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DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

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BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

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The Sultanate of Oman is a hereditary monarchy with a population of approximately 3.3 million, including approximately 900,000 nonnationals, ruled by Sultan Qaboos Al Bu Sa'id since 1970. Only the sultan can amend the country's laws through royal decree. The 84-member Majlis as-Shura (Consultative Council) is a representative advisory institution that can review legislation. In October 2007 approximately 245,000 registered voters participated in generally free and fair elections for all of the council's seats. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

Citizens did not have the right to change their government. The government restricted freedoms of privacy, speech, press, assembly, association, and religion. Discrimination and domestic violence persisted for women. There was a lack of sufficient legal protection and enforcement to secure the rights of migrant workers. There were reports that expatriate laborers, particularly domestic workers, were placed in situations amounting to forced labor and that some suffered abuse.

On November 16, the government established an independent human rights commission with membership from both the public and private sectors. On November 24, it also passed a comprehensive law to combat trafficking in persons.

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 that 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 that 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. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that any prison cells lacked proper sanitation.

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.

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 its findings are turned over to the Directorate General of Human Resources for disciplinary action. There is no public information about the ROP's internal disciplinary action. Officers received human rights training at the police academy.

Arrest and Detention

The law does not require the police to obtain a warrant prior to making an arrest. The law provides that within 48 hours of arrest, the 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. In contrast with 2007, 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 if necessary. There was a functioning system of bail. Detainees generally had prompt access to a lawyer of their choice; however, the 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 that foreign workers suspected of being in the country illegally were detained without charge 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 located throughout the sultanate that 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 inspector general.

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 made by government bodies and 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 that require 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 in cases involving state security.

Military and security personnel are subject to a military tribunal system of justice to which there is 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. Juries are not used; however, citizens 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 directs 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 may appeal jail sentences 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

Civil cases are governed by applicable civil procedure codes. Citizens and nationals of other countries were able to file cases in the courts. There were instances in which courts ruled in favor of domestic servants against their sponsors, requiring sponsors to return the workers' passports and allow them to break the employment contract. In some of these instances, the court issued orders to apprehend the sponsor and force his or her appearance before the court. Both 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 used in practice.

The law does not require police to obtain search warrants before entering homes, although the police often obtained warrants from the public prosecutor's office. The government monitored private communications, including mobile 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; however, the government generally restricted these rights in practice. Journalists and writers exercised self-censorship, due to both the expectation of official censorship and fear of government reprisal.

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 five privately owned newspapers in the country, three in Arabic and two in English. Editorials generally were consistent with the government's views, although authorities tolerated some limited criticism regarding domestic and foreign affairs issues, 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 three radio stations and two television stations, none of which generally aired politically controversial material. There were also three private radio stations that aired occasional news bulletins supplied by the state-owned Oman News Agency. Access to foreign broadcasts via satellite was widespread in the major urban areas; however, there was no permanent international media presence in the country. Occasional international reporting tended to focus on special events or human interest stories.

The Ministry of Information strictly 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 prior to publication.

Various media companies reportedly refused to publish articles by journalists who previously criticized the government; however, unlike in 2007, there were no reports that the government maintained an alleged blacklist of journalists and writers whose work is not to be published in the country. The authorities tolerated a limited degree of criticism of policies, government officials, and agencies, particularly via the Internet; however, such criticism rarely appeared in traditional mass media.

The government continued to use 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 very little publication of books. The government restricted the importation, distribution, and publication of books as it restricted other media.

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 during the year; however, Internet access was widely available via Internet cafes in urban areas.

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, which increased 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 tracking the contributors through their Internet service provider addresses.

The country's former most popular chat room site, al-Sablah al-Omania, remained closed at year's end. In January 2007 police arrested the site's founder and 10 of his associates for publishing comments critical of government officials. After a four-month trial, a court of first instance acquitted the founder and three codefendants on charges of slander but fined the six other defendants and sentenced one defendant to one month in jail. Although several sites served as replacements for al-Sablah, all were rigorously cautious concerning content, and moderators reportedly quickly deleted potentially offensive material.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom, particularly publishing or discussing controversial matters such as domestic politics, through the threat of dismissal. As a result, academics generally 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. Organizations avoided controversial issues, reportedly due to belief that the 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. The 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, which approves association bylaws. The average time required to receive approval and register an association was about two years. Formal registration of nationality-based associations was limited to one association for each nationality.

Women's associations were able to register somewhat faster than other organizations because women's associations only have to register with the Ministry of Social Development and do not have to be approved by the Council of Ministers.

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, but within defined parameters that placed limitations on the right in practice. The law provides that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source 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 donated by the sultan. In 2006 the government formally prohibited religious gatherings in locations other than government-approved houses of worship and mandated that non-Islamic institutions receive approval from the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) prior to issuing publications within their communities. The government enforced the prohibition on places of worship only if there was a specific complaint, and it generally did not review religious publications prior to their dissemination.

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 studies instruction.

The law does not prohibit proselytizing, but the 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 distributed monthly by the ministry. Imams may be suspended or dismissed for exceeding government boundaries; however, 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-Islamic communities.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal violence or harassment against members of religious groups; however, anti-Semitism was present in the media. There was no Jewish population and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts or public statements by community or national leaders that vilified Jews. However, anti-Semitic editorial cartoons depicting stereotypical and negative images of Jews, along with Jewish symbols, were published during the year. These expressions occurred primarily in the privately owned daily newspaper Al-Watan without government response.

For a more detailed discussion, see the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report at www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt.

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 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 (UNHCR) did not visit the country during the year, and the UNHCR 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 law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating

to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, although the country is not party to either the convention or the protocol. The ROP is responsible for determining refugee status but did not accept refugees for resettlement during the year. The ROP's system for granting refugees was not transparent, and the law does not specify a time frame in which the ROP must adjudicate a resettlement 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 refugees and prospective 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 October 2007 more than 60 percent of almost 400,000 registered voters participated in elections for the Consultative Council, which has no formal legislative powers. 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, comprising the Consultative Council, whose members are elected, 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.

Government Corruption and 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.

The law does not provide public access to government information; however, all royal decrees and ministerial decisions were published for public access.

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

The government restricted NGO activity. There were no registered domestic human rights NGOs or fully autonomous human rights groups in the country. On November 16, the government established a human rights

commission to protect and 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 could receive up to six months in jail and a 500-rial (approximately \$1,310) fine. Heads of domestic NGOs reported that 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.

In 2006 there were reports that the government threatened an activist involved in a foreign-registered organization with arrest or loss of government employment or scholarships. There were no further reports of this practice during the year.

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 (ILO).

Section 5 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. However, the government did not effectively enforce the law, and discrimination of various types existed.

Women

The law criminalizes rape, with penalties of up to 15 years in prison, but it does not criminalize spousal rape. The government generally enforced the law when cases were reported; however, cultural and societal influences may have prevented many women from reporting rape. As a result, there was no estimate of the extent of the problem. Foreign nationals working as housemaids occasionally reported that 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 the police; however, due to cultural and societal customs, women often sought private family intervention to protect them from violent domestic situations. Authorities enforced the law when they were aware that such crimes had occurred.

According to a 2006 report by the World Health Organization, female genital mutilation (FGM) occurred in rural areas to a limited extent. There is no law prohibiting FGM, but the Ministry of Health prohibited doctors from performing the procedure in hospitals. The problem remained sensitive and was not discussed publicly. Planners at the Ministry of Health have not taken action to eliminate FGM.

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

Despite legal and some social progress, including the appointment of women as ministers, ambassadors, and senior government officials, women continued to face many forms of 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.

Although women may own property, government officials applied different standards to female applicants for housing loans, resulting in fewer approvals for women. On November 16, the government enacted new laws to equalize the treatment of men and women in receiving free government land for housing. Illiteracy among women 45 and older hampered their ability to own property, participate in the modern sector of the economy, or educate 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; however, many women still faced 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 Ministry of Social Development 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

The government is committed to the rights and welfare of children in Oman. Primary school education for children, including noncitizen children, was free and universal but not compulsory.

There were no public reports of violence against children; however, FGM allegedly was performed on some girls ages one to nine.

Trafficking in Persons

On November 24, the government enacted a law that prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons. Trafficking remained a problem in the country. The law establishes the "National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons" under the leadership of a government minister.

The sultanate was a destination and transit country 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 also a destination country for women from the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, India, Morocco, and Eastern Europe for commercial sexual exploitation.

During a 2006 fact-finding visit, the UN special rapporteur (UNSR) for trafficking in persons received reports that some local recruitment agencies brought domestic servants and laborers to the country under fictitious contracts and sometimes confiscated passports and other labor documents.

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 at least two prostitution cases during the year.

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. For example, the government signed a memorandum of understanding with India regarding the treatment of its expatriate workers in Oman and also worked with sending countries to identify and prosecute recruitment agencies involved in trafficking.

During the year the MOM employed new labor inspectors trained by the ILO to identify victims of trafficking in persons and began more rigorous inspections of privately owned companies in the country. The government continued to operate a 24-hour hot line to register complaints from potential victims and held training sessions for MOM officials on trafficking and forced labor during the year.

The State Department's 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, although a February 2007 report by the UNSR on disabilities identified a lack of protective legislation to ensure equal educational opportunities. Although there were no reports of government discrimination against persons with disabilities, the government did not effectively enforce the law, and persons with disabilities faced societal discrimination.

The law mandates access to buildings for persons with disabilities. Access to buildings is sometimes possible, but persons with disabilities still face challenges and many older buildings and historical sites 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 Ministry of Social Development is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Education initiated programs in the Muscat area during the year to reintegrate students with disabilities into the mainstream education system.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

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

There were no reports of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. Right of Association

In 2006 the government officially recognized 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, workers had formed 58 unions at the enterprise level.

Workers have the right to strike; however, they must give employers three weeks' notice of intent to strike. In May 2007 workers at the Port of Salalah went on strike demanding higher wages and changes to policies covering health and safety. The MOM declared the strike illegal because workers had not provided sufficient advance notification. The strike ended after one day with most of the striking workers returning to their jobs, and the parties subsequently achieved a negotiated settlement.

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.

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, including of children; however, there were reports that adult forced labor occurred.

At times foreign workers were reportedly placed in situations amounting to forced labor. In 2006 the Supreme Court ruled that foreign workers may change employers without first receiving permission from their original sponsor. However, some employers of domestic workers continued to withhold documents releasing them from employment contracts or demanded release fees totaling as much as 600 rials (approximately \$1,560) before allowing them 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 years, 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. The MOM generally enforced the law effectively; however, in practice, enforcement often did not extend to small family businesses that employed underage children, particularly in the agricultural and fishing sectors.

Child labor did not exist in any formal industry. As a cultural practice, Bedouin children voluntarily participated in camel racing for their families. The government continued one-year increases in the minimum age of camel riders; the 18-year minimum is scheduled to be achieved in 2009.

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. Further, minimum wage regulations did not apply to a variety of occupations and businesses, including small businesses that employed fewer than five persons, dependent family members working for a family firm, and some categories of manual labor. There is no minimum wage for foreign workers. There were reports that 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 that 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 recover 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 that 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.