



2008 Human Rights Report: Qatar

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR
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Qatar is a constitutional monarchy headed by Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. The population is approximately 1.7 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 a main source of legislation. The emir ultimately approves or rejects legislation after a process of consultation with the appointed 35-member Advisory Council and cabinet, formalized by the constitution. There are no elections for national leadership and political parties are forbidden by law. In 2007 citizens elected the 29 members of the Central Municipal Council. Monitoring by the government-appointed National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and informal observations by diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

Citizens lacked the right to change the leadership of their government by direct ballot. There were prolonged detentions in overcrowded and harsh facilities, often ending in deportation. The government placed varying 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. Cultural discrimination against women limited their full participation in society. The unresolved legal status of "Bidoons" (Arabic for "without" meaning "without citizenship"; stateless persons with residency ties) resulted in discrimination against these noncitizens. Worker rights were severely restricted, 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 or other disappearances.

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

The constitution and the law prohibit such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them. Documentation of abuses was very limited due partly to hesitancy of alleged victims to make public claims of torture or abuse.

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, medical personnel, and public officials about the prohibition. However, 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. During the year the government conducted training for law enforcement and other personnel about the prohibition on torture. The government did not submit a report by February 10 as required under the convention.

There were no developments in the 2006 case of an Indian citizen who alleged that police intentionally burned him with cigarettes during interrogation. According to the NHRC, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) investigated and filed charges against a police officer, and the officer remained suspended at year's end pending trial.

The courts ordered corporal punishment (flogging) prescribed by interpretation of Shari'a in cases of alcohol consumption. On April 18, a court sentenced an Egyptian citizen to 40 lashes after he confessed to driving while drunk. On appeal, this type of sentence was typically reduced to a fine. Authorities did not carry out corporal punishment during the year.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

The NHRC conducted regular visits to prisons, jails, and detention centers. Authorities informed the NHRC of the citizenship of prisoners and allowed them to monitor the length of time each prisoner was detained. Several embassies reported, however, that notification of arrest was frequently delayed. The NHRC and other sources reported an improvement in the conditions at the Deportation Detention Center (DDC) during the year, including fewer detainees (approximately 800-1,000 at any given time), and reduced duration of detention (approximately two months). The government permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to these prisoners in 2007. There were no requests for visits by independent human rights observers during the year. The government granted regular access to the DDC and the central prison to staff from several foreign embassies. The government did not approve requests by diplomatic representatives to visit the state security prison and police detention centers.

In March authorities moved the Capital Police Detention Center (CPDC) to a facility which offered improved conditions with beds and separation according to sex. Citizen and noncitizen detainees were housed together. After conviction, political prisoners were held with the general prison population at the state security prison, where conditions were generally better than at the central prison. Some men and women awaiting civil or criminal trial as plaintiffs were held with persons awaiting deportation at the DDC. Some pretrial detainees were held with convicted prisoners at the central prison 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. However, individuals may be detained at the state security prison for indefinite periods under the 2002 Protection of Society Law and Antiterrorism Law. The NHRC reported that authorities detained three persons during the year under the 2002 law. Their status is unknown. There were an unknown number of reported cases of individuals held for up to 30 days without charges in accordance with the Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law. Processing speed for deportations increased for most DDC detainees during the year.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the military and internal police forces. The police were under the authority of the MOI and were generally regarded as effective by the population. The government had mechanisms to investigate abuse and corruption. During the year the government instituted training programs to prevent corruption and torture by the police forces, which decreased reports of official impunity.

Arrest and Detention

The 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. The Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law provides an exception which permits detention without charges for up to two years (in six month periods which can be extended) and allows detention for up to six months without charges for investigation purposes, extendable indefinitely by a special court order. Decisions taken under the Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law may not be appealed in the courts. This law empowers the minister of interior to detain a defendant for crimes related to national security, honor, or impudence upon the recommendation of the director general of public security. The prime minister adjudicates complaints against these detentions. This provision was generally not used in practice.

In normal 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. Citizens are more likely to be granted bail than noncitizens. Noncitizens charged with minor crimes can be released to their citizen sponsor, although they are prohibited from leaving the country until the case is resolved.

Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one month at a time to allow authorities 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. Suspects detained under the Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law generally were afforded access to counsel, but access to family members was delayed although eventually granted. Once prisoners are found guilty of state security violations, they are held at the state security prison. In 2007 authorities released 18 persons detained under the Protection of Society and Combating Terrorism Law. According to the NHRC, authorities detained these individuals for five months while a public prosecutor conducted an investigation, which did not result in charges. The government deported some of the detainees, while some remained in the country.

Amnesty

A committee within the MOI reviews individual cases for possible leniency and makes recommendations to the emir, who customarily grants amnesties on religious holy days and other special occasions. At the end of Ramadan the emir granted amnesty to 85 prisoners, and to another 20 on National Human Rights Day.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, in practice all judges were appointed by emiri decree, based on the recommendation of the chief justice. Approximately 25 percent of the judges were foreign nationals dependent on residence permits granted by the civil authorities. Prosecutors were similarly appointed based upon the recommendation of the attorney general. All judges held their positions at the discretion of the emir. The Supreme Judicial Council recommends candidates. There were no reports of political or governmental interference in the courts. Although the emir has the ability to remove judges, he has never exercised this 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. Separate Shari'a courts were eliminated in 2003, although Shari'a law still governs family cases heard by the civil courts. The Court of Cassation has four chambers, two for the appeals of civil cases, and two for the appeals of criminal cases. It hears cases from the appeals court that may have been contradictory to established law or where the law may have been mistakenly interpreted. The Court of Cassation is the court of final appeal, except on constitutional matters. A separate 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 the establishment of security tribunals. The established court system would handle such cases. The constitution provides for the establishment of military tribunals, but their use is restricted to periods of martial law, and only military crimes committed by the armed forces and the security forces may come before such tribunals.

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

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial for all citizens, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. Although separate Shari'a courts have been eliminated, women were denied equal status in certain civil proceedings through the application of Shari'a.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants are tried under the unified court system, regardless of citizenship. All courts are united 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 the case is deemed sensitive. In October the Court of Cassation limited the media's access to courts by requiring journalists to obtain a judge's permission to attend. All sentences were announced in public.

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

The government increased the number of judges and prosecutors during the year to address delays in the processing of criminal cases. Felony cases were completed within four to six months of detention, and misdemeanor cases within one to two months of citation. Defendants have the right to be present and the right of appeal. Their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases, once the case has been filed in the court. Defendants may consult with an attorney in a timely manner.

Defendants have the right to confront and question witnesses against them and present witnesses and evidence on their behalf. The law provides defendants the presumption of innocence; in practice, however, those charged with a crime carry the burden of disproving the charge against them at trial.

The fee for appealing to the Court of Cassation is high, and constitutes a restriction on the right to appeal. The

appellant must deposit 20,000 riyals (approximately \$5,500) for the appeal if the case was decided by the court of appeals and 5,000 riyals (\$1,375) if the case was 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. Sums may be seized, in whole or in part, should the court decide to reject the appeal.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Of the 37 individuals convicted in the 1996 planned counter-coup, 19 received death sentences and 18 were sentenced to life in prison. Of the 37, 27 remained in prison at the end of the year. The emir ordered nine of the individuals to be released in 2007 reportedly for health reasons, including a member of the ruling family sentenced to death. The government permitted the ICRC access to these prisoners in 2007. In July authorities released a Saudi member of the group following efforts by the Saudi government to secure his release.

In July 2007 the government released a reform activist held in detention for four months for inciting women to protest publicly.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law and judiciary generally permit persons with civil grievances to seek redress in the court system, although the judiciary is not impartial and independent in practice, as judgments tend to favor citizens. The law specifies a number of circumstances in which a judge must be removed 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 no cases were reported during the year. In 2006 a laborer brought a lawsuit against his sponsor for suppression of the right of freedom of movement. The resolution of the case remained unknown at year's end.

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 warrants 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 were believed to monitor telephone calls and e-mails, particularly when an individual was suspected of a crime.

Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners and may apply for residence permits or citizenship for their spouses. Such permission generally was granted. The nationality law allows for both males and females 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, material deemed hostile to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states. There were reports that security authorities threatened both individuals and organizations against publishing certain articles. According to a regional human rights organization, interference of media owners in the content of media material was prevalent. Journalists reported that they were forbidden by their editors from

printing the names of specific companies involved in labor cases.

The 1979 Press and Publications Law provides for criminal penalties and jail 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 December 2007 the emir established the Doha Centre for Media Freedom to protect threatened journalists and promote the free flow of news and information around the world. In June the center provided refuge for an Afghan journalist whose life was threatened for her reporting. In November the center provided refuge for a Somali journalist who had received death threats for her reporting on Somali television.

On May 22, a court sentenced Jordanian journalist Amal Eisa in absentia to three years in prison for defamation after she wrote a story about a case of medical malpractice at government-owned Hamad Hospital. The court also fined her editor 20,000 riyals (approximately \$5,500).

In October authorities arrested and detained Gulf Times reporter Peter Townson on charges of "spreading racial hatred" and bringing the country "disrepute" after he filed stories on family day policies that prevent Asian laborers from entering entertainment areas on certain days. The Doha Centre for Media Freedom intervened in the case, but it remained unresolved at year's end.

According to a 2007 Freedom House report, a court sentenced a noncitizen journalist to one year in prison for slandering a citizen.

Citizens publicly discussed sensitive political and religious issues. The much larger foreign population, however, did not express itself 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 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) featuring citizens and noncitizens speaking about internationally controversial topics. In January a debate about the policies of Arab countries in Darfur was held in which several participants criticized the policy of the government. In November debate participants drew attention to the challenges facing migrant workers throughout the region.

While 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.

In 2007 several citizens whose writings appeared in regional and international media outside of the country reported that authorities deliberately banned their work in the local press. Authorities lifted these bans during the year.

The censorship office in the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation (QRTC) and customs officials censored material. There were no specific reports of political censorship of foreign broadcast news media or foreign programs, although foreign movies were censored. A division of the QRTC, Qatar Media Services, buys books and screens them for suitability before allowing them to be sold in the country.

State-owned television and radio reflected government views. However, 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.

Doha-based Arabic language Al-Jazeera satellite television network focused coverage and commentary on

international news topics. Al-Jazeera and the government claimed that the channel was independent and free of government influence, but the government exercised editorial and programmatic control on the channel through its supply of funding to the network and its influence on the selection of the station's management. Al-Jazeera covered local news when there was an international component. Al-Jazeera English covered in-depth some government policies, particularly labor practices. In August 2007 the channel aired an investigative documentary entitled, "Blood, Sweat, and Tears," which highlighted forced labor practices in the Gulf, with several references to Qatar. The documentary was also shown on the Al-Jazeera Arabic channel and rebroadcast during the year.

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, a technology and fashion site. A user who believed that a site was censored mistakenly could submit the web address to have the site reviewed for suitability; however, there were no reports that Web sites were unblocked using this procedure. According to 2007 International Telecommunication Union data, there were an estimated 87,000 subscribers and 351,000 users of the Internet.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The constitution provides for freedom of opinion and scientific research. In practice, the government generally permitted academic freedom, although instructors at Qatar University noted that they often exercised self-censorship. Instructors at the 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; however, a number of restrictions and conditions must be met in order to acquire a permit. For example, the permission of the director general of public security must be obtained, and his decision is not subject to appeal. During the year the government granted permission for a public demonstration in opposition to Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip. A group that organized an Indian cultural event reported that the government promptly granted an event permit after the group disclosed the time, purpose, and number of participants.

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 the conditions placed on forming such associations severely 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 deemed a threat to the public interest. In the case of professional societies, they must pay 50,000 riyals (approximately \$13,740) in licensing fees and 10,000 riyals (\$2,750) in annual fees. There is a requirement for frequent reregistration. Registrations are valid for a three-year period, after which they must register again and again pay the same fees. The law allows noncitizens to participate in private societies only in cases where their participation is deemed necessary to the work of the society. However,

the prime minister must approve their participation, and their number cannot exceed 20 percent of the total membership.

Since 2004, 15 societies have been approved. An additional 29 were under consideration at year's end, including five new ones that applied for registration during the year. In 2007 the ministry approved one request for a nongovernmental human rights organization designed to support persons with disabilities. Applications first submitted in 2005 (applications must be resubmitted yearly) to establish a journalists' association and a teachers' association were pending at year's end.

Informal organizations, such as community support groups and activity clubs, operated without registration; however, 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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the country. Although untested, as written, 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 the public order and morality; however, 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. In May the Ministry of Justice established 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 own 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 government and business communities.

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 the public schools. The emir participated in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and personally financed the Hajj journeys of poor pilgrims.

From May 13 to 15, the sixth Conference for Religious Dialogue took place in Doha. Representatives from the three largest monotheistic religions--Christianity, Islam, and Judaism--were invited. Invitations were extended to the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Coptic Church, Middle East Churches Council, Orthodox Church, the Vatican, and Jewish rabbis, among others. Rabbis and religious scholars from several foreign countries delivered speeches and participated in panel discussions.

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 sponsor clergy for visas. Construction continued on five Christian churches on property leased from the government. On March 15, at an event attended by the deputy prime minister, a Roman Catholic Church was consecrated and opened to the public. Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is,

and members of other religious groups do not operate as freely as Christian congregations.

Religious services were held without prior authorization from the government; however, congregations have been asked not to advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses.

According to the criminal law, individuals proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation, for any religion other than Islam, may be sentenced to a prison term of up to 10 years. Proselytizing on behalf of an individual for any religion other than Islam can result in a sentence of up to five years. Individuals who possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity can be imprisoned for up to two years.

Converting to another religion from Islam is technically a capital offense; however, there has been no execution or other punishment for such an act.

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

Islamic instruction was compulsory in public schools. While 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 were allowed to 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. Bibles were not publicly available in local bookstores, either in Arabic or English.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There was no indigenous Jewish community; the few Jews in the country were foreigners with no restrictions on their 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. The government does not officially collect or publish statistical data on the religious affiliation of the population.

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 constitution provides for these rights; the government's practice, however, included notable exceptions. 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. However, authorities restricted in-country movement of noncitizens, and reportedly prevented groups of foreign workers from entering entertainment areas in Doha on weekends and during certain periods designated

as "family times." Arab and Western men were not barred from entering the entertainment areas at any time.

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

Official policy severely restricted foreign travel for expatriate workers. Citizen employment sponsors frequently confiscated and held the passports of their noncitizen workers, and they could not travel outside of the country without their sponsor's permission and an exit visa. 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 were granted residence permits and could apply for citizenship; however, 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. According to Amnesty USA, in 2007 the government restored the citizenship of approximately 2,000 persons, many of whom were members of the Al-Murrah tribe. Some in this group alleged that authorities modified birth documents to show birth outside of the country, eliminating their eligibility to vote. In 2006 the emir ordered the reinstatement of citizenship for as many as 6,000 persons from the Al-Murrah tribe whose citizenship the government revoked in 2004 and 2005. By the end of 2007 the government restored citizenship to all but approximately 200 of those who had lost it.

Amnesty USA also reported several cases of denationalization of individual citizens in 2007. Maher Ibrahim Mohamed Hanoon alleged that the government arbitrarily stripped him and his family of their nationality in July 2007, leaving the family at risk of deportation.

In July 2007 the MOI stripped Abeer al-Tamimi and her children of their citizenship and threatened her with deportation, according to Amnesty USA. Because her children were vacationing in Jordan at the time, authorities confiscated their passports at the Qatari Embassy in Amman, separating the family for a long period of time.

Protection of Refugees

The constitution prohibits the extradition of political refugees; however, 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. There were no reports that the government closed its borders to asylum seekers. Individuals who were able to obtain local sponsorship or employment were allowed to enter and could remain as long as they were sponsored. They were not, however, granted asylum status. Entries were generally based on political or friendship ties.

The government generally provided protection against refoulement, the forcible return of a person to a country or territory where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of 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; however, in practice restrictions and uneven application of the law prevent stateless persons from acquiring citizenship. The Nationality Law allows noncitizen residents to apply for citizenship after residing in the country 25 consecutive years, but only 50 may be granted per year, and only a small number have been granted under this provision.

Citizenship is derived solely from the father. Women are not permitted to transmit citizenship to their children, even if the child is born in wedlock in the country. Women must obtain permission from the authorities before marrying a foreign national, but they do not lose nationality upon marriage. According to the UNHCR, there were approximately 1,500 stateless Bidoons in the country. There were reports of summary deportation orders issued against long-term residents and Bidoons, although all family and economic ties remained in the country. The Permanent Committee for Naturalization Affairs commissioned a study during the year to determine the extent of these practices.

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

The constitution does not provide citizens the right to change their government by direct ballot. However, it provides several methods by which the Advisory Council may exercise significant influence over ministries, such as by votes of no confidence. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by the emir's branch of the Al-Thani family. The constitutional provision for the 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 to organize.

Elections and Political Participation

The emir exercises full executive powers, including appointment of cabinet members. In April 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 issues such as street repair, green space, trash collection, and public works projects for the entire country. Informal observation by diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities in these elections. Nearly 50 percent of the less 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 that were in the country prior to 1930. All citizens over 21 were permitted to run for seats on the council, regardless of gender. The law also limits political participation for persons whose citizenship was withdrawn but subsequently restored. These persons are denied the right to candidacy or nomination in any legislative body for a period of 10 years from the date of restoration of their citizenship.

The law forbids formation of and membership in political parties. In July the emir postponed elections for the expanded 45-member Advisory Council and extended the term of the current council for two years.

Influence of traditional attitudes and roles continued to limit women's participation in politics; however, some women served in public office as: minister of health, minister of education; 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. Also, one woman served on the Central Municipal Council.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; no cases of corruption involving public officials were reported during the year. Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws.

In December 2007 the emir established the National Committee for Accountability and Transparency. The committee 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 the state's properties, suggesting related legislation, and training staff. In November the audit bureau reported that it had referred 26 cases involving private sector corruption in the administration of government contracts to the public prosecutor during the year. These prosecutions resulted in five convictions, with judgments in favor of the government totaling more than 23 million riyals (approximately \$6.5 million).

The government publishes its 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 this information, budget, government expenditure, and draft law information was generally not available.

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

No international or independent domestic NGO or international organizations focusing on human rights or humanitarian issues were resident in the country. During the year representatives from the Solidarity Center, the National Democratic Institute, and the American Bar Association visited the country to meet with authorities and local contacts.

In May 2007 the secretary general of Amnesty International (AI) participated in a BBC "Doha Debate" on the prevalence of torture and whether it should be permitted under medical and judicial supervision for the purpose of saving lives. During the visit, the secretary general publicly noted that the issue of statelessness related to the Al-Murrah tribe is a key human rights problem. She credited the country with the establishment of the NHRC but noted that it must be strong and independent to be effective.

By law, domestic associations or NGOs may not engage in political activity or be critical of the government. One foreign NGO successfully registered in 2007, and another began the process during the year.

The NHRC is an organization funded by the government. An emiri decree established the NHRC in 2002 to investigate and improve local human rights conditions. Its 12 members were all appointed by the government, five from government ministries and seven from civil society. Since 2006 votes by government members do not count, but they continue to participate in NHRC deliberations. The committee issued its most recent report in 2006, and it was published in all local newspapers and on the NHRC Web site. The NHRC did not issue a report during the year. In September the secretary general of the NHRC said that the committee issues a quarterly report to the cabinet, to which the government does not generally respond cooperatively. He stated that the NHRC handled 1,500 petitions during the preceding 12 months, one-third of which were submitted by citizens and the rest by expatriate workers.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, language, religion, and disability. However, in practice government actions were heavily influenced by local custom, and legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed based on gender. There were no reports of discrimination based on religious affiliation. Noncitizens were afforded fewer rights under the law. There were no reports of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Women

According to the Qatari Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children (QFPWC), a quasigovernmental

organization, domestic violence against women was a problem. A total of 122 cases of domestic abuse against women were reported to the foundation during the year. According to the organization, the increase was due to greater awareness among the community, the requirement that all health care facilities report suspected abuse cases, and the use of the established hotline system. There were no arrests or convictions for family domestic violence among citizens publicized in the press, although cases involving noncitizens appeared. The law criminalizes domestic violence and rape but does not address spousal rape. There were cases of rape publicized between foreigners, but none were reported involving citizens. The penalty for rape is 10 years' imprisonment, or 14 years if the victim is below the age of 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 hampered due to underreporting by victims who feared the social stigma of being identified as a rape victim.

A Qatar University study found that 63 percent (out of 2,778 surveyed) of citizen and noncitizen female students at the university 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 considered suicide because they were afraid of the repercussions they would face should they notify authorities.

In September 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.

The legal system allows leniency for a man found guilty of committing a "crime of honor," or a violent assault against a woman for perceived immodesty or deviant behavior. Although not deemed an honor killing by the court, in January 2007 the court of appeals commuted the three-year imprisonment sentence of a Jordanian teenager to one suspended year for killing his sister as the court stated that there was no overwhelming evidence to prove that it was a case of premeditated murder. The lower court observed that it could not be termed a case of honor killing as the postmortem report proved the victim was a virgin.

Sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic servants in some cases. 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. The Sri Lankan Embassy reported 700 cases of sexual harassment against housemaids during the year, the majority of them by citizen employers. When brought to the attention of the authorities, the housemaids were often deported and no charges filed against the employer. The Indonesian Embassy reported five cases of alleged rape against housemaids during the year and an increase in the number of complaints alleging physical abuse and sexual harassment.

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

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. Traditions and interpretation of Shari'a, however, placed some women at a disadvantage in inheritance cases. The government adhered to an interpretation of Shari'a that recognizes Muslims have the automatic right to inherit from their Muslim spouses. Non-Muslim spouses (invariably wives, since Muslim women cannot legally marry non-Muslims) do not inherit unless their spouse formally wills them a portion (up to one-third of the total) of their estates. Similarly a Muslim husband does not automatically inherit the property of a non-Muslim wife. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. The proportion that women inherit depends upon their relationship to the deceased; however, in the cases of siblings, sisters inherit only one-half as much as their brothers.

In cases of divorce, young children usually remain with the mother, regardless of her religion, unless she is found

to be unfit. Male children remain in the custody of the mother until 13 and females until 15. In certain conditions the court may extend the age of maternal custody to 15 years for males and to the time of marriage for females. As an exception, the mother retains custody of children with disabilities with no age limit stipulated.

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 males or females can benefit if they support parents, brothers, and sisters or are above 35 years old. The law is generally applied fairly in practice.

Women may attend court proceedings and may represent themselves, but they were generally represented by a male relative. In cases involving financial transactions, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpreted this requirement on a case-by-case basis. 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 to be Muslim.

According to the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, women constituted approximately 13 percent of business owners in the country, and 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 did not receive equal allowances, which generally covered transportation and housing costs.

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. The council played an integral role in the drafting of legislation affecting women and children. In December the SCFA held its second conference on combating violence against women, a subject once considered taboo in the country. The discussion focused on the first-ever study of "Violence against Women in Qatari Society."

Children

The government is committed to the welfare of citizen children. The government provided for a well-funded, free public education system (elementary through university) and a complete medical protection program. Education was compulsory for citizen children through the age of 15 and was free through primary school (the equivalent of ninth grade) for noncitizen children whose parents worked in the government sector. There was generally no difference in attendance of girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels. Girls constituted the majority of the students at post-secondary institutions.

Medical care was available to noncitizen children for a nominal fee. Officials routinely granted fee waivers to those parents who could not pay for their child's care. Health care services were provided equally for noncitizen girls and boys.

There was no societal pattern of child labor or abuse. There were some cases of children who had suffered from various forms of family violence and physical and sexual abuse. The QFPWC reported that 73 cases involving abuse of children were reported to the organization during the year. In September five women were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for conspiring to purchase a child in another country to bring to Qatar.

The government-funded Qatar Orphan Foundation provided shelter, medical care and education to orphans from birth to 18 years of age. The children are housed in a modern facility, segregated by age and sex, with adult supervision and medical care provided. The foundation seeks to place the orphans with citizen families, though there is no provision for adoption under Islamic law.

The QFPWC maintained a children's hotline called the "Friendly Line" for use by children and conducted awareness campaigns on the rights of the child. The system 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 was operated in conjunction with the family abuse hotline; statistics on use were not available. During the year, the SCFA hosted a conference focused on raising public awareness of children's issues.

Trafficking in Persons

There is no specific antitrafficking law. Provisions of the Sponsorship Law create conditions that could lead to forced labor activities and slave-like conditions. Although the law criminalizes many related practices, including slavery, forced labor and forced prostitution prosecutions did not occur.

In 2007 the UN Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on Trafficking in Persons noted that the country is a destination and, in some instances, transit point for trafficking of migrant workers, mainly for forced labor as low-skilled workers or domestic servants, including on camel farms and for sexual exploitation. The UNSR criticized the sponsorship system as an unjust arrangement that increases the vulnerability of foreign migrant workers by rendering them dependent on their sponsors, thus fostering demand for trafficking. The UNSR also raised concern that the labor law excludes foreign domestic workers from protection and in practice places them in a situation whereby their working conditions are regulated as private matters. Contracts between domestic employees and their employers were recognized and enforced by the courts.

Men and women from Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East travel willingly 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 by their economic circumstances. 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 unprotected by labor legislation. The Indian Embassy reported that 236 maids had been forced into these conditions in 2007.

Legislation guiding the sponsorship of foreign laborers created conditions constituting forced labor or slavery. Under the law foreign laborers were not allowed to leave the country without a signed exit permit or change employment without a written release from their sponsor. The dependence of foreign laborers on their employer for residency rights and the inability to change employment or to travel without the sponsor's permission left them vulnerable to abuse, arrest, and deportation. Some sponsors intimidated and coerced foreign employees to work for longer periods, reduced or withheld pay, and commonly withheld passports and failed to obtain or renew residence permits.

Authorities arrested workers without valid residence permits and detained them at the DDC. There were between 800 and 1,000 detainees awaiting deportation at the DDC at all times. During the year the Ministry of State for Interior Affairs created a committee to reduce the delays in deportation. The facility currently holds both detainees waiting to be deported for criminal offenses and those awaiting repatriation at the termination of their employment contracts. The committee is planning a new facility that will house them separately.

Principal traffickers included individual employers, contractors, and employment recruitment agencies. Most victims travel legally into the country by means of recruiting agencies in their home countries, but then subsequently face conditions of forced labor and trafficking after they reach the country. Some workers are recruited for jobs in the country but then abandoned by their recruiters upon arrival in the country or by employers after the work is

completed, making them even more vulnerable to trafficking.

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

Traffickers can be prosecuted under slavery or forced labor articles of the Criminal Law of 2004, which bans forced or coerced labor with penalties of up to seven years and a fine of no more than 10,000 riyals (\$2,748). The criminal law also addresses crimes that violate human liberty and sanctity (kidnapping) with penalties of imprisonment up to 10 years.

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

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

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

The country's antitrafficking prevention efforts continued during the year. A government committee conducted visits to camel racing tracks, the police services continued to incorporate antitrafficking training into the basic training curriculum for police officers, and a media campaign highlighted sponsors' responsibilities and resources available to victims. In March the National Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons (NOCTP) co-sponsored an international conference that highlighted the migrant worker problem in the country and the broader Gulf Cooperation Council countries. During the year the NOCTP increased technical expertise in areas such as on-time payment of wages, forced labor, and involuntary servitude.

In November the Qatar Foundation sponsored a Doha Debate on the plight of migrant workers in the Gulf.

In 2005 the government established a human rights department in the MOI to receive and process victims of human rights abuses and trafficking in persons. In March the director of this department stated publicly that human trafficking does not constitute a problem in the country.

In 2005 the government opened a shelter for trafficking victims to serve the needs of abused domestic workers, other laborers and children. The shelter was managed by the National Trafficking in Persons Coordinator, and referral by police or other government agencies for access was no longer required. According to government policy, any person facing criminal or immigration violations, i.e. absconding, cannot be considered a victim by the shelter and will not receive assistance. This policy continued to severely limit the effectiveness of the shelter during the year.

The State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report can be found at 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 acts on complaints from individuals and from the NHRC and enforces compliance. The law requires that 2 percent of all 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 reported cases during the year.

The special rapporteur of the UN Commission for Social Development on Disability, a citizen, noted in October 2007 that government schools in the country provided 21 percent of the required services for their students with disabilities, while the private and independent schools in general provided 68 percent of the required services. The UNSR also noted that there were only three public places in the country with the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings were not considering these standards. On July 12, the government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The SCFA was charged with ensuring compliance with the rights and provisions mandated under the law; however, compliance was not effectively enforced.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The government distinguished between citizens and noncitizens in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services, but only to the extent that noncitizens were required to pay for health care, electricity, water, and education (services that were provided without charge to citizens). Noncitizens were eligible for medical coverage at a nominal fee. Noncitizens generally could not own property; however, the law provides for property ownership in three designated areas. The largest noncitizen groups were Indian, Nepalese, Sri Lankan, expatriate Arabs, Filipino, Bangladeshi, Iranian, Pakistani, and Indonesian. In the private sector, Iranians occupied some of the highest positions.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The law prohibits same-sex relations between both males and females. Penalties for adults range from a maximum of seven to 15 years imprisonment. There were an unknown number of cases before the court during the year. The verdict in the 2006 case involving a male citizen and an Asian expatriate male remained unknown at year's end.

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

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The labor law and regulations provide for the right of worker organizations for citizens over 18 years of age in private enterprises with 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 single 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 worker committees, joint labor-management committees, general committees, or a national trade union, and there were no reported attempts to form them during the year.

The law grants workers the right to strike, but the restrictive conditions imposed by the statute made the likelihood of a legal strike extremely remote. Nevertheless, foreign workers staged at least 10 strikes during the year to seek

redress and improvement in their work situation from employers. Foreign embassies reported several cases in which they intervened to prevent or settle strikes by their nationals working in the country. They reported that 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; however, none are known to have occurred.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Under the labor law, workers in private enterprises with more than 100 citizen workers were granted the right to bargain collectively and to sign joint agreements, i.e. agreements reached 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; however, foreign workers avoided drawing attention to problems with their employers for fear of retaliation and deportation. According to resident embassies of foreign workers and some individual migrant workers, the labor department was widely perceived to be objective within its narrow mandate when dealing with the nonpayment of wages. The labor department claimed that it resolved 80 percent of worker complaints amicably with a very small percentage referred to the labor courts for judgment. During the year the labor inspection department increased its staff to 67, and trained inspectors who were provided with the power of law enforcement. During the year they conducted more than 17,000 inspections.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred, and the government did not enforce the law. Foreign workers in many cases were employed under circumstances that constituted forced labor. According to government figures, more than 85 percent of the workforce was comprised of foreign workers who, entirely dependent on their employer for residency rights, were vulnerable to abuse. For example, employers must give consent before exit permits are issued to any foreign employee seeking to leave the country. Some employers temporarily withheld this consent to force foreign employees to work for longer periods than they wished. 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 as 16 years. The labor law provides that minors between the ages of 16 and 18 can be employed with parent 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 that are 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 cases involving the employment of minors, the punishment is three years' imprisonment or a fine of approximately 10,000 riyals (\$2,748). The government effectively enforced this law during the year.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Although the labor law provides the emir with authority to set a minimum wage, he did not do so. 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, although 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. Government offices and major private sector companies adhered to this law; however, it was often not observed with respect to unskilled laborers and domestic and personal employees, the majority of who were foreigners. Many such workers frequently worked seven days per week and more than 12 hours per 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. Such mistreatment generally involved the nonpayment or late payment of wages and in some cases involved rape and physical abuse. Some foreign embassies provided temporary shelter for 48 hours to their nationals who left their employers as a result of abuse or disputes before transferring the case to local government officials. According to their embassies, the majority of cases were resolved within 48 hours. 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.

The Nepalese Embassy reported that it received approximately 1,500 complaints during the year, the majority of which were related to nonpayment of salaries, failure to pay overtime, and refusal to obtain residence permits. No cases of sexual abuse or harassment were reported by the Nepalese Embassy during the year. The Sri Lankan Embassy received between 50 and 60 complaints per day. Complaints included sexual harassment, delayed and nonpayment of salaries, forced labor, contract switching, holding of passports, poor accommodation, 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 the Nepalese Embassy, 85 of its reported 280,000 nationals died. Heart attacks claimed 65, work-related accidents 17, and suicides three. Local support groups believed that authorities reported the cause of death as heart attacks to hide workplace deaths. The Indonesian Embassy reported an increase in the number of complaints for rape and physical abuse during the year, including five allegations of rape.

The government has enacted regulations regarding worker safety and health, but enforcement, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy and Industry, the Ministry of Health, and the Labor Department, while improving, was uneven due to insufficient training and lack of personnel. Diplomatic representatives visited labor camps and found the majority of 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 found to be below minimum standards, the operators received a warning, after which compliance was enforced. Statistics on the number of inspections were not available, but most foreign labor attaches reported that most labor camps in the country remained far below minimum standards. The Indonesian Embassy reported good conditions at the three camps which house its nationals, and that 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 September the Ministry of Labor announced that it had punished or warned 850 firms for violating the country's labor laws, although this information could not be independently confirmed since journalists are not permitted to print the names of firms alleged to have violated labor laws. The ministry stated that raids against the firms had uncovered violations of safety and health standards, nonpayment of wages, and evidence of illegal employment. Those firms were prohibited from importing labor until they entered into compliance with the law.

The law does not provide workers the specific right to remove themselves from hazardous work conditions, and workers often hesitated to do so for fear of dismissal. The law provides any worker with the right to seek legal relief from onerous work conditions; however, pursuing such relief risked deportation, and there were no reports of workers seeking such relief during the year.