



## Saudi Arabia

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Saudi Arabia is a monarchy without elected representative institutions or political parties. It is ruled by King Fahd bin Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud, a son of King Abd Al-Aziz Al Saud, who unified the country in the early 20th century. Since the death of King Abd Al-Aziz, the King and Crown Prince have been chosen from among his sons, who themselves have had preponderant influence in the choice. A 1992 royal decree reserves for the King exclusive power to name the Crown Prince. Crown Prince Abdullah has played an increasing role in governance since King Fahd suffered a stroke in 1995. The Government has declared the Islamic holy book the Koran and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad to be the country's Constitution. The Government bases its legitimacy on governance according to the precepts of a rigorously conservative form of Islam. Neither the Government nor the society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state. The Government prohibits the establishment of political parties and suppresses opposition views. In 1992 King Fahd appointed a Consultative Council, or Majlis Ash-Shura, and similar provincial assemblies. The Majlis, a strictly advisory body, began holding sessions in 1993 and was expanded first in 1997 and again in May. The judiciary is subject to influence by the executive branch and members of the royal family.

The Government maintains control of the various security forces. Police and border forces under the Ministry of Interior are responsible for internal security. Also subordinate to the Ministry of Interior are the Mubahith, or internal security force, and the elite special forces. The Committee to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue, whose agents commonly are known as Mutawwa'in, or religious police, is a semiautonomous agency that enforces adherence to Islamic norms by monitoring public behavior. The Crown Prince controls the National Guard. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Aviation, Prince Sultan, is responsible for all the military forces. Members of the security forces committed serious human rights abuses.

The population is approximately 22.1 million with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$7,564. The oil industry has been the basis of the transformation of Saudi Arabia from a pastoral, agricultural, and trading society to a rapidly urbanizing one, characterized by large-scale infrastructure projects, an extensive social welfare system, and a labor market comprised largely of foreign workers. Oil revenues account for approximately 55 percent of the GDP and 80 percent of government income. Agriculture accounts for only about 6 percent of GDP. Government spending, including spending on the national airline, power, water, telephone, education, and health services, accounts for 24 percent of GDP. About 40 percent of the economy is nominally private, and the Government is promoting further privatization of the economy. In 1995 the Government began an aggressive campaign to increase the number of Saudi nationals represented in the public and private work forces.

The Government's human rights record remained poor. Citizens have neither the right nor the legal means to change their government. Security forces continued to abuse detainees and prisoners, arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, and hold them in incommunicado detention. In addition there were allegations that security forces committed torture. On October 1, the Council of Ministers approved a new law regarding punitive measures that would forbid harming detainees and to allow those accused of crimes to hire a lawyer or legal agent. The law became effective in November; however, at year's end, there were no reports of its implementation. Prolonged detention without charge is a problem. Security forces committed such abuses, in contradiction to the law, but with the acquiescence of the Government. The Mutawwa'in continued to intimidate, abuse, and detain citizens and foreigners. Most trials are closed, and defendants usually appear before judges without legal counsel. The Government infringes on citizens' privacy rights. The Government prohibits or restricts freedom of speech, the press, assembly, association, religion, and movement. However, during the year, the Government continued to tolerate a wider range of debate and criticism in the press concerning domestic issues. Other continuing problems included discrimination and violence against women, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and strict limitations on worker rights.

The Government views its interpretation of Islamic law as its sole source of guidance on human rights and disagrees with internationally accepted definitions of human rights. However, in 2000 and during the year, the Government initiated limited measures to participate in international human rights mechanisms, such as its approval of the October legislation, which the Government claimed would address some of its obligations under the Convention Against Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

## RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

#### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of political or other extrajudicial killings during the year.

The Government executed persons for criminal offenses after closed trials in which forced confessions are common and few procedural safeguards are provided (see Sections 1.c. and 1.e.).

The investigation of the 1996 Al-Khobar bombing, which killed 19 U.S. servicemen, continued. The Government has not yet issued a report of its findings.

#### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

#### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Shar'ia (Islamic law) prohibits any judge from accepting a confession obtained under duress; however, there were credible reports that the authorities abused detainees, both citizens and foreigners. Ministry of Interior officials are responsible for most incidents of abuse of prisoners, including beatings, whippings, sleep deprivation, and at least three cases of drugging of foreign prisoners. In addition there were allegations of torture, including allegations of beatings with sticks, suspension from bars by handcuffs, and threats against family members. Torture and abuse are used to obtain required confessions from prisoners (see Section 1.e.). There were reports that in detention centers some boys and young men were flogged, forced constantly to lie on hard floors, deprived of sleep, and threatened with whipping and other abuse.

The Government has refused to recognize the mandate of the U.N. Committee Against Torture to investigate alleged abuses, although it has invited the committee to visit the country. However, the Government has pledged to cooperate with U.N. human rights mechanisms and announced in 2000 the establishment of a committee to investigate allegations of torture pursuant to its obligations under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (see Section 4).

Although the Government asks for details of reports of torture and other human rights abuses made by international human rights groups, it does not permit international observers to investigate such reports; however, it has invited observers from international human rights groups to visit the country. The Government's reluctance to grant members of diplomatic missions access to the Ministry of Interior detention facilities or allow members of international human rights groups into the country hinders efforts to confirm or discount reports of abuses. The Government's past failure to criticize human rights abuses has contributed to the public perception that security forces may commit abuses with impunity.

The Mutawwa'in continued to intimidate, harass, abuse, and detain citizens and foreigners of both sexes. They also bring citizens to police for detention. Throughout the year, both citizens and foreigners reported incidents of intimidation, harassment, and detention by the Mutawwa'in (see Sections 1.d. and 1.f.).

The Government punishes criminals according to its interpretation of Shari'a. Punishments include flogging, amputation, and execution by beheading, stoning, or firing squad. The authorities acknowledged 81 executions during the year. Executions were for murder, narcotics-related offenses, rape, and armed robbery. In accordance with Shari'a, the authorities may punish repeated thievery and other repeated offenses by amputation of the right hand and left foot. Persons convicted of political or religious crimes reportedly were flogged with a leather strap. Persons convicted of less serious offenses, such as alcohol related offenses or being alone in the company of an unrelated person of the opposite sex, sometimes were punished by caning.

Prison and jail conditions vary throughout the Kingdom. Prisons reportedly generally meet internationally accepted standards and allegedly provide air-conditioned cells, good nutrition, regular exercise, and careful patrolling by prison guards. Some police stations, deportation centers, and jails, nonetheless, are overcrowded, unsanitary, and not air-conditioned. Authorities generally allowed family members access to detainees, but in some cases only after holding detainees for a significant period of time.

Boards of Investigation and Public Prosecution, organized on a regional basis, were established by King Fahd in 1993. The members of these boards have the right to inspect prisons, review prisoners' files, and hear their complaints. However, the Government does not permit human rights monitors to visit prisons or jails. The Government does not allow impartial observers of any type access to specialized Ministry of Interior prisons, where persons accused of political subversion are detained.

Representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are present at the Rafha refugee camp, which houses former Iraqi prisoners of war and civilians who fled Iraq following the Gulf War. According to UNHCR officials, there was no systematic abuse of refugees by camp guards. When isolated instances of abuse surfaced in the past, the authorities were responsive and willing to investigate allegations and reprimand or remove offending guards. The camp receives a high level of material assistance and is generally comfortable and well run. The Government previously confined refugees to the camp, except in the event of approved emigration (see Section 2.d.); however, during the year, refugees were permitted to visit the town of Rafha to shop.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest; however, the authorities at times make arrests and detain persons without following explicit legal guidelines. The Mutawwa'in generally are free to intimidate and bring to police stations persons whom they accuse of committing "crimes of vice" based on their own religious interpretations. There are few procedures to safeguard against abuse, although the Government claims that it punishes individual officers who violate regulations. There have been few publicized cases of citizens successfully obtaining judicial redress for abuse of the Government's power of arrest and detention; none were reported during the year.

According to regulation, authorities may not detain suspects for longer than 3 days before charging them. However, serious exceptions have been reported. In practice persons are held weeks or months and sometimes longer. The regulations also provide for bail for less serious crimes, although authorities at times release detainees on the recognizance of a patron or sponsoring employer without the payment of bail. If they are not released, authorities typically detain accused persons for an average of 2 months before sending the case to trial or, in the case of some foreigners, summarily deporting them. There is no established procedure providing detainees the right to inform their family of their arrest.

The Mutawwa'in have the authority to detain persons for no more than 24 hours for violations of the strict standards of proper dress and behavior. In the past, they sometimes exceeded this limit before delivering detainees to the police (see Section 1.f.). During the year, Mutawwa'in reportedly in practice handed over detainees to police within the 24-hour period; however, in some cases prisoners were held by police for longer periods, depending on the offense. Current procedures require a police officer to accompany the Mutawwa'in at the time of an arrest. Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement. During the year, in the more conservative Riyadh district, reports continued of Mutawwa'in accosting, abusing, arresting, and detaining persons alleged to have violated dress and behavior standards.

The Mutawwa'in reportedly detained young men for offenses that included eating in restaurants with young women, making lewd remarks to women in the shopping malls, or walking in groups through family-only sections of shopping centers. Women of many nationalities were detained for actions such as riding in a taxi with a man who was not their relative, appearing with their heads uncovered in shopping malls, and eating in restaurants with males who were not their relatives. Many such prisoners were held for days, sometimes weeks, without officials notifying their families or, in the case of foreigners, their embassies.

The Government continued to detain Christians, at times for holding services and at times apparently arbitrarily (see Section 2.c.).

According to various reports, a number of Shi'a sheikhs (religious leaders) were arrested and detained in 2000 and during the year (see Section 2.c.).

Political detainees who are arrested by the General Directorate of Investigation (GDI), the Ministry of Interior's security service (Mubahith), commonly are held incommunicado in special prisons during the initial phase of an

investigation, which may last weeks or months. The GDI allows the detainees only limited contact with their families or lawyers. During the year, foreigners detained by the GDI and under investigation were held without legal counsel or family visitation.

The authorities may detain without charge persons who publicly criticize the Government, or may charge them with attempting to destabilize the Government (see Sections 2.a. and 3). On December 10 on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, the Government released by royal pardon 12,000 prisoners serving time for minor offenses.

The Government continued to commit abuses against members of the Shi'a minority. Since beginning the investigation of the 1996 bombing of the U.S. military installation at Al-Khobar, in which a number of eastern province Shi'a were arrested, authorities have detained, interrogated, and confiscated the passports of a number of Shi'a Muslims. The Government reportedly continued to detain an unknown number of Shi'a who were arrested in the aftermath of the Al-Khobar bombing. Government security forces reportedly arrest Shi'a based on the smallest suspicion, hold them in custody for lengthy periods, and then release them without explanation.

There is no reliable information about the total number of political detainees.

The Government did not use forced exile; however, it previously has revoked the citizenship of opponents of the Government who reside outside the country (see Section 3).

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The independence of the judiciary is prescribed by law and usually is respected in practice; however, judges occasionally accede to the influence of the executive branch, high-ranking members of the royal family and their associates, who are not required to appear before the courts. Judges are appointed by the Justice Ministry and confirmed by the Royal Diwan (Royal Court). The Ministry exercises judicial, financial, and administrative control of the courts. The Supreme Judicial Council, whose members appointed by the King, may discipline or remove judges.

The legal system is based on Shari'a. Shari'a courts exercise jurisdiction over common criminal cases and civil suits regarding marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Such jurisdiction extends to non-Muslims for crimes committed in the country. Shari'a courts base judgments largely on their interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna. Cases involving relatively small penalties are tried in Shari'a summary courts. More serious crimes are adjudicated in Shari'a courts of common pleas. Appeals from Shari'a courts are made to the courts of appeal.

Other civil proceedings, including those involving claims against the Government and enforcement of foreign judgments, are held before specialized administrative tribunals, such as the Commission for the Settlement of Labor Disputes and the Board of Grievances.

The Government permits Shi'a Muslims to use their own legal tradition to adjudicate noncriminal cases within their community. There is no comparable right for non-Muslims or foreigners, whose cases are handled in regular Shari'a courts.

The military justice system has jurisdiction over uniformed personnel and civil servants that are charged with violations of military regulations. The Minister of Defense and Aviation and the King review the decisions of courts-martial.

The Supreme Judicial Council is not a court and may not reverse decisions made by a court of appeals. However, the Council may review lower court decisions and refer them back to the lower court for reconsideration.

The Council of Senior Religious Scholars is an autonomous body of 20 senior religious jurists, including the Minister of Justice. It establishes the legal principles to guide lower-court judges in deciding cases.

In November a law became effective that provided persons under investigation with the right to a lawyer during investigation and trial; however, the new law has not yet been observed in practice. Previous law did not provide the defendant with the right to have a lawyer present in court. Defendants in most cases continue to appear without an attorney before a judge, who determines guilt or innocence in accordance with Shari'a standards. The law does not provide defendants with the right to a translator. The courts generally do not provide foreign defendants with translators. Defense lawyers may offer their clients advice before trial or may

attend the trial as interpreters for those unfamiliar with Arabic. Public defenders are not provided. Individuals may choose any person to represent them by a power of attorney filed with the court and the Ministry of Justice. Most trials are closed.

There were reports during the year that the authorities tortured detainees and pressured them to confess by isolation, blindfolding, and drugging over a period of weeks.

A woman's testimony does not carry the same weight as that of a man. In a Shari'a court, the testimony of one man equals that of two women.

Female parties to court proceedings such as divorce and family law cases generally must deputize male relatives to speak on their behalf. In the absence of two witnesses, or four witnesses in the case of adultery, confessions before a judge almost always are required for criminal conviction—a situation that repeatedly has led prosecuting authorities to coerce confessions from suspects by threats and abuse (see Section 1.c.).

Sentencing is not uniform. Laws and regulations state that defendants should be treated equally; however, under Shari'a as interpreted and applied in Saudi Arabia, crimes against Muslims receive harsher penalties than those against non-Muslims. In the case of wrongful death, the amount of indemnity or "blood money" awarded to relatives varies with the nationality, religion, age, and sex of the victim. A sentence may be changed at any stage of review, except for punishments stipulated by the Koran.

Provincial governors have the authority to exercise leniency and reduce a judge's sentence. In general members of the royal family and other powerful families are not subject to the same rule of law as ordinary citizens. For example, judges do not have the power to issue a warrant summoning any member of the royal family.

The King and his advisors review cases involving capital punishment. The King has the authority to commute death sentences and grant pardons, except for capital crimes committed against individuals. In such cases, he may request the victim's next of kin to pardon the murderer—usually in return for compensation from the family or the King.

There is insufficient information to determine the number of political prisoners. The Government does not provide information regarding such persons or respond to inquiries about them. It does not allow access to political prisoners by international humanitarian organizations. Moreover, the Government conducts closed trials for persons who may be political prisoners and in other cases has detained persons incommunicado for long periods while under investigation. Amnesty International (AI) estimates the number of political prisoners to be between 100 and 200.

#### f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Government infringes on these rights. The sanctity of family life and the inviolability of the home are among the most fundamental of Islamic precepts. Royal decrees include provisions calling for the Government to defend the home from unlawful intrusions, while laws and regulations prohibit officials from intercepting mail and electronic communication except when necessary during criminal investigations. Nonetheless, there are few procedural safeguards against government interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence.

The police generally must demonstrate reasonable cause and obtain permission from the provincial governor before searching a private home; however, warrants are not required by law.

Customs officials routinely open mail and shipments to search for contraband, including material deemed pornographic and non-Muslim religious material. Customs officials confiscated or censored materials considered offensive, including Christian Bibles and religious videotapes (see Section 2.c.). The authorities also open mail and use informants and wiretaps in internal security and criminal matters. Security forces used wiretaps against foreigners suspected of alcohol-related offenses. Informants (known as "mukhbir") and ward bosses (known as "umdas") report "seditious ideas" or antigovernment activity in their neighborhoods to the Ministry of the Interior.

The Government enforces most social and Islamic religious norms, the Government's interpretation of which are matters of law (see Section 5). Women may not marry noncitizens without government permission; men must obtain government permission to marry noncitizen women outside the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In accordance with Shari'a, women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims; men may marry Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims. Marriages between Sunni and Shi'a citizens are discouraged, and any such marriages generally are made formal officiated in ceremonies in the neighboring country of Bahrain.

Mutawwa'in practices and incidents of abuse varied widely in different regions of the country, but they were most numerous in the central Nejd region. In certain areas, both the Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, abused, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners (see Section 1.d.). The Government requires the Mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner; however, Mutawwa'in did not always comply with the requirements. During the year, the Government neither criticized publicly abuses by Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes nor sought to curtail such abuses.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included the closing of commercial establishments during the five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with strict norms of public dress, and dispersing gatherings of women in public places designated for men, as well as preventing men from entering public places designated for families. Mutawwa'in frequently reproached citizen and foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes and arrested men and women found together who were not married or closely related.

Some professors believe that informers monitor comments made in university classrooms and make reports to government authorities (see Section 2.a.).

## Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Government severely limits freedom of speech and the press; however, the Government continued to relax restrictions somewhat during the year.

The authorities do not permit criticism of Islam or the ruling family, and criticism of the Government is rare. The authorities allow the press some freedom to criticize governmental bodies and social policies through editorial comments and cartoons. During the year, both Arabic and English newspapers reported on domestic problems, such as abuse of women, servants, and children, previously not addressed by the media. Persons whose criticisms align them with an organized political opposition are subject to arrest and detention until they confess to a crime or sign a statement promising not to resume such criticisms, which is tantamount to a confession. For example, writer Zuheir Kutbi claims that he has been imprisoned six times for his writings. Due to his past imprisonment, Kutbi has been deprived of employment and his passport, and lives under government surveillance.

On occasion the Government provides direction to mosque orators and imams regarding the content of their messages; in some instances the Government has banned imams from speaking for political comments that they made (see Section 2.c.).

The print media are privately owned but publicly subsidized. A media policy statement and a national security law prohibit the dissemination of criticism of the Government. The media policy statement urges journalists to uphold Islam, oppose atheism, promote Arab interests, and preserve the cultural heritage of the country. The Ministry of Information appoints, and may remove, all editors in chief. It also provides guidelines to newspapers regarding controversial issues. The Government owns the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), which expresses official government views.

In 2000 the Government approved a wide-ranging press law that would permit the creation of professional journalism societies and permit the publication of foreign newspapers in the country. The law states that local publications will be subject to censorship only in emergencies and pledges to protect free expression of opinion; however, the law obliges the authorities to censor foreign publications that defame Islam and harm the interests of the state or the "ethics of the people." Implementation of the law has not significantly changed current practices regarding freedom of expression.

In July the Council of Ministers approved a new press law establishing a journalists' association to address wages, benefits, and relations with management. It will issue membership cards permitting journalists to work in the country and oversee introduction of a minimum wage, job security, and other benefits for journalists. Membership will be restricted to citizens. The Government announced in December that the association would be formed in early 2002.

Newspapers typically publish news on sensitive subjects, such as crime or terrorism, only after the information has been released by the SPA or when it has been authorized by a senior government official. Two Saudi-owned, London-based dailies, Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat and Al-Hayat, are distributed widely and read in the country. Both newspapers tend to practice self-censorship in order to comply with government restrictions on sensitive issues.

The April 28 edition of Arreyand, an eastern province-based sports daily, was seized by the Information Ministry to prevent criticism of the Saudi Sports Federation; the Government directed another newspaper not to publish anything on the event.

The authorities dictate to domestic newspapers when they are allowed to release stories about the country that are based on stories in the foreign press. The authorities also continued on occasion to censor stories about the country in foreign publications. Censors on occasion also remove or blacken offending articles imported into the country, glue pages together, or prevent certain issues of foreign publications from entering the market. However, while this occurs, it is not consistent and frequently controversial articles about the country appear in foreign publications that are distributed. During the year, the Ministry of Information continued to relax its blackout policy regarding politically sensitive news concerning the country reported in the international media, although press restrictions regarding reporting of domestic news remained very stringent. The Government's policy in this regard appears to be motivated in part by pragmatic considerations: Access by citizens to outside sources of information, such as Arabic and Western satellite television channels and the Internet, is increasingly widespread.

The Government tightly restricts the entry of foreign journalists. However, during the year, a relatively higher number of foreign journalists received visas to enter and report in the country than in the previous year.

The Government owns and operates the television and radio companies. Government censors remove any reference to politics, religions other than Islam, pork or pigs, alcohol, and sex from foreign programs and songs. There are several million satellite-receiving dishes in the country, which provide citizens with foreign broadcasts. The legal status of these devices is ambiguous. The Government ordered a halt to their importation in 1992 at the request of religious leaders who objected to foreign programming being made available on satellite channels. In 1994 the Government banned the sale, installation, and maintenance of dishes and supporting devices; however, the number of dishes continues to increase and residents legally may subscribe to satellite decoding services that require a dish.

The Government bans all books, magazines, and other materials that it considers sexual or pornographic in nature. The Ministry of Information compiles and updates a list of publications that are prohibited from being sold in the country.

Access to the Internet is available legally only through Saudi servers, which are monitored heavily by the Government. There are as many as a million Internet subscribers. Some citizens attempt to circumvent this control by accessing the Internet through servers in other countries. The Government attempts to block all web sites that it deems sexual, pornographic, politically offensive, or "un-Islamic." However, such web sites are accessible from within the country. During the year, the Government closed a number of Internet cafes, especially those established for women, after complaints that the cafes were being used for "immoral purposes."

The Government censors all forms of public artistic expression and prohibits cinemas and public musical or theatrical performances, except those that are considered folkloric.

Academic freedom is restricted. The authorities prohibit the study of evolution, Freud, Marx, Western music, and Western philosophy. Some professors believe that informers monitor their classroom comments and report to government and religious authorities.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Shari'a does not address freedom of assembly, and the Government strictly limits freedom of assembly in practice. It prohibits public demonstrations as a means of political expression. Public meetings are segregated by sex. Unless sponsored by diplomatic missions or approved by the appropriate governor, foreign residents who seek to hold unsegregated meetings risk arrest and deportation. The authorities monitor any large gatherings of persons, especially of women. The Mutawwa'in dispersed groups of women found in public places, such as restaurants. Government policy permits women to attend cultural and social events at diplomatic chanceries and residences only if they are accompanied by a father, brother, or husband. However, in practice police often implement the policy in an arbitrary manner. On some occasions during the year, authorities actively prohibited women from entering diplomatic chanceries or residences to attend cultural events and lectures.

Shari'a does not address freedom of association, and the Government strictly limits freedom of association in practice. The Government prohibits the establishment of political parties or any type of opposition group (see Section 3). By its power to license associations, the Government ensures that groups conform to public policy.

The Government licenses a large number of humanitarian organizations and tribal and professional societies, such as the Saudi Chemists Society and the Saudi Pharmacists Society. The Government claims that such groups operate without government interference because they are not detrimental to public security.

### c. Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion does not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. The Government prohibits non-Islamic public worship but permits nondefined private worship. Conversion by a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy. Public apostasy is a crime under Shari'a and punishable by death. There were no executions for apostasy during the year, and no reports of any such executions for the past several years.

Islamic practice generally is limited to that of the Wahhabi order, which adheres to the Hanbali school of the Sunni branch of Islam as interpreted by Muhammad Ibn Al-Wahab, a puritanical 18th century religious reformer. Practices contrary to this interpretation, such as visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims or the celebration of the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, are discouraged. However, there are significant numbers of Sufis in the western province who engage in technically illegal practices, such as celebrating the Mawlid, or Prophet's birthday, more or less openly without government interference. The practice of other schools of Sunni Islam is discouraged, and there is institutionalized discrimination against adherents of the Shi'a branch of Islam.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs directly supervises, and is a major source of funds for, the construction and maintenance of most mosques in the country. The Ministry pays the salaries of imams (prayer leaders) and others who work in the mosques. On occasion the Government provides direction to mosque orators and imams regarding the content of their messages; in some instances, imams have been banned from speaking. A governmental committee is responsible for defining the qualifications of imams. The Mutawwa'in receive their funding from the Government and are government employees. The General President of the Mutawwa'in holds the rank of cabinet minister. Mutawwa'in and imams are trained at the Imam Mohammed University outside of Riyadh and also at the Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca.

Foreign imams are barred from leading worship during the most heavily attended prayer times and prohibited from delivering sermons during Friday congregational prayers. The Government states that its actions are part of its "Saudiization" plan to replace foreign workers with citizens. The spreading of Muslim teachings not in conformance with the officially accepted interpretation of Islam is prohibited. Writers and other individuals who publicly criticize this interpretation, including both those who advocate a stricter interpretation and those who favor a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, reportedly have been imprisoned and faced other reprisals.

The Shi'a Muslim minority (roughly 900,000 of nearly 14 million citizens) lives mostly in the Eastern Province, although a significant number also reside in Madina in the western province. Its members are the objects of officially sanctioned political, social, and economic discrimination (see Section 5). Since beginning the investigation of the 1996 bombing of the U.S. military installation at Al-Khobar, in which a number of eastern province Shi'a were arrested, authorities have detained, interrogated, and confiscated the passports of a number of Shi'a Muslims (see Section 1.d.).

The authorities permit the celebration of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in the eastern province city of Qatif, provided that the celebrants do not undertake large, public marches or engage in self-flagellation (a traditional Shi'a practice). The celebrations are monitored by the police; however, police presence at the April Ashura celebrations reportedly was much less prominent than the previous year. No other Ashura celebrations are permitted in the country, and many Shi'a travel to Qatif or to Bahrain to participate in Ashura celebrations. The Government continued to enforce other restrictions on the Shi'a community, such as banning Shi'a books.

According to various reports, the Government arrested and detained a number of Shi'a sheikhs (religious leaders) in 2000 and during the year. Early in 2000, a Shi'a sheikh was taken into custody, and three other sheikhs were arrested for unknown reasons near the border with Jordan. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that at least seven additional Shi'a religious leaders reportedly remained in detention for violating restrictions on Shi'a religious practices. According to AI, Hashim Al-Sayyid Al-Sada, a Shi'a cleric suspected of political or religious dissent, was arrested in his home in April 2000 and reportedly remained in incommunicado detention at year's end (see Section 1.d.). AI reported that Sheikh Aliban Ali al-Ghanim was arrested in August 2000 at the border with Jordan and held by the Mabuhith, the national investigative bureau that is part of the Ministry of the Interior. In March Mabuhith officers reportedly arrested and detained Sheikh Mohammed Al Amri in Medina.

The Government seldom permits private construction of Shi'a mosques. The Shi'a have declined Government



offers to build state-supported mosques because the Government would prohibit the incorporation and display of Shi'a motifs in any such mosques.

In April 2000, in the city of Najran, in the southwest region bordering Yemen, rioting by members of the Makarama Ismaili Shi'a eventually led to an attack by an armed group of Shi'a on a hotel that contained an office of the regional governor. Security forces responded, leading to extended gun battles between the two sides. Some press reports indicated that the rioting followed the arrest of a Makarama Ismaili Shi'a imam and some of his followers on charges of "sorcery." Various other reports attributed the unrest to the closure of two Ismaili Shi'a mosques and the provincial governor's refusal to permit Ismailis to hold public observances of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura. Still other reports attributed the unrest to a local crackdown on smuggling and resultant tribal discontent. Officials at the highest level of the Government stated that the unrest in Najran was not the result of Shi'a-Sunni tension or religious discrimination. After the unrest ended the Government stated that 5 members of the security forces were killed, and Ismaili leaders claimed that as many as 40 Ismaili tribesmen were killed. There was no independent confirmation of these claims.

In October 2000, AI reported that two Ismaili Shi'a teachers, who were arrested in April 2000 following the unrest, were convicted on charges of sorcery and each sentenced to 1,500 lashes; however, the report could not be confirmed.

Magic is widely believed in and sometimes practiced, often in the form of fortune-telling and swindles. However, under Shari'a the practice of magic is regarded as the worst form of polytheism, an offense for which no repentance is accepted, and which is punishable by death. There are an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," or the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." In a few cases, self-proclaimed "miracle workers" have been executed for sorcery involving physical harm or apostasy.

The Government prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, lashing, and deportation for engaging in overt religious activity that attracts official attention, although there were no reports of lashings during the year. The Government has stated publicly, including before the U.N. Committee on Human Rights in Geneva, that its policy is to protect the right of non-Muslims to worship privately. During the year, senior officials in the Government reaffirmed the right of non-Muslims to engage in private religious worship to a visiting religious delegation. However, it does not provide explicit guidelines--such as the number of persons permitted to attend and acceptable locations--for determining what constitutes private worship, which makes distinctions between public and private worship unclear. Such lack of clarity, as well as instances of arbitrary enforcement by the authorities, force most non-Muslims to worship in such a manner as to avoid discovery by the Government or others. Other high-level officials have confirmed that the Government does not sanction investigation or harassment of such private worship services. These officials ascribed any residual harassment of private worship services or seizure of personal religious materials, such as Bibles or icons, to individuals and organizations acting on their own authority and in contradiction of Government policy.

In May and June, the Government detained between 12 and 14 Christians, apparently in connection with two large farewell parties held by members of the local evangelical Christian community in which religious activities occurred. The parties were held in a public hall, which the organizers had rented. Government officials maintained that so many persons attended the event that it could not be considered private. The detainees were still being held in a prison in Jeddah without charge at year's end. Reports indicated that government officials suspected the group may have succeeded in converting one or more citizens, a crime that (in the case of the Saudi converts) is punishable by death. In October one of the detainees reported that he was beaten; two others reportedly were abused during interrogation.

On November 30, 2000, police broke up a gathering of 60 Christians worshiping in a rented building and detained 5 of the worshipers for approximately an hour for questioning. In December 2000, authorities broke up a private Christian worship service of 12 Filipino citizens, arrested 6 of the Filipinos, and detained 3 of those arrested for nearly 2 months. All six were deported early in the year. On April 20, a Filipino Christian man reportedly was stopped at a routine police checkpoint while driving a woman from a Christian service. After discovering religious materials in the car, the police detained the man for 2 days.

The Government does not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country for the purpose of conducting religious services, although some come under other auspices. Such restrictions make it very difficult for most non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergymen and attend services. Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faith, particularly are affected.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, is illegal. There were no reports during the year of arrests for proselytizing. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols of any kind in public risk confrontation with the Mutawwa'in. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, approximately 50 so-called "Call and Guidance" centers employing approximately

500 persons work to convert foreigners to Islam. Some non-Muslim foreigners convert to Islam during their stay in the country, including more than 200 persons in Jeddah each year. The press often carries articles about such conversions, including testimonials.

There were reports during the year that authorities interrogated members of the Baha'i community, although they reportedly did not take additional action against them.

Under the Hanbali interpretation of Shari'a law, judges may discount the testimony of people who are not practicing Muslims or who do not adhere to the correct doctrine. Legal sources report that testimony by Shi'a is often ignored in courts of law or is deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis. For example, in May a judge in the eastern province asked two witnesses to an automobile accident if they were Shi'a. When they so confirmed, the judge announced to the court that their testimony was inadmissible. Sentencing under the legal system is not uniform. Laws and regulations state that defendants should be treated equally; however, under Shari'a as interpreted and applied in the country, crimes against Muslims may result in harsher penalties than those against non-Muslims.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools at all levels. All children receive religious instruction, which generally is limited to that of the Hanbali school of Islam.

In accordance with Shari'a, Saudi women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims, but Saudi men may marry Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims.

The Government requires noncitizens to carry Iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contain a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim."

#### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Government restricts these rights. The Government restricts the travel of Saudi women. They are not allowed to drive inside the country and are dependent upon males for any transportation. Likewise, they must obtain written permission from their closest male relative before the authorities allow them to travel inside the country or to travel abroad (see Section 5). In November the Government announced that women could obtain their own identity cards; however, it required that they obtain permission to receive a card from their nearest male relatives. Moreover, the identity cards have not been made mandatory for women (see Section 5).

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution some Shi'a suspected of subversion have been subjected periodically to surveillance and limitations on travel abroad. In previous years, the Government actively discouraged Shi'a travel to Iran to visit pilgrimage sites due to security concerns. Shi'a who traveled to Iran without government permission, or who were suspected of such travel, normally had their passports confiscated upon their return for periods of up to 2 years. However, according to press reports, early in the year, the Government lifted the requirement that citizens intending to travel to Iran seek permission in advance from authorities, and the new policy reportedly was observed in practice. The change corresponds with improving relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Advance permission for travel to Iraq, whether for business or religious pilgrimage, has been necessary for some time due to security concerns, but such travel remains possible. Travel to Iraq still requires specific permission.

Foreigners typically are allowed to reside or work in the country only under the sponsorship of a Saudi national or business. By law the sponsors or employers of foreign residents must hold their passports until they are prepared to depart the country. The Government requires foreign residents to carry identification cards. It does not permit foreigners to travel outside the city of their employment or change their workplace without their sponsor's permission. Previously, foreign residents who traveled within the country could be asked by the authorities to show that they possessed letters of permission from their employer or sponsor. However, this regulation was rescinded late in the year, and only Iqamas (residency identification) now were required, although by year's end, there was no information regarding whether the authorities were observing the new policy in practice.

Sponsors generally retain possession of foreign workers' passports, although some classes of foreign workers are now allowed to keep their passports. Foreign workers must obtain permission from their sponsors to travel abroad. If sponsors are involved in a commercial or labor dispute with foreign employees, they may ask the authorities to prohibit the employees from departing the country until the dispute is resolved. Some sponsors use this as a pressure tactic to resolve disputes in their favor or to have foreign employees deported. There were numerous reports of the Government prohibiting foreign employees involved in labor disputes from departing the country until the dispute was resolved (see Sections 5 and 6.c.).

The Government seizes the passports of all potential suspects and witnesses in criminal cases and suspends the issuance of exit visas to them until the case is tried or otherwise concluded. As a result, some foreign nationals are forced to remain in the country for lengthy periods against their will. The authorities sometimes confiscate the passports of suspected oppositionists and their families.

Citizens may emigrate. The Government prohibits dual citizenship; however, children who holding other citizenship by virtue of birth abroad increasingly are permitted to leave the country using non-Saudi passports. Apart from marriage to a Saudi national, there are no provisions for foreign residents to acquire citizenship. Foreigners are granted citizenship in rare cases, generally through the advocacy of an influential patron.

The law does not provide for the granting of asylum and refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

The Basic Law provides that "the state will grant political asylum if the public interest militates in favor of it." The law does not specify clear rules for adjudicating asylum cases, and does not provide for first asylum. In general the authorities regard refugees and displaced persons similarly as they do foreign workers: They must have sponsors for employment or risk expulsion. Of the 33,000 Iraqi civilians and former prisoners of war allowed refuge in the country at the end of the Gulf War, none has been granted permanent asylum. Nevertheless, the Government cooperates with the UNHCR. It has underwritten the entire cost of providing safe haven to the Iraqi refugees and continues to provide logistical and administrative support to the UNHCR and other resettlement agencies. At year's end, approximately 27,000 of the original 33,000 Iraqi refugees had been resettled in other countries or voluntarily repatriated to Iraq. Most of the approximately 5,200 remaining refugees are restricted to the Rafha Refugee Camp. At year's end, plans prior to September 11 to repatriate Afghan and Iraqi refugees were deferred. Efforts continue to encourage the Iraqi refugees to return to their country; in July there were brief demonstrations concerning the resettlement program, and five refugees held a hunger strike. The UNHCR has monitored over 3,000 persons voluntarily returning to Iraq from Rafha since December 1991 and found no evidence of forcible repatriation (see Section 1.c.).

The Government has allowed some foreigners to remain temporarily in the country in cases in which their safety would be jeopardized if they were deported to their home countries.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

### Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Citizens do not have the right to change their Government. There are no formal democratic institutions, and only a few members of the ruling family have a voice in the choice of leaders or in changing the political system. The King rules on civil and religious matters within certain limitations established by religious law, tradition, and the need to maintain consensus among the ruling family and religious leaders.

The King is also the Prime Minister, and the Crown Prince serves as Deputy Prime Minister. The King appoints all other ministers, who in turn appoint subordinate officials with cabinet concurrence. In 1992 the King appointed 60 members to a Consultative Council, or Majlis Ash-Shura. This strictly advisory body began to hold sessions in 1993. In 1997 and again in May the King expanded the membership of the Council; it has 120 members plus its chairman. There are plans to expand the Majlis Ash-Shura again in 2005. There are two Shi'as on the Council. The Council engages in debates that, while closed to the general public, provide advice and views occasionally contrary to the Government's proposed policy or recommended course of action. The Government usually incorporates the Majlis' advice into its final policy announcements or tries to convince it why the Government's policy is correct.

The Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (ulema) is another advisory body to the King and the Cabinet. It reviews the Government's public policies for compliance with Shari'a. The Government views the Council as an important source of religious legitimacy and takes the Council's opinions into account when promulgating legislation.

Communication between citizens and the Government usually is expressed through client-patron relationships and by affinity groups such as tribes, families, and professional hierarchies. In theory any male citizen or foreign national may express an opinion or a grievance at a majlis, an open-door meeting held by the King, a prince, or an important national or local official. However, as governmental functions have become more complex, time-consuming, and centralized, public access to senior officials has become more restricted. Since the assassination of King Faisal in 1975, Saudi kings have reduced the frequency of their personal contacts with the public. However, during the year, Crown Prince Abdullah held a variety of meetings with citizens throughout the country. Ministers and district governors more readily grant audiences at a majlis.

Typical topics raised in a majlis include complaints about bureaucratic delay or insensitivity, requests for personal redress or assistance, and criticism of particular acts of government affecting family welfare. Broader "political" concerns--social, economic, or foreign policy--rarely are raised. Complaints about royal abuses of power are not entertained. In general journalists, academics, and businessmen believe that institutionalized avenues of domestic criticism of the regime are closed. Feedback is filtered through private personal channels and has affected various policy issues, including the Middle East peace process, unemployment of young Saudi men, and the construction of new infrastructure.

The Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), an opposition group, was established in 1993. The Government acted almost immediately to repress it. In 1994 one of its founding members, Mohammed Al-Masari, fled to the United Kingdom, where he sought political asylum and established an overseas branch of the CDLR. In 1996 internal divisions within the CDLR led to the creation of the rival Islamic Reform Movement (IRM), headed by Sa'ad Al-Faqih. Al-Masari expressed the CDLR's "understanding" of two fatal terrorist bombings of U.S. military facilities in 1995 and 1996 and sympathy for the perpetrators. The IRM implicitly condoned the two terrorist attacks as well, arguing that they were a natural outgrowth of a political system that does not tolerate peaceful dissent. Both groups continue to criticize the Government, using computers and fax transmissions to send newsletters to Saudi Arabia.

Women play no formal role in Government and politics and are actively discouraged from doing so. Participation by women in a majlis is restricted, although some women seek redress through female members of the royal family. On rare occasions, women have been called to advise members of the Majlis Ash-Shura in private, closed-door sessions.

#### Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

There are no publicly active human rights groups, and the Government has made it clear that none critical of government policies would be permitted.

The Government generally does not permit visits by international human rights groups or independent monitors; however, on several occasions, the Government has announced publicly, through the press, that it would welcome visits from AI, HRW, and other human rights organizations.

The Government disagrees with internationally accepted definitions of human rights and views its interpretation of Islamic law as the only necessary guide to protect human rights. The Government generally ignored citations of government human rights abuses by international monitors or foreign governments and, in the past, has criticized such citations as attacks on Islam.

The Government announced on October 1 that the Council of Ministers' approved a new law regarding punitive measures that address its obligations under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; however, by year's end, there were no reports of its implementation.

#### Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

There is legal and systemic discrimination based on sex and religion. The law forbids discrimination based on race, but not nationality, although such discrimination occurs. The Government and private organizations cooperate in providing services for persons with disabilities; however, there is no legislation mandating public access. The Shi'a religious minority suffers social, legal, economic, political, and sectarian discrimination.

#### Women

Shari'a prohibits abuse and violence against all innocent persons, including women. The Government does not keep statistics on spousal abuse or other forms of violence against women. However, based on the information available regarding physical spousal abuse and violence against women, such violence and abuse appear to be common problems. Hospital workers report that many women are admitted for treatment of injuries that apparently result from spousal violence; hospitals now are required to report any suspicious injuries to authorities. A Saudi man may prevent his wife and any child or unmarried adult daughter from obtaining an exit visa to depart the country (see Section 2.d.).

Foreign embassies continued to receive many reports that employers abuse foreign women working as domestic servants. Some embassies of countries with large domestic servant populations maintain safehouses to which their citizens may flee to escape work situations that include forced confinement, withholding of food, beating and other physical abuse, and rape. Often the reported abuse is at the hands of female citizens.

During the year, the media reported more frequently on cases involving domestic abuse of women, servants, and children. However, in general the Government considers such cases to be family matters and does not intervene unless charges of abuse are brought to its attention. It is almost impossible for foreign women to obtain redress in the courts due to the courts' strict evidentiary rules and the women's and servants' own fears of reprisals. There were increasing reports during the year of employers being punished for abuse of domestic servants. There are no private support groups or religious associations to assist such women.

By religious law and social custom, women have the right to own property and are entitled to financial support from their husbands or male relatives. However, women have few political or social rights and are not treated as equal members of society. There are no active women's rights groups. Women legally may not drive motor vehicles and are restricted in their use of public facilities when men are present. Women must enter city buses by separate rear entrances and sit in specially designated sections. Women risk arrest by the Mutawwa'in for riding in a vehicle driven by a male who is not an employee or a close male relative. Women are not admitted to a hospital for medical treatment without the consent of a male relative. By law and custom, women may not undertake domestic or foreign travel alone (see Section 2.d.). In November the Government announced that women could obtain their own identity cards; however, it required that they obtain permission to receive a card from their nearest male relatives. In addition the identity cards were not made mandatory for women, although some women applied for and obtained the cards. In 1999 the Ministry of Interior announced that preparations were underway to issue identity cards to women, which would represent a step toward allowing women to establish independent legal identities from men.

In public a woman is expected to wear an abaya (a black garment that covers the entire body) and also to cover her head and hair. The Mutawwa'in generally expect women from Arab countries, and other countries in Asia and Africa to comply more fully with Saudi customs of dress than they do Western women; nonetheless, in recent years they have instructed Western women to wear the abaya and cover their hair and face. During the year, Mutawwa'in continued to admonish and harass women to wear their abayas and cover their hair.

There were no reports during the year of government officials and ministries barring accredited female diplomats in the country from official meetings or placing other restrictions on them, as had occurred in the past.

Prostitution is illegal and does not appear to be a widespread problem.

Women also are subject to discrimination under Shari'a as interpreted in the country, which stipulates that daughters receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers. While Shari'a provides women with a basis to own and dispose of property independently, women often are constrained from asserting such rights because of various legal and societal barriers, especially regarding employment and freedom of movement. In a Shari'a court, the testimony of one man equals that of two women (see Section 1.e.). Although Islamic law permits polygyny, with up to four wives, it is becoming less common due to demographic and economic changes. Islamic law enjoins a man to treat each wife equally. In practice such equality is left to the discretion of the husband. Some women participate in Al-Mesyar (or "short daytime visit") marriages, or what are described as "weekend marriages," in which the women relinquish their legal rights to financial support and nighttime cohabitation. Additionally, the husband is not required to inform his other wives of the marriage, and any children resulting from such a marriage have no inheritance rights. The Government places greater restrictions on women than on men regarding marriage to noncitizens and non-Muslims (see Section 1.f.).

Women must demonstrate legally specified grounds for divorce, but men may divorce without giving cause. In doing so, men are required to pay immediately an amount of money agreed upon at the time of the marriage, which serves as a one-time alimony payment. Women who demonstrate legal grounds for divorce still are entitled to this alimony. If divorced or widowed, a Muslim woman normally may keep her children until they attain a specified age: 7 years for boys; 9 years for girls. Children over these ages are awarded to the divorced husband or the deceased husband's family. Numerous divorced foreign women continued to be prevented by their former husbands from visiting their children after divorce.

Women have access to free but segregated education through the university level. They constitute over 58 percent of all university students, but are excluded from studying such subjects as engineering, journalism, and architecture. Men may study overseas; women may do so only if accompanied by a spouse or an immediate male relative.

Women make up approximately 5 percent of the formal work force and own about 20 percent of the businesses, although they must deputize a male relative to represent them in financial transactions. Most employment opportunities for women are in education and health care, with fewer opportunities in business, philanthropy, banking, retail sales, and the media. Despite limited educational opportunities in many professional fields, some female citizens are able to study abroad and return to work in professions such as

architecture and journalism. Many foreign women work as domestic servants and nurses.

In 1997 the Government authorized women to work in a limited capacity in the hotel industry. Women who wish to enter nontraditional fields are subject to discrimination. Women may not accept jobs in rural areas if there are no adult male kin present with whom they may reside and who agree to take responsibility for them. Most workplaces in which women are present are segregated by gender. Frequently, contact with male supervisors or clients is allowed only by telephone or fax machine. In 1995 the Ministry of Commerce announced that women would no longer be issued business licenses for work in fields that might require them to supervise foreign workers, interact with male clients, or deal on a regular basis with government officials. However, in hospital settings and in the oil industry, women and men work together, and, in some instances, women supervise male employees.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), which is condemned widely by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is practiced among some foreign workers from East Africa and the Nile Valley. It is not always clear whether the procedure occurred in Saudi Arabia or the workers' home countries. There is no law specifically prohibiting FGM.

#### Children

The Government provides all children with free education and medical care. Children are not subject to the strict social segregation faced by women although they are segregated by sex in schools, beginning at the age of 7; however, schools were integrated through the fourth grade in some areas. By age

9, most children are segregated by sex in school. In more general social situations, boys are segregated at the age of 12 and girls at the onset of puberty.

It is difficult to gauge the prevalence of child abuse, since the Government currently keeps no national statistics on such cases. Although in general Saudi culture greatly prizes children, new studies by Saudi female doctors indicate that severe abuse and neglect of children appears to be more widespread than previously reported. One major hospital has begun a program to detect, report, and prevent child abuse. There are several widely publicized programs to uncover and address child abuse.

In general children play a minimal role in the workforce; however, there have been numerous reports that young boys of Saudi, Sudanese, and South Asian origin are used as jockeys in camel races.

Trafficking in children for forced begging persists (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.).

#### Persons with Disabilities

The provision of government social services increasingly has brought persons with disabilities into the public mainstream. The media carry features highlighting the accomplishments of persons with disabilities and sharply criticizing parents who neglect children with disabilities. The Government and private charitable organizations cooperate in education, employment, and other services for persons with disabilities. The law provides hiring quotas for persons with disabilities. There is no legislation that mandates public accessibility; however, newer commercial buildings often include such access, as do some newer government buildings.

Foreign criminal rings reportedly bought and imported children with disabilities for the purpose of forced begging (see Sections 6.c. and 6.f.).

Police generally transport mentally ill persons found wandering alone in public to their families or a hospital. However, there were reports that police pick up mentally ill persons for minor violations, detain them for a few weeks, and then release them, only to detain them again later for similar violations. Police officials recognize the problem, but they claim that according to Islam, family members should be taking care of such individuals.

#### Religious Minorities

Shi'a citizens are discriminated against in government and employment, especially in national security jobs. Shi'a are subjected to employment restrictions in the oil and petrochemical industries. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, some Shi'a who are suspected of subversion have been subjected periodically to surveillance and limitations on travel abroad. Since beginning the investigation of the 1996 bombing of a U.S. military installation, authorities have detained, interrogated, and confiscated the passports of a number of Shi'a Muslims, including Shi'a returning to the country following travel to Iran (see Sections 1.d. and 2.d.).

Additionally, the courts will not accept a member of the Shi'a faith as a witness in a trial (see Section 2.c.).

In April 2000, in the city of Najran, in the southwest region bordering Yemen, rioting by members of the Makarama Ismaili Shi'a eventually led to an attack by an armed group of Shi'a on a hotel that contained an office of the regional governor. Security forces responded, leading to extended gun battles between the two sides (see Section 2.c.).

It commonly is believed that the Government accepted Abdullah al-Khoneizi as new leader for the religious community in Qatif to replace his brother, Al-Khuti, after his death in April.

Under the law, children of Saudi fathers are considered Muslim, regardless of the country or the religious tradition in which they may have been raised. In some cases, children raised in other countries and in other religious traditions later taken by their Saudi fathers back to the country reportedly were coerced to conform to their fathers' interpretation of Islamic norms and practices. No such cases were reported during the year.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although racial discrimination is illegal, there is substantial societal prejudice based on ethnic or national origin. Foreign workers from Africa and Asia are subject to various forms of formal and informal discrimination and have the most difficulty in obtaining justice for their grievances. For example, pay scales for identical or similar labor or professional services are set by nationality such that two similarly qualified and experienced foreign nationals performing the same employment duties receive varied compensation based on their nationalities.

#### Section 6 Worker Rights

##### a. The Right of Association

The Government prohibits the establishment of labor unions; however, in May the Government announced that beginning in December, workers in companies employing more than 100 citizens could form "labor committees."

The labor committees are to consist of three to nine members, who would serve 3-year terms. The Government has no role in selecting the committee members; both management and workers will be represented. The committee may make recommendations to company management to improve work conditions, increase productivity, improve health and safety, and recommend training programs. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs may send a representative to attend committee meetings. A committee must provide a written report of its meetings to company management, which also will be transmitted to the Ministry. The Ministry may dissolve a labor committee if it violates regulations or threatens public security. Foreign workers may not form or become members of labor committees. No committees were formed by year's end.

Strikes are prohibited, but several work stoppages were staged in Jeddah in 2000 by foreign hospital, food processing, and construction workers who had not been paid. There were no strikes reported during the year.

In 1995 the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation suspended coverage for Saudi Arabia because of the Government's lack of compliance with internationally recognized worker rights standards.

##### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining is forbidden. Foreign workers comprise about two-thirds of the work force. There is no minimum wage; wages are set by employers and vary according to the type of work performed and the nationality of the worker (see Section 5).

There are no export processing zones.

##### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Government prohibits forced or compulsory labor pursuant to a royal decree that abolished slavery. Ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions 29 and 105, which prohibit forced labor, gives them the force of law. However, employers have significant control over the movements of foreign employees, which gives rise to situations that sometimes involve forced labor, especially in remote areas where workers are unable to leave their place of work.

Some sponsors prevented foreign workers from obtaining exit visas to pressure them to sign a new work contract or to drop claims against their employers for unpaid salary (see Section 2.d.). Additionally, some sponsors refused to provide foreign workers with a "letter of no objection" that would allow them to be employed by another sponsor. The authorities in some cases forced maids fleeing abusive employment circumstances to return to their employers.

There have been many reports of workers whose employers refused to pay several months, or even years, of accumulated salary or other promised benefits. Foreign workers with such grievances, except foreign domestic servants, have the right to complain before the labor courts, but few do so because of fear of deportation. The labor system is conducive to the exploitation of foreign workers because enforcement of work contracts is difficult and generally favors employers. Labor courts, while generally fair, may take many months to reach a final appellate ruling, during which time the employer may prevent the foreign laborer from leaving the country. An employer also may delay a case until a worker's funds are exhausted, and the worker is forced to return to his home country.

The law does not specifically prohibit forced or bonded labor by children. Nonetheless, with the rare exception of criminal begging rings, and the possible exceptions of family businesses, forced or bonded child labor does not occur (see Section 6.d.). In 1997 the Government attempted to eradicate forced child begging. Nevertheless, criminal rings consisting almost exclusively of foreigners have continued to buy and import South Asian and African children for the purpose of forced begging (see Section 6.f.).

#### d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 13 years, which may be waived by the Ministry of Labor with the consent of the juvenile's guardian. There is no minimum age for workers employed in family-oriented businesses or in other areas that are construed as extensions of the household, such as farming, herding, and domestic service.

Children under the age of 18 may not be employed in hazardous or harmful industries, such as mining or industries employing power-operated machinery. While there is no formal government entity responsible for enforcing the minimum age for employment of children, the Ministry of Justice has jurisdiction and has acted as plaintiff in the few cases that have arisen against alleged violators. However, in general children play a minimal role in the work force.

The law does not prohibit specifically forced or bonded labor by children, but it is not a problem, with the rare exception of forced child begging rings, and possibly family businesses (see Section 6.c.). Reportedly, young boys of Saudi, Sudanese, and South Asian origin are used as jockeys in camel races.

The Government has not ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legal minimum wage. Labor regulations establish a 48-hour workweek at regular pay and allow employers to require up to 12 additional hours of overtime at time-and-a-half pay. Labor law provides for a 24-hour rest period, normally on Fridays, although the employer may grant it on another day. The average wage generally provides a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The ILO has stated that the Government has not formulated legislation implementing the ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration and that regulations that segregate work places by sex, or limit vocational programs for women, violate ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation.

Workers risk losing employment if they remove themselves from hazardous work conditions.

Labor regulations require employers to protect most workers from job-related hazards and disease. However, foreign nationals report frequent failures to enforce health and safety standards. Farmers, herdsmen, domestic servants, and workers in family-operated businesses are not covered by these regulations.

Some foreign nationals who have been recruited abroad have claimed that after their arrival in the country, they were presented with work contracts that specified lower wages and fewer benefits than originally promised. Other foreign workers reportedly have signed contracts in their home countries and later were pressured to sign less favorable contracts upon arrival. Some employees report that at the end of their contract service, their employers refuse to grant permission to allow them to return home. Foreign employees involved



in disputes with their employers may find their freedom of movement restricted (see Section 2.d.). The labor laws, including those designed to limit working hours and regulate working conditions, do not apply to foreign domestic servants, and such domestic servants may not seek the protection of the labor courts. There were credible reports that female domestic servants sometimes were forced to work 16 to 20 hours per day 7 days per week. There were numerous confirmed reports of maids fleeing employers and seeking refuge in their embassies (see Section 5). Foreign embassies continued to receive reports of employers abusing domestic servants. Such abuse included withholding of food, beatings and other physical abuse, and rape (see Section 5). The Government's figures for 1999 stated that 7,000 maids fled their place of employment, and the actual number presumably was higher. During the year, the media reported additional stories of such incidents. The authorities in some cases forced such maids to return to their places of employment.

The ongoing campaign to remove illegal immigrants from the country has done little to Saudiize the economy because illegal immigrants largely work in low-income positions, which most citizens consider unsuitable. The Government is carrying out the campaign by widely publicizing its enforcement of existing laws against illegal immigrants and citizens employing or sponsoring illegal immigrants. In addition to deportation for illegal workers and jail terms and fines for Saudis hiring illegal workers, the Government announced in 1998 that houses rented to illegal aliens would be ordered closed.

In 1997 the Government offered an amnesty to allow illegal immigrants and their employers or sponsors to avoid the possibility of prosecution by voluntarily seeking expeditious repatriation. As of September 1999, as many as 1.1 million persons departed the country under terms of the amnesty or were deported for violating residence and labor laws. During this process, the Government bowed to domestic pressure and granted grace periods and exemptions to certain categories of illegal immigrants (such as servants, drivers, and shepherds), thereby allowing many illegal immigrants to legalize their status without leaving the country.

The effect of the expeditious repatriation of some illegal immigrants and the legalization of others has been to improve overall working conditions for legally employed foreigners. Illegal immigrants generally are willing to accept lower salaries and fewer benefits than legally employed immigrants. The departure or legalization of illegal workers reduced the competition for certain jobs and, thereby, reduced the incentive for legal immigrants to accept lower wages and fewer benefits as a means of competing with illegal immigrants. Furthermore, their departure or legalization removed a large portion of the class of workers most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of their illegal status.

#### f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit specifically trafficking in persons; however, the law prohibits slavery and the smuggling of persons into the country.

Criminal rings consisting almost exclusively of foreigners have bought and imported South Asian children, including children with disabilities, and women for the purpose of organized begging, particularly in the vicinity of the Grand Mosque in Mecca during Islamic holidays.

There were unconfirmed reports that women were trafficked into the country to work as prostitutes.

Among the millions of foreign workers in the country, some persons, particularly domestic workers, are defrauded by employment agencies or exploited by employers; some workers overstay their contracts and are exploited as they have few legal protections. Many foreign domestic servants flee work situations that include forced confinement, beating and other physical abuse, withholding of food, and rape. The authorities often forced domestic servants to return to their places of employment (see Sections 5 and 6.c.). The Government states that it does not believe that trafficking in persons is a problem because foreign workers come to the country voluntarily. It primarily focused on identifying and deporting illegal workers, and did not devote significant effort or resources to antitrafficking activity.