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U.S. Department of State

Turkmenistan Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

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

TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan, a one-party state dominated by its president and his closest advisers, made little progress in moving from a Soviet-era authoritarian style of government to a democratic system. Saparmurad Niyazov, head of the Turkmen Communist Party since 1985 (renamed the Democratic Party in 1992) and President of Turkmenistan since its independence in 1991, legally may remain in office until 2002. The Democratic Party, the renamed Communist Party, retained a monopoly on power; the Government registered no parties during the year and continued to repress all opposition political activities. Emphasizing stability and gradual reform, official nation-building efforts focused on fostering Turkmen nationalism and the glorification of President Niyazov. The 50-member unicameral Parliament (Mejlis) has no genuinely independent authority, and in practice the President controls the judicial system.

The Committee on National Security (KNB) has the responsibilities formerly held by the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB), namely, to ensure that the regime remains in power through tight control of society and discouragement of dissent. The Ministry of Internal Affairs directs the criminal police, which work closely with the KNB on matters of national security. Both operate with relative impunity and have been responsible for abusing the rights of individuals as well as enforcing the Government's policy of repressing political opposition.

Turkmenistan is largely a desert with cattle and sheep raising, intensive agriculture in irrigated areas, and huge oil and gas reserves. Its economy remains dependent on central planning mechanisms and state control, although the Government has taken a number of small steps to make the transition to a market economy. Agriculture, particularly cotton cultivation, accounts for nearly half of total employment. Gas,

oil and gas derivatives, and cotton account for almost all of the country's export revenues. The Government is proceeding with negotiations on construction of a new gas export pipeline across the Caspian Sea, through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey, and also is considering lines through Iran and Afghanistan.

The Government continued to commit human rights abuses, and the authorities in particular severely restricted political and civil liberties. Citizens do not have the ability to change their government peacefully. Following a commitment by President Niyazov in May, dissident Gulgeldi Annaniyazov was released on January 9, 1999. Security forces continued to beat and otherwise mistreat suspects and prisoners, and prison conditions remained poor and unsafe. Arbitrary arrest, detention, unfair trials, and interference with citizens' privacy remained problems. The Government completely controls the media, censoring all newspapers and rarely permitting independent criticism of government policy or officials. The Government imposes restrictions on some religious groups. The Government generally gave favored treatment to ethnic Turkmen over minorities and to men over women. Women experience societal discrimination, and domestic violence against women is a problem.

The law on religion, amended most recently in 1996, reaffirmed a number of important religious freedoms but also tightened government control of religious groups. The requirement that religious organizations have at least 500 Turkmen citizens as members to be registered legally has prevented all but Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians from legally establishing themselves.

The Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, given a mandate to conduct research in support of the democratization of the government and society and to monitor the protection of human rights, completed its second year of operation in October. In December the Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concerning the opening of an OSCE office in Ashgabat in 1999.

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

The 1992 Constitution makes torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment illegal. Nevertheless, there were credible and widespread reports that security officials frequently beat criminal suspects and prisoners and often used force to obtain confessions. Security forces also used denial of medical treatment and food, verbal intimidation, and placement in unsanitary conditions to coerce confessions.

Dissident Durdymurad Khodzha-Mukhammed (arrested by authorities in 1995) was released from a psychiatric hospital in Geok-Depe in April.

Prison conditions are poor, and prisons are unsanitary, overcrowded, and unsafe. Food is poor, and infectious diseases are rampant. Facilities for prisoner rehabilitation and recreation are extremely limited. Some prisoners died due to overcrowding, untreated illnesses, and lack of adequate protection from the severe summer heat.

Although in the past year diplomats have been permitted to visit selected prisons and detention centers, the Government does not permit unrestricted independent monitoring of prison conditions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution states that citizens "have the right to freedom of belief and the free expression thereof and also to obtain information unless it is a state, official, or commercial secret." In practice those expressing views critical of or different from those of the Government have been arrested on false charges of committing common crimes (see Section 1.e.).

The precise number of political detainees held at year's end was unknown. Pretrial detainees are held 6 to 8 months on the average. According to government sources, more than 8,000 persons were released from prison under presidential amnesties in February and October. Foreign diplomats received reports that prison officials requested bribes to implement releases under these amnesties.

Forced exile was not known to have occurred during the year. However, almost all prominent political opponents of the present Government have chosen to move to either Moscow, Stockholm, or Prague for reasons of personal safety; none returned this year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for judicial independence. However, in practice, the judiciary is not independent; the President's power to select and dismiss judges subordinates the judiciary to the Presidency. The President appoints all judges for a term of 5 years. The appointments are without legislative review, except for the Chairman (Chief Justice) of the Supreme Court, and the President has the sole authority to remove them from the bench before the completion of their terms.

The court system has not been reformed since the Soviet era. It consists of a Supreme Court, 6 provincial courts (including 1 for the city of Ashgabat only), and, at the lowest level, 61 district and city courts. A Supreme Economic Court hears cases involving disputes between state-owned enterprises and ministries, and, increasingly, commercial disputes. The Government abolished all military courts in 1997. Criminal offenses committed by members of the armed forces are now tried in civilian courts under the authority of the Office of the Prosecutor General.

The law provides for the rights of due process for defendants, including a public trial, the right to a defense attorney, access to accusatory material, and the right to call witnesses to testify on behalf of the accused. In practice these rights are often denied by authorities, and there are no independent lawyers, with the exception of a few retired legal officials, available to represent defendants. When a person cannot afford the services of a lawyer, the court appoints one. A person may represent himself in court.

Lower courts' decisions may be appealed, and, in the case of the death penalty, the defendant may petition the President for clemency. The President granted clemency to over 1,000 persons in connection with the general amnesties in February and October which released over 8,000 inmates from prison (see Section 1.d.). In practice adherence to due process is not uniform, particularly in the lower courts in rural areas. Even when due process rights are observed, the authority of the prosecutor vis-a-vis the

defense attorney is so great that it is very difficult for the defendant to receive a fair trial.

At year's end, the Government held at least four political prisoners. In April the Government released four political prisoners held in connection with a July 12, 1995 demonstration over living conditions in which several thousand persons participated. Two of the nine persons convicted and sentenced for their role in this peaceful protest remained in prison at year's end; however, the first, Gulgeldi Annaniyazov, who was in grave physical condition in May, was released on January 9, 1999, following an earlier commitment by President Niyazov for his release. The second remaining prisoner from the July 1995 demonstration, Gurbanmurad Mammetnazarov, was sentenced to an additional 1 year in May for possession of narcotics found in his prison cell; he was released as part of a presidential amnesty in January 1999. Two other persons convicted in secret before the Supreme Court in 1995 for antigovernment activities and planning terrorist actions against government officials were sentenced to additional concurrent terms of 18 years each for allegedly attempting to escape from the maximum security prison in Turkmenbashi. Dissident Ata Aymamedov, sentenced in February 1996 for "hooliganism" after he criticized the President in a private conversation, was released later that same year.

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

The Constitution provides for the right of protection from arbitrary interference by the State in a citizen's personal life. However, there are no legal means to regulate the conduct of surveillance by the state security apparatus, which regularly monitors the activities of opponents and critics of the Government. Security officials use physical surveillance, telephone tapping, electronic eavesdropping, and the recruitment of informers. Critics of the Government, and many other people, report credibly that their mail is intercepted before delivery.

Unlike previous years, the Government no longer restricted citizens' ability to obtain foreign newspapers. A wide variety of Russian and western newspapers are available.

In the past, the authorities have dismissed children from school and removed adults from their jobs because of the political activities of relatives. Since his trial, the Government has reportedly persecuted Ata Aymamedov's entire family in this way (see Section 1.e.). The authorities also threaten supporters of opposition political movements with loss of employment and homes (see Section 2.b.).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for the right to hold personal convictions and to express them freely. In practice, however, the Government severely restricts freedom of speech and does not permit freedom of the press. Continued criticism of the Government can lead to personal hardship, including loss of opportunities for advancement and employment.

The Government completely controls radio and television; it funds almost all print media. The Government censors newspapers and uses Turkmen language newspapers to attack its critics abroad; the Committee for the Protection of State Secrets must approve prepublication galleys. Russian language newspapers from abroad now are available by subscription and some Russian and other foreign newspapers are also available in several Ashgabat hotels. However, the two nominally independent newspapers established under presidential decree, Adalat (Justice) and Galkynysh (Revival), are no longer even nominally independent.

In order to regulate printing and copying activities, the Government ordered in February that all publishing houses and printing and copying establishments obtain a license and register their equipment.

The Government prohibits the media from reporting the views of opposition political leaders and critics, and it never allows even the mildest form of criticism of the President in print. Criticism sanctioned by the President or government officials is commonplace. The Government has subjected those responsible for critical foreign press items to threats and harassment. The KNB arrested a former presidential spokesman one day after he criticized the Government on Radio Liberty in August. The former press secretary was released 10 days after the arrest after he said that he was coerced into making antigovernment statements by the radio service. The Government revoked the accreditation of the Ashgabat-based Turkmen language Radio Liberty correspondent in 1996 because of broadcasts by an opposition politician in exile, but it has not prevented him from continuing to file reports.

Following his release from a psychiatric hospital in Geok-Depe in April, dissident Durdymurad Khodzha-Mukhammed was warned by a member of the state's internal security apparatus to refrain from political activity, including meeting with foreign diplomats. In August after meeting with the British ambassador in Ashgabat, Khodzha-Mukhammed was abducted and beaten severely by unknown persons; he remains in very poor physical condition. Members of Khodzha-Mukhammed's family also reportedly have been threatened with harm if he resumes political activities.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty correspondent Yoshan Annakurbanov was released in November 1997 from a KNB prison but remained under investigation for allegedly attempting to smuggle "military secrets" out of the country. He was forbidden to leave his apartment, meet with journalists and foreign officials, or discuss his case. In August he left the country and now lives in the West.

Intellectuals have reported that the security organs have instructed them to praise the President in their art and have warned them not to participate in receptions hosted by foreign diplomatic missions.

The Government also restricts academic freedom. It does not tolerate criticism of government policy or the President in academic circles, and it discourages research into areas it considers politically sensitive. The government-controlled Union of Writers has in the past expelled members who have criticized government policy; libraries have removed their works.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution allows for peaceful assembly, but the Government restricts this right in practice. It does not permit peaceful demonstrations organized by alleged critics and in 1995 dispersed the first peaceful protest rally in years (see Section 1.e.), convicting a number of persons for their participation. Permits are required for public meetings and demonstrations. There were reports of spontaneous demonstrations over bread prices in 1996, but none in 1998.

The Constitution allows for freedom of association, but the Government restricts this right in practice. A few unregistered organizations without political agendas are permitted to function publicly. Unregistered organizations with political agendas are not allowed to hold demonstrations or meetings outside but can hold small private meetings. No political groups critical of government policy have been able to meet the requirements for registration. The Government uses laws on the registration of political parties to prevent the emergence of potential opposition groups. At present the only registered political party is the Democratic Party, the former Turkmen Communist Party.

Social and cultural organizations without political aims are allowed to function, but often have difficulty

registering. Theoretically, citizens have the freedom to associate with whomever they please. However, the authorities have fired or threatened to fire supporters of opposition movements from their jobs, removed them from professional societies, and even threatened them with the loss of their homes. In addition some citizens with links to foreigners are subject to official intimidation.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a State religion; however, the Government imposes restrictions on some religious groups. Citizens are overwhelmingly Muslim, but Islam does not play a dominant role in society, in part due to the 70 years of Soviet rule.

A modest revival of Islam has occurred since independence. The Government has incorporated some aspects of Muslim tradition into its efforts to define a Turkmen identity, and it gives some financial and other support to the Council on Religious Affairs, which plays an intermediary role between the government bureaucracy and religious organizations.

Religious congregations are required to register with the Government. While reaffirming a number of important religious freedoms, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, amended in 1995 and again in 1996, also provides for significant government control of religion. For example, the requirement that religious organizations have at least 500 Turkmen citizens over the age of 18 as adherents to be registered legally has prevented all but Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians from setting up legal religious organizations. Moreover, the Government applies the 500-member standard on a local/regional basis. For example, one representative of a major Christian religious group was told that the group would have to have 500 adherents in Ashgabat to be registered there, and another 500 in the city of Turkmenbashi to be registered there. This restriction also has caused problems for a number of minority religions, especially the Baha'i, who have been prevented from conducting services since 1997.

Diplomats received reports of raids and seizures of religious materials at Protestant churches in other areas of the country.

While protected by law, proselytizing by "foreign" (that is, non-Sunni Muslim) religious groups can incur official displeasure. Government permission is required for any mass meetings or demonstrations for religious purposes, although small prayer groups meet in informal settings. The Government also restricts the travel of clergy or members of religious groups to the country. Islamic religious literature is distributed through the mosques. Orthodox churches offer Christian religious literature.

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

The Government does not generally restrict movement within the country, although travel to southern border zones is tightly controlled. Citizens still carry internal passports. These documents are used primarily as a form of identification, rather than as a means of controlling movement. Residence permits are not required, although place of residence is registered and noted in passports.

The Government uses its power to issue passports and exit visas as a general means of restricting international travel. Most nonofficial travelers find the process of obtaining passports and exit visas to be difficult. Many allege that officials solicit bribes in exchange for permission to travel abroad. In 1997 the Government introduced new passports which eventually are to serve as combined foreign and internal travel documents.

Most citizens are permitted to emigrate without undue restriction. In 1996 some government opponents were denied the opportunity to emigrate; however, there were no reports of similar government action this year. Ethnic Russians and other non-Turkmen residents, including Jewish residents, have been permitted to emigrate during the year.

The government-funded Council of World Turkmen provides assistance to ethnic Turkmen abroad who wish to return to the country and apply for citizenship. The Government, however, discourages immigration by ethnic Turkmen living in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and other countries. Immigration of non-Turkmen from other areas of the former Soviet Union is discouraged by the unofficial policy of favoring employment of ethnic Turkmen.

In 1997, the Government adopted the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee and Its 1967 Protocol, and its accession to the Convention was approved by the United Nations on March 3. The law on refugees also was adopted in 1997. It establishes the procedure and conditions for recognizing refugee status and sets the legal, economic, and social rights of refugees. The country currently provides first asylum if the person is recognized under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Government has granted refugee or asylee status to some ethnic Turkmen from Afghanistan and has allowed some Tajik refugees and migrants to reside in the country. The Government cooperates with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations that assist refugees. There were no confirmed reports of forced expulsion of those having a valid claim to refugee status. There have been unconfirmed reports of small numbers of refugees being forcibly returned by individual border guards. However, according to the UNHCR, there is no clear pattern of abuse of forced expulsion of refugees, with the exception of such low-level harassment.

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

Citizens have no real ability to effect peaceful change in the Government and have little influence on government policy or decisionmaking. The 1992 Constitution declares Turkmenistan to be a secular democracy in the form of a presidential republic. It calls for the separation of powers between the various branches of government, but vests a disproportionate share of power in the Presidency. In practice President Niyazov's power is absolute, and the country remains a one-party state. Despite the appearance of decisionmaking by consensus, most decisions are made at the presidential level. In his address to the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council) in July, President Niyazov called for local councils and village leaders to have greater power and authority to deal with local issues. However, in reality, local leaders are selected and dismissed by the President.

In the 1992 presidential election, the sole candidate was Saparmurad Niyazov, the incumbent and nominee of the Democratic Party. The Government announced the election barely a month before voting day, giving opposition groups insufficient time to organize and qualify to submit a candidate. A 1994 national referendum extended the President's term to 2002, obviating the need for the scheduled presidential election in 1997. According to the official results, 99.9 percent of those voting cast their ballots to extend his term. The policy of the Democratic Party, according to its leadership, is to implement the policy of the President.

In the 1994 elections for a reconstituted Mejlis (Parliament), no opposition participation was permitted. The Government claimed that 99.8 percent of all eligible voters participated. The Mejlis routinely supports presidential decrees, and, as yet, has no genuine independence, although it has taken several measures to become a more professional body and does debate and amend draft legislation, including key bills such as civil and criminal codes. President Niyazov has promised that the parliamentary elections scheduled for December 1999 would be conducted on a "wide democratic basis."

There are no legal restrictions on the participation of women or minorities in the political process. Nine members of the Mejlis are women, although they constitute over 50 percent of the population. Women hold the positions of Minister of Textile Industry, Prosecutor General, Deputy Chairperson of Parliament, and the Ambassador to the United Nations. No women serve as provincial governors. Minorities are represented in the Government although preference is given to ethnic Turkmen. There reportedly are only two nonethnic Turkmen in the Mejlis.

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

There are no local human rights monitoring groups, and government restrictions on freedom of speech, press, and association would preclude any effort to investigate and criticize publicly the Government's human rights policies. Several independent journalists based in Russia report on these issues in the Russian press and have contact with international human rights organizations. On numerous occasions the past, the Government has warned its critics against speaking with visiting journalists or other foreigners wishing to discuss human rights issues.

The National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President completed its second year of operation in October. Its mandate is to support the democratization of the government and society and to monitor the protection of human rights. The institute maintains five full-time staff members to receive and resolve citizen complaints of arbitrary government action.

One-third of the approximately 1,300 complaints received by the institute during the year concerned the judicial process and judges, but there are no specific statistics on the number of complaints against law enforcement and security organizations. In general the Institute conducts a study of the complaint and returns its findings to the individual and the organizations involved. However, the institute is not an independent body, and the full extent of its ability to obtain redress remains unclear.

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

The Constitution provides for equal rights and freedoms for all, independent of one's nationality, origin, language, and religion. It further specifies equal rights before the law for both men and women. There is no legal basis for discrimination against women or religious or ethnic minorities. Cultural traditions and the Government's policy of promoting Turkmen nationalism, however, limit the employment and educational opportunities of women and nonethnic Turkmen.

Women

Anecdotal reports indicate that domestic violence against women is common, but no statistics are available. The subject is not discussed in society. There are no court cases available and no references to domestic violence in the media. One unofficial group to support battered women operates in Ashgabat.

Women are underrepresented in the upper levels of state-owned economic enterprises and are concentrated in the health care and education professions and in service industries. Women are restricted from working in some dangerous and environmentally unsafe jobs. Under the law, women enjoy the same inheritance and marriage rights as men. In traditional Turkmen society, however, the woman's primary role is as homemaker and mother, and family pressures often limit opportunities for women to enter careers outside the home and advance their education. Religious authorities, when proffering advice to practicing Muslims on matters concerning inheritance and property rights, often favor men over women.

There is only one officially registered women's group, which is headed by the Deputy Chairperson of the Mejlis and dedicated in honor of the President's mother. The Government has no program specifically aimed at rectifying the disadvantaged position of women in society, as it does not acknowledge that women suffer discrimination.

Children

The Government's social umbrella covers the welfare needs of children. The Government provides 9 to 10 years of education for children. Generally, there is little difference in the education provided to girls and boys. The Government has not taken effective steps to address the environmental and health problems that have resulted in a high rate of infant and maternal mortality.

During the annual cotton harvest, some schools in agricultural areas are closed and children as young as 10 years of age work in the cotton fields (see Section 6.d.). Other than this activity, there is no societal pattern of abuse against children.

People With Disabilities

Government subsidies and pensions are provided for those with disabilities, although the pensions are inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living. Those capable of working are generally provided with jobs under still-valid preindependence policies that virtually guarantee employment to all. According to existing legislation, facilities for the access of the disabled must be included in new construction projects. However, compliance is inconsistent and most older buildings are not so equipped. Care for the mentally retarded and mentally ill is provided on the local level. Mentally retarded and mentally ill children are placed in boarding schools, with educational and future employment opportunities if their condition is mild. Adults with disabilities requiring institutionalization are kept primarily in "psycho-narcological" hospitals in Geok-Depe, Bekrova, and Kakha and in theory provided with food, clothing, and medical care.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The Constitution provides for equal rights and freedoms for all citizens. Turkmen comprise approximately 77 percent of the population of about 4.7 million; Uzbeks, 9 percent; and Russians, 7 percent. There are smaller numbers of Kazakhs, Armenians, Azeris, and many other ethnic groups. Since independence, the country has not experienced ethnic turmoil.

As part of its nation-building efforts, the Government has attempted to foster Turkmen national pride, in part through its language policy. The Constitution designates Turkmen as the official language, and it is a mandatory subject in school, although it is not necessarily the language of instruction.

The Constitution also provides for the rights of speakers of other languages to use them. Russian remains in common usage in government and commerce. The Government insists that discrimination against Russian speakers will not be tolerated. However, efforts to reverse past policies that favored Russians work to the benefit of Turkmen at the expense of the other ethnic groups, not solely ethnic Russians. Non-Turkmen fear that the designation of Turkmen as the official language will put their children at a disadvantage educationally and economically. They complain that some avenues for promotion and job advancement are no longer open to them. Only a handful of non-Turkmen occupy high-echelon jobs in the ministries, and government employees from minority ethnic groups are sometimes assigned lesser positions than their experience and qualifications would merit.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Turkmenistan has inherited the Soviet system of government-controlled trade unions. There are no legal guarantees entitling workers to form or join unions. The Colleagues Union is the only legal central trade union federation permitted, and it claims a membership of 1.6 million; its member unions are divided along both sectoral and regional lines. Unions may not form or join other federations.

While no law specifically prohibits the establishment of independent unions, there are no such unions, and no attempts were made to register an independent trade union during the year.

The law neither prohibits nor permits strikes and does not address the issue of retaliation against strikers. Strikes are extremely rare and no strikes were known to have occurred during the year.

There is no information available on union affiliation with international unions. Turkmenistan joined the International Labor Organization in 1993.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law does not protect the right to collective bargaining. In practice in the state-dominated economy, the close association of both the trade union and the state-owned enterprise with the Government seriously limits workers' ability to bargain, and workers often go months without pay or receive their paychecks late.

The Ministry of Economics and Finance prepares general guidelines for wages and sets wages in health care, culture, and some other areas. In other sectors, it allows for some leeway at the enterprise level, taking into account local factors. The Government determines specific wage and benefit packages for each factory or enterprise.

The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers, and there are no mechanisms for resolving such complaints.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced labor. No incidents of compulsory labor were reported.

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children and generally enforces this prohibition effectively, with the exception of cotton harvesting in rural areas (see Section 5).

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

The minimum age for employment of children is 16 years; in a few heavy industries, it is 18 years. The law prohibits children between the ages of 16 and 18 years from working more than 6 hours per day (the normal workday is 8 hours).

The Government prohibits forced and bonded labor by children and generally enforces this prohibition effectively, with the exception of cotton harvesting in rural areas (see Section 6.c.). A 15-year-old child

may work 4 to 6 hours per day but only with the permission of the trade union and parents. This permission rarely is granted. Violations of child labor laws occur in rural areas during the cotton harvesting season, when teenagers work in the fields and children as young as 10 years of age sometimes help with the harvest.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage. As of August 1, the average wage in the state sector was approximately \$40 (200,000 manats) per month. While the Government subsidizes the prices of many necessities and provides others free of charge, this wage falls short of the amount required to meet the needs of an average family. Most households are multigenerational, with several members receiving salaries, stipends, or pensions. Even so, many people lack the resources to maintain an adequate diet, and meat is a luxury for most citizens.

The standard legal workweek is 40 hours with 2 days off. Individuals who work fewer hours during the week or are in certain high-level positions may also work on Saturdays.

The country inherited from the Soviet era an economic system with substandard working conditions--one in which production took precedence over the health and safety of workers. Industrial workers often labor in unsafe environments and are not provided proper protective equipment. Some agricultural workers are subjected to environmental health hazards. The Government recognizes that these problems exist and has taken some steps to address them, but it has not set comprehensive standards for occupational health and safety. Workers do not always have the right to remove themselves from work situations that endanger their health or safety without jeopardy to their continued employment.

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