

I. Methodology and consultation process

This report is based on the guidelines issued by the Human Rights Council. The Ministry of the Interior has coordinated the reporting process, in which relevant ministries have been involved. Valuable input has been received from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially the Icelandic Centre for Human Rights regarding the content and formulation of the report.

Over 60 NGOs, religious organisations and interest organisations were specifically notified of the process and invited to offer their comments on a draft table of contents. Views were also sought from the Welfare Watch, a governmental committee. Following this, a working group formed by the relevant ministries drafted a report that was posted on the Government's website for public consultation for two weeks. The draft was also presented at an public interactive meeting with opening statements from the Minister of the Interior, the chair-woman of the working group and the director for the Icelandic Human Rights Centre.

The preparation of the UPR report has given Icelandic authorities a good opportunity to undertake a general, critical review of the human rights situation in Iceland. In following up its UPR report, Iceland will seek close collaboration with civil society actors.

II. Legal and institutional framework for the protection of human rights

A. The Constitution

Iceland is a representative democracy and a parliamentary republic. The Icelandic Constitution provides that state power is exercised by the Parliament (Althingi), the President of Iceland, the Government and the Judiciary. The Parliament and the President exercise legislative power jointly while the President and the Government exercise executive power. Judges are vested with the exercise of judicial power. The Constitution provides for the direct election of the President and the Parliament by secret ballot at intervals of four years. All Icelandic citizens aged 18 and above who are permanent residents of Iceland are eligible to vote in parliamentary, presidential and municipal elections. Immigrants fulfilling certain criteria are eligible to vote in municipal elections.

The Icelandic Constitution is the highest ranking legal instrument in the Icelandic legal order. All laws, regulations and executive action must comply with its provisions. The Constitution was adopted, following a referendum, when the Republic of Iceland was established on 17 June 1944. The Constitution consists of 79 articles in 7 chapters. The Constitution not only provides the basis for the organisation of state power but also guarantees certain human rights and fundamental freedoms such as the freedom of religion, freedom from interference with privacy, home and family life and freedom of association and assembly. Fundamental amendments to the human rights provisions of the Constitution were enacted in 1995 by Constitutional Act. In effect, its human rights provisions had until then remained almost unaltered since the adoption of Iceland's first Constitution in 1874 as they had not been changed at the time Iceland became a Republic and the present Constitution entered into force. With the amendment Act of 1995 a multitude of new human rights provisions were added to the Constitution and the older provisions were rephrased and modernised.

Currently the Constitution is under review. An emphasis has been put on public participation in the review process. A Constitutional Committee was elected by the Parliament that had the role to prepare and organize a National Gathering in constitutional matters, which was held in November 2010. One thousand delegates to the National Gathering were chosen at random out of the National Registry. The outcome of the National Gathering, suggestions, remarks and literature on constitutional matters were put together in an extensive report which the Constitutional Committee delivered to the Constitutional Council.

A consultative Constitutional Assembly consisting of 25 representatives was elected in November 2010. Following complaints about faults in how the election was conducted, the Supreme Court of Iceland invalidated the results of the elections in early 2011, stating that the election process was in breach with the applied Election Act. Consequently, the Parliament decided to appoint the 25 delegates who had been elected to the Assembly to a Constitutional Council with a similar role. The Council shall deliver its propositions for an amended Constitution to Althingi by the end of summer 2011.

B. International obligations and legislation

Iceland is party to most major UN human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Iceland has ratified to all the optional protocols to these conventions, except for the optional protocol to the ICESCR and CAT.

Furthermore Iceland has ratified a number of ILO Conventions, including the eight key conventions and a number of international humanitarian law conventions.

Iceland submits on a regular basis periodical reports to the relevant UN treaty bodies on Iceland's implementation of its international human rights obligations. Iceland takes seriously the recommendations issued by UN treaty bodies and carries out a thorough review of the recommendations set out in their concluding remarks and carries out a thorough follow-up.

Iceland has issued a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Iceland is a member of the Council of Europe and has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and most of its protocols, as well as a number of Council of Europe human rights conventions. By ratifying the ECHR, Iceland has undertaken to comply with the judgments issued by the European Court of Human Rights in cases brought against Iceland. Judgments against Iceland have prompted the payment of compensation to applicants, and in some instances amendments to Icelandic legislation. The ECHR has been incorporated, as a whole, into Icelandic law.

As a participating state of the OSCE, Iceland fully adheres and complies with the commitments of the OSCE's three dimensions: the politico-military dimension; the human dimension; and the economic and environmental dimension.

Icelandic law is based on a dualistic system, whereby international conventions to which Iceland ratifies must be incorporated into national legislation with legal amendments. In the

Icelandic legal system, stipulations in international agreements cannot be directly applied to individuals or entities without implementing legislation. However, existing laws must be interpreted in accordance with international law, both customary law and international agreements

C. Institutions

General

The responsibility of national implementation of human rights obligations is divided between the different ministries who are also responsible for following up recommendations from various convention bodies. All parties or institutions exercising state power are bound by Iceland's human rights obligations in the exercise of their authority. The Ministry of Interior is generally responsible for ensuring that Icelandic law is consistent with Iceland's human rights obligations, the Ministry of Welfare is responsible for issues that have a close link with social rights and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is responsible for international cooperation in the field of human rights, in particular within the UN, the OSCE and partly the Council of Europe.

Judiciary

The independence of the judiciary is safeguarded by the Constitution. The courts have jurisdiction over criminal as well as civil and administrative cases. There is no administrative or constitutional court in Iceland. Icelandic courts are empowered to review the constitutionality of all laws. District courts and the Supreme Court may decide that legislation that they find incompatible with the Constitution cannot be applied. The Supreme Court and the district courts can also review decisions taken by the executive, although they cannot replace the repealed decision with another one. Legislation conflicting with the human rights provisions of the Icelandic Constitution will not be applied by the Icelandic judiciary, although such legislation will not be formally invalidated. In such case a person suffering loss of his or her rights as a result of such legislation will be entitled to compensation. An administrative decision conflicting with the human rights provisions of the Constitution will be invalidated by the courts of Iceland and this may also make a person suffering loss of his or her rights as a result of the decision entitled to compensation.

Ombudsmen

The ombudsmen institutions play an important role in monitoring whether Icelandic authorities fulfil their human rights obligations. *The Althingi Ombudsman* is independent in his or her work and has the role to monitor the administration of the State and local authorities and safeguard the rights of the citizen vis-à-vis the authorities. Any person who feels unfairly treated by the authorities may lodge a complaint with the Althing Ombudsman. All individuals, whether Icelandic nationals or aliens, may complain to the Ombudsman. The same applies in the case of associations and bodies formed by individuals. The Ombudsman can also take up matters at his own initiative.

Ombudsman for Children is also independent and does not take orders from the executive or the legislative powers and has an extensive right to get information. The Ombudsman for Children shall endeavour to ensure that the rights, needs and interests of children up to the age

of 18 are fully taken into account, both by public and private entities and in all areas of society, and to respond if they are violated against. The Ombudsman shall inter alia be the children's advocate, raise strategic discussions about matters concerning children, give indications and put forth proposals for the improvement of legislative, regulatory and administrative provisions directly concerning rights and interests of children, and be instrumental in raising public awareness of legislation concerning children. This involves observing international agreements containing provisions on the rights and welfare of children that have been ratified by Iceland and recommending that such international agreements be ratified.

The Debtors' Ombudsman is a new institution established following the financial crisis in 2008, operating since 2010. The Debtor's Ombudsman represents the interests of debtors and offers them support if applicable. The Debtors' Ombudsman offers free assistance to individuals who have serious difficulties meeting their financial obligations in order to find a balance between financial capacities and financial obligations.

A *National Human Rights Institution* that fulfils the Paris Principles has not been established in Iceland. Establishment of such an institution is currently being considered.

The Icelandic Human Rights Centre is an independent non-governmental institution that was established in 1994 and is partly funded with a contribution from the state budget. The purpose and aim of the Centre is to promote human rights by collecting information on and raising awareness of human rights issues in Iceland and abroad. The Centre works to make human rights information accessible to the public by organising conferences and seminars on human rights issues and by providing human rights education. The Centre also promotes legal reform and research on human rights and has established the only specialised human rights library in Iceland.

D. The role of civil society

Iceland believes that a strong and vibrant civil society is fundamental in achieving democratic development. There is a long tradition for civic engagement and an active civil society in Iceland. Non-governmental organisations and the public in Iceland participate actively in the national societal debate. In that manner they stimulate debate on policies and priorities. The media also plays an important role in society by providing information to the public, initiating public debate and scrutinising the exercise of public power.

III. Implementation of human rights in Iceland, best practices and challenges

A. Introduction

Human rights and democracy are fundamental values in Icelandic society and the Government is firmly committed to ensuring full respect for human rights. Iceland's long-standing democratic system of government and constitutional framework continue to form the basis of the enjoyment of all rights, while the general welfare system has contributed to the practical enjoyment of a number of rights. The state is responsible for all or most of the costs related to education, health care, child care, elderly care and pensions. As an example of best practice, Iceland has made progressive steps in promoting gender equality and gay rights.

Although the status of human rights in general is strong, Iceland encounters challenges in a few areas. This applies in particular to Iceland's ability to secure the rights of vulnerable groups. The impacts of the global economic crisis that hit Iceland particularly hard in 2008 and increased unemployment have also led to challenges in preserving certain aspects of welfare.

B. Non-discrimination and equality

1. Gender Equality

Promoting gender equality and ensuring that women and men enjoy equal rights in all aspects has been a key priority of the government of Iceland for many years. The Constitution stipulates that men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all respects. Iceland has had legislation on gender equality in force since the year 1976, with the most recent amendment in 2008. The aim of the legislation is to establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, and thus promote gender equality in all spheres of society. Various mechanisms have been put in place to ensure gender equality as well as affirmative actions in different sectors.

Iceland has come first at the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report in the last two years, 2009 and 2010. The report evaluates gender equality in different countries based on the gender balance in the area of politics, education, employment and health. In the last parliamentary elections in 2009, the proportion of women MPs grew to 43%. Following the elections the first Icelandic government to have an equal number of women and men was formed, under the leadership of the country's first female Prime Minister. Currently, 40% of government ministers are women. In the 2010 municipal elections women also reached the 40% threshold for the first time.

Iceland has one of the highest rate of female labour force participation among OECD countries, or 78% - and 84% for men in 2010. At the same time Iceland has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe, or 2,14 children per woman in 2009. A number of welfare projects, such as the expansion of public child care and elderly care facilities over the last few decades have been important in this regard. In 2009 95% of children aged 3 to 5 attended pre-schools. The Icelandic system of parental leave, which gives both parents equal and non-transferable rights, has also been important to ensure this high level of women's participation in the work force. The system, introduced in 2000, provides parents nine months paid parental leave, three months for fathers, three months for mothers and three months to share. Research has shown that fathers are as a result building closer relationships with their children, and women and men are on a more equal footing in the workplace. In 2007 90% of fathers used their paternal leave. There are indications that after the financial crisis in 2008 this number has gone down, which is a concern.

Women are well represented in the area of education. At the secondary level of education women represent around 51-53%. In the school year 2008-2009 the ratio of women among University graduates was 66% for Bachelor's degrees, 60% for Masters level and 54% for PhD level.

In spite of these positive advances and efforts undertaken in the last few decades, gender inequality still exists. The biggest challenges are found in the area of work. The gender pay gap still persists, measured in 2008 at 16%, despite the fact that an Act on equal pay for equal

work has been in force since 1961. Women also hold fewer leadership positions. The percentage of women employed as managers in Icelandic companies in the private sector was 19% in 2009. Choice of education and career paths also tends to be quite traditional, although some improvements have been made in recent years.

Several actions have been undertaken to address these challenges. Most importantly the parliament passed legislation in 2010 requiring companies with 50 employees or more, to have both women and men on their company boards, and if there are three or more board members, the percentage of either sex must not be under 40%. This legislation will take effect in 2013.

2. Ethnic discrimination and racism

The prohibition of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, is set out in Art. 65 of the Constitution and is specifically safeguarded in two provisions in the General Penal Code. Incidents of refusal of access to public spaces and harassment based on race and/or ethnic origin are reported but as of present no cases referring to this provision have been decided in the courts. The Supreme Court has only dealt with one case regarding racial discrimination resulting in a fine.

Iceland has never had minority groups in the sense of specific minorities among the population with a rich historical or long-lasting connection with the country, furthermore distinguishing themselves from the majority of the population in terms of language, culture, religion or other collective features.¹

Steadily increasing immigration in recent years has called for specific measures and legislation to combat discrimination and racism. A survey from the year 2009 on attitudes of the general public toward minority groups in Iceland revealed that 56,9% thought that discrimination based on race or ethnicity was common in Iceland.

An Action Plan on Immigrants Issues was passed by the Parliament in 2008. Various projects and researches which focus combating racism and anti-discrimination have been supported by the Ministry of Welfare.

The Ministry of Welfare is currently preparing new legislation prohibiting discrimination².

3. Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons

The National Organization of Lesbian and Gay Men in Iceland (now National Queer Organization) was founded in 1978, resulting in more open discussion on homosexuality. Although prejudices were strong at that time, attitudes have shifted dramatically.

In 1996, registered partnership between same-sex couples was given the same legal status as marriage except for certain limitations as to adoptions. In 2010 this difference between marriages and registered partnerships was abolished, and the marriage Act now applies both

¹ See Iceland's Fifth Periodic Report on Implementation of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights Pursuant to Article 40 of the Covenant, April 2010

² The new legislation will be based on Council Directives 2000/43/EC, Equal Treatment between Persons Irrespective of Racial or Ethnic Origin, and 2000/78/EC, general legal framework on equal treatment in employment.

to heterosexual and homosexual couples. That same year an amendment was made to the Act on Artificial Fertilisation whereby lesbian couples were given the right to in vitro fertilization. Since 1996 discrimination on grounds of “sexual orientation” is subject to penalty under the General Penal Code.

The National Queer Organization has in the recent years emphasized the rights of transgender persons in Iceland. A recent opinion of the Althingi Ombudsman has highlighted the lack of legal framework and called for legislation in order to protect the rights of transgender people. Although there are no legal rules on medical treatment, a code of practice is followed, similar to that applied in other Nordic countries. Practice relating to name-change has recently been modified, following investigation by the Althing Ombudsman. Change of name and sex in the national register is now possible upon request after one year of hormonal treatment. In March 2011 the Minister of Welfare appointed a working group on the legal status of transgender persons.

C. Rights of persons with disabilities

Prohibition on discrimination against disabled people is stipulated in the Constitution. The Act on the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities further ensures people with disabilities equality and living conditions comparable with those of other citizens and provides them with conditions that enable them to lead a normal life. Persons with disabilities shall be entitled to all general services provided by the State and by municipalities. It shall be endeavoured at all times to provide services for people with disabilities in accordance with general laws in the field of education, health and social services, employment, transport services social habilitation and rehabilitation. Representatives shall be appointed to whom a disabled person, who thinks that his or her rights are violated, may turn in order to get assistance.

One of the main aims of new Acts on Planning and on Constructions is to ensure access for all and require designers and those responsible for constructions to ensure access for all with measures as all hallways being wide enough for wheelchairs.

The main responsibility of the special services for people with disabilities has been transferred from the state to the local municipalities as of January 2011. This is a step in the direction of mainstreaming the services for persons with disabilities and integrating the special services to people with disabilities with ordinary social services which has been the responsibility of the municipalities.

A new legislation defines and recognises Icelandic sign language for the first time as the first language or mother tongue of deaf people. Still there are challenges in ensuring rights for the deaf population in Iceland. A working group has been appointed to map these challenges and set forth an action plan in order to meet them.

Iceland has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its optional protocol and ratification is being prepared. To that end a bill that is currently before Parliament proposes that the Ministry of Welfare shall be responsible for the safeguarding of the rights of persons with disabilities and educating persons with disabilities and those who work with them about their rights. The bill also contains more detailed provisions regarding appointed representatives of persons with disabilities. Finally it is proposed that persons who, because of their disabilities, have difficulties taking important decisions themselves or managing their affairs by themselves shall have the right to choose a

personal representative who shall assist them in making informed decisions about such matters. This is in accordance with Article 12 paragraph 3 of the CRPD.

A bill is also being prepared regarding use of restrictive and constraint measures in the care of persons with disabilities. As a main principle, the use of restraint and physical coercion will be prohibited, but guidelines will be set forth on when and how exceptions can be made, and how the exercise of such exceptions will be supervised.

D. Rights of elderly persons

According to the Act on the Affairs of the Elderly from 1999, elderly persons shall have access to the health and social services they require and such services shall be provided in accordance with the needs and condition of each individual. The aim is also to ensure that the elderly enjoy a normal domestic life as long as they are able to and that they are assured the required institutional services when needed. The elderly shall enjoy equal rights with other citizens and their right to self-determination shall be respected. The old-age pension has not kept up with the cost of living and following the financial crisis, many pension funds have had to lower monthly payments to pensioners. Since 2008 pensioners with a low income have been entitled to a special supplement support to improve their living standard.

In addition, there are complaints regarding the lack of adequate nursing – home nursing as well as in nursing homes, where people often have to share a room with one or more residents, resulting in a discriminating lack of respect for private life and family life. Since 2008 it has been the policy of the government to work towards meeting the demand for single rooms. All new nursing homes are therefore designed to meet that aim and where possible shared rooms in older nursing homes have been changed to single rooms.

E. Rights of the child

The rights and welfare of children are protected both in the Children's Act and the Child Protection Act, as well as in individual provisions in other legislation. Through various legislation, every kind of violence and misuse against children is prohibited and punishable.

The child welfare system is the responsibility of both local authorities and the state. Child protection committees in municipalities are responsible for basic services to children and families. A state body, the Government Agency for Child Protection, is responsible for monitoring child protection committees and ensuring that they operate in accordance with legislation. Furthermore, the Government Agency for Child Protection is responsible for special tasks of child protection, such as operation of The Children's House. The Agency collects data on a regular basis on the frequency of child abuse and supports research and various developmental projects. The interest of the child shall always be paramount in the work of child protection authorities. In their work, child protection authorities shall always take children's views and wishes into account, in the light of the age and maturity of the child.

Iceland has ratified the CRC which has been of great guidance for legislation in the field since its ratification. Although CRC has not been incorporated completely into the legislation, all provisions regarding children are based on the CRC fundamental principles and all legislation shall be interpreted in accordance with the CRC. A legislative bill with amendments to the Children's Act was submitted recently to Althingi including *inter alia* provisions that are aimed at better reflecting the fundamental principles in Articles 2, 3, 6 og 12 of the CRC.

According to the Youth Act from 2008 municipal authorities are for the first time required to promote the establishment of special youth councils in every municipality. The role of the youth council is, among other things, to advise municipal authorities on the affairs of young people in the community concerned. Youth councils are now active in many municipalities.

Children shall be provided with care and education, in a healthy and encouraging environment, as well as safe conditions to learn and play. All compulsory school pupils have the right to appropriate instruction within an encouraging environment in suitable facilities which take into account their needs and general well-being. Pupils have the right to enjoy all activities organised by the school and the right to express their opinion regarding all school activities and their opinion shall be taken into account whenever possible. Any individual who has completed compulsory education is entitled to enrol in upper secondary school and to study there until the age of 18. It is of concern that the dropout rate of pupils with immigrant background is higher in upper secondary schools than for pupils of Icelandic origin, which may be partly due to lack of skills in the Icelandic language.

There have been coordinated efforts for some years in Iceland to prevent bullying, persecution and social exclusion in schools, with focus on improving and maintaining positive school environment. Development of various preventive activities in schools have also taken place in close cooperation with parents and the community, both at compulsory and upper secondary school level, focusing on drug prevention and risk behaviour and in recent years with increased focus on health and well-being of children.

Particular efforts are focused on vulnerable groups of children and young persons, such as those with disabilities and learning difficulties, long time illnesses, ADHD and children and young persons with immigrant background. The government recognises the necessity to prioritise support of these groups and to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities.

Since the financial crisis in 2008 the Parliament has organised efforts to monitor the services for children and to ensure cooperation between all sectors, among other things by the establishment of the Welfare watch. It seems that the public system has mostly been able to provide necessary services despite budget cuts. It is important to continue monitoring the development in the near future, especially concerning vulnerable children that need extra support or services. The Welfare watch has established several task forces such as on the welfare of marginalized groups and on the welfare of children and families with children.

An Action plan for the period of 2007-2011 to strengthen the Status of Children and young persons was passed by Althingi in 2007. The action plan is based on the rights of the child as defined in the CRC. In 2008 another action plan on Child Protection matters was passed by Althingi, valid from 2008-2010. NGOs have criticized authorities for insufficient implementation in some areas of the actions laid down in the two Action Plans and have encouraged better implementation. NGOs have also raised concerns regarding potential threats to children's future well-being. It has *inter alia* been pointed out that no regular monitoring has been exercised in Iceland on the frequency of violence and sexual abuse against children and that no public authority is responsible for preventative measures in that field. The Action plan 2007 – 2011 is presently being reviewed. Priority is given to include issues of access to justice and prevention measures.

F. Violence against women

Combating violence against women is a great priority of the Icelandic government. In 2006 the government launched an action plan containing 37 actions to fight sexual and domestic violence. The chief objective of the plan is to combat domestic and sexual violence directed towards women and children and to improve services for victims of such violence and those who are at risk. The actions include strengthening preventative measures, training of staff, ensuring appropriate assistance to victims and breaking the vicious cycle of violence by improving treatment available to perpetrators.

Based on the 2006 action plan, five books on violence in intimate relationships have been published, one textbook for university and four for civil servants working in the field. Several studies have also been conducted on the subject; one wide ranging study which revealed that 42% of Icelandic women had, since the age of 16, been subject to violence, threat or physical contact of a sexual nature that caused distress. Also 22% of women had during their lifetime experienced violence in close relationships. Four studies on the provision of public services for victims of violence in intimate relationships have also been conducted.

Implementing the plan, a legislative bill has been put forth in the parliament that amends the penal code with provisions authorizing the removal of the party accused for domestic violence from the household and putting in place a specific restraining order should there be a suspicion of domestic violence.

Numbers show that only a small portion of rape victims file charges, and in even fewer cases indictments or convictions are given. This is a concern. An extensive consultation on the matter has been launched under the Ministry of the Interior with the participation of academics, the police, NGOs working with victims of rape, the states prosecution and the judicial branch.

A new action plan is now under preparation. The new plan will give emphasis to examining gender based acts of violence, their prosecution and handling in the judicial system, but few cases of this nature go all the way through the judicial system. The new action plan will be valid from 2011-2015.

To combat violence against women and to fight international crime, including human trafficking, the Icelandic parliament passed in 2009 a law criminalising the purchasing of sexual services and thereby defining prostitution as a form of violence against women that must be eliminated. For the same reasons private dancing and strip clubs have been made illegal.

Female genital mutilation is prohibited in the General Penal Code.

G. Human trafficking

Although very few victims have been identified, there are indications of that Iceland has become a destination and a transit country for human trafficking in recent years, especially for women who are subjected to forced prostitution,. Iceland may also be a destination country for women and men who are subjected to forced labour in restaurants and in the building industry.

Human trafficking is a criminal offence in Iceland. Fighting human trafficking is a priority for the Government. In 2009, a National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan was launched which

outlined steps to improve prevention measures and formal provisions for victim assistance. A team to coordinate interagency anti-trafficking activities was set up in November 2009 to deal with human trafficking cases and assist victims, as well as to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan.

In an effort to reduce the demand for sex trafficking and also to ensure assistance to possible victims of human trafficking, extensive legal amendments have been made. The purchase of sexual service has, *inter alia*, been criminalised, nude shows have been prohibited in Iceland and victims of human trafficking are entitled to temporary residence permit in Iceland. During this period of temporary residence, victims will be provided with information and assistance, and given help.

H. Prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Article 68, paragraph 1 of the Constitution provides that no one may be subjected to torture or any other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The General Penal Code contains provisions that classify torture as a criminal act. If a public servant subjects someone to physical torture, his/her conduct would fall under the provisions on infringement of physical inviolability. Offences committed in an official capacity are also criminalised in the Penal Code. Despite the fact that no term corresponding to “torture” is used in the relevant provisions there is no doubt that these criminal provisions apply to any conduct described in Article 1 of the CAT. In addition, the provisions mentioned are in some respects of more extensive scope than the definition in Article 1 of the CAT, as they make punishable any misuse of public authority, and not only misuse for the purposes which Article 1 describes. In addition physical torture is punishable under a large number of criminal provisions, despite the fact that no term corresponding to “torture” is used. In general, all provisions of the General Penal Code make acts committed against life and limb punishable, including physical torture.³

I. Deprivation of liberty

The arrangement of imprisonment of juvenile prisoners has led to criticism from the Icelandic Human Rights Centre (IHRC). This criticism has been based on the fact that the separation of juvenile prisoners from adult prisoners is still not obligatory under Icelandic law.

The Prison and Probation Administration (PPA) have to take account of, *inter alia*, the age of the prisoner when deciding in which prison or penal institution the prisoner should be placed according to the Icelandic Execution of Sentences Act. Every juvenile prisoner is offered, according to agreement between PPA and the Governmental Agency for Child Protection (GACP), to be placed on regular supervisory facility for children administered by GACP. A placement according to this agreement is subject to the agreement of the child. The IHRC is concerned that these measures are not enough to serve the best interest of these children although the number of juvenile prisoner is approximately one per year and full separation from adult prisoners would lead to total isolation for the young inmate.

³ See Iceland’s Fifth Periodic Report on Implementation of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights Pursuant to Article 40 of the Covenant, April 2010.

A working group of experts to review these matters published a report in the year 2010, recommending that the Execution of sentences Act would be reviewed and juvenile prisoners obliged to execute their sentence in regular supervisory facility for children. The Minister of Justice nominated a committee to review the Execution of sentence Act in 2010 and the committee is still at work.

The Icelandic Government is planning to build a new reception and custody prison in Reykjavík. This prison will also have facilities for female inmates. The prison will take over the custody facility in Litla-Hraun prison and will also take over both prisons in Reykjavík which have been criticised by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). The construction of this new prison will be in an open tender in the year 2011.

J. The right to health

The Constitution stipulates that everyone shall be guaranteed necessary assistance in case of *inter alia* sickness, invalidity or infirmity by reason of old age. The Act on Patient Rights specifically prohibits discrimination against patients on any grounds. The Act also stipulates that patients have the right to the best health service available at each time, appropriate to the patient's condition and prognosis and the best knowledge available. The objective of the Health Service Act is to provide everyone access to the optimum health service which it is possible to provide at any time in order to safeguard mental, physical and social health. The stated objective of the Act on Health Insurance is to ensure health insured person's assistance for the protection of their health and equal access to health service, irrespective of their financial position.

Statistics on longevity and rate of infant mortality have constantly ranked the Icelandic health service as one of the best in the world. However the provision of optimum health service has always been and will always be limited by the funds allocated to the health service. After the financial crisis in 2008 the Government has been obliged to make cuts in the state budget, including to funds for health services. It will therefore be a greater challenge to maintain the standard of health care and fulfil the objectives of access to optimum health service for everyone. Health care providers are however doing their best within their budget and health authorities are monitoring the service to ensure that the citizens have access to necessary health service.

K. Immigrants and asylum seekers

1. Immigrants and integration

Immigration to Iceland has increased in the recent years. In the year 2000, 3% of the population had an immigrant background while in the year 2010 the rate was 8,2%. Most immigrants come from other EEA countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Germany and Denmark.

The goal of the Icelandic integration policy is to ensure that all residents of the country enjoy equal opportunities and are active participants in all aspects of society. Social services, health care and education is provided on an equal basis for everyone who is registered legally in the country.

In 2008 the Parliament adopted a National Action Plan on Immigrant Issues that aims to improve the reception of people immigrating to Iceland and making it easier for them to become active participants in Icelandic society and pursue their cultural traditions. The plan is divided into ten chapters which concern *inter alia* health and social services, education, dissemination of information and anti-discrimination.

It is the policy of the authorities to ensure that immigrants receive thorough information about Icelandic society and their rights and obligations as residents in Iceland in order to encourage their successful integration into society. As mastering the Icelandic language is very important for successful integration of immigrants into Icelandic society, various organisations offer Icelandic language education for adults aimed at the needs of immigrants. In most cases participants have to pay a fee to enrol in such education, however the lessons are subsidised by the government and if a person is unemployed the lessons are free of charge.

Until 2008 unemployment amongst immigrants was low or none existing. As unemployment has risen in general in Iceland, following the financial crisis, unemployment amongst immigrants is higher than with Icelandic citizens which raises concerns. This may however be partly explained by the fact that the construction industry, where many foreign workers were employed, suffered disproportionately to other sectors following the crisis. The Directorate of Labour offers various courses which aim at reducing unemployment amongst young immigrants.

The collection of information on immigrant issues is vital for the government, both for policy formulation and to assess the success of actions taken.

A bill is being prepared in the Ministry of Welfare with the aim of coordinating and improving public services for immigrants.

2. Refugees and asylum-seekers

Icelandic asylum policy and rules on procedure is governed by the Act on Foreigners. Iceland has been a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees since 1956. In addition Iceland is a party to a number of international human rights conventions that contain rules which are relevant to the rights of refugees, such as the ECHR, the CAT, the CRC and others. The Act on Foreigners provides for subsidiary protection and protection on humanitarian grounds. The Act also reflects the respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

Extensive amendments were made to the asylum chapter of the Act on Foreigners in 2010. The amendments cover *inter alia* regime for subsidiary protection, more precise rules regarding residence permits on humanitarian grounds, further legal aid to those who receive a negative decision and partially for asylum seekers during procedure at first level instance and rules regarding reception conditions. Several amendments were also made to establish safeguards for the protection of unaccompanied minors that apply for asylum in Iceland.

Applicants who cannot provide for themselves during their stay in Iceland are offered support and housing through the Directorate of Immigration.

All negative decisions can be appealed to the Ministry of Interior. Not all decisions have suspensive effect upon appeal but the asylum seeker can submit a special request for a suspensive effect. Free legal aid is provided for all asylum seekers at the second level

instance. The Ministry reviews independently all cases appealed to it. In addition to the two administrative levels, everyone is entitled to a court procedure and appeal.

The authorities are obliged to cooperate with the UNHCR in cases regarding applications for asylum and to request for information when necessary. The Icelandic Red Cross has close cooperation with UNHCR in this field. There is also close cooperation between the Icelandic Red Cross and the Directorate of Immigration.

Despite low numbers of asylum seekers in Iceland⁴ the authorities have dealt with a few challenges in the field, such as a lengthy process of asylum applications. Despite efforts to decrease the time of procedure the challenges are still present. Following the financial crisis is a tighter situation on the working market has resulted in difficulties for asylum seekers to receive a preliminary residence and work permit.

Iceland has received groups of refugees for resettlement since 1956. Between 1956 and 2010 a total of 516 refugees were resettled in the country. Since 2005 an emphasis has been on receiving groups in line with UNHCR's resettlement criteria of Women at risk. The Icelandic Refugee Committee has overseen the reception of refugees annually or every other year, approximately 22 refugees each year, as a part of the UNHCR Resettlement Programme.⁵ It is a precondition that resettlement takes place on the basis of an arrangement with UNCHR and upon their request. The individual's need for protection has to be confirmed by the UNHCR and the ability for the state, local authorities and Red Cross to provide sufficient support to the refugees is taken into consideration. The Icelandic programme for reception of resettlement refugees has proved to be very successful and has therefore been given considerable attention abroad. Iceland,

L. Decent work / employment

In Iceland decent working conditions and respect for worker's rights are considered essential elements for a fair and balanced social development. Trade unions are well established in Iceland, and the vast majority of workers in Iceland are unionised. The Constitution specifically safe-guards trade unions but also contains a special provision guaranteeing the right to remain non-unionised.

Organisations of the social partners negotiate workers' wages and terms and also other working conditions in the course of free collective bargaining. Furthermore, the organisations of the social partners have agreed between themselves most of the rules applying to the Icelandic labour market, and it may be said that the labour market system is based, in all its essentials, on an agreement between these parties. There is also a long tradition for a tripartite dialogue between the Government and the social partners on labour market issues and other related economic and social issues. In cases where laws or regulations are to be set on issues regarding the labour market, the government has attached particular priority on having close consultation with the social partners regarding the formulation of such rules.

⁴ 35-117 annually

⁵ For further information on Icelandic policy on reception of resettlement refugees, see the following report : [http://esb.utn.is/media/esb_svor/24 - Justice, Freedom and Security/Ch. 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security- FINAL.pdf](http://esb.utn.is/media/esb_svor/24_-_Justice,_Freedom_and_Security/Ch._24_-_Justice,_Freedom_and_Security- FINAL.pdf)
<http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/information/refugees/>

In recent years, the social partners and the Government joined forces in fighting social dumping in the labour market. A new legislation aimed at ensuring workers' rights and preventing illegal work that took effect in 2010 is a result of that cooperation. Its purpose is to ensure that employers in the national labour market and their employees to obey the law, regulations and collective agreements that are in effect. As a result the surveillance of the representatives of the social partners will be better ensured.

Similar legislation has been adopted on the rights and obligations of foreign undertakings posting workers temporarily to Iceland. Its main purpose is to give Icelandic authorities a better overview of the status on the national labour market concerning the operations of foreign service providers in the country as well as the number of foreign workers that work for those undertakings. Furthermore, the goal is to maintain the surveillance of the Icelandic labour market so that the law and collective agreements that are in effect are respected and that the position of workers that are posted temporarily in Iceland by foreign undertakings is further guaranteed. Furthermore the aim of the legislation is to ensure that foreign workers, posted temporarily in Iceland by foreign undertakings, stay and work legally in the country and that reliable information regarding these foreign workers is available.

Legislation has been adopted regarding the working environment, health and safety in the workplaces on land, at sea and in the air. Special bodies are responsible for administrating and monitoring each of the acts. In general, the acts state that the employers shall make clear to the employees the accident and health hazards that may be involved in their work, and ensure a good working environment and that the employees have sufficient education and training to carry out their work in such a way that no danger will result from it.

M. Management of the fisheries system

The Human Rights Commission issued for the first time an opinion in a complaint against Iceland under the Optional Protocol to the CCPR; in the case *Haraldsson and Sveinsson v. Iceland* of 24 October 2007, No. 1306/2004. The conclusion was that the Government of Iceland had not shown that the particular design and modalities of implementation of the quota system according to the Icelandic Fisheries Management Act met the requirement of reasonableness. The Committee concluded that, in the particular circumstances of the case, the property entitlement privilege accorded permanently to the original quota owners, to the detriment of the authors, was not based on reasonable grounds and that this disclosed a violation of Article 26 of the Covenant.

Following the opinion, the Icelandic Government stated to the Human Rights Commission that an overall review of the Icelandic fisheries management system would be carried out in the near future with a view to its amendment. The Government Coalition Platform states that further action is required following the opinion of the UN Commission on Human Rights, for instance, by honouring freedom of employment and ensuring equality in the allocation of utilisation rights and access to the common resource.⁶ On that basis, the Government has presented a new legislative bill aimed at increasing the possibilities for participation for those who are not current stakeholders in the system.

⁶ <http://www.government.is/government/coalition-platform/>

N. Freedom of opinion and expression

Freedom of opinion and expression is protected by Article 73 of the Constitution. Article 73 of the Constitution was formulated with particular view to Article 10 of the ECHR and Article 19 of the ICCPR. Limitations on freedom of expression can be found in the Icelandic legislation and they must comply with the criteria stipulated in Article 73(3) and Article 10(2) of the ECHR

An extensive case-law has been established where the Icelandic courts are confronted with finding the balance between freedom of expression and right to private life. The courts have applied the principles of the European Court of Human Rights in this respect. Accordingly, they have confirmed that freedom of expression is wider in the context of political debate and that debate of public interest and restrictions must not undermine the democratic need to exchange information and opinions freely. Furthermore, they have confirmed the role of the media to impart information in a democratic society in matters of public concern. An example of this can be seen in the judgment of the Supreme Court 1 June 2006, Case No 541/2005. The case was subject to an application to the European Court of Human Rights⁷ claiming that Iceland had neglected its obligation to protect the applicant's right to private life, but was found inadmissible.

In recent years, media pluralism and diversity and media concentration has been heavily politically debated in Iceland. A new media law, passed in 2011 aims to promote freedom of expression, freedom of information, media literacy, variety and pluralism in media and to enhance consumer protection in the area. The media law includes provisions ensuring editorial independence, prohibition against hate speech, improved protection of journalists' sources, new rules on the right to reply as well as coordinated rules on media liability for all types of media. Provisions on editorial independence is intended to prevent dominant shareholders in the media sector from limiting freedom of expression and information, and to prevent ownership positions from being used to promote the owners' own political or financial interests. Provisions on ownership transparency include obligations to report changes in the ownership structure of the media service providers. Furthermore a political committee has been appointed to draft an additional provision on media concentration amending the media law.

In 2010, the Parliament passed a resolution, supported by parliamentarians from all political parties, for Iceland to strongly position itself with regard to the protection of freedom of expression and information. The aim of the resolution is to create a comprehensive policy and an internationally leading legal framework to protect the freedom of expression needed for investigative journalism and by that improve democracy through the power of transparency.

O. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

The right to enjoy freedom of thought, conscience and religion is protected in the Constitution. Article 63 provides that all persons have the right to form religious associations and to practice their religion in conformity with their individual convictions. Nothing may, however, be preached or practised which is prejudicial to good morals or public order. Article 64 provides that no one may lose any of their civil or national rights on account of their religion, nor may anyone refuse to perform any generally applicable civil duty on religious grounds.

⁷ Benediktssdottir v. Iceland No 38079/06

Article 62 of the Constitution provides that the Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the National Church in Iceland and, as such, be supported and protected by the State. The Supreme Court of Iceland has found in the Judgment of 25 October 2007, Case No. 109/2007, that this system is not in violation with the freedom of religion and the principle of equality.

In accordance with Articles 63 and 64 of the Constitution, no one is obliged to be a member of a religious association in Iceland. The Act on registered religious associations, grants permission to found religious associations outside the National Church of Iceland without any obligation to give notice to government authorities of their establishment or operation. The registration is required in order to enable the religious associations' officials to perform ceremonies having legal sequels. The registration is a condition for the State's collection of fees from the members. The National Registry maintains a record of what religious association a person belongs to, if any. Joining a religious association, as well as leaving a religious association, shall be announced in writing to the National Registry.

There is no legislative framework for conscientious objection. Iceland has never had a military force and no practical issues have been raised regarding the right to conscientious objection.

P. Freedom of assembly and association

Article 74, paragraph 3, of the Constitution guarantees the right to assembly. Following the collapse of the Icelandic banking system in October 2008 and the economic crisis which began directly afterwards, Iceland witnessed the largest public demonstrations in its history. In the early months of 2009, continued protest meetings were held in front of the Parliament building, the Government ministries and other public buildings where thousands of people gathered on several occasions to protest. These demonstrations took the form both of organized outdoor meetings, announced in advance, and also, gatherings that were not specifically announced and that had no structured agenda.

While these demonstrations were for the most part peaceful, there were exceptions to this with examples of acts of vandalism against public buildings, the forcible entry of public buildings including the parliament building and a police station, and assaults on the police. Despite this situation of unrest lasting many weeks in the city, the police never banned public meetings in view of the danger of public disorder, as they are permitted to do under the Constitution. These protests gradually decreased after the Government resigned, a new Government took over and a date was set for a general election that was held in May 2009.

Subsequent to the mass protests, a group of demonstrators was charged for breaking into Althingi's building, assaulting its employees, causing them physical injury, and interrupting a meeting of the Parliament. Five of the demonstrators were acquitted in the district court of Reykjavik; two were sentenced to probation and other two to paying a fine.

The freedom of association is protected by the first and second paragraphs of Article 74 of the Constitution. The scope of protection also covers the negative freedom of association.

The Constitution makes a special reference to the establishment of political associations and trade unions, which are seen as the most important associations operating in democratic societies. No obligation is placed upon political associations to register or notify their establishment or operation. Financial support of political associations by foreign entities is prohibited. This restriction is based upon the interests of the public, and its aim is to prevent foreign entities from coming to power in national politics. Political associations that field candidates in parliamentary or municipal elections and meet certain conditions are guaranteed

funding from the central and local government. A maximum on financial contributions made by legal entities is also stipulated by law.

No conditions are placed upon the establishment or operation of trade unions, and no one is obliged to belong to a trade union. Trade unions are not under any obligation to register or notify the authorities of their establishment or operation. However, certain rules are stipulated by law on the operation of trade unions. Particular rules apply to civil servants, as lawfully established trade unions represent them. Certain conditions are placed on the establishment of trade unions by civil servants and on strike action. The right of some civil servants to strike is restricted, on grounds of public interests. This applies, for example, to members of the police and employees in the field of administration of justice and in the field of health care.

Q. Human rights education

Welfare and well-being of children and adolescents is defined as a basic principle of all school activity in a new legislation on pre-school education, compulsory school education and upper secondary education from 2008. The role of the schools to encourage pupils' general development and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society is emphasised at all three school levels.

Iceland has taken an active part in the Council of Europe's project „Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. In December 2008 the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture published a report and guidelines on human rights education on their website. Furthermore A new National Curriculum for Pre-Schools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools was published in 2011. It contains six fundamental pillars of education, one of which is democracy and human rights and another is equality.

Actions are being taken to ensure the implementation of the National Curriculum with the development of teaching material for pupils and handbooks for teachers, planned education for teachers and financial support for projects to implement the new curriculum. The implementation of the National Curriculum will be monitored.

R. Environmental rights

Participatory rights regarding environmental matters are ensured in Icelandic environmental legislation. Furthermore, public authorities and private entities that carry out any public service are required by law to provide environmental information to the public. The right to participate in decision making on environmental matters is safeguarded in several acts of law. This includes the requirement of a public consultation before an Environmental Impact Assessment is finalised, before municipalities adopt local plans, before deliberate release and placing on the market of Genetically Modified Organisms as well as before an operation permit can be granted to a polluting operation. Furthermore a bill is before the parliament that is to ensure access to justice in environmental matters in order to align with the UNECE Convention (Aarhus Convention) on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The Convention, which links human rights and environmental rights, will be ratified in 2011.

S. Poverty / Economic crisis

There is no official definition of poverty in Iceland. However Statistics Iceland has participated in EU-SILC since 2004, and publishes its findings on a yearly basis. According to

the EU criteria, 9.8% of the Icelandic population were under the “at-risk-of-poverty” threshold in the year 2010. When analysed by age and gender it can be seen that the ratio below the poverty threshold in 2010 is highest for women 18 to 24 years old or 19%, and lowest for males 65 years and older, or 2.5%. When analysed by household types, single parents are at greatest risk of falling under the threshold “at risk of poverty” or 30%, followed by single males, 23.3%. Tenants are at much more likely to fall under the said threshold than home owners, or 22.2% compared to 7.2%.

The welfare system of Iceland aims at preventing poverty with accessible health care at minimum cost for all citizens, free education for children and young persons between 6 and 20 years and quality childcare at low cost for children between 1 ½ or 2 years up to elementary school. Meals are provided for all pre- and elementary school children. The Social Security Act provides all persons with disability a minimum level of income. The Act on Rental Support, aims at decreasing the cost of rent for low income individuals and families.

The purpose of the Local Authorities’ Social Services’ Act is to guarantee financial and social security and to work for the welfare of the inhabitants on the basis of mutual aid. The local authorities provide individuals and families, who are unable to provide for themselves, with minimum payments as well as social counselling. Temporary housing solutions are also provided. The Local Authorities’ Social Services provide various counselling among other things on parenting and family issues as well as financial matters.

The child benefit scheme applies to all children under 16 years of age and is linked to income of the custodian.

In the wake of the onset of the economic recession in autumn 2008, the Government appointed a steering committee, that was given the name the Welfare watch to monitor welfare issues. The Welfare watch is expected to monitor systematically the social and financial consequences of the economic situation for families and individuals and to propose measures to be taken to meet the needs of households. The committee consists of 21 members, including representatives of the social partners, ministries, NGOs and the local authorities. The Welfare watch has established several task forces on specific welfare issues, with a special focus on the rights and welfare of children and has made several proposals on remedies to the relevant authorities.

T. Access to courts

Legal aid is a financial contribution from the Government entitled to individuals who for certain reasons need assistance to pay for legal fees resulting to the applicants being a party to a court case. In certain cases, a right to legal aid is stipulated in law, such as when seeking damages for an illegal search conducted by authorities and when an advisory opinion is required from the EFTA court in court proceedings. In other cases, such as private lawsuits, the provision of legal aid is subject to the approval of an application to a Legal Aid Committee. Certain criteria’s, such as lack of economic means, must be met in order to receive legal aid. An applicant for legal aid may not have an income exceeding the amount of 2 mil. ISK per year. If the applicant for legal aid has children under the age of 18 the amount is raised by 250.000 ISK for each child. The same applies to stepchildren or foster children under the persons care. Legal aid can be granted to persons whose income exceeds the aforementioned amount under certain circumstances. For example when the persons cost of living is unusually high, the persons possibilities to make a living are permanently impaired because of invalidity, it is foreseen that the cost of the case will be high in comparison with

the persons income etc. The amount has been criticised as being too low which has raised issues on weather access to courts is *de facto* restricted, as the possibility of bearing legal fees can drive the low – income population away from seeking to the judiciary system.

IV. National human rights priorities

A. Ratification of international human rights instruments

Iceland will continue to make efforts to ensure that Icelandic legislation is in line with international human rights instruments. Iceland intends to ratify the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as its optional protocol, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the optional protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Iceland also intends to ratify the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (The Aarhus Convention), as well as some Council of Europe Conventions

B. Implementation of human rights in Iceland

Extensive emphasis will be placed on democratic, judicial and executive reform, such as the Constitutional Congress. Possibly, changes to the Elections Act will be prepared, to equate the weight of votes and thereby responding to recommendations made by the OSCE concerning elections.

Human Rights Conventions signed and ratified by Iceland will be transposed into Icelandic law and a Human Rights Policy drafted following Nordic models. Education in human rights will be increased at all levels of education.

Equal rights issues will be given increased attention within public administration. Actions will be taken to eliminate gender pay gap and gender-based violence.

An effort will be made to improve the legal situation of transgender persons in accordance with recommendations from the Althingi Ombudsman.

Emphasis will be placed on ensuring the rights and participation of people of foreign origin and further possibilities on revised legislation on asylum and immigration explored.

C. Iceland's international priorities

Iceland will continue to promote and protect human rights internationally and fight discrimination. The government of Iceland emphasises working for human rights and gender equality, peace and security and combating poverty, social injustice, inequality and famine, for instance, with focused foreign aid.

Efforts will continue to advance gender equality and ensure equal rights for women and men in every aspect. Iceland has given a particular focus to women's empowerment and participation in decision-making. Advancing the aims of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions on women, peace and security is a priority. Iceland's second National Action Plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 will be published in 2011. Gender and climate change, is another focus area. Iceland will continue to emphasize the importance of the gender

perspective of climate change; especially the principle of equal participation and that women are important stakeholders in the UNFCCC negotiations on a new international agreement on climate change.

Iceland will continue to promote and protect the rights of the child and intensify efforts to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Iceland will also continue to advocate for respect for human rights in the fight against terrorism.

Iceland emphasises human rights in its development assistance and works towards reaching the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Particular focus is given to women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming.