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U.S. Department of State

Iran Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

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IRAN*

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 after a populist revolution toppled the Pahlavi monarchy. The Government is dominated by Shi'a Muslim clergy. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution and functions as the Chief of State and the Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Seyed Mohammad Khatami was elected to a 4-year term as President in a popular vote in February 1997. A popularly-elected 270-seat unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly, or Majles, develops and passes legislation. All legislation passed by the Majles is reviewed for adherence to Islamic and constitutional principles by a Council of Guardians, which consists of six clerical members, who are appointed by the Supreme Leader, and six lay jurists, who are appointed by the head of the judiciary and approved by the Majles. Candidates for most elective offices are screened carefully for their ideological beliefs by the regime. The Government seeks to conform public policy to its political and socio-religious values, in particular the tenets of Shi'a Islam, but there are serious factional differences within the leadership. The judiciary is subject to government and religious influence.

Several agencies share responsibility for internal security, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Ministry of Interior, and the Revolutionary Guards, a military force established after the revolution. Paramilitary volunteer forces known as Basijis, and gangs of street thugs, known as the Ansar-e Hezbollah (Helpers of the Party of God), who often are often aligned with specific members of the clergy, act as vigilantes. Both regular and paramilitary security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

Iran has a mixed economy. The Government owns the petroleum, banking, insurance, power, and most large-scale manufacturing industries, and controls access to foreign exchange. Large charitable foundations called bonyads, most with strong connections to the Government, control properties and businesses that were expropriated from the former Shah and figures associated with his regime. The bonyads exercise considerable influence in the economy, but do not account publicly for revenue and pay no taxes. Basic foodstuffs and energy costs are subsidized heavily by the Government. Oil exports account for nearly 80 percent of foreign exchange earnings. Economic performance is affected adversely by government mismanagement and corruption, and was made worse during the year by the low price of oil. Unemployment in 1998 was estimated to be at least 25 percent, and inflation was an estimated 25 percent.

The Government's human rights record remained poor; despite some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remain. The Government restricts citizens' right to change their government. Systematic abuses included extrajudicial killings and summary executions; disappearances; widespread use of torture and other degrading treatment; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; lack of due process; unfair trials; infringement on citizens' privacy; and restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement. The Government manipulates the electoral system and represses political dissidents. Increased debate in the country over President Khatami's expression of interest in promoting greater attention to the rule of law and the development of civil society led to factional struggle and occasionally to violent tactics by hard-line elements opposed to change. A trend toward greater freedom of expression and thought was reversed late in the year through arbitrary arrests, the closure of reform-oriented publications, and the murders of several dissident writers. Religious minorities, in particular Baha'is, came under increasing repression by conservative elements of the judiciary and security establishment. The Government restricts the work of human rights groups. Women face legal and social discrimination, and violence against women occurs. The Government discriminates against religious and ethnic minorities and restricts important workers' rights. Vigilante groups enforce their interpretation of appropriate social behavior through intimidation and violence.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

U.N. representatives, including the U.N. Special Representative on Human Rights in Iran, Maurice Copithorne, and independent human rights organizations continue to note the absence of procedural safeguards in criminal trials. Inhuman punishments are used in some cases, including stoning (see Section 1.c.). In 1992 the domestic press stopped reporting most executions; however, executions appear to continue in substantial numbers. The U.N. Special Representative reported an estimated 199 executions in 1997, many of those attributable to drug convictions. Human Rights Watch reported "hundreds" of executions during the year after trials that failed to comply with minimum international standards.

Ruhollah Rouhani, a Baha'i, was executed in July after having served 9 months in solitary confinement on a charge of apostasy stemming from allegedly having converted a Muslim woman to the Baha'i faith. The woman maintained that her mother was a Baha'i and that she herself had been raised a Baha'i. Rouhani was not accorded a public trial or sentencing for his alleged crime, and no sentence was announced prior to his execution. Two other Baha'is, Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hadayat Kashefi-Najafabadi, were tried alongside Rouhani and later sentenced to death by a revolutionary court in Mashad for practicing their Baha'i faith. Their sentences were under appeal before the Supreme Court of Iran at year's end. Six Baha'is are on death row. Baha'is face severe repression, and are particularly

vulnerable during times of social and political unrest (see Section 2.c.).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported the death in May of Ruhollah Kakhodah-Zadeh, a businessman and an active member of Tehran's small Jewish community. Kakhodah-Zadeh was hanged in prison without benefit of public charge or legal proceeding, although there were reports that he was ordered executed for helping Jews leave Iran. HRW also reported the killing of Sunni prayer leader Molavi Imam Bakhsh Narouie in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan in southeast Iran, which led to protests from members of the local Sunni community who believed that government authorities were involved in the murder (see Section 2.c.).

Prominent opposition figure Dariush Foruhar and his wife were stabbed to death at their residence in November in a manner that led many human rights observers to believe that the couple was murdered for their political beliefs. The Forouhars were under continual monitoring by state security officials. Dariush Foruhar had been active in Iran's prerevolutionary National Front Movement, and had served as labor minister in an early postrevolution government. However, since that time he had spoken out frequently against the abuse of power of the revolutionary government, in particular with respect to human rights abuses. Supreme Leader Khamanei, President Khatami, and other senior officials condemned the murders.

Several other prominent and active political dissidents also were killed late in the year. In November the body of writer and translator Majid Sharif, whose published political views included advocacy for the separation of state and religion, was discovered in a Tehran morgue several days after his mysterious disappearance. In December the body of Mohammad Mokhtari, a prominent poet and literary critic, also was discovered at a Tehran morgue after he disappeared 6 days earlier. Parviz Davani, a publisher and dissident critic of the Government, disappeared in August. Amnesty International (AI) received unconfirmed reports that Davani's mother was contacted by unnamed persons who told her that her son was killed. Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh, a dissident writer and advocate against censorship, also disappeared in December and later was found dead. Sharif, Mokhtari, and Pouyandeh were among 134 signatories of the 1994 Declaration of Iranian Writers; several signatories have been targets of regime harassment and violence since the release of the Declaration (see Section 2.a.). The Government investigation of these murders continued at year's end.

Exiles and human rights monitors allege that many of those executed for criminal offenses, primarily narcotics charges, are actually political dissidents. A November 1995 law criminalized dissent and applied the death penalty to offenses such as "attempts against the security of the State, outrage against high-ranking Iranian officials, and insults against the memory of Imam Khomeini and against the Leader of the Islamic Republic." President Khatami advocated allowing criticism of the Government on several occasions throughout the year, but offered no official protection to critics. In June the daily newspaper Hamshahri reported the public hanging of four men in Ahvaz, in southern Iran, for "insulting" Supreme Leader Khamenei, and "armed robbery."

Investigations of the killing of political dissidents abroad continued during the year. The Istanbul Court of Appeal upheld the conviction of an Iranian national for complicity in the 1996 murder of Zahra Rajabi and Ali Moradi, who were both associated with the National Council of Resistance (NCR), an exile group that has claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks within Iran. The U.N. Special Representative reported that Italian security authorities continued their investigation into the 1993 killing in Rome of Mohammad Hossein Naghdi, the NCR's representative in Italy.

The Government announced in September that it would take no action to threaten the life of British author Salman Rushdie, or anyone associated with his work, "The Satanic Verses." The announcement came during discussions with the United Kingdom regarding the restoration of full diplomatic relations.

Several revolutionary foundations and a number of Majles deputies within Iran repudiated the Government's pledge and emphasized the "irrevocability" of the fatwa, or religious ruling, calling for Rushdie's murder by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. The 15 Khordad Foundation raised the bounty it earlier had established for the murder of Rushdie.

b. Disappearance

No reliable information is available on the number of disappearances. In the period immediately following arrest, many detainees are held incommunicado and denied access to lawyers and family members.

A Christian group reported that between 15 and 22 Iranian Christians disappeared during 1997 and the first half of 1998. Those who disappeared reportedly were Muslim converts whose baptisms had been discovered by the authorities.

There was an increase in the disappearances of prominent writers and dissident figures during the latter part of the year, many of whom were found dead (see Section 1.a.).

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

There are numerous, credible reports that security forces continue to torture detainees and prisoners. Common methods include suspension for long periods in contorted positions, burning with cigarettes, and, most frequently, severe and repeated beatings with cables or other instruments on the back and on the soles of the feet. Prisoners also have reported beatings about the ears, inducing partial or complete deafness.

Stoning and flogging are expressly prescribed by the Islamic Penal Code as appropriate punishment for adultery. Article 102 of the Code states, "the stoning of an adulterer or adulteress shall be carried out while each is placed in a hole and covered with soil, he up to his waist and she up to a line above her breasts." Zoleykhah Kadkhoda, who had been arrested on charges of adultery and stoned to near death in August 1997, reportedly was released in November 1997 after widespread international criticism of the punishment.

Faraj Sarkuhi, a magazine editor critical of the government who disappeared in 1996, later reappeared and was convicted in 1997 of "spreading antigovernment propaganda" and sentenced to a year in jail. He was released in January. In April Sarkuhi was allowed to visit his family in Germany. Sarkuhi used this opportunity to describe the torture he had suffered while in detention, including repeated beatings about the head and to the feet with a wire cable. Sarkuhi spent more than 9 months in solitary confinement and was forced to admit to false charges that he was a spy of Germany and France. On one occasion, Sarkuhi reported, his torturers tied a rope around his neck to feign impending execution.

In the course of a wide-ranging Tehran municipality corruption case, which concluded in the indictment and trial of former Tehran Mayor Hossein Gholam Kharbaschi (see Section 1.e.), several defendants accused police and prison officials of using torture to coerce admissions of guilt and statements implicating the Mayor. These confessions allegedly were coerced at so-called "special detention centers" affiliated with, but outside the official prison system. Several of those tortured reportedly brought cases against the police for improper interrogation methods, and the U.N. Special Representative reported that 152 Majles deputies sent a letter to Supreme Leader Khamanei requesting a high-level inquiry into the charges, although no subsequent action apparently was taken in response. The secretary general of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, a government-affiliated body, cited the special detention centers in

remarks critical of police tactics in the municipality case.

Prison conditions are harsh. Some prisoners are held in solitary confinement or denied adequate food or medical care in order to force confessions. Female prisoners reportedly have been raped or otherwise tortured while in detention. In the past, prison guards have intimidated the family members of detainees and tortured detainees in the presence of family members.

The Government does not permit visits to imprisoned dissidents by human rights monitors.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, these practices remain common. There is reportedly no legal time limit on incommunicado detention, nor any judicial means to determine the legality of detention. Suspects may be held for questioning in jails or in local Revolutionary Guard offices. Although reliable statistics are not available, international observers believe that between scores and hundreds of citizens are imprisoned for their political beliefs.

The security forces often do not inform family members of a prisoner's welfare and location. Even if these circumstances are known, the prisoner still may be denied visits by family and legal counsel. In addition, families of executed prisoners do not always receive notification of the prisoner's death. Those who do receive such information may be forced to pay the Government to retrieve the body of their relative.

At least 26 editors and writers either were detained, jailed, fined, or prohibited from publishing their writings during the year (see Section 2.a.).

Adherents of the Baha'i faith continue to face arbitrary arrest and detention. The Government appears to adhere to a practice of keeping a small number of Baha'is in detention at any given time. According to the U.N. Special Representative and Baha'i groups, at least 14 Baha'is are in prisons, including 6 men, convicted of either apostasy or "actions against God" and sentenced to death. Thirty-six Baha'is associated with the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning were detained arbitrarily in a September government raid on offices and residences associated with the Institute (see Section 2. c.). Four of those arrested remained in custody at year's end.

The Government enforced house arrest and other measures to restrict the movements and ability to communicate of several senior religious leaders whose views on political and governance issues are at variance with the ruling orthodoxy. The clerics include Ayatollah Hassan Tabataei-Qomi, under house arrest for more than 13 years; Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Rowhani, under house arrest for more than 12 years; and Ayatollah Yasub al-Din Rastgari, under house arrest since late 1996. Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, the former designated successor of Iran's late Spiritual Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, and an outspoken critic of Iran's current leader, remains under house arrest and heightened police surveillance (see Section 2.a.). Dissident clerics' followers reportedly have been detained and tortured by government authorities.

Human Rights Watch reported that in April, about 40 bazaar shopkeepers and teachers were detained for leading protests against the restrictions on Ayatollah Montazeri in his home town of Najafabad. Montazeri's son-in-law, Hadi Hashemi, was detained in May and held incommunicado. Mohammad Movahedi Savoji, the son of a Member of Parliament, also was arrested in May and sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment in September for speaking out against the harsh treatment of Ayatollah Montazeri.

In September 1994, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) issued a report on "unresolved humanitarian issues" from the Iran-Iraq war. The ICRC noted that the Iranian Government failed to identify combatants killed in action and failed to exchange information on those killed or missing. The report criticized the Government for obstructing ICRC efforts to register and repatriate prisoners of war (POW's).

Iran agreed to the release of 5,584 Iraqi POW's in April, and news organizations reported intermittent meetings throughout the remainder of the year between Iranian and Iraqi government officials toward reaching a final agreement on the remaining POW's held by each side. An Iranian government official was quoted in the press as pledging to settle the remaining POW issues with Iraq by March 1999. A June press report also described joint Iran-Iraq search operations to identify remains of those missing in action.

The Government does not use forced exile, but many dissidents leave the country because they feel threatened.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The court system is not independent and is subject to government and religious influence.

There are two primary court systems: Traditional courts, which adjudicate civil and criminal offenses; and Islamic Revolutionary Courts, which were established in 1979 to try offenses including those against internal or external security, narcotics crimes, and official corruption. A special clerical court also exists to examine alleged transgressions within the clerical establishment. The Supreme Court has limited authority to review cases.

Many aspects of the prerevolutionary judicial system survive in the civil and criminal courts. For example, defendants have the right to a public trial, may choose their own lawyer, and have the right of appeal. Trials are adjudicated by panels of judges. There is no jury system. If a situation is not addressed by statutes enacted after the 1979 revolution, the Government advises judges to give precedence to their own knowledge and interpretation of Islamic law rather than rely on statutes enacted during the Shah's regime.

Trials in the Revolutionary Courts are notorious for their disregard of international standards of fairness. A law authorizes Revolutionary Court judges to act as prosecutor and judge in the same case, and judges are appointed for their ideological beliefs. Often, pretrial detention is prolonged and defendants lack access to attorneys. Indictments are often for undefined offenses such as "antirevolutionary behavior," "moral corruption," and "siding with global arrogance." Defendants do not have the right to confront their accusers. Secret or summary trials of 5 minutes are not unknown. Others are show trials intended to highlight a coerced public confession. In 1992 the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights concluded that "the chronic abuses associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Courts are so numerous and so entrenched as to be beyond reform." The Government has undertaken no major reform of the Revolutionary Court system since that report.

Much attention was focused on the fairness of the court system during the high profile trial in June of the former Mayor of Tehran, Gholam Hossein Kharbaschi, on corruption charges. Kharbaschi criticized the proceedings as unfair, in particular the conflict of interest on the part of the judge, who also served as prosecutor. Testimony offered in support of the charges against Kharbaschi reportedly was coerced from detained municipality officials under harsh treatment (see Section 1.c.).

It is difficult for many women, particularly those residing outside large cities, to obtain any legal redress. A woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man's, making it difficult for a woman to prove a case against a male defendant. In addition, the families of female victims of violent crime reportedly must pay the assailant's court costs.

The Government frequently charges members of religious minorities with crimes such as "confronting the regime" and apostasy, and conducts trials in these cases in the same manner as is reserved for threats to national security. Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the judiciary, stated in 1996 that Baha'ism was an espionage organization. In October a Revolutionary Court in Mashad sentenced to death Sirus Zabihi-Moghaddam and Hedayat Kashefi-Nejafabadi, two Baha'is arrested in October 1997, in a secret trial on a finding of "waging war against God." A third defendant in the same trial, Ataollah Hamid-Sasirizadeh, was given a 10-year sentence. Among the charges against the defendants were "activism in the administration of the Baha'i faith; misleading Muslims; and espionage on behalf of foreign powers." The defendants were denied the right to choose their own counsel, or to consult family or coreligionists during their extended pretrial detention period.

Independent legal scholar and member of the Islamic clergy Hojatoleslam Sayyid Mohsen Saeidzadeh was detained in June for his outspoken criticism of the treatment of women under the law (see Section 5). While detained prior to his appearance before the special clerical court convened to hear his case, Saeidzadeh was denied access to his lawyer, and was prevented from receiving visits from his wife and other family members. Saeidzadeh reportedly was found guilty of the charges against him, freed from detention, and barred from clerical activities for 5 years. Human Rights groups outside Iran noted reports that Saeidzadeh's sentence also included a prohibition on publishing. He had ceased authoring a monthly column on legal issues since the time of his detention.

In September authorities rearrested former deputy prime minister and longtime political dissident Abbas Amir-Entezam for comments he made questioning the legitimacy of the extended power invested in the office of Iran's Supreme Leader, and for criticizing the torture of prisoners (see Section 2.a.).

No estimates are available on the number of political prisoners. However, the Government often arrests persons on questionable criminal charges, usually drug trafficking or espionage, when their actual "offenses" are political.

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

The Constitution states that "reputation, life, property, (and) dwelling(s)" are protected from trespass except as "provided by law;" however, the Government infringes on these rights. Security forces enter homes and offices, monitor telephone conversations, and open mail without court authorization.

The Basijis, other security forces, and the Ansar-e Hezbollah monitor the social activities of citizens. Such organizations harass, beat, or arrest women whose clothing does not cover the hair and all of the body except the hands and face, or those who wear makeup. Vigilante violence may include attacking young persons believed to be too foreign in their dress or activities, invading private homes, and abusing unmarried couples. Authorities occasionally enter homes to remove television satellite dishes, or to disrupt private gatherings where unmarried men and women socialize, or where alcohol, music, or other forbidden activities are offered or take place. Enforcement appears to be very arbitrary, varying widely with the political climate and the individuals involved. There are penalties for those who do not follow the Islamic dress code at work (see Sections 5 and 6.a.).

A well-coordinated and nationwide government raid of more than 500 homes and offices owned or

occupied by Baha'is suspected to have connections to the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning took place in September, during which instructional materials, office equipment, and other items of personal property were confiscated (see Section 2.c.). The effort apparently was designed to disrupt the operation of the Institute, which serves as the only alternative source of higher education for most Baha'is, who are denied entry to the state-controlled university system.

In the past, prison guards have intimidated family members of detainees (see Section 1.c.). Iranian opposition figures living abroad have reported harassment of their relatives in Iran.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of the press, except when published ideas are "contrary to Islamic principles, or are detrimental to public rights;" however, in practice the Government restricts freedom of speech and of the press. The Government exerts strong control over most media, particularly publications, by, among other methods, controlling access to newsprint and to foreign exchange to purchase newsprint. The Government directly controls television and radio broadcasting networks.

Newspapers represent a wide variety of political and social perspectives, some allied with particular figures within the Government. Many subjects of discussion are tolerated, including criticism of certain government policies. However, generally prohibited materials include faultfinding comment on the personality and achievements of the late leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini; direct criticism of the Supreme Leader; assailing the principle of velayat-e faqih, or rule by a supreme religious leader; and promotion of the rights or autonomy of ethnic minorities.

Complaints against journalists, editors, and publishers frequently are levied by public officials and even rival publications. The practice of complaining against the writings of journalists crosses ideological lines. Offending writers are subject to trial, with fines, suspension from journalistic activities, lashings, and imprisonment all common punishments on findings of guilt for offenses ranging from "fabrication" to "propaganda against the State" to "insulting the leadership of the Islamic Republic."

Police frequently raid newspaper offices, and Ansar-e Hezbollah mobs continue to attack the offices of liberal publications and bookstores without interference from the police or prosecution by the courts.

The record on freedom of expression was mixed during the year. The Government took steps to encourage an environment of greater tolerance in the early part of the year. This included easing issuance of licenses for new publications, a policy that sparked a large increase in reported circulation of print media. President Khatami and others in the Government made statements indicating that criticism and debate were healthy for society, which encouraged publishers and journalists to test the bounds of expression. The ensuing public debate on a wide variety of topics quickly raised the level of concern among antireform elements, which saw the increased openness as an invitation for "disunity" and chaos in the society. Supreme Commander of the Revolutionary Guards Rahim Safavi, a vehement critic of the new openness, told a gathering of the Guards' officers in April that "we have to cut the throats of some and cut out the tongues of others," in referring to "liberals" in the society. Safavi's remarks formed part of a backlash against the limited reform measures undertaken by the Government. The judiciary took the lead in this effort, closing several publications and jailing writers and editors for overstepping the bounds of allowable expression, including Jameah, the newspaper that had printed Safavi's leaked remarks. In November judiciary head Mohammad Yazdi said that freedom of the press "should not undermine Islamic fundamentals," and that whoever criticizes the civil and criminal laws "oversteps the

limits of liberty, since this legislation is inspired by Islamic sacred law."

At least 12 publications were banned or suspended during the year. In addition, at least 26 editors and writers either were detained, jailed, fined, or prohibited from publishing because of what they wrote. Following the closing of Jameah, its writers and editors began work on another reform-oriented publication, Tous, which also came under the attack of anti-reform elements. Tous was closed in September, and its editor and publisher were jailed for about a month. Authorities revoked the license of the weekly magazine Khaneh after it reportedly printed a letter from a reader harshly critical of the policies of former Supreme Leader Khomeini. During the trial of the mayor of Tehran, the offices of the publications Hamshahri, Iran, and the Iran Daily News were raided by police. Each of those publications had been supportive of the mayor in his trial on corruption charges.

The Government monitors carefully the statements and views of Iran's senior religious leaders to prevent disruptive dissent within the clerical ranks. In November 1997, Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a cleric formerly designated as the successor to Iran's late Spiritual Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, called into question the authority of the current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamanei, criticizing his increasing intervention in government policy. The comments sparked attacks by Ansar-e Hezbollah mobs on Montazeri's residence and a Koranic school in Qom run by Montazeri. These events prompted Ebrahim Yazdi, the leader of the Iran Freedom Movement, and 54 others, to issue an open letter calling on the Government to respect Montazeri's rights. Yazdi reportedly was detained later for 11 days for his role in this protest.

Independent legal scholar and Islamic cleric Hojatoleslam Sayyid Mohsen Saidzadeh was detained in June because of his criticism of the treatment of women under the law (see Section 1.e. and 5).

In September authorities rearrested former deputy prime minister and long-time political dissident Abbas Amir-Entezam for comments he made questioning the legitimacy of the extended political power invested in the office of the Supreme Religious Leader, and for criticizing torture and mistreatment of prisoners. Amir-Entezam's comments came in the wake of the killing of the former head of Iran's prison authority, Assadullah Lajeverdi. He had been criticized by Lajeverdi family members and officials associated with the Bureau of Prisons. Amir-Entezam's attorney said that he had been charged with "making false accusations" and "insult." Amir-Entezam has spent 17 years in jail under the Islamic Republic for alleged espionage. Human Rights groups have protested the fact that he was never given a proper trial.

Further violence and harassment was directed against signatories of the 1994 Declaration of Iranian Writers, which declared a collective intent to work for the removal of barriers to freedom of thought and expression. The association of international writers, PEN, reported in October the questioning by a Revolutionary Court of signatories Mohammad Pouyandeh, Mohammad Mokhtari, Houshang Golshiri, Kazem Kardevani, and Mansour Koushan in connection with their attempts to convene a meeting of the Iran Writer's Association. Mokhtari and Pouyandeh later disappeared under suspicious circumstances, and both were found dead. Signatory Mansour Koushan reportedly fled to Norway during the year, while another signatory, Faraj Sarkuhi, was allowed to leave for Germany, where he provided reports of the mistreatment he had received while in jails in 1997 and 1998 (see Section 1.c.).

The Government owns all television and radio broadcasting facilities; programming reflects the Government's political and socio-religious ideology.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance is charged with screening books prior to publication to ensure that they do not contain offensive material. However, some books and pamphlets critical of the

Government are published without reprisal. The Ministry inspects foreign printed materials prior to their release on the market.

The Government effectively censors Iranian-made films, since it is the main source of funding for Iranian film producers, who must submit scripts and film proposals to government officials in advance of funding approval.

President Khatami announced in September that the Government would take no action to threaten the life of British author Salman Rushdie, or anyone associated with his work, "The Satanic Verses" (see Section 1.a). However, his remarks were repudiated by other parties, including the 15 Khordad Foundation, which claims to have financed a bounty for the murder of Rushdie.

Academic censorship persists. In his 1996 interim report, the U.N. Special Representative noted the existence of a campaign to bring about the "Islamization of the universities," which seemed to be a movement to purge persons "who fight against the sanctities of the Islamic system." Government informers who monitor classroom material are said to be common on university campuses. Admission to universities is politicized; all applicants must pass "character tests" in which officials screen out applicants critical of the Government's ideology. To achieve tenure, professors must cooperate with government authorities over a period of years.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution permits assemblies and marches "provided they do not violate the principles of Islam;" however, in practice the Government restricts freedom of assembly and closely monitors gatherings to ensure that they do not constitute uncontrolled anti-government protest. This includes funeral processions and Friday prayer gatherings. Many instances were reported during the year of Ansar-e Hezbollah disruptions of gatherings of university students and other groups. Police and military forces often do not intervene in these cases. In one such incident in September, Ansar-e Hezbollah thugs attacked Vice President Abdollah Nuri and Culture Minister Attaollah Mohajerani, who are both closely associated with President Khatami's reform program, during a Friday prayer gathering in Tehran. Authorities sought to break up spontaneous celebrations that followed Iran's qualification for the World Cup soccer finals because the celebrations featured male-female commingling and flaunting of the Islamic dress code by women.

The Government limits the freedom of association. The Constitution provides for the establishment of political parties, professional associations, and religious groups provided that they do not violate the principles of "freedom, sovereignty, and national unity," or question Islam or the Islamic Republic. Several new political parties were established and registered with the Government during the year. However, several other applications were rejected.

The U.N. Special Representative noted in his October report that elections for the leadership of the Iran Bar Association took place in December 1997, with candidates required by the government to meet certain qualifications. The Bar Association was reported in August to have sent a letter to the Minister of Justice detailing its recommendations for improvement of the court system.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The 1979 revolution resulted in the creation of an Islamic Republic, the central feature of which is rule by a "religious jurisconsult." Its senior leadership, including the Spiritual Leader of the Revolution, the President, the head of the judiciary, and the

Speaker of the Majles, is composed principally of Shi'a clergymen. The Constitution declares that the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the sect followed is Ja'fari Shi'ism." It also states that "other Islamic denominations shall enjoy complete respect," and recognizes Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians as "protected religious minorities." Religions not specifically protected under the Constitution do not enjoy freedom of activity. This most directly affects the nearly 350,000 followers of the Baha'i faith, who effectively enjoy no legal rights in the society. In addition, the Government is highly suspicious of the proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims and may be harsh in meting out its response, in particular against Baha'is and evangelical Christians.

Approximately 90 percent of the population are Shi'a Muslims. Aside from slightly over 1 percent who are not Muslims, the rest of the population are Sunni Muslims, drawn largely from Kurdish, Arab, Turkoman, Baluchi, and other ethnic minorities.

Human Rights Watch reported the killing of Sunni prayer leader Molavi Imam Bakhsh Narouie in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan in southeast Iran, leading to protests by members of the local community who believed that authorities were involved in the murder.

Majdhub Alishahi, an adherent of the Sufi tradition, reportedly was executed on charges of adultery and homosexuality after a coerced confession in 1996. Sufi organizations outside Iran reported an increasing level of repression by the authorities of Sufi religious practices.

Religious activity is closely monitored by the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance; non-Muslim religious activities often require the approval of or licensing by the Ministry. Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians legally are permitted to practice their religion and instruct their children, but may not proselytize Muslims. The Government interferes with the administration of their schools, and harassment by government officials is common (see Section 5).

Oppression of evangelical Christians continued during the year. Christian groups reported instances of government harassment of churchgoers in Tehran, in particular against worshipers at the Assembly of God congregation in Tehran. Instances of harassment cited included conspicuous monitoring by authorities outside Christian premises to discourage Muslims or converts from entering, and entry to the church premises by armed Revolutionary Guards who subsequently demanded identity papers of worshipers inside. Christian church leaders are also subject to pressure from government authorities to sign pledges that they would not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services. Iranian Christians International (ICI) detailed the cases of Alireza and Mahboobeh Mahmoudian, converts to Christianity and lay leaders of the Saint Simon the Zealot Osgofi Church in Shiraz, who were forced to leave Iran permanently in June after continued harassment by government authorities. The ICI reported that Alireza Mahmoudian had lost his job because of his conversion and had been repeatedly beaten by Basiji and Ansar-e Hizbollah thugs on orders from Ministry of Islamic Guidance officials. His wife, Mahboobeh, also had been the subject of intimidation, principally through frequent and aggressive interrogation by government officials.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported the death in May of Jewish businessman Ruhollah Kakhodah-Zadeh, who was hanged in prison without a public charge or legal proceeding (see Section 1.a.). While Jews are a recognized religious minority in Iran, allegations of official discrimination are frequent. Jewish leaders in Iran reportedly are reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

The year was particularly difficult year the Baha'i community. The Government regards the Baha'i community of 300,000 to 350,000 members, whose faith originally derives from a strand of Islam, as a

"misguided" or "wayward" sect. The Special Representative noted in his September report that pressures on Baha'is from the judiciary apparently increased during the year. The execution of Ruhollah Rouhani and the death sentences confirmed against two other Bahai's in Mashad (see Section 1.a.), along with the arbitrary roundup of students and faculty associated with the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning, marked a renewed level of persecution and state-directed intimidation of a community that is always at risk, but particularly so during times of political ferment.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with coreligionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i faith in the 19th century in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel exposes Iranian Baha'is to government charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism," in particular when caught communicating with or addressing contributions to Baha'i administrative headquarters.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is appear to be geared to destroying them as a community (see Section 5). Baha'i marriages are not recognized by the Government, leaving Baha'i women open to charges of prostitution. Children of Baha'i marriages are not recognized as legitimate and, therefore, are denied inheritance rights. Sacred and historical Baha'i properties have been confiscated systematically. Baha'is are not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition, while historic Baha'i gravesites have been confiscated, and in many cases desecrated or destroyed. In October three Bahai's were arrested in Damavand, a city north of Tehran, on the grounds that they had buried their dead without government authorization.

Group meetings and religious education, which often take place in private homes and offices, are curtailed severely. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students, a particularly demoralizing blow to a community that traditionally has placed a high value on education. Denial of access to higher education appears aimed at the eventual impoverishment of the Baha'i community. In September authorities launched a nationwide operation to disrupt the activities of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Learning, also known as the "Open University," established by the Baha'i community shortly after the revolution to offer higher educational opportunities to Baha'i students who had been denied access to high schools and universities. The Institute employed Baha'i faculty and professors, many of whom had been dismissed from teaching positions by the Government as a result of their Baha'i faith, and conducted classes in homes or offices owned or rented by Baha'is. In the assault, which took place in at least 14 different cities, 36 faculty members were arrested, and a variety of personal property, including books, papers, and furniture, were either destroyed or confiscated. Government interrogators sought to force the detained faculty members to sign statements acknowledging that the Open University was now defunct and pledging not to collaborate with it in the future. Baha'is outside Iran report that none of the 36 would sign the document. Four of those arrested in September remained in custody at year's end.

The Government appears to adhere to a practice of keeping a small number of Baha'is in arbitrary detention, some at risk of execution, at any given time (see also Section 1.d.). There were 14 Baha'is reported to be under arrest for practice of their faith at year's end, 6 under sentence of death (see Section 1.a.). Baha'is regularly are denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization. Government authorities claim that only Muslim plaintiffs are eligible for compensation in these circumstances. Baha'is are prohibited from government employment. A 1993 law prohibits government workers from membership in groups that deny the "divine religions," terminology the Government uses to label members of the Baha'i faith. The law also stipulates penalties for government workers who do not observe "Islamic principles and rules."

The Government restricts the movement of several senior religious leaders, some of whom have been under house arrest for years (see Sections 1.d. and 2.d.), and often charges members of religious

minorities with crimes such as drug offenses, "confronting the regime," and apostasy (see Section 1.e.).

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

The Government places some restrictions on these rights. Citizens may travel to any part of the country, although there have been restrictions on travel to Kurdish areas during times of occasional heavy fighting. Citizens may change their place of residence without obtaining official permission. The Government requires exit permits (a validation stamp placed in the traveler's passport) for draft-age males and citizens who are politically suspect. Some citizens, particularly those whose skills are in short supply and who were educated at government expense, must post bonds to obtain exit permits. The Government restricts the movement of several religious leaders (see Sections 1.d., and 2.c.).

Citizens returning from abroad are sometimes subject to search and extensive questioning by government authorities for evidence of antiregime activities abroad. Cassette tapes, printed material, and personal correspondence and photographs are subject to confiscation. Such actions reportedly increased late in the year as authorities noted the increased activity of dissident groups outside the country.

The Government permits Jews to travel abroad, but often denies them the multiple-exit permits normally issued to other citizens. The Government normally does not permit all members of a Jewish family to travel abroad at the same time. Baha'is often experience difficulty getting passports. Iranian women must obtain the permission of their husband, father, or other living male relative in order to obtain a passport for travel abroad.

The law contains provisions for granting refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government generally cooperates with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. Although the Government generally provides first asylum, pressure was applied on some refugees to force them to return to their home countries.

The country hosts a very large refugee population. The Government and the UNHCR estimate that there are approximately 1.4 million Afghan refugees in the country. Of this total, about 21,200 are accommodated in refugee camps administered by the Government. The rest subsist on itinerant labor, often moving from place to place within the country. As of September, the UNHCR estimated that 1,525 Afghans refugees were repatriated to Afghanistan during the year, continuing the low trend of recent years. There were reports in December that the Government forcibly repatriated Afghan refugees, although the lack of a UNHCR presence in Afghanistan due to continued instability in that country these reports difficult to verify.

The UNHCR estimates that there are about 580,000 Iraqi Kurdish and Arab refugees in Iran, and reported 9,232 returnees to Iraq during the year, through September.

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

The right of citizens to change their government is severely compromised. The Supreme Leader, the recognized Head of State, is selected for a life term by the popularly-elected Assembly of Experts. The Assembly itself is restricted to clerics. The Government effectively manipulates the electoral system to its advantage. There is no separation of state and religion, and clerics dominate the Government. The Government represses any movement seeking to separate state and religion, or to alter the State's existing theocratic foundation. The selection of candidates for elections is effectively controlled by the ruling clerics.

The Constitution provides for a Council of Guardians composed of six Islamic clergymen and six lay members who review all laws for consistency with Islamic law and the Constitution. The Council also screens political candidates for ideological, political, and religious suitability. It accepts only candidates who support a theocratic state; clerics who disagree with government policies also have been disqualified.

Regularly scheduled elections are held for the President, members of the Majles, and members of the Assembly of Experts, a body responsible for selecting the successor to the Supreme Leader.

Seyed Mohammad Khatami was elected President in May 1997. The Interior Ministry estimated that over 90 percent of the eligible population voted in the presidential election. During the campaign, there was considerable government intervention and censorship. The Council of Guardians reviewed 238 candidates, including a woman, but only allowed 4 individuals to run. Three were clerics; all were men. Khatami garnered nearly 70 percent of the vote, his greatest support coming from the middle class, youth, minorities, and women.

The election results were particularly notable because Khatami was not the regime's preferred candidate. In a break with precedent, Supreme Leader Khamenei let it be known that he preferred Majles Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri. Prayer leaders also supported Nateq-Nuri in their sermons. The regime attempted to censor public debate by restricting the campaign coverage of some technocratic and modern left publications, particularly the pro-Khatami daily, Salam. As the election neared, Khatami was evicted from his campaign headquarters. Despite the regime's clear preference for Nateq-Nuri, the election results were not disputed, and the regime does not appear to have engaged in election fraud--possibly due to Khatami's early and overwhelming lead. The results appear to indicate that citizens demanded change within the limits allowed by government control of the electoral process.

The Government in 1997 nullified election results from the spring 1996 Majles elections in several districts, including Malayer, Astara, and Esfahan.

Elections were held in the fall for the 86-member Assembly of Experts. The Council of Guardians disqualified numerous candidates, leading to criticism from many observers that the Government improperly pre-determined the election results.

Preparations were begun late in the year for the election of local councils throughout the country, the first such elections since the 1979 revolution. Vigorous parliamentary debates take place on various issues. Most deputies are associated with powerful political and religious officials, but often vote independently and shift from one faction to another.

Women are underrepresented in government. They hold only 13 of 270 Majles seats, and there are no female cabinet members. In 1997 President Khatami appointed the first female vice president (for environmental protection) since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Masoumeh Ebtekar, following his inauguration. Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Ataollah Mohajerani appointed a second woman to a senior post, Azam Nouri, when he chose her in 1997 as his deputy. A woman was also appointed as a district mayor of Tehran. President Khatami also appointed a woman to serve as Presidential Adviser for Women's Affairs. A small number of women serve in the judiciary as advisers but not fully enabled judges; their authority is limited principally to family law cases.

Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians elect deputies to specially reserved Majles seats. However, the UN Special Representative noted in his September report frequent assertions that religious minorities are, by law and practice, barred from being elected to a representative body (except to the seats in the Majles

reserved for minorities), and from holding senior government or military positions. Religious minorities are allowed to vote, but they may not run for president.

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

The Government continued to restrict the work of local human rights groups. The Government denies the universality of human rights and has stated that human rights issues should be viewed in the context of a country's "culture and beliefs."

International human rights NGO's, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, are not allowed to establish offices or conduct regular investigative visits to Iran.

The ICRC and the UNHCR both operate in the country. However, the Government did not allow U.N. Special Representative for Human Rights in Iran, Maurice Copithorne, to visit the country during the year, and complained that his annual report to the U.N. Human Rights Commission was biased and reflected "an absence of accurate understanding of Islamic norms." Copithorne was last allowed entry to Iran to gather information for his yearly report in 1996. In his September report, he noted his concern about the infrequency of even written communication from the Government in response to his inquiries regarding specific cases. U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson visited Iran in February to inaugurate a conference on Asian human rights issues. She reportedly had received assurances from the Government that Special Representative Copithorne would be allowed to visit later in the year, but this never occurred.

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) was established in 1995 under the authority of the Head of the Judiciary, who sits on its Board as an observer. In 1996 the Government established a human rights committee in the Majles. Most observers believe these bodies lack independence. The U.N. Special Representative cited press reports that the IHRC fielded 2,450 complaints from March 1997 through March 1998, half from women and 50 percent against the police. The Secretary General of the IHRC, Mohammad Ziaei-Far, reportedly complained about the use by police of "special detention centers" to conduct coercive interrogations of detainees (see Section 1.c.) and acknowledged widespread human rights violations.

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

In general the Government does not discriminate on the basis of race, disability, language, or social status. The Government does discriminate on the basis of religion and sex.

Women

Although domestic violence is known to occur, little is known about its extent. Abuse in the family is considered a private matter and is seldom discussed publicly. There are no official statistics on the subject.

Women have access to primary and advanced education, but social and legal constraints tend to inhibit their professional opportunities. The state enforces gender segregation in most public spaces. While the enforcement of conservative Islamic dress codes has varied with the political climate since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, the fact remains that what women wear in public is not entirely a matter of personal choice. Women are subject to harassment by the authorities if their dress or behavior is considered inappropriate, and may be sentenced to flogging or imprisonment for such violations. In

April a girl detained by authorities on suspicion of having an inappropriate relationship with a man reportedly committed suicide in detention. The Majles passed a law in April restricting the publication of pictures of women in the Iranian print media, including pictures of foreign women, unless fully covered as prescribed by the Islamic dress code. There are penalties for failure to observe Islamic dress codes at work (see Section 6.a.).

Discrimination against women is reinforced by law through provisions of the Islamic Civil and Penal Codes, in particular those sections dealing with family and property law. The Majles approved a bill in April mandating segregation of the sexes in the provision of medical care. The bill provided for women to be treated only by female physicians and men by male physicians and raised questions about the quality of care that women could receive under such a regime, considering the current imbalance between the number of trained and licensed male and female physicians and specialists. Upon first review, the Council of Guardians rejected the law pending an amendment to assure funding, but approved it in a subsequent review in November.

The minimum legal age of marriage for women is 9, although marriage at that age is rare. All women, no matter the age, must have the permission of the father or a living male relative in order to get married. The law allows for the practice of Siqeh, or temporary marriage, a Shi'a custom in which a woman or a girl can become the wife of a married or single Muslim male after a simple and brief religious ceremony. The Siqeh marriage can last for a night or as little as 30 minutes. The bond is not recorded on identification documents, and according to Islamic law, men may have as many Siqeh wives as they wish, although these wives are not granted rights associated with traditional marriage.

The Penal Code includes provisions that mandate the stoning of women and men convicted of adultery (see Section 1.c.). Under legislation passed in 1983, women have the right to divorce, and regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. In 1986 the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce that limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract also recognized a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage, and to increased alimony rights. In November the Majles passed a law granting custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases when the father was proven unfit to care for the child. Women who remarry are forced to give up to their father custody of children from earlier marriages. Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men. The testimony of a woman is worth only half that of a man's in court (see Section 1.e.).

Children

Most children have access to education through the 12th grade, and to some form of health care. There is no known pattern of child abuse.

People With Disabilities

There is no available information regarding whether the Government has legislated or otherwise mandated accessibility for the disabled. However, the Cable News Network (CNN) reported in 1996 on the harsh conditions in an institution for retarded children who had been abandoned by their parents. Film clips showed children tied or chained to their beds, in filthy conditions, and without appropriate care. It is not known to what extent this represents the typical treatment of the disabled in Iran.

Religious Minorities

The Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Baha'i minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and public accommodations (see Section 2.d.). For example, members of religious minorities are barred from becoming school principals. Muslims who convert to Christianity also suffer discrimination. Apostasy, or conversion from Islam to another religion, may be punishable by death.

University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic theology. Although public-school students receive instruction in Islam, this requirement limits the access of most religious minorities to higher education. Applicants for public-sector employment are screened in similar fashion for their adherence to Islam.

Religious minorities suffer discrimination in the legal system, receiving lower awards in injury and death lawsuits, and incurring heavier punishments than Muslims. Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local level, and reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition surfaced during the year. Muslim men are free to marry non-Muslim women, but marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not recognized.

In 1993 the U.N. Special Representative reported the existence of a government policy directive on the Baha'is. According to the directive, the Supreme Revolutionary Council instructed government agencies to block the progress and development of the Baha'i community, expel Baha'i students from universities, cut the Baha'is' links with groups outside Iran, restrict the employment of Baha'is, and deny Baha'is "positions of influence," including those in education. The Government claims that the directive is a forgery. However, it appears to be an accurate reflection of current government practice.

Property belonging to the Baha'i community as a whole, such as places of worship, remains confiscated. Baha'i graveyards have been confiscated and defiled. Other government restrictions have been eased; Baha'is currently may obtain food ration booklets and send their children to public schools. However, the prohibition against the admission of Baha'is to universities remains. Thousands of Baha'is who were dismissed from government jobs in the early 1980's receive no unemployment benefits and have been required to repay the Government for salaries or pensions received from the first day of employment. Those unable to do so face prison sentences (see Sections 1.d. and 2.c.).

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The Kurds seek greater autonomy from the central Government and continue to suffer from government discrimination. The Kurds' status as Sunni Muslims serves as an aggravating factor in their relations with the Shi'a-dominated government. Kurds often are suspected of harboring separatist or foreign sympathies by government authorities. Human Rights Watch reported in September 1997 that in the wake of the Gulf War and the creation of an autonomous Kurdish zone in northern Iraq, Iranian authorities increased their military presence in Kurdish areas of Iran, which often led to human rights abuses against Kurds. Abuses included destruction of villages, forced migrations, and widespread mining of Kurdish property.

Azeris are well integrated into the Government and society, but complain of ethnic and linguistic discrimination. The Government traditionally has viewed Azeri nationalism as threatening.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Although the Labor Code grants workers the right to establish unions, there are no independent unions. A national organization known as the Worker's House, founded in 1982, is the sole authorized national labor organization. It serves primarily as a conduit for the Government to exert control over workers. The leadership of the Worker's House coordinates activities with Islamic labor councils, which are organized in many enterprises. These councils also function as instruments of government control, although they frequently have been able to block layoffs and dismissals. Moreover, a network of government-backed guilds issues vocational licenses, funds financial cooperatives, and helps workers find jobs.

The Government does not tolerate any strike deemed to be at odds with its economic and labor policies. In 1993 the Parliament passed a law that prohibits strikes by government workers. It also prohibits government workers from having contacts with foreigners and stipulates penalties for failure to observe Islamic dress codes and principles at work.

There are no known affiliations with international labor organizations.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Workers do not have the right to organize independently and negotiate collective bargaining agreements. No information is available on mechanisms used to set wages.

It is not known whether labor legislation and practice in the export processing zones differ from the law and practice in the rest of the country.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Penal Code provides that the Government may require any person who does not have work to take suitable employment. This provision has been criticized frequently by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as contravening ILO Convention 29 on forced labor. There is no information available on the Government's policy on forced and bonded labor by children.

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

The Labor Law prohibits employment of minors under 15 years of age and places special restrictions on the employment of minors under age 18. Education is compulsory until age 11. The law permits children to work in agriculture, domestic service, and some small businesses. By law women and minors may not be employed in hard labor or, in general, in night work. Information on the extent to which these regulations are enforced is not available. There is no information available on the Government's policy on forced and bonded labor by children (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Labor Code empowers the Supreme Labor Council to establish annual minimum wage levels for each industrial sector and region. It is not known if the minimum wages are adjusted annually or enforced. The Labor Code stipulates that the minimum wage should be sufficient to meet the living expenses of a family and should take inflation into account. Under current poor economic conditions, many middle-class citizens must work two or even three jobs to support their families. The daily minimum wage was raised in March 1997 to \$2.80 (8,500 rials). This wage apparently is not sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Information on the share of the working population covered by minimum wage legislation is not available.

The Labor Code establishes a 6-day workweek of 48 hours maximum, with 1 weekly rest day, normally Fridays, and at least 12 days of paid annual leave and several paid public holidays.

According to the Labor Code, a Supreme Safety Council, chaired by the Labor Minister or his representative, is responsible for promoting workplace safety and health. The Council reportedly has issued 28 safety directives, and oversees the activities of 3,000 safety committees established in enterprises employing more than 10 persons. It is not known how well the Ministry's inspectors enforce regulations. It is not known whether workers can remove themselves from hazardous situations without risking the loss of employment.

*The United States does not have an embassy in Iran. This report draws heavily on non-U.S. Government sources.

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