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Qatar

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2005](#)

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Qatar is a monarchy governed by the ruling al-Thani family through Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, who deposed his father in 1995. The population is approximately 800 thousand, of whom approximately 200 thousand are citizens. The emir exercises full executive power based on the influence of religious law, consultation with citizens, and rule by consensus. Shari'a (Islamic law) is the main source of legislation, and the emir generally legislates after consultation with leading citizens, an arrangement institutionalized in the appointed 35-member Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura) that assists the emir in formulating policy. The new constitution, which came into force on June 6, provides for continued hereditary rule by the emir's branch of the al-Thani family. The constitution provides that, after elections, expected in 2007, the Advisory Council will possess direct legislative power. In April 2003 citizens elected all 29 members of an advisory Central Municipal Council whose members serve a four-year term. While the elections were generally regarded as free and fair, only 30 percent of eligible voters participated. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

Although there were improvements in a few human rights areas, serious problems remained and new ones emerged. The following human rights problems were reported:

- restriction of right of citizens to peacefully change their government
- civil liberties: restricted freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association
- limited freedom of religion
- government revocation of citizenship
- government corruption and lack of transparency
- legal discrimination against women
- trafficking in persons
- severely restricted worker rights

The new constitution contains human rights provisions, although their practical effect had not come fully into play since most provisions depended on implementing still-ongoing legislative and institutional changes. The new labor law, which came into effect on January 6, expands and protects some workers' rights for citizens; however, the law prohibits noncitizen workers from forming labor unions or associations, and it restricts the rights to bargain collectively and to strike. The government addressed one of its problems related to trafficking in persons by legislating a ban on underage camel jockeys, by repatriating approximately 200 underage jockeys, and by opening a shelter for trafficking victims.

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 of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The law prohibits torture, and there were no reports that government officials employed torture. However, the government administered most corporal punishment prescribed by its interpretation of Islamic law. Amputation was not allowed. Punishments were not administered publicly.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions generally met international standards. In previous years the government permitted visits by independent human rights observers; however, no foreign independent human rights observer or media group sought to conduct independent monitoring of prisons or general human rights conditions in the country during the year. The National Human Rights Committee conducted four visits to prisons and detention centers during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions in practice; however, these rights were restricted by Law No. 17 implemented in 2002, which was used to "protect society." In other cases, the government detained persons, who, after having been stripped of their nationality, lacked legal residence status in the country.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of the Interior controls the police forces, which include the coast guard and border police, fire department, and immigration authorities. They generally were effective, and corruption and abuse of power were minimal. The civilian intelligence service, Qatari State Security, reported directly to the emir and performed internal security investigations, gathered intelligence, and had primary responsibility for sedition and espionage cases.

Arrest and Detention

In practice suspects are charged within 48 hours and must appear before a judge within 4 days of their arrest. The judge may order the suspect released, remanded to custody to await trial, held in pretrial detention pending investigation, or released on bail. Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one week at a time to allow the authorities to conduct investigations. The accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process. There were no provisions for state-funded legal counsel for indigents. Suspects who were detained in security cases generally were afforded access to counsel; however, they may be detained indefinitely while under investigation.

Law No. 17 is aimed specifically at the "protection of society" and provides official exemption from the prohibition of arbitrary arrest and detention and the code of criminal procedure. The 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. Under this statute, the detention period can range from two weeks to six months. Moreover, that period can be extended up to two years at the discretion of Ministry of Interior officials. The prime minister adjudicates complaints against these detentions.

According to human rights officials, there were three cases of individuals arrested under Law No. 17 during the year. In addition, since June, nine men were held in detention at the central jail due to their nationality being revoked. They were released in September. Their legal status remained pending at year's end.

There were no reported cases of incommunicado detention by the government; however, 14 individuals were held in solitary confinement in relation to the March theatre bombing. By year's end they were released.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, although in practice it is dependent since all judges held their positions at the discretion of the government. As well, approximately half of the judges were foreign nationals dependent on residence permits granted by the civil authorities. The emir appoints all judges based on the recommendation of the Supreme Judiciary Council for renewable three-year terms.

The Adlea (civil law) courts and Shari'a courts were united under the Supreme Judiciary Council in 2003, although there is not a single codified body of law. Since 2002, with the enactment of Law No. 10, general prosecutors have been independent from the authority of the Ministry of Interior. Although the prosecutors report to the emir, he does not interfere in their work.

The law provides for a three-tiered court system: the Courts of First Instance, Appeal, and Cassation. The three courts hear all cases and apply one law based on legal precedence and Shari'a interpretations. The Court of Appeal hears appeals of decisions from the Court of First Instance. The Court of Cassation is the court of final appeal. It comprises of two wings, civil and criminal, with a five-judge panel chaired by a president or deputy.

Trial Procedures

Criminal cases normally were tried within two to three months after suspects were detained. Suspects are entitled to bail, except in cases of violent crime. Foreigners charged with minor crimes can be released to a citizen sponsor, although they are prohibited from departing the country until the case is resolved. Defendants in the civil courts have the right to legal representation. Trials in criminal cases are public and juries are used. Defendants have the right to be present and the right of appeal. Their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants are tried under the unified court system. Court trials are public, but the presiding judge can close the courtroom to the public if the case is deemed sensitive. Lawyers prepare litigants and speak for them during the hearing. Non-Arabic speakers are provided with interpreters. Defendants are entitled to legal representation throughout the trial and pretrial process. In matters involving religious issues, Shi'a and Sunni judges may apply their own interpretations. There is an adequate number of both Shi'a and Sunni judges to accommodate their population and their population respects their decisions.

Political Prisoners

Approximately 27 individuals involved and convicted in the 1996 attempted counter-coup remained in prison.

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

The law prohibits 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. There were no reports of unauthorized searches of homes during the year. The police and security forces were believed to monitor the telephone calls and emails of suspected criminals, of those considered to be security risks, and of selected foreigners.

Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners and to apply for residence permits or citizenship for their spouses. Such permission generally was granted for male citizens. Legally, female citizens were not able to provide citizenship for their husbands.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government restricted these rights in practice. In addition, journalists continued to self-censor due to social and political pressures when reporting on government policies, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states.

Although citizens expressed many of their views freely and in public, they avoided discussing sensitive political and religious issues. The much larger foreign population did not express itself as freely or as publicly. During the year the government supported a series of public debates, called the "Doha Debates," addressing political issues of the day, such as separation of mosque and state and regional democratic reform. The government did not prosecute anyone for the expression of views considered offensive.

The five daily newspapers are not state-owned; however, the owners are members of the ruling family or have close ties to government officials. Copies of foreign newspapers and magazines were censored for political and explicit sexual content.

The censorship office in the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation censored materials for pornography and material deemed hostile to Islam, reports on government policies, and the ruling family. There were no reports of political censorship of foreign print or broadcast news media or foreign programs.

Customs officials screened and censored imported print and electronic media for items on government policies, pornography, materials deemed hostile to Islam, and the ruling family, but officials no longer blocked the personal importation of non-Islamic religious items (see section 2.c.). The law provides for criminal penalties and jail sentences for libel. All cases involving the media fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal courts.

State-owned television and radio reflected government views. Doha-based Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel focused on coverage and commentary on international news topics. Al-Jazeera and the government both claimed the channel to be independent and free of government influence, but it was government subsidized and avoided critical commentary of government policies. On domestic issues, Al-Jazeera covered local news generally only if there was an international angle to it. Callers to a popular morning show on the state-owned radio frequently discussed topics such as government inefficiency and the lack of responsiveness by various ministries to citizens' needs, such as poor schools and roads, failure to deliver adequate water and sewage services, and problems with the health care system.

The government censored the Internet for religious, political, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which blocked websites containing certain key words and phrases. A user who believed that a site was censored mistakenly could submit the web address to have the site reviewed for suitability.

The law provides for freedom of opinion and scientific research; however, there was no tradition of academic freedom, and instructors at the University of Qatar exercised self-censorship.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

Law No. 18 of 2004 provides for and regulates freedom of assembly; however, a permit is required for such public gatherings. A number of restrictions and conditions must be met in order to acquire a permit, one of which is the permission of the public security director general, whose decision is immune to appeal. The government generally did not allow political demonstrations and there were none during the year. However, a peaceful demonstration following the March theatre bombing was allowed to take place.

Freedom of Association

Law No. 12 of 2004 regulates the right to form private societies and professional associations, and the government severely limited this right in practice. The law allows for the participation of noncitizens 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. Law No. 12 also imposes strict conditions for the establishment, management, and function of these societies and associations. They are prohibited from engaging in political matters and must get approval from the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Housing, which can deny their establishment if deemed a threat to the public interest. Also, in the case of professional societies, they must pay approximately \$14 thousand (50,960 riyals) in licensing fees and \$2,700 (9,828 riyals) in annual fees and their permits are valid for only a 3-year period, after which time they must renew their license and again pay the same fees. Since the enactment of Law No. 12, 19 requests to form new associations were submitted to the ministry. Three requests were approved to form a bar association, the Gulf Studies Center, and the Japan-Qatar Friendship Association. The rest were either under revision or has been sent for cabinet approval.

The regulations also prohibit international affiliation of associations.

The government did not allow political parties or international professional organizations critical of the government or of any other Arab government. Security forces monitored the activities of such groups.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting the public order and morality; however, the government continued to prohibit proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims and placed some restrictions on public worship. Of the non-Muslim religions, the government permitted only Christians to rent space to hold their services publicly. However, adherents of other faiths may privately practice their religion without harassment.

The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahhabi order of Sunni Islam. Both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims practiced Islam freely. Shi'a Muslims organized traditional Shi'a ceremonies and performed rites such as self-flagellation in their own mosques. Shi'a Muslims were permitted to build and decorate Shi'a mosques without restrictions.

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.

Shi'a Muslims were well represented in the bureaucracy and business community.

The government has given legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Coptic, and many Indian Christian denominations; other Christian congregations may request recognition. However, the government does not allow the building of any new places of worship without permission. The government provided congregations with registration numbers that allow them to open bank accounts and sponsor clergy for visas. In May representatives of Christian churches in the country signed an agreement with the government for a 50-year lease on a large tract of property on the outskirts of Doha on which they will erect six churches at their own expense. The property will include a Catholic church, an Anglican church that can also be used by other Protestant denominations, a church to serve 34 Indian Christian denominations, a church for the small but influential Coptic community, and a site for two Orthodox churches, one Greek and one Eastern Rite. In December the foundation stone for the Catholic church was laid.

Converting from Islam was considered apostasy and was technically a capital offense; however, since 1971 there have been no records of prosecution for such a crime or known citizen converts.

The government regulated the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature; however, individuals were allowed to import Bibles and other religious items for personal use. Government officials only monitored Islamic religious literature and copies of the Koran. Religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter were available readily in local shops. However, Bibles were not available in Arabic.

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 are no religious private schools.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The size of the Jewish community is nominal; many Jews have different nationalities and do not declare their religious affiliation. There were no acts of physical violence against or harassment of Jewish persons; however, on occasions responding to political events and developments in the region, privately owned newspapers carried articles or cartoons with anti-Semitic content or critical of the government of Israel. There have not been any reports of anti-Semitism on the radio and television. Israelis living abroad have appeared on talk shows discussing issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On June 29 and 30 the Third Conference for Religious Dialogue took place in Doha. For the first time in the country, representatives from Christianity, Islam, and Judaism attended.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2005 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

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

The law provides for these rights, and the government generally respected them in practice; however, there were some notable exceptions. There were no restrictions on internal travel, except around sensitive military and oil and industrial installations. In general women over age 30 did not require permission from male guardians to travel; however, men may prevent females and children under their guardianship from leaving the country by providing their names to immigration officers at ports of departure. Foreign women employed by the government must obtain official permission to travel abroad when requesting leave. The government did not allow noncitizen custodial parents to take their children out of the country without the permission of the citizen parent. Citizens critical of the government faced restrictions on their right to travel abroad.

The law prohibits forced exile of citizens. However, the government revoked the citizenship of as many as six thousand persons, principally from the Al-Ghufran branch of the Al-Murra tribe, who the government claimed possessed Saudi citizenship. This policy created some "stateless" persons. Upon the revocation of their nationality, these individuals automatically lost their jobs, and they and their families were no longer eligible to receive government benefits. The government maintained that these individuals were holding dual citizenship, a status prohibited under law; however, diplomats pointed out that many other dual nationals in Qatar have not been affected. The government settled approximately one-third of these cases by either restoring the citizenship of the affected individuals or by having them legally establish their nationality of origin.

The law provides that citizens have the right to return. Foreigners were subject to restrictions on entry and exit designed to control the size of the local labor force (see sections 6.c. and 6.d.). Foreign women who were married to citizens were granted residence permits and could apply for citizenship; however, they were required to relinquish their foreign citizenship.

Protection of Refugees

The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. Those attempting to enter the country illegally, including persons seeking asylum from nearby countries, were refused entry. Asylum seekers who were able to obtain local sponsorship or employment were allowed to enter and could remain as long as they were sponsored. In other cases, the government granted residence to individuals deemed political asylum seekers, such as the former ruler of Mauritania, an Algerian political activist, and a number of officials associated with the former Iraqi regime.

The government did not cooperate with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

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. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by the emir's branch of the al-Thani family, and legislative authority to be vested in normal circumstances in an advisory council with 30 elected members and 15 members appointed by the emir. The influence of Bedouin tribal traditions was still strong, and the government did not permit political parties or opposition groups to organize.

Elections and Political Participation

The emir exercises most executive powers, including appointment of cabinet members. In 2003 citizens elected all 29 members of the Central Municipal Council, which addresses local issues such as street repair, green space, trash collection, and public works projects. Its role is to advise the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture. The council does not have the authority to change policy. The elections were generally regarded as free and fair, although only 30 percent of eligible voters participated.

Influence of traditional attitudes and roles continued to limit women's participation in politics; however, there were a number of women serving in public office: Sheikha bint Ahmed al-Mahmoud as Minister for Education; Sheikha Aisha bint Khalifa al-Thani, member of the ruling family, is president of the Election Committee; and Sheikha Ghalia bint Mohammad bin Hamad al-Thani, also a member of the ruling family, is Deputy Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission and head of the General Authority for Health. There was also one woman serving on the Central Municipal Council. A woman is the president of the University of Qatar. The emir's sister is vice president of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and also has the rank of minister.

Government Corruption and Transparency

In April three ministerial-level officials were removed from their positions following a scandal related to stock purchases. The scandal involved fraudulently using Qatari identities to buy extra shares of Qatar Gas Transport Company than the official allocation allowed. The three dismissed officials used up to \$500 million (1.82 billion riyals) in loans from various local and regional sources to finance the stock purchases. In October two senior corporate executives were convicted on charges of insider trading in the Doha Stock Exchange. One of the executives convicted is an uncle to the emir's wife and was serving his sentence. In another case, a ranking member of the ruling family, the former chairman of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage was indicted in April for illegal trading and embezzlement.

The law does not provide public access to government information, and little was readily available, particularly statistical data. The government publishes its laws in the official gazette; however, it does not facilitate access to certain economic statistics, demographical data, judicial decisions, or draft legislation being analyzed or considered by the government or advisory council. At their discretion, government officials shared draft legislation with selected industry representatives for comment. The Ministry of Economy and Commerce and the Central

Bank provided published materials on laws and procedures for the public, but these efforts were not consistent throughout the government. Individuals and private institutions could request this information from the ministries and the planning council.

The lack of clarity in government procurement, such as the conditions and criteria of the tender, proper notification or explanation concerning bidders' qualifications, remained an issue of concern.

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

Law No. 12, enacted in November 2004, provides for the right to form private independent societies and associations; however, since the law was enacted, no applications have been submitted to establish an independent human rights organization. The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), established in May 2002, was composed of members of both government ministries and civil society to investigate and improve local human rights conditions. The NHRC held numerous training workshops for government officials, media representatives and university students. Participants included those from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, State Security Organization, Public Prosecution, courts, Qatar University, and Al-Jazeera. The NHRC also successfully helped three Arab expatriates to be released from jail. During the year the NHRC visited prisons four times to investigate conditions and issued recommendations to the Ministerial Council. Upon request, the government permitted international governmental organizations to visit the country; however, no such requests were reported during the year.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, language, religion, and disability, but legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed based on gender.

Women

According to a local quasi-governmental organization on family issues, domestic violence against women occurred. A total of 318 cases of domestic abuse against women were reported during the year; however, there were no publicized arrests or convictions for domestic violence. The maximum penalty for rape is death. Shari'a provides no punishment for spousal rape.

Foreign domestic servants experienced sexual harassment and maltreatment; however, most domestic servants did not press charges for fear of losing their jobs (see section 6.e.).

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 defiant behavior; however, none was reported during the year. Prostitution is illegal and is not considered a widespread problem. Government officials reported 13 cases before the courts. Sexual harassment is also illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment and/or fines. In the eight reported cases, there were five convictions, and the three were still pending at year's end.

Traditions and the interpretation of Shari'a restricted activities of women. The government adhered to an interpretation of Shari'a that recognizes that Muslims have the automatic right to inherit from their Muslim spouses; however, 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. A Muslim husband similarly does not automatically inherit the property of a non-Muslim wife. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. Women may inherit more or less than other male family members depending on their relation 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. Interpretations of Shari'a stipulate that girls remain with their mother until the age of 16 and 14 for boys. The tendency is to allow girls to remain with their mothers until marriage, and there is greater flexibility for boys.

Women may attend judicial court proceedings but generally were represented by a male relative; however, women may represent themselves. The testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpreted this 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. A noncitizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

Women made up 14 percent of the overall workforce and 30 percent of the local national workforce, serving as university professors, public school teachers, and police. Women served as professionals in government service, education, health, and private business. Women appeared to receive equal pay for equal work; however, they often did not receive equal allowances, which generally covered transportation and housing costs.

Although women above age 30 were legally able to travel abroad alone (see section 2.d.), tradition and social pressures caused most women to travel with male escorts.

The Supreme Council for Family Affairs, a government department, 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. Since the establishment of the Supreme Council, the status of women has improved and women's issues were accorded due importance. Unlike previously, women had input on the contents and provisions of laws that affect them and their children. The council played an integral role in the drafting of legislation affecting women and children. Women were being empowered to tackle issues once considered taboo, such as violence. In November the Supreme Council held a two-day seminar on violence against women in conjunction with the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The seminar focused on ways to fight violence against women, ensure the safety of victims, and provide legal mechanisms to address such cases.

The Supreme Council established five organizations that deal with women and children issues: the Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children, the Family Consulting Center, the Motherhood and Childhood Cultural Center, the Orphans Care Center, and the Qatar Society for Senior Citizens Care. The Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children handled more than 300 cases involving women and children. The foundation successfully resolved 90 percent of these cases to the satisfaction of the complainant. Cases were either referred to the courts or other agencies, and where appropriate, counseling and additional support were provided.

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 all citizen children and for noncitizen children whose parents worked in the government sector. Based on 2004 figures from the Planning Council, approximately 60 percent of school-age children attended school, and most children completed primary school. Medical coverage for noncitizen children was limited. The lack of primary educational and medical services to noncitizen children caused hardship for a substantial part of the expatriate population living in the country.

There was no societal pattern of child labor or abuse of children, apart from the trafficked, juvenile camel jockeys (see section 5, Trafficking).

The Qatar Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs maintained a children's hot line called the Friendly Line for use by children and conducted numerous 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.

Trafficking in Persons

Young boys were trafficked into the country to serve as jockeys in camel races early in the year. However, on July 28, Law No. 22, banning the transport, employment, training, and involvement of children under the age of 18 in camel races, came into force. According to Article 4, anyone who violates the law faces 3 to 10 years imprisonment and a fine ranging between \$13,000 (47,320 riyals) and \$55,000 (200,200 riyals).

Between the months of June and August, the government repatriated approximately 200 children jockeys to Sudan. According to officials at the Embassy of Sudan, no Sudanese camel jockeys remained in the country. The Qatar Charitable Society, in coordination with the Sudanese-based National Council for Childhood Care and the Qatari Embassy in Khartoum, will administer the government's program to rehabilitate and integrate the repatriated camel jockeys.

In July a human rights department was established in the Ministry of Interior to receive and process victims of human rights abuses and trafficking in persons. The director of the department was named as the national coordinator for trafficking problems. Three hot lines have also been established for victims of trafficking in persons.

In September the government opened a shelter for trafficking victims to serve the needs of abused domestic workers, other laborers and children. The shelter was in a small housing compound and consisted of fully furnished three-bedroom villas, with two villas each for men, women and children. Each villa could accommodate between six to seven people. The administrative building houses a health clinic with a medical doctor working on site. The shelter was under the management of the national trafficking in persons coordinator.

In addition to the law banning underage camel jockeys, traffickers can also be prosecuted under the Penalty Law of 2004, which bans forced or coerced labor. Those caught breaking the law may receive six months' imprisonment or a fine of approximately \$825 (3,003 riyals). In cases involving the employment of minors, the punishment is three years imprisonment or a fine of approximately \$2,700 (9,828 riyals).

Men and women were trafficked into situations of coerced labor. Legislation guiding the sponsorship of expatriate labors has created conditions constituting forced labor or slavery.

Under Law No. 3 of 1984, expatriate laborers were not allowed to leave the country without a signed exit sponsorship or change employment without a written release from their sponsor. The dependence of foreign laborers on their employer for residency rights, plus the ability to change employment or travel, leaves them vulnerable to abuse. Some sponsors have used this power against their workers. They have withheld their consent to force foreign employees to work for longer periods, to avoid having to pay salary owed to the worker, and to extract money from the laborer. Some workers ended up in the deportation center due to their employers withholding their passports and failing to renew their work visas. Nepalese officials reported that 367 Nepalese workers have been held at the deportation center and have been awaiting repatriation for several months. The workers were apprehended by law enforcement officials because they had expired work visas.

The country also was a destination for women and girls who traveled to the country to work as domestic servants. Two embassies reported that a total of 600 of their nationals had been forced into domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.

Although the government has identified various agencies to implement antitrafficking reforms, it did not systematically monitor its antitrafficking efforts.

Persons with Disabilities

Law No. 2 of 2004 requires the allocation of resources for persons with disabilities and prohibits discrimination against such persons. Among some of the rights and provisions mandated for persons with disabilities are: Rehabilitation, education, transportation, medical and social care, support services, access to public facilities, and employment. In the case of the latter, the law requires that 2 percent of all jobs in government agencies and public institutions be set aside for persons with disabilities. Also, private sector businesses employing a minimum of 25 persons were required to hire persons with disabilities. Employees who violated these employment provisions were subject to fines. According to government officials and the National Human Rights Committee, the law was strictly observed, and no complaints were made during the year. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs is charged with ensuring compliance with the rights and provisions mandated under Law No. 2.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The government discriminated based on nationality in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services. Noncitizens did not receive the same benefits as citizens. They were required to pay for residence permits, health care, electricity, water, and education (services that were provided free of charge to citizens). Noncitizens generally could not own property; however, Law 17 of 2004, regulates the right of usufruct and allows for ownership of property in only two designated areas. The largest nationality groups among noncitizens were Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Nepalese nationals, and Arab nationals of other countries. In the private sector, many citizens of Iranian origin occupied some of the highest positions.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Law No. 11 of 2004 prohibits sex between males. Penalties included life imprisonment for acts involving minors or mentally retarded persons, 7 years' imprisonment in cases involving consenting adults and 15 years' imprisonment in cases in which an individual is forced.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The new labor law enacted in January and subsequent regulations promulgated in May provide for the right of association for citizens over 18 years of age. Noncitizens were not eligible to form worker or general committees. Under the new labor law, labor associations or unions are defined as worker or general committees. Also, workers' committees can only be formed in private enterprises with more than 100 citizen workers. Foreign workers can only be members of joint labor-management committees. Those working in the government sector are prohibited from joining unions. Further, the new law and regulations permit only a single national trade union structure and forbid affiliation with groups outside the country.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Although no labor unions existed during the reporting period, under the new labor law, workers are granted the right to bargain collectively and to sign joint agreements, i.e., agreements reached between employer and worker regarding a work-related issue; however, that right is circumscribed by the government's control over the rules and procedures of the bargaining and agreement processes. Collective bargaining is not freely practiced, and there are no workers under collective bargaining contracts. The new law also grants workers the right to strike; however, the restrictive conditions imposed by the statute make the likelihood of striking extremely unlikely. Although the law constrains a worker's right to strike, expatriate workers staged a total of six strikes during the year as a means of seeking redress and improvement in their work situation from employers.

Government employees, domestic servants, and those in the public utility, health, and security services are prohibited from striking. However, they can seek permission to hold a public gathering under Law No. 18 of 2004. Employers set wages unilaterally 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 repatriation. According to source country embassies and some migrant workers, the Labor Department was widely perceived to be objective within a narrow mandate when dealing with the nonpayment of wages. The Labor Department claimed that it resolved the vast majority of worker complaints amicably, with a very small percentage referred to the labor courts for judgment.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Penalty Law of 2004 prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, foreign workers in some cases were employed under circumstances that constituted forced labor. More than three-quarters of the workforce were foreign workers who, dependent on a single 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. During the year compulsory labor by children occurred (see section 6.d.).

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 with respect to citizen children; however, some child labor occurred. The new labor law raised the minimum age for employment to 16 years.

The law provides that minors between the ages of 16 and 18 can be employed 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 6 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 department may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs that are judged dangerous to the health, safety, or morals of minors. In the beginning of the year, very young children, usually of Sudanese background, were employed as jockeys in camel races (see section 5, Trafficking).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Although the 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. According to Planning Council statistics, the average monthly wage in 2001 was \$795 (2,902 riyals). 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 not observed with respect to unskilled laborers and domestic and personal employees, the majority of whom were foreigners. Many such workers frequently worked 7 days per week, and more than 12 hours per day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and no effective way to redress grievances.

Some employers mistreated foreign domestic servants, predominantly those from South Asia, Indonesia and the Philippines. 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 source country embassies, the majority of cases were resolved amicably within 48 hours. Those not resolved within 48 hours were transferred to the Criminal Evidence and Investigation Department of the Ministry of Interior for a maximum of seven days. Cases not resolved within seven days were transferred to the court. The embassies of the Philippines and Indonesia combined received a total of 600 complaints from housemaids alleging mistreatment by their employers during the year. Complaints included sexual harassment, physical torture or torment, overwork, imprisonment, and maltreatment. Abused domestic servants usually did not press charges for fear of losing their jobs. According to Indonesian officials, a total of 553 Indonesian housemaids ran away from their sponsors during the year.

The government has enacted regulations regarding worker safety, but enforcement, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy and Industry, the Ministry of Health, and the Labor Department, was lax due to insufficient training and lack of personnel. Diplomatic representatives conducted visits to labor camps and found the majority of unskilled foreign laborers living in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water or electricity. A visit to a camp adjacent to a paper factory where five workers had died after exposure to toxic gases found other workers, four days later, still being exposed to the same poisonous gases.

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. The law does not provide workers specifically the 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 repatriation, and there were no reports of workers seeking such relief during the year.

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. The government also fined individual sponsors and employers who severely violated residence and sponsorship laws by prohibiting them from importing labor until they rectified the situation. Employers mistreated some foreign domestic servants. Such mistreatment generally involved the nonpayment or late payment of wages; in some cases, it involved rape and physical abuse.

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