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U.S. Department of State

Chad Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, February 26, 1999.

CHAD

Chad is a centralized republic dominated by a strong presidency. President Idriss Deby, leader of the Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS), has ruled since taking power in a 1990 rebellion. The Sovereign National Conference (CNS) confirmed Deby in 1993 as Chief of State and he was elected President in mid-1996 under a constitution adopted in a referendum earlier that year. According to widespread credible reports, fraud, vote-rigging, and local irregularities marred both the 1996 presidential election, which Deby won, and the 1997 legislative elections in which members of the MPS won 65 of 125 seats in the National Assembly. The Government remained unable to exert effective control over some parts of the country. In May a major rebel group based in the southern region, the Armed Forces for the Federal Republic/Victims of Aggression (FARF/VA), reached a peace agreement with the Government, following the disappearance and presumed death of FARF/VA leader Laokein Barde Frisson. However, a rebellion led by members of the Toubou ethnic group, including former Defense Minister Youssouf Togoimi, broke out in the northwest in October. The judicial system continued to be ineffective, overburdened, and subject to outside interference, including by the executive branch.

The army, gendarmes, police, National and Nomadic Guard (GNNT), and intelligence services are responsible for internal security. Officers from President Deby's Zaghawa ethnic group dominate the Rapid Intervention Force (FIR), and the National Security Agency (ANS), a counterintelligence organization that has acted as an internal political police force. The security forces continued to commit serious human rights abuses.

The economy is mainly based on subsistence agriculture, herding, and fishing. Annual per capita income

is estimated at \$225. The country has little industry; its chief export is cotton. Among the impediments to economic growth are corruption, numerous state-owned monopolies, and a bloated civil service. Although the country has substantial oil reserves, the Government relies heavily on assistance from external donors and international financial institutions.

The Government's human rights record continued to be characterized by serious problems in many areas. The security forces were responsible for the extrajudicial killing of many civilians during operations in the south of the country. Members of the security forces also tortured, beat, and otherwise abused citizens. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Security forces continued to use arbitrary arrest and detention. The Government did not prosecute or punish members of the security forces who committed human rights abuses. The Government also did not prosecute security personnel accused in previous years of killings, rape, torture, arbitrary arrest, and detention. Lengthy pretrial detention remained a problem. The judiciary remained subject to executive interference and was unable to provide citizens with prompt and trials. Trials were sometimes not fair: the Government denied an opposition party leader access to counsel during a criminal trial. Security forces used illegal searches and wiretaps and monitored the contents of private mail. The Government arbitrarily conscripted young men into the army without informing their families. The Government increasingly restricted freedom of speech and of the press, prosecuting an opposition party leader and journalists on criminal libel charges and convicting journalists of criminal libel for the first time. The Government at times restricted freedom of assembly and association. There were some limits on freedom of movement. The Government limited citizens' right to choose their government. The Government interfered with the operations of human rights groups. Societal discrimination against women remained common; violence against women also is believed to be common. Female genital mutilation (FGM) remained widespread. Ethnic and regional discrimination remained widespread; northerners, and in particular members of President Deby's Zaghawa ethnic minority, continued to dominate key positions in the public sector. Serious armed conflict among ethnic and regional groups continued.

FARF/VA rebels reportedly committed serious abuses, including killings of civilians, before signing a peace accord with the Government in May.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

Reports of officially sanctioned extrajudicial killings of suspected criminals by police and gendarmes continued, although they were fewer than in the previous year.

Police and security forces repeatedly used deadly force against unarmed persons who were perceived to support rebel groups in and around the southern towns of Sarh in Moyen-Chari prefecture and Moundou in Western Logone prefecture. In March security forces killed a number of unarmed or disarmed persons while conducting a major counterinsurgency operation, ostensibly directed against the Popular Democratic Front rebel group (see Section 1.b.), in the prefecture of Moyen-Chari. In the same month, security forces expanded their campaigns in eastern and western Logone prefectures against FARF/VA rebels, sympathizers, and highway bandits. Amnesty International reported that security forces summarily executed approximately 100 persons in this campaign. Security forces repeatedly executed unarmed persons, including village chiefs, in reprisal for rebel operations near their villages.

On March 11, in the town of Gore in Western Logone prefecture, security forces shot and killed 15

village chiefs whom they had lured there on the pretext of collecting tax receipts. Security forces also reportedly killed Gore's canton chief Mbainabeye Beye and a 12-year-old child during the same operation.

As in previous years, the Government took no action to prosecute members of the security forces who committed extrajudicial killings. The Government continued to grant amnesty to rebels who made peace with it.

The FARF also is believed to have targeted civilians in response to the government offensive in March. However, reports of such attacks ceased after the FARF/VA signed a peace accord with the Government in May. In August the National Assembly passed a law giving amnesty to FARF/VA mem