



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Suriname

#### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2006](#)

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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 493,000. After generally free and fair elections in May 2005, the New Front Plus government, a coalition of eight parties, was formed. On August 3, 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

Although the government or its agents did not commit any politically motivated killings, security forces killed two persons during the year.

In October a court sentenced a police officer to eight years' imprisonment for the January shooting of a 16-year-old barbershop apprentice during an argument.

In April police shot and killed a man who fled after robbing a supermarket. A police investigation concluded that there was no wrongdoing on the officer's part and cleared the officer of all charges.

In July a court convicted a police officer of manslaughter, sentenced him to one year in prison, and suspended him from the police force for two years for the fatal shooting in February 2005 of a 5-year-old girl while attempting to break up a fight between two men. It was determined that the officer was under the influence of alcohol when the incident occurred.

There were no developments in the 2004 case in which two officers shot and killed a defenseless suspect.

In accordance with a June 2005 ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that found the government guilty of human rights violations in the 1986 massacre of at least 39 civilians at the N'Djuka Maroon village of Moiwana, the attorney general established a coordination team to investigate the Moiwana massacre and other crimes committed by the security forces that remain unpunished. In February the government established a working group consisting of officials from various ministries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to oversee execution of the court's orders, and the government paid \$13,000 in reparations to each survivor of the massacre and organized a large public ceremony in July to offer its apologies to the N'Djuka Maroons. The government's failure to fully implement the court's judgment remained controversial, as demonstrated by protests during November's commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the massacre.

In 2000 the Court of Justice ordered the prosecutor's office to investigate the 1982 killings by the Desi Bouterse regime of 15 prominent political, labor, business, and media leaders. In mid-2004 the prosecutor's office completed its investigation and scheduled trials for more than 20 suspects, including the prime suspect--former military dictator (and current National Assembly member) Bouterse. The suspects appealed a military court's ruling on pretrial objections, and the Court of Justice is scheduled to start the appeal hearings in early 2007; the actual murder trial can only start after the court's ruling.

###### b. Disappearance

Although there were no reports of politically motivated disappearances, the government had yet to investigate allegations of certain disappearances that occurred between 1983 and 1991.

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

While the law prohibits such practices, human rights groups 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 accused the police of using excessive force during arrests. There were reports that police shot and injured three suspects, including armed dangerous criminals, during arrests.

In January police shot a man who fled after robbing two people in a park. In February police officers beat a suspect while arresting him for possession of marijuana. In November a citizen filed a complaint against a police officer asserting that he had been assaulted at the police station. At year's end authorities continued investigations into the actions taken by the police officers in these cases.

An investigation was still pending into the October 2005 case in which a police officer shot and injured an unarmed detainee who tried to escape from the police station.

No information was available about results of other investigations by the police Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ) into reports that police beat suspects in 2005. Likewise, no information was available about any investigation into the December 2005 complaint by a father and his 13-year-old daughter charging physical abuse by police when the two entered and refused to leave the motorcade escorting the visiting Dutch prime minister to the airport in November of that year.

### Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were poor. Most facilities, particularly older jails, remained unsanitary and seriously overcrowded, with as many as four times the number of detainees for which jail capacity was intended.

Violence among prisoners was common, and prisoners continued to complain of mistreatment by guards. In November authorities arrested eight prison officers in connection with an inmate's death. The coroner's report showed that his death was due to grievous bodily harm, and an investigation into this case continued at year's end.

Human rights monitors expressed concern about conditions in pretrial detention facilities, which remained overcrowded. A steadily growing number of people who had been convicted, but not yet placed in prisons due to a lack of space in prison facilities, continued to be held in these detention cells. Because of staff shortages, police officers rarely permitted detainees to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also complained about inadequate meals.

Conditions in 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. Conditions in a separate youth detention center in Paramaribo remained inadequate, and prisoners and NGOs complained about overcrowding and poor ventilation, physical and verbal abuse by the guards, and unchecked violence among detainees.

In January construction began on a new youth detention center for Paramaribo. The Welzijns Institute Nickerie, an NGO operating in the western district of Nickerie, renovated the youth detention center in that district with financial assistance from a Dutch NGO. The Welzijns Institute has a cooperation agreement with the police permitting it to visit and provide counseling for the detainees in the youth detention center in Nickerie.

The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. Representatives of the NGO Moiwana '86 group reported that, in general, they had access to prisoners and received cooperation from prison officials on routine matters.

### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

While the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions, prisoners who appealed their cases often served their full sentences before the lengthy appeals process could be completed, as a result of the shortage of judges.

The attorney general's office reiterated its concern that prisoners who completed their original sentences were not released on a timely basis. Defense lawyers often utilized an article of the Code of Criminal Proceedings that allows a judge to release a suspect if the case against the accused appears weak.

### 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 minister of defense. Civilian police bear primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and report to the Ministry of Justice and Police. The OPZ conducts investigations into complaints of police abuse. Police effectiveness was hampered by a lack of equipment and training, low salaries, and poor coordination with

other law enforcement agencies. While joint police and military operations were limited in the past, the ministers of justice and police and defense formalized their cooperation in October 2005.

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

Through October authorities disciplined 26 officers for various offenses and jailed 19, including nine officers on narcotics charges, one for manslaughter, and four for extortion.

In December 2005 authorities dishonorably discharged and jailed two police officers who stole four machine guns from a police weapons depot; an investigation remained under way at year's end.

#### Arrest and Detention

Individuals were apprehended with warrants and were promptly informed about 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 located at police stations throughout the country. In December there were 974 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. The president had yet to appoint a president of the Court of Justice; the acting president had occupied his position since 2000.

The judicial system consisted of three lower courts, two specialized courts, and the Court of Justice as an appeals court.

The judiciary was significantly hampered by a shortage of judges, which limited the effectiveness of the civilian and military courts. There were 11 permanent judges and one deputy judge for the entire country, a number that human rights groups and lawyers' associations viewed as inadequate. A government program continued to train 10 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 Moiwana '86, these lawyers often did not appear at all. To remedy this situation for juveniles, a one-year NGO-funded pilot project was launched in July 2005 giving juvenile detainees who could not afford a lawyer immediate access to counsel upon arrest. Although the program was considered successful, it was discontinued after a year due to a lack of funds.

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 of 11 permanent judges and one deputy judge 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 the expediency of 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. The police obtained them in the great majority of investigations.

### 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, due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership and in response to pressure by senior government officials and other important community leaders on journalists who published negative or unflattering stories about the administration.

In May the Association of Journalists voiced strong protests when a minister's bodyguard threatened a journalist and took away his camera when he was taking pictures of the minister's car.

After a radio call-in program alleged corrupt practices with regard to acquisition of land by a coalition party, the party chairman threatened to file a lawsuit against the radio announcer but did not follow up on his threat.

In December 2005 a local newspaper, De Ware Tijd, refused to publish a court-ordered retraction to an article published in De West, a competing publication. Journalists voiced their concern about the precedent the ruling could set, and De West filed an appeal of the ruling ordering the retraction. Hearings were scheduled to start in 2007.

#### Internet Freedom

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

#### Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful 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 law 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.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2006 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.

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 they feared persecution. During the year the government did not grant asylum or refugee status.

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 in 2005 marked the third such peaceful electoral transition; however, in its 31 years of independence, the country experienced two military coups, seven years of military rule, and one instance in which massive public demonstrations forced an agreement to hold elections a year early.

#### 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 of that year.

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. In the past, participation by women in politics (and other fields) generally was considered inappropriate. Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs showed that while women made limited gains in attaining political power in recent years, political circles remained under the influence of traditional male-dominated groups. 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. In August 2005 two women were appointed police commissioners, and in May a woman was appointed as head clerk, the highest administrative position in the parliament.

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 are concentrated in remote areas in the interior and therefore have limited access to, and influence on, the political process. There were three Maroon and one Amerindian 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 May 2005 election and became part of the governing coalition, with three Maroons in the cabinet.

#### Government Corruption and Transparency

There was a widespread perception of corruption in the executive branch of the government, and corruption of government officials remained a serious problem. A shortage of police personnel continued to hamper police investigations of fraud cases.

In February a court sentenced an official from the Ministry of Home Affairs to one year in prison for embezzling thousands of dollars through a pension benefits scheme; in addition, she was ordered to pay the money back within two years of her release from prison.

In March authorities arrested a customs officer stationed in the eastern district of Marowijne and charged him with extortion and embezzlement. In July a judge sentenced the customs officer to one year in prison and suspended him from the service for two years.

The trial of former minister of public works, Dewanand Balesar, and 16 other suspects on charges of fraud, forgery, and extortion at the Ministry of Public Works continued at year's end.

Authorities arrested and placed on trial for corruption three officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Fisheries. The trial concluded in December. While the ministry's deputy director was acquitted due to lack of evidence, the judge sentenced other suspects in this case to prison terms ranging from 12 to 24 months.

The media reported on alleged corrupt practices with regard to the acquisition of land by one of the political parties in the governing coalition.

Although the law provides for public access to government information, such access was limited in practice for both 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 '86, 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 its effectiveness was hampered by resource constraints. In February parliament established 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

Violence against women was a common problem, which the government had not addressed specifically. The law does not differentiate between domestic violence and other forms of assault. There was no information available regarding the number of reports of domestic violence the police received during the year. The chairwoman of the NGO Stop Violence Against Women stated that the working relationship between the police and the various NGOs dealing with this issue was slowly improving, as attention was now being paid to the victim, rather than just focusing on the offender. 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 on dealing with victims and perpetrators of sexual crimes and domestic violence.

The law prohibits rape but does not address spousal rape. The maximum penalty for rape or forcible sexual assault is a 12-year sentence. The only statistics available covered sex crimes in general: as of October, authorities had opened 218 new cases against 277 defendants, 212 of whom were imprisoned pending the outcome of their trials.

Although the law prohibits sexual exploitation, including prostitution, in practice prostitution generally was tolerated. Concerns about the link between prostitution and trafficking in persons resulted in police raids on commercial sex locations and arrests of several prostitutes. Poverty continued to put young women at risk of becoming prostitutes. The presence of large groups of illegal miners in the gold mining sector in the interior drew many young Maroon women and girls into prostitution. Police allowed many brothels to operate, and officials asserted that they made random checks on the brothels twice a month 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 (see section 5, Trafficking).

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 the girls' education and resulted in the direct passage of all property the women would have inherited from their parents to their husband 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. According to a report, more than 60 percent of women worked in traditionally female administrative or secretarial jobs. 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 to launch 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 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 of human rights abuses about their rights. Resource constraints continued to limit the effectiveness of these groups. In March the Women's Rights Center organized a five-day training course about the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; participants included government officials, NGOs, journalists, and academics.

#### 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 attended school; however, 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.

While there was no societal pattern of abuse directed against children, some children were abused sexually and physically. Through December police received reports of 235 cases of sexual abuse of children and 100 cases of cruelty against 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. In March a court sentenced an elementary school principal who had sexually molested and assaulted at least 23 boys to four years' imprisonment.

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, where approximately 49 percent of the country's population was concentrated.

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 (see section 5, Trafficking). According to the Mamio Namen Project Foundation, an NGO working on the well-being of HIV-infected persons, sex tourism was increasing; boys reportedly were targeted in particular. The Salvation Army and a Catholic charitable organization provided shelter 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 (see section 6.d.).

In June the Ilse Henar Hewitt Bureau for Legal Assistance for Women, an NGO, launched a campaign to inform and educate the public regarding the right of children to be heard in any judicial and administrative procedure affecting them. In October the Code of Civil Procedure was amended to include this right.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) continued cooperating with the government on the basis of a multiannual plan of action. UNICEF provided training to officials from various ministries dealing with children and children's rights. UNICEF coordinates its activities with the Bureau for Children's 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 working as prostitutes. 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.

In March the National Assembly approved a Penal Code amendment to increase the maximum prison term for human traffickers and human smugglers from two to four years, make assisting or facilitating human trafficking a crime, and institute 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 intensified significantly.

In two separate instances in January and February, police arrested four brothel owners, including a woman, and charged them with human trafficking and participation in a criminal organization. The four brothel owners were in the business of trafficking women from the Dominican Republic; the women were unaware that they would be expected to work as prostitutes. In November a court convicted the female brothel owner and sentenced her to 18 months' imprisonment; she was released for time served. At year's end the cases against the other brothel owners were still pending in the courts.

In March 2005 a court sentenced Marie Bichotte, a Haitian national, to two and a half years' imprisonment for human smuggling and ordered her to pay a fine of approximately \$3,570 (SRD 10,000). Bichotte and her husband were reportedly involved in large-scale smuggling and trafficking of Haitians for eventual transit to French Guiana. At year's end authorities were seeking the husband and intended to prosecute him.

In July 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.

In December a court convicted Henk Kunath and sentenced him to six months' imprisonment on charges of trafficking in persons. Kunath, who owned Paramaribo's largest brothel, Diamond, trafficked Brazilian women to work in his club.

The government's Antitrafficking Commission had 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.

The Special Antitrafficking Police Unit conducted limited investigations and raids throughout the year. The public prosecutor's office and the police continued a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality. The police operated a telephone hot line to handle all cases involving the commercial sex industry. The police had informal agreements with many brothel owners allowing them to proceed with their business. However, police conducted random checks to ensure that women were not mistreated, that no minors were present, and that owners did not keep the women's airline tickets and passports. During the year there were fewer than four reports of brothel owners retaining passports and airline tickets to enforce contract obligations. In such cases the police assisted these women to return to their country of origin at their own expense.

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.

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 these 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.

In February the government launched an intensive trafficking in persons awareness campaign, funded by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In March two foreign judges visited their counterparts with whom they held intensive discussions about effective approaches to handle cases involving trafficking in persons. The judges also met with government and NGO officials, academics, and members of the legal community. In June three officials from the Antitrafficking Commission attended an IOM-sponsored training course on trafficking in persons for law enforcement officials.

#### Persons with Disabilities

There were no laws prohibiting discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of state services. There were no laws, provisions, or programs to ensure 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 (see section 3), 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.

Unlike in previous years, there were no new protests by residents of neighboring Maroon villages against gold mining activities by the Gross Rosebel Goldmines Company in the interior. Some forms of discrimination that affected indigenous Amerindians also extended to Maroons (see section 5, Indigenous People).

#### 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.

Official and informal meetings between the parties involved in implementing the 2001 Lelydorp Accord (which superseded the 1992 peace accords that formally ended the 1986-91 insurgencies) continued without substantive results. No former Jungle Commando members were integrated into the police force, but some obtained jobs with the government. In October more than 200 former members of the Jungle Commando complained to the government that they were not being integrated into the civil services as outlined in the 1992 peace agreement.

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 March the government established a commission consisting of officials from various ministries and representatives from Maroon and

Amerindian groups to advise the government on the issue of land rights.

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 the IACHR sent the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The court was expected to start hearings in 2007.

Human rights and environmental groups continued monitoring the joint venture activities of SURALCO and BHP Billiton, which were exploring the possibility of mining bauxite and generating hydropower in the western part of the country.

Maroon and Amerindian groups continued to cooperate with each other in an effort to exercise their rights more effectively. NGOs such as Moiwana '86 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. In March local newspapers reported that a patient infected with HIV/AIDS died because hospital workers were reluctant to treat him. An NGO working with HIV-infected persons reported that HIV testing was still part of the hiring procedures of law enforcement agencies and the fire department.

During the year the National AIDS Program expanded and authorities filled crucial positions that had been vacant since its inception. The Ministry of Health also intensified its efforts in prevention of mother to child transmission. By the end of the year, the ministry expected to reach 90 percent of pregnant women for voluntary testing. Testing was also available through hospitals, Primary Health Services' clinics, family practitioners, and the Regional Health Services. The government included combating HIV/AIDS as an issue in its 2006-11 Multi-Year Development Program, and in December it launched a "Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS" campaign against AIDS.

In July the Union of Teachers, together with the NGOs Education International and the Education for All Commission organized a seminar on HIV/AIDS and prevention for Teacher's College teachers.

In December 2005 the business community launched the Business Coalition against HIV/AIDS. The coalition wrote a protocol on dealing with HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment on the work floor and combating stigma and discrimination. Initially intended to be a three-month project, the Know Your Status campaign concluded in June after seven months and produced good results. In an effort to reach as many people as possible for testing, there were seven voluntary counseling and testing sites.

#### 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 the 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 July Fernandes Bakery employees went on strike demanding payment of a previously agreed lump sum from their employer, although a collective bargaining agreement had already been signed between the union and the employer. Fernandes fired the 82 employees. In August the Dismissal Committee of the Ministry of Labor, Technological Development, and Environment ruled that the decision to fire the employees was unlawful and that the employees had to be rehired. However, in September a judge ruled in a summary suit filed by Fernandes that the company had acted correctly. Fernandes subsequently rehired approximately 50 percent of the employees.

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, there were reports that such practices occurred (see section 5).

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

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 districts of Nickerie and Saramacca in the west.

Children under 14 worked as street vendors, newspaper sellers, rice and lumber mill workers, packers for traders, or shop assistants. 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, a 2002 survey conducted by the Institute for Training and Research found that 50 percent of children between the ages of four and 14 were economically active, working mainly in the informal sector. The worst forms of child labor, such as prostitution, remained a problem; there were reports of commercial sexual exploitation of children and teenagers by caretakers and older recruiters (see section 5).

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 were available regarding the number of inspections performed during the year. The government did not investigate exploitive child labor cases outside urban areas. As in the past, labor inspectors were not authorized to conduct inspections in the informal sector, where child labor remained a problem, 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.

In December the government installed the National Commission dealing with Child Labor, consisting of officials from the Ministries of Labor, Social Affairs, and Education, and representatives from the labor unions, the private sector, and NGOs. The commission was primarily tasked with establishing an authority on child labor, as provided for the International Labor Organization convention on the worst forms of child labor.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There was no legislation providing for a minimum wage. The lowest wage for civil servants was 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 work force of 100,000 persons, 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 required 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.