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U.S. Department of State

Ghana Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

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

GHANA

Ghana is a constitutional republic dominated by a strong presidency. Flight Lieutenant (ret.) Jerry John Rawlings has ruled the country for 17 years. He became the first President of the Fourth Republic following controversial elections in 1992. This ended 11 years of authoritarian rule under Rawlings and his Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), which had seized power from an elected government in 1981. The opposition fully contested the 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections, which were described as peaceful, free, and transparent by domestic and international observers. President Rawlings was reelected with 57 percent of the popular vote. Rawlings' National Democratic Congress (NDC) party won 133 of the Parliament's 200 seats, just short of the two-thirds majority required to amend the Constitution. The Constitution calls for a system of checks and balances, with an executive branch headed by the President, a unicameral parliament, an independent judiciary, and several autonomous commissions, such as the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). In reality this system of checks and balances is circumscribed by a parliament dominated by the President's party, a hesitant judicial service, and a system-wide lack of resources that hobbles the effectiveness of all three branches. The presence of a significant number of opposition parliamentarians has led to increased scrutiny of the Government's activities. In June in peaceful elections voters elected new district assembly representatives and, for the first time, unit committee members to complete the local government structure outlined in the Constitution. The judiciary appears subject to executive influence on occasion and lacks adequate resources.

Several security organizations report to various government departments. The police, under the jurisdiction of an eight-member Police Council, are responsible for maintaining law and order. A

separate department, the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), handles cases considered critical to state security and answers directly to the executive branch. Although the security apparatus is controlled by and responsive to the Government, monitoring, supervision, and education of the police in particular remain poor. Police committed some serious human rights abuses.

The economy suffered considerably in 1998 due in part to a prolonged power supply problem. A drought over the past few years culminated in record low water levels in the Volta Lake, diminishing the electricity generated by the Akosombo dam--the main power source. The economy remains dependent on agriculture, with about 41 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 60 percent of employment derived from this sector. Gold, cocoa, and timber are the traditional sources of export earnings, although cocoa production declined due to inadequate rainfall and mining continued to slow due to the fall in gold prices. Tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner. Service sector growth outpaced both agriculture and industry. Overall the economy grew at a rate of 4.6 percent, down from 5.1 percent in 1997. Inflation fell from 20.8 percent in 1997 to 15 percent. Per capita GDP increased to approximately \$407.

The Government attempted to improve human rights practices, but problems remain in several areas. Police use of excessive force resulted in a number of extrajudicial killings as well as injuries. There were continued credible reports that members of the police beat prisoners and