



Maldives

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2000](#)

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The Republic of Maldives, which comprises 1,190 islands (less than 200 of which are inhabited), with a population of approximately 270,000, has a parliamentary form of government with a very strong executive. The President appoints the Cabinet, members of the judiciary, and one-sixth of the Parliament. The President derives additional influence from his constitutional role as the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets" of Islam. Political parties are officially discouraged, and candidates for the unicameral legislature, the People's Majlis, run as individuals. The Majlis selects a single presidential nominee who is approved or rejected in a national referendum. President Gayoom was approved for a fifth 5-year term in October 1998. The Majlis must approve all legislation and is empowered to enact legislation without presidential approval. Civil law is subordinate to Islamic law, but civil law generally is applied in criminal and civil cases. The judiciary is subject to executive influence.

The National Security Service (NSS) performs its duties under effective civilian control. The NSS includes the armed forces and police, and its members serve in both police and military capacities during their careers. The police division investigates crimes, collects intelligence, makes arrests, and enforces house arrest.

Fishing, small-scale agriculture, and tourism provide employment for over one-half of the work force. Tourism accounts for over one-quarter of government revenues and roughly 40 percent of foreign exchange receipts. Manufacturing accounts for 6 percent of gross domestic product.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens in a number of areas; however, its record was poor in some other areas, particularly with regard to political and religious freedoms. The President's power to appoint a significant portion of the Parliament constrains citizens' ability to change their government. The Government limits freedom of assembly and association. There are significant restrictions on the freedom of religion; in the past, the Government has detained arbitrarily and expelled foreigners for proselytizing and detained citizens who converted. Although the Government has undertaken a number of programs addressing women's issues, women face a variety of legal and social disadvantages. Some of these disadvantages are linked to the Government's observance of Shari'a (Islamic law) and other Islamic customs. The Government also restricts worker rights. Nonetheless, in recent years there has been some progress in certain areas. The Majlis has assumed a more active political role in recent years, and its members routinely differ with government policy on many issues. The courts were reorganized in 1997, and a new Constitution, which provides for the protection of certain fundamental rights, went into effect at the beginning of 1998. In addition procedural rules limiting indefinite police detention were instituted in 1998, and the presidential nominating process involved competition among candidates for the first time in 1998. A continued easing of government restrictions and the Press Council's balanced handling of issues related to journalistic standards allowed a greater diversity of views in the media, although most media outlets are controlled by persons friendly to the Government or by the Government itself.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no reports of political or other extrajudicial killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

There were no reports of beatings or other mistreatment of persons in police custody during the year; however, convicted criminals may be flogged under judicial supervision when this punishment is prescribed by Islamic law as interpreted in the country (i.e., only when the criminal confesses to the crime and only for the offenses of marital infidelity and alcohol abuse). There were no public floggings during the year. In 1998 there were two private floggings (carried out without public spectators) due to the confession of an extramarital affair. The man was subsequently banished, and the woman was placed under house arrest for 12 months. Punishments usually are confined to fines, compensatory payment, house arrest, imprisonment, or banishment to a remote atoll. The Government generally permits those who are banished to receive visits by family members.

The country's prison was destroyed by fire in 1999. Following the fire, the Government transferred prisoners to a temporary facility on Maafooshi, which houses a fluctuating population of approximately 300 inmates (including 20 women who are housed in a separate compound). Children also are housed in separate center for juveniles. Prison conditions at the current facility, including food and housing, generally are adequate. Prisoners are allowed to work in prison and given the opportunity for regular exercise and recreation. Spouses are allowed privacy during visits with incarcerated partners. However, Amnesty International (AI) reported that in 1998, in the since-destroyed prison, prisoners were mistreated. The Government is surveying prison facilities in other countries to incorporate international standards and improvements in the reconstruction of the prison, and it has requested training for prison guards.

The Government has permitted prison visits by foreign diplomats. The issue of visits by human rights groups is not known to have arisen.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The 1997 Constitution states that no person shall be arrested or detained for more than 24 hours without being informed of the grounds for arrest or detention; however, in 1998 authorities arbitrarily detained foreign Christians for allegedly proselytizing and detained citizens who supposedly converted (see Section 2.c.). Police initiate investigations based on suspicion of criminal activity or in response to written complaints from citizens, police officers, or government officials. They are not required to obtain warrants for arrests. Based on the results of police investigations, the Attorney General refers cases to the appropriate court. The authorities generally keep the details of a case confidential until they are confident that the charges are likely to be upheld. In the past, persons have been held for long periods without charge.

Depending upon the charges, a suspect may remain free, be detained in prison, or placed under house arrest for 15 days during investigations. The President may extend pretrial detention for an additional 30 days, but in most cases the suspect is released if not brought to trial within 15 days. Those who are released pending trial may not leave a specific atoll. The law providing for the indefinite detention of individuals under investigation was revised substantially in 1998. Within 24 hours of an arrest, an individual must be told of the grounds for the arrest. An individual can then be held for 7 days. If no legal proceedings have been initiated within 7 days, the case is referred to an anonymous three-member civilian commission appointed by the President that can authorize an additional 15 days' detention. After that time, if legal proceedings still have not been initiated, a judge must sanction the continued detention on a monthly basis. There is no right to legal counsel during police interrogation. There is no provision for bail.

The Government may prohibit access to a telephone and nonfamily visits to those under house arrest. While there have been no reported cases of incommunicado detention in recent years, the law does not provide safeguards against this abuse.

There were no reports of the external exile of citizens, although 24 foreigners suspected of proselytization were banished for life in 1998 (see Section 2.c.). The Government sometimes banishes convicted criminals to inhabited atolls away from their home communities; a man who confessed to an extramarital affair in April 1998 was banished for 1 year. AI reported that in 1999, 10 persons from Faafu Magoodhoo were banished, reportedly without trial, for trying to organize a demonstration against the local atoll chief.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The 1997 Constitution does not provide for an independent judiciary, and the judiciary is subject to executive

influence. In addition to his authority to review High Court decisions, the President influences the judiciary through his power to appoint and dismiss judges, all of whom serve at his pleasure and are not subject to confirmation by the Majlis. The President nevertheless has removed only two judges since 1987. Both dismissals followed the recommendation of the Justice Ministry that found the judges' professional qualifications to be below standard. The President may also grant pardons and amnesties.

In September 1997, the court system, under the Ministry of Justice, was reorganized and court administration has improved. There are three courts: One for civil matters; one for criminal cases; and one for family and juvenile issues. On the recommendation of the Ministry of Justice, the President appoints a principal judge for each court. There is also a High Court on Male, which is independent of the Justice Ministry and which handles a wide range of cases, including politically sensitive ones. The High Court also acts as court of appeals. Under a 1995 presidential decree, High Court rulings can be reviewed by a five-member advisory council appointed by the President. The President also has authority to affirm judgments of the High Court, to order a second hearing, or to overturn the Court's decision. In addition to the Male courts, there are 204 general courts on the islands.

There are no jury trials. Most trials are public and are conducted by judges and magistrates trained in Islamic, civil, and criminal law. Magistrates usually adjudicate cases on outer islands, but when more complex legal questions are involved, the Justice Ministry will send more experienced judges to handle the case.

The Constitution provides that an accused person be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and that an accused person has the right to defend himself "in accordance with Shari'a" (Islamic law). During a trial, the accused also may call witnesses, and be assisted by a lawyer. Courts do not provide lawyers to indigent defendants. Judges question the concerned parties and attempt to establish the facts of a case.

Civil law is subordinate to Shari'a, which is applied in situations not covered by civil law as well as in certain acts such as divorce and adultery. Courts adjudicating matrimonial and criminal cases generally do not allow legal counsel in court because, according to a local interpretation of Shari'a, all answers and submissions should come directly from the parties involved. However, the High Court allows legal counsel in all cases, including those in which the right to counsel was denied in the lower court. Under the country's Islamic practice, the testimony of two women is required to equal that of one man in matters involving Shari'a, such as adultery, finance, and inheritance. In other cases, the testimony of men and women are equal.

There were no confirmed reports of political prisoners.

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

The 1997 Constitution prohibits security officials from opening or reading letters, telegrams, and wireless messages or monitoring telephone conversations, "except as expressly provided by law." The NSS may open the mail of private citizens and monitor telephone conversations if authorized in the course of a criminal investigation.

Although the 1997 Constitution provides residential premises and dwellings should be inviolable, there is no legal requirement for search or arrest warrants. The Attorney General or a commanding officer of the police must approve the search of private residences.

The Government is attempting to concentrate the population on the larger islands by providing government services and concentrating job creation efforts there. The smaller islands are to be provided with only "basic services." However, no one is being coerced to move to the larger islands under this program.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law prohibits public statements that are contrary to Islam, threaten the public order, or are libelous.

The Penal Code prohibits inciting citizens against the Government. However, a 1990 amendment to the Penal Code decriminalized "any true account of any act of commission or omission past or present by the Government in a lawfully registered newspaper or magazine, so as to reveal dissatisfaction or to effect its reform."

Regulations that make publishers responsible for the content of the material they published remain in effect but did not result in any legal actions during the year.

Most major media outlets are owned either by the Government or its sympathizers. Nonetheless these sympathetic outlets do on occasion strongly criticize the Government.

The Press Council is composed of lawyers, private and government media representatives, and other government officials. The Council reviews charges of journalist misconduct (advising the Ministry of Information, Arts, and Culture on measures to be taken against reporters, when appropriate) and promotes professional standards within the media (recommending reforms and making suggestions for improvement). Private journalists have said that they are satisfied with the Council's objectivity and performance. The Government agreed that private journalists, rather than the Government, should take responsibility for preparation of a journalistic code of ethics. Individual newspapers and journals established their own ethical guidelines in many cases.

There were no reports of government censorship of the electronic media, nor were there closures of any publications or reports of intimidation of journalists. Television news and public affairs programming routinely discussed topics of current concern and freely criticized government performance. Regular press conferences with government ministers instituted in 1995 continued. Journalists are more self-confident than in the past; self-censorship appears to have diminished, although it remains a problem. Since it is not clear when criticism violates the law prohibiting public statements that are contrary to Islam, threaten the public order, or are libelous, journalists and publishers continue to watch what they say, particularly on political topics, to avoid entanglement with the Government.

Pornography and material otherwise deemed objectionable to Islamic values may be banned. In 1999 the Government banned the animated movie "The Prince of Egypt," on the grounds that it was offensive to Islam (see Section 2.c.).

In 1997 the Government banned a book written by an elderly close relative of the President for its derogatory comments about a deceased previous president, after the relatives of the latter complained.

Although 88 newspapers and periodicals are registered with the Government, only about 60 regularly publish. Aafathis, a morning daily, is often critical of government policy. Another daily, Miadhu, began publishing in 1996, and Haveeru is the evening daily. Both Miadhu's and Haveeru's publishers are progovernment.

The Government owns and operates the only television and radio station. It does not interfere with foreign broadcasts or with the sale of satellite receivers. Reports drawn from foreign newscasts are aired on the Government television station.

Cable News Network (CNN) is shown, uncensored, daily on local television. In 1996 a company began providing Internet service. The Government enacted no regulations governing Internet access but blocks distribution of pornographic material via the Internet.

There are no legal prohibitions on the import of foreign publications except for those containing pornography or material otherwise deemed objectionable to Islamic values. No seizures of foreign publications were reported during the year.

There are no reported restrictions on academic freedom. Some teachers reportedly are vocal in their criticism of the Government.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The 1997 Constitution provides for freedom of assembly "peaceably and in a manner that does not contravene the law;" however, the Government imposes limits on this right in practice. The Home Ministry permits public political meetings during electoral campaigns but limits them to small gatherings on private premises.

The Government registers clubs and other private associations if they do not contravene Islamic or civil law; however, the Government imposes some limits on freedom of association. While not forbidden by law, the President officially discourages political parties on the grounds that they are inappropriate to the homogeneous nature of society. However, many Majlis members were active and outspoken critics of the Government and have stimulated closer parliamentary examination of government policy.

c. Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion, and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. The practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited by law. However, foreign residents are allowed to practice their religion if they do so privately. On July 4, the commemoration of the day the country embraced Islam, President Gayoom stated that no other religion should be allowed in the country, and the Home Affairs Ministry announced special programs to safeguard and strengthen religious unity. The President, the members of the People's Majlis, and cabinet members must be Muslims.

There are no places of worship for adherents of other religions. The Government prohibits the importation of icons and religious statues, but it generally permits the importation of individual religious literature, such as Bibles, for personal use. It also prohibits non-Muslim clergy and missionaries from proselytizing and conducting public worship services. Conversion of a Muslim to another faith is a violation of Shari'a and may result in a loss of the convert's citizenship.

Islamic instruction is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funds the salaries of religious instructors. The Government has established a Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs to provide guidance on religious matters. The Government also has set standards for individuals who conduct Friday services at mosques to ensure adequate theological qualifications.

In January 1999, the Government banned the animated movie "The Prince of Egypt" on the ground that "its portrayal of the Prophet Moses was offensive to Islam, because all prophets and messengers of God are not to be animated or portrayed in any way" (see Section 2.a.). During June 1998, the authorities detained 24 foreigners (including children) for alleged Christian proselytization without explaining the charges against them and then expelled them from the country for life. Following the expulsion of the foreigners, police took two female citizens into custody for allegedly converting to Christianity. As many as a dozen other citizens were questioned. The women were detained from mid-June to late September 1998, during which time they received extensive counseling. No formal charges were ever brought against them, and they were released to their families. In April 1998, the Government asked the Seychelles Government to stop the radio broadcast of Christian programming in the local language, Dhivehi, to the country. However, the broadcasts continued throughout the year.

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

Citizens are free to travel at home and abroad, to emigrate, and to return. Because of overcrowding, the Government discourages migration into the capital island of Male or its surrounding atoll. Foreign workers are often kept at their worksites. Their ability to travel freely is restricted, and they are not allowed to mingle with the local population on the islands. The Government has not formulated a policy regarding refugees, asylees, or first asylum. The issue of the provision of first asylum did not arise during the year. There were no reports of forced expulsion of those having a valid claim to refugee status.

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

Citizens' ability to change their government is constrained, and the strong executive exerts significant influence over both the legislature and the judiciary. Under the 1997 Constitution, the Majlis chooses a single presidential nominee, who must be a Sunni Muslim male, from a list of self-announced candidates for the nomination. Would-be nominees for President are not permitted to campaign for the nomination. The nominee is then confirmed or rejected by secret ballot in a nationwide referendum. From a field of five candidates, President Gayoom was nominated by the Majlis and was confirmed for a fifth 5-year term in October 1998. Observers from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation found the referendum to be free and fair.

The elected members of the Majlis, who must be Muslims, serve 5-year terms. All citizens over 21 years of age may vote. Of the body's 50 members, 42 are elected--2 from each of the 20 inhabited atolls and 2 from Male--and the President appoints 8 members. Individuals or groups are free to approach members of the Majlis with grievances or opinions on proposed legislation, and any member may introduce legislation. There are no political parties, which are officially discouraged.

The Office of the President is the most powerful political institution. The 1997 Constitution gives Islamic law preeminence over civil law and designates the President as the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets" of Islam. The President's authority to appoint one-sixth of the Majlis members, which is one-third of the total needed for nominating the President, provides the President with a power base and strong political leverage.

The President currently also is commander in chief of the armed forces, the Minister of Defense and National Security, the Minister of Finance and Treasury, and the Governor of the Maldivian Monetary Authority.

Relations between the Government and the Majlis have been constructive. The Government may introduce legislation but may not enact a bill into law without the Majlis' approval. However, the Majlis may enact legislation into law without presidential assent if the President fails to act on the proposal within 30 days or if a bill is repassed with a two-thirds majority. In recent years, the Majlis has become increasingly independent, challenging government policies and rejecting government-proposed legislation.

In 1993 the Majlis introduced a question period during which members may question government ministers about public policy. Debate on the floor has since become increasingly sharp and more open. Elections to the People's Majlis were held in November 1999. According to observers from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the elections were generally free and fair. Several losing candidates entered court challenges, but the courts upheld the election results.

Women are not eligible to become president but may hold other government posts. For reasons of tradition and culture, few women seek or are selected for public office, and women are underrepresented in government and politics. In order to increase participation by women in the political process, the Government continued a political awareness campaign in the atolls. In the November 1999 elections, six women ran for seats and two were elected. During the 1999 elections, observers from the SAARC noted that women participated equally in the electoral process. Following the elections, President Gayoom appointed an additional three women to the Majlis.

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

Although not prohibited, there are no active local human rights groups. The Government has been responsive to at least one foreign government's interest in examining human rights issues. The Government also facilitated visits of teams of SAARC election observers in 1994, 1998, and 1999.

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

The 1997 Constitution declares all citizens equal before the law, but there is no specific provision to prohibit discrimination based on these factors. Women have traditionally been disadvantaged, particularly in terms of education and the application of Islamic law to matters such as divorce, inheritance, and testimony in legal proceedings.

Women

Women's rights advocates agree that wife beating and other forms of violence are not widespread. There are no firm data on the extent of violence against women because of the value attached to privacy in this conservative society. In 1997 the Government commissioned a study by a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) on domestic violence, but it was never completed. Police officials report that they receive few complaints of assaults against women. Rape and other violent crimes against women are extremely rare. None were reported or prosecuted during the year. Under Shari'a the penalty would be flogging, banishment, or imprisonment for up to 5 years.

Women traditionally have played a subordinate role in society, although they now participate in public life in growing numbers and gradually are participating at higher levels. Women constitute 38 percent of government employees, and about 10 percent of uniformed NSS personnel. Well-educated women maintain that cultural norms, not the law, inhibit women's education and career choices. In many instances, education for girls is curtailed after the seventh grade, largely because parents do not allow girls to leave their home island for an island having a secondary school. Nonetheless, women enjoy a higher literacy rate (98 percent) than men (96 percent). Due largely to orthodox Islamic training, there is a strong strain of conservative sentiment--especially among small businessmen and residents of the outer islands--that opposes an active role for women outside the home. However, the Government continued legal literacy programs to make women aware of their legal rights and workshops on gender and political awareness in the outer atolls. The Government also has built 10 of 15 planned women's centers in the atolls, which are facilities where family health workers can provide medical services. The centers also provide libraries and space for meetings and other activities with a focus of the development of women.

Under Islamic practice, husbands may divorce their wives more easily than vice versa, absent any mutual

agreement to divorce. Islamic law also governs intestate inheritance, granting male heirs twice the share of female heirs. A woman's testimony is equal to only one-half of that of a man in matters involving adultery, finance, and inheritance (see Section 1.e.). Women who work for wages receive pay equal to that of men in the same positions.

In October the Cabinet replaced the National Women's Council with a Gender Equality Council to serve as an advisory body to the Government to help strengthen the role of women in society and to help ensure equal participation by women in the country's development. Also during the year, the Government, with the assistance of the European Union and the U.N. Population Fund, expanded a program of small loans to women for development projects to additional islands.

Children

The Government does not have a program of compulsory education, but it provides universal access to free primary education. The percentage of school-age children actually in school was as follows: (grades 1 to 5) 99.26 percent, (grades 6 to 7) 96.2 percent, and grades (8 to 10) 51.09 percent. Of the students enrolled, 49 percent are female and 51 percent are male. The Government is committed to the protection of children's rights and welfare. The Government is working with UNICEF to implement the rights provided for in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government established a National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in 1992. Government policy provides for equal access to educational and health programs for both male and female children. Laws protecting children's rights apply with equal force to children of either sex.

Children's rights are incorporated into law, which specifically protects them from both physical and psychological abuse, including abuse at the hands of teachers or parents. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare has the authority to enforce this law, takes its responsibility seriously, and has received strong popular support for its efforts. The Ministry noted an increase in reports of child abuse during the first part of the year with 138 reports involving 317 children, including 10 reports of sexual abuse. Penalties could be banishment or imprisonment for up to 3 years. It is not known if there were any prosecutions during the year. The Government is reviewing the law to see if improvements and additional protections are necessary. There is no reported societal pattern of abuse directed against children.

People with Disabilities

There is no law that specifically addresses the rights of the physically or mentally disabled. In 1999 the Government initiated a survey and identified 30,000 persons in the country as disabled (primarily hearing and sight impaired). The Government has established programs and provided services for the disabled.

Persons with disabilities usually are cared for by their families. When such care is unavailable, persons with disabilities are kept in the Institute for Needy People, which also assists elderly persons. The Government provides free medication for all mentally ill persons in the islands, and mobile teams regularly visit mentally ill patients. In 1999 the Government enacted a new building code, which mandated that all new government buildings and jetties must be accessible to disabled persons. The CARE Society, an NGO that assists the disabled, with funding from UNICEF and the Australian Government, began programs to train disabled persons in life and work skills.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

While the Government does not expressly prohibit unions, it recognizes neither the right to form them nor the right to strike. There were no reports of efforts to form unions or of strikes during the year. However, small groups of similarly employed workers with mutual interests have formed associations, which include employers as well as employees. These associations may address a variety of issues, including workers' rights.

The work force consists of between 70,000 and 75,000 persons, including expatriate labor and seasonal and part-time workers. About 20 percent of the workforce are employed in fishing. The approximately 27,000 foreigners who work in the country makeup almost half of the workers in the formal sector; most are employed in tourist hotels, the retail and wholesale trade, factories, or on construction projects. The Government employs approximately 22,000 persons, both permanent and temporary. It estimates that the manufacturing sector employs about 15 percent of the labor force and tourism another 10 percent.

Although workers can affiliate with international labor federations, this generally has not been the case. However, it is believed some seamen have joined such federations.

In 1995 the U.S. Government suspended Maldives' eligibility for tariff preferences under the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences because the Government failed to take steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights to Maldivian workers.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law neither prohibits nor protects workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively. Wages in the private sector are set by contract between employers and employees and are usually based on the rates for similar work in the public sector. There are no laws specifically prohibiting antiunion discrimination by employers against union members or organizers. The Government has exerted pressure in the past to discourage seamen from joining seamen's unions as a means to secure higher wages. There have been no reported complaints alleging such discrimination or claiming government interference with workers' attempts to join unions in the past 5 years.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

Forced or compulsory labor is not prohibited by law. However, there were no reports that it occurred. The Government does not specifically prohibit forced and bonded labor by children, but such practices are not known to occur.

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

There is no compulsory education law, but more than 98 percent of school-age children to grade 7 are enrolled in school. A 1992 law bars children under 14 years of age from "places of waged work and from work that is not suitable for that child's age, health, or physical ability or that might obstruct the education or adversely affect the mentality or behavior of the child." An earlier law prohibits government employment of children under the age of 16. There are no reports of children being employed in the small industrial sector, although children work in family fishing, agricultural, and commercial activities. The hours of work of young workers are not limited specifically by statute. The Government does not prohibit specifically forced and bonded labor by children, but such practices are not known to occur (see Section 6.c.). A Unit for Children's Rights in the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare is responsible for monitoring compliance with the child labor regulations. It relies upon complaints filed with it rather than initiating its own inspections to ensure compliance. As a result, oversight is incomplete.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

In 1994 the Government promulgated its first set of regulations for employer-employee relations. The regulations specify the terms that must be incorporated into employment contracts and address such issues as training, work hours, safety, remuneration, leave, fines, termination, etc. There is no national minimum wage for the private sector, although the Government has established wage floors for certain kinds of work. Given the severe shortage of labor, employers must offer competitive pay and conditions to attract skilled workers.

There are no statutory provisions for hours of work, but the regulations require that a work contract specify the normal work and overtime hours on a weekly or monthly basis. In the public sector, a 7-hour day and a 5-day workweek have been established through administrative circulars from the President's office. Overtime pay in the public sector was instituted in 1990. Employees are authorized 20 days of annual leave, 30 days of medical leave, maternity leave of 60 days, and special annual leave of 10 days for extraordinary circumstances. There are no laws governing health and safety conditions. However, there are regulatory requirements that employers provide a safe working environment and ensure the observance of safety measures. It is unclear whether workers can remove themselves from unsafe working conditions without risking the loss of their jobs. The Ministry of Trade, Industries, and Labour set up a Labour Dispute Settlement Unit in 1998 to resolve wage and labor disputes and to visit worksites and enforce labor regulations.

In 1997 the Government for the first time worked closely with the International Labor Organization to address a number of labor issues. Although two draft labor laws were prepared in 1998: One to address issues such as the right of association, the right to organize, and acceptable work conditions related to health, environment, employer-employee relations, leave, and termination, and the other to deal with social security, pensions, and

provident funds, these laws have not been enabled.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not address the problem of trafficking in persons; however, the Attorney General's Office believes that should a case arise it could be addressed under Shari'a. There were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, within, or through the country.

[End.]