

SURINAME

Suriname is a constitutional democracy, with a president elected by the unicameral National Assembly or by the larger United People's Assembly. The population is approximately 493,000. After generally free and fair elections in May, a coalition government was formed by the Mega Combination, the A Combination, and People's Alliance political groups. The National Assembly elected former military leader Desire Bouterse as president in July. Security forces reported to civilian authorities.

The following problems were reported during the year: overcrowded detention facilities; an overwhelmed judiciary with a large case backlog; lengthy pretrial detention; self-censorship by some media; governmental corruption; societal discrimination against women, minorities, and indigenous people; violence against women; trafficking in women, girls, and boys; and child labor in the informal sector.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

The trial of former military head of state and current President Desire Bouterse and his codefendants for the 1982 extrajudicial killing of 15 political opponents continued at year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

While the law prohibits such practices, human rights groups and the media continued to express concern about mistreatment by police and prison officials and reported isolated incidents of abuse of prisoners by prison officials.

In December 2009 mob violence in Albina erupted after a Brazilian man stabbed to death a Maroon (descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior of the country to avoid recapture) during a dispute. The violence, primarily directed towards Brazilian and Chinese migrants, resulted in at least three rapes. Twenty persons, including a local official, were arrested on charges including rape, theft, and arson. During the year trials convened for nine of these suspects and continued at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions remained poor, but the government permitted visits by independent human rights observers.

Violence among prisoners continued sporadically, including two riots in September at Santo Boma prison. Prison and local authorities restored order and no serious injuries were reported. Poor ventilation, limited lighting, and extreme heat remained problems in prisons and detention centers. Most prisons and detention centers, particularly the older jails, were unsanitary and overcrowded.

There were three prisons, which held female and male prisoners separately. There were also 19 smaller jails, or temporary detention centers, in police stations throughout the country.

There was one juvenile detention facility, Opa Doeli, for boys and girls under the age of 18 years old. This facility, located in Paramaribo, was considered adequate, provided educational and recreational facilities, and was occupied to less than its maximum capacity. A separate wing of the detention facility held boys under the age of 18 years old who had been convicted of serious crimes.

Growing numbers of convicted prisoners were held in pretrial detention cells due to prison overcrowding. Due to staff shortages, police officers rarely permitted detainees to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also alleged that meals were inadequate.

Conditions in the women's jail and prison facilities were generally better than those in the men's facilities. Following conviction, girls under the age of 18 years old

were held in the women's detention center and in the women's section of one of the prison complexes.

Prisoners continued to have reasonable access to visitors and were permitted religious observance of their choice. Government officials continued regular monitoring of prison and detention center conditions. Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship. During the year prisoners from the Santo Boma prison sent letters to public officials complaining of inadequate food provisions, mistreatment by prison guards, limited ventilation, and a lack of rehabilitation programs. Officials took no known action on these complaints and at year's end.

Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed concern over the continued tense situation in Santo Boma prison, with declining prison conditions, inadequate legal representation, and delayed court verdicts.

The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers, and such visits occurred during the year. No ombudsman served on behalf of prisoners and detainees; prisoners notify their defending lawyers and government officials of any problems.

The Welzijns Institute Nickerie, an NGO operating in the western district of Nickerie, continued to visit and provide counseling for detainees in the youth detention center in that district. The institute continued a program to train prison officers to counsel detainees.

The government continued construction on the main pretrial detention center to improve conditions and reduce overcrowding. During the year the detention center accepted pretrial detainees who were previously imprisoned in the 19 smaller jails around the country.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The armed forces are responsible for national security and border control, with the military police having direct responsibility for immigration control at the country's ports of entry. All elements of the military are under the control of the Ministry of Defense. Civilian police bear primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and report to the Ministry of Justice and Police.

Police effectiveness was hampered by a lack of equipment and training, low salaries, and poor coordination with military forces.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

Individuals were apprehended openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and brought before an independent judiciary. The law provides detainees with the right to a prompt judicial determination of the legality of the detention, and authorities respected this right in practice. Detainees were promptly informed of the charges against them. Police may detain a person suspected of committing a crime for up to 14 days if the sentence for that crime is longer than four years, and an assistant district attorney or a police inspector may authorize incommunicado detention. The police must bring the accused before a prosecutor to be charged formally within 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 the prosecutor thinks that this could harm the investigation. Detainees were allowed weekly visits from family members.

The average length of pretrial detention was 30 to 45 days for lesser crimes. Detainees were held in 19 detention cells at police stations throughout the country that were at or near capacity. In accordance with the law, the courts freed most detainees who were not tried within the 164-day period. According to human rights monitors, factors such as a shortage of judges, large case loads, and large numbers of detainees caused trial delays.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence.

The judiciary lacked professional court managers and case management systems to oversee the courts' administrative functions and also lacked adequate physical

space – factors that contributed to a significant case backlog. The courts required a minimum of six months to process criminal cases.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair, public trial in which defendants have the right to counsel, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. All trials are public except for indecency offenses. There is no jury system. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to appeal. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult an attorney in a timely manner. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence. Defendants' attorneys can question witnesses and ~~can~~ present witnesses and evidence on the defendant's behalf. The courts assign private sector lawyers to defend indigent detainees. There were court-assigned attorneys for both the civil and the penal systems. The law extends the above rights to all citizens.

Military personnel generally are not subject to civilian criminal law, and there are parallel military and civilian court systems. Military police investigate crimes committed by members of the armed forces. An officer on the public prosecutor's staff directs military prosecutions before two military judges and one civilian judge. Due to a shortage of judges, military and civilian judges are selected from the same pool by the Court of Justice, which makes assignments to specific cases. A mechanism exists to prevent conflicts of interest. The military courts follow the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There is no appeal from the military to the civil system.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Regional Human Rights Court Decisions

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has ruled in two cases with regard to the Surinamese government.

No further progress was made on implementing the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' ruling on a 2006 case involving 12 Saramaccan clans who claimed authority over 60 villages in the Upper Suriname River area. The court ruled in 2007 that the government must recognize the collective land rights of the Saramaccan clans, draft legislation that complies with international treaties,

establish a development fund of SR\$1,680,000 (\$600,000), and provide them with their own land. By the end of the year, the government had paid approximately SR\$560,000 (\$200,000) toward this amount, but had yet to pay in full or to complete the demarcation process.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Although there are separate procedures for civil processes, the same pool of judges is responsible for presiding over these procedures. There is a court to consider lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation. Despite the installation of new judges during the year, the backlog in cases continued. Most civil cases were resolved approximately three to four years after being heard by the courts.

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

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law requires search warrants, which are issued by quasi-judicial officers who supervise criminal 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. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press.

In October media reported that a government official allegedly threatened an investigative journalist from a leading radio station, claiming that the journalist's investigations and reporting undermined the new government.

In October 2009 the government announced it would compensate two broadcasting companies for the army's destruction of their radio stations under the military dictatorship in 1982. The issue remained pending at year's end.

Some media members continued to practice occasional self-censorship. This was due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former

military leadership or a response to pressure applied by senior government officials and important community leaders on journalists who published negative stories about the administration. In addition many news outlets were affiliated with particular political parties, which discouraged journalists from reporting on some news items.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail. The International Telecommunication Union reported that there were approximately 31 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2009. The population in the interior had less access to the Internet due to limited infrastructure.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

c. Freedom of Religion

For a complete description of religious freedom, please see the *2010 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/.

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

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. No occasion arose during the year for government cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Although the law does not address forced exile, the government did not use it.

Protection of Refugees

The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, 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 the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

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 based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

The constitution provides for direct election by secret ballot of the 51-member National Assembly no later than five years after the prior election date. 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 National Assembly elected Desire Bouterse president in July. Political parties could operate without restriction or outside interference.

Historical and cultural factors, particularly in rural areas, inhibited equal participation by women in leadership positions in government and political parties. Societal pressures and customs, particularly with respect to marriage and inheritance, also limited female participation in political leadership. While women made limited gains in attaining political power, men continued to dominate political life. There were six women among the 51 members of the National Assembly and two women among the 17 ministers in the cabinet. There were five women among the 20 sitting judges. The head clerk of the Court of Justice, that body's highest administrative position, was a woman.

Several factors traditionally limited the participation of Maroons, the descendants of escaped slaves, and indigenous Amerindians in the political process, including a population concentrated in remote areas in the interior and removed from the country's centers of political activity. Four of the 21 Maroon political parties participated in the May elections, and three of the four parties are members of the government, participating as the A-Combination coalition. Voters elected 10 Maroons and two Amerindians to the National Assembly, all of whom joined in the governing coalition.

Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Long delays often occurred before corruption cases came to trial.

The World Bank's worldwide governance statistics continued to indicate corruption was a serious problem. The media frequently reported alleged corrupt practices with regard to land rights and land titles, misuse of government funds, and other practices.

In September 2009, 200 pounds of cocaine was stolen from a storage vault at a police facility. Six suspects were arrested, including three civilians and three police officers. The investigation was ongoing at year's end.

The Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ), an office within the Police Department, investigates complaints against members of the police force. The OPZ received 190 complaints against members of the police force during the year and launched 20 investigations into cases involving mistreatment of detainees and civilians. Throughout the year, authorities relieved 29 police officers of duty for various offenses, 20 of whom were jailed.

Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws. Various sections of the Ministry of Justice and Police, including the Fraud Police and the Attorney General's Office, were responsible for combating government corruption.

Although the law provides for public access to government information, such access was limited in practice for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media. While almost every ministry has an information service, gaps in official

government statistics and bureaucratic hurdles made obtaining information difficult.

Section 5 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of independent domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. NGOs reported generally positive relationships with government officials, although occasionally officials were not responsive to their views. No international human rights groups operated in the country during the year.

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

Section 6 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. Although 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 various sectors of the population, such as women; Maroons; Amerindians; persons with HIV/AIDS; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, suffered forms of discrimination.

Women

The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, prescribes penalties for rape or forcible sexual assault of between 12 and 15 years' imprisonment. The government enforced the law effectively. During the year the Ministry of Justice and Police registered 189 cases of attempted rape, 106 cases of rape, 1,213 cases of domestic violence, and 269 cases of child abuse.

Violence against women was a common problem. The Ministry of Justice and Police registered 1,213 cases of domestic violence during the year, a drop from 1,769 in 2009. The increase in registered domestic violence cases may be due to a greater awareness of domestic violence issues.

The 2009 Law Combating Domestic Violence, which allowed for more severe punishments (four to eight years' imprisonment) than are available when prosecuting domestic violence cases under the assault law, had not been implemented by year's end. The Bureau of Women and Child Policy under the Ministry of Justice and Police conducted an awareness campaign on domestic violence in 2009 in cooperation with the Foundation Ilse Henar Hewith, and the bureau trained government officials, social workers, and NGO staff on domestic violence issues. The Victim Assistance Bureau in Paramaribo provided resources for victims of domestic violence and other crimes. It operated a satellite office in Nickerie, the country's second largest city. There were four victims' rooms in police stations in Paramaribo and Nickerie, and police units were trained to deal with victims and perpetrators of sexual crimes and domestic violence. An NGO operated a shelter for victims of domestic violence.

There was no specific legislation on sexual harassment; however, prosecutors cited various penal code articles in filing sexual harassment cases. There were no reported court cases involving sexual harassment in the workplace during the year.

Couples and individuals had the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Access to information on contraception was widely available and, according to the Population Reference Bureau, contraceptive use among married women was 42 percent. The UN Population Fund estimated the maternal mortality ratio in 2008 at 100 deaths per 100,000 live births, while UNICEF reported that 90 percent of births included skilled attendance during childbirth in 2008. Women and men were given equal access to diagnostic services and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Women have the legal right to equal access to education, employment, and property; nevertheless, societal pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, inhibited their full exercise of these rights, particularly with respect to marriage and inheritance. Where local customs remain a strong influence on the family unit, girls traditionally marry at or near the legal age of consent, and inheritance rights pass to their husband.

Men and women generally enjoyed the same rights under property law and under the judicial system. The Bureau for Women and Children under the Ministry of Justice and Police worked to ensure the legal rights of women and children.

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

The National Women's Movement, the most active women's rights NGO, continued assisting women in launching small home-based businesses, such as sewing and vegetable growing, and provided general legal help. The Women's Business Group advocated for business opportunities for women, while the Women's Parliament Forum advocated for opportunities in the public sector. Stop Violence against Women provided assistance to victims of domestic violence, including legal help with dissolving an abusive marriage.

Children

Citizenship is derived by birth within the country's territory and from one's parents.

Physical and sexual abuse of children continued to be a problem. During the year police received reports of 269 cases of sexual abuse of children, compared with 265 reported in 2009. 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, raise awareness about child abuse, and ~~to~~ solicit and investigate complaints. The Youth Affairs Office continued to raise awareness about sexual abuse, drugs, and alcohol through a weekly television program.

Authorities applied various laws to prosecute perpetrators of sexual abuse, and several cases of sexual abuse against minors came to trial. Sentences averaged three years in prison. In the capital, there were several orphanages and one privately funded shelter for sexually abused children.

During the year there was one report of sexual abuse of three children in a religious-led orphanage. The suspect was charged, and prosecution continued at year's end.

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

Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of minors remained problems.

The criminal law penalizes child prostitution and provides sanctions of up to six years' imprisonment and fine of SR\$100,000 (\$35,700). The law also prohibits child pornography, which has a maximum penalty of six years' imprisonment and maximum fine of SR\$50,000 (\$16,700).

The UN Children's Fund continued cooperating with the government in providing training to officials from various ministries dealing with children and children's rights. The government operated a "1-2-3" telephone hotline for children and provided confidential advice and aid to children in need.

The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of Child Abduction. For information on international parental child abduction, please see the Department of State's annual report on compliance at http://travel.state.gov/abduction/resources/congressreport/congressreport_4308.html.

Anti-Semitism

There was a declared Jewish community of approximately 150 persons. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts or other societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Trafficking in Persons

For information on trafficking in persons, please see the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/g/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

There are no laws prohibiting discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of state services. In practice persons with disabilities suffered from discrimination when applying for jobs and services. Some training programs were provided for the persons with visual disability and others with nonvisual disabilities. There are no laws or programs to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to buildings. A judge may rule that a person with a cognitive disability be denied the right to vote, take part in business transactions, or sign legal agreements. Persons with disabilities had equal access to information and

communications. There were no reports of abuse in educational facilities for persons with disabilities.

A Ministry of Social Affairs working group remained responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, but it made limited progress during the year.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, and no such discrimination complaints were filed during the year. However, Maroons, who represent an estimated 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 reduced their access to educational and professional opportunities and health and social services. Some forms of discrimination that affected indigenous Amerindians also extended to Maroons.

Indigenous People

The law affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous people. Most Amerindians (approximately 2 percent of the population) live in the remote and undeveloped interior of the country, where government services are largely unavailable. Geographic isolation afforded limited opportunity to participate in national and regional policymaking, including decisions affecting interior lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources.

Because Amerindian and Maroon lands were not effectively demarcated or policed, 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, some of whom were themselves indigenous or supported by indigenous groups, 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. Many Maroon and Amerindian groups also complained about the government granting land within their traditional territories to third parties, who sometimes prevented the villages from engaging in their traditional activities on those lands. There are no laws granting indigenous people rights to share in the revenues from the exploitation of resources on their traditional lands.

Indigenous groups, with the assistance of the Amazon Conservation Team, mapped their lands and presented proposed demarcation charts to the government in 2000 and to the Ministry of Physical Planning, Land, and Forestry Management in both 2006 and 2009. At year's end, this proposal remained under consideration by the new government.

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

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Although the law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, there were reports of employment discrimination against LGBT persons. There were no reports of official discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, access to education, or health care.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons with HIV/AIDS continued to experience societal discrimination in employment and medical services. An NGO working with HIV-infected persons reported that law enforcement agencies and the fire department conducted HIV testing as part of their hiring procedures. Catering establishments, casinos, and some private companies also reportedly demanded HIV tests prior to employment. The Mamio Foundation noted that individuals, mostly women, reported physical violence or discrimination after their HIV-positive status became known. Insurance companies allegedly denied services to HIV-positive clients, having identified their status via their medication histories.

The Ministry of Health continued its efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS through a comprehensive outreach program involving local health care providers. The program achieved its goal of voluntary testing of 90 percent of expectant mothers. The military continued its HIV/AIDS awareness program among troops during the year.

Section 7 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers did so in practice. Nearly 60 percent of the workforce was organized into unions, and most unions belonged to one of the country's seven major labor federations.

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

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining is protected by law, and the government generally enforced this right in practice. Collective bargaining agreements covered approximately 50 percent of the labor force. The law prohibits employer interference in union activities, and in practice it did not occur.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred. Also see the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/g/tip.

The trial of six individuals arrested in 2009 after allegedly recruiting 23 men for a cooking course in Trinidad and Tobago and then providing them as forced labor upon arrival in that country continued at year's end.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for most types of employment at 14 years old and restricts working hours for minors to day shifts but does not limit the number of hours minors can work. Children younger than 14 years old are allowed to work only in a family-owned business, small-scale agriculture, and special vocational work. The law does not define the worst forms of child labor. Children younger than 18 years old are prohibited from doing hazardous work, which is defined as work dangerous to their life, health, and decency. Children under the age of 15 years old are not permitted to work on boats. The Ministry of Labor and the police enforced the law sporadically, and child labor remained a problem in the informal sector, especially in the western districts of Nickerie and Saramacca.

Some children under the age of 14 years old continued to work illegally in gold mines and in urban informal sectors. Employers in these sectors generally did not assure work safety or provide benefits such as access to medical care. There was a general lack of statistical data on the labor environment and child labor in the country.

The Ministry of Labor's Department of Labor Inspection, with 63 inspectors, of which 22 have finished their theoretical training by the end of the year, has responsibility to implement and enforce labor laws; however, enforcement was inadequate. Inspectors visited private sector companies throughout the country, but no data was available regarding the number of inspections performed during the year. Employers were required to maintain a Register of Young Persons that includes each employee's information. Employing a child less than 14 years of age is punishable by fines and up to 12 months in prison. Parents who permit their children to work in violation of labor laws may be prosecuted. The government did not investigate exploitive child labor cases outside urban areas. Labor inspectors were not authorized to conduct inspections in the informal sector as responsibility for controlling the informal sector lies with the police.

Children were exploited in agriculture, particularly harvesting fruit and rice. Although the government provided no programs to remove children from the worst forms of child labor, it supported vocational programs for dropouts and older children to serve as an alternative to underage labor and participated in a regional project to combat the worst forms of child labor in the Caribbean.

The National Commission for the Eradication of Child Labor became active in 2009. Members included officials from the ministries of labor, social affairs, and education, as well as representatives from labor unions, the private sector, and NGOs. The commission's mandate includes formulating national policy regarding the eradication of child labor, initiating specific programs for indigenous children, developing a list of occupations involving the worst forms of child labor, and monitoring the country's compliance with international child labor standards. However, the commission's progress in these policy areas stalled during the year.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislation providing for a minimum wage. The lowest wage for civil servants was approximately SR\$600 (\$214) per month, including a cost of living allowance, which did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Government employees, who constituted approximately 50 percent of the

100,000-member workforce, frequently supplemented their salaries with second or third jobs, often in the informal sector. During the year the government continued to implement a new civil servant wage system, increasing wages for many civil servants.

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

The government sets occupational health and safety standards. A 10- to 12-member inspectorate in the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing occupational safety and health regulations, but it did not make regular inspections. There is 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.