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Suriname

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

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Suriname is a constitutional democracy, with a president usually elected by a unicameral legislature. The population is approximately 493 thousand. After generally free and fair elections in May, the New Front Plus government, a coalition of nine parties, was formed. On August 3, 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:

- 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 executive branch
- societal discrimination against women, minorities, and indigenous people
- violence against women
- trafficking in women, girls, and boys
- 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 individuals during the year.

In April a police officer shot and killed an armed suspect who tried to escape arrest. An investigation vindicated the officer. In October a police officer shot and wounded an unarmed detainee who tried to escape from the police station; results of the investigation were pending at year's end.

No information was available as to whether any action was taken against the two officers who shot and killed a defenseless suspect in May 2004.

In June the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found the government guilty of human rights violations in the case of the 1986 massacre of at least 39 civilians at the N'Djuka Maroon village of Moiwana and the intentional destruction of their property by a unit of the National Army. The court ordered the government to pay \$13 thousand in reparations to each survivor, investigate the crimes, and conduct a public ceremony whereby the state recognizes its responsibility and apologizes to the N'Djuka people. On November 28, the Minister of Justice and Police stated that the government accepted the verdict and would implement it within the prescribed time limit. On November 30, a first large-scale commemoration ceremony took place in Moiwana, drawing over 300 attendees. In December the government formed a commission to see that the court's orders were properly executed. The attorney general also established a coordination team to investigate the Moiwana massacre and other crimes committed by the security forces that remain unpunished.

In mid-2004 the prosecutor's office completed its investigation into the 1982 killings by the Desi Bouterse regime of 15 prominent political, labor, business, and media leaders, ordered in 2000 by the Court of Justice. More than 20 suspects, including prime suspect--former military dictator (and current National Assembly member)--Desi Bouterse, were scheduled to be tried. At year's end the trial was pending a military court ruling on pretrial objections raised by defendants.

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 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 five suspects, including armed dangerous criminals, during arrests. In January police officers severely beat two suspects, one of whom required medical treatment. Results of an investigation by the Police Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ) were not available at year's end.

In August police officers beat an unarmed homeless man charged with theft during arrest.

In December a father and his 13-year-old daughter filed a complaint against the police for physical abuse on November 25 when the father, with his daughter in the car, entered and refused to leave the motorcade escorting the visiting Dutch prime minister to the airport. The father claimed that he suffered a lost tooth, a cut over his left eye, and a shoulder injury, and that his daughter was slapped by the police officer during the confrontation. The matter was under investigation at year's end.

Through November citizens filed 279 complaints with the OPZ, the majority of which were for physical mistreatment and neglect of duty (see section 1.d.). In January the minister of justice and police established a new Reporting Unit for Police Conduct, but the unit does not publicly disclose the number of inquiries received. The authorities arrested 53 officers and disciplined 151 for various offenses, including brutality; 7 officers were incarcerated, 21 were suspended, and 21 were fired. According to human rights groups, inadequate training of police officers serving as the jailers at local detention facilities contributed to the abuses.

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 they were designed.

Violence among prisoners was common, but unlike previous years there were no complaints of mistreatment by guards.

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 were considered adequate and included educational and recreational facilities. A separate wing of an adult prison held boys under age 18 who committed serious crimes. Conditions in the separate youth detention center remained inadequate, and prisoners and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) complained about overcrowding and poor ventilation, physical and verbal abuse by the guards, and unchecked violence among detainees.

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 due to the lengthy appeals process resulting from a shortage of judges.

The attorney general's office reiterated its concern that prisoners who served their original sentence 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 reported to the Ministry of Justice and Police. 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. 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 November the OPZ had investigated 279 complaints against officers and made recommendations whether an officer should be punished internally or if criminal charges should be brought.

In December 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 a person suspected of committing a crime for investigation up to 14 days if the sentence for that crime is longer than 4 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.

There were no reports of political detainees.

The average length of pretrial detention was 30 to 45 days for lesser crimes. Detainees often were held in overcrowded detention cells at local police stations. The number of persons in pretrial detention was estimated at 880, or 55 percent of the total prison population; 650 of them were held in the 7 detention cells in Paramaribo and the remainder in various cells in the country's districts. In practice the courts freed most detainees who were not tried within the 164-day period, in accordance with the law.

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 in recent years. In June the president confirmed the acting attorney general, who had served in the position since 2000. 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 judiciary was significantly hampered by a shortage of judges, which limited the effectiveness of the civilian and military courts. There were nine permanent judges and one deputy judge for the entire country, a number that human rights groups and lawyers' associations widely viewed as inadequate. A government program to train 10 new judges continued throughout the year; they were expected to assume their duties in 2008.

Other problems the judiciary faced included financial dependency 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 obstacles caused a significant case backlog. The courts required a minimum of six months to process criminal cases, and most civil cases were resolved approximately three to four years after being heard by the courts.

The judicial system consisted of three lower courts, two specialized courts, and the Court of Justice as an appeals court. Although the constitution calls for the establishment of an independent constitutional court, the National Assembly had not created such a court due to concerns that it would have the authority to overturn government decisions.

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 giving juvenile detainees who could not afford a lawyer immediate access to counsel upon arrest.

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 nine 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

There were no reports of political prisoners.

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 and did not restrict academic freedom or access to the Internet.

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 publishing negative or unflattering stories about the administration.

In April the then-vice president was reported to have engaged in press censorship after an incident in which a television program suggesting that the minister of agriculture was corrupt was interrupted abruptly. At least one newspaper raised the issue of the sensitivity of reporting on ethnic politics, suggesting that there was a reluctance to tackle the subject for fear of polarizing the country's multi-ethnic society.

After a local newspaper, *De West*, voluntarily retracted an article alleging corruption at the Foreign Exchange Commission, the agency took the matter to court demanding a second retraction be published in another daily newspaper, *De Ware Tijd*, which has the largest circulation in the country. In December the judge ruled in favor of the plaintiff, but *De Ware Tijd* refused to publish the retraction, stating it was a disinterested third party in this matter. Journalists voiced their concern about the precedent the ruling could set, and *De West* filed an appeal against the verdict.

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 [2005 International Religious Freedom Report](#)

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

The law provides for these rights, and the government generally respected them in practice.

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 during the year marked the third such peaceful electoral transition; however, in its 30 years of independence, the country has experienced 2 military coups, 7 years of military rule, and 1 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 5 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, the United People's Assembly reelected incumbent Ronald Venetiaan as president in August.

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. While women made limited gains in attaining political power in recent years, political circles remained under the influence of traditional male-dominated groups, and women were disadvantaged in seeking high public office. There were 13 women in the 51-seat National Assembly, and the cabinet included 2 women. In 2001 the first woman judge joined the Court of Justice. In August two women were appointed police commissioners.

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 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 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 problem. Shortage of personnel continued to hamper police investigations of fraud cases.

In May authorities brought two policemen and one prison officer to court for smuggling cocaine to prisoners in Paramaribo's Santo Boma prison. The three officials were all dishonorably discharged; the prison official was sentenced to 18 months in prison. In June 3 tax officials defrauded the government of \$50 thousand (SRD 140 thousand) by means of false restitution reports; unspecified internal measures were taken against them.

In May police investigated allegations of corruption at the Ministry of Public Works and in June allegations of corruption at the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Fisheries. The National Assembly lifted the ministerial immunity of former Minister of Public Works Dewanand Balesar after fraud, forgery, and extortion allegations were raised against him. At year's end the former minister remained free while police continued their preliminary investigation. The prosecution expected to start his trial in March 2006, while the other 16 suspects in this case were scheduled to go to trial in January 2006. They remained free but restricted to Paramaribo and the neighboring district of Wanica. The director of fisheries, whom the police were investigating for extortion, also was not arrested. In July police arrested a Ministry of Interior official who embezzled thousands of dollars through a pension benefits scheme.

Former Finance and Natural Resources Minister Errol Alibux, successfully prosecuted for embezzlement in 2004, awaited a decision on his challenge to the Suriname Court of Justice verdict. Alibux, who was released in August 2004 after serving eight months of his sentence, contested the one-year prison term and three-year bar from public office verdict at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), on the grounds that since the Court of Justice is the highest court in the country, he had no venue for appeal as required by the American Convention on Human Rights.

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.

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. Police received 662 reports of domestic violence, the majority of which were for assault and intimidation. The NGO Stop Violence against Women reported 215 new victims during the year and stated that the police improved their attitude toward victims of domestic violence and maintained a good working relationship with NGOs. An NGO-driven network including police units worked to combat domestic violence. Public officials spoke out against domestic violence, receiving wide media coverage. There were victims' rooms in police stations in Paramaribo, 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: 166 new cases opened against 212 defendants; 134 suspects were under preliminary investigation but not yet formally charged at year's end.

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 with 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 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.

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, although 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 \$10 to \$35 (SRD 25 to SRD 100) 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 level (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. Police received reports of 139 cases of sexual abuse of children and 59 cases of cruelty against children in the first half of the year, compared with 183 cases in all of 2004. 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 August a leading newspaper published a series of articles aimed at raising awareness about child abuse, following the July arrest of an elementary school principal who had sexually molested and assaulted at least 23 boys between the ages of 6 and 12 during his 14 years in charge of the school. The school organized five counseling sessions for the victims and their parents with the assistance of the NGOs Stop Violence against Women and the Children's Foundation. Authorities scheduled the principal's trial for January 2006.

Various laws were used to prosecute perpetrators of sexual harassment, and several cases of sexual abuse against minors came to trial. The youth police reported more than 189 cases of sexual abuse against minors. 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, revised in 2004, 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). 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 November the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing and the Child Rights Bureau organized a youth discussion group for participants from Paramaribo and other districts.

The UN Children's Fund continued providing funding for a government project to assist children. The government established a national steering committee, consisting of the Ministries of Health, Education, Regional Affairs, Planning and Development Cooperation, and Labor, to direct the project.

Trafficking in Persons

No comprehensive trafficking in persons law exists, but statutes that apply only to women and children prohibit "white slavery," migrant smuggling, and pimping. In practice these statutes rarely were enforced, and trafficking in persons, including for sexual exploitation, remained a problem. Criminal law prohibits solicitation and brothel operation, but the law was not enforced. 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. The maximum penalty for rape or forcible sexual assault is a 12-year sentence, and a person convicted of sexual exploitation that involved rape would receive the longer of the 2 sentences.

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, and, at the beginning of the year, the NGO Maxi Linder Foundation. The commission met monthly to assess the government's progress in combating trafficking in persons and coordinate new action steps. Police cooperated with Curacao, Guyanese, and Dutch law enforcement on three trafficking in persons and child smuggling cases.

The extent of trafficking of women and girls to, through, and within the country for prostitution was difficult to estimate. Several commercial sex trade establishments reportedly recruited Brazilian, Colombian, Dominican, Guyanese, and Chinese women for prostitution. Victims in commercial sex trade transited the country and were routed to the Netherlands or other European destinations to work in brothels. There also were reports of underage Hindustani and Maroon girls and Javanese and Hindustani boys trafficked within the country for prostitution by recruiters or caretakers.

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 10 reports of brothel owners retaining passports and airline tickets to uphold contract obligations. In such cases the police assisted these women to return to their country of origin at their own expense.

In July a court sentenced Deputy District Commissioner of Nieuw Nickerie Hesdy Veira to two years' imprisonment for trafficking young Guyanese women into the country to work as prostitutes in a brothel he owned. In December police arrested Henk Kunath, owner of Paramaribo's largest brothel, Diamond, for trafficking a Brazilian woman to work in his brothel. Kunath, a Dutch national permanently residing in the country, was previously arrested and sentenced for trafficking and human smuggling in Brazil. Kunath spent several weeks in custody but was later released pending the conclusion of investigation. Authorities expected to try Kunath in early 2006.

The public prosecutor's office and the police established a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality. The police continued operating a telephone hot line to handle all cases from the commercial sex industry.

The Special Antitrafficking Police Unit conducted limited investigations and raids throughout the year. Raids on brothels and informal commercial sex locations resulted in the deportation of foreign women in prostitution for immigration violations and continuing investigations into several cases of potential trafficking of victims of Guyanese, Dominican, Haitian, and Chinese nationalities. An NGO receiving government funding, the Maxi Linder Foundation, continued working with trafficking victims, providing counseling and rehabilitative training.

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 for a legitimate purpose to enter the country.

In April government and NGO participants received three days of training on investigating and prosecuting human trafficking, including trafficking victim witness interviewing techniques. In November the government organized two train-the-trainer workshops, one for immigration and one for police officials, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration.

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, who numbered 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 the previous year, 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 continued without substantive results. No former Jungle Commando members were integrated into the Police Force, but some obtained jobs with the government.

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 2000 the Vereniging van Saramakaanse Gezagdragers, an organization representing 12 Saramaccaner clans with authority over 60 villages in the Upper Suriname River area, filed a petition with the IACHR claiming that lumber operations, mostly by Chinese-owned concessions, threatened their way of life. The IACHR heard the case during the year, and a decision was expected at the end of January 2006.

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. Hospital workers and other health professionals were reluctant to treat infected persons. Barbers and taxi drivers declined to provide services to children from a home for HIV-infected children.

The steering committee established in 2004 by the Ministry of Health, consisting of officials from the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs, Finance, Education, and Planning and Development Cooperation, continued working on the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS along with a newly revamped National AIDS Program. An interagency working group, consisting of representatives from NGOs, government, and civil society, was tasked with reducing stigmatization of HIV/AIDS victims. In June the then minister of labor spoke out against HIV/AIDS-based employment discrimination during a workshop organized by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and trade unions. In December the first voluntary HIV counseling and testing site opened in Albina, in the eastern part of the country, and the government launched a successful know-your-status campaign to encourage voluntary testing.

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 six 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.

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, child prostitution continued (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 4 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 54 inspectors, has responsibility to implement and enforce labor laws, including those pertaining to the worst forms of child labor. Inspectors performed approximately 10 inspections per day, concentrated in the greater capital area. The government did not investigate exploitative child labor cases outside urban areas. An estimated 510 inspections were performed during the year, with none resulting in penalties or convictions for child labor. 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.

Suriname Labor College and other unions subsidized by the Ministry of Labor conducted campaigns aimed at eliminating child labor in its worst forms in various districts of the country, including Nickerie, Paramaribo, and Marowijne; the campaign targeted public and private sector officials, school teachers, students, and caregivers. A government-subsidized NGO, Welzijn Institute Nickerie, operated a day center in Nickerie, training school dropouts in gardening work and providing employment assistance. ILO officials visited the country in February to train labor inspectors and in May to train officials from the Suriname Labor College.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There was no legislation providing for a minimum wage. Including a cost of living allowance, the lowest wage for civil servants was approximately \$190 (SRD 512) per month, 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 thousand 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.

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