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## 1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
U.S. Department of State, February 25, 2000

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### MALDIVES

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

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

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

The Government restricts human rights in several areas. The Majlis has assumed a more active political role in recent years, and its members routinely differ with government policy on many issues; however, the President's power to appoint a significant portion of the Parliament still constrains citizens' ability to change their government. Arbitrary arrest and detention remain problems. A continued easing of government restrictions and the Press Council's balanced handling of issues related to journalistic standards allowed a greater diversity of views in the media. Nevertheless, the Government banned a book in

1997 because it contained derogatory comments about a previous president. The Government limits freedom of assembly and association. There are significant restrictions on the freedom of religion; the Government has detained arbitrarily and expelled foreigners for proselytizing and detained citizens who converted. Women face a variety of legal and social disadvantages. Some of these restrictions are linked to the Government's observance of Shari'a (Islamic law) and other Islamic customs. The Government restricts worker rights. Nonetheless, in recent years there has been some progress in certain areas; the courts were reorganized in 1997, and a new Constitution, which provides for the protection of certain fundamental rights, went into effect at the beginning of 1998. In addition, procedural rules limiting indefinite police detention were instituted, and the presidential nominating process involved competition among candidates for the first time in 1998.

## **RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

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

#### a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no reports of political or other extrajudicial killings.

#### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

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

Amnesty International reported that prisoners have been mistreated, including by being handcuffed to coconut palms, being handcuffed in their cells, and being held in solitary confinement for long periods. Female prisoners reportedly have been jabbed awake for dawn prayers by male prison guards in a humiliating manner.

Prison conditions, including food and prisoner housing, are generally adequate; however, Amnesty International reported that cells may be overcrowded and lack adequate sleeping space. Prisoners are allowed to work in prison and given the opportunity for regular exercise and recreation. Spouses are allowed privacy during visits with incarcerated partners. The country's prison facility was destroyed by fire during the year, and the prisoners were moved to another island with improved conditions. The Government is surveying prison facilities in other countries to incorporate international standards and

improvements in the reconstruction of the prison.

The Government has permitted prison visits by foreign diplomats.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

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

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

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

The Government detained three individuals in April 1995 who remained under house arrest without charge until October 1995, when their detention was lifted. No charges were brought against them. The Government has offered no reasons for their detention. However, it is widely believed that their detention was the result of political differences with the Government rather than due to any threat that the men--all of whom are elderly and well known figures--pose to national security. According to an Amnesty International (AI) report in June 1998, Ismail Saadiq, a Maldivian businessman, was taken into police custody possibly for political reasons in Male and later detained because he allegedly had been in contact with a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reporter. According to AI, he previously had been under house arrest for alleged business irregularities, and was told that the media contact violated house arrest rules. The Government claimed that Saadiq was a businessman involved in fraud and corruption. At year's end, the exact details surrounding Saadiq's detention could not be confirmed, but he was convicted of fraud in December 1998, and is awaiting trial on other fraud charges.

There were no reports of the external exile of citizens, although 24 foreigners suspected of proselytization were banished for life in 1998 (see Section 2.c.). The Government

sometimes banishes convicted criminals to inhabited atolls away from their home communities; a man who confessed to an extramarital affair in April 1998 was banished for 1 year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The 1997 Constitution does not provide for an independent judiciary, and the judiciary is subject to executive influence. In addition to his authority to review High Court decisions, the President influences the judiciary through his power to appoint and dismiss judges, all of whom serve at his pleasure and are not subject to confirmation by the Majlis. The President nevertheless has removed only two judges since 1987. Both dismissals followed the recommendation of the Justice Ministry that found the judges' professional qualifications to be below standard. The President may also grant pardons and amnesties.

In September 1997 the court system, under the Ministry of Justice, was reorganized and court administration has improved. There are three courts: One for civil matters; one for criminal cases; and one for family and juvenile issues. On the recommendation of the Ministry of Justice, the President appoints a principal judge for each court. There is also a High Court on Male, which is independent of the Justice Ministry and which handles a wide range of cases, including politically sensitive ones. The High Court also acts as a court of appeals. Under a 1995 presidential decree, High Court rulings can be reviewed by a 5-member advisory council appointed by the President. The President also has authority to affirm judgments of the High Court, to order a second hearing, or to overturn the Court's decision. In addition to the Male courts, there are 204 general courts on the islands.

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

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

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

Ilyas Ibrahim, the President's chief rival for the 1993 presidential nomination, and a relative of the President, was tried in absentia in 1994 and sentenced to 15 years' banishment on the charge of illegally attempting to become president and to 6 months

banishment for violating his oath as minister. Ilyas returned from his self-imposed foreign exile in 1996 and was placed under house arrest for several months. The President has since pardoned him, and there are no restrictions on his political rights. In November 1998 President Gayoom appointed Ilyas to the Cabinet as Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation. In November, Ilyas was elected to a parliamentary seat from Male.

There were no reports of political prisoners. Amnesty International reports that Wu Mei De, a Chinese national, has been detained since 1993, which AI states apparently occurred as a result of official connivance in a dispute with his former Maldivian business partner. De has been offered the opportunity to leave the country, but has declined to do so.

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

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

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

### Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

#### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Law No. 4/68 of 1968 prohibits public statements that are contrary to Islam, threaten the public order, or are libelous. In April 1996, a journalist was sentenced under this law to 2 years' imprisonment for comments made about the 1994 general elections in an article published in the Philippines. On appeal the High Court reduced his sentence to 6 months. The President pardoned the journalist at the beginning of 1997.

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

The Press Council established by the Government in December 1993 is composed of official government and private media representatives, lawyers, and government officials. The Council reviews charges of journalist misconduct (advising the Ministry of Information, Arts, and Culture on measures to be taken against reporters, when appropriate) and promotes professional standards within the media (recommending reforms and making suggestions for improvement). In 1998, the Press Council organized a 6-month training program for 12 journalists to improve media reporting and accuracy. The Council met regularly, and private journalists were satisfied with its objectivity and performance. Regulations that made publishers responsible for the content of the material they published remained in effect but did not result in any legal actions, despite reports in 1994 that the regulations were under review and that a change was likely. The Government agreed that private journalists, rather than the Government, should take responsibility for preparation of a journalistic code of ethics. Individual newspapers and

journals established their own ethical guidelines in many cases.

There were no reports of government censorship of the electronic media, nor were there closures of any publications or reports of intimidation of journalists. However, pornography and material otherwise deemed objectionable to Islamic values may be banned. In January the Government banned the animated movie "The Prince of Egypt," on the grounds that it was offensive to Islam (see Section 2.c.). The Government banned a book in 1997 written by an elderly close relative of the President for its derogatory comments about a deceased previous president, after the relatives of the latter complained. No journalists were arrested during the year. The Government discontinued its practice of providing reporting guidelines to the media in 1994.

Television news and public affairs programming routinely discussed topics of current concern and freely criticized government performance. Regular press conferences instituted with government ministers in 1995 continued. Journalists are more self-confident than in the past; self-censorship appears to have diminished, although it remains a problem. Since it is not clear when criticism violates Law 4/68, journalists and publishers continue to watch what they say, particularly on political topics, to avoid entanglement with the Government.

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

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

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

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

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

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

The Government registers clubs and other private associations if they do not contravene Islamic or civil law; however, the Government imposes some limits on freedom of

association. While not forbidden by law, the President officially discourages political parties on the grounds that they are inappropriate to the homogeneous nature of society. However, many Majlis members were active and outspoken critics of the Government and have stimulated closer parliamentary examination of government policy.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. The practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited by law. However, foreign residents are allowed to practice their religion if they do so privately.

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

Islamic instruction is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funds the instructors who teach Islam. The Government also has set standards for individuals who conduct Friday services at mosques to ensure adequate theological qualifications.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The office of the President is the most powerful political institution. The 1997 Constitution gives Islamic law preeminence over civil law and designates the President as the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets" of Islam. The President's authority to appoint one-sixth of the Majlis members, which is one-third of the total needed for nominating the President, provides the President with a power base and strong political leverage. The President currently is also commander in chief of the armed forces, and is the Minister of Defense and National Security, the Minister of Finance and Treasury, and the Governor of the Maldivian Monetary Authority.

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

In 1993 the Majlis introduced a question time in which members may question government ministers about public policy. Debate on the floor has since become increasingly sharp and more open. Elections to the People's Majlis were held in November. According to observers from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the elections were generally free and fair. However, several losing candidates challenged the election results and the courts currently are considering their claims of campaign irregularities.

Women are not eligible to become president but may hold other government posts. For reasons of tradition and culture, few women seek or are selected for public office. In order to increase participation by women in the political process, the Government continued a political awareness campaign in the atolls. Three women, two appointed by the President, served in the Majlis before the November elections and sat in the Cabinet. In November,

six women ran for seats in the People's Majlis and two were elected. During the November elections, observers from the SAARC noted that women participated equally in the electoral process.

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

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

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

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

##### Women

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

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

Under Islamic practice, husbands may divorce their wives more easily than vice versa, absent any mutual agreement to divorce. Islamic law also governs intestate inheritance, granting male heirs twice the share of female heirs. A woman's testimony is equal to only one-half of that of a man in matters involving adultery, finance, and inheritance (see Section 1.e.). Women who work for wages receive pay equal to that of men in the same

positions. About 10 percent of uniformed NSS personnel are women.

### Children

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

Children's rights are incorporated into law, which specifically protects children from both physical and psychological abuse, including abuse at the hands of teachers or parents. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare has the authority to enforce this law, takes its responsibility seriously, and has received strong popular support for its efforts. The Government is reviewing this law to see if improvements and additional protections are necessary. There is no reported societal pattern of abuse directed against children.

### People with Disabilities

There is no law that specifically addresses the rights of the physically or mentally disabled. During the year, the Government initiated a survey to identify the magnitude of the need in the country. The Government has established programs and provided services for the disabled. There is no legislated or mandated accessibility for the disabled.

Persons with disabilities are usually cared for by their families. When such care is unavailable, persons with disabilities are kept in the Institute for Needy People, which also assists elderly persons. The Government provides free medication for all mentally ill persons in the islands, and mobile teams regularly visit mentally ill patients. The Government provides assistance to the physically disabled and enacted a new building code during the year, which mandated that all new government buildings and jetties must be accessible to disabled persons.

## Section 6. Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

While the Government does not expressly prohibit unions, it recognizes neither the right to form them nor the right to strike. There were no reports of efforts to form unions during the year.

The work force consists of approximately 64,000 persons, about 20 percent of whom are employed in fishing. About 16,700 foreigners work in the country, many in tourist hotels, retail/wholesale trade, factories, or on construction projects. The great majority of workers are employed outside of the wage sector. The Government estimates that the manufacturing sector employs about 15 percent of the labor force and tourism another 10

percent.

Workers can affiliate with international labor federations.

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

#### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

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

There are no export processing zones.

#### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

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

There is no compulsory education law, but more than 96 percent of school-age children to grade 7 are enrolled in school. A 1992 law bars children under 14 years of age from "places of waged work and from work that is not suitable for that child's age, health, or physical ability or that might obstruct the education or adversely affect the mentality or behavior of the child." An earlier law prohibits government employment of children under the age of 16. There are no reports of children being employed in the small industrial sector, although children work in family fishing, agricultural, and commercial activities. The hours of work of young workers are not specifically limited by statute. The Government does not specifically prohibit forced and bonded labor by children, but such practices are not known to occur (see Section 6.c.). A Children's Unit in the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare is responsible for monitoring compliance with the child labor regulations. It relies upon complaints filed with it rather than initiating its own inspections to ensure compliance. As a result, oversight is incomplete.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

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

shortage of labor, employers must offer competitive pay and conditions to attract skilled workers.

There are no statutory provisions for hours of work, but the regulations require that a work contract specify the normal work and overtime hours on a weekly or monthly basis. In the public sector, a 7-hour day and a 5-day workweek have been established through administrative circulars from the President's office. Overtime pay in the public sector was instituted in 1990. Employees are authorized 20 days of annual leave, 30 days of medical leave, maternity leave of 45 days, and special annual leave of 10 days for extraordinary circumstances. There are no laws governing health and safety conditions. However, there are regulatory requirements that employers provide a safe working environment and ensure the observance of safety measures. It is unclear, however, whether workers can remove themselves from unsafe working conditions without risking the loss of their jobs. The Ministry of Trade, Industries, and Labour set up a Labour Dispute Settlement Unit in 1998 to resolve wage and labor disputes and to visit worksites and enforce labor regulations.

In 1997 the Government for the first time worked closely with the International Labor Organization to address a number of labor issues, including the right of association, the right to organize, and acceptable conditions of work. A draft labor law is under consideration by the Government.

#### f. Trafficking in Persons

There were no reports that persons were trafficked in, to, or from the country.

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