



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Suriname

#### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2007](#)

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Suriname is a constitutional democracy, with a president elected by the unicameral legislature or by the larger United People's Assembly. The population is approximately 471,000. After generally free and fair elections in 2005, the New Front Plus government, a coalition of eight parties, was formed. In August 2005 the United People's Assembly reelected Ronald Venetiaan as president. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

While the government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, there were problems in some areas, including police mistreatment of detainees at the time of arrest; abuse of prisoners by guards; overcrowded detention facilities; an overwhelmed judiciary with a large case backlog; lengthy pretrial detention; self-censorship by some media; increased corruption in the government; societal discrimination against women, minorities, and indigenous people; violence against women; trafficking in women, girls, and boys; and child labor in the informal sector.

#### RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

###### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

The government or its agents did not commit any politically motivated killings; however, security forces killed two persons during the year. There were reports that police shot and killed at least two suspects during arrests.

On July 6, police shot and killed Andy Aroma, a suspect wanted in a string of armed robbery cases, when he reportedly fled from officers attempting to apprehend him. Internal investigations into the shooting continued at year's end.

On November 28, police shot and killed Rodney Dors, while trying to arrest him. Dors attempted to flee from the police during a failed robbery attempt. A police investigation concluded that there was no wrongdoing on the officer's part and cleared the officer of all charges.

In February the government established the Foundation for Development of Moiwana and began constructing a housing project in the Moiwana Village as part of the Inter-American Court's ruling on the 1986 massacre of 39 Moiwana citizens.

On November 30, a trial began for 25 defendants and former military head of state Desi Bouterse for the 1982 extrajudicial killings of 15 political opponents of the military regime. The trial was pending at year's end.

###### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

While the law prohibits such practices, human rights groups and the media continued to express concern about official mistreatment, and they documented cases of police mistreatment of detainees, particularly during arrests, and abuse of prisoners by prison officials.

Human rights activists, the media, and concerned citizens accused the police of using excessive force during arrests.

On February 12, police Major Omar Terborg was arrested for ordering six other police officers to punish detainees for

attempting to escape a police detention cell.

On May 18, a judge sentenced Steve Douglas to a reduced jail term of three years for drug trafficking after evidence showed he was electrocuted by police during questioning. Police investigations continued at year's end.

On May 22, seven robbery suspects claimed police used excessive force against them to coerce confessions. Investigations into actions of the officers were ongoing at year's end.

There were no developments, and none were expected, in the investigations of the January, February, and November 2006 allegations of abuses by police officials.

There were no developments, and none were expected, in the 2005 case in which a police officer shot and injured an unarmed detainee who tried to escape from the police station.

#### Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were poor. Most facilities, particularly older jails, remained unsanitary and seriously overcrowded, with occupancy as much as quadruple design capacity.

Violence among prisoners was common, and prisoners continued to complain of mistreatment by guards.

On April 1, a male inmate at Nieuwe Haven police station was stabbed to death; investigations continued at year's end.

A trial was ongoing at year's end in the November 2006 case of eight prison officers accused of killing an inmate.

Human rights monitors expressed concern about conditions in pretrial detention facilities, which remained overcrowded. Growing numbers of convicted prisoners were held in detention cells due to prison overcrowding. Because of staff shortages, police officers rarely permitted detainees to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also alleged that meals were inadequate.

In July a prison was expanded to include cells for those convicted of misdemeanors.

Conditions in the women's jail and prison facilities were generally better than those in the men's facilities. Once sentenced, there was no separate facility for girls under the age of 18; girls were held in the women's detention center and in the women's section of one of the prison complexes.

Juvenile facilities for both boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 18 within the adult prison located outside the city of Paramaribo were considered adequate and included educational and recreational facilities. A separate wing of that prison held boys under age 18 who committed serious crimes.

On October 26, a new youth detention center was opened in Paramaribo.

The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. Representatives of the nongovernmental organization (NGO), Moiwana, reported that, in general they had access to prisoners and received cooperation from prison officials on routine matters. The Welzijns Institute Nickerie, an NGO operating in the western district of Nickerie, visited and provided counseling for detainees in the youth detention center in that district.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions. Due to a shortage of judges, prisoners who appealed their cases often served their full sentences before the lengthy appeals process could be completed. Unlike in previous years, the Attorney General's office did not express concern that prisoners who had served their original sentences were not released on a timely basis.

#### Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The armed forces are responsible for national security and border control, with the military police having direct responsibility for immigration control at the country's ports of entry. All elements of the military are under the control of the Ministry of Defense. Civilian police bear primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and report to the Ministry of Justice and Police. The Personeel Investigation Department (OPZ) is an office within the Police Department that conducts investigations into complaints of police abuses. Police effectiveness was hampered by a lack of equipment and training, low salaries, and poor coordination with other law enforcement agencies. The police and military continued

joint operations.

Corruption remained a problem, and senior officers met monthly with the Attorney General's office to review corruption and other cases against the police.

According to OPZ, at year's end authorities disciplined 29 officers for various offenses and jailed eight, including one on charges of participation in a criminal organization and five for grievous bodily harm.

#### Arrest and Detention

Individuals were apprehended with warrants and were promptly informed of the charges against them. The police may detain for up to 14 days a person suspected of committing a crime if the sentence for that crime is longer than four years, and an assistant district attorney or a police inspector may authorize incommunicado detention. The police must bring the accused before a prosecutor to be charged formally in that period, but if additional time is needed to investigate the charge, a prosecutor and, later, a judge of instruction may extend the detention period an additional 150 days. There is no bail system. Detainees were allowed prompt access to counsel of their choosing, but the prosecutor may prohibit access if he thinks that this could harm the investigation. Detainees were allowed weekly visits from family members.

The average length of pretrial detention was 30 to 45 days for lesser crimes. Detainees were held in 22 overcrowded detention cells at police stations throughout the country. At year's end there were 977 persons detained in these cells. In accordance with the law, the courts freed most detainees who were not tried within the 164-day period.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the law provides for an independent judiciary, disputes over the appointment of judges undermined the independence of the judiciary. The attorney general is appointed for life. On March 2, the president appointed a new president of the Court of Justice; the acting president had occupied his position since 2000.

The judicial system consists of three lower courts, two specialized courts, and the Court of Justice as an appeals court. A military court system operates in cooperation with the civilian judicial system.

The judiciary was significantly hampered by a shortage of judges, which limited the effectiveness of the civilian and military courts. There were nine permanent and two deputy judges for the entire country, a number that human rights groups and lawyers' associations viewed as inadequate. A government program continued to train seven new judges who were expected to assume their duties in 2008.

Other problems the judiciary faced included financial dependence on the Ministry of Justice and Police (and hence the executive branch), lack of professional court managers and case management systems to oversee the courts' administrative functions, and lack of space. These contributed to a significant case backlog. The courts required a minimum of six months to process criminal cases.

#### Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair, public trial in which defendants have the right to counsel, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to appeal their verdict. Defendants' lawyers can question witnesses. There is no jury system. The courts assign private sector lawyers to defend indigent detainees, paying the costs from public funds. However, court-assigned lawyers, of whom there were 14, generally appeared at the trial without prior consultation with defendants. According to the NGO Moiwana, these lawyers often did not appear at all.

Military personnel generally are not subject to civilian criminal law. A member of the armed forces accused of a crime immediately comes under military jurisdiction, and military police are responsible for all such investigations. Military prosecutions are directed by an officer on the public prosecutor's staff and take place in separate courts before two military judges and one civilian judge. Due to the shortage of judges, military and civilian judges are selected from the same pool by the Court of Justice, which makes assignments to specific cases. A mechanism exists to prevent conflicts of interest. The military courts follow the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There is no appeal from the military to the civil system.

#### Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

#### Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Although there are separate procedures for civil judicial processes, the same pool of judges is responsible for presiding over these procedures. There is access to a court to bring lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation. However, the shortage of judges impeded this process; most civil cases were resolved approximately three to four years after being heard by the courts.

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

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law requires warrants, which are issued by quasi-judicial officers who supervise criminal investigations, for searches.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

Some media members continued to practice occasional self-censorship. This was due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership or response to pressure applied by senior government officials and important community leaders on journalists who published negative stories about the administration.

On May 10, the news show *Suriname Today* did not broadcast citizens' comments on the China-Taiwan controversy at the request of Vice President Ramdien Sardjoe. The Surinamese Association of Journalists reported the incident to the regional Association of Caribbean Media Workers.

In August, after a private television station carried comments by a news show guest that some considered racist, some members of the government called for "regulation" of the station. Although attempts to regulate and censor television stations failed in parliament, Vice President Sardjoe warned that media firms should stick to the conditions of their permits.

There were no developments in the 2005 case in which local newspaper *De Ware Tijd*, refused to publish a court-ordered retraction to an article published in *De West*, a competing publication. *De West* filed an appeal of the ruling ordering the retraction, and hearings were scheduled to start in early 2008.

On at least three occasions, government ministers threatened legal action against newspapers, and one case led to a court verdict mandating a public apology, which the newspaper published.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Assembly and Association

The law provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination, including anti-Semitic acts. The Jewish community numbered approximately 150 persons.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2007 International Religious Freedom Report*.

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

The Constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

Although the law does not address exile, it was not used in practice.

#### 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. Under special circumstances, persons may be granted refugee status, and in practice the government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they feared persecution. During the year the government granted refugee status to one individual.

The government cooperated with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

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

The law provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

#### Elections and Political Participation

The constitution provides for direct election by secret ballot of the 51-member National Assembly every five years. The National Assembly in turn elects the president by a two-thirds majority vote. If the legislature is unable to do so, the constitution provides that the United People's Assembly, composed of members of parliament and elected regional and local officials, shall elect the president. After generally free and fair elections in May 2005, the United People's Assembly reelected incumbent Ronald Venetiaan as president in August 2005. Political parties could operate without restriction or outside interference.

Historical and cultural factors, such as early, arranged marriages for Hindu and Muslim women, impeded equal participation by women in leadership positions in government and political parties. While women made limited gains in attaining political power, participation by women in politics (and other fields) generally was considered insufficient, and men continued to dominate political life. There were 13 women in the 51-seat National Assembly, and the cabinet included three women. In 2001 the first female judge joined the Court of Justice and remained the sole female on the court. In 2006 a woman was appointed head clerk of parliament, that body's highest administrative position.

Several factors traditionally limited the participation of indigenous Amerindians and Maroons--descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior to avoid recapture--in the political process. Most of the country's political activity takes place in the capital, Paramaribo, and in a narrow belt running east and west of it along the coast. The Maroons and Amerindians were concentrated in remote areas in the interior and therefore had limited access to, and influence on, the political process. There was one Amerindian and three Maroon political parties, and voters elected eight Maroons and one Amerindian to the National Assembly. The opportunity for Maroons to participate in the political process increased when the three Maroon parties formed a coalition for the 2005 election and became part of the governing coalition, with three Maroons in the cabinet.

#### Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The World Bank's worldwide governance indicators reflected that government corruption was a problem. There was a widespread perception of corruption in the executive branch of the government. A shortage of police personnel continued to hamper police investigations of fraud cases.

On March 13, Alice Amafo, former minister of transport, communications and tourism, allegedly used government funds amounting to \$13,000 (36,000 SRD) to finance her birthday celebration. She resigned under pressure but was not prosecuted.

In June a judge ruled on the 2005 case against 19 public officials charged with corruption at the Ministry of Public Works. Eleven officials received jail terms ranging from three to 11 months' imprisonment, and eight were acquitted of all charges.

Former minister of public works, Dewanand Balesar, who was charged with forgery, swindling, extortion, and violating the Law Regulating the Responsibilities of Ministers, remained on trial at year's end.

On August 9, the government's Central Account Department began investigating an alleged fraud conspiracy at the Ministry of Finance, and the Prosecutor General's Office opened a criminal investigation against 16 persons. The amount embezzled was approximately \$1.96 million (5.5 billion SRD). Police arrested three people, including two former ministry officials, for their role in the embezzlement. The trial was pending at year's end.

The media frequently reported alleged corrupt practices with regard to the acquisition of land by one of the political parties in the governing coalition and the generally lengthy and bureaucratic procedures for citizens to receive land from the government.

Although the law provides for public access to government information, such access was limited in practice for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media. While almost every ministry has an information service, onerous bureaucratic hurdles made obtaining information very difficult.

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

A number of independent domestic human rights groups, such as the Organization for Justice and Peace, the Know Your Rights Foundation, and Moiwana, generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. However, government officials often were not cooperative or responsive to their views. No international human rights groups operated in the country during the year.

A parliamentary commission on human rights continued operating throughout the year, but resource constraints hampered its effectiveness. Parliament also has a commission dealing with women's and children's rights.

#### Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on race and ethnicity but does not address discrimination based on disability, language, or social status. While the law does not specifically prohibit gender discrimination, it provides for protection of women's rights to equal access to education, employment, and property. In practice several societal groups, including women, Maroons, Amerindians, persons with HIV/AIDS, and homosexuals, suffered various forms of discrimination.

##### Women

The law prohibits rape but does not address spousal rape. The maximum penalty for rape or forcible sexual assault is 12 years' imprisonment.

Violence against women was a common problem, which the government did not address specifically. The law does not differentiate between domestic violence and other forms of assault. The Nieuwe Haven Police Unit for Domestic Abuse, the most active such unit in the country, reported 275 cases of abuse during the year. An NGO-driven network, including police units, continued working to combat domestic violence. There were four victims' rooms in police stations in Paramaribo and in Nickerie, and police units were trained in dealing with victims and perpetrators of sexual crimes and domestic violence.

Although the law prohibits sexual exploitation, including prostitution, in practice prostitution was tolerated. Concerns about the link between prostitution and trafficking in persons resulted in police raids on commercial sex locations and arrests of several prostituted persons. Poverty continued to put young women at risk of becoming exploited for commercial sex. The presence of large groups of illegal workers in the gold mining sector in the interior drew many young Maroon women and girls into commercial sexual exploitation. Police allowed many brothels to operate but made bimonthly checks on these establishments to see if women were being abused, held against their will, or having their passports retained by brothel owners to ensure fulfillment of work contract obligations.

Women have the legal right to equal access to education, employment, and property; nevertheless, social pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, inhibited their full exercise of these rights, particularly with respect to marriage and inheritance. Social pressures on families to have their daughters married at or near the legal age of marital consent frequently interfered with these girls' education and resulted in the direct passage of all property the women would have inherited from their parents to their husbands and parents-in-law in accordance with these customs.

Women experienced economic discrimination in access to employment and in rates of pay for the same or substantially similar work. The government did not make specific efforts to combat economic discrimination.

The National Women's Movement, the most active women's rights NGO, continued assisting women in launching small home-based businesses, such as sewing and growing vegetables, and provided general legal help. The Women's Business Group advocated business opportunities for women, while the Women's Parliament Forum advocated opportunities in the public sector. Stop Violence against Women provided assistance to victims of domestic violence, including legal help with dissolving an abusive marriage. The Maxi Linder Foundation worked with persons in prostitution, including women and children who were victims of trafficking, and conducted outreach and informational sessions to inform victims about their rights. Resource constraints continued to limit the effectiveness of these groups.

## Children

The government allocated limited resources to ensure safeguards for the human rights and welfare of children.

Schooling is compulsory until 12 years of age; however, in practice some school-age children, particularly in the interior, did not have access to education due to a lack of transportation, building facilities, or teachers. Although school attendance was free through university level, most public schools imposed a nominal enrollment fee, ranging from \$9 to \$40 (SRD 25 to SRD 115) a year to cover costs. Approximately 85 percent of children in cities, but as few as 50 percent of children in the interior, attended school. Most children attended school through middle school (age 16). There was no legal difference in the treatment of girls and boys in education or health care services, and in practice both were treated equally.

Government medical care for children was generally adequate, and vaccination for all children was obligatory. However, the government offered very limited mental health care. The NGO, Bureau for Child Development, provided mental health care for abused children. There was a home for HIV/AIDS orphans and abandoned children in Paramaribo.

Physical and sexual abuse of children continued to be a problem. During the year police received reports of 250 cases of sexual abuse of children. The police Youth Affairs Office conducted three visits per week to different schools in the capital and the surrounding areas on a rotating schedule to provide outreach and raise awareness about child abuse and to solicit and investigate complaints. The Youth Affairs office also raised awareness about sexual abuse, drugs, and alcohol through a weekly television program.

In January a child care center director was arrested for sexual abuse of children at a home for homeless children in Paramaribo. The case against the director continued at year's end with more children stepping forward with complaints. The case, along with a similar case in June 2006 at a different children's care center, led to increased media reporting on the problem and of sexual abuse cases.

Various laws were used to prosecute perpetrators of sexual harassment, and several cases of sexual abuse against minors came to trial. Sentences averaged three years in prison. There were several orphanages and one privately funded shelter for sexually abused children in the capital.

While the legal age of sexual consent is 14, it was not enforced effectively. The marriage law sets the age of marital consent at 15 for girls and 17 for boys, provided parents of the parties agree to the marriage. Parental permission to marry is required up to age 21. The law also mandates the presence of a Civil Registry official to register all marriages.

Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of minors remained a problem. According to the Mamio Namen Project Foundation, an NGO working to assist HIV-infected persons, increased sex tourism led to increased sexual exploitation of children, particularly young boys. Two NGOs provided shelters for homeless boys.

Children faced increasing economic pressure to discontinue their education to seek employment, particularly in the interior of the country, and child labor remained a problem in the informal sector.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) continued cooperating with the government on the basis of a multi-annual plan of action. UNICEF provided training to officials from various ministries dealing with children and children's rights. UNICEF coordinated its activities with the Bureau for Children Rights and the national steering committee, which includes representatives from the Ministries of Health, Education, Regional Development, Planning and Development Cooperation, and Labor.

## Trafficking in Persons

Although trafficking in persons is criminalized by law, persons were trafficking to, through, and within the country, primarily for sexual exploitation.

The country was primarily a transit and destination country for women and children trafficked internationally for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Foreign girls and women were trafficked from Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Colombia for commercial sexual exploitation; some transited the country en route to Europe. The majority of these girls and women were reportedly unaware that they would be forced into prostitution. Authorities noted that "snake heads,"

Chinese human trafficking organizations, were active. Chinese nationals transiting the country risked debt bondage to these migrant smugglers; men were exploited in forced labor and women in commercial sexual exploitation. Haitians migrating illegally were also vulnerable to forced labor exploitation in the country. There also were reports of underage girls and boys trafficked within the country for prostitution by recruiters or caretakers.

The Penal Code establishes a maximum prison term for human traffickers and human smugglers of four years, criminalizes assisting or facilitating human trafficking, and provides heavy fines for the offenders. The penalty for sexual exploitation, a criminal felony, is a five-year sentence; labor exploitation is covered only by labor law and is a misdemeanor carrying a three-to six-month sentence. Criminal law prohibits solicitation and brothel operation, but the law was not enforced.

Government efforts to investigate and prosecute traffickers continued.

Trials were pending at year's end in the February 2006 case against four brothel owners involved in trafficking women from the Dominican Republic for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

In July 2006 police arrested a person on charges of trafficking in persons, assault, and intimidation. The women were trafficked under false pretenses and were forced to work as prostitutes. Trial was ongoing at year's end.

There were reports that government officials, including consular affairs, customs, and immigration officials, facilitated trafficking in persons by allowing individuals who were not bona fide visitors to enter the country. Authorities continued to investigate such reports.

The government's Antitrafficking Commission has primary responsibility for combating trafficking; the commission included representatives from law enforcement (Attorney General's Office, police force, and the military police, which handles immigration), the Ministries of Justice and Police, Labor, Home Affairs, and Foreign Affairs. The commission met monthly to assess the government's progress in combating trafficking in persons and coordinate new action steps. Police cooperated with counterparts in Guyana and the Dominican Republic, and justice officials sought improved mechanisms for cooperation with Colombia, the Netherlands Antilles, and French Guiana. On various occasions the commission teamed up with officers of the Ministry of Labor, Technological Development and Environment and with the military police when inspecting brothels.

The Public Prosecutor's office and the police continued a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality. The police had informal agreements with many brothel owners allowing them to proceed with their business. Through October the Special Antitrafficking Police Unit conducted bimonthly checks to ensure that women were not mistreated, that no minors were present, and that owners did not keep the women's airline tickets or passports. Through October two brothels were closed because the owners did not have permits to operate.

The police unit also visited cyber cafes to prohibit people performing sexual acts in front of webcams for use on sexually explicit Web sites. The police operated a telephone hot line to handle cases involving the commercial sex industry.

Although the government continued to lack resources for the direct provision of services to victims of trafficking, it increased efforts to work with civil society to shelter and assist victims. Authorities extended services provided for domestic violence victims and worked with civil society contacts and consular representatives of victims' source countries. As a result, identified foreign victims were temporarily sheltered and kept safe until their repatriation. Victims could file suit against traffickers, but few victims came forward. Women arrested in brothel raids as immigration violators and who did not indicate they were trafficked were deported, but efforts were made to treat identified victims as material witnesses needing protection rather than as criminals. An NGO receiving government funding, the Maxi Linder Foundation, continued working with trafficking victims, providing counseling and rehabilitative training.

The government continued operating an intensive trafficking in persons awareness campaign funded by the International Organization for Migration focusing on the Chamber of Commerce, Youth Parliament, and the border town of Nickerie.

#### Persons with Disabilities

No laws prohibit discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of state services. There are no laws, provisions, or programs requiring access to buildings for persons with disabilities. Some training programs were provided for the blind and others with disabilities. In general, persons with disabilities suffered from discrimination when applying for jobs and services. A Ministry of Social Affairs working group remained responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities but made no progress during the year.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, and no discrimination complaints were filed during the year. Nonetheless Maroons, who represent approximately 15 percent of the population, generally continued to be disadvantaged in the areas of education, employment, and government services. Most Maroons lived in the interior where limited infrastructure narrowed their access to educational and professional opportunities and health and social services. Maroons in Paramaribo suffered from negative social stereotypes.

Some forms of discrimination that affected indigenous Amerindians also extended to Maroons.

#### Indigenous People

The law affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous people. Most Amerindians (approximately 3 percent of the population) suffered a number of disadvantages and had only limited ability to participate in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources. The country's political life, educational opportunities, and jobs were concentrated in the capital and its environs, while the majority of Amerindians (as well as Maroons) lived in the interior, where government services were largely unavailable.

The Amerindian (and Maroon) populations continued to face problems with illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining. Organizations representing Maroon and Amerindian communities complained that small-scale mining operations, mainly by illegal gold miners, dug trenches that cut residents off from their agricultural land and threatened to drive them away from their traditional settlements. Mercury runoff from these operations also contaminated and threatened traditional food source areas.

In 2005 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) heard a petition filed in 2000 by the Vereniging van Saramakaanse Gezagdragers, an organization representing 12 Saramaccaner clans with authority over 60 villages in the Upper Suriname River area, claiming that lumber operations, mostly by Chinese-owned concessions, threatened their way of life. After the government failed to take appropriate measures, in June 2006 the IACHR sent the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, whose decisions are binding for those States which have accepted the Court's jurisdiction. In December the Inter-American Court ruled that the government must recognize the collective land rights of the Saramaccan clans, draft legislation that complies with international treaties, and establish a development fund of \$600,000 (\$1,680,000 SRD). Demarcation must commence on February 28, 2008 and be complete within three years.

Maroon and Amerindian groups continued to cooperate with each other to exercise their rights more effectively. Moiwana and other NGOs continued working to promote the rights of indigenous people.

#### Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Although the law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, there were reports that homosexuals continued to suffer from employment discrimination. Persons with HIV/AIDS continued to experience societal discrimination in employment and medical services. An NGO working with HIV-infected persons reported that law enforcement agencies and the fire department conducted HIV testing as part of their hiring procedures.

The Ministry of Health intensified its efforts in prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, through a comprehensive outreach program involving local health care providers. The outreach program was successful in achieving its goal of voluntary testing of 90 percent of expectant mothers. Testing was also available through hospitals, Primary Health Services' clinics, family practitioners, and the Regional Health Services.

The military increased its HIV/AIDS awareness campaign among troops after it was announced that HIV/AIDS was the number one cause of death among defense force members.

#### Section 6 Worker Rights

##### a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers did so in practice. Nearly 60 percent of the work force was organized into unions, and most unions belonged to one of the country's seven major labor federations. Unions were independent of the government but played an active role in politics.

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

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the government generally protected this right in practice. Collective bargaining agreements covered approximately 50 percent of the labor force.

The law provides for the right to strike, and workers in both public and private sectors exercised this right in practice.

In September employees of the Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport staged an unofficial strike suspending flight operations for a short time. After talks with Vice President Ramdien Sardjoe the strike was postponed.

In December unions representing bus drivers, air traffic controllers, and high school teachers went on strike. While the bus drivers demanded higher tariffs, the air traffic controllers and teachers demanded better working conditions and increased wages. After negotiations between the bus drivers' unions and the government, parties came to an agreement, and bus drivers resumed their work. Negotiations between the government and the air traffic controllers' and teachers' unions continued at year's end.

There are no export processing zones.

#### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

While the law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, including by children, such practices occurred.

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

The country's labor laws do not define the worst forms of child labor or hazardous work, and the government does not have a comprehensive policy or national program of action on child labor.

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years and restricts working hours for minors to day shifts but does not specify the length of such day shifts. Children younger than 18 are prohibited from doing hazardous work, defined as work dangerous to their life, health, and decency; those younger than 14 are only allowed to work in a family or special vocational setting or for educational purpose. However, the Ministry of Labor and the police enforced this law sporadically, and child labor remained a problem in the informal sector, especially in the western districts of Nickerie and Saramacca.

Children under 14 worked as street vendors, newspaper sellers, rice and lumber mill workers, packers for traders, shop assistants, and in the gold mining sector and reportedly in the commercial sex industry. Working hours for youths were not limited in comparison with the regular work force. Employers in these sectors did not guarantee work safety, and children often worked barefoot and without protective gloves, with no access to medical care. Although government figures reported that only 2 percent of children were economically active, there was a lack of statistical data on the labor environment and child labor situation in the country. The worst forms of child labor, such as commercial sexual exploitation, remained a problem; there were reports of commercial sexual exploitation of children and teenagers by caretakers and older recruiters.

The Ministry of Labor's Department of Labor Inspection, with approximately 40 inspectors, has responsibility to implement and enforce labor laws, including those pertaining to the worst forms of child labor. Inspectors covered the entire country, but no data was available regarding the number of inspections performed during the year. The government did not investigate exploitive child labor cases outside urban areas. Labor inspectors were not authorized to conduct inspections in the informal sector as responsibility for controlling the informal sector lies with police.

The police continued raids on known child labor locations in Paramaribo, including street spots where underage vendors worked, as well as nightclubs, casinos, and brothels, to combat the problem.

The government provided no social programs to prevent and withdraw children from the worst forms of child labor, but supported vocational programs for dropouts and older children to serve as an alternative to work.

In January the government installed the National Commission dealing with Child Labor, consisting of officials from several ministries, and representatives from labor unions, the private sector, and NGOs. The commission was primarily tasked with establishing an authority on child labor, as provided for in the International Labor Organization Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. At year's end such an authority was not yet established; however, the commission was examining existing legislation and holding discussions with stakeholders.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislation providing for a minimum wage. The lowest wage for civil servants is approximately \$211 (SRD 593) per month, including a cost of living allowance, which did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Government employees, who constituted approximately 50 percent of the 100,000-member work force, frequently supplemented their salaries with second or third jobs, often in the informal sector. The president and the Council of Ministers set and approved civil service wage increases.

Work in excess of 45 hours per week on a regular basis requires special government permission, which was granted routinely. Such overtime work earned premium pay. The law prohibits excessive overtime and requires a 24-hour rest period per week.

A 10- to 12-member inspectorate in the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing occupational safety and health regulations. Resource constraints and lack of trained personnel precluded the division from making regular inspections. There was no law authorizing workers to refuse to work in circumstances they deem unsafe; they must appeal to the inspectorate to declare the workplace situation unsafe.



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