



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [Human Rights Reports](#) » [2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) » [Near East and North Africa](#) » [Oman](#)

2009 Human Rights Report: Oman

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

March 11, 2010

The Sultanate of Oman is a hereditary monarchy with a population of 3.3 million, including approximately one million nonnationals. Sultan Qaboos Al Bu Sa'id has ruled since 1970. The sultan has the sole authority to amend the country's laws through royal decree, although ministries draft laws and citizens provide input through the 84-member Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council), an elected advisory institution. In 2007 approximately 245,000 registered voters participated in generally free and fair elections for all of the council's seats. The sultan appoints the 71-member Majlis al Dawla (State Council); it and the Majlis al Shura review legislation, recommend policy, and conduct studies on public policy. The 32-member cabinet of ministers advises the sultan on government decisions. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of security forces.

Citizens did not have the right to change their government; however, operating under a system of rule of law based on the Basic Law of 1996, the government generally respected the human rights of its citizens. The government placed some restrictions on privacy and freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion. Instances of discrimination and domestic violence toward women were reported. There were also isolated reports some employers placed expatriate laborers in situations indicative of forced labor or abuse.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports government officials employed them.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions generally met international standards, and the government permitted visits by independent human rights observers.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Royal Office, part of the cabinet, controls internal and external security and coordinates all intelligence and security policies. Under the Royal Office, the Internal Security Service investigates all matters related to internal security, and the Sultan's Special Force has limited border security and antismuggling responsibility. The Royal Oman Police (ROP), also part of the cabinet, performs regular police duties, provides security at points of entry, serves as the country's immigration and customs agency, and operates the coast guard. The Ministry of Defense, and in particular the Royal Army of Oman, is responsible for securing the borders and has limited domestic security responsibilities. The security forces performed their duties effectively.

There were isolated reports of corruption during the year. The ROP's Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation is charged with investigating allegations of police abuse and turns its findings over to the Directorate General of Human Resources for disciplinary action. There was no public information about ROP internal disciplinary action. Officers received human rights training as part of the police academy's standard training program.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

The law does not require police to obtain a warrant before making an arrest. The law provides that within 48 hours of arrest, police must either release the accused or refer the matter to the public prosecutor. Within 24 hours, the public prosecutor must formally arrest or release the person. Authorities respected these rights in practice. Detainees were generally informed promptly of the charges against them. The state provided public attorneys to indigent detainees. Authorities must obtain court orders to hold suspects in pretrial detention. Judges may order detentions for 14 days to allow investigation and may grant extensions. There was a functioning system of bail. Detainees generally had prompt access to a lawyer of their choice. Police sometimes failed to notify a detainee's family, or the detainee's sponsor in the case of an expatriate laborer, of the detention. There were isolated reports authorities detained without charge foreign workers suspected of being in the country illegally, pending confirmation of their immigration status.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary; however, the sultan may act as a court of final appeal and exercise his power of pardon as chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, the country's highest legal body, which is empowered to review all judicial decisions.

The Ministry of Justice administers all courts. The magistrate court system is composed of courts of first instance, courts of appeal, and the Supreme Court. There are 42 courts of first instance throughout the sultanate to hear civil, criminal, commercial, labor, and personal status cases. One judge presides over each court of first instance. There are six courts of appeal, each with a panel of three appointed judges. The Supreme Court, comprising five judges, standardizes legal principles, reviews decisions of lower courts, and monitors judges in their application and interpretation of the law. The sultan can pardon or reduce sentences but cannot overturn a Supreme Court verdict. The Supreme Judicial Council can hear appeals beyond the Supreme Court. Members of the Supreme Judicial Council included the president of the Supreme Court, the minister of justice, the public prosecutor, and the ROP inspector general.

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Principles of Shari'a inform the civil, commercial, and criminal codes. Laws governing family and personal status are based on the government's interpretation of Shari'a.

The Administrative Court, under the authority of the Diwan of the Royal Court, reviews complaints about the misuse of governmental authority. It has the power to reverse decisions by government bodies and to award compensation. Appointments to this court are subject to the approval of the Administrative Affairs Council. The court's president and deputy president are appointed by royal decree based on the council's nomination.

The State Security Court tries cases involving national security and criminal matters requiring expeditious or especially sensitive handling. The security court procedures mirror those applicable elsewhere in the criminal system. The sultan may exercise his powers to extend leniency, including cases involving state security.

Military and security personnel are subject to a military tribunal system of justice with limited outside visibility or access.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right for all citizens. The law also provides for the presumption of innocence. There is no jury trial. Citizens and legally resident noncitizens have the right to a public trial, except when the court decides to hold a session in private in the interest of public order or morals.

Defendants have the right to be present, to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and to present evidence and confront witnesses. The prosecution and defense counsel direct questions to witnesses through the judge. Defendants and their lawyers generally had access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Courts provide public attorneys to indigent detainees and offer legal defense for defendants facing prison terms of three years or more. Those convicted in any court may appeal a jail sentence longer than three months and fines of more than 480 rials (approximately \$1,250).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Applicable civil procedure codes govern civil cases. Citizens and nationals of other countries were able to file cases in the courts. There were instances in which courts ruled in favor of foreign domestic servants against their sponsors, requiring sponsors to return the workers' passports and allow them to break the employment contract. In some instances, the court issued orders to apprehend the sponsor and force his or her appearance before the court. Citizens and foreign workers can lodge complaints regarding working conditions with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) for administrative redress. The MOM may refer cases to the courts if the ministry is unable to negotiate a solution.

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

The law provides for broad governmental discretion, which the government exercised in practice.

The law does not require police to obtain search warrants before entering homes, although police often obtained warrants from the public prosecutor's office. The government monitored private communications, including cell phones, e-mail, and Internet chat room exchanges. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) required citizens to obtain permission to marry foreigners, except nationals of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries; permission was not granted automatically. Citizen marriage to a foreigner abroad without MOI approval may cause the foreign spouse to be denied entry into the country and prevent a legitimate child from claiming citizenship rights.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for limited freedom of speech and of the press. The government generally abridged these rights in practice. Journalists and writers exercised self-censorship.

The law prohibits criticism of the sultan in any form or medium; "material that leads to public discord, violates the security of the state, or abuses a person's dignity or his rights"; "messages of any form that violate public order and morals or are harmful to a person's safety"; and "defamation of character." Courts have interpreted these laws to mean it is illegal to insult any public official.

There are seven privately owned newspapers in the country, four in Arabic and three in English. Editorials generally were consistent with the government's views, although authorities tolerated limited criticism regarding domestic and foreign affairs, including GCC policies, which the country participated in determining. In addition, there were two state-owned newspapers and more than 30 state-owned and privately owned magazines in circulation. The government owned four radio stations and two television stations and licensed one privately owned satellite-based television station, none of which generally broadcast politically controversial material. There were three private radio stations broadcasting occasional news bulletins supplied by the state-owned Oman News Agency. Access to foreign broadcasts via satellite is permitted and was widespread. There was no permanent international media presence in the country. Occasional international reporting tended to focus on special events or human interest stories.

The MOI reviewed all media products produced in or imported into the country and prohibited or censored material viewed as politically, culturally, or sexually offensive from all domestic and imported publications. All content in both public and private print outlets was subject to an official, nontransparent review and approval process before publication.

Unlike previous years, there were no reports of media companies refusing to publish articles by journalists who had previously criticized the government. Authorities tolerated a limited degree of criticism of policies, government officials, and agencies, particularly via the Internet. Such criticism rarely appeared in traditional mass media.

The government used libel laws and concerns for national security as grounds to suppress criticism of government figures and politically objectionable views.

There were no major publishing houses in the country and limited publication of books. The government restricted the importation, distribution, and publication of books as it did other media products.

Internet Freedom

The law restricted free speech via the Internet, and the government enforced the restrictions. The government's national telecommunications company made Internet access available for a fee to citizens and foreign residents. Despite infrastructure increases, less than 5 percent of the population had subscription Internet access at year's end. Internet access was available via schools, workplaces, wide area networks at coffee shops, and other venues, especially in urban areas, and approximately 20 percent of the country's inhabitants used the Internet, according to 2008 International Telecommunication Union statistics.

The government's telecommunications company restricted access to numerous Web sites considered pornographic, culturally or politically sensitive, or competitive with local telecommunications services. The criteria for blocking Internet sites were not transparent. The government placed warnings on other Web sites that criticism of the sultan or personal criticism of government officials would be censored and could lead to police questioning, effectively increasing self-censorship. The government also monitored Internet communications and reportedly questioned some chat room

contributors who were critical of government officials or policies, or whose postings precipitated criticism, after identifying the contributors through their Internet service provider addresses. There were reports Web site administrators removed chat room or blog postings, but it was unclear whether such censorship was self-imposed or in response to government requests.

During the year several Web sites were rigorously cautious concerning content, and moderators reportedly were quick to delete potentially offensive material.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government limited academic freedom, particularly publishing on or discussing controversial matters such as domestic politics, through the threat of dismissal. Academics largely practiced self-censorship. There were no reported cases during the year in which the government dismissed an academic on these grounds.

The appropriate government authority must approve all public cultural events. There were indications organizations avoided controversial issues due to the belief authorities might not approve such events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The law provides for circumscribed freedom of assembly, and the government restricted the exercise of this right in practice. Prior government approval was necessary for all public gatherings. Authorities enforced this requirement, with rare exceptions.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association "for legitimate objectives and in a proper manner." The Council of Ministers approves the establishment of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)--officially recognized as associations--to work on a set of acceptable issues, including women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, the environment, and others approved by the council. The council limited freedom of association in practice by prohibiting associations whose activities were deemed "inimical to the social order" or otherwise not appropriate and did not license groups regarded as a threat to the predominant social and political views or the interests of the country. Associations must also register with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), which approves association bylaws. The average time required to receive approval and register an association was approximately two years, although the process could be as short as two months. Approval time varied based on the level of preparedness of the applying organization and was often longer because the group required significant help from the MoSD to formalize its structure. Formal registration of nationality-based associations was limited to one association for each nationality.

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for the freedom to practice religious rites as long as doing so does not disrupt public order. The government generally respected this right, albeit within defined parameters that placed limitations on the right in practice. By law Islam is the state religion and Shari'a is the basis of legislation. Most citizens were Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims, with some Shia and a few non-Muslim citizens. The government permitted worship by non-Muslim residents. All religious organizations must be registered with the government.

Non-Muslims were free to worship at churches and temples built on land the sultan donated. The government prohibits religious gatherings in locations other than government-approved houses of worship; it enforces this limitation only if there is a specific complaint, and there were no reports of such complaints during the year.

Islam was taught from a cultural and historical perspective in public and private schools, and Islamic studies were mandatory for Muslim students. Non-Muslim students in both systems were exempt from this requirement, and many private schools provided alternate religious instruction.

The law does not prohibit proselytizing, but the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) can stop individuals or groups from engaging in proselytizing if the ministry receives complaints. The government may use immigration regulations and laws against harassment to enforce the ministry's policy.

The MERA monitored sermons at mosques to ensure imams did not discuss political topics or instigate religious hatred or divisions. The government expected all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts the ministry distributed monthly. Imams may be suspended or dismissed for exceeding government boundaries. There were no reported suspensions or dismissals during the year. The government monitored, but did not attempt to control the content of sermons in non-Muslim places of worship.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal violence or harassment against members of religious groups. There was no Jewish population, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts or public statements by community or national leaders vilifying Jews. Anti-Semitism was present in the media. Anti-Semitic editorial cartoons depicting stereotypical and negative images of Jews, along with Jewish symbols, were published during the year, primarily in the privately owned daily newspaper *Al-Watan*. A senior columnist at the privately owned sister papers *The Times of Oman/Al-Shabiba* on several occasions attacked Israeli actions and policies in anti-Semitic tones, including the use of citations from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2009 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for freedom of movement within the country and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. The law does not specifically provide for foreign travel or emigration; however, the government generally respected these rights in practice. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees did not visit the country during the year, and it did not maintain an office or personnel in the country. The law prohibits forced exile, and there were no reported cases during the year.

Protection of Refugees

The country is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 protocol. Nevertheless, the law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. The ROP is responsible for determining refugee status but did not grant asylum or accept refugees for resettlement during the year. The ROP's system for granting refugee status was not transparent, and the law does not specify a time frame in which the ROP must adjudicate an asylum application.

In practice the government did not provide protection against the return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened. Tight control over the entry of foreigners effectively limited access to protection for refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities apprehended and deported hundreds of Somalis, Yemenis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans who sought to enter the country illegally by land and sea in the South, and Afghans and Pakistanis who generally came to the country by boat via Iran in the North. Authorities generally detained these persons in centers in Salalah or the northern port city of Sohar, where they stayed an average of one month before being deported to their countries of origin.

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

The law does not provide citizens with the right to change their government. The sultan retains ultimate authority on all foreign and domestic issues.

Elections and Political Participation

In 2007 more than 60 percent of almost 400,000 registered voters participated in elections for the Consultative Council, which has no formal legislative powers but provides a mechanism for citizen input into the establishment of laws. Electoral commissions reviewed potential candidates against a set of educational and character criteria before allowing candidates' names on the ballot. There were no notable or widespread allegations of fraud or improper government interference in the voting process. Although the government did not permit independent monitoring of the elections, the Ministry of Information invited foreign journalists to cover the voting in several locations throughout the country.

The law does not provide for political parties.

There were 14 women in the 154-seat Council of Oman, which includes the Consultative Council and the State Council, whose members are appointed by the sultan. There were four appointed female ministers, three of whom served in the 32-member cabinet.

The Council of Oman and the Cabinet of Ministers were composed of representatives from a variety of linguistic, religious, racial, and other backgrounds.

Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year.

Public officials are not subject to financial disclosure laws.

The law does not provide public access to government information. All royal decrees and ministerial decisions were published for public access.

Section 5 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

There were no registered domestic human rights NGOs or fully autonomous human rights groups in the country. There was a government-funded human rights commission to report on human rights via the State Council to the sultan.

No association may receive funding from an international group without government approval. Individuals convicted of doing so may receive up to six months in jail and a fine of 500 rials (approximately \$1,310). Heads of domestic NGOs reported the government periodically asked to review their financial records to confirm sources of funding and required NGOs to inform the government of any meetings with foreign organizations or diplomatic missions.

The government allowed several international organizations to work in the country without interference, including the UN Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, and the International Labor Organization.

Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination against citizens on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, race, language, religion, place of residence, and social class. The government generally enforced prohibitions on discrimination effectively.

Women

The law criminalizes rape with penalties up to 15 years in prison, but it does not criminalize spousal rape. The government generally enforced the law when cases were reported, but cultural and societal influences may have prevented victims from reporting rape. As a result, there was no reliable estimate of the extent of the problem. Foreign nationals working as domestic employees occasionally reported they had been raped by their sponsors or by employees of labor recruitment agencies. According to officials in foreign missions, police investigations resulted in few rape convictions; sponsors repatriated most of the women who made the allegations.

The law does not specifically address domestic violence. Assault, battery, and aggravated assault carry a maximum sentence of three years in prison. Allegations of spousal abuse in civil courts handling family law cases were reportedly common. Victims of domestic violence may file a complaint with police; due to cultural and societal customs, women often sought private family intervention to protect them from violent domestic situations. Authorities generally enforced the law when they were aware such crimes had occurred.

There is no law prohibiting female genital mutilation (FGM), but the Ministry of Health prohibited doctors from performing the procedure in hospitals. The issue remained sensitive and was not publicly discussed. Planners at the Ministry of Health did not take action to eliminate FGM during the year.

Prostitution was illegal. Observers reported, however, despite strict cultural norms and immigration controls, women from Eastern Europe, South Asia, North Africa, and China engaged in prostitution.

The law does not specifically prohibit sexual harassment. In a recent study, 11 percent of women surveyed said they had been sexually harassed.

The government recognized the basic right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children. Health clinics were permitted to operate freely in disseminating information on family planning under the guidance of the Ministry of Health. There are no legal restrictions on the right to access contraceptives. The government guaranteed free childbirth services to citizens within the framework of universal health care. Prenatal and postnatal care was readily available. Men and women received equal access to diagnosis and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Despite legal and some social progress, including the appointment of women as ministers, ambassadors, and senior government officials, women continued to face discrimination. Aspects of Islamic law and tradition as interpreted in the country discriminated against women. The law favors male heirs in adjudicating inheritance. Many women were reluctant to take an inheritance dispute to court for fear of alienating the family. Women married to noncitizens may not transmit citizenship to their children and cannot sponsor their noncitizen husband's presence in the country.

Women may own property. Government officials applied different standards to female applicants for housing loans, resulting in fewer approvals for women. The law equalizes the treatment of men and women in receiving free government land for housing, and in April the government began allocating land to women to address concerns about inequality in access to land ownership. Illiteracy among women 45 and older hampered their ability to own property, participate in the workforce, or inform themselves about their rights.

Government policy provided women with equal opportunities for education, and educated women have attained positions of authority in government, business, and the media, but women still faced some job discrimination based on cultural norms. In both the public and private sectors, women were entitled to maternity leave and equal pay for equal work. The government, the country's largest employer of women, observed such regulations, as did many private sector employers.

The MoSD is the umbrella ministry for women's affairs. The ministry provided support for women's economic development through the Oman Women's Association and local community development centers.

Children

Citizenship is derived from one's parents. Although women married to noncitizens may not transmit citizenship to their children, there were no reported cases of statelessness. All births were registered promptly.

Primary school education for children, including noncitizen children, was free and universal, but not compulsory.

There were reports of FGM performed on some girls ages one to nine.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons for all purposes. Nonetheless, there were reports persons were trafficked to and through the country. The sultanate was a destination for men and women trafficked primarily from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines, some of whom became victims when they were subjected to conditions of involuntary servitude as domestic workers and laborers. It was a transit point for such victims from those countries en route primarily to the United Arab Emirates, but also to other Gulf countries. It was also a destination country for women from the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, India, Morocco, and Eastern Europe for commercial sexual exploitation.

Labor recruiting agencies in sending countries sometimes used false contracts for employment. Some employers of illegal immigrants exploited their employees based on their illegal status. Some foreign female household workers were lured into prostitution with the promises of higher wages.

Persons convicted on trafficking charges face three to 15 years in prison and fines of 5,000 to 100,000 rials (approximately \$13,000 to \$260,000). The government arrested, prosecuted, and punished individuals in two trafficking cases during the year.

On May 27, a court in Seeb sentenced 11 men to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 rials (\$26,000) each for trafficking Arab women through Oman for prostitution in another Gulf country.

On September 6, a court in Sohar sentenced two men to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 rials (\$26,000) each for trafficking in persons and forced prostitution.

The MOM, ROP, and public prosecutor's office are primarily responsible for combating trafficking. The government worked with foreign governments to prevent trafficking in persons. During the year the government maintained its 2008 memorandum of understanding with India regarding the treatment of its expatriate workers in the country and also worked with sending countries to identify and prosecute recruitment agencies involved in trafficking.

The government made significant efforts to combat trafficking during the year, including training for the police on the identification of trafficking victims and screening of immigrants who are apprehended for entering the country illegally. The government continued to provide shelter, financial assistance, and counseling to trafficking victims at appropriate facilities. There were no reports government officials were involved in trafficking.

In the two trafficking cases concluded during the year, the government provided accommodation for the victims in a specially arranged shelter with access to health care. The government paid for the victims to be repatriated as they desired at the conclusion of the cases.

The MOM conducted rigorous inspections of privately owned companies to identify victims of trafficking during the year. The government continued to operate a 24-hour hotline to register complaints from potential victims and held training sessions for MOM, public prosecutors, and ROP officials on trafficking and forced labor during the year. In October the government launched an antitrafficking Web site and published a national plan to combat trafficking in persons. The plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of each government entity involved in combating trafficking in persons and lists factors to assist authorities in identifying trafficking victims. It also established a secretariat to collect and publish data related to trafficking in persons.

The Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* can be found at www.state.gov/g/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides persons with disabilities the same rights prescribed for other citizens; however, there was no protective legislation to ensure equal educational opportunities for them. Persons with disabilities also faced societal discrimination.

The law mandates access to buildings for persons with disabilities, but many older buildings (including government buildings and schools) were not retrofitted to conform to the law. The law also requires private enterprises employing more than 50 persons to reserve at least 2 percent of positions for persons with disabilities. In practice this regulation was not widely enforced.

The MoSD is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The penal code criminalizes homosexuality with a jail term of six months to three years. There were no reports of prosecutions for homosexual conduct during the year.

The discussion of sexual orientation in any context remained a social taboo. There was no official or overt societal discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, or access to education or health care.

Other Societal Discrimination

The government does not permit foreigners with HIV/AIDS to work in the country.

Section 7 Worker Rights

a. Right of Association

The government recognizes workers' rights to form unions and a general federation to represent unions in regional and international fora. Members of the armed forces, public security institutions, government employees, and domestic workers are prohibited from forming or joining unions. At year's end according to the MOM, there were 80 unions at the enterprise level.

Workers have the right to strike. They must give employers three weeks' notice of intent to strike.

Some government control over union activities remained. The law prohibits accepting grants or financial assistance from any source without the MOM's prior approval. The government also requires unions to register. The law prohibits unions among civil servants and most essential services, thus preventing strikes as well. Any worker in the country who feels his or her rights have been violated can lodge a complaint with the MOM. The MOM investigated complaints and responded appropriately.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows for collective bargaining, and regulations require employers to engage in collective bargaining on the terms and conditions of employment, including wages and hours of work. The law prohibits employers from firing or imposing penalties for union activity.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor. There were reports that adult forced labor occurred. Some men and women from South and Southeast Asia, most of whom migrated voluntarily to the country as domestic servants or low-skilled workers in the construction, agriculture, and service sectors, subsequently faced conditions indicative of involuntary servitude, including withholding of passports and other restrictions on movement, nonpayment of wages, long working hours without food or rest, threats, and physical or sexual abuse. Some employers of domestic workers, contrary to the law, continued to withhold documents releasing the workers from employment contracts or demanded release fees totaling as much as 600 rials (approximately \$1,560) before allowing the workers to change employers.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all child labor; the minimum age for employment is 15, or 18 for certain hazardous occupations. Children 15 to 18 may only work between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Minors are prohibited from working for more than six hours per day, on weekends, or on holidays.

Child labor did not exist in any formal industry. As a cultural practice, Bedouin children sometimes voluntarily participated in camel racing for their families, despite the 18-year minimum age for camel riders.

The MOM generally enforced the law effectively; in practice, enforcement often did not extend to small family businesses that employed underage children, particularly in the agricultural and fishing sectors.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage for citizens of 140 rials (approximately \$364) per month did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Minimum wage regulations did not apply to a variety of occupations and businesses, including small businesses employing fewer than five persons, dependent family members working for a family firm, and some categories of manual laborers. There is no minimum wage for foreign workers. There were reports migrant laborers in some firms and households worked more than 12-hour days for as little as 30 rials (\$78) per month. The MOM effectively enforced the minimum wage for citizens.

The private sector workweek was 40 to 45 hours and included a rest period from Thursday afternoon through Friday. Government workers had a 35-hour workweek. Although the law does not designate the number of days in a workweek, it requires at least one 24-hour rest period per week and mandates overtime pay for hours in excess of 48 per week. Government regulations regarding hours of employment were not always enforced, especially for foreign workers. Employees who worked extra hours without compensation could file a complaint with the MOM's Directorate of Labor Care.

The law states an employee may remove himself or herself from dangerous work without jeopardy to continued employment if the employer knew about the danger and did not implement corrective measures. Employees covered under the labor law may receive compensation for job-related injury or illness through employer-provided medical insurance. Domestic workers are not covered under the labor law, but separate domestic employment regulations obligate

the employer to provide domestic workers with local medical treatment free of charge throughout the contract period. Medical professionals reported some employers did not provide low-skilled migrant workers with medical insurance or provided them with coverage as low as five rials (approximately \$13) per month, with any excess costs deducted from their salaries. Inspectors from the Department of Health and Safety of the Labor Care Directorate generally enforced the health and safety standard codes and made regular onsite inspections as required by law. Additional training was conducted for these inspectors during the year.