



**Submission of the National Society for Protection of Children
for Human Rights Council in Geneva
on the occasion of the 21st session of the Universal Periodic Review – January 2015**

First: Children’s Status in Kuwait:

If we look at the children’s status in Kuwait from a general perspective, we find that it is quite satisfactory, as Kuwaiti children are not deprived from adequate food, nor do they lack access to education, health or social care. The government provides free health care to every member of the Kuwaiti society, and there are Child Care Centers in all the six governorates of Kuwait, which include Maternity Care and Preventive Health Centers that offer free integrated program for basic vaccinations that carried out inoculations for almost 98.7% of the total number of children in Kuwait. Child inoculations start from birth and continue until primary school age. Naturally, this health care leads to a reduction in child mortality rates, as there is only one death in every 12 thousand children; hence, child mortality rate in Kuwait is considered the lowest in the region. Maternal mortality rate among pregnant women has also declined significantly as it does not exceed five deaths per year since 95% of pregnant women give birth under medical supervision. Accordingly, this health care has been complimented by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and it has been considered an ideal example among the countries of the region in addition to the psychological and social care of children.

Second: The Right to Education:

Education in Kuwait is totally free for all Kuwaiti citizens and “the stateless” (or non-naturalized) , and this includes children of Kuwaiti women, GCC students, and children of teachers and professors in the various stages of public education. Education for Kuwaitis is compulsory from the age of six until the end of middle school for both males and females in accordance with ministerial resolution No (11/1965). Percentage of child school enrollment can be as high as 99% from primary school to high school, and it reached 83% for boys and 98% for girls between the years 2005-2009.

Education in Kuwait is compulsory until the end of middle school, and it is free at all stages. Kuwait has been able to reduce illiteracy rate to 3.7%, and illiteracy remains only among the elderly who are over 60 years of age- particularly among females. This rate is comparable to the rates available in the developed countries.

About 14.910 students, children of Kuwaiti women married to non-naturalized residents, receive free education offered by the Charity Fund for the academic year 2013/2014.



Third: Social Care:

Despite the high standard of living for most Kuwaitis, the state of Kuwait is keen on securing the healthy physical growth for children through a system of food subsidies that provides a variety of essential nutrients for Kuwaiti children at low prices.

A set of laws and regulations issued by the government of Kuwait have ensured the protection of children against all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty or harm, and they criminalized all acts of child labor, trafficking, and violating their innocence.

The State of Kuwait has taken care of the orphans through seeking foster families in accordance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia (Foster Parent). In 1998, The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an affiliate of UNICEF (Geneva), underscored the need for further reforms, which demonstrates that children in Kuwait still suffer from some deficiencies in one or more of the rights provided to them by Islamic law and international conventions.

The Public Authority for the Disabled in Kuwait provides services and facilities to approximately 1956 non-naturalized residents, and about 223 of those underage.

4. Disadvantages

Despite the international recognition that the overall developmental efforts made by the State of Kuwait have succeeded in providing the basic elements of adequate life for the children in Kuwait, children are still facing some of the difficulties and problems in more than one aspect of their life with respect to mental, psychological and physical health, as well as issues related to their rights of independence, participation and education. The major difficulties are the following:

1. Health problems resulting from low levels of breastfeeding among infants in Kuwait, heavy reliance on fast food among the youth, and hyper-consumption of manufactured foods, have led to the skyrocketing of malnutrition and obesity rates among both the children and the youth. As for the wellbeing of adolescents, it is crystal clear that there is insufficient data about the health of this category- especially with respect to the issues related sexual and reproductive health; however, prevalent traditions and values have significantly contributed to the decline of cases of contracting AIDS.



2. Education problems:

- Children in Kuwait may be deprived from the right of Education if their mothers were divorced or widowed, as divorced women are not entitled to enroll their children in school without the prior consent of the father or the guardian. The Law in effect in the Ministry of Education states clearly that “Authority over child education is granted to the father-custodian”, overlooking the mother-(custodian).
- Weakness and rigidity of the curriculum, which is based on memorization and indoctrination at the expense of understanding and comprehension .
- The problem of failure by 14.5 % and dropout by 11.5% among students of public education, which are also high due to many social and familial reasons.
- The reluctance of citizens, especially males, to take up the teaching profession, as they make up only 18% of the total number of Kuwaiti teachers compared to 82% of female Kuwaiti teachers. According to experts, this imbalance is attributed to a number of reasons, the most important of which are: low wages in comparison to the duties of the teaching profession, lack of appreciation of talent and poor evaluation methods, an imbalance of values and absence of appreciation of teachers by both students and parents, and finally over-crowded classrooms which increase the overloads on teachers.
- The prevalence of private tuition which reflects lack of adequate education in schools, density of curriculum, and lack of qualified teachers who are competent in delivering information to the students in the classroom. It is well known that private tuition has a negative impact on the learning process, and it weakens the development of the student's personality and enhances his dependency and reliance on others.
- Poor school management and lack of clear strategic vision of the Ministry of Education and disadvantages of the educational scale which is linked to the stages of growth. The school administration also suffers from the limitations of weakness and inertia.

3. Domestic Violence :

There are many cases of domestic violence against children in Kuwait, as is the case in several communities worldwide; however, reporting such cases is so limited, especially cases involving sexual assault due to the lack of adequate regulations of relevance. Cases accounted for usually come from doctors' reports which are very rare with respect to cases of sexual assault and other



forms of abuse as well. Mothers do not often disclose acts of child abuse committed by the fathers based on a misconception that by doing so, they would be maintaining their family unity, which is in fact a very fragile unity. Due to the lack of shelters allocated for children, police stations have no means of providing adequate shelter for abused children.

4. School violence:

No doubt that there are many cases of school violence in the light of conditions that are usually characterized by social antagonism. This is notably reflected in violence carried out in schools at the various educational stages. It is unfair to hide the facts about school violence which is exercised against children, and we have many cases of child abuse yet the major problem in this regard is the non-collaboration of the concerned authorities towards providing data, information and statistics about such cases in order to find solutions for these problems and the violence targeting children whether it was peer bullying or teacher-student abuse.

Violence is growing persistently, not only in Kuwait schools alone, but also in most communities worldwide, and it has recently escalated seriously, as children (students) in the various stages of education have begun using cold steel such as knives, and in few cases guns. This phenomenon requires intensive collaboration with the Ministry of Education to combat it; and the National Society for Protection of Children have organized several training courses over the past four years in collaboration with experts, psychologists, social workers and teachers in public schools to combat violence within schools; every training course was held over a period of five months, but this is not enough! Therefore, this year, the Ministry of Health has formed a higher committee for the protection of children, with the participation of the National Society for Protection of Children, to carry out this project for its diverse potentials and authorities.

5. Children of Kuwaiti women

There is a clear distinction in the Kuwaiti Nationality Act between the children of Kuwaiti men and children of Kuwaiti women, as Article II of the Act (the Amiri Decree No. 15 of 1959) has stated that: “Any child born in Kuwait or abroad to a Kuwaiti father is eligible to Kuwaiti nationality”. This provision violates Article (29) of the Kuwaiti Constitution, which stipulates that all people are equal with respect to human dignity, and they are equal by the law with respect to public rights and duties without any discrimination on grounds of sex, origin, language or religion. Kuwaiti men have the right to grant their nationality to their children, while Kuwaiti women are deprived of this right, except in the case of divorce or death of the non-Kuwaiti spouse. This situation may create a state of anxiety and instability in the family which would affect the children’s lives and their future.



Fifth: Remedies:

1. Child Rights Act:

Although Kuwait is a signatory of the 1991 International Convention on the Rights of Children without reservations, it has not yet endorsed an integrated law for the children's rights despite the urgent need of the children and the community for such a law, and it has instead been satisfied with the regulations dispersed in the various statutes, such as the Personal Status Laws, and the other brief laws listed in the Ministries of Social Affairs and Labor, Education, Health and others which are insufficient and do not meet the urgent need to provide protection and security for the children in the society they live in.

Since its foundation, the National Society for Protection of Children has been exerting strenuous efforts to drive both legislative and executive authorities to issue this law; and for this objective, it has prepared a bill (draft Law) which includes more than 160 articles, and made attempts to submit it to both legislative and executive authorities to drive them to take the initiative to issue the law. Finally, the (Committee on Women and Family) has adopted it in the National Assembly as a proposal for a bill (draft law), and it was raised to His Highness the Prime Minister three months ago, who in turn referred it to the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, hoping that this procedure will move the subject forward.

2. Instilling Principles of Human Rights in Children:

The educational curriculum in Kuwait lacks the culture of cultivating the behavior of the youth and developing the sublime values of tolerance, acceptance of the other, human rights and other civilized values which have now become a necessity for all human societies. Hence, the Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights formed in the period from 1999 to 2006 a team headed by Prof. Dr. Siham Al-Fraih who worked with a highly experienced team under the approval of the Ministry of Education over a period of six years on preparing six textbooks for the three stages of education (primary - middle - high) which included the concepts of human rights commensurate with the mentality of the learner at every stage of learning. They also prepared (3) teachers' guides to equip the teachers with the necessary expertise to teach these concepts to the youth; however, these books have not yet been used up till now despite the fact that they have been approved by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry has instead used a book which contains selected excerpts from the Constitution of the State of Kuwait which does not satisfy the fundamental educational objectives.



3. Creating Social Services :

- They address the impact of domestic violence on children; interventions that support children who are exposed to domestic violence reduce the long-term risks inflicted on these children, and they must be generously sponsored in addition to expanding their scope and domain.
- Developing health, social and educational services related to children, and highlighting the issue of violence against these children .
- Providing a safe environment for children.
- Creating an ombudsmen's office concerned with the affairs of children, or establishing systems for child justice .
- Conducting training programs for officials dealing with children or for the children themselves.
- Shelters: due to the lack of shelters in Kuwait, after reporting cases of domestic child abuse, the abused children return to the same environment, where they were first exposed to violence. Therefore, the National Society for the Protection of Children has called since its foundation for accelerating the establishment of these shelters. This year, the National Society has submitted a pilot project to establish an adequate shelter that includes all medical, psychological, social, educational, research and legal needs, to the Cabinet of Ministers, hoping for its approval and implementation with creating branches in all the districts of Kuwait as well as a hotline to receive reports about cases of violence against children, and to pass laws that protect the reporter of such cases.