



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Turkmenistan

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

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Although the constitution declares the country to be a secular democracy and presidential republic, it is an authoritarian state of approximately five million that was dominated by President-for-life Saparmyrat Niyazov until his death in December 2006. The Halk Maslahaty (People's Council) selected six candidates for the February 11 presidential election, all from the Democratic Party, the country's only political party. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov won in elections that did not meet international standards. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

Although there were modest improvements, the government continued to commit serious abuses, and its human rights record remained poor. Authorities continued to severely restrict political and civil liberties. Human rights problems included: citizens' inability to change their government; torture and mistreatment of detainees; incommunicado and prolonged detention; arbitrary arrest and detention; house arrest; denial of due process and a fair trial; arbitrary interference with privacy, home, and correspondence; restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association; restrictions on religious freedom, including continued harassment of some religious minority group members; restrictions on freedom of movement for some citizens; violence against women; and restrictions on free association of workers. Documentation of abuses was very limited.

The government initiated a broad effort to revise a variety of national laws to bring them into conformity with relevant international conventions. Other measured improvements in human rights included: the registration of two evangelical Christian groups; the pardoning of at least 22 prisoners of interest to the international community, some of whom were associated with the 2002 attack on President Niyazov's motorcade; removal of external travel restrictions for at least four citizens; elimination of restrictions on internal movement for citizens; reinstatement of a 10th year of mandatory schooling; and establishment of a government commission tasked with bringing Turkmenistan's practices in line with commitments in international human rights covenants.

### RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

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

There were no reliable reports that the government or its agents committed any politically motivated killings; however, there were several reports of citizens dying under suspicious circumstances during detention. A family member of an allegedly drunk suspect who died while in police custody in Mary claimed evidence existed of physical abuse on the corpse. In June a person died in an Ashgabat detention center while awaiting an appeal decision. While there was no evidence of mistreatment, his wife claimed that the court knew he had a serious medical condition but denied him medical treatment.

Human rights observers who had not heard news of prisoners of concern for some time frequently assumed that they died in prison.

Human rights observers reported that in December 2006, just after the death of former President Niyazov, prison guards used military force to suppress a riot and killed 23 prisoners at Ovadan-Depe.

There were no developments in the September 2006 suspicious death in custody of journalist Ogulsapar Myradova. The government did not carry out a transparent investigation into the causes of Myradova's death, as urged by the international community.

##### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such practices; however, security officials tortured, routinely beat, and used excessive force against criminal suspects, prisoners, and individuals critical of the government, particularly in detention while seeking a confession. There were reports of individuals convicted of complicity in the 2002 attack being tortured, although there was also one report that this torture ceased following Niyazov's death.

The Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation claimed that the government tortured Ogulsapar Myradova, Annakurban Amanklichev, and Sapardurdy Hajiyev during detention in 2006 to extract confessions. All three were subsequently sentenced to prison. Myradova died in September 2006 while imprisoned; Amanklichev and Hajiyev remained in prison.

Authorities continued to detain persons in psychiatric hospitals as punishment. In July police arrested a Jehovah's Witnesses member for refusing military service and detained him in a psychiatric hospital. Authorities released him four weeks later after international organizations and the diplomatic community expressed interest in his case.

While there were no known reports during the year of specific hazing incidents, according to the Memorial Human Rights Center and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, hazing of military conscripts remained a problem and led to cases of desertion from units where conditions were particularly difficult. According to a 2006 report, corruption within the defense ministry and draft commissions, tribal- and ethnicity-based rivalries, and disregard for the rights of soldiers led to an increasing number of deaths caused by brutal treatment meted out by soldiers on fellow conscripts. Regular military units continued to be used as unpaid manual labor working in fields, hospitals, factories, and construction.

#### Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were poor; prisons were unsanitary, overcrowded, unsafe, and posed a threat to life. Disease, particularly tuberculosis (TB), was rampant. There continued to be concerns that the government did not adequately test and treat prisoners with TB before they were released into the general population, although the government reportedly screened prisoners for TB, among other diseases, and transferred prisoners diagnosed with TB to a special Ministry of Interior hospital in Mary Province for treatment. Nutrition was poor, and prisoners depended on relatives to supplement inadequate food supplies; there were also reports that prison officials sometimes confiscated these food parcels.

Although prisoners convicted for treason were unable to receive supplies from relatives, there was one report that individuals convicted of complicity in the 2002 attack were given supplemental food packages for the first time since they were imprisoned.

Family members and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed some prisoners died due to the combination of overcrowding, untreated illnesses, and lack of adequate protection from the summer heat.

Sources familiar with prison conditions at Owadan Depe Prison reported that former high-level officials continued to be denied proper medical treatment and suffered beatings and verbal intimidation to coerce confessions.

The government did not investigate the June 2006 death in custody of former Lebap provincial governor Geday Ahmedov, who reportedly died due to a lack of medical care.

The government did not investigate the 2006 likely death in prison of former Prosecutor General Gurbanbibi Atajanova.

There were three types of incarceration facilities: educational-labor colonies, correctional-labor colonies, and prisons. In the correctional-labor colonies, relatives of prisoners reported excessive periods of prisoner isolation. There were reports that prisoners were forced to work under hazardous and unhealthy conditions in a kaolin mine in Gyzylgaya Prison, near Dashoguz.

Authorities held prisoners connected with the 2002 attack separately at the Owadan Depe Prison. Government officials refused to respond to inquiries from family members and diplomats about political prisoners' location or condition. Government officials also refused to permit family members, foreign diplomats, or international observers, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), access to detainees or prisoners associated with the 2002 attack. During the year the ICRC did not conduct any prison visits, due to unacceptable government limitations on visiting certain types of prisons and prisoners.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, they remained serious problems.

### Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) directs the criminal police, who works closely with the Ministry of National Security (MNB) on matters of national security. The MNB controls personnel changes in other ministries and enforces presidential decrees. Both the MNB and criminal police operated with impunity. Corruption existed in the security forces.

In February President Berdimuhamedov created a presidential commission, led by the Chairman of the Supreme Court, to review citizens' complaints of abuse, including unfair treatment, efforts to take bribes, and unjustified arrests and prosecutions, by law enforcement agencies. At year's end, however, there were no cases in which the commission investigated allegations of abuse and held members of the security forces accountable. The commission only reviewed three cases that led to further review by the Supreme Court and reductions of sentence. In July the president publicly fired and later arrested the Chairman of the Supreme Court, in part for his failure to ensure that cases coming from the commission were properly reviewed. In October the president fired the minister of internal affairs, reportedly because of an alleged doubling of cases involving ministry corruption and abuse under review by the commission.

### Arrest and Detention

A warrant was not required for arrest. Authorities could detain individuals for 72 hours without a formal arrest warrant but legally had to issue a formal bill of indictment within 10 days of arrest to hold detainees longer. However, authorities did not adhere to these provisions in practice. The chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, a position held by the president, had sole authority for approving arrest warrants.

There was no bail system. Detainees were entitled to immediate access to an attorney once a bill of indictment was issued, and they were able to choose their counsel. However, in practice they did not have prompt or regular access to legal counsel. In some cases legal counsel ceased advising their clients after government officials altered the charges or case details initially provided to defendants. Incommunicado detention was a problem. Authorities denied some prisoners visits by family members during the year. Families sometimes did not know the whereabouts of imprisoned relatives.

The law characterizes any opposition to the government as an act of treason. Those convicted of treason faced life imprisonment and were ineligible for amnesty or reduction of sentence. Unlike in previous years, there were no known treason convictions. The government arrested those expressing critical or differing views on economic or criminal charges.

Pretrial detention could legally last no longer than two months, except for exceptional cases that may be extended to one year. In practice pretrial detentions averaged two to three months; authorities often exceeded legal limits. Chronic corruption and cumbersome bureaucratic processes contributed to lengthy trial delays.

The government used house arrest without due process to control regime opponents, but unlike in previous years, authorities allowed several citizens under house arrest to meet with foreign diplomats. For example, the government allowed foreign diplomats to meet with Maral Yklymova, under house arrest since 2002 for her suspected involvement in the 2002 attack. In July the authorities allowed her to depart the country. The current status of individuals previously placed under house arrest, including NGO leaders, relatives of those suspected of involvement in the 2002 attack, and some of the 100 individuals prevented from meeting with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2003, was unknown.

In April 2006 Gurbandurdy Durdykulyev, detained since February 2004 in a psychiatric hospital for petitioning the government to hold a peaceful demonstration, was released from the hospital under international pressure. Unlike the previous year, Durdykulyev was allowed to leave his home, and he returned to work.

While authorities occasionally questioned Jehovah's Witnesses leader Andrey Zhbanov, authorities no longer aggressively harassed and monitored him.

The president dismissed numerous ministers and government officials from their positions; they were sometimes sentenced to jail terms, often for valid, although sometimes politically motivated, charges. The government sentenced five senior government officials to jail terms or put them under house arrest after dismissal; seven more officials were fired from their positions but remained free, or their whereabouts were unknown.

### Amnesty

On August 9, President Berdimuhamedov pardoned 11 prisoners, including Muslim cleric and former grand mufti Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah and former Justice Minister Yusup Khaitiev, who were jailed for their alleged role in the 2002 attack. After the pardon, the government appointed Ibadullah an advisor to the country's Council on Religious Affairs (CRA).

On October 9, the government pardoned more than 8,800 prisoners in connection with the annual Ramadan-associated "Night of Omnipotence" amnesty, including at least 17 additional prisoners of concern. The amnesty included the parents

of Arslan Kakaev, the principal suspect in a wire transfer theft of \$40 million from the central bank in 2001; they had been imprisoned since 2002 on what observers considered fabricated charges. There were reports of common prisoners' families purchasing amnesty for as much as \$3,000, depending on the severity of the crime.

It was unknown if amnestied prisoners still had to swear an oath of allegiance to the *Ruhnama*, former President Niyazov's spiritual guidebook on the country's culture and heritage. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that "The August 2007 presidential pardon of 11 people was a welcome step, though their public statements recognizing their guilt must be assumed to have been a condition for their release."

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary; however, in practice the judiciary was subordinate to the president. There was no legislative review of the president's judicial appointments, except for the chairman (chief justice) of the Supreme Court, whom the parliament nominally reviewed. The president had the sole authority to dismiss all judges before the completion of their terms. The judiciary is widely reputed to be both corrupt and inefficient.

The court system consists of a Supreme Court, six provincial courts (including one for Ashgabat), and at the lowest level, 64 district and city courts. Civilian courts, under the authority of the Office of the Prosecutor General, tried criminal offenses committed by members of the armed forces.

#### Trial Procedures

The law provides due process for defendants, including a public trial, access to accusatory material, the right to call witnesses to testify on their behalf, a defense attorney or a court-appointed lawyer if the defendant cannot afford one, and the right to represent oneself in court. In practice authorities often denied these rights. Defendants frequently did not enjoy a presumption of innocence. There was no jury system. The government permitted foreign observers to attend most nonpolitical trials but closed some trials, especially those it considered to be politically sensitive. There were few independent lawyers available to represent defendants. The courts at times did not allow defendants to confront or question witnesses against them and denied defendants and their attorneys access to government evidence. In some cases courts refused to accept exculpatory evidence provided by defense attorneys, even if that evidence would have changed the outcome of the trial. Even if the courts observed due process rights, the authority of the government prosecutor far exceeded that of the defense attorney, making it very difficult for the defendant to receive a fair trial. Court transcripts were frequently flawed or incomplete, especially when defendants' testimony needed to be translated from Russian to Turkmen. Lower courts' decisions could be appealed, and the defendant could petition the president for clemency. In most cases courts ignored allegations of torture that defendants raised in trial.

There were regular reports that police arrested individuals and requested they pay fines for breaking specific laws. However, when asked to see the law, government officials refused or stated that the laws were secret.

#### Political Prisoners and Detainees

The government held at least one political prisoner, Mukhametkuli Aimuradov, imprisoned since 1995.

Police detained long-time ecologist and environmental activist Andrey Zatoka on charges of disorderly conduct in December 2006 and charged him with possession of weapons and poisonous substances. He received a suspended sentence in January and was pardoned in October. While there was evidence that he broke the law, many NGOs claimed that his arrest was politically motivated.

In 2006 the government convicted Annakurban Amanklichev and Sapardurdy Hajiyev of weapons possession in a closed two-hour trial and sentenced them to seven years in prison. Many NGOs maintained that their imprisonment was politically motivated.

Opposition groups and some international organizations claimed the government held many political detainees, although the precise number of these individuals--including those convicted of involvement in the 2002 attack--remained unknown. There were reports that the government held approximately 360 individuals in Owadan Depe prison for their perceived political opinions and alleged involvement in the 2002 attack. Human rights observers considered Owadan Depe Prison to have among the worst conditions in the country, and there were reports that prison officials subjected these prisoners to torture and abuse.

During the year there were reports that some prisoners accused of economic crimes, including a number of former senior government ministers, may have been moved from Owadan Depe Prison to Bayramaly Prison. Government officials refused to respond to inquiries from family members and diplomats about many prisoners' location or condition. Government officials also refused to permit family members, foreign diplomats, or international observers, including the ICRC, access to detainees or prisoners associated with the 2002 attack.

### Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The civil judiciary system was not independent or impartial; the president appointed all judges. There were instances of police investigations that went to court in which plaintiffs could sue defendants. In theory the civil court system functions, but there were reports of bribes to ensure a positive outcome. In cases in which the state had interests regarding an individual citizen, it enforced domestic court orders. The most commonly enforced court orders were eviction notices.

### Property Restitution

The government failed to enforce the law consistently with respect to restitution or compensation for confiscation of private property. The government demolished fewer private homes as part of an urban renewal program in and around Ashgabat.

In February President Berdimuhamedov announced that there would be no new housing demolition unless replacement housing was available, and there were no reports this change in government policy was not being enforced. In some 2006 cases, the government required evicted families to pay for removal of the rubble of their destroyed homes, gave persons as little as 48 hours to vacate, and did not provide homeowners with alternative accommodations or compensation. Others were given two weeks' notice to vacate and offered apartments or plots of land in compensation on undeveloped or non-irrigated plots, resulting in the loss of livelihood for some.

One large 2006 demolition project in southern Ashgabat involved 500 families. Another 2006 project involved up to 2,000 families, most of whom did not receive compensation.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such actions. However, authorities frequently did not respect these prohibitions in practice. Authorities in some cases forcibly searched the homes of suspected regime opponents and some minority religious group members without authorization of an independent judiciary. The law does not regulate surveillance by the state security apparatus, which regularly monitored the activities of officials, citizens, opponents and critics of the government, and foreigners. Security officials used physical surveillance, telephone tapping, electronic eavesdropping, and informers. The government reportedly intercepted surface mail before delivery, and letter packets and parcels taken to the post office had to remain unsealed for inspection.

Noncitizens may marry a citizen only after one year's residency in the country. There were reports of a small number of such marriages.

## Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including

### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and of the press, but the government did not respect these rights in practice. Unlike in previous years, there were no specific reports of persons expressing dissenting views being arrested on false charges of committing common crimes and in some cases being subjected to abuse, harassment, and deprivation, including loss of opportunities for advancement and employment. However, there were reports that law enforcement officials harassed and detained Turkmen journalists working for foreign media outlets, most notably, several of those working for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

Almost all print media were government financed. Except for the private but government-sanctioned Turkish newspaper *Zaman*, which reflected the views of the state newspapers, the government banned foreign newspapers. The editorial staffs of the periodicals self-censored the content to not offend the government. A ban on subscription to foreign periodicals continued, although copies of the Russian news journal *Argumenti i Fakti* and other nonpolitical periodicals appeared occasionally in the bazaars.

The government controlled radio and local television, but use of satellite dishes enabling access to foreign television programming was widespread throughout the country. Citizens also received international radio programs through satellite television access.

There was no independent oversight of press accreditation, no defined criteria for allocating press cards, no guarantee of receiving accreditation when space was available, and no prohibition on withdrawing accreditation for political reasons. The government required all foreign correspondents to apply for accreditation. Foreign journalists were granted visas only to cover specific events throughout the year, such as the presidential election and summit meetings, where their activities could be monitored. Authorities denied at least two journalists accreditation, but at least three others were able to operate without accreditation. In 2005 authorities deported the last accredited foreign correspondent, Viktor Panov, of the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, on alleged espionage charges.

During the year government agents reportedly detained, harassed, and intimidated journalists and their families. In April, according to HRW, the national security service detained an independent journalist, Sona Chuli-Kuli, for three days, during which time she was interrogated and her computer confiscated. She was released after signing a statement that she would not work for the international media.

In December local law enforcement authorities began to harass two RFE/RL journalists, telling them to stop working for RFE/RL and threatening harm to their families. National security service representatives asked one journalist to appear for questioning.

Harassment of RFE/RL reporter Halmyrat Gylychdurdyev declined somewhat during much of the year but increased again in December. Authorities intermittently monitored his activities, harassed his family, and periodically disconnected his mobile telephone service. In 2006 authorities routinely harassed him and his family for previously writing economic articles unfavorable to the government.

In February 2006 national security officers warned RFE/RL stringer Shamyrat Akoyliyev of the unacceptability of his affiliation with RFE/RL. Authorities later cut his telephone line. In June 2006 Akoyliyev was taken off a train traveling from Balkanabat to Ashgabat by Ministry of National Security officers.

In March 2006 RFE/RL police arrested stringers Meretmuhammet Hommadov and Jumadurdy Owezov and sentenced them to 15 days' administrative detention for acts of public contempt during a meeting including district-level elders. However, two police officers and guards at the detention facility told Hommadov's wife that he had been arrested for "dealing with foreigners and betraying his country."

In August 2006 the authorities charged three journalists, Ogulsapar Myradova, Annakurban Amanklichev, and Sapardurdy Hajiyev, with weapons possession after they received journalism equipment from foreign sources and sentenced them in a closed trial to six to seven years' imprisonment. RFE/RL, the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, and several other human rights organizations claimed they were charged with criminal activities in order to end their journalism. There was no further information regarding the government's investigation of Amanklichev and Hajiyev on additional charges of espionage and treason, and they remained in jail. In September 2006 Myradova died in police custody, under suspicious circumstances.

The OSCE reported that the government did not allow a journalist to travel abroad. RFE/RL associate Ashyrguly Bayryev, arrested in 2004 for smuggling novels into the country, had his sentence suspended and was released.

Domestic journalists and foreign news correspondents engaged in self-censorship due to fear of government reprisal. The government continued to censor newspapers. The government continued to prohibit reporting opposing political views or any criticism of the president. The former editor-in-chief of the state newspaper *Esger* remained in jail on a 17-year sentence for unspecified crimes.

In 2005 the government banned local journalists from all contact with foreigners unless specifically permitted. Journalists who did not comply were threatened with losing their jobs.

The government continued to keep Russian government-supported, Russian-language Radio Mayak transmissions off the air.

To regulate domestic printing and copying activities, the government required all publishing houses and printing and photocopying establishments to obtain registration licenses for their equipment. The government required the registration of all photocopiers and mandated that a single individual be responsible for all photocopying activity. The government owned all publishing companies and works on topics that were out of favor with the government, including fiction, were not published. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that the government-controlled Union of Writers expelled members who criticized government policy.

#### Internet Freedom

Internet access increased slightly, although government-owned Turkmen Telecom was the sole provider to the general population. The government monitored citizens' e-mail and Internet usage and cut service for accounts used to visit sensitive Web sites. Unlike in previous years, the government issued new Internet accounts to businesses and organizations; however, no new accounts were issued to private individuals. There were approximately 15 state-owned Internet cafes nationwide, in addition to NGO-sponsored facilities, private businesses, and business centers that were granted access to the Internet. Although the government reduced Internet cafe fees, Internet fees were still prohibitively expensive for the average citizen. Access to specific Web sites remained inconsistent.

#### Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

No master's degrees or doctorates have been granted in the country since 1998. Government permission was required to study abroad and receive recognition of foreign degrees. The Ministry of Education has taken no new steps to act on the president's decision to facilitate recognition of foreign degrees; no foreign degrees were recognized during the year.

The government did not tolerate criticism of government policy or the president in academic circles, and curtailed research into areas it considered politically sensitive, such as comparative law, history, ethnic relations, or theology. Officials from the Ministry of Education and provincial authorities sought to prevent students who were not ethnically Turkmen from entering exchange programs. University enrollment increased by some 4,000 students, after a decline in past years.

Niyazov's *Ruhnama*, *Ruhnama II*, poetry volumes, *The Spring of My Inspiration*, and *My Beloved*, remained part of the school curriculum, and passing tests on knowledge of the *Ruhnama* was still necessary for advancement or graduation. However, teachers reported having to spend substantially less class time on former President Niyazov's works than in the past, as the revamped curriculum introduced new subjects and an expanded and more fact-based study of local history and culture.

Although restrictions eased somewhat, the government continued to control attendance at nonindigenous cultural events and refused to permit the production of some foreign plays and performances in state theaters. While the government demonstrated little or no support for non-Turkmen music, classical music was taught and performed throughout the country. Traditional local music, which had not been performed for years, was beginning to be played in concerts and social events. Pirated copies of international films were available for sale or rent for home viewing. The Ministry of Culture censored and then monitored all public exhibitions--music, art and cultural.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

##### Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly, but the government restricted this right in practice. Authorities neither granted the required permits for any public meetings and demonstrations during the year, nor did it allow unregistered organizations, particularly those perceived to have political agendas, to hold demonstrations.

##### Freedom of Association

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, the government restricted this right in practice. The law requires all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and all foreign assistance to be registered with the Ministry of Economics and Finance (formerly with the State Agency for Investment), the MOJ, and coordinated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Unregistered NGO activity is punishable by fines, short-term detention, and confiscation of property. The government continued routinely to deny registration to NGOs and other private organizations using subjective criteria. No new NGO has been registered since 2005.

Of the 89 registered NGOs, international organizations considered seven to be independent. The government continued to present numerous obstacles to those attempting to register. While some groups reported good cooperation with the MOJ in the registration process, other NGOs reported difficulties, such as frequently returned applications on technical grounds. At least six different NGOs repeatedly submitted applications for registration, and all but one had been denied by year's end. Some NGOs found alternative ways to carry out activities, such as registering as businesses or subsidiaries of other registered groups. Other groups considered themselves temporarily closed.

Security service officials harassed NGOs and their local partners throughout the year. In April and May authorities closed several information and resource centers in the central Ahal region that an international NGO operated; one was allowed to reopen. Authorities terminated cooperation between an NGO and local community groups on two separate occasions early in the year. Also in April and May authorities advised two community groups against cooperation with an NGO, and in one case terminated training the NGO was providing, advised against cooperation with the NGO, and questioned its local point of contact.

No independent political groups existed. The only registered political party was the Democratic Party, the former Communist Party of Turkmenistan. The government did not prohibit membership in political organizations; however, in practice authorities harassed those who claimed membership in political organizations other than the Democratic Party.

Government authorities harassed some recipients of foreign grants. There were no cases in which the government refused to register a grant project, but there were numerous cases in which the government delayed the registration for several months.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution and law provide for freedom of religion, although the government restricted this right in practice. There

was no state religion, but the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. The government incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition into its efforts to define a national identity, but in practice the government closely controlled and monitored all religious activities and placed some restrictions on Muslims.

The government required all religious groups as well as individual mosques and churches to register with the MOJ and continued government monitoring of financial and material assistance to religious groups from foreign sources. The government required groups to file reports of proceedings at all meetings. Some groups reported confusion over registration requirements because of conflicting statements by government officials from different ministries. In 2005 the government explained that individual branches of religious groups could be temporarily registered by requesting representative powers of attorney from the registered branch of their particular group; in most cases this resolved branches' registration problems. While religious groups still had persistent problems overcoming administrative hurdles to registration, the government registered two evangelical Christian groups in September and October.

In September the government registered one new evangelical Christian religious group, the first group to receive registration since 2005. In October the government registered a second group as a branch affiliate. Other nonregistered religious congregations such as Jehovah's Witnesses, separate groups of Baptists, and other evangelical Christian groups existed, although the government restricted their activities. The government officially prohibited nonregistered groups from conducting religious activities.

The Catholic Church remained unregistered because of a conflict with local law requiring that the head of the church be a citizen. However, authorities appear to have eased their harassment of the church. Church leaders conducted regular masses and held classes on Catholicism for interested ethnic Turkmen and non-Turkmen citizens without government harassment.

The CRA continued to exercise direct control over the hiring, promotion, firing, and in some cases, compensation of both Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox clergy.

While the government increased harassment of some registered and many unregistered religious minority groups following the February inauguration of President Berdimuhamedov, reports of such incidents decreased by the end of the year. Examples of harassment included government agents interrupting religious services and interrogating, detaining, and pressing religious minority group members to abandon their beliefs. Some were assessed fines.

Jehovah's Witnesses and members of other minority religious groups reportedly experienced disrupted meetings, surveillance, detentions, and administrative fines. In April police reportedly raided an apartment belonging to three female Jehovah's Witnesses and arrested the women. A police officer allegedly sexually molested one of the women.

According to the news service Forum 18, in December police disrupted a Baptist service in a private home in Balkanabat, briefly detained and questioned three individuals, and seized books, literature, and CDs of sermons.

Reports of obstructed travel based on religious minority group affiliation continued; however, the government allowed several previously restricted individuals from minority religious groups to travel. For example, in January 2006, according to Forum 18, the government refused to grant permission to Merdan Shirmedov, a Protestant from an ethnic Turkmen fellowship in Dashoguz, to leave the country to join his pregnant wife abroad. In June Shirmedov was allowed to depart the country. Additionally, the government continually denied foreign members of registered and unregistered groups exit visas.

The government controlled the establishment of Muslim places of worship and limited access to Islamic education. Unlike in previous years, there were two reports of mosques being refurbished or rebuilt.

Police officers subjected ethnic Turkmen who converted to non-Russian Orthodox Christianity to harassment and mistreatment, such as verbal abuse for denying their heritage by converting.

In May MNB officials arrested Vyacheslav Kalataevsky, a Baptist leader with Ukrainian citizenship, tried him, and sentenced him to three years in prison for an alleged illegal border crossing six years earlier. His family and some NGOs believe the sentence was intended to punish him for his leadership of an unregistered Baptist church in Turkmenbashi. The government amnestied Kalataevsky in October but did not release him until November. Authorities denied his request for residency in early December, although he has a wife and children in Turkmenbashi, and he was deported to Ukraine on December 11.

Also in May authorities arrested another Baptist leader from Turkmenbashi, Yevgeny Potolov. Without charging or trying him, in July the government deported him to Russia, where he had citizenship.

Foreign missionary activity is prohibited, although both Christian and Muslim missionaries were present. The government also prohibited proselytizing by unregistered religious groups.

There were no developments and none were expected in the 2005 Jehovah's Witnesses Nazikgul Orazova case for proselytizing and possessing religious literature.

There was no official religious instruction in public schools. Although the *Ruhnama* continued to be taught in all public schools and institutes of higher learning, teachers reported that such training decreased substantially. Extracurricular religious education was allowed only with CRA and presidential permission. While President Berdimuhamedov continued with 2006 plans to construct a *Ruhnama* university, the projected university's focus began to change from "studying the deep roots of the nation's great spirit" to include a more international outlook. Only one institution of Islamic education remained open, and the government controlled the curriculum.

Although government-supported mosques continued to display copies of the *Ruhnama*, the former president's works disappeared from many other mosques. The government did not allow the publication of religious literature. Government representatives informed religious groups they could only import as much religious literature as corresponded to registered congregants, but even registered groups had difficulty importing religious literature. Unlike in previous years, ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups accused of disseminating religious material did not receive harsher treatment than members of other ethnic groups.

In August the president amnestied the former grand mufti, Nasruallah ibn Ibadullah, who had been sentenced in 2004 to 22 years in jail in a closed trial for his alleged involvement in the 2002 attack. It was widely reported the actual reason for Ibadullah's imprisonment was his resistance to placing the *Ruhnama* in mosques.

During the year the government sponsored only 188 pilgrims to go on the hajj to Mecca, out of the country's quota of 4,600 persons. There were reportedly no restrictions on self-financed trips to perform the hajj, and there were anecdotal reports claiming that additional persons may have gone. However, Forum 18 reported that no more than 188 pilgrims from the country went on the hajj.

During the year authorities charged six Jehovah's Witnesses with evading compulsory military service, but all received suspended sentences after interventions from the international community. Begench Shakhmuradov, who served a sentence for the same charges in 2005, received a two-year suspended sentence. Authorities sentenced Suleiman Udaev to 18 months in prison but commuted his sentence to a two-year suspended sentence with compulsory labor. In July Aleksandr Zuyev, Bayram Ashirgeldyyev, and Nuryagdy Gayyrov received suspended sentences for refusing compulsory military service. The government pardoned Zuyev, Gayyrov, and Udaev in the annual "Night of Omnipotence" amnesty. In December Ashirgeldy Taganov also received an 18-month suspended sentence for refusing compulsory military service.

#### Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were 2,000 self-identified Jews and no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Ethnic Turkmen who chose to convert from Islam to other religious groups were viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2007 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

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

The constitution and law do not provide for full freedom of movement and require internal passports and residency permits. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, stateless persons, and other persons of concern. The president eliminated police checkpoints on major roads soon after his inauguration in February and lifted controls requiring citizens to obtain permits for internal travel to border regions in July. The border permit requirement remained in effect for all foreigners.

The government inconsistently applied its policy on dual-passport holders and occasionally demanded that Russian passport holders procure CIS visas based on their Turkmen passports. Beginning in June, the government permitted at least four previously restricted citizens to travel overseas. However, the criteria for preventing travel remained unclear, and the government was still barring citizens from departing the country at year's end.

The government denied that it maintained a list of persons not allowed to depart the country. A restrictive 2005 migration law forbids travel by any citizen who has access to state secrets, has falsified personal information, has committed a serious crime, is under surveillance, might become a trafficking victim, has previously violated the law of the destination country, or whose travel contradicts the interests of national security.

Citizens were able to inquire about their travel status at the State Agency for the Registration of Foreign Citizens Immigration. However, only about half of those who inquired received information on their travel status. At least four

individuals were able to successfully appeal restrictions on travel. In 2006 the niece of an accused participant in the 2002 attack, living in self-imposed exile and a participant in external opposition efforts, was denied permission to return to her university studies abroad. Also in 2006 the government told the daughters of deceased journalist Ogulsapar Myradova that they will not be permitted to travel abroad.

On November 11, Turkmen Evangelical Church Pastor Ilmyrat Nurliyev was escorted off a plane bound for Ukraine. When Nurliyev wrote a letter of complaint to the State Agency for the Registration of Foreign Citizens, he received a reply noting that his claim of being forcibly removed from an airplane was not confirmed.

On November 24, authorities prevented Svetlana Orazova, the sister of exile opposition leader Khudayberdy Orazov, from boarding a plane to Moscow. Orazova had previously appealed her travel restriction and the State Agency for the Registration of Foreign Citizens told her that she would be allowed to leave the country. On December 17, she sent a letter of complaint to the State Agency for the Registration of Foreign Citizens; she had not received a reply by year's end.

The government permitted citizens living in Dashoguz and Lebap provinces to spend only three days a month visiting relatives in the Bukhara and Khorezm provinces of neighboring Uzbekistan.

The law permits forced internal and external exile, and at year's end some individuals remained in forced exile. Authorities sent some prisoners, usually former government officials, into internal exile. Numerous former ministers and government officials were dismissed from their positions and sent into internal exile remained under house arrest. Almost all political opponents of the government live in other countries for reasons of personal safety; none returned during the year.

There was no follow-up action in the 2005 case of Alexander Fataliyev, who continued to live in exile. Sazak Begmedov remained in internal exile in Dashoguz. Maral Yklymova, the daughter of one of the accused organizers of the 2002 attack, who had been under house arrest in Mary, was allowed to depart the country in July.

In contrast to previous years, the government did not overtly discourage emigration of ethnic Turkmen living in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and other countries or emigration of non-Turkmen from the former Soviet Union.

#### Protection of Refugees

The laws 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 established a system for providing protection to refugees. The government granted refugee status or asylum. In practice, the government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they feared persecution. The government granted refugee or asylum status to some ethnic Turkmen from Afghanistan and Tajikistan and to other groups of ethnic Uzbeks and Russians. There were 125 UNHCR mandate refugees in the country. The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol and in 2006 granted citizenship or legal residency to more than 16,000 individuals. Most of those granted citizenship were ethnic Turkmen who had fled conflict in Tajikistan in the early 1990s, ethnic Uzbeks, or Russians. The government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

#### Stateless Persons

The UN Development Program (UNDP) reported that there were few stateless persons in the country. However, the UNDP also estimated that there may be as many as 9,000 undocumented residents who were Soviet Union passport holders at the time of the dissolution and who did not have a state affiliation selected when their Soviet passports expired in 1999. The government administratively processed these residents and issued them residency permits while considerations of state affiliation continued. The UNDP cannot easily quantify these persons because they have not sought UNDP assistance nor have they sought a change in their status. The UNHCR considered these individuals as de facto stateless or at risk of becoming stateless. The government streamlined its residency registration process via a 2005 decree and then issued citizenship to approximately 13,000 ethnic Turkmen refugees seeking haven from Tajikistan's civil war. A small but undefined number of ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azerbaijanis became refugees during the war between these states in the early 1990s. They resided in the country but were not considered stateless and thus carry UN refugee documentation. UNDP representatives reported that the government was cooperative and responsive to refugee and migration concerns.

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

Citizens could not freely choose and change the laws and officials that governed them. The constitution declares the country to be a secular democracy in the form of a presidential republic. It calls for the separation of powers among the various branches of government but vests a disproportionate share of power in the presidency. In practice the president's power over the state continued to be absolute; he made most important decisions. Unlike previous years, citizens swore a national oath of allegiance to the country rather than to the president.

According to the OSCE, the election law does not meet OSCE standards.

#### Elections and Political Participation

Under the constitution, upon the December 2006 death of former President Niyazov, then-Parliament Chairman Ovezgeldy Atayev should have become the interim president. However, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the deputy prime minister, was named instead, and authorities initiated a criminal investigation against Atayev. On December 26, 2006, the People's Council selected six presidential candidates, changing the constitution to allow the candidacy of Interim President Berdimuhamedov. Residency requirements precluded the candidacy of some exiles who expressed a desire to run for president. Nurberdy Nurmamedov, a dissident figure living in Ashgabat and whom some of these exiles hoped would be a candidate, was detained on December 23, 2006 and released on December 30, 2006.

On February 11, citizens selected Berdimuhamedov president in an election that did not meet international standards. The OSCE noted the following problems: lack of political pluralism, restrictions on the right of citizens to stand for president, lack of provisions regulating the media coverage of the campaign, prohibition for failed candidates to contest a repeat election, and negative voting--where voters cross out the names of all candidates except the name of the chosen candidate. Although the government legally did not prohibit membership in political organizations, it banned all political parties other than the president's Democratic Party. The government continued to ban the existence of political opposition in the country, leaving the exiled opposition movements in Europe as the only alternative political voice for the country.

There were eight women in the 50-member parliament, including the new Mejlis Chairman, elected in 2005. Women were also represented in the 2,500-delegate People's Council. Women served in a few prominent government positions: Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for Culture and Television (a vice-premier position), Minister of Textiles, Director of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, the head of the Supreme Council on Science and Technology, and the head of the state news agency.

The one member of a minority group in the 50-seat parliament died in November 2006, and his seat remained vacant. Ethnic minorities were also represented in the 2,500-delegate People's Council. The government gave preference for appointed government positions to ethnic Turkmen, but ethnic minorities occupied several high governmental positions. Members of the country's largest tribe, the president's Teke tribe, held the most prominent roles in cultural and political life.

#### Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials reportedly often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Widespread corruption existed in all social and economic sectors. Factors included the existence of patronage networks, a lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms, and fear of government reprisal. According to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, the country had a severe corruption problem. Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index noted that corruption among the country's public officials was perceived by experts to be rampant.

During the year authorities indicated they would charge at least seven senior government officials with crimes after firing them, including Akmurat Rejepov, chief of the presidential guard and close advisor to former President Niyazov; Payzegeldy Meredov, a former minister of agriculture accused of corruption; and Ovezgeldy Atayev, former chairman of the Mejlis. Atayev was sentenced to five years in prison; the status of the others was unknown at year's end.

There is no law that allows for public access to government information, and in practice the government did not provide access. Authorities denied requests for specific information on the basis of information being a state secret. Some statistical data was considered a state secret. There was no public disclosure of demographic data, and published economic and financial data was manipulated to justify state policies and expenditures.

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

There were no domestic human rights NGOs. The government warned its critics against speaking with visiting journalists or other foreigners wishing to discuss human rights problems. During the year the government continued to monitor the activities of nonpolitical social and cultural organizations.

There were also no international human rights NGOs with an ongoing permanent presence in the country; however, the government permitted international organizations, including the OSCE and the UNHCR, to have resident missions. Government restrictions on freedom of speech, press, and association severely restricted international organizations' ability to investigate and criticize the government's human rights policies. Some officials were more responsive to questions regarding alleged human rights abuses. The government appeared to have relaxed somewhat past efforts to control its citizens' access to international organizations and missions and to discourage citizens from cooperating with foreigners. In October the OSCE reported that unlike in previous years, the government did not prevent ordinary citizens

from visiting the OSCE Center or participating in OSCE-sponsored civil society-themed seminars and activities. In June 2006 the Council of Ministers accused diplomats and the mission of the OSCE of fomenting revolution in the country for passing journalism equipment to citizens.

The government established a Human Rights Commission, which reports to the president, to oversee institutional human rights reform. The National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR), nominally headed by President Berdimuhamedov, appeared to have little real authority. In 2005 the Committee on the Protection of Human Rights and Liberties was established in parliament to oversee human rights-related legislation. The IDHR was mandated to support democratization and monitor the protection of human rights and also maintained a human rights library. In principle the institute reviewed citizens' complaints and returned its findings to the individual and the organizations involved; however, the institute was not an independent body, and its ability to obtain redress was limited.

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

Although the law prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status, violence against women, and discrimination against ethnic minorities continued to be problems.

##### Women

Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal, with penalties of between three and 25 years based on the level of violence of the incident and whether the attacker was a repeat offender. A cultural bias against reporting or acknowledging rape made it difficult to determine how widespread the problem was.

The law prohibits domestic violence, including spousal abuse, but it is not effectively enforced. Penalties are based on the extent of the injury. Anecdotal reports indicated that domestic violence against women was common; most victims of domestic violence kept silent, either because they were unaware of their rights or afraid of increased violence from husbands and relatives. There were a few court cases and occasional references to domestic violence in the media. One official women's group in Ashgabat, an independent NGO, and several informal groups in other regions assisted victims of domestic violence.

Prostitution is illegal but remained a problem throughout the country. Authorities actively monitored prostitution but did not attempt to counter it. There is no law specifically prohibiting sexual harassment, and anecdotal reports suggested that sexual harassment existed in the workforce.

Women had equal rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. In December the Mejlis approved a new law on Women's Rights after consultation with UNDP and other partners. The Mejlis Committee on Human Rights and Liberties was responsible for drafting human rights and gender legislation, integrating a new gender program into the education curriculum, and publishing regular bulletins on national and international gender laws. According to legislation, women are on equal footing with men in all spheres, including wages, loans, starting businesses, and working in government. However, women continued to experience discrimination in practice due to hiring biases. Employers allegedly gave preference to men in order to avoid productivity losses due to pregnancy or child care issues. Women were underrepresented in the upper levels of government-owned economic enterprises and were concentrated in health care, education, and service professions. The government restricted women from working in some dangerous and environmentally unsafe jobs.

The government did not acknowledge or address discrimination against women.

##### Children

The government has taken modest steps to address the welfare of children, including increased cooperation with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international organizations on programs designed to improve children's health and reinstating the 10th year of mandatory schooling.

Primary and secondary education was free and compulsory. The government began a potentially significant reform of the educational system, adding a 10th year of mandatory education for girls and boys. The government stated that approximately 95 percent of children between the ages of seven and 16 attended school on a regular basis; however, a 2003 UNDP report listed school attendance at 81 percent, and an Institute for War and Peace Reporting release reported that by eighth grade attendance at some schools was approximately 40 to 50 percent. Most children completed secondary school.

The government initiated reforms in the higher education system, including extending university education to five years from the two years under Niyazov and removal of the requirement that university students work for two years before embarking on a degree program. The government eased its restrictions for students wishing to study abroad, but significant bureaucratic hurdles remained, and students had to pass a Turkmen language exam to obtain approval to study

in some countries.

The government revised the school curriculum, introduced new subjects, increased teacher salaries, and reduced class sizes, but facilities, especially in urban areas, remained overcrowded, and textbooks and supplies were inadequate.

By law the government provides free health care for children until the age of 18. Hospital care was also free; however, parents regularly paid bribes for service, medicines, and adequate medical equipment, including syringes.

There were isolated reports of child abuse.

According to UNICEF, 9 percent of marriages involved minors.

#### Trafficking in Persons

In December the parliament passed a comprehensive law prohibiting trafficking in persons. There were some reports that persons were trafficked to, from, and within the country.

Available information is insufficient to substantiate a significant number of victims in the country. The government continued to use the 2005 migration law to forbid suspected female trafficking victims from boarding planes to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, the two countries considered to be the most important trafficking destination countries. Iran was also assumed to be a trafficking destination. NGOs noted that young women from minority ethnic groups were most vulnerable to being trafficked.

The International Organization for Migration assisted 20 trafficked persons with repatriation from Turkey during the year. Traffickers were subject to between two and eight years' imprisonment and the confiscation of property, depending on which law they were convicted under. The State Service for the Registration of Foreigners was responsible for combating trafficking.

The MOJ worked with foreign embassies and international organizations to promote public awareness of trafficking. Some social action groups carried out trafficking-awareness programs in the provinces. However, the government did not publicly acknowledge trafficking as a problem and did not monitor the trafficking situation within its borders, nor did it have a strategy to do so. The government did not systematically screen vulnerable population groups to identify trafficking victims.

#### Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, and other state services, although various regulations contradict the law, in effect nullifying it. Persons with disabilities encountered discrimination in employment, education, access to health care, and provision of other state services. The government systematically categorized many persons with physical disabilities as persons with mental disabilities and housed them at facilities for the mentally ill. The government provided subsidies and pensions for persons with disabilities, although they were inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living. Because they received these subsidies, the government considered persons with disabilities "employed" and therefore ineligible to compete for government jobs, the country's largest employer.

Some groups of students with disabilities were unable to obtain education because there were no teachers. Students with disabilities did not fit the unofficial university student profile and were not admitted to universities. Children with disabilities, including those with mental disabilities, were placed in boarding schools through which they were to be provided with educational and future employment opportunities if their condition allowed them to work; in practice neither was provided. Special schools for the hearing and sight impaired existed in the larger cities.

Although the law requires that new construction projects include facilities to allow access by persons with disabilities, compliance was inconsistent and older buildings were not accessible. The Ministry of Social Welfare was responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law provides for equal rights and freedoms for all citizens, although the former president made statements promoting the importance of ethnic purity. Several minority groups tried to register as NGOs in order to have legal status to conduct cultural events. No minority groups succeeded in registering during the year.

The law designates Turkmen as the official language, although it also provides for the rights of speakers of minority languages. While Russian remained prevalent in commerce and everyday life in the capital, the government continued its campaign to conduct official business solely in Turkmen. The government required ministry employees to pass tests

demonstrating knowledge of the *Ruhnama*, state symbols, and professional subjects in Turkmen; employees who failed the exam were dismissed. Turkmen was a mandatory subject in school, although it was not necessarily the language of instruction. The government systematically replaced teachers and staff at Turkish schools with ethnic Turkmen. Only in schools did the government dedicate resources toward providing Turkmen language instruction for non-Turkmen speakers.

Non-Turkmen speakers complained that some avenues for promotion and job advancement were closed to them, and only a handful of non-Turkmen occupied high-level jobs in the ministries. In some cases applicants for government jobs had to provide ethnicity information for the last three generations. The government often first targeted non-Turkmen for dismissal when government layoffs occurred.

#### Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Homosexuality between men is illegal and punishable by up to two years in prison.

#### Section 6 Worker Rights

##### a. The Right of Association

The law provides for citizens to join unions, but in practice all existent trade and professional unions were government-controlled. Private citizens were not permitted to form independent unions.

The government only permitted an umbrella organization Center for Professional Unions, led by a presidential appointee, under which numerous professional unions in most fields, including medicine, construction, banking, accounting, economics, entrepreneurship, and lease-holding existed. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers against union members and organizers, and there were no mechanisms for resolving complaints of discrimination; however, there were no reports of discrimination.

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

All unions were government appendages and had no independent voice in their activities. The law does not protect the right of collective bargaining. There was no law regulating strikes or retaliation against strikers, and strikes were rare.

There are no export processing zones.

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

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports it occurred.

A 2005 presidential decree bans child labor and states that no children would participate in the cotton harvest; there continued to be a decrease in the number of children working in the cotton fields.

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

There are laws and policies to protect children from exploitation in the workplace, but they were not implemented effectively. The minimum age for employment of children is 16 years; in a few heavy industries, it is 18 years. The law prohibits children between the ages of 16 and 18 years from working more than six hours per day. A 15-year-old child may work four to six hours per day with parental and trade union permission, although such permission was rarely granted. Child labor laws were not effectively enforced in practice, although implementation appeared to have improved during the year. The MOJ and the Prosecutor General's Office were responsible for enforcing child labor laws.

##### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The state sector minimum monthly wage of approximately \$40 to \$60 (1 to 1.5 million manat) did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The government increased teachers' salaries by 40 percent at the beginning of the school year, however, and reduced their weekly hours of work from 35 to 24. In November the president signed a law increasing the minimum wage by 10 percent.

The standard legal work week is 40 hours with two days off. Most public-sector employees also worked at least one-half day on Saturdays. The law states overtime or holiday pay should be double the regular payment; maximum overtime in a year is 120 hours and cannot exceed four hours in two consecutive days. This law, however, was not enforced.

The government did not set comprehensive standards for occupational health and safety. Industrial workers in older

factories often labored in unsafe environments and were not provided proper protective equipment. Some agricultural workers were subjected to environmental health hazards. Workers did not always have the right to remove themselves from work situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their continued employment.

