

**Universal Periodic Review  
(12<sup>th</sup> session, 3-14 October 2011)**

**Contribution of UNESCO**

**SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

**I. Human rights treaties which fall within the competence of UNESCO and international instruments adopted by UNESCO**

1. Table:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Date of ratification, accession or succession</i>	<i>Declarations /reservations</i>	<i>Recognition of specific competences of treaty bodies</i>	<i>Reference to the rights within UNESCO's fields of competence</i>
Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960	-	<i>Reservations to this Convention shall not be permitted</i>		Right to education
Convention on Technical and Vocational Education. 1989	-			Right to education
Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972	13/08/1975			Right to take part in cultural life
Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003	11/03/2005			Right to take part in cultural life
Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions 2005	05/02/2008			Right to take part in cultural life

2. Human Rights Education and Training: Syrian Arab Republic reported to UNESCO in 2009 within the framework of the Fourth Consultation of Member States on the measures taken for the implementation of the 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (covering the period 2005-2008).

## II. Promotion and protection of human rights on the ground

### 1. Right to education<sup>1</sup>

#### A. *Normative framework*

##### a) Constitutional framework:

3. According to Article 37 of the 1973 Syrian Constitution, “education is a right guaranteed by the State. Elementary education is compulsory and all education is free. The State undertakes to extend compulsory education to other levels and to supervise and guide education in a manner consistent with the requirements of society and of production.”

4. Moreover, Article 21 stipulates that “the educational and cultural system aims at creating a socialist nationalist Arab generation which is scientifically minded and is attached to its history and land, proud of its heritage, and imbued with the spirit of struggle to achieve its nation's objectives of unity, freedom, and socialism, and to serve humanity and its progress”.

5. Article 22 adds: “the educational system has to guarantee the people's continuous progress and adapt itself to the ever-developing social, economic, and cultural requirements of the people.” Finally, according to Article 23(1), “(1) The nationalist socialist education is the basis for building the unified socialist Arab society. It seeks to strengthen moral values, to achieve the higher ideals of the Arab nation, to develop the society, and to serve the causes of humanity. The state undertakes to encourage and to protect this education.”

##### b) Legislative framework:

6. Law N° 35 on Compulsory Education of 1981 stipulates the age (6 years) at which children are obligated to enter primary school (six-year programme), the competent

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sources:*

i) International Bureau of Education, Profile of the education system of the Syrian Arabic Republic, <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/worldwide/unesco-regions/arab-states/syrian-arab-republic/profile-of-education.html> (Accessed 14/01/2011)

ii) National report on the development of education in the Syrian Arab Republic, 48th International Conference on Education, Geneva, 2008, [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/ICE\\_2008/syria\\_NR08\\_ea.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/syria_NR08_ea.pdf) (Accessed 14/01/2011)

enforcement authorities, and the sanctions imposed on families failing to send their children to school. This law also provides for incentives to be granted to both children and staff.

7. According to Law N° 32 of 7 April 2002, free and compulsory basic education includes the primary and intermediate stages.

8. Other laws and basic regulations concerning education are:

9. The Decree Law N° 208 of 1973, which embodies the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, defines the principles and objectives of education in the country.

10. The Decree Law N° 7 of 1972 on the Elimination of Illiteracy, which established the Higher Council for Literacy in Syria under the presidency of the Prime Minister and the membership of a number of ministers and chiefs of popular organizations.

11. Ministerial Resolutions No. 1697/543 of 1989 and No. 3013/443 of 1991 contain further regulations concerning pre-school education (kindergartens). Private education is regulated by the Law No. 160 of 1958. This Law has been amended to allow for more freedom in opening private kindergartens, and to allow for opening kindergarten classes for 5-year-old children in public elementary schools.

12. The Decision N° 967 of 12 March 1997 issued by the Regional Leadership of the Baath Socialist Party determines that the training of teachers and teacher assistants will be provided in faculties of education instead of teacher-training institutes. The Decree No. 290 of 1997 established faculties of education in Aleppo, Tichreen and Al-Ba'ath universities, in addition to the faculty of education at Damascus University, to implement this decision. The four faculties were entrusted with the task of training teachers, including those at kindergarten and elementary education levels, by virtue of Decree No. 61 of 1999.

13. The Decision N° 15 of 2000 issued by the Regional Leadership concerns the development of vocational education.

14. Legislative decree 55 (2004) which emphasizes the contribution of private education side by side with the state education in promoting education quality.

15. Internal Regulation for the Basic Education Stage was issued as a Decision N° 21231/443 dated 21/7/2002 including styles of applying Basic Education and the distinguished properties of this stage. It provides at the same time the direct reference to Basic Education progress and facing any obstacle that may intercept Law enforcement. This Law was amended according to Decision N° 3053/443 dated 16/08/2004 after receiving some field notes.

16. Regulation of the Internal System of the Ministry of Education issued in the Decision N° 1269/443 dated 1988.

## ***B. Policy measures***

17. The Ministry of Education puts among its main priorities the upgrading of human development indicators and developing education system. Hence, in order to make the education system more productive, the current plan stresses the necessity of a balanced development of both teaching and learning processes, the focus on linking schools to the society, and introducing new trends in the learning process that focus on skills in languages, sciences and mathematics, and on using the internet as an important source for learning. The new vision of the status of education has been paid a great attention in the tenth five-year plan (2006-2010) of the state especially in the Education sector whose budget was doubled.

18. Many moving schools were initiated for the children of the Beduins who keep on moving with their animals.

19. There is a Project of Integrating Technology in Education as well as using computers in processes of teaching and learning. During the summer of 2008, about 7000 of new teachers were trained and the work will go to include all teachers according to the timed plans at central and local levels.

## **2. Freedom of opinion and expression**

### Achievements, best practices, challenges and constraints:

20. Freedom of expression is still frequently restricted across all mediums in the Syrian Arab Republic.

21. Certain articles of the penal code, the Emergency Law, and a 2001 Publications Law (Articles 28 Sec. C, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 53, 55, and 56) criminalize the publication of material that harms national unity, tarnishes the image of the state, or threatens the “goals of the revolution.” The 2001 Publications Law also permits the authorities to deny or revoke publishing licenses and require reporters to reveal their sources in response to government inquiries.

21. Syrians access the internet through state-run servers and social-networking and video-sharing websites are often blocked. In November 2010, the Syrian Cabinet approved a law governing internet publishing. The law has yet to be approved by parliament. However, in February of 2011, a positive step was taken when after 3 years of filtering, the government allowed access to social networks Youtube and Facebook.

22. According to UNESCO’s information, there is not a self-regulating mechanism for the media in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Capacity-building and technical assistance provided and/or recommended by UNESCO

23. Consistent with its mandate, UNESCO collaborates at different levels with the Syrian Arab Republic to reinforce the right to freedom of expression. Among other activities, UNESCO works to empower women journalists who are too often absent at decision-making levels.

24. On 17 March 2000, the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize was awarded to Syrian journalist Nizar Nayyuf on recommendation of an international jury of media professionals. This price is intended to honor each year a person, organization or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defense and/or promotion of press freedom.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Right to education**

25. Syrian Arab Republic should be encouraged to ratify the 1960 UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education and the 1989 UNESCO's Convention on Technical and Vocational Education.

#### **Freedom of opinion and expression**

26. There are several opportunities for developing and protecting freedom of expression in the Syrian Arab Republic. UNESCO recommends:

- i) to introduce provisions in the existing legislation to guarantee freedom of expression, media freedom, and the right to access information;
- ii) to establish a self-regulatory mechanism for the media.