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Report :

Saudi Arabia and the Repercussions of (COVID–19) Pandemic

July 2020

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An Initiative of Asbar Center

Introduction:

When the "COVID-19" pandemic broke out in China, many people thought that the disease was very far away. Soon enough, Italy and Iran became epicenters of the COVID-19 pandemic! In Saudi Arabia and other places around the world, it was only a matter of time for the disease to strike. Saudi Arabia has embarked on several successive measures to tackle the Corona pandemic at all levels: health, economic, social, educational, security, and others. This created a feeling of satisfaction among citizens and expatriates alike. The Kingdom also earned the praise of several international organizations, particularly the World Health Organization (WHO) for taking these measures. However, the repercussions of the pandemic are still ongoing. This requires serious management at the official and civil society organizations levels in carrying out their social responsibilities dictated by the current crisis.

Part of the commitment to meeting its national responsibility, Asbar Council, which is an initiative of the Asbar Center, encountered the pandemic through discussions and analyses of its various dimensions and successive repercussions on all walks of life. The Council harnessed its pool of one-hundred experts and intellectuals of various disciplines in holding the discussions and making the analyses.

The current report embraces the outcomes of the discussions and analyses carried out by these experts and intellectuals at the Asbar Council. It is made up of a summary and nine themes, which examined the following dimensions: health, economy, education, psychology, family, remote work, bureaucracy, national responsibility, human rights, and the Saudi Arabia's attitudes during the pandemic. The Council is confident that the recommendations and results of the issues raised are of concern to the competent authorities, and some of them may have been adopted recently.

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Summary:

This report is a summary of the discussions held by the Asbar Council about the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue was addressed through several themes. The discussions tried to analyze the repercussions of the pandemic on the Saudi society, whether in terms of tracing the effects, or the measures taken to adapt to it. The report concluded with proposing practical recommendations that can contribute to the effective management of any emergency crises should they erupt in the future.

The first theme addressed the health dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the discussions focused on tackling the Coronavirus as a health threat, and on related scientific facts. The focus was also made on the efforts of the Saudi health sector and the Kingdom's precautionary measures in countering the challenges of the pandemic. Emphasis was made on the fact that the current crisis has proven that health is the greatest and essential element of human life and the basis on which all activities, efforts, and achievements are built. So, any threat to health through pandemics or disasters must be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is important to give the health sector more material and human support. Besides, it must be provided with technical equipment through advanced and sustainable health systems. The capacity of this sector in accommodating patients must also be raised when designing the national development plans. Medical majors may also be established in areas of epidemics and contagious diseases. More international strategic partnerships may be created to develop the national knowledge bases in such areas.

The second theme addressed the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic. There has been consensus that the impact of the Corona pandemic created unprecedented panic, which contributed to the global macroeconomic weakness. The import and export activities have been suspended, and the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) has decreased. These consequences undoubtedly weakened most world economies if not all of them. For these reasons, the global economies must be affected and the business wheel is now moving slowly and some businesses stopped altogether. Despite all cases of business stoppage caused by the Corona pandemic, the perception has been that the global economy required restructuring in terms of institutions

and tools, down to the financial and monetary policies. Concerning the Saudi domestic economy, we are not isolated from what is happening in the world. However, it is important to note that the Corona pandemic was not the first test that the Saudi economy will have after starting work with Vision 2030. The Saudi economy has had many tests before and passed them all with distinction. However, the Corona test remains the strongest and most sinister ever. The economic impact of the Corona pandemic has reached large companies and SMEs.

In a related context, the third theme addressed distance education during the pandemic (COVID-19). The importance of this mode of education has emerged strongly in the light of this pandemic, which we still live day by day. Saudi Arabia was one of the leading countries in providing technology that helped in this respect. The country is endowed by an excellent economic income and ability to provide devices and infrastructure for this education through a strong communications network. The pros and cons of distance education experience in educational institutions were refuted in the Kingdom during the Corona pandemic crisis. The discussion concluded with envisioning the future of distance education in the post-Corona pandemic stage.

The fourth theme addressed remote work during the (COVID-19) pandemic. In this context, the reality and challenges of the Kingdom's transformation to remote work in light of this pandemic were emphasized in this framework. The expected effects of remote work on the State and society were also addressed out of the premise that the Corona pandemic has put us in front of an imperative option. Thinking about remote work has become an inevitable reality, and plans for this type of work and programs have become effective overnight. This necessitates trying to anticipate the future of remote work in the post-Corona pandemic.

The fifth theme of the report highlighted national responsibility during the pandemic. In this theme, the pandemic was taken as a model for promoting national responsibility with addressing the means and mechanisms for developing this responsibility among young people. Promoting the concept of national responsibility, especially during crises - as in the current Corona crisis – is very critical to ensure the solidarity of society in such a sweeping crisis.

The report did not neglect the family, which formed the sixth theme. The family has been dealt with in terms of the challenges

it is facing during this pandemic. In this regard, reference was made to the points of strength of the Saudi family for overcoming these challenges, and to the expected role of the State and societal institutions to support and protect the family from the pandemic repercussions. Just as the Corona pandemic showed that the whole world needs to reorganize its health, economic, diplomatic, and political profiles, it has also revealed the need for the family to reorder its roles and functions. This is particularly important since the family is the most important link that supports the State in its societal plans and actions. This requires that the State has the necessary elements and schemes to ensure its strength and power.
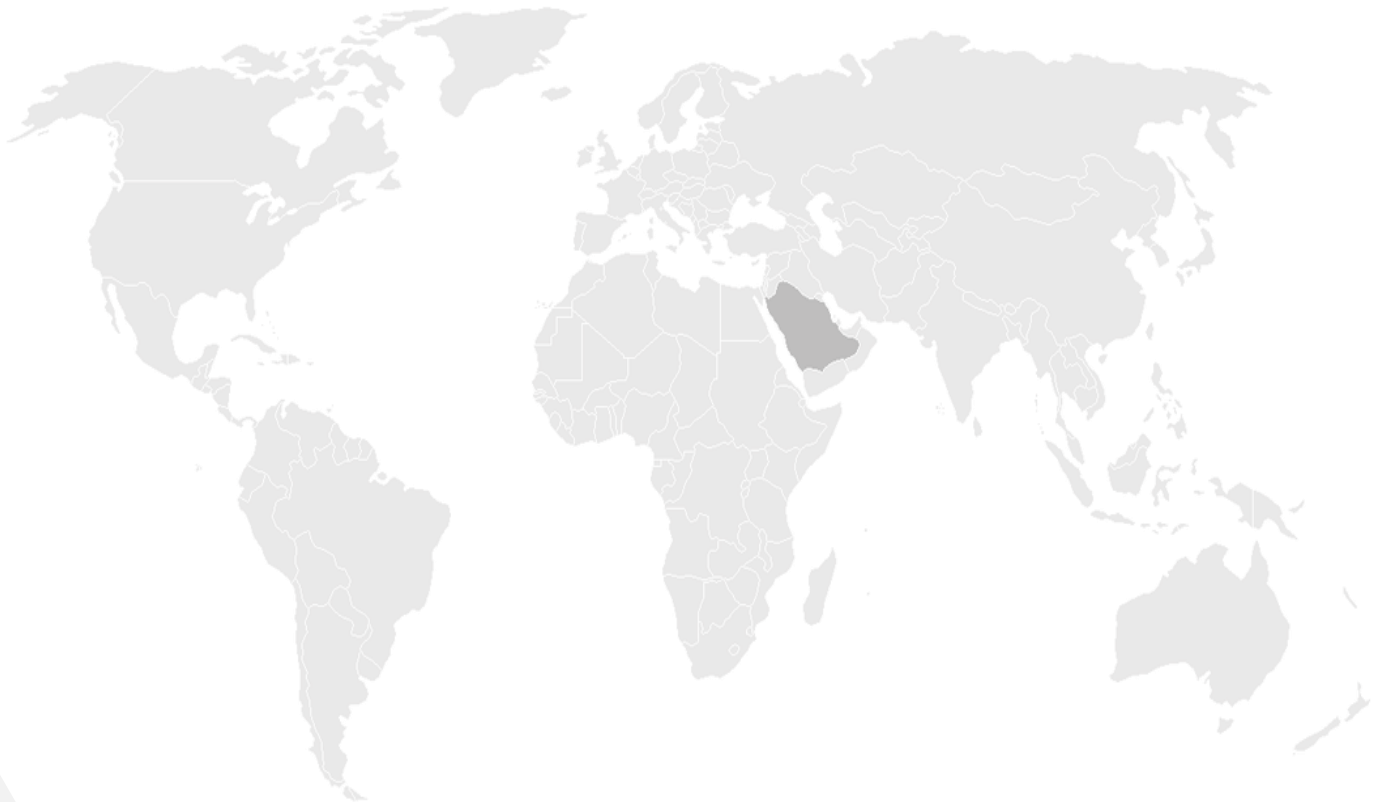
The seventh theme in this report was dedicated to dealing with psychological health during the (COVID-19) pandemic. The report discussed the positive effects of the pandemic on psychological health, especially in terms of acquiring the adaptation skills, finding alternatives, and strengthening family ties. On the other hand, the most prominent negative effects of the pandemic on psychological health were traced. This is based on the confirmation by the World Health Organization (WHO) that the pandemic has tangible effects on the psychological health of community members that include anxiety, depression, and apprehension about what happened or is likely to happen, whether in terms of physical health, infection to a family member, loss of work, or anxiety for fears of getting infected with the virus. The theme ended with several practical mechanisms to encounter the effects of the Corona pandemic on the psychological health of members of Saudi society.

The eighth theme focused on bureaucracy since it may stand in some government agencies as a barrier to the flexibility required to implement initiatives and decisions during crises, as is the case in the contemporary Corona pandemic. It is noticed that since launching the initiatives as of mid-March 2020, most of these initiatives have not been initiated as desired in terms of implementation and reaching the intended beneficiaries. Some of these initiatives and some examples of the bureaucratic obstacles that they faced were clarified, and the theme concluded by referring to the mechanisms that deal with bureaucratic problems in the Kingdom during the Corona pandemic.

Finally, the report presented the ninth theme, which tackled human rights and the attitudes of Saudi Arabia during the Corona

pandemic. In this context, the consequences of the pandemic on the concepts of human rights, as well as the Kingdom's efforts in human rights during the pandemic were addressed. It appeared clear in general that Saudi Arabia has intended in its dealings with the Corona pandemic to preserve human health. The Kingdom has put human health at the top of its priorities and provided what is necessary for citizens and expatriates to preserve their health and safety and provide them with decent livelihoods during the pandemic.

It is worth noting that at the beginning of each theme in the report, reference was made to the most important recommendations. Each theme was also included as a summary of the discussions and the most prominent ideas that represent key premises for understanding and analyzing the dimension covered by the theme.

Theme I :

Health During the (COVID-19) Pandemic

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speaker: Ms. Faiza bint Ahmed Al Ajroush

Contributors: (33) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Dr. Khalid bin Dahesh

Recommendations

Adopting a National Center for a crisis management emergency plan that addresses any future pandemics or epidemics, with engaging all relevant sectors with the Ministry of Health, and supporting them with the necessary human and material resources. This emanates from the fact that health is the most basic and essential component of human life and the anchor on which all activities, efforts, and achievements are built.

Raising the capacity of the Ministry of Health in future development plans in terms of the number of (hospitals, beds in intensive care units, doctors, health practitioners and medical devices, equipment, and necessary industries).

Focusing on supporting the preventive and therapeutic health sector and preparing a medical cadre in pandemics such as preventive medicine, diet medicine, biotechnology, and biology in coordination with higher education institutions and others.

Establishing more advanced research centers and developing the present ones to support the medical sector with focus on micro-medical and epidemiological majors, including vaccines and immunization, enabling and engaging them, and exchanging strategies with countries with successful experiences.

Raising the share of the health sector in the State budget

▶ Coronavirus as a health threat

Coronavirus kept on expanding and striking in many countries in the world, taking an epidemiological curve. No one imagined the consequences of this epidemic, starting from a rapidly spreading infection, increasing the numbers of victims, isolating entire cities, discontinuing the performance of religious rites, suspending airlines and land and railways, closing schools and universities, reducing major companies to their businesses and threatening millions of jobs, causing billions of financial losses.

However, focusing on the scientific facts about the Coronavirus, it has been found that 80% of those infected with the virus either had no symptoms or mild respiratory symptoms that did not require medical care, though the virus was present in their respiratory system and spreading the disease. They are asymptomatic patients because their immune system has fought the virus, and thus they have immunity. This usually occurs for healthy people who have no chronic diseases and are under the age of 60. For those who are in contact with a patient, they are held for the incubation period, which is between 5 - 14 days. Therefore, they are quarantined a maximum period of 14 days, until symptoms or their analysis appear positive. They are kept in quarantine until we have had at least two negative analyses with 48 hours in between. Then, they are discharged from the quarantine and are considered as recovered. As for the question: Should they be under surveillance? It is believed that this is not necessary if they do not need health care, and we have to make sure that they comply with the quarantine instructions until their analysis becomes negative.

Several reasons make the (COVID-19) pandemic a global epidemiological problem. Such reasons include lacking information on this virus compared to other viruses. This virus also develops every time it is transmitted from person to another, which makes it spread so fast among people. Also, the idea of manipulating some genes by genetic engineering in laboratories remains a credible idea, especially with the evolving pattern, action, and reaction that humans show when infected.

It is important to be aware that rumors and false information about the virus are ample. We should have the ability to deal with a lack of knowledge in these situations instead of fabricating false

information. Indeed, this virus is new, and many scientific papers have continued to emerge that explain some of its characteristics, but we still do not know much about it.

On the other hand, to produce the vaccine, we need the genetic code of the virus. Science has evolved in this respect, and all research centers now have this code, and it can be obtained from infected patients. It should be noted that we do not need the patients' blood to produce a vaccine. Patients' blood or plasma has antibiotics that their bodies have produced to fight the virus, and these are given as blood products to patients to help them overcome the critical stage.

▶ The Saudi health sector and countering the challenges of Corona

What has happened during the Corona pandemic is a test for every country in terms of the health sector's readiness, the level of governance in government agencies, the citizens' awareness, and social cohesion. If anyone of these elements is weakened for any reason, it is expected that the pandemic will continue and a humanitarian catastrophe will occur, like the scenario experienced by some European countries.

According to the World Health Organization, the global average for beds relative to citizens is 36 for every 10 thousand people, and for some developed countries, this average is much higher than 36. The number of beds required in a pandemic depends on the epidemiological curve; If it is high and the virus is spreading at a large scale, nothing will work, and Italy is a good example for this matter. The health sector has collapsed even though the average hospital beds is above average. As for the number of beds in the intensive care units - according to unconfirmed statistics - it ranged from 3 to 34 beds per 100,000 citizens. The lowest number was in China 3.5, the highest was in America 34, and Italy was in the middle 12.5. As for the quarantine of health workers, it was implemented by China, and workers used to live in hotels close to hospitals to ensure that they do not spread infection in the community, and facilitate their travel to workplaces. Concerning donating blood by the recovered, China now calls on people who have been infected with the disease to donate blood, especially plasma to take antibiotics from them and give to patients. However, these antibiotics have not yet become commercial and have not been exported, and they are expected to be available in the coming months.

The Kingdom's precautionary measures were pioneering, scientific, and highly professional. It is an experience that must be documented, evaluated, built upon, and presented within the (best practices) that are taught in this field, whether in disaster medicine or crisis management. The present situation has proven that health is a very important foundation even for the economy because everything was disrupted when health was in danger. Therefore, it is important to focus on supporting the health sector seriously from preventive and therapeutic aspects. The medical cadres in all areas need to be prepared, with a focus on the specializations that we need in such pandemics, preventive medicine, diet medicine, elderly medicine, and related disciplines in other medical sciences.

The present situation clearly shows that there is a real crisis, and it is important to benefit from it, especially concerning the following:

- First: Giving priority to health. When the health around the world was struck, education and economy were disturbed, the other systems were disrupted, and life was shaken.

- Second: Health care starts from the edifices of public and university education. The indicators tell that health care in public schools is weak, starting from toilets, health facilities, the number of students per class, health awareness, and curricular and extracurricular activities.

- Third: Focusing on disaster and crisis management strategies.

- Fourth: Considering the role of civil society institutions and their role during crises.

It is necessary to prepare well for the future after the (COVID-19) pandemic by attracting major international companies and research laboratories in the field of biosecurity. It is also necessary to forge strategic partnerships with them to develop national knowledge capabilities, and attract experts and scientists in the biological and chemical weapons from countries of the world to localize knowledge in these two areas. In the long-run, government spending on basic sciences should be immediately increased because it is not possible to anticipate when those specialties are needed. This is evidenced by the problems that the Kingdom has faced over almost two decades, starting with the Rift Valley Fever up to (COVID-19). The private sector will not support primary or non-economic research (on the surface). Generally, this does not mean that the other health sectors are not supported, rather the level of integrating them must be raised.

Theme II :

The Economic Impact of the (COVID-19) Pandemic

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

    Keynote speaker: Mr. Nabil Al-Mubarak

    Contributors: (32) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Mr. Abdulrahman Basalam

Recommendations

1 Establishing more endowment investment funds to counter emergencies.

2 The importance of the speed factor in following up the major support decisions approved by the State due to the importance of time factor in saving small and medium-sized enterprises from reaching the stage of bankruptcy.

3 Stimulating the Community Fund initiatives to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the (COVID-19) pandemic on needy individuals and families.

4 Raising the efficiency of multi-purpose industrial production through the application of total automation, in addition to keeping pace with the human resource for that, relying on local supply chains and developing the existing ones for partial and gradual dispensing with the imports.

5 Developing the performance of the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority and the Local Content Authority and Government Procurement and their scientific and practical outputs, and leaving the role of the spectator to the role of the initiator in developing the desired local content and refining human talents by qualifying them with appropriate, competitive and productive qualification.

The global economic impact of the Corona pandemic

The global economy before the Corona pandemic was not at its best. It has been suffering since the global financial crisis in 2008. This is especially true concerning the production and manufacturing operations, product prices, and the global economic structure that has taken shape since World War II led by America. This economy is suffering from a structural defect, as today's data are unable to live with the old structure.

With the outbreak of the pandemic, and the decision of the World Health Organization to label this virus as a pandemic due to the rapid spread, there were the first signs of economic concern, although the beginning was in China and the problem was health. There was a sort of Western celebration of what was happening in China, especially with the start of the Cold War through the tariff war that was taking place between China and America. The issue soon led to a semi-closure to the economy all over the world up today, and it is not known until when this closure will continue.

There is no doubt that the impact of the Corona pandemic has created unprecedented panic, and this panic has contributed to the global macroeconomic weakness. The import and export activities came to a total halt, and the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) has decreased. Such effects undoubtedly weakened most if not all of the world economies altogether. For these reasons, the global economies must be affected and the business wheel is now moving slowly and some businesses stopped altogether.

The global economy was suffering from a clear structural imbalance for many reasons. Some affected areas included the United States and Europe. The economies of some countries have been tailored to meet the Western-style in the general sense since World War II. A lot has changed since then, as China did not exist as an industrial power and became the second in the world, and will soon be the first. Consequently, management of the global crisis (2008) was tailored to meet an old body, but the current body has completely different sizes. The Western world lives in a state of denial to these facts, in addition to unprecedented technical developments. This made all the apparatuses, governments, and financial sectors unable to respond to this develop-

ment. The regional China-led blocs are now beginning to take more momentum than expected.

Despite stopping the economic activities because of the Corona pandemic, the perception has been that the global economy required restructuring in terms of institutions and tools, down to the financial and monetary policies. In particular, the concept of criticism in the economy has changed. We will also see the beginning of a US-China understanding to run the world or a US-China struggle to take over the world, and there is, unfortunately, no third option. Also, international institutions will be restructured in line with the balance of new powers.

The first winner from the crisis is technology, in all areas, particularly companies that had ambitions to control the world through technology. What they have of data and information about individuals around the world is not possessed by governments about their citizens. There will be many winners, both politically and economically.

Also, there will be a return, albeit to a lesser extent, to the economic borders at the country level. This will be true if the sensible countries can have full production cycles. The Corona pandemic has been and remains shocking to many countries.

In other words, despite the predictions made of the impact of the epidemic on the global economy, it will not be final. Rather, they depend on the length of time needed to recover, and hence the success of the policies and actions taken.

▶ The economic impact of the Corona pandemic on the Saudi domestic economy

Concerning the domestic economy and the effects of the Corona pandemic, we are not isolated from what is happening in the world. Whatever programs and assistance have been provided, they will only be relieving elements to mitigate the impact, not eliminate it. The global economy has, in many estimates, begun to stagnate. Some experts are likening the situation to a general paralysis that may continue beyond the first quarter of next year. However, this is undoubtedly a special opportunity for small and medium-sized enterprises to learn a lesson in crisis management, and to find solutions to recover and adapt to the present and future circumstances.

The Corona pandemic was not the first test that the Saudi economy goes through after starting work with Vision 2030. The Saudi

economy has had many tests before and passed them all with distinction. However, the Corona test remains the strongest and most sinister ever. Only the strongest and most established economies can pass. Optimistically, the fact is that the Saudi economy is expected to grow this year largely at a percentage of 6%. This may be attributed to large increases in the production of crude oil, where this sector is expected to grow by 13%. The increase in gas production and the start-up of the Jazan refinery will boost the gross domestic product of the oil sector in 2020. The continued implementation of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, through the strict application of the detailed obligations included in the various vision programs, will be the main driver of the non-oil economy. The range of potential effects of the Coronavirus on the Kingdom's economy is largely uncertain. Saudi Arabia has taken many precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus, but in the end, this is only one side, and the other side is the spread of the virus in various parts of the world for an indefinite period. This may lead to a widespread and permanent turmoil in global trade and industrial output in 2020, which will inevitably be another obstacle to domestic economy.

To know the economic impact of this crisis on the Saudi economy, it is necessary to understand the difference between monitoring the impact and stimulating the economy in terms of supply and demand. Amongst the most important criteria that we must rely on are monitoring the growth rate of infections that have been taking place recently, and the recovery rate during the same period. The monitoring phase is marked by an increasing growth rate of infections and a decreasing recovery rate, which requires taking more precautionary measures. When necessary, the focus will be on monitoring the impact on the most influential activities. The priority will be given to activities that enhance supply, such as the national industries that provide essential goods and services if the global supply chain is affected. It may be early to complete detecting all and deepest effects on the Saudi economy. Therefore, it is necessary to work hard to stimulate supply and demand in a balanced way and to stimulate the supply side at this stage, which will, directly or indirectly, help to control the prices, and then stimulate demand. This will be realized by reducing the exports of vital and strategic commodities that have a security side, such as food, medicines, and others, as well as reducing the operating costs. It is important at this stage to consid-

er the possibility of localizing many of the food and pharmaceutical industries, supplies, and medical equipment. The logical solutions will not be clear until the vision becomes clear relative to what stage we are in. Calculations of the economic impact, profit and loss are very sensitive and difficult when it comes to human lives. At this stage, we must balance the public interest and their health compared with the economic interest. It can be recommended to hire more economic and political intellectuals and researchers in crisis and disaster management to make scientific studies according to the data and information resulting from this crisis. The lesson learned by anyone working in the sectors affected economically by this crisis is to plan immediately to digitize everything in their company to be able to recover quickly.

There is no doubt that there are economic sectors in the Kingdom that have been negatively affected by the Coronavirus. These sectors include the consumer-related manufactures, sports, tourism, and entertainment (which considered a luxury), and air transport. As for the positive impact, it is believed that it will be in favor of the Saudi job nationalization, a decrease in cover-up employment, and further development in the uses of technology. It is hoped that one of the positive aspects of this crisis will be the establishment of a ministry for scientific research to make university education independent from research and development. The prospective ministry is expected to oversee research in various areas including the development of the medical sector, equipment, and medicines. Perhaps one of the economic impacts of this crisis is the high level of dependence on our local capabilities, especially our private sector. This sector has proven over the decades to have high dependency compared to the foreign private sector, which has proven to be weak.

While analyzing the impact of the Corona pandemic on the local economy, it has been noticed that the local content of any country, if not one of its strategic pillars, the country will not be considered welfare and productive. Establishing an authority concerned with the local content and tagged (The Local Content and Government Procurement Authority) is considered a gesture with economic and political dimensions. For the local content to be sustainable and grow, it must have motivating components and activities that are aligned with the natural and unnatural capabilities that the country has. The local content is the strategic repository that helps any country dispense with other countries in sev-

eral areas. In this and other crises, the need to benefit from the local content comes through what was previously built and gained.

It is worth noting that the Corona pandemic hastened to restructure the Saudi economy towards the digital economy to which the Kingdom was approaching in the Vision 2030. This was reflected in the plans and efforts of the government towards digital transformation. The Kingdom was almost on the list of the best 15 global models in digital transformation and innovation, and the development of business climate, local content, enhancement of the economic competitiveness, and improvement of the Kingdom's ranking on global indicators. The Business Report 2020, which was recently issued by the World Bank, marked a leap of (30) in the Kingdom's ranking in terms of ease of doing business, and reaching (62) among the 190 countries. This is compared to (92) on the list of the top ten countries. This was further supported by the improvement of the Kingdom's ranking by three places to rank 36 in the Global Competitiveness Report issued by the World Economic Forum. The Kingdom's efforts were also evident in the structural transformation of its economy, through the adoption of information and communication technology, to become 38th in the world. This result is supported by the rapid deployment of broadband technology and a large increase in Internet users. The innovation ability index also improved to become in the 36th position, through an increase in patent applications and the level of spending on research and development. Regarding the Global Competitiveness Report issued by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD), the Kingdom achieved the most progress among the most competitive countries with 13 centers, ranking 26th among the most competitive countries.

It is worth noting that the developments occurred five years ago at the level of the domestic economy helped reduce the negative effects of the Corona pandemic in the short-term. However, the belief still there that the positive effects in the medium-term are much greater than achieving strategic goals for the Kingdom through what is happening to the energy sector worldwide. In this respect, the Kingdom has proven to be a world influential leader and knows how to move. Perhaps what happened helps reconsider some trends. We will act to have an increased degree of self-sufficiency and full productive cycles, especially concerning food, technical, and health security.

The economic impact of the Corona pandemic on large companies

There are companies, particularly those that have invested in future technologies including the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain, and they will be the biggest beneficiaries.

On the other hand, many other large companies were not immune from what happened to any other small, medium, or above-medium-sized enterprises as a result of the Corona pandemic. Without a doubt, large enterprises may sustain less dangers. However, in the event of any lengthy crisis, there is no doubt that such enterprises will be affected as any others. This is especially true if they have incurred debts as a result of financial loans or have not received financial rights for the debts with the clients for one reason or another.

Large companies have already started to move in all directions to reduce costs, most notably employment costs. This will result in many layoffs, reduced salaries, and employees taking leaves. The pain will be severe, and the impact will be deeper the longer the Corona pandemic crisis continues.

Among the proposals that can be considered in the Kingdom is that Aramco, as a leading national company, does the following:

1. Establish an international exploration company and purchase small and medium-sized oil companies. Aramco can develop them and add reserves, and when the prices get better, it either sells, breaks off, or keeps some in important places.

2. Acquire and localize small companies with modern technology in services. Perhaps the Public Investment Fund can play the role of the investment arm.

3. Acquire companies of the military industries, water technologies, renewable energy, agriculture, construction, artificial intelligence, etc.

The economic impact of the Corona pandemic on small and medium-sized enterprises

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are the main driver for the advancement of local economies. They are the main marketer of any product, particularly local products and services. Therefore, caring for and supporting them is always one of the most important basic factors to support the national economy as a whole.

To avoid the negative economic impacts on the small and medium-sized enterprises in the Kingdom, there was an expected demand for supporting them. The State was faster in thinking and developing solutions through several superior initiatives. It deferred for three months the fee payment of some government and municipal services that have become due by the private sector establishments. It also deferred the collection of customs duties on imports for 30 days in exchange for providing a bank bond for the next three months. It postponed the delivery of value-added tax, selective goods tax, and income tax. It further deferred submittal of Zakat statements, and the payment of the sums incurred. It also granted Zakat statements without restrictions for the fiscal year 2019. It accepted installment requests without the requirement of a down-payment by the General Authority for Zakat and Income. It authorized the Minister of Finance to agree to lend and exempt the payment of fees and returns of the loans granted until the end of this year under the initiative of the Corporate Sustainability Program. It enabled employers to extend the unused exit and re-entry visas during the entry and exit lockdown for 3 months without charge. It also enabled them to recover fees of the issued work visas that were not used during the entry and exit or extend them for a period of 3 months without charge. It waived payments by the expatriates whose residency permits expired as of the announced date until the end of June 2020. It extended their residency permits for 3 months without charge. There are other initiatives and programs which the State launched that supported our economy.

The expectation is that the greater the government's support and incentives for individuals and private sector enterprises are, and the faster the pace of implementation, there will be more proactive treatment for many of the catastrophic economic impacts. The problem is not with the effects that we see or anticipate. The problem is in the unpredictable and foreseeing because we are not aware of the duration and depth of the current crisis. We also have no idea about the recovery period which the crisis may take, at the government or private sector levels.

Theme III :

Distance Education During the (COVID-19) Pandemic

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

> **Keynote speaker**s: Dr. Muhammad Al-Mulhim, Dr. Hamad Al-Braithen, Dr. Saeed Al-Amoudi
>
> **Contributors**: (23) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Dr. Hind Al-Khalifa

Recommendations

Developing an integrated strategy for distance learning. The plan is to incorporate this model of learning into the different stages of public and private education. The application will be in coordination among the Ministry of Education, the Education Evaluation Authority, and the Communications and Information Technology Authority to set policies and procedures, plan technical needs and ensure information security.

Recruiting and creating distance learning programs to establish students' skills in parallel with full-time learning.

Creating an integrated system for distance learning management as an inevitable and powerful strategic option. This will be taking place through planning and designing digital content, implementing mechanisms, governance, and adaptation of assessment tools and others.

Establishing integrated infrastructures that guarantee the successful implementation of the distance learning policy.

Providing the appropriate learning environment required for all students in their homes and setting programs and initiatives to support them in providing the necessary technical needs.

Evaluating the experience of distance learning in the Kingdom during the Corona pandemic

First: Advantages of distance learning:

The value of distance learning has emerged strongly during the Corona pandemic which we still live day by day. Saudi Arabia has been one of the leading countries in providing technology for learning education. The country is endowed by excellent economic income and can provide the devices and infrastructure required for e-learning through a strong communications network. E-learning has benefits during this pandemic at several economic, social, and logistical levels, which can be illustrated as follows:

- **The economic level:** We have always suffered from lacking the right school buildings. Rented schools are hindering the educational process due to lacking facilities for having a modest structure. Therefore, building modern schools is expensive, and having distance education will solve this problem. The educational process can be managed through small buildings that house offices equipped with modern technology. This approach will create a financial surplus that will be channeled to other more pressing sectors such as health, housing, social welfare, manufacturing, and scientific research.

- **The logistical level:** Distance education will reduce population mobility, rural-to-urban migration, and traffic congestions that result from regular mobility and traffic. We will not see many cars on our roads to transport students, which will lead to having a better environment, pure air, and low pollution levels. Distance education will limit the spread of diseases and epidemics among students, especially in the winter.

- **The social level:** Distance education will help a lot in reducing problems such as bullying. During regular education, we used to have large numbers of students in one place that are difficult to control by teachers who do not have sufficient authority to discipline the wrongdoers. Distance education will help integrating some groups with special needs with their fellow students at no high cost.

In a related context, the critical reading of the benefits of distance education (i.e., the advantages and disadvantages of this approach to learning) reveals the following:

1. Raising the cultural, scientific, and social awareness levels among individuals.
2. Reducing the vulnerabilities of some public and higher education institutions.
3. Reducing the individual differences among the students, when placing the various educational resources in the hands of each learner. It provides full support to the educational institutions with the various resources they need to produce effective education.
4. Opening horizons for career development for employees who missed regular education as this enables them to study and work simultaneously.
5. Saving time and effort, and motivating the learners to acquire the most skills and have academic achievement. This will be the case because the focus of the educational process will be only on the academic content without being distracted.
6. Helping the individual to be self-dependent by selecting the references where to obtain the necessary information by themselves without the influence of others. This is the main objective of shifting from the policy of teaching to the policy of learning.
7. Distance education is appropriate for all family members. This holds for lecturers and students alike. It provides the learners with the learning flexibility so that they can decide on what to study while at home.

Second: Disadvantages of distance education:

1. The high cost of enrolling in this type of education.
2. Some societies do not accept this type of education, believing that this approach does not help in providing job opportunities, as compared to formal education that requires classroom attendance.
3. The students feel like they are being taught by their parents at home so that the value of education is not up to the expectations.
4. Lacking the availability of modern technology in parts of the country, which deprives some students of real-time contact with their professors, not to mention the economic conditions of some families that do not have access to modern computer systems.

It is worth noting that regular education is not only concerned with delivering the piece of information, but is also covers the moral, behavioral, and social sides. It is also concerned with evaluating achievement and personality traits. This evaluation is built on many decisions such as admission to higher school levels, obtaining a job, a promotion, or a license to practice the job. Therefore, at the beginnings, distance education was mainly concerned with delivering information. The scientific evaluation methods of distance education developed and have become part and parcel of the educational process during the bachelor stage for many universities in marking the students' assignments.

Also, it is important to bear in mind that some disciplines depend on experiments and cannot be done remotely. At the moment, three-dimensional virtual classrooms are being developed that enable the student to experiment with virtual reality. However, although such experiments will have good quality, yet they are different from the actual practice. There is a prospect for the use of 3D printers, where the student can print the experiment which they obtain electronically, but the supervision portion remains in the hands of the teacher.

What has been mentioned about the possibility of distance education as a solution to many economic problems (high cost of school buildings, teachers' salaries taking the lion's share of the budgets of educational institutions, the logistical and social problems) can be true to address the current Corona crisis or other crises. Distance education cannot be a total substitute for classical education at schools, so we will still need school buildings and teachers. Students do not only need to learn, but they also need to feel the human presence, interaction, joint human activities and feel that they are human beings, not electronic devices.

We need a real, actual evaluation of the quality of distance education. We do not have to be overtaken by passion or search for economic budgets to have distance education. It would be possible to have courses with very few limits in distance education. However, with this expanded, then the fear is that we will get very fragile outputs that are not learned. Today, the teachers are suffering from many problems that came about from distance education. They can be asked about such problems and the person in charge will realize that those who took a positive stance with distance education are a few serious groups who were in an environment that has been motivating for learning. Therefore, today's

compulsory distance education experience must not be a model according to strategic decisions that will be made.

Despite the wonderful and advanced facilities provided by distance education and the keenness of those involved to overcome and address all difficulties, some academic staff faced endless abstinence, fleeing, and justifications by students, despite the concern to contain, support, and encourage them. Rather, some have used their abilities and intelligence to escape and take the excuse. They created methods for cheating during tests. So, the future effort should inculcate the values and love of education and the rejection of fraud and similar ethics. This is a risk indicator. When the test requires research, or it is made up of open-ended questions and multiple-source take-home exam, we find some students seek the help of some commercial agencies to do the tests. The issue requires the enactment of laws and regulations to bring such agencies to justice. These are the problems of distance education that need to be addressed. As for the distance education approach itself, it is amazing and distinctive because of its facilities and services for the performance of both the teacher or the student. The material is also presented elegantly.

Many questions can be asked in the context of the Kingdom's experience of distance education under the Corona pandemic, including:

- How can distance learning outcomes be measured now after the decisions to cancel exams and upgrade the students?

- What is the nature of the experience of Saudi schools in the major cities relating to distance education compared to rural and remote areas?

- What is the nature of the experience of Saudi schools in distance education compared to foreign and international schools in major cities in Saudi Arabia?

- What is the experience of world schools in distance education and how can they be compared to the Saudi experience?

- What are the lessons learned to be used later in strengthening and using the distance education platforms to support direct education?

▶ A future look at distance education during the post-Corona pandemic

In response to the State's decisions to suspend educational and academic work in all educational institutions to reduce the spread of Corona, distance education emerged as an option. In light of this option, which we are not prepared for well, whether, at the level of students, teachers, or educational institutions, we need to develop the digital infrastructure and Internet servers that support the educational process. Despite the success stories achieved in countering the Corona pandemic, it turned out that there are some aspects of the technical deficiencies that we must reconsider. Distance education and remote work do not come as a result of the acquisition of tablets with modest programs developed by specialized agencies without knowing that establishing integrated and effective programs in virtual ways is the basis of doing business. The tasks are the basis of works and task performance as they are in reality.

It may be appropriate for the educational model to be a common structure of two concepts (distance and traditional). This holds not only for disciplines that impose themselves in experiments through laboratories and field applications, but also in theoretical disciplines that can be overcome by distance education. Some skills and abilities are built through the traditional educational process (perhaps most of them are not systematic). They are an interaction between the teacher and students and among the students themselves. They help overcome social phobias and friendships and they build the students' leadership capabilities. The students also feel the challenges that are facing the new generation, including broken families, drugs, delinquencies, terrorism, adoption of astray thinking. Although it is easier to obtain, process and retrieve the information because of having the technology and the Internet, the students grasp them better in classrooms. The process is accompanied by eye contact, competitions, applause, and encouragement.

However, we have to grasp the opportunities when they arise. Distance education is necessary and inevitable, and it is important to increase the reliability and organization of distance education together with traditional education to include all practical and literary specialties, levels of basic, university and post-university education. Work has to focus on overcoming the diffi-

culties it faces (technical, legal, organizational, credibility, and social) and establish organizations for facilitation. Likewise, the private sector must participate through attractive offers to obtain the necessary technology, and work to improve communications and information technology, and educational software at special prices .... etc.) This would not be more effective without studying what the educational process experienced including the current experience, merging it with previous experiences, and studying it through workshops consisting of our various universities (electronic, KAUST, and the rest of major universities). We have to take into account the geographical, economic, and demographic components of society.

It remains necessary in this framework to work on the following:

- Developing an e-learning strategy in each educational institution based on the philosophy of the curricula, provided that the functions are defined accurately and prepared according to the capabilities available to each institution.

- Emphasizing the importance of integrating all e-learning systems as an inevitable and a powerful strategic option. These include an integrated system for distance learning management, virtual classroom systems, digital repository system, digital content management systems with current and existing systems such as admission and registration, faculty system, e-mail system, text messages management system, and others.

- Benefiting from global experiences to reach an integrated system of distance education.

- Recognizing the certificates of holders of distance education, and acknowledging the right to obtain suitable job opportunities in the labor market.

- Having appropriate curricula and electronic training programs to present in distance education technologies, and design them according to the standards of the internationally approved electronic courses under the supervision of a group of specialized scientific competencies.

- Urging the relevant authorities in universities to hold more training courses for university professors to develop their skills in designing e-courses.

- Continuing evaluation of electronic curricula and training programs aimed at improving and obtaining results that achieve the goal of educational outputs.
- Considering distance education among the research scholarships.
- Providing the appropriate educational environment for students at homes through having an appropriate place and appearance.
- Having a robust design and high-level management of distance learning programs to get the desired results.
- Implementing awareness programs for all groups (students, parents, teachers, and administrators) for the success of distance education.
- Ensuring electronic devices and their readiness, and the necessity for providing technical support to students through specialists who can communicate with them through modern media.

Theme IV :

Remote Work During the (COVID-19) Pandemic

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speakers: Dr. Zuhair Radwan, Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Harqan, Dr. Sultan Al-Moraqi

Contributions: (21) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Dr. Riyad Nejm

Recommendations

1 Establishing a national committee comprising the relevant authorities including the government, the private and civil sectors. The committee is to develop a national program and governance for remote work in the three sectors. Among its most important goals is raising the Saudization rate in the workforce.

2 Establishing a permanent guide for remote work by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, including all the details related to working hours, employee evaluation, and mandatory ratios of application in each field.

3 Developing local applications for remote work, including the videos, and taking into account the security aspects. For instance, companies and information technology specialists in the Kingdom can be invited to compete for developing such applications.

4 Inviting private and non-profit organizations to set the necessary controls and standards and evaluate employee performance remotely to be part of their internal system and governance.

5 Developing a guide containing a communication protocol and security precautions. It has to be updated periodically to indicate the use of specific safe applications and the discovery of any technological gaps when working remotely by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in cooperation with the National Authority for Cyber Security.

The status and challenges of transforming the Kingdom to remote work during the Corona pandemic

It has been noticed that the Corona pandemic, which started in late 2019, accelerated remote work to a large scale. This crisis has been a real test for the countries' readiness in technologies. The Kingdom has succeeded in this side and proved to the world that it is one of the leading countries in information technology and it has the essentials and tools required for remote work.

It is necessary to refer to the outstanding role of the Kingdom. It had the initiative under the leadership of King Salman to hold the first virtual (remote) meeting that included the heads of States of the G20 to handle their work during this pandemic. The Saudi government also continues to work remotely whether in holding meetings by the Council of Ministers or the Shura Council or other military, security, and civil sectors.

As the Coronavirus continues to spread throughout the Middle East and the world, companies are wondering: How will this affect their performance? How will they be able to maintain their businesses, and what changes should they apply to their employees and customers?

Some countries have declared complete closures, while others have imposed strict measures on travel, movement, and gatherings, aimed at curbing the spread of the Coronavirus. These measures prompted small and large companies to take into consideration working remotely and using technology to perform their daily tasks, in addition to searching for any possible alternatives to follow work as usual. This sudden shift generated a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty in some public and private sectors, but it was necessary to face the current circumstances.

This transformation was less complicated for many technology companies, such as digital media, software providers, and companies that work in social network sites, etc. However, more complexity emerged for companies that depend on physical presence, such as restaurants, retail stores, government sectors, and others.

Despite this, it has become necessary for companies and organizations in all sectors to start using tools and technologies via the Internet to overcome the economic and financial challenges arising from the Corona pandemic. As cities and countries opted for

the total lockdown to limit the spread of the virus, companies, organizations, and governments must also use tools that limit physical contact to ensure business continuity.

Experts say that the Coronavirus forced countries and institutions to shift to remote work and open new horizons for work. They also established a new economic business base that allows saving money in exchange for higher gains.

This is said by a report published earlier by the Harvard Business Review. It indicated that the world after Corona will not be the same as before Corona, and the report did not exclude the occurrence of problems as a result of the rapid change from work onsite to remote work. However, it says these are natural challenges that will take place sooner or later and some people will lose their jobs. However, this will later have many advantages, as this new business model will save expenditures and generate new businesses and jobs. Remote work is comfortable for some freelancers who are used to working from home from time to time, but it is not so for all people.

In a related context, with the international repercussions of the Corona crisis, which necessitated social distancing, the motives for using financial technologies "Fintech" have emerged. This has been the response of many companies operating in these technologies. According to the estimates of many experts, investments in this sector tended to grow, unlike many other sectors that are negatively affected by the pandemic. This has been accompanied by increasing applications of financial payments using mobile phones. This has been more accelerated and adopted because the World Health Organization warned about the possibility of transmitting the virus by using the banknotes.

However, some challenges are facing the world and the Kingdom that have coincided with the shift to perform many businesses remotely:

1. Lacking equipment and infrastructure appropriate to perform the work remotely, including some media and technical equipment of remote work. The equipment are also lacking for holding virtual periodical meetings or following up the performance of all employees and workers electronically.

2. Some agencies, including the sensitive government sectors, have resorted to using off-the-shelf applications or programs available in the global market, such as Skype for Business,

VPNs, MS Teams, ZOOM, or any other means, with reservations on the use of these programs for all actions due to lacking complete confidentiality in what is being circulated through these applications.

3. Some employees did not comply with using the devices assigned to them by the employer. Such devices are compliant with the cybersecurity rules.

4. There is a shortage of qualified human cadres that can comply with the concept of remote work. It is noticed that there is a disparity in the level of knowledge and ability of some employees and workers in this aspect.

5. There is no clear mechanism for implementing this type of business model by employees or completing the performance of tasks and responsibilities, and following up on their work.

6. There is an imbalance between professional and social life, as some social problems emerged due to a lack of commitment to certain work hours. Some agencies started their work late and sometimes even on weekends. By applying home quarantine, some people were not able to distinguish between weekdays and holidays.

7. There is no manual for remote work during the emergency conditions of the Corona pandemic.

8. Lacking appropriate regulations, legislation, and governance to the concept of remote work.

▶ The effects of remote work during the Corona pandemic on society

The remote work necessitated by the Corona pandemic can be seen from an economic viewpoint with a focus on energy consumption (whether in transportation means or in places and offices that consume a significant amount of energy, electricity, fuel, furniture, and human effort...etc.). Some works are difficult to perform remotely and there must be field-work to be able to account for these works to know which can be performed remotely or employing modern technology.

Another issue related to remote work is that this type of work is not divided based on workers' sex. The skills required for remote work are appropriate for both sexes, and women may even find an opportunity to do their traditional job as a housewife and at the same time as a productive employee at home.

Also, it is possible to address remote work in terms of performance speed and saving time because the work will be done electronically away from the human factor that may be a barrier. The remote work creates equality in treatment, and then reduces corruption, favoritism, and bureaucracy.

Among the most expected prominent effects of remote work on the State and society during the Corona pandemic are the following:

1. There will be a change in tolerating cost and the cash flow of business returns. The percentage of money that will be issued to foreign companies abroad in the form of hard currency will increase. The Internet and companies such as Google, Microsoft, satellite, and telecommunication companies that own technologies and services and others may start charging fees against some services provided to the user. They will also charge fees for chatting and imaging applications, which are all owned by foreign companies.

2. The society, businesses and the State will become more vulnerable to hacking and there will be no confidential information. Technology companies, most of them are American, will have access to information. In this context, it is worth noting that there is always a risk of hacking by internal and external hackers, but the competent authorities in private organizations and the State will encounter them. These are usually able to achieve a reasonable level of information security. The real problem with the foreign companies that own the technologies is that no one can guarantee that they will not use confidential information or sell them to other parties? This applies to all software sold by these companies, not only to audio communication programs while working remotely.

3. There will be citizens who are unable to use the applications, some of them will not be technically able to use them, while others will not be financially able to use them. The third type of people will neither be technically nor financially able to use them.

4. Entrepreneurs will discover that there is slack in many businesses and that many jobs are not needed. Perhaps the most important gain for remote work during the Corona pandemic is showing that many functions do not need physical presence and can be performed remotely with the same quality or even better. This will further reduce the evaluations based on checking-in and

checking-out, in favor of performance-based evaluation, where time and space limits no longer have an impact. This would increase fairness in the evaluation and reduce the role of unnecessary elements in evaluation.

5. Remote work may make the person lose the motivating factors to perform work due to lacking appropriate laws or policies to facilitate communication with work. Also, remote workers may have to work extra hours to carry out the required work without obtaining compensation for this increase in hours, so there is no specific measure.

In the same context, remote work during the Corona pandemic involved an important anomaly, and it can be described as working closely, but this time "inside the homes". The Corona pandemic created various changes in our working and personal lifestyles. Small works were almost performed only with great effort and fuss, but during the pandemic they were completed through "digital applications" quietly.

On the other hand, some people believe that the Corona pandemic has greatly enhanced the value of many remote works. Today, we can hold meetings at our convenience, and we can offer many training courses, including those of a professional nature. We can also manage a number of our works remotely according to a mechanism consistent with the nature of this work … etc. Some were concerned about the validity of remote work, especially those who did not realize its nature. Some people raised a lot of problems towards it and they doubted its productivity. However, the experience of many government institutions and companies before Corona in many jobs in which women were employed to work from homes gave large positive indications. It is critical not to exaggerate so that we do not overweigh the field of remote work and we should not adhere to traditional practices that assume that working from the company offices is the best. This moderate stance will first allow the possibility to continue to evaluate the experiences, and secondly, it will allow knowing the nature of the differences in productivity and their efficiency, which will empower us to develop these experiences in the future.

▶ The future of remote work during the post-Corona pandemic

Some crises and situations compel the decision-makers to make a decision that may be corrective or create a change in the system of work or society. Then the situation will soon return to normal in some cases after the impact has ceased. Here, the ques-

tion raised is: Does this apply to the Corona pandemic, or is it different, since the decision here is not individual and does not concern one particular society inasmuch as it is an international decision? There is no doubt that the Corona pandemic has put us in front of an inevitable option. Thinking about remote work has become an unavoidable reality, and plans for this type of work and programs have become effective overnight. The questions remain: Will we, as a society or as public and private sectors, view remote work, as an emergency that ends with the end of the crisis and then we return as we were?! Does the economic return (saving expenses) enhance the view of remote work and expand it?! How does this affect unemployment and will it contribute to increasing it? Are there corresponding solutions?! On the other hand, will remote work open new horizons for reducing unemployment?!

Despite the foregoing, the shock brought about by the crisis made the individual discover their underlying capabilities and skills. Despite the lack of planning and establishment of remote work in most sectors and the lack of clarity in how it works, the reality experienced by those who have had this experience during the current crisis will find that it involves positives, including saving the time and cost of commuting. It will also reduce the numbers of unproductive workers, and increase the productivity of the actual production workers. It allows all segments of society who are eligible to work, especially those with special needs or women who have special circumstances that prevent them from leaving home. It also allows flexibility in time and stimulates the principle of self-censorship for every employee. What we need is the inclusion of remote work in all aspects of rights and duties, and establishing separate administrative departments for remote work.

It is worth noting that we did not expect that a crisis or the Corona pandemic would reach such a level of blockage or complete paralysis in all businesses and sectors. Therefore, legislation and regulations were not ready, including governance that ensures the procedures for remote work, whether from the legislator (relevant ministries, such as communications and information technology or the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development) or even employers. Also, local platforms were not present, which made most officials find ways to complete their work and duties, whatever the cost and they had no choice but to use for-

eign platforms. They did not look at other aspects, including the level of protection on such a platform. We have in the Kingdom, excellent infrastructure in communication and information technology, but what is lacking in remote work is the presence of local means, among which is an important local platform with all its technical tools that we can trust and deal with freely. What is required is the development of a national platform that will be pioneering in remote work, supported by the State and led by the private sector.

It is expected that the Communications and Information Technology Commission and the National Cybersecurity Authority will have a major role to play in leading private and government agencies. In practice, it should be noted that remote work is one of the foundations of administrative principles. Every work in the main work cycle must be accompanied by a complementary remote work. This does not mean resorting to it during crises only. Rather, it is supposed to be fundamental for any sector, including services, industrial or commercial. So remote work is the cornerstone of any work system. For the desired outcomes of this approach to appear, there has to be an integration between the main work cycle and pursuing the correct track for remote work. Hence, we will reach the phase of the complete realization of this policy to obtain positive results for the workforce in general. Further, reaching the next phases, subjective steps have to be taken. Such steps include foundations that are necessary for creating a comprehensive environment for bolstering the results of remote work. Therefore, the main elements below are required:

- The remote works to be performed have to be applicable.
- Available legislation supporting the remote work policy.
- Available technical tools to support remote work policy.
- Enforce high-tech control for the safety of remote work performance.
- The remote work policy will be a fundamental element, not a secondary one, that complements the basic work system.

It must be recognized that, after the Corona pandemic has influenced all aspects of life and activities, the world will certainly witness a fundamental transformation in the pattern of social and economic life. This will mark the advent of new methods of business, and the near future in the Kingdom will witness a digital and electronic movement without the need for physical presence

and communication. Our remote work experience has proven to be feasible and efficient during the crisis. It has also proven that productivity in working from home for many entities and companies was equal or even higher than productivity in the official working hours in many locations and with fewer employees. The Corona pandemic will radically change business concepts - the legacy of luxury offices will end exactly like the customer service centers. The transformation will be very huge and will make us resort to continuing systems development, launching creative initiatives that increase productivity. The understanding now is that remote work has become a realistic option and it will be a priority for the country shortly. For ensuring the continued success of this experiment, it must not be limited to urban areas where the Internet is available at high speeds. This has to go along focusing on the importance of educating the technologically illiterate people to enable them to use remote communication systems.

Further, one of the most important elements for the success and continuity of achievement in remote work is having a strong management infrastructure (performance indicators) and ensuring that remote communication skills and systems are regularly updated.

Above all, a smart and digital infrastructure must be provided, and a mechanism must be created to ensure a balance between work from home and workplaces, in terms of setting annual goals for each employee who grew up in an electronic, not a paper-based system. This is to achieve the desired outputs from the business continuity theory with high professionalism. This will inevitably create an integrated system for remote work that makes crisis and emergency conditions something common that can be handled with high flexibility and professionalism.

It can be pointed out that remote work can be a successful experience for some groups and specific periods. Therefore, this experience deserves a trial and opens new horizons for reducing unemployment. Examples on such horizons include the following:

1. Remote work is suitable for utilizing the talents of people with special needs in certain jobs in which this work model can be easily applied.

2. Remote work is a great opportunity for pregnant and breastfeeding women. This helps ensure that the child has grown properly

and soundly, especially during their first year of life, and at the same time the mother will not lose their jobs.

3. Remote work can be applied at schools and universities in theory and perhaps in practice, and we can resort to during periods of rain or natural disasters, rather than suspending study as used to happen in the Kingdom.

4. Remote work is appropriate for people with chronic diseases. This will allow them to perform their work for a few hours, instead of taking long vacations that deprive the organization of taking advantage of their capabilities and weakens their morale and ability to work again.

5. It will be appropriate to apply remote work optionally by giving the employees the right to choose a certain number of days during the year, provided that this will not affect their vacation days.

6. It will be appropriate to apply remote work optionally during the month of Ramadan for any employee who wishes to do so. This emanates from the fact that Ramadan is a spiritual month for the Muslims and staying at home helps to devote oneself to worshipping.

7. It is appropriate for remote work to be permanently approved for employees who have completed 20 years or above of service, especially for women before retirement or it can be left to the employee's desire and health condition.

8. Remote work is very suitable for escort people abroad. This is an option that can be resorted to instead of dropping out employment or taking exceptional long holidays.

9. The evaluation of government employees before Corona was mainly dependent on the employee's physical presence through paper signature and fingerprint. This means that attendance is the basis of evaluation while productivity comes second (for lack of clear evaluation tools). However, during Corona, productivity became the basis instead. For the private sector before and during Corona, the story is different, productivity is the basis for evaluation. The compelling question in the future is: What is the mechanism or technical tools that are used to ensure that productivity measured remotely is evaluated correctly while controlling working hours for all sectors?

The bottom line is that remote work needs a culture and a sense of responsibility as well as standards and administrative conditions to achieve the required productivity. This can be started in a proportional matter for some jobs and some periods

and some quarters. Then, the success or failure of the experience can be measured to take the right decision. Before implementation, we need to document the policies and procedures necessary to manage and activate modern digital technologies and teamwork applications. We also need to develop appropriate legislation that guarantees the rights and determines obligations which are considered to be one of the most important elements of success and continuing achievement for safe and effective implementation in normal situations.

The future management approach will depend on proactive management. This will be especially true during the high economic cost associated with the emergence of epidemics or other destructive risks. This approach allows taking the necessary measures to counter the shocks that may arise outside the borders of the economic institution. It aims at designing a comprehensive framework that takes into account many key elements, which include continuous monitoring of the external environment to take the necessary precautionary measures to face the risks of different shocks that may take place to demand and main supply chains. This will make it possible to better diagnose the trauma to take action to prevent it. This approach is based on taking into account the direct and indirect costs related to the negative effects of these shocks. Such costs include medical care services, disability compensation, early deaths, and economic loss resulting from low productivity due to epidemics.

Theme Ⅴ :

National Responsibility During the (COVID-19) Pandemic Crisis

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speakers: Mr. Fadel Al-Qarni, Dr. Faiza Al-Harbi, Dr. Saeed Al-Ghamdi

Contributors: (28) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Ms. Haila Almkairish

Recommendations

Integrating national concepts, the values of good citizenship, and the requirements of social responsibility in the curriculum.

Starting the national education initiative to develop the youth's attitudes positively towards interacting with this initiative, and focusing in this regard on activating the role of the teacher as a role-model.

Giving more room for citizens to share opinions on developing visions, plans, and projects. The more their participation increases and their opinions are taken into consideration, the higher their feelings of loyalty and belonging to the homeland will be.

Intensifying the publication of specialized media programs on national responsibility, implementing them with attractive and advanced mechanisms, directing them to all segments of society, and supporting them through various social media platforms.

Studying and analyzing the content of social media and working to monitor intellectual trends that work against the unity of the country and deal with them firmly.

The crisis of Corona pandemic as a model of national responsibility

Every citizen, regardless of gender or age, has an important national role to play during crises to serve the best interest of the country in terms of stability and preserving the gains and legacies. The Corona crisis confirmed this fact. In other words, the citizen in the Kingdom is responsible. They sense the great role the State has played to serve them and the wise leadership's keenness to do so.

On the other hand, this crisis emphasized the spirit of citizenship enjoyed by Saudi citizens by announcing their desire to participate in the various voluntary fields. The number of volunteering Saudi people can be estimated at dozens of thousands. This was particularly the case after the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development announced opening the platform of voluntary work.

The businessmen and the private sector also had their share of contribution. The focus was on what affects most the daily life of citizens and expatriates.

The Corona crisis showed a distinct societal interaction among the main elements of society (the government sector, the private sector, and volunteers). This took many and different shapes which affected control, crisis management, and financial support by the government. The banking sector contributed sums of money as part of support during the pandemic. It is worth noting that this is a new experience in terms of its modern way for society to deal with a crisis. This can be said even there were previous examples where there was social interaction. The government, however, managed it with full sovereignty, like the crisis that followed the first Gulf War (the liberation of Kuwait). What is required, then, is the sustainability of a sense of responsibility after the crisis, which will put that to the test, and the economic repercussions and confusion that follows unemployment, which was already high before the crisis. This is in addition to the social, psychological, and health effects. A society and a political entity cannot reach aspiration and ambition after experiencing crises of all kinds unless it realizes it very well.

What is certain is that promoting the concept of national responsibility, especially during crises - as in the current Corona crisis –

is very critical to ensure the solidarity of society in such a sweeping crisis. This responsibility is based on the following pillars:

- The first pillar is loyalty to the country and its leadership and not violating plans put forward by the leadership. This is especially because the Kingdom is surrounded by turbulent countries. They use social media and perhaps their official media sometimes against the Kingdom. Here we must be very careful and not give them an excuse to interfere in our national affairs, no matter how impartial or objective they are. As Saudis, we can handle our issues by ourselves, thereby closing the door to any interference, no matter how brilliant it is. In the end, we have to beware that there are plans being prepared to undermine our solidarity.

- The second pillar for promoting national responsibility is to obey the law. Adherence to the law guarantees the permanence of society and prevents abuse, which will maintain security and justice for all. The ultimate goal of the law is to establish justice, preserve rights, and maintains the survival of society.

- The third pillar is to preserve and protect public property from sabotage, prevent any abuses, and report what may affect these properties including all public facilities and services. This approach needs to be educated to our children.

- The fourth pillar is to carry out the work entrusted to each of us with all seriousness and integrity. This emanates from sensing the role we play as individuals in carrying out our responsibilities. We contribute to the survival and solidarity of society in countering crises, whatever they may be. All nations went through and experienced crises, and what helps their survival in addition to the above is working with a collective spirit, getting rid of selfishness and looking at society as a big family that provides its members with a safe haven during crises.

- The fifth pillar is sacrifice, self-denial, and distancing from everything that would divide people.

▶ Means of developing national responsibility for Saudi youth

There has been a discussion on how to develop the national responsibility of young people, and how to work towards promoting this responsibility among citizens. Some see it through celebrating the Saudi National Day, adhering to the Saudi costumes, or adopting the subject of national education and others at schools. Others see that this can be done by enhancing patriotism, which is bolstered through providing services and protecting individual rights with the presence of real satisfaction in all aspects.

Concerning the process of developing the national responsibility of the youth, it is interrelated and must be integrated by the effort made by many institutions in society. The success and achievement of the desired results will not be realized unless they are united by these institutions. If we take education as an example, it is necessary to link education with the students' environment to teach them to belong and care for civil society and to develop voluntary activities that serve society. Likewise, there has to be a focus on the country's history, geography, and unity to suit the students' capabilities and deepen belonging to the Kingdom. Social upbringing also has the largest role in educating and consolidating this responsibility, the beginning of which is the individual's loyalty and affiliation to the family, respect of its members, and getting acquainted with their tasks and roles as a first training to bear a greater responsibility. The rest of the institutions also have important roles to promote national responsibility, especially the media and some influential figures in society. If the right foundations for national education are laid out today, we will encounter and overcome any future crisis.

To develop and enhance the concept of social responsibility concerning citizenship among young people and Saudi youth, the following should be taken into account:

- The focus of the community institutions responsible for socialization, the family, the school, and the media, on raising children on citizenship and patriotism. This may take place through training them to partner in their home countries and master the skills necessary to play their role in society today and in the future.

- Providing a good example in adult behavior towards society.

- Following the educational democratic approach.

- Responsibility training.

- Following the applied approach in exercising citizenship and expressing patriotism.

In the same context, developing the social responsibility of the youth may take place through finding and strengthening the positive attitude (the psychological attitude) towards the country. Moreover, the practical behavior of citizenship has to be inculcated in our children. It should be clear for all that national responsibility is a profitable value even in the long run - and in return, the citizen must not feel that national irresponsibility is the path to success. We must not express patriotism in verbal behavior only,

because this facilitates the emergence of false national responsibility.

Also, among the most important foundations for promoting national responsibility during crises is national education. So, our education needs to focus on equipping young people with national values and sacrifice to leverage their pride in their country, society, cultural, social and economic nature, and its position among the countries of the world as it is honored to serve the Two Holy Mosques. The Kingdom is also unique for its geographical and economic position as being among the top 20 economic States in the world. The citizens have to be more aware of their fundamentals and more aware of their rights and duties towards their homeland. Besides, the people of the Kingdom need to develop a national passion and social sense. They will also be given positive feedback on the countries of the world. This is inevitable during globalization and the advanced information and technology revolution. They will also need to be aware of the status of their homeland among the countries of the world. By following these steps, we will have achieved the goal of preparing good citizens who are loyal to their country and bear responsibility during crises. They will be equipped with love to defend their country, and love and respect to the law. They will also have developed the foundations of dialogue, cooperation, charitable and voluntary work.

Finally, the main pillar of building the national spirit, and hence the collective feeling of national responsibility in the Kingdom, will arise from the Kingdom's vision 2030, and what His Highness the Crown Prince presented to the world. His Highness discussed the vital axis of society, and the ambitious homeland, as two important pillars that will create a Saudi society in harmony with the requirements of the day, and homogeneous and harmonious with itself and the world, taking into account the means of scientific, cognitive and economic progress. We are yearning to a society interconnected with all its ethnic, economic, sectarian, and age groups. It feels the individual and collective responsibility of the homeland and its security in all circumstances. It is a society based on cooperation between the government, the private sector and citizens to raise the name of the country high and to the position it deserves among the developed countries.

▶ Suggested practical mechanisms for strengthening national responsibility in crises

In the third chapter of the Basic Law of Governance, which addresses the elements of Saudi society, it is mentioned in Article

(11) that the "Saudi society is founded on the belief in Allah the Almighty, cooperation on righteousness, piety and solidarity among people so as not to be divided." Article (12) emphasized that "promoting national unity is a duty, and the State prohibits whatever that leads to division, strife, and division." Accordingly, there is a need to find a practical program to deepen citizenship and coexistence that promotes work with perfection for the sake of the country and society. This includes enacting the social-contract law and adopting a national strategy to promote citizenship and combat anti-nationalism.

If raising awareness with the national responsibility is important and necessary or a must, then it becomes obligatory in crises, where rumors abound. This is especially due to the spread of social media and the utilization by people with bad intentions abroad to pass agendas and goals. This adds more to the parenting role in raising awareness of the family, especially children, with the importance of taking information from the official source and following the instructions issued in this regard. During this crisis, we have noticed how society and the State got united, which demonstrated the depth of the relationship and mutual trust. Perhaps it is appropriate here to refer to the saying of the eighteenth century's satirical Scottish writer and philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, who said: "It is good for a person to die for his country, but it is more beautiful to live for this country."

Loving the homeland is not a claim but an act of giving, and when it comes to Saudi Arabia and its security and its social, economic, political and cultural fabric, we must all stand together in practice. Patriotism is to preserve the lives of the people of this country, its soil, sanctities, heritage, culture, and national sovereignty. Patriotism means being united in countering dangers, disasters, wars, pandemics, and fatal diseases. We are now facing a real test of this patriotism in enhancing solidarity, interdependence, and compliance to counter the rapid spread of a virus that kills humanity and paralyzes life. Considering all this, we all together have always to cooperate in promoting the spirit of national responsibility, not during the times of crises only. We have to work together to continue building the homeland and support the government. This collective effort will help in getting out of this crisis safely. The starting point will be the officials themselves, followed by all citizens, regardless of age, or role.

In this context, a mechanism is proposed as follows:

- **Social fabric:** Patriotism always requires us to prove that the Kingdom is one society, that we are united, and we are people who stand against discrimination. This is because the division is not found in the Saudi dictionary, and we must preserve the solidarity of our social fabric, preserve the capabilities of this country, protect economy, and confirm that recklessness is strongly rejected.

- **National family:** The family plays a critical role in producing good citizens and society. The family immunizes children, strengthens the spirit of citizenship, and promotes the love of the country. These are among the important meanings that must be taken care of by parents and educators. They create in young people and youth the spirit of belonging and continuous work for elevating their homeland. They also assist them in building the homeland and make them immune to the deviant trends that try to influence the minds of young people and turn them into time bombs. They undoubtedly have a very big role in promoting the affiliation and loyalty of citizens to their homeland. There are so many issues that parents should pay attention to when raising their children. There are related to patriotism and deepening their citizenship. What can be emphasized here is the great role of parents, especially the mother, who must nurture their children to love their country. They have to immunize them early in their lives. The father also has a role to play through teaching their children the meanings of patriotism and citizenship in their lives by being a role-model.

- **Wealthy Saudis:** This crisis is enough to test the loyalty of the rich Saudis to their homeland. It wouldn't be justifiable for them in such difficult circumstances to turn their backs for the State. The country has been making every effort to encounter this pandemic. So, it would not be ethical to leave it and the ordinary citizens face the crisis alone without a positive intervention by the rich. It is time for them to pay back. The Kingdom and its people deserve more, and patriotism does not need rhetoric, and actions have always and ever witnessed the Saudis' love for their country. The establishment of a cooperative fund in the Kingdom, in which the wealthy can contribute, may be investigated to take advantage of its credit in getting out of the Corona crisis or other crises with the lowest possible losses for the homeland and citizens.

- **Media:** When we talk about the national responsibility of media, we refer to responsible performance. This is true at the level of the media organization, the journalist or media man practicing the profession. This responsible performance is achieved by adopting and adhering to the highest professional and objective standards to the utmost degree. It is also achieved by being credible in reporting news and information, without unnecessary additions and deletions.

- **Members of the Shura Council:** Members of the Shura Council must be qualified to bear the national responsibility. Their prime concern shall be serving the country. They shall also play a tangible role during this crisis by setting a development vision and a plan that leverages this current experience to levels that are consistent with the hopes and aspirations.

- **Private sector:** We urge the great patriotic sense enjoyed by the large companies in the Kingdom. There is no doubt that during the past decades, great projects have been implemented. They strengthened the development process, but it is time that these companies adopt a culture of (giving back to the country). They can contribute to making a difference and facing the repercussions of the Coronavirus. This may be realized by launching more initiatives that can be marked as social responsibility. To be united with the State, we need to realize that we have the same destiny. The State cannot easily tolerate having two sinister shocks at a time. This refers to the global pandemic and declining oil prices.

- **Fighting corruption:** This is a collective effort whereby every serviceman, regardless of ranks, is required to abide by the teachings of religion and law. The principles necessary to fight corruption need to be included in the primary school curricula.

  In a related context, two things are desperately needed, and they are extremely important so that they will deepen the spirit of patriotism and citizenship, especially during crises:

- The first is related to stopping all forms of racism that have emerged recently, especially in social media. Having racism in Saudi society has dangerous repercussions, and this must be stopped by the force of law, decisively and firmly. We all know that striking national unity is very dangerous for any country.

- The second is related to the balanced development of all regions of the Kingdom, taking into account the number of people, the

points of strength and weakness, etc. There are weak areas in the infrastructure that is suffering from lacking investment. This makes young people flee to areas that provide job opportunities.

If adherence to laws and maintaining the gains is a duty, then it will become more urgent during crises to respect the laws and regulations and take responsibility. This is applicable at the level of work, the family, or the roles to be undertaken. It also exceeds them by taking the initiative towards every national task that may contribute to containing, eliminating, or alleviating the crisis. Two tracks can be talked about in connection with the enhancement of national responsibility during crises. The first is the long-term foundational track. The second is the short-term remedial track.

- **First: Foundational track.** It requires a strategic plan at the national level that aims at leveraging the level of national feelings and achieving the requirements of true citizenship at all times and during crises in particular. This plan, as stated by the Kingdom's Vision 2030, can only be reached through complementing roles and assuming responsibilities among the three sectors (government, private and civil society organizations). This integration shall take place according to major plans that are launched, distributed, implemented, followed, evaluated, and focused in this particular phase on the family, various educational institutions, media, and other organizations related to planning.

- **Second: Short-term remedial track:** It highlights the importance of the role of leaders, whether family leaders or leaders of government and non-government organizations at various levels ending with the supreme leader of the country. During crises, people need rational leadership, characterized by the ability to take responsibility, raise morale and motivate to communicate effectively, calm tense situations, identify challenges and problematic issues, take appropriate measures and overcome difficulties. The leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been largely responsible and has dedicated a large portion of the State's income and economy for the benefit of citizens. The leadership has taken the necessary measures and decisions during the current Corona crisis. Besides, it has also played an important role in media that is characterized by transparency and correct information. This prevented falsifying news or spreading rumors. Also, the parties related to the crisis should be responsible for continuous education on the nature of the crisis and for raising awareness of the measures required to mitigate its impact. Likewise,

the family has a major role in promoting the national responsibility of its members, especially during crises through guidance, role-models, distribution of tasks, and stimulating constructive reactions. Every citizen has a great and responsibility towards their country at all times, and during crises in particular.

To enhance and promote the national responsibility of members of Saudi society during crises, along with the foregoing, the measures below can be taken:

- Writing different curricula for the various educational levels (primary, intermediate, secondary, and university) that focus on the concepts of patriotism, national responsibility and citizenship, and explain the related laws.

- Preparing and publishing specialized media programs and directing them to all segments of society on these important issues, to be implemented with a deliberate media network, away from the direct pattern that we routinely see in all national media.

- Creating multiple accounts on social media platforms to serve this trend. It can be benefitted from some successful sites in this field, which find popularity among different age groups.

- Holding conferences, seminars, lectures, and meetings for the same purpose to come up with important applicable recommendations.

- Analyzing and studying social media to monitor intellectual trends that may split national unity and spread rumors that threaten social peace.

- Coordinating among the concerned authorities (State Security Services, the Ministry of Interior, the Communications and Information Authority, and the Ministry of Information) to enforce copyright regulations, laws and the penalties for the crimes of electronic publishing, to address everything that affects national unity, and spreads hatred and racism among citizens.

- Taking advantage of the experiences of other countries to find out the methods that they used to enhance the citizens' national responsibility.

Theme VI :

Family and the Challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speakers: Prof. Majida Al-Najem, Dr. Ziad Al-Drees, Ms. Haila Almkairish

Contributors: (19) members of the Asbar Council
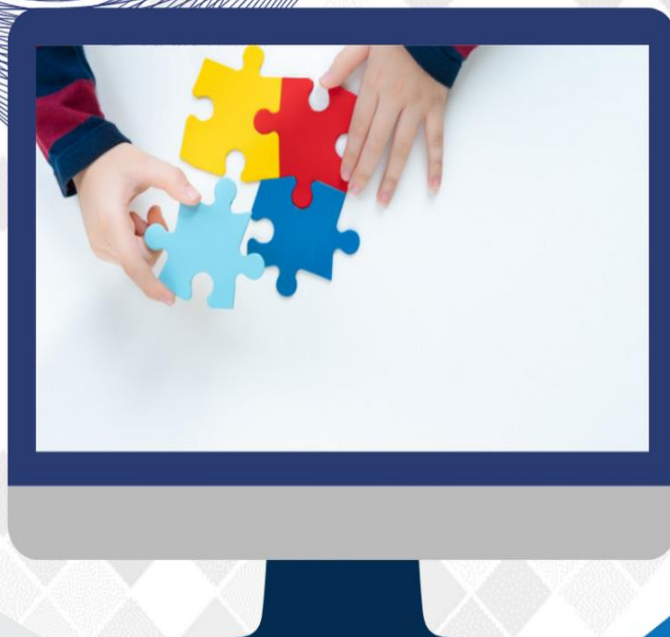
⊙ **Moderator:** Dr. Maha Al-Aidan

Recommendations

Emphasizing communicating all educational and informative messages by the family Affairs Council to all social classes in all regions, villages, governorates, and cities.

Continuing the enactment and enforcement of laws and regulations that empower the family. The family is the most important link in preserving society and the strong fortress that is resorted to during crises, and taking care of the family is largely important.

Developing plans and procedures to prevent and reduce family violence in general, especially during crises. Such measures include raising awareness and facilitating access to services by victims. They also include providing hotlines in such circumstances and ensuring support and psychological and social counseling and protection for the abused with the speed and professional skill required in such cases.

Enacting social policies and special laws to deal with crises and disasters to protect low-income families and vulnerable groups in society. This has to take place in partnership between the State and civil society institutions so that there is a will to intervene when crises occur.

Changing and developing some work laws to become more flexible for the benefit of family members, especially for pregnant or breastfeeding working women.

▶ Challenges facing the family during the Corona pandemic

The Corona pandemic crisis revealed that the whole world needs to reorganize its health, economic, diplomatic, and political profiles. It also revealed the need for the family to reconsider its roles and tasks, especially after the emergence of some challenges during the lockdown. This made the family face a difficult test and they have to pass it with distinction and cooperation by its members. Among the most important of these challenges are the following:

1- Change in the form of relationships and roles in the family and the resulting problems. The family is the first unit concerned with providing support to all its members of all ages and interests. There are children, young people, and the elderly, each with their own needs and requirements, which have traditionally been satisfied to a large extent by other agencies and institutions (such as education, health care, entertainment). Today, education is taking place at home, and the family must take care of educating their children. This puts pressure on the family in which the father and mother often work and they are also required to perform their business tasks remotely. It is expected that these new overlapping and new roles will affect the interactions and relationships of family members. This may be reflected in the differences that may arise between the spouses while managing the family affairs and in setting priorities, in terms of a financial point of view or in satisfying children's requirements, education requirements, and maintaining the health of every member of the family. Such conditions may result in problems and arguments that may lead to violence. Mostly these conditions will remain within the family, and we do not know if they will reach the concerned authorities that can address them. We do not know if they will have an impact on family relations in the future.

2- Social media addiction: It has been noticed that during the lockdown, social media addiction increased by family members, and they became more like prisoners of their mobile phones and modern devices. They have become dependent on these means. Every person in the family is busy with their virtual life. With the compulsory lockdown, we find that the parents are busy, along with their preoccupation with the health and psychological conditions of their children. They exchange roles to help them, and at

the same time, they work remotely. This doubled the burden for them. There has been another disadvantage that emerged from the lockdown. The children have become more addicted to foreign movies and TV series online. We all know that they may contain content and scenes that do not fit their age.

3- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy: Just as communication means brought people closer during the lockdown, it has become impossible to maintain confidentiality and family privacy. Some may disclose confidential information about their families out of boredom.

4- Family budget: During the Corona pandemic, discussions and jokes emerged about the extra costs and expenses that the Saudi family has suffered after the lockdown. Some people resorted to purchasing extra sanitizers, medicines, and food items. This is either for storage for fear that they will not be available in the future or because they wanted to avoid going out more than once to buy. They also bought some fun items and luxuries including food and toys to help overcome these hard times psychologically.

5- Of course, family expenditures and income can only be formally seen through reliable economic and social numbers and data. This will help including them in long-term strategic planning.

6- Psychological aspect: During the Corona pandemic crisis, the family is daily exposed to frightening news about the Coronavirus, which may cause anxiety and distress. There is no doubt that acceptance of the family members to this news varies according to their age and personalities. Some let negative thoughts affect them, especially the elderly and children, and we have to prevent the situation from getting worse.

7- The future relationship between generations: The expectation is that the current Corona pandemic crisis will not pass without leaving a print on the future of the family. At the core of it is the role of the family and the relationship between generations. Because of this pandemic, the application of the two rules for separating the elderly from the young and the social distancing was essential for greater success in facing the spread of the virus and preventing the formation of horizontal epidemic outposts in homes and residential neighborhoods. Social isolation had significant results regarding the isolation of grandparents from the young. This led to negative and psychological effects on young and old family members. A large percentage of families had

grandparents who live with their families and depended on them to care for children and accompany them to schools or public places. This completely ceased because of the possibility of getting infected from children or grandchildren.

8- The risks that families will be exposed to vary according to many variables such as the nature of their members (children, elderly, handicapped), and according to their economic level, and even the environment (the type of housing and neighborhood). The family with one or more elderly people is a great challenge as a result of the current situation. This entails that the family will have to be able to maintain their physical and psychological health. Experiencing change is significant for the elderly, and the imposition of quarantine at this age has its impact. The elderly will be suffering because of lacking social relations and communication that were a feature of our society in terms of ensuring visits to and meeting with the elderly. This also applies to physical health, as they are undoubtedly more likely to develop the disease. Accordingly, it is necessary to provide the necessary precautions, which may be the cause of differences sometimes between the elderly and children. The same applies to children, as their long stay at home affects one way or another their later social development. Besides, they may be subject to abuse as a result of different expectations between them and their parents in their ability to have remote education. This also applies to the acceptance of the status quo and the change in the nature of life, just as the handicapped also have a presence in the family that has challenges, especially those who were receiving care services from other institutions. The economic risks are the biggest, most influential, and dangerous challenge. There are many families whose income depends on their daily production. As a result of the current situation, family income has been reduced or cut off. Many have lost or may lose their businesses if the Corona pandemic takes more time, which means more unemployed people. Also, there will be families who will run poor and they will need help and support. This will put pressure on social security and charitable associations later.

9- Anxiety and fear about the future: The conditions which the family lives in today are unprecedented. These are conditions that create a collective state of anxiety and fear about the future. This will result in a collective feeling of insecurity. The impact of these conditions on the family comes at different levels. There is a level

related to family building, relationships, roles, values, and concepts through which these relationships and roles are formed. Some of these changes are positive, reinstating the roles of parents and children. They reveal aspects of the highest value in a person's life that cannot be maintained without them. For instance, medicine, science, and research are more valuable than the acquisition of international brands and lounging in cafes. These fundamental changes must be emphasized so that we will not lose them after the crisis. As for the second level of change, it is linked to the routine of daily life, which has changed dramatically. The family members found themselves close together after long times of separation where each one of them used to live his/her own life. Here, the family needs a lot of support and guidance to allow its members to coexist, tolerate, and respect the feelings and the right to express so that peace prevails at home.

10- There is fear that some of the behaviors that resulted in facing the Corona pandemic may turn to be permanent, whether at the level of the family, society and the State, even after the return of life to normal. The perception is that the biggest catalyst for this is the "social anxiety" that has spread around the world, and the feeling of society's weakness in facing risks. There is also the belief that some actions were taken by families to encounter COVID-19 and secure their members will continue as a result of this concern. This will especially be in the relationship with the world and where there will be excessive confidence in external products, especially restaurants and cafes, and places of gathering that will decrease greatly. Perhaps this will generate innovations appropriate to the needs of the family to enjoy life outside the home. However, most worries are manifested in two aspects:

• The first was related to the families that do not have easy access to technology and virtual communication. This will lead to accessing services, the most important of which is distance education, and access to health services that were provided by the delivery of medicines and others. This in turn will enhance the differences between families, with deprived families experiencing more deprivation.

• The other thing is the crisis of health care under the growing need to provide care for children, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups in the family.

Determinants of the Saudi family to overcome the challenges of the Corona crisis

There is no doubt that the Corona pandemic crisis revealed the boldness and power of the Saudi family structure and stability. This created differences between families in terms of their ability to face challenges. Difficult situations and crises reveal the family's ability to survive. Concerning the expected role of the family to overcome the Corona pandemic crisis as a model for emergency crises, this role can be indicated in the following points:

1- Seeing the current Corona pandemic crisis as an opportunity to rearrange internal home affairs. This relates to the redistribution of roles and responsibilities. For instance, the parents should exercise their role in pursuing distance education, and creating an economic atmosphere that enhances the importance of preserving the grace related to the consumption of food, water, and electricity, ordering delivery meals and items, using napkins, fruits, and all other resources. The most important resource that has to be managed well is time.

2- Creating a spirit of care and cooperation between relative families as well as neighbors. With quarantine, the focus becomes more on the self, and this violates the solidarity required in such circumstances.

3- It is inconceivable that all families have the material and technical capabilities that allow them to benefit from the multiple electronic services that were launched simultaneously with the breakout of the Corona pandemic. Here the role of mayors arises to follow up on the situation and provide the required care for the families that do not have the Internet services and cannot benefit from the electronic applications.

4- Promoting the patriotic spirit of families, by explaining what is going on and the importance of true belonging, and turning patriotism into actions that express unity.

5- All family members must join the mother to turn this ordeal into a review of our family in all aspects: spiritual, moral, economic, social, and psychological.

6- The opportunity is now there for the father to re-establish family relationships, and open a new page with the children that would last beyond Corona. The children desperately need the help of their fathers to continue their remote education.

7- Promoting self and moral control among children. The role of the family needs to be activated as it is the incubator of their children.

8- Thinking collectively to support and strengthen individuals and groups. There will be focus on the participation of children in group games that depend on the realization of ideas, discovering talents, and reviving some beautiful customs and traditions away from electronic devices.

9- Promoting awareness with the importance of caring about the preventive aspects of all family members when using social media, informing them of the risks, and continuously monitoring them. This will guard against divulging family secrets and maintain privacy.

10- Understanding how consumer spending grows during the crisis and analyzing the trends to provide economic and social databases that reflect the reality of household spending, consumption, and income. The analyses have to be carried out based on precise electronic systems that are highly reliable.

11- Engaging all family members in budget planning, because this is an element of success. This engagement increases motivation to feel family responsibility and sense the importance of good planning.

12- Paying attention to the religious aspects, by strengthening the children's relationship with God.

13- Taking care of the psychology of our children and parents - whether we live with them, or they live in another place - and ensuring that their immune system is protected and that they are reassured and supported.

14- Drawing attention to the importance of having a role for the family counselor to help those who need to recover from the Coronavirus.

▶ The State's expected role and societal institutions to support and protect the family from the fallouts of the Corona pandemic

Recent years have witnessed serious steps and effective legislation by the State aimed at protecting the family and preserving stability. Among them is the establishment of the Family Affairs Council, passing a law to protect the family against harm and provide child protection. Further, there has been a large package of reforms and legislation that are in the interest of protecting the

family and its members approved by the Ministry of Justice. During this pandemic, the State has continued this effort to protect the family through a large number of resolutions and procedures in all aspects aimed at reducing the pressure of this pandemic on the individual and the family. There have been waivers, aid, and facilities, the most prominent of which is the decision to stop the provisions of the visit for divorced children to protect them from exposure to disease. What the State is doing today is social risk management, which is a social policy that will be part of the social policies at large. It is a means to overcome crises and develop appropriate scenarios to all classes of society when exposed to risks and includes a strategy of mitigation, prevention, and readjustment.

During the Corona pandemic, the need remains for the State's continued role in supporting and protecting the family with the regulations, legislations, and procedures. This will certainly lead to the desired stability. Whenever we seek to maintain family security and health, psychologically, socially, ethically, and economically, the more we guarantee the security, economy, and health of society. Thus, the contribution to activating the State's plans, progress, and empowerment will become true.

The Family Affairs Council, in its capacity as the supreme body entrusted by the State, can do everything related to the family. The Council's purpose was to empower the family and enhance its development role in all regions of the Kingdom. The Family Affairs Council (FAC) should invest in this pandemic and its positive repercussions on the family. It may conduct many studies and research and come up with strategic action plans that enhance the developmental role of the family. This will lead to a vital community in an ambitious country, as stated by the Saudi Vision 2030. This will be realized through the procedures and laws regulating this at the State level. Moreover, this may be bolstered by promoting the level of awareness with the religious and social values of the family in the lives of individuals and societies. The suggestion in this regard is that the FAC establishes a distinctive and attractive family T.V. channel with unusual content. Unlimited spending can be made on creating and activating such a channel that can be invested later in social and national returns. The channel may present programs, competitions, and activities with incentives and prizes that help to participate and encourage families to join. Its task will be to strengthen family ties in partnership

with the private sector and educational, recreational, and sports institutions. Presently, it would be necessary for the FAC to work to reach all segments of society and send awareness messages that are transmitted through television, radio, and the Internet. It has to direct the content to children, the elderly, young people, and parents to deal with the problems resulting from the Corona crisis in various educational areas related to the pandemic. Concerning the national family strategy, two main points may be noted:

- First: Since the strategy has not been issued or has not been finalized yet - and even if it was issued - it is necessary to take advantage of these conditions to develop and introduce the relevant amendments.

- Second: There is a need to review all our laws to protect the family and benefit from our recovery from this pandemic. The main role will be put in the hands of the FAC. This is especially related to submitting to the Shura Council a package of amendments to the regulations that relates to the family. This is not only during the Coronavirus pandemic but will be effective at all times. This will also be reflected in the National Strategy.

Also, it is important to note that the appropriate educational messages be prepared by the Family Affairs Council to access all groups. Some people may not be able to deal with the technology and modern means of communication, so it would be appropriate to deliver messages via radio, television, and mobile as well. For example, elderly people may be reassured via television.

In a related context, the national response plans of the Corona pandemic must include a series of preventive measures to reduce domestic violence during quarantine, such as increasing the number of shelters, raising awareness, and facilitating victims' access to services. There is also a need to study the current situation of families, and develop policies to meet the varying needs of these families to ensure fairness in taking into account the differences between families in terms of accessing the services.

It is important to emphasize the role of community institutions to help families cope with the Corona pandemic through the following means:

- Taking preventive measures to ensure that the individuals concerned have access to appropriate services.

- Adapting the services provided to all individuals and families to new situations, changing the pattern of requesting services, and introducing community members to them.

- Providing training and capacity building for workers in this field (emergency and crises).

- Focusing on emergencies to protect the most vulnerable groups, such as children, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and women who are subject to violence.

- Activating hotlines in such circumstances to provide psychological and social support and counseling.

- Promoting partnership and coordination among all institutions and sectors related to health, work, education, social security, and others.

Theme VII :

Mental Health during the (Covid-19) Pandemic Crisis

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speakers: Dr. Fahad Al-Yahya, Dr. Wafa' Taybah, Dr. Maha Al-Munif

Contributors: (32) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Dr. Nawal Al-Dhubayban

Recommendations

1 Establishing effective partnerships with the private sector to invest in social responsibility items in favor of mental health programs in the society.

2 Preparing first aid manuals for mental health disorders aimed at different age groups.

3 Providing psychological counseling hotlines.

4 Paying attention to the groups most in need of psychological care during crises, such as the elderly, children, and those with special needs.

5 Providing psychological support to medical staff by establishing an optional psychological first aid clinic to cope with the stress they face in this pandemic.

Positive effects of the Corona pandemic on mental health

Among the most important positive effects of the Corona pandemic on Saudi society are the following:

1. Adapting to the conditions. This emanated from the fact that the human being is adaptive in nature, but they may sometimes show resistance, which negatively affects their morale.

2. Searching, identifying, and benefiting from available alternatives.

3. Learning and working have emerged as priorities.

4. Consolidating family relations, increasing familiarity, and family rapprochement. What is certain is that the Saudi family members were finally able to stay with each other. They eat their meals together, watch TV programs together, and hear their kids criticize some of these programs, and they sometimes play games together or motivate each other to play common sports. All of these difficult interactions at the beginning now produce a good mixture of a gradual understanding of family members to each other. They are now able to carry out long conversations with greater depth. The parents have become closer to their children, which will pay off later despite the evident challenges at present.

5. Corona pandemic led to reordering priorities and building bridges of communication and relationships. This is the focus of continuous daily interaction at the family level where family members discover their common life. They also discover their interdependence, and the possibility of spending fun and useful times at home together. The greatest challenge is the continuity of these positive sides after the crisis ends, and the preservation of their permanence to be part of the fabric, principles, and values of the family.

Negative effects of the Corona pandemic on mental health

The World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that despite the evident negative effects of the Corona pandemic on the economies and stability of countries in general, there are parallel effects on the mental health of members of society. Anxiety and depression emerged about what happened and about what will happen to us as people. This relates to physical health, infection, unemployment or just worrying about the unknown enemy that the world does not yet seem able to control. The most feared

mental health concern is the quarantine and the restrictions imposed by governments on mobility.

With the passage of time and the escalation of Coronavirus infection rates, there appeared to be a worrying crisis at all levels, including the psychological side. The pandemic has drastically changed the lives of a large number of people. The anxiety that accompanied the pandemic can be attributed to the following:

1. Anxiety is parallel to fear and fearful apprehension of the present and the future! This means fear of an individual or a family member being affected by the epidemic or a relative in or outside the city, not knowing when the pandemic will end, and when people will return to their normal lives? These circumstances and questions raise anxiety.

2. Non-stop daily exciting media releases. These releases are permeated with inconsistencies about the pandemic, degree of spread, treatment, and sometimes there is confusing information. Amid all this, there is the conspiracy theory and the questions raised about whether the pandemic is part of a biological war or is it fate and destiny, or it is just an unintended mistake in leaking the virus from a laboratory. To make matters worse, some rumors spread on social media with unqualified people, not doctors, who provide information about the pandemic. These people create confusion because there are people who believe them and circulate their rumors. With so much transparency during the Corona pandemic, we are living in what might be called "information intensity disorder", and this disorder will create within us other new disorders.

3. Some feared to lose their jobs over time, especially those working in the private sector. There are similar fears also of those working in the government sector of a financial deficit that the State may face. This will certainly affect its ability to pay employees' salaries. Among the justified fears are also the fear of the shortage of some food products and commodities and their high prices.

4. Fears of the eruption of war because of the economic and political conditions. The Arab region has ongoing conflicts, which means that people's anxiety may be justified. Part of this anxiety is once again linked to the conspiracy theory that fuels it. For instance, some believe that a war will break out with China.

5. The stressful condition leads to anxiety in the short term, but in the longer term, it leads to depression, loss of hope, weak motivation to rejoice in life, pessimism, and expectation of the worst.

6. Sleeping and eating disorders resulting from lacking routine, not going to work, and the absence of alternative activities, all lead in many cases to the disruption of daily life and the biological clock. This in itself affects the activities of the entire body. Appetite also changes, and food intake may increase to overcome annoying feelings.

7. Volatile mood and nervousness, ranging from sadness, anger, joy, and fear.

8. Increasing cases of domestic violence due to quarantine and psychological effects.

9. The sudden change in the pace of life and lacking familiarity with the measures taken by the State during the Corona pandemic, creating a problem for some, especially those who are used to working in normal conditions outside the home. This in itself has created some ambiguity about the nature of work in the future and that several employees can be laid off in the event of continued quarantine or worsening health conditions.

The above applies generally, but there are two categories subject to additional pressure compared to other categories:

• First: Those working in the frontline to encounter the Corona pandemic. They include health practitioners of various specialties who work in the departments of emergency, intensive care units, infectious diseases, and epidemics wards and those who work in field surveys. They are at the forefront and under constant pressure. They have fears that they would pass the disease to their family members. Some organizations have provided housing for the staff who are in constant contact with cases. They spend several days to protect their families.

• Second: Families whose members got infected with the Coronavirus. They have fears for the infected and they are worried about getting infected themselves. Also, some of them may carry the virus but still in the incubation period (which lasts between 2 to 14 days). They may also be infected, but they are asymptomatic. There are two categories of people who are most liable to the negative impacts. They are the elderly and the psychopaths. The elderly people are used to have a daily routine, and it would be so difficult for them to change. Moreover, adaptation to the new

situation requires more time and effort. So, it is important to explain the matter to them. It will also be better to make them busy with what they like and educate them on how to use the visual and audio means of communication to get connected with their beloved ones. Some elderly people have dementia/Alzheimer's. This category also sticks to their daily routine greatly and they cannot understand the epidemic and the pandemic and the need to be quarantined. They also need to follow and use preventive precautions and understand that these measures will increase their nervousness and anger. In this case, it would be appropriate to request the advice of specialists over the phone to modify specific drug doses for them. As for the psychopaths, this stressful situation is considered a psychological/ nervous stimulus that may lead to relapse or worsen the disorder! Therefore, they may need to resort to using cooling down and reassuring techniques, avoiding stimulants, and replacing them with herbs. Keeping them busy at home doing beneficial and entertaining things makes them feel that life is returning to normal. In some cases, there is a need to modify the dosages of medicines!

▶ **Practical mechanisms to address the undesirable effects of Corona pandemic on mental health**

It is appropriate to invest the Corona pandemic in focusing on improving mental health for members of Saudi society. This will take place through several means, including:

• **Community initiatives,** such as dialogue platforms, competitions, and children's programs for communication to spend time through contests and what promotes dialogue, patriotism, responsibility, and seriousness. These initiatives can be applied for all ages, whether through the Ministry of Social Affairs, across clubs, neighborhood centers, universities, mosques, television, companies, and others.

• **An opportunity for relevant legislation,** such as organizing workers' housing, and organizing regulations of public conduct. The Corona crisis has highlighted the importance of respecting the law, reverence for the elderly, security men and societal rights. Mental health treatment is certainly inseparable from high-level community behavior and elegant societal health.

• **Dialogue platforms:** Serious social interaction by taking advantage of communication platforms has been noticed, and it is

important to activate a culture of dialogue and community interaction.

- **Organizing and correcting habits:** Society has many improper customs and norms, such as excessive gifts on social occasions, marriage costs, excessive eating in restaurants, spending a lot of time in rest areas, and many others. We have found that we can live without them, which requires empathy and finding moderate alternatives. It would be fine to hear a moderate marriage that has its style during the Corona pandemic. This will mark a shift in lifestyle after the pandemic.

- **Finding societal and psychological alternatives:** There are habits that people used to do before the pandemic, such as caring for the hungry, going to the club, etc. Such habits don't have to stop. They can proceed as before by finding the alternatives.

- **Honoring the generous during crises.** This crisis underlined the priority of honoring doctors, nurses, and scientists.

- **The importance of studying the impact of financial changes** and losing jobs on family stability and mental health.

- **Life continues with seriousness:** Many employees and students have become indolent in achievement and production, and this - if it has been acceptable for weeks - it will not be acceptable for months, which requires the promotion of a culture of seriousness. This is evident in focusing on the study and serious tests. Accordingly, the students will be graduated with competence, not only with success.

- **Relying on educational and psychological Sharia concepts.** We learned about the fragility of other societies, considering the priority of money over the human being, the priority of health for young people over the elderly, and cases of depression and the like. So, it is important to highlight religious concepts related to mental health and stability, including trust in God, believing in fate, family solidarity, and good manners in interaction.

In a related context, it is important to carry out scientific studies on the impact of the pandemic and quarantine on members of society, and expect that we will have a different impact between adults and children, between residents of villas and apartments, between open areas and crowded neighborhoods, and between cities and rural areas. It is worthwhile to study the impact of this on morbidities and divorces.

It is also necessary for the legislators to focus on the psychological side of the human being. It is not clear that the psychological aspect is one of our priorities, and besides legislation we need implementation. We are lacking doctors, nurses, psychiatric hospitals, and clinics. We are also lacking awareness of the importance of seeing a doctor or psychiatrist and we are lacking specific legislations. The mental health law deals with ill people and their status in the hospital through the doctor and others only. Visits made by patients are still stigmatized in many cases, and we did not notice appropriate attention in this aspect during this pandemic. Because we do not talk about feelings and why we are worried, nor do we speak to a specialist who helps us, many of us felt very worried. All shortcomings of the legislative and executive aspects added insult to injury to those who were sick and their families during this pandemic.

It seems urgent to activate the family's role in enhancing the psychological aspect of its members, especially the elderly and children. This activation will be in terms of ensuring that information is conveyed in a calm, balanced, and reassuring manner and in terms of emphasizing the emotional stability. Parents must also organize a dynamic, varied, and renewed daily schedule, according to the interests of family members, to alleviate the psychological pressures resulting from the long quarantine at home. This may include some games, cultural and sports competitions, etc., and motivate everyone to participate for very simple prizes.

Also, there is a need for the media to discuss mental health issues during the Corona pandemic, as well as giving more focus on the issue of mental health in the current situation. The most affected categories should receive primary attention, and they include health practitioners, security men, and everyone who works in teams to counter the pandemic. The focus should also be on other groups, the elderly and vulnerable, such as hospital inpatients, psychiatric patients, prisoners, front-line soldiers, children, families of the infected, and the deceased. Accordingly, the following aspects can be emphasized:

1. The need to restrict the victims' categories to those with mental health cases to start taking progressive procedures to help them.

2. These measures first include educating those around us and those dealing with these groups, because psychological support to a mental health patient is more important than educating them.

3. Promoting awareness of these groups with smart messages that help them in reassuring the services provided, whether in therapeutic health or the psychological care aspect.

4. Educating community members about the availability of mental care services for mental health problems associated with the pandemic phobia, describing the symptoms of these problems, and not being afraid about talking about these matters.

5. Preparing centers and clinics specialized in psychological care or psychotherapy. They will be utilized as places for holding courses offered by experts to raise the level of treatment or psychological care with a focus on problems that can arise from the pandemic phobia.

6. Educating parents about their young children and providing them with appropriate answers when talking about the pandemic. The parents also need to direct their children about avoiding rumors and distorted images and control their browsing the Internet and social media.

7. Directing parents and older siblings on how to treat children during the pandemic, especially for those who live in small apartments and enclosed spaces where it is very difficult for the child to move.

8. Instructing those caring for the elderly about how to talk to them about the pandemic and the need to reassure them, with communicating official messages from the Ministry of Health appealing to the elderly not to request their grandchildren and others to visit them. This will be like support on their part for their sons who will have to avoid such visits to prevent transmitting the virus.

9. Caring for the children's psyche through activities designated for them to express themselves through drawing or music according to their age and the physical and mental activities that they perform at home.

10. Holding psychological support sessions in neighborhood centers, and through social media sites and video platforms.

11. Providing psychological, health, and spiritual support applications through smart devices that have an increased rate of use by individuals.

12. Activating the psychological counseling hotline, as well as looking into the possibility of sending messages via mobiles that include tips and instructions on how to deal with stress, some breathing exercises, and beneficial nutrition, and how to communicate with consultants who serve women, children, or the elderly.

Theme VIII :

Bureaucracy and the COVID-19 Pandemic

⊙ **Contents:**

⊙ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speaker: Mr. Khaled Al-Othman, Dr. Wafaa Al-Rasheed, Dr. Khaled Al-Fuhaid

Contributors: (16) members of the Asbar Council

⊙ **Moderator:** Mr. Ibrahim Nazer

Recommendations

1. Stepping up efforts to develop the administrative practices and policies in government agencies through Vision Realization Offices to combat negative bureaucracy.

2. Developing the infrastructure and legislation that allows the application and employment of the latest technologies in automation and digitization, whose use greatly reduces opportunities for exploitation and administrative corruption.

3. Reconsidering and amending all implementing and interpretive laws and regulations based on the lessons learned from the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, so that they will be flexible, effective, and applicable during crises and emergencies.

4. The Ministry of Education is working to include codes of ethics, a culture of teamwork, and innovative initiatives in curricula to overcome bureaucracy by starting in early education stages. This will promote those cultures in future generations.

5. Establishing an executive crisis cell with special powers to oversee the implementation of governmental and non-governmental initiative packages, eliminate the obstacles facing them, reducing traditional procedures and requirements, and documenting quick feedback to interact with them as should be.

▶ Bureaucracy, State performance, and public sectors during crises: Corona pandemic as a model

The Saudi Vision 2030 represents an important turning point in the Saudi development process in general, and in this issue in particular. The Vision focused on reviewing, developing, and improving work structures in the government sector. The first program under the Vision 2030 was the National Transformation Program, which aimed at developing the work in the government sector and raising its efficiency and effectiveness.

Since the breakout of the Coronavirus, the Saudi leadership has worked to enable various sectors to encounter the pandemic. Besides, it launched many initiatives and packages specifically directed to alleviate the burdens of the economic crisis on citizens in general and the private sector in particular. The government tried to prevent the collapse of the private sector. It also planned to maintain its momentum to resort to addressing the challenges of the crisis and investing in the opportunities it holds in the long run. The efforts and stances of the Saudi government have been a role- model in comparison with other countries that faced this global pandemic.

It has been noticed that, since launching the State's initiatives as of mid-March 2020, some of these initiatives have not been implemented at the desired level in terms of reaching the intended beneficiaries. The following is an illustration of some of these initiatives and some examples of the bureaucratic obstacles they faced:

• The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency initiatives included allocating a portfolio to lend to private sector institutions, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, through commercial banks. However, this initiative is still facing the intricacies of banking and bureaucracy procedures that are overloaded by a lot of paperwork.

• The initiatives of the General Organization of Social Insurances (GOSI) included waiving the payment of fines by the private sector institutions for not paying the social insurance fees during the crisis. However, GOSI abstained from issuing the social insurance certificates that the institutions needed to submit requests to collect their contractual dues.

- The initiatives of GOSI also included the payment of a percentage of the salaries of some Saudis in the private sector institutions in the "Sanid" program. However, GOSI linked this to the institutions' commitment to the salary protection program without supporting these institutions to pay the dues of the rest of the employees.

- The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques allocated an amount of 50 billion riyals for the urgent overdue payment to the private sector for previous years. However, the private sector institutions were given only a short time not exceeding 10 days under lockdown to collect documents of these dues from workplaces and submit them to the chambers of commerce. Above all, the procedures were not clear, and there were no means available for following up or reporting the acceptance of these claims and the date of payment.

In a related context, there are some obstacles or challenges that make the government agencies fail to perform what is required and expected of them in achieving the goals and providing the expected services, especially in exceptional circumstances such as the Corona pandemic. Such obstacles include but without limitation the following:

- **Sticking to the letters of the laws and regulations:** The bureaucratic public agencies resort to the literal application of the laws, regulations, resolutions, and orders issued by the leadership. This scenario complicates the services and obstructs the implementation of government initiatives and services. It also leads to sticking to the literal interpretation by bureaucratic employees consistent with their motivations in terms of performing or even abstaining from providing the service.

- **Extreme centralization:** This is characteristic of bureaucracies in developing countries. Although such countries claim that they adopt a decentralization approach, they still practice centralization. This results in poor performance and weak administrative competencies.

- Among the causes of government, bureaucracy is the failure to put the right man in the right place and the absence of a system for evaluating the selection of people for leadership positions, which is carried out randomly.

Just as Saudi Arabia succeeded in managing the Corona pandemic crisis, the bureaucracy also confirmed that we have a cri-

sis in management. Certainly, among the most important lessons learned from the Corona pandemic is the necessity of providing alternative plans, and flexible procedures and regulations in the event of abnormal situations and crises. Sometimes the cost of taking a wrong decision and backing down is much less than not deciding until it is validated. The Foreign Affairs magazine stated that the Coronavirus spread rapidly in Iranian cities because of bureaucracy that failed to respond in a coordinated and consistent manner to public health emergencies. When compared to this scenario, and others, the Saudi government has taken measures aimed at facilitating the procedures for the return of the private sector and creating the climate and supporting it. Undoubtedly, these can be judged as good steps taken to support the current trends and have a better economic situation. However, when there is corruption, bureaucracy, and incompetence in any institution, whether a company, organization, the State, or any entity, this will be enough to destroy and make them bankrupt, or even obstruct the implementation of the issued decisions and hence productivity. Likewise, observations on the ground and preliminary studies have shown after the experience of remote work that there was a lot of bureaucracy in the previous work routine. The manifestations of such bureaucracy included lengthy meetings and unnecessary instructions and procedures, which require inevitable change. Among the changes that Corona will make in institutional work at all levels are the following:

1. The actual measurement of the effectiveness of public and private institutions while working at the minimum load during disasters and crises.

2. Cracking the bureaucracy and focusing on the importance of facilitating the services provided.

3. Changing business patterns, consumption, and movement. The change will also include plans for neighborhoods and homes.

4. Providing an opportunity for innovators and creative-thinkers to embrace their practical and actionable ideas.

▶ Mechanisms to address bureaucratic problems in Saudi Arabia during the Corona pandemic

Many observations have been presented for diagnosing the current situation on which the treatment of bureaucratic problems in Saudi society can be based. Such observations include the following:

1. The executive government apparatus manages and organizes the State-owned and national resources of all kinds, the sovereign privileges, and other organizational responsibilities (through regulations and laws) that are uniquely organized in favor of the State. This apparatus does so under the supervision of the law (administrative inspection mechanisms).

2. The government does so by maintaining a state of balance between the various interests which are determined or implied by the regulations and procedural instructions.

3. A large amount of substantive, procedural, and executive regulations and norms that define the powers, responsibilities, measures, and standards of the department (which is the unit of responsibility in the national executive apparatus) collectively called the administrative law.

4. Higher policies, norms, and regulations (which the Kingdom's government always nominates) necessitate transparency. The most important areas of transparency are declaring regulations and instructions of all kinds and the procedures during and after implementation.

5. Knowing and understanding all this and having the skill in absorbing it is a major part of management efficiency. This requires the qualification of the employee and the apparatus, clarity, and publicity of the instructions, in addition to mechanisms that guarantee this and ensure good decision-making.

6. The administrative judiciary is responsible for controlling the executive branch. However, there is a stage before having to resort to an administrative judiciary, which is to allow the department to amend its decision or not or to go for it. Here, the judgment of the concerned department will be appreciated.

7. Departments have a mechanism to review the relevant decision quickly on a semi-judicial basis and neutrally. The decision is made objectively, with the aid of professional considerations (they are largely independent of the head of the department) and such departments operate in transparent and clear procedures.

8. The reliability of change management that we see in government agencies in the vision realization offices deserves compliment. However, it clashes with a lot of resistance resulting from a bureaucratic practice rooted in government agencies in general.

   Based on the foregoing, there is a need for effective mechanisms to address bureaucratic problems in the Saudi Arabian agencies

during crises, like the Corona pandemic, the most prominent of which are the following:

1. Overcoming the issue of weak competencies, and also the weak ability to make decisions.

2. Establishing a comprehensive law that deals with different situations, not case-by-case. The prospective law has to be created for the organization, not a complication, and for finding positive solutions.

3. Writing down the decisions that are derived from the spirit of the law for reference and teaching in administrative courses.

4. Having a unified government record in which the regulations, and instructions are documented using an interconnected indexing system. This record has to be managed by a competent department that publishes the applicable laws, and discounts the inapplicable ones. The published laws have to be made public and independent of the departments, with setting deadlines for all administrative resolutions authorized by the department, and when passed they are considered approved.

5. There has to be a solid approach to the law and general administrative skills that translate administrative law (other than the skills for management work) and be the basis for tests and promotions (with relevant technical skills).

6. Generalizing the administrative law and government organizations that there are independent quasi-judicial committees in the departments that deal with specific (quasi-judicial) procedures with all types of complaints (from employees and beneficiaries). These committees are the final step before resorting to the administrative court by the claimant (the department pays the costs of the complaint if the claimant wins).

7. It is important for the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, based on the principle of transparency, to create a guide for administrative procedures during crises for every government agency and the private sector in coordination with those agencies.

8. It may be appropriate for the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to conduct remote training programs or workshops for decision-makers in government agencies that contribute to developing and modernizing systems and working to dissolve the consequences of bureaucracy.

9. It is important to determine the mechanism of countering the Corona pandemic crisis carried out by all government agencies to

identify and reinforce positive aspects and avoid the negative ones.

It is important to note that regardless of the view on "bureaucracy" being negative or positive, it is difficult if it is not impossible to judge far from being placed in its proper framework. Bureaucracy is part of an administrative system that has characteristics, values, and concepts that must be freed first. This system has not been freed yet, nor discussed or studied with its pros and cons so far! Likewise, without framing our administrative practices and studying them scientifically, taking into consideration the Saudi personality, the environmental and cultural diversity of all regions of the Kingdom, the development, specifically since the seventies of the last century until today, and the effects of Western and Arab schools, it would be difficult to criticize the administrative practice on the ground. Criticism so far has been based on the extent of benefit or loss of this practice, and therefore it is not systematic. Countries of the world are competing to publicize their experiences and they always try to be proud that they have schools like the German, American, British and Japanese schools. Why don't we have a Saudi school, with a written-down and a clear methodology to study, discuss, and write in-depth research studies?

What is certain is that addressing bureaucracy with its roots deep in government administrative practices requires some patience and a great deal of effort to address in parallel with the efforts of national transformation to ensure the realization of the goals and objectives of the Vision 2030 and the aspirations of national development. But we also urgently need to adopt urgent approaches to enforce the country's initiatives, which reflect a belief in the importance of the private sector and its role in development. Perhaps these approaches are first a model for the approaches of urgent solutions to deal with crises in the short run as in the current Corona crisis. Second, they represent an approach to create models for successes to demonstrate the possibility, efficacy, and chances of change in the long-run.

Theme IX :

Human Rights and Saudi Positions during the Corona Pandemic Crisis

◉ **Contents:**

◉ **Speakers and contributors:**

Keynote speakers: Mr. Lahim Al-Nasser, Dr. Abdul Elah Al-Saleh, Dr. Wafa' Taybah

Contributors: (16) members of the Asbar Council

◉ **Moderator:** Ms. Maha Aqeel

Recommendations

1. Developing a human rights report by the Human Rights Commission documenting all measures taken by the Kingdom during the Corona pandemic.

2. Developing an information strategy in association with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information, the Human Rights Commission, and other human rights institutions to present the right image of the Kingdom. Help may be sought by referring to experts in psychology and sociology.

3. Engaging the Shura Council in addressing world parliaments and coordinating with relevant institutions internally, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

4. Documenting the most prominent legal problems arising from the Corona pandemic, and tracking their features and effects on legal relations in general and contractual relations in particular.

5. Engaging in a strong, professional, and practical way the important international organizations such as the Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization, and others, and investing in all forces that may aid in promoting the Kingdom's image, development, and reforms in human rights.

Corona pandemic implications for human rights concepts

Human rights principles are essentially the accumulation of common norms and the product of human effort. They grew from the teachings of heavenly religions and then settled in Western culture in what was called "the natural law." The aftermaths of the two world wars pushed for consensus on this law. The philosophy and modern formulation of these principles represent common human aspirations and standards for responsibilities and duties for the individual, society, and the national State. They were formalized at the international level in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (30 items) unanimously agreed upon by members of the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Then, within the framework of this declaration, and based on the provisions of the United Nations' charter, clauses 1 (3), 55 (c) and 56 regarding its responsibility to enforce the principles of human rights at the level of public and private international law, an important accumulation of conventions and concepts was established under its institutions, which led to launching the International Bill of Human Rights. Among its pillars, in addition to the declaration itself, are the international covenants on "economic, social and cultural rights" and "civil and political rights" and the mechanisms for their implementation and follow-up.

Reviewing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, specifically concerning health as a human right without discrimination, we find the stipulation that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control," which make them lose their sources of income.

Likewise, while the principle of human rights has a universal and national consensus, there is a difference in the details for different reasons according to cultures, countries, and stages. It is almost certain worldwide that mobility freedom will diminish during the Corona pandemic in favor of the State and at the expense of the citizen. This necessitated a convergence of interests and risks of a global nature. The Corona pandemic only precipitated future visions. This applies to privacy, which will shrink in favor of

large companies and at the expense of the citizen. On the other hand, the rights of treatment, medical care, and social services for the benefit of society will be affected at the expense of public finance and the concomitant increase in taxes.

Given what was done by the developed countries during the Corona pandemic, we find that they clashed with this item by setting age priorities in containing the pandemic. The Corona pandemic was a touchstone to the standards of Western values and the extent to which they were adhered to.

Perhaps many countries, due to the slowdown or even the economic downturn, and the massive unemployment rates that have occurred due to the Corona pandemic, will, in turn, be forced, to expand social security, and work for self-sufficiency in strategic industries (medicines, medical equipment, and food industries, etc.), expand trade protectionism. The World Trade Organization is expected to review its general philosophy of keeping pace with trade wars between the poles of the global economy.

▶ Saudi human rights efforts during the Corona pandemic

The measures taken by the Kingdom and the regulations of human rights during the Corona pandemic (and before it) are clearly outlined in its articles of association (28,26, 29, 30, 39). What is certain is that these principles are translated into legislative and organizational items in judicial affairs, health, educational, cultural, and social affairs and services and personal status. There is no disagreement that the Saudi legislator in translating these principles looks very seriously and adheres to the Charter of Human Rights, relevant international treaties and covenants even the Kingdom is not a party.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been clear from the start to encounter the Corona pandemic. It opted for man over economics, money, and business. This meant man without discriminating between citizens or expatriates, and whether their residence is legal or not. Accordingly, the Kingdom developed its precautionary and preventive plan to besiege the pandemic and curb its health, social and economic effects. So, the Kingdom was one of the first countries to suspend entry to the country. It suspended Umrah from outside and inside the country and until it reached a stage of total lockdown. The steps have been gradual, taking into account besieging the pandemic and controlling its acceleration.

The intention was not to cause any shocks or surprises to the people and prevent the chaos that might have resulted from panic. The Kingdom has made its priorities to facilitate access to the necessary services while proceeding with the preventive measures. It shifted to remote education, supported delivery services through various applications, and encouraged citizens to sign up with them and supported the people financially. It also made it obligatory to make payments through the electronic payment channels, and it developed government applications to communicate and obtain travel permits electronically. It suspended imprisonment for financial rights, and the Ministry of Health expanded conducting surveying and examination to include citizens and legal or illegal expatriates. The government waived illegal expatriates of statutory penalties and ensured the isolation and treatment of those infected. To ensure a decent life for citizens and expatriates, the State provided incentive packages to the private sector to maintain jobs, including credit facilitation and salary support to the amendment of the articles of the labor law. With continued precautionary and preventive procedures, society has been following the developments of the pandemic with transparency through conferences of the spokesman of the Ministry of Health. There have been intensified awareness-raising efforts taking place through text messages, short videos, social media platforms, and guide boards in different languages in an attempt to communicate them to the largest audience.

Saudi Arabia did not lose sight of its nationals abroad. With the complete international lockdown and the difficulty of movement, it supported them with planes to bring them back home at its expense. It also provided housing at its expense for those whose conditions did not help bringing them back home. The approach and plan of the Kingdom in dealing with the pandemic was a humanistic one that represented its doctrine, religion, and commitment to Islamic law. During this pandemic, the Kingdom demonstrated that human rights are not slogans, but they are deeds. The Kingdom succeeded where the developed countries failed, and then it is still going on in its plan that it had planned for itself to encounter the pandemic, trying every effort to help the world to overcome this crisis by coordinating with other countries and international organizations and through assisting the World Health Organization.

The speech by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to the people of March 19, 2020, was a declaration that all economic, health, and security measures that will be taken will consider the citizens and expatriates, and their safety, whatever the cost. The State's guarantee of treatment for the citizens, expatriates, and illegal expatriates was a human gesture in which developed countries failed. The health insurance law of such countries does not allow the treatment of those who do not have insurance. The State emphasized not to dismiss employees or terminate contracts. The Ministry of Human Resources established procedures that prevented employees' dismissal. The financial and economic packages provided for the private sector are only to aid companies and support them to reduce the existing economic impact due to the demand arising from restricted movement.

The Kingdom has dealt with the Corona pandemic with an integrated precautionary and preventive plan. Coordinating efforts among various agencies was one of the most important factors that led to the success of this plan. The State also provided all medical staff with the need to protect and help them to carry out their work.

In a related context, the Human Rights Commission held some remote activities on Covid-19. The National Society for Human Rights followed the preventive and precautionary procedures in prisons as overcrowded and closed areas. It made some proposals and recommendations to the competent authorities to reduce the number of prisoners, particularly those with special rights claimed against them. Amnesty instructions were issued by the State, which benefited many prisoners and detainees, and reduced overcrowding in prisons. This also helped to maintain the health of prisoners. The Society stressed that such decisions will have an effective role not only at the level of maintaining the health of the prisoners and detainees, but it goes beyond this to support the humanitarian aspects of their families, and the ability of some to reorder their lives concerning the payment of their debts.

Considering the efforts made and the decisions are taken by the Kingdom at the economic and social levels, the Kingdom is viewed as one of the best countries in addressing the repercussions of the Corona pandemic. It expressed its full interest in ensuring the human rights of groups affected by the pandemic by ensuring the following:

- Supporting the Saudi economy, small enterprises, individuals, and their families; maintaining job security for them, maintaining the health and safety of citizens and expatriates, and bearing their health costs in quarantine, medicines, analyses, devices, medical and preventive personnel, quarantine security arrangements, and lockdown.

- Implementing a balanced plan with gradually reopening economic activities and maintaining stable health and social conditions. This has taken place after continuous coordination between the Ministry of Health and the competent authorities.

- The plan to reopen the economy considered giving priority to the necessary activities to provide basic goods and services and taking all precautions and preventive measures to prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace, with an emphasis on returning to work with caution.

- Following up international trade in dealing with the current crisis with continuous coordination in the G20.

- More than 250,000 establishments benefited from the tax payment deferral. Moreover, the 50-billion-riyal package announced by the State included the payment of dues to the private sector.

- The government confirms its commitment to protect the health sector and support the social protection system so that the citizen will not be affected.

- Among the first initiatives launched by the Kingdom, represented by the Ministry of Human Resources, was the establishment of the community fund to mitigate the effects of the Corona crisis on the most affected groups. Through this initiative, the Ministry also bears the cost of delivery during the period of the total lockdown for those who are entitled. So, it entered into a contract with one of the delivery applications to deliver for free. It also bore the cost of medical tests of the workers and housed them in schools. There were other initiatives also presented by the government independently or in cooperation with the private sector.

  Emanating from its international responsibilities, the Kingdom - which presides the G20 - has created a special working group especially for COVID-19 to solve the problem, after the summit meeting called for by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. The meeting resulted in many commitments by the G20 which were all of human rights nature. Saudi Arabia also provided financial support to the World Health Organization to support less

fortunate countries and provide health and protection requirements for their health cadres and citizens.

Also, the King Salman Center for Humanitarian Relief has played important roles in facing the consequences of the Corona pandemic and has had many contributions at the international level. For example, the Center formed a special committee for the Corona pandemic in affected countries to provide medical assistance and relief. Upon directions of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Center signed six contracts to support Yemen and Palestine to encounter the Coronavirus. Accordingly, many necessary and preventive medical devices and supplies will be provided. The Center also distributed 250 food baskets in the Hadhramaut Governorate, to provide relief to the people in quarantine.

In general, when highlighting the Saudi efforts in dealing with the Corona pandemic at the local and international levels, it is important to ensure that this stems mainly from the Kingdom's ethics in preserving human health. This is a priority that has stood at the forefront of the Saudi efforts in this regard during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Conclusion:

The repercussions of the Corona pandemic in Saudi Arabia and the world as a whole, are still taking shape, whether in terms of the negative effects they have had on all aspects of life: economic, social, health, educational, tourism, security, media, etc. or in terms of procedures and measures that attempt to counter these repercussions. The current Asbar Council's report attempted to analyze the pandemic considering several dimensions. It is an attempt to shed light on the various aspects of the current pandemic and an alert to draw attention to some aspects that still need to be emphasized.

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