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol were adopted at United Nations Headquarters in New York. On 30 March 2007, the door for signature was opened. Saudi Arabia was one of the first Arab States to accede to the Convention and its Optional Protocol in 2008. In the basic law of governance in Saudi Arabia, article 27 stated that " The State shall guarantee the right of the citizen and his family in emergencies, sickness, disability, and old age, and shall support the social security system and encourage institutions and individuals to participate in charitable work". As persons with disabilities included in this article, the State is responsible for protecting and promoting their rights. It also sought to achieve decent lives for them and their families. In addition, the system of care for persons with disabilities, promulgated by Royal Decree No. (M/ 37) of 2000, ensured the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.

The Cabinet Decision No. 291 of July 23, 2012, approved the regulation of the rehabilitation centers for the disabled with the aim of encouraging the private sector to participate in the care and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. It is working on the development of programs and services provided to them from the professional, Education, health and rehabilitation through vocational rehabilitation as well as other centers for social rehabilitation and day care centers[[1]](#footnote-1).

Moreover, the state supports associations for Persons with Disabilities. The system of associations and civil institutions issued by Royal Decree No. (M / 8) dated 1 December 2015, including the provision of government's subsidies to the associations. The government established a fund called the "Association Support Fund", which supporting the associations' programs and developing them to ensure their continuation. Government's support to NGOs and associations, including those dealing with the rights of persons with disabilities in 2017, amounted to more than 450 million Saudi Riyals[[2]](#footnote-2).

1. **Steps taken by the Kingdom towards persons with disabilities**

Saudi Arabia is one of the leading Arab countries in the protection of the rights of persons with special needs. The Kingdom has taken a number of measures aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. For instance, the establishment of 38 centers for comprehensive rehabilitation and supporting them with specialized cadres, that distributed throughout the Kingdom. In addition to the adoption of home health care programs, and the establishment of "Saudi Sports Federation for Special Needs", which established 15 training centers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in which all sports activities are practiced.

The Kingdom allocates a monthly subsidy to persons with disabilities. Also, it does efforts to enable them to use public transport and giving them and their companions a reduction of 50% inside and outside the Kingdom. In addition to the provision of compensatory devices and audio and video aids, and others freely. Furthermore, providing social, medical and psychological care for persons with disabilities; providing disabled persons with equipped vehicles; employing persons with disabilities in the public sector and encouraging the private sector to employ them. It also provides special education for persons with disabilities through specialized institutes and integrating them in public education[[3]](#footnote-3).

Additionally, Saudi Arabia has provided subsidies to persons with disabilities and their families who are caring for them. To encourage enrollment in rehabilitation programs for persons with disabilities; Article 14 of the Basic Regulations for Rehabilitation Programs for Persons with Disabilities includes the following: payment of a reward of SR 400 per disabled person from the date of joining the rehabilitation program, including holidays. While, in case of residence in the internal section, this fee is reduced to (200) riyals per month, and in both cases added to the amount (200) riyals for the dependents of the family[[4]](#footnote-4). The subsidy service is provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. This service includes access to auxiliary equipment from electric or ordinary wheelchairs, medical beds and other medical devices that a person with disabilities needs or helps him to rely on himself.

On February 13, 2018, the Cabinet approved the establishment of "the Authority for the Care of People with Disabilities", in a meeting chaired by the Minister of Labor and Social Development, and representatives of the Ministries of Health, Finance, Economy, Planning, Municipal and Rural Affairs and representatives of persons with disabilities. The Authority aims to ensure that they have access to disability-related rights and to strengthen the services provided by the agencies to them. It also aims to raise the level of prevention. Thus, helping them to receive the necessary care and rehabilitation. The authority takes the necessary procedures for such coordination and cooperation with the relevant authorities, defining the roles of the agencies in relation to the care of persons with disabilities. It will also identify the role of different agencies related to the affairs of persons with disabilities and review the quality of services provided to them. In addition to its role in conducting studies, research and collecting statistics to support research in the areas of disability[[5]](#footnote-5).

On December 18, 2018, the Minister of Labor and Social Development's decision (No. 70273) issued the Executive Regulations of the Labor Law and its annexes, including Annex No. 3 that "sets out a table of the facilitating arrangements and services that employers are required to make to modify and adapt the work conditions and physical environment to enable the disabled person to perform work"[[6]](#footnote-6).

The Kingdom is preparing a national strategy comprising 23 initiatives to assist persons with disabilities including elder people, who amounted to (1,419.203) persons; the number of males is (742.102), and the number of females is (677.101)[[7]](#footnote-7). In addition to the development of a national program for the diagnosis and classification of disabilities and the establishment of a unified national database of records and statistics. The strategy aims to encourage early intervention, to expand the program to integrate public schools, and to provide vocational training as well as to implement a comprehensive accessibility program for people with special needs[[8]](#footnote-8).

In addition to government agencies, civil society organizations play a role too. Indeed, the King Salman Center for Disability Research, a civil society foundation, is a pioneer in the field of scientific research on disability issues and causes, ways to avoid them and treat them. The Center's strategic objectives are to improve decision-making, planning, research priorities, use of the latest technologies to achieve a better understanding of forms of disability and diagnostic and therapeutic capacities, and to develop concrete contributions to help the disabled. The center specialized in doing scientific studies and research in the field of disability. It is also responsible for establishing educational and training facilities related to the scientific and research aspects of disability, issuing periodicals and publishing studies related to disability. Therefore, establishing an information center, designing and developing databases and information on disability research. It has worked on the best ways to care for persons with disabilities within their families and in society and to cooperate with the competent authorities in following up on disability recommendations and decisions[[9]](#footnote-9).

Considering the discrimination against persons with disabilities, including the elderly, in law and practices, the kingdom does its best to eradicate it. According to the national law and the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, The Kingdom ensures that persons with disabilities are recognized on an equal basis with others before the courts and give them a priority in litigation procedures. Persons with disabilities have been granted the right to use assistants to provide their arguments, such as the provision of a sign language interpreter, or any kind of assistance, and have the right to request that to be provided by the Court.

Supreme Decree No. 25803 dated 15 February 2018, which provides directives to the Ministry of Labor and Development to provide assistance to the needy and asking for their rights, including persons with disabilities. The most important one of these directives is coordination with the Saudi Bar Association to obtain a list of the names and addresses of lawyers who donating to provide judicial assistance, in accordance with article 13, paragraph (11), of the Saudi Bar Association. As well as, the Cooperation with the National Human Rights Association to benefit from its legal aid, and communicate with licensed lawyers to encourage and motivate them to provide legal aid and technical advice to those entitled. A memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Justice and the King Salman Center for Disability Research in connection with the Universal Access Program to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to the courts and to prepare them according to the necessary standards.

With regard to the discrimination on the basis of disability in marriage, family, motherhood, paternity and personal relationships, it is prohibited under the relevant regulations of the Kingdom. Some of the measures adopted in the concept of affirmative action for persons with disabilities are: the launching of programs for the collective marriage of persons with disabilities, and supported them financially and socially; Covering all marriage costs and assisting in acquiring independent homes for them; and following up the conditions and needs of persons with disabilities who are married even after marriage.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Development has many programs and activities in the field of family development, especially for families in which one or both spouses are disabled or have children with disabilities. This is included in the basic regulations for programs for the rehabilitation of disabled persons issued by the Cabinet which referred to in this report. Also, these programs providing them with home care, assisting in the reproduction manner through the provision of care and free artificial insemination. In addition to Studies and research on the family, and education of its members including applicants for marriage; focusing on social and psychological aspects, family planning and reproductive health issues.

1. **Vision 2030: Promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities**

The "Vision of the Kingdom 2030", approved by the Council of Ministers in its resolution No. 308 of 25 April 2016, has enabled persons with disabilities to obtain suitable employment opportunities and education that ensure their independence and integration as actors in society. This vision provides all facilities and tools that assist older persons to live in a healthy community and provide decent livelihoods. The National Transformation Program was also launched to build the capacity and capabilities needed to achieve the ambitious goals of this vision. The program has included several initiatives aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, especially the elderly[[10]](#footnote-10).

Another program, the "Quality of Life" program, is one of the programs in Saudi Arabia that seeks to achieve the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2030. the Kingdom seeks to improve the lifestyle of the individual and the family and to build a society with a balanced lifestyle, including persons with disabilities. Therefore, creating the necessary environment by improving the infrastructure including transport, housing, urban design, environment, health care, economic and educational opportunities, security and the social environment. Infrastructure facilities should be available throughout the Kingdom and not only in major cities, easily accessible by public transport, and accessible to persons with disabilities. In addition to improving the health services of persons with disabilities by facilitating access to health services and enhancing the protection against health risks. The Kingdom also provides compensatory and audiovisual devices for persons with disabilities, especially the elderly. It provides all types of care, including treatment and medicines free of charge, and the payment of subsidies to families caring for persons with disabilities. Besides the establishment and support of institutions and centers that provide care and rehabilitation programs for persons with disabilities[[11]](#footnote-11).

Moreover, they seek to enable the integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market, by providing employment opportunities commensurate with the abilities and qualifications of persons with disabilities, in order to give them the opportunity to reveal their own abilities. That's to enable them to gain income like other members of society and to improve their performance through work through training. This is considered as a great step towards enforcing the independence of persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Labor has launched a "TAWAFUQ" program aimed at employing persons with disabilities, providing them with a suitable work environment. It is encouraging private sector enterprises to employ persons with disabilities, by granting them comparative advantages in calculating the people with disabilities working in the "Nitaqat" program, which seeks to localize jobs in the private sector[[12]](#footnote-12).

1. For more information, please, check this link: <http://saudi.law/document_files/961520397925.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "تقرير أهداف التنمية المستدامة، الاستعراض الطوعي الوطني الأول للمملكة العربية السعودية"، **المنتدى السياسي الرفيع المستوي**. (2018)، ص37.

   <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20233SDGs_Arabic_Report_972018_FINAL.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. المملكة تؤكد سعيها لإدماج حقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة ضمن خططها الوطنية، صحيفة سبق الإلكترونية، 16 يونيو 2017. <https://bit.ly/2Ua5d9c> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. للائحة الأساسية لبرامج تأهيل المعوقين، <http://saudi.law/document_files/961520397925.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. "Cabinet approves authority for care of people with disabilities", Saudi Gazette. (13 Feb. 2018). <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/528340/SAUDI-ARABIA/Cabinet-approves-authority-for-care-of-people-with-disabilities?fbclid=IwAR1gUHYlYlA9PxoIpABPGDs5FDoLKTWOQ1HoSbwABebw-80Zn9sCu8KE44M> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. قرارات وزارية اعتماد اللائحة التنفيذية لنظام العمل وملحقاتها، جريدة أم القري، 11 يناير 2019. <https://www.uqn.gov.sa/articles/1547152625218390800/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. "Persons with Disability Survey", **General Authority for Statistics,** (2017). <https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/disability_survey_2017_ar.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Al-Sulami, M. & Rashid Hassan. "Saudi Arabia develops 23 initiatives to serve, support people with disabilities", **Arab News**. (13 June 2018). <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1321086/saudi-arabia> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For more information about the King Salman Center, check this link: <http://www.kscdr.org.sa/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Vision of Kingdom 2030: <https://vision2030.gov.sa/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For more information about 'quality of life' program, please, check this link: <https://vision2030.gov.sa/ar/qol> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For more information about 'Tawafuq' program, please, check this link: <https://www.hrdf.org.sa/Page/Tawafuq> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)