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## 2009 Human Rights Report: Qatar

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### 2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

March 11, 2010

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy headed by Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. The population is approximately 1.8 million, of whom approximately 225,000 are citizens. The emir exercises full executive power. The 2005 constitution provides for continued hereditary rule by the emir's male branch of the Al-Thani family. Shari'a (Islamic law) is the main source of legislation. The emir approves or rejects legislation after consultation with the appointed 35-member Advisory Council and cabinet. There are no elections for national leadership, and the law forbids political parties. In 2007 citizens elected the 29 members of the Central Municipal Council. Reports based on monitoring by the government-appointed National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and informal observations by diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of security forces.

Citizens lacked the right to change the leadership of their government by election. There were prolonged detentions in overcrowded and harsh facilities, often ending in deportation. The government placed restrictions on civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press (including the Internet), assembly, association, and religion. Foreign laborers faced restrictions on foreign travel. Trafficking in persons, primarily in the labor and domestic worker sectors, was a problem. Legal, institutional, and cultural discrimination against women limited their participation in society. The unresolved legal status of "Bidoons" (stateless persons with residency ties) resulted in discrimination against these noncitizens. Authorities severely restricted worker rights, especially for foreign laborers and domestic servants.

### 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 constitution and law prohibit such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed torture. The 2008 NHRC report cited receipt of information in two cases of "ill-treatment" and indicated that authorities took "due and necessary action." Documentation of abuses was limited due partly to hesitancy of alleged victims to make public claims of torture or abuse. The government interprets Shari'a as allowing corporal punishment.

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During the year the government conducted training for law enforcement and military personnel focusing on the prohibition of torture. A 2006 UN Committee Against Torture Report questioned the country's implementation of its obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, citing the lack of a comprehensive definition of torture in domestic law and the absence of training and education for law enforcement personnel, medical personnel, and public officials about the prohibition. Under the constitution, the terms of all international agreements ratified by the government become domestic law, and the government considers its definition of torture to be the one contained in the UN convention.

At year's end a police officer's appeal was pending of his conviction for mistreatment in 2006 of an Indian citizen who alleged that police intentionally burned him with cigarettes during interrogation.

Courts ordered corporal punishment (flogging) prescribed by interpretation of Shari'a in cases of alcohol consumption. On appeal, the court typically reduced this type of sentence to a fine. Authorities did not carry out corporal punishment during the year.

### Prison and Detention Center Conditions

In some prisons and detention centers, conditions did not meet international standards. During the year there were no monitoring visits or requests to visit by independent human rights observers. The government-appointed NHRC conducted regular visits to prisons, jails, and detention centers, but it did not visit the state security prison. Authorities informed the NHRC of the citizenship of prisoners and detainees, and the NHRC monitored the length of each person's detention. According to some embassies, the government frequently delayed notification of arrest. The NHRC reported that the Deportation Detention Center (DDC) held an estimated 1,000 male and 300 female detainees during the year. The government granted foreign embassy personnel regular access to the DDC and the central prison. The government did not approve requests to visit the state security prison and police detention centers.

The Capital Police Detention Center (CPDC) had better conditions with beds and separation according to gender. In the state security prison, conditions were generally better than at the central prison. The DDC held some male and female detainees awaiting civil trial or persons awaiting criminal trial together with persons awaiting deportation. The central prison held some pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners because of overcrowding at the CPDC. The Ministry of Social Affairs had authority over juvenile detainees and held them separately under the supervision of a social worker.

### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. Authorities may detain individuals in the state security prison for indefinite periods under the Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law. There were no reports of arbitrary arrest or detention, and the NHRC reported during the year authorities released three persons previously held under the law. Processing speed for deportations increased for most DDC detainees during the year with the period of detention ranging

from two days to three months.

#### Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the military and internal police forces. Police, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), were responsible for general security, combating crime, and protecting public facilities, and the population generally regarded police as effective. The government had mechanisms to investigate abuse and corruption. During the year the government instituted training to prevent corruption and torture by police, and reports of official impunity decreased.

#### Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

Criminal law requires that persons be apprehended openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by a duly authorized official, be charged within 24 hours, and be brought before a court without undue delay. Authorities respected this in practice. The Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law provides an exception that permits detention without charge for as long as two years (in six-month periods that can be extended) and allows detention for as long as six months without charge for investigation, extendable indefinitely by a special court order. Decisions under the law were not subject to appeal. The law empowers the minister of interior to detain a defendant for crimes related to national security, honor, or impudence. Although generally not used, a provision of the law permits the prime minister to adjudicate complaints against these detentions.

In most cases a judge may order a suspect released, remanded to custody to await trial, held in pretrial detention pending investigation, or released on bail. Although suspects are entitled to bail (except in cases of violent crimes), it is used infrequently in practice. Authorities were more likely to grant citizens bail than noncitizens. Noncitizens charged with minor crimes may be released to their citizen sponsor, although they may not leave the country until the case is resolved.

Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one month at a time to provide authorities additional time to conduct investigations. The accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process and prompt access to family members in nonsecurity cases. There are provisions for state-funded legal counsel for indigents in criminal cases, and this requirement is generally honored in practice. Authorities generally afforded suspects detained under the Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law access to counsel but delayed access to family members. Once convicted of state security violations, prisoners were held in the state security prison.

The Permanent Committee on Examining the Conditions of Inmates at the DDC was charged with reviewing and acting on the cases of those in custody for two months.

#### Amnesty

A committee within the MOI reviews individual cases for possible leniency and makes recommendations to the emir, who customarily grants amnesties on holy days and other special occasions. During Ramadan the emir granted amnesty to 205 prisoners, of whom 168 were noncitizens. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that the emir pardoned prisoners on National Human Rights Day.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but the emir, based on the recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Council, appoints all judges. They hold their positions at his discretion. Approximately 75 percent of the judges were foreign nationals dependent on residency permits granted by civil authorities. During the year there were no reports of political or governmental interference or corruption in the courts. Although the emir has the ability to remove judges, he has never exercised the power.

The law provides for a three-tiered court system: the courts of first instance, appeals, and cassation. The courts of first instance are the courts of justice (civil, criminal, and commercial). The court of appeals hears appeals of decisions from the courts of first instance. Legal reforms in 2003 eliminated separate Shari'a courts, although Shari'a still governs family cases heard by the civil courts. The Court of Cassation hears cases from the appeals court and has four chambers, two for appeals of civil cases and two for appeals of criminal cases. The Court of Cassation is the court of final appeal, except on constitutional matters. A separate Supreme Constitutional Court rules on disputes related to the constitutionality of laws and rules and the jurisdiction of lower courts.

An administrative court of at least one circuit exists within each of the three tiers (first instance, appeal, and cassation). Each circuit consists of three judges and is the sole party concerned with settling administrative disputes between government entities.

There are no provisions in the law for establishment of security tribunals. The existing court system would handle such cases. The constitution provides for establishment of military tribunals, but their use is restricted to periods of martial law, and only military crimes committed by members of the armed forces and other security forces may come before such tribunals.

There are provisions for nonjudicial proceedings for administrative discipline of military and security personnel, but during the year no such proceedings were reported.

#### Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial for all citizens, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

The law provides defendants the presumption of innocence; in practice, those charged with a crime carry the burden of disproving at trial the charge against them.

All litigants, regardless of religion or citizenship, are tried in the unified court system under the Supreme Judicial Council, which regulates the judiciary. Trials are by jury and open to the public, but the presiding judge can close the courtroom to the public if he deems the case to be sensitive. Due to an October 2008 court of cassation ruling, the media has limited access to courts since journalists must obtain a judge's permission to attend. All sentences are publicly announced.

Lawyers prepare litigants and speak for them during the hearing, with interpreters provided for non-Arabic speakers. Defendants are entitled to legal representation throughout the pretrial and trial process. In matters involving religious issues, Shia and Sunni judges may apply their interpretations for their respective groups. There was an adequate number of both Shia and Sunni judges.

The courts reached verdicts in felony cases within four to six months of detention, and in misdemeanor cases within one to two months of citation.

Defendants have the right to be present for trial and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. Their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases, once the case has been filed in the court. Defendants have the right to confront and question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have the right of appeal.

Although there are no separate Shari'a courts, the application of Shari'a denied women equal status in certain civil proceedings.

The high fee for appealing to the Court of Cassation restricts the right to appeal. The appellant must deposit 20,000 riyals (approximately \$5,500) for the appeal in a case decided by the court of appeals and 5,000 riyals (\$1,375) in a case decided by the court of first instance. An appeal to the court of appeals costs 1,000 riyals (\$364). Litigants must deposit 10,000 riyals (\$2,750) for an appeal to the Constitutional Court. Deposits may be seized, in whole or in part, should the court decide to reject the appeal.

On September 27, the Supreme Constitutional Court, established in 2008, started to function following the nomination of Mubarak al-Assiri, head of the Supreme Judicial Council, as chief justice. The jurisdiction of the court is specifically limited to cases that involve constitutional questions.

#### Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reported political prisoners or detainees during the year.

#### Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law and judiciary permit persons with civil grievances to seek redress in the court system, although the majority of administrative decisions by the executive authority are immune from judicial jurisdiction, according to the 2008 NHRC report. The judiciary is not impartial and independent in practice, and judgments tend to favor citizens. The law specifies circumstances that necessitate a judge's removal from a case for conflict of interest, and these were observed in practice. There are civil and criminal remedies available for those seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations, but there were no cases reported during the year. There were no reports that a noncitizen won a judicial decision in a case involving an alleged civil grievance.

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

The constitution and the criminal procedures code prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. Traditional attitudes of respect for the sanctity of the home and the privacy of women provided protection against arbitrary intrusion for both citizens and noncitizens. Judicial authorities must grant a warrant before police may search a residence or business, except in cases involving national security or emergencies, of which there were none reported during the year. Police and security forces reportedly monitored telephone calls and e-mails.

Citizens must obtain government permission, which was generally granted, to marry foreigners. Citizens may apply for residency permits or citizenship for their spouses. The nationality law allows men and women to apply for citizenship for their spouses.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

#### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press in accordance with the law, but the government limited these rights in practice. Journalists and publishers continued to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government policies or material deemed hostile to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states. There were no reports that security authorities threatened individuals and organizations to keep them from publishing certain articles. According to journalists, editors would not permit printing the names of companies involved in labor cases. The law provides the press the right to attend the court proceedings, but the court may bar the media on a case-by-case basis.

The 1979 Press and Publications Law provides for restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspapers and criminal penalties and prison sentences for libel and slander, including injury to dignity, as well as for closure and confiscation of assets of the publication. All cases involving the media fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts.

In 2007 the emir established the Doha Center for Media Freedom to protect threatened journalists and to promote the free flow of news and information around the world. On June 19, Robert Menard, the former head of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Reporters without Borders (RSF), and three other officials of the center stepped down. In Menard's view, authorities had "suffocated" the center, and he protested the country's refusal to reform the "obsolete" and "repressive" laws governing the media that, he said, "made it impossible for the center to criticize any other country for imposing restrictions on media freedom." The center was largely inactive since June, and its Web site was unavailable at year's end.

Prior to Menard's departure, according to several media NGOs, the center provided assistance to 250 journalists and media organizations worldwide through direct funding and legal and medical assistance. Local media criticized the center for alleged lack of support to journalists and lack of regard for cultural values in the region.

After the Doha Center intervened during the year, authorities dismissed the case against *Gulf Times* reporter Peter Townson. Townson was arrested and charged in October 2008 with "spreading racial hatred" and bringing the country into "disrepute" after he filed stories on "family day" policies that prevent Asian laborers from entering entertainment areas on certain days.

Citizens discussed sensitive political and religious issues. Members of the much larger foreign population did not express themselves on sensitive topics. The government did not prosecute anyone for expression of views. During the year the government-supported Qatar Foundation continued to fund the "Doha Debates," a series of public debates broadcast by the BBC featuring citizens and noncitizens speaking about internationally controversial topics.

Although the seven daily newspapers are not state owned, owners are members of the ruling family or have close ties to government officials. The government reviewed and censored foreign newspapers and magazines for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content.

The Qatar Radio and Television Corporation and customs officials censored material. There were no specific reports of political censorship of foreign broadcast news media or foreign programs during the year.

State-owned television and radio reflected government views. Callers to the state-owned radio station's popular morning show frequently discussed topics such as government inefficiency and the lack of responsiveness to citizens' needs.

The Doha-based, Arabic-language Al Jazeera satellite television network focused coverage and commentary on international news. Al Jazeera and the government claimed that the channel was independent and free of government influence, but the government exercised editorial and programmatic control of the channel through funding and selection of the station's management. Al Jazeera covered local news when there was an international component. In October Al Jazeera Arabic Channel televised an investigative documentary titled *Foreign Workers in the Gulf*. The documentary included interviews with foreign workers and employers in the country about their opinion of the sponsorship law implemented in March.

#### Internet Freedom

The government restricted the peaceful expression of views via the Internet and censored the Internet for political, religious, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which monitored and blocked Web sites, e-mail, and chat rooms through the state-owned Internet service provider. For example, the government blocked access to the *Arab Times*, an Arab-American online newspaper, which at times published articles critical of the government. Authorities also blocked other sites such as [boingboing.net](http://boingboing.net), a technology and fashion site. A user who believed a site was mistakenly censored could submit the Web address to have the site reviewed for suitability; there were no reports that any Web sites were unblocked based on this procedure. According to 2008 International Telecommunication Union data, there were an estimated 116,000 Internet subscribers, and 34 percent of the country's population used the Internet.

#### Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research according to the conditions and circumstances stipulated by law. In practice, instructors at Qatar University noted that they often exercised self-censorship. Instructors at foreign-based universities operating in the country reported enjoying academic freedom. There were no reported government restrictions on cultural events, although some groups organizing cultural events reported that they exercised self-censorship.

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

##### Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for, but regulates, freedom of assembly. Organizers must meet a number of restrictions and conditions to acquire a permit for a public meeting. For example, the director general of public security must give his permission. His decision is not subject to appeal.

##### Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right to form societies, defined by the Advisory Council as professional societies. A number of professional societies exist, but administrative obstacles, including the slow pace of procedures required to form such associations, limited this right in practice. The law imposes strict conditions on the establishment, management, and function of professional societies. They are prohibited from engaging in political matters and must obtain approval from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which can deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest. Professional societies must pay 50,000 riyals (approximately \$13,740) in licensing fees and 10,000 riyals (\$2,750) in annual fees. Registrations are valid for three years, after which an association must register again and pay new fees.

The law allows noncitizens to participate in private societies only in cases in which their participation is deemed necessary to the work of the society. The prime minister must approve their participation, and the number of noncitizens cannot exceed 20 percent of the total membership.

During the year the government did not approve new NGOs. Since 2004 the government has approved 15 societies. At year's end 29 others were under consideration, including five that applied for registration during the year. Applications first submitted in 2005 (applications must be resubmitted yearly) to establish a journalists' association and a teachers' association remained pending at year's end.

Informal organizations, such as community support groups and activity clubs, operated without registration, but they may not engage in activities that could be deemed "political." The regulations prohibit international affiliation of associations.

A 2006 law regarding the establishment of "private establishments having public interest" allows for relaxed requirements for the formation of independent local and international NGOs in the country. Although untested, the law allows the registration of independent NGOs without the administrative hurdles and monetary requirements of the previously enacted law governing the formation of professional societies.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution provides for freedom of worship and forbids discrimination based on religion in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting public order and morality, but the government continued to prohibit proselytizing by non-Muslims and placed some restrictions on public worship. Among non-Muslims, only Christians have requested and been allowed to rent space for public worship. The Ministry of Justice maintains a registration procedure for Christian marriages performed by registered churches in the country. Adherents of other faiths may privately practice their religion without harassment.

The state religion is Islam. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims practiced Islam freely. Shia Muslims (approximately 10 percent of the citizen population) organized traditional Shia ceremonies and performed rites in their mosques because they chose not to perform them publicly. The government allowed Shia to build and decorate Shia mosques without restriction, and Shia were well represented in the lower and middle levels of government and in the business community.

The government and the ruling family are linked inextricably to Islamic institutions and practices. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs administers the construction of mosques, clerical affairs, and Islamic education for adults and new converts. The Ministry of Education administers Islamic education in public schools. The emir participated in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and financed the Hajj journeys of some pilgrims.

In October the authorities hosted the Seventh Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue. More than 250 participants from 59 countries, including Muslim clerics, Christian clergy, and Jewish rabbis, participated in the conference. At the conclusion of the conference, participants approved a declaration calling for interfaith cooperation to advance human rights, protect holy sites, and combat hunger and disease.

There was no prohibition of or action to discourage specific religions or religious factions. The government provided legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and many Indian Christian churches. The government allowed recognized congregations to open bank accounts and to sponsor clergy for visas. Construction continued on five Christian churches on land leased from the government. Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and members of other religious groups do not

operate as freely as Christian congregations do.

Religious services took place without prior government authorization; authorities have asked congregations not to advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses.

Criminal law provides for prison terms of up to 10 years for individuals proselytizing for any religion other than Islam on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation. Proselytizing on behalf of an individual for any religion other than Islam can result in a sentence of up to five years' imprisonment. The law provides for imprisonment of as long as two years for individuals who possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity.

In May the government issued a number of deportation orders, later rescinded, to a multinational group of Christian expatriates allegedly involved in unauthorized activities at labor camps in industrial areas. Other deportation orders for two Indian Christians were still being processed at year's end.

Converting to another religion from Islam is technically a capital offense, but there were no executions or other punishments handed down or carried out for such an act during the year.

Disclosure of religious affiliation is required when applying for a passport or other identity documents, but affiliation is not listed in the issued documents.

Islamic instruction was compulsory in public schools. Although there were no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attended secular private schools. There were no religious private schools.

The government regulated the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature. Individuals could import Bibles and other religious items for personal or congregational use. Government officials only monitored Islamic religious literature and copies of the Koran. Religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter were readily available in local shops; however, Bibles were not publicly available in local bookstores, either in Arabic or in English. Christmas decorations were on display in many public places, including shopping malls and in the common areas of housing compounds. Such decorations were available for sale at stores throughout Doha.

#### Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There was no indigenous Jewish community; the few Jews in the country were foreigners with no restrictions on traveling to or working in the country. On occasion, in response to political events and developments in the region, some of the country's privately owned Arabic-language newspapers carried cartoons depicting offensive caricatures of Jews and Jewish symbols and editorial comparisons of Israeli leaders and Israel to Hitler and the Nazis. These occurred primarily in the daily newspapers *Al-Watan*, *Al-Sharq*, *Al-Arab*, and *Al-Raya*, and drew no government response. In a January 9 sermon on Al-Jazeera, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi called for killing Jews "down to the very last one." The government does not officially collect or publish statistics on the religious affiliations of the population.

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

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

The constitution provides for these rights, but the government did not fully respect these rights. The government severely restricted in-country movement and foreign travel for noncitizens.

There were no reports that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) asked the government to assist refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

The only restrictions on in-country movement for citizens concerned sensitive military, oil, and industrial installations. Unlike previous years, local shopping malls did not prevent groups of foreign workers from entering entertainment areas in Doha on weekends and during certain periods designated as "family times."

The Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law allows the government to prevent some citizens from traveling abroad. Men may prevent adult female family members from leaving the country, but only by seeking and securing a court order. During the year no cases of women older than 18 being prevented from traveling abroad were reported.

Official policy severely restricted foreign travel for expatriate workers. A Sponsorship Law enacted in March outlawed the practice of employers retaining workers' passports but retained the provision requiring workers to obtain exit permits from their employers before being allowed to exit the country. Although the law provided an administrative procedure for obtaining an exit permit without an employer's approval, the process was burdensome. Foreign embassies reported that the process was ineffective and that they continued to be called upon to mediate disputes concerning exit permits between foreign workers and their sponsors.

The government did not allow noncitizen custodial parents to take their children out of the country without the permission of the citizen parent.

The constitution prohibits internal and external forced exile of citizens, and the government respected this prohibition in practice.

The constitution provides citizens who have left the country the right to return. Noncitizen women who were married to citizens received residence permits and could apply for citizenship, but they were required to relinquish their foreign citizenship. There were no restrictions on emigration from the country.

The government occasionally revoked citizenship or passports for political reasons, thereby restricting freedom of movement.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reported cases of deprivation of citizenship.

#### Protection of Refugees

The constitution prohibits the extradition of political refugees. The country is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the government has not established a system for providing protection or status to refugees. Its laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status. Individuals who were able to obtain local sponsorship or employment were allowed to enter and could remain as long as they were sponsored, but without asylum status.

The government generally provided protection against the expulsion or forcible return of refugees to countries where their

lives or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

#### Stateless Persons

The government provides a legal means for long-term residents to apply for and acquire citizenship; in practice, restrictions and uneven application of the law prevent stateless persons from acquiring citizenship. The Nationality Law allows a maximum of 50 noncitizen residents per year to apply for citizenship after residing in the country 25 consecutive years, but only a small number have been granted citizenship under this provision.

Citizenship derives solely from the father. Women do not transmit citizenship to their children, even if the child is born in wedlock in the country. A woman must obtain permission from authorities before marrying a foreign national, but she does not lose nationality upon marriage. According to the UNHCR, there were approximately 1,500 Bidoons (stateless Arabs with residency ties) in the country. They suffered discrimination based upon their lack of nationality. They were unable to register for such services as education and health care. There were no reports of summary deportation orders issued against long-term residents, including Bidoons. The Permanent Committee for Naturalization Affairs commissioned a study in 2008 to determine the extent of these practices, but the results of that study were not made public during the year.

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

The constitution does not provide citizens the right to peacefully change their government through elections. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by the emir's branch of the Al-Thani family. The Advisory Council, whose members the emir appointed, exercised significant influence over ministries. The constitutional provision for initiation of legislation by the Advisory Council has not been implemented. The influence of family and tribal traditions was strong, and the government did not permit political parties or opposition groups.

#### Elections and Political Participation

The emir exercises full executive powers, including appointment of cabinet members. In 2007 citizens elected the 29 members of the third Central Municipal Council to four-year terms. The council advises the minister of municipal affairs and agriculture on local public services. Diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities in the elections. Nearly 50 percent of the fewer than 50,000 eligible voters participated.

Approximately 75 percent of citizens could not vote in the 2007 municipal elections, as this right was limited to families who were in the country prior to 1930. All citizens older than 21 were eligible to run for seats on the council. The law limits political participation by persons whose citizenship was withdrawn but subsequently restored. These persons are denied the right to candidacy or nomination in any legislative body for 10 years from the date of restoration of their citizenship.

The law forbids formation of and membership in political parties. In July 2008 the emir postponed elections for an expanded 45-member Advisory Council and extended the term of the current council until 2010. In February the Permanent Elections Commission conducted a training program on campaign planning and communications with the foreign NGO National Democratic Institute in anticipation of 2010 elections.

Although the influence of traditional attitudes and roles continued to limit women's participation in politics, women served in public office as president of the Permanent Election Committee, head of the General Authority for Health, vice president

of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs (SCFA) with ministerial rank, head of the General Authority for Museums, and president of Qatar University. One woman served on the Central Municipal Council.

#### Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption. During the year local newspapers reported three prosecutions for embezzlement of funds from public corporations. The cases were still pending at year's end. Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws.

The National Committee for Accountability and Transparency is charged with implementing articles of the UN Convention for Combating Corruption, developing a national strategy to support transparency, implementing an awareness campaign, investigating complaints from the public, managing state properties, suggesting legislation, and training staff. The committee was considered effective in carrying out its mandate.

In November 2008 the audit bureau reported it had referred 26 cases involving private sector corruption in the administration of government contracts to the public prosecutor. During the year prosecutions resulted in five convictions, with judgments in favor of the government totaling more than 23 million riyals (approximately \$6.5 million). During the year local newspapers reported that a number of senior officials in various ministries had been dismissed for using their offices for personal gain but offered no details.

The government publishes laws in the official gazette, and some information was available on the Internet. Although there is a mechanism for individuals and private institutions to request information, information on the government budget, expenditures, or draft laws was generally not available.

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

There were few human rights organizations operating in the country. Domestic associations or NGOs may not engage in political activity or be critical of the government.

No international NGO or international organization focusing on human rights or humanitarian issues was resident in the country, with the exception of a major Western labor organization, which in March placed a representative in Doha to work on labor rights issues. During the year there were visits from representatives of the same organization to meet with authorities and local contacts for short periods.

The law provides the right to form private independent societies and associations, including NGOs, but since the law's enactment in 2004, the government approved only one application (for establishment of the Qatar Society for Rehabilitation and Special Needs, a nongovernmental human rights organization supporting persons with disabilities). One foreign NGO also successfully registered in 2007.

The government-funded and appointed NHRC investigates and works to improve local human rights conditions. In December the secretary general of the NHRC stated that the committee handled 1,009 petitions for assistance during the preceding 12 months, 400 submitted by citizens and 609 by expatriate workers. The government appointed five NHRC members from government ministries and seven from civil society. Members from the government ministries participate in the deliberations, but their votes do not count when the NHRC board members vote on resolutions.

During the year the NHRC did not issue a report on the status of human rights in the country.

## Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, language, religion, and disability, but not gender or social status. In practice, custom heavily influenced government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws, and legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed against women, noncitizens, and foreign workers.

### Women

The law criminalizes domestic violence and rape but does not address spousal rape. There were publicized cases of rape involving foreigners, but none were reported involving citizens. The penalty for rape is 10 years' imprisonment, or 14 years if the victim is younger than 16. If the perpetrator is the teacher, guardian, or caregiver of the victim, the penalty is life imprisonment. The government's ability to enforce the law against rape was limited due to underreporting by victims who feared social stigma.

There is no specific law criminalizing domestic violence. According to the NHRC, domestic violence may be prosecuted under the Criminal Law that provides a general prohibition against violence. According to the quasigovernmental Qatari Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children (QFPWC), domestic violence against women was a problem. There were no arrests or convictions for family domestic violence among citizens publicized in the press, although there were reports of cases involving noncitizens. During the year 259 cases of domestic abuse against women were reported to the foundation.

A 2007 Qatar University study found that 63 percent of 2,778 surveyed citizen and noncitizen female students reported they had been victims of physical abuse, with 52 reporting cases of "strong violence," such as rape, and 120 reporting sexual harassment. Approximately 50 women reported they had considered suicide because they were afraid of the repercussions if they notified authorities.

In 2007 the SCFA established a shelter under the supervision of the QFPWC to accommodate abused women and children. Since its opening, the shelter has accommodated 61 women and 73 children. The shelter provided a variety of services, including financial assistance, legal aid, and psychological counseling.

There were no reports of government interference in the right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children. There is no direct government support for access to means of contraception, but contraceptives are freely available without a prescription. Licensed medical professionals attended mothers at birth, and maternal care was readily available. Men and women are treated equally for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). All STDs are reported to the Ministry of Health.

The legal system allows leniency for a man found guilty of committing a so-called "honor" crime against a woman for perceived immodesty or deviant behavior. There were no reports of honor crimes during the year.

Prostitution is illegal, and the government considered it a problem. Government officials reported an increasing number of cases involving prostitution but provided no information about the scale of the problem.

In some cases sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic servants. Most domestic servants did not press charges for fear of losing their jobs. Sexual harassment is illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment and/or fines. A foreign embassy reported 700 cases of sexual harassment against domestic employees in 2008, the majority by citizen

employers. When the domestic employees brought harassment to the attention of authorities, the employees were often deported and no charges were filed against the employer. Another foreign embassy reported four cases of alleged rape against domestic employees during the year and an increase in the number of complaints alleging physical abuse and sexual harassment.

The constitution asserts the principle of equality between citizens in rights and responsibilities, and the Civil Service Law, the Housing Law, and others consolidate this principle of equality. However, traditions and interpretation of Shari'a disadvantaged women in certain cases. For example, the government adhered to an interpretation of Shari'a that recognizes Muslims have the automatic right to inherit from their Muslim spouses. A non-Muslim spouse (invariably a wife, since Muslim women cannot legally marry non-Muslims) does not inherit unless her spouse wills her a portion (as much as one-third of the total) of his estate. A Muslim husband does not automatically inherit the property of a non-Muslim wife. The proportion that women inherit depends upon their relationship to the deceased; in the cases of siblings, sisters inherit only one-half as much as their brothers.

Citizen women faced legal discrimination in obtaining citizenship for their noncitizen husbands and their children.

In cases of divorce, young children usually remain with the mother, regardless of her religion, unless she is found to be unfit. Sons remain in the custody of the mother until age 13 and daughters until age 15. In certain conditions the court may extend the age of maternal custody to 15 years for sons and to the time of marriage for daughters. In exceptional cases, the mother retains custody of children with disabilities with no age limit stipulated. In some cases, according to the NHRC, women who are granted guardianship over their children by law are denied their financial rights and associated right of residence.

The law allows a female citizen married to a noncitizen man residing in the country for the previous five years to benefit from the government housing system. Widows and divorced women may also benefit if they have children and have not inherited a house from a deceased husband. Unmarried men or women can benefit if they support parents, brothers, and sisters or are older than 35 years. The law is generally applied fairly in practice.

Women may attend court proceedings and may represent themselves, but a male relative generally represented them. In cases involving financial transactions, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but courts routinely evaluated evidence according to the overall credibility of the witness and the testimony being offered, and not on the basis of gender. In August 2008 the government equalized the law on compensation that had previously set the level of compensation to be paid for the loss of a woman's life at half that of a man.

A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim, but many make a personal decision to do so. Children born to a Muslim father are considered Muslims. Female family members can travel freely unless a male family member notifies customs and immigration officials that his permission is required. There were no reports that the travel of any woman had been restricted in this fashion during the year.

According to the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, women constituted approximately 13 percent of business owners, mainly operating design companies, fashion establishments, training centers, and beauty centers. Women served in the workforce as university professors, public school teachers, and police. Women served as professionals in government service, education, health, and private business. Women received equal pay for equal work but often lacked access to some positions and did not receive equal allowances for transportation, housing, and subsistence.

The SCFA seeks to improve the status of women and the family under both civil and Islamic law. The council contributed to a number of national and international conferences, studies, and reports on the status of women in the country, as well as the drafting of legislation affecting women and children.

#### Children

Citizenship is derived from one's father. The government generally registered all births immediately except for Bidoons. Since all persons must provide proof of nationality to access health care and education, these services are not available to stateless children.

The government provides for the welfare of citizen children, but not noncitizen children. The government funds free public education (elementary through university) and health care for citizens. Education was compulsory for all children through the age of 18. In practice this requirement is not enforced for noncitizen children. Schooling is free through primary school (the equivalent of ninth grade) for noncitizen children whose parents work in the government sector. There was generally no difference in attendance of girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels. Girls were the majority in postsecondary institutions.

There was no societal pattern of child labor or abuse, although there were some cases of family violence and physical and sexual abuse. The QFPWC reported during the year it received 106 cases involving abuse of children. Under section 280 of the Criminal Law, the penalty for having sexual relations with a person younger than 16 years is life imprisonment. If the individual is the relative, guardian, caretaker, or servant of the victim, the penalty is death.

The government-funded Qatar Orphan Foundation provided shelter, medical care, and education to orphans from birth to age 18. The children lived in a modern facility, segregated by age and sex, with adult supervision and medical care. The foundation seeks to place the orphans under the guardianship of citizen families.

The QFPWC conducted awareness campaigns on the rights of the child and maintained a special hotline that allowed both citizen and noncitizen children to call with questions and concerns ranging from school, health, and psychological problems to concerns about sexual harassment. This hotline operated in conjunction with the family abuse hotline; statistics on use were not available.

#### Trafficking in Persons

During the year the government adopted the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, but it had not passed a law criminalizing trafficking at year's end. Provisions of the Sponsorship Law create conditions that can lead to forced labor activities and slave-like conditions. Although the law criminalizes many practices related to trafficking in persons, including slavery, there were no forced labor or forced prostitution prosecutions.

The country was a transit and destination country for men and women trafficked for the purposes of involuntary servitude and, to a lesser extent, commercial sexual exploitation.

Men and women from Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East travel to the country as laborers and domestic servants but often subsequently face conditions of forced labor and physical and sexual exploitation.

Some women and girls who traveled to the country voluntarily to work were forced into prostitution. Most often, victims

were not prosecuted for prostitution; the government issued a deportation order and sent the women to the DDC. Women and girls also traveled to the country to work as domestic servants, where they were vulnerable to domestic servitude and physical and sexual exploitation and were unprotected by labor legislation.

A new sponsorship law implemented during the year prohibits the retention of workers' passports. The law retains the provision under which foreign laborers are not allowed to leave the country without a signed exit permit or to change employment without a written release from their sponsor. Under the terms of the new sponsorship law, foreign laborers may change employment or travel without the sponsor's permission only after a long administrative process. Foreign embassies reported that it was a burdensome process and implementation was not effective. Workers remained vulnerable to abuse, arrest, and deportation. Some sponsors intimidated and coerced foreign employees to work for longer periods than called for in contracts, reduced or withheld pay, and withheld passports and failed to obtain or renew residency permits.

Authorities arrested workers who did not have valid residency permits and detained them at the DDC. At the end of the year there were approximately 1,300 detainees awaiting deportation at the DDC.

Principal traffickers included individual employers, contractors, and employee recruitment agencies. Most victims traveled legally to the country by means of recruiting agencies in their home countries but faced conditions of forced labor and trafficking after they reached the country. Some workers were recruited for jobs in the country but then were abandoned by their recruiters upon arrival or by employers after the work was completed, making them even more vulnerable to trafficking.

Under the criminal law, traffickers can be prosecuted for slavery or forced labor. The law bans forced or coerced labor with prison sentences of up to seven years and a fine of up to 10,000 riyals (\$2,748). The law also specifically bans and provides penalties for child labor, including child camel riders (see section 7.d.).

The criminal law also addresses crimes that violate human liberty and sanctity (kidnapping) with up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The law specifically criminalizes the handling of money related to trafficking of women and children.

During the year no antitrafficking or related cases against employers or labor recruitment agencies were prosecuted, and there was no indication that the government assisted with international investigations or that it extradited citizens who were accused of trafficking in other countries.

Although there was no evidence of institutional involvement by government bodies or officials, some officials may own or operate companies that subject their employees to forced labor conditions.

Trafficking prevention efforts by the government included visits to camel racing tracks, police antitrafficking training, and a media campaign. In September the NHRC sponsored an antitrafficking awareness campaign that focused on the energy sector and included classroom training on workers' rights conducted at corporate facilities.

A human rights department in the MOI receives and processes cases of alleged human rights abuses and trafficking in persons.

There was a government shelter for trafficking victims to serve the needs of abused domestic workers, other laborers, and children. According to government policy, any person facing criminal or immigration violations cannot be considered a victim and will not receive assistance. This policy continued to severely limit the effectiveness of the shelter during the year.

The Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* can be found at [www.state.gov/g/tip](http://www.state.gov/g/tip).

#### Persons with Disabilities

The law requires the allocation of resources for persons with disabilities and prohibits discrimination against such persons. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals and the NHRC and enforcing compliance. The law requires that 2 percent of jobs in government agencies and public institutions be set aside for persons with disabilities. Private sector businesses employing a minimum of 25 persons were required to hire persons with disabilities. Employers who violated these employment provisions were subject to fines. There were no reports of any employer being fined for violating this law during the year. New public buildings were required to be accessible to persons with disabilities. In October the emir's sister, Sheikha Hassa bint Khalifa Al Thani, delivered a speech at the close of her term as the UN special rapporteur on disabilities in which she called on her country to enforce more rigorously its own laws and international conventions on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Private and independent schools in general provided most of the required services for students with disabilities, but government schools did not. Few public buildings met the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings generally did not comply with standards. The SCFA was charged with ensuring compliance with the rights and provisions mandated under the law, but compliance was not effectively enforced.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The government distinguished between citizens and noncitizens in employment, education, housing, and health services. Noncitizens were required to pay for health care, electricity, water, and education (services provided without charge to citizens). Noncitizens were eligible for medical coverage at a nominal fee. Noncitizens generally could not own property, but the law provides for property ownership in three designated areas.

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

The law prohibits same-sex relations between men but is silent concerning same-sex relations between women. Under the criminal law, a man convicted of having sexual relations with another man or boy younger than 16 is subject to a sentence of life in prison. A man convicted of having sexual relations with another man older than 16 is subject to a sentence of seven years in prison under section 285 of the criminal law. There were an unknown number of cases before the courts during the year. There were no lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) organizations in the country. During the year no violence was reported against LGBT persons.

#### Other Societal Discrimination

There was discrimination against HIV patients. HIV-positive foreigners, whose condition was typically diagnosed during their medical examinations upon arrival in the country, were deported. HIV-positive citizens were quarantined and received treatment.

## Section 7 Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

The labor law and regulations provide for worker organizations for citizens older than 18 in private enterprises that have more than 100 citizen workers. In practice, the law makes union formation difficult. Noncitizens were not eligible to form worker committees, and foreign workers could only be members of joint labor-management committees. Those working in the government sector were prohibited from joining a union. The law and regulations permit only the General Union for the Workers of Qatar (composed of various general committees for the workers in a trade or industry, which are in turn made up of worker committees at individual firms) and forbid affiliation with groups outside the country. There were no reported attempts to form unions during the year.

The law grants workers the right to strike, but restrictive conditions made the likelihood of a legal strike extremely remote. The labor law requires that a strike be approved by three-fourths of the company's workers committee. Such committees are composed of an equal number of representatives from management and labor, making it practically impossible for labor to gain a strike authorization. During the year there were no strikes reported. Foreign embassies reported several cases in which they intervened to resolve labor disputes reported by their nationals working in the country. In the past, the government responded to labor unrest by dispatching large numbers of police to the work sites or labor camps involved, and that the strikes generally ended peacefully after these shows of force. In most cases, the government summarily deported strike organizers. Government employees, domestic servants, and those in the public utility, health, and security services were prohibited from striking. These workers may legally seek permission to hold a public gathering, but there were no reports of such gatherings occurring during the year.

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

The labor law grants workers in private enterprises that have more than 100 citizen workers the right to bargain collectively and to sign joint agreements between employer and worker regarding a work-related issue. The government circumscribed the right through control over the rules and procedures of the bargaining and agreement processes. Collective bargaining was not freely practiced, and there were no workers under collective bargaining contracts.

Private employers and workers set wages without government involvement. Local courts handled disputes between workers and employers. Foreign workers avoided drawing attention to problems with their employers for fear of retaliation and deportation. The Human Rights Office at the MOI served as the point of contact for the complaints of foreign workers. According to resident embassies of countries with foreign workers present and some individual migrant workers, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' Labor Department was widely perceived to be objective within its narrow mandate when dealing with the nonpayment of wages. The department claimed that it resolved 80 percent of the 6,044 complaints filed by workers. The remaining cases were referred to the labor courts for judgment.

There are no export processing zones.

### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. However, there were reports that such practices occurred. Foreign workers in many cases worked under circumstances that constituted forced labor. These conditions were found

primarily in the construction and domestic labor sectors.

The Sponsorship Law that took effect in March gives the MOI the power to transfer temporarily a worker's sponsorship to another employer if there is a legal dispute between the worker and the original employer. According to government figures, more than 85 percent of the workforce was composed of foreign workers who, dependent on their employer for residency rights, were vulnerable to abuse. For example, employers must consent to and the MOI must approve the granting of an exit permit to any foreign employee. Some employers temporarily withheld this consent to force foreign employees to work for longer periods than they wished. Workers could report such cases to the MOI's Human Rights Office. Unskilled workers and domestic servants were particularly vulnerable to nonpayment or late payment of wages.

#### d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits forced and compulsory labor by children, and the government generally enforced this prohibition. The labor law stipulates the minimum age for employment is 16 years. The labor law provides that minors between the ages of 16 and 18 can work with parental or guardian permission, and some children worked in small, family-owned businesses such as small markets or as office clerks. Minors may not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Labor Department with the names and occupations of their minor employees and obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to hire a minor. The Labor Department may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs judged dangerous to the health, safety, or morals of minors.

Violators of the law banning child camel jockeys may receive six months' imprisonment or a fine of approximately 3,000 riyals (approximately \$825). In other cases involving the employment of minors, the punishment is three years' imprisonment or a fine of approximately 10,000 riyals (\$2,748). During the year there were no reported cases, and there have been no prosecutions under this law.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage stipulated by law. The average wage of noncitizen workers did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The law prescribes a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period, but most government offices followed a 36-hour workweek. Employees who worked more than 48 hours per week or 36 hours per week during the holy month of Ramadan were entitled to overtime pay of at least a 25 per cent wage supplement. Government offices and major private sector companies adhered to this law; it was often not observed with respect to unskilled laborers and domestic and personal employees, the majority of whom were foreigners. Many such workers frequently worked seven days a week and more than 12 hours a day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and no effective means to redress grievances.

The rights of noncitizen workers continued to be severely restricted. Some employers mistreated foreign domestic servants, predominantly those from South Asia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, by withholding wages or paying wages late. Some cases involved rape and physical abuse. Some foreign embassies provided temporary shelter to their nationals who left their employers because of abuse or disputes before transferring the cases to local government officials. According to these embassies, the majority of cases were resolved within 48 hours by their mediation efforts between employee and employer. Those not resolved within 48 hours were transferred to the Criminal Evidence and Investigation Department of the MOI for a maximum of seven days. Cases not resolved within seven days were transferred to the labor court, a special section of the first instance civil court.

One foreign embassy reported that it received approximately 6,000 complaints during the year; most related to nonpayment of salaries, failure to pay overtime, and refusal to obtain residence permits. Changes in the sponsorship law accounted for a steep drop in the number of complaints against sponsors for retaining employees' passports. An employer's withholding of a passport carries a fine of 10,000 riyals (approximately \$2,747). Another foreign embassy received between 50 and 60 complaints a day, including sexual harassment, delay and nonpayment of salaries, forced labor, contract switching, withholding of passports, poor accommodations, nonrepatriation, termination and deportation without cause, physical torture or torment, overwork, imprisonment, and mistreatment. Abused domestic servants usually did not press charges for fear of losing their jobs. According to a foreign embassy, 217 of its reported 280,000 citizens working in the country died during the year, with heart attacks claiming 115; work-related accidents, 23; and suicides, 9. Forty Nepalese citizens died in traffic accidents and nine died from drowning. Police investigated work-related deaths, but the results were not made public. Local support groups believed authorities reported the cause of death as heart attacks to hide workplace deaths. A foreign embassy reported an increase in the overall number of complaints during the year.

There were government regulations regarding worker safety and health, but enforcement, which is the combined responsibility of the Ministry of Energy and Industry, the Ministry of Health, and the Labor Department, was uneven due to insufficient training and lack of personnel. Diplomatic representatives visited labor camps and found most unskilled foreign laborers living in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. The labor inspection department conducted a limited number of random inspections of labor camps, and when it found them below minimum standards, the operators received a warning, and authorities ordered them to remedy the violations within a specific period. If they did not remedy the violations, the Labor Department referred the matter to the public prosecutor for action. An unknown number of cases were filed during the year. Statistics on the number of inspections were not available, but foreign labor officials reported that most labor camps in the country remained far below minimum standards. A foreign embassy reported acceptable conditions at the three camps that house its nationals, and embassy staff were permitted to visit on a regular basis.

The Department of Public Safety oversaw safety training and conditions, and the state-run petroleum company had its own safety standards and procedures. The regulations listed partial and permanent disabilities for which compensation may be awarded, some connected with handling chemicals and petroleum products or construction injuries. The law does not specifically set rates of payment and compensation. The government provided free medical treatment to workers who suffered work-related sickness or injuries.

Foreign workers may enter the country on a visitor's visa, but a sponsor is needed to convert a visitor's visa to a work visa, and the worker must have a sponsor's permission to depart the country. In August the Labor Ministry conducted a labor protection drive that included unannounced worksite inspections to check for proper payment of wages in compliance with worker protection laws. In October the NHRC conducted a labor protection drive in the energy sector that included classroom instruction and the distribution of printed materials explaining workers' rights and obligations under the labor and sponsorship laws.