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Sweden

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The Kingdom of Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a multiparty parliamentary form of government. According to government statistics, the population is approximately 9.2 million. Legislative authority is vested in the unicameral Riksdag (parliament). In national elections in September 2006, voters elected a center-right coalition government led by the Moderate Party. The elections were free and fair. The king is the largely symbolic head of state. The prime minister is the head of the government and exercises executive authority. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Reported human rights problems included isolated incidents of excessive police violence; prison overcrowding and lengthy pretrial detention; government surveillance and interference; isolated cases of anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic discrimination; violence against women and children; trafficking in women and children; and societal discrimination against foreign-born residents, Roma, and homosexuals.

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.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The law prohibits such practices; however, there were isolated reports that police used excessive force.

During the year law enforcement authorities conducted 40 investigations of police officers and charged and convicted nine for crimes, including minor assault, theft, and sexual molestation.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions generally met international standards, although overcrowding and lengthy pretrial detention remained problems. The addition of some 700 new detention and prison cells during the year helped mitigate prison overcrowding.

Restrictive conditions for prisoners held in pretrial custody remained a problem. According to the National Agency for Prison and Probation, 40 to 50 percent of these detainees were subject to restrictions, such as extended isolation.

The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. In January the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights visited the prison system.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the National Police and the Swedish Security Service and other government authorities have effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year.

Arrest and Detention

The law requires warrants issued by duly authorized officials for arrests, and the government generally respected this requirement in practice. Police must file charges within six hours against persons detained for disturbing the public order or considered dangerous, and within 12 hours against those detained on other grounds. Police may hold a person for questioning for six hours, or up to 12 hours if necessary for the investigation. After questioning, the extent to which reasonable suspicion remains determines whether the individual will be arrested or released. If the suspect is arrested, the prosecutor has 24 hours (or three days in exceptional circumstances) to request continued detention. An arrested suspect must be arraigned within 48 hours, and initial prosecution must begin within two weeks, unless extenuating circumstances exist. Authorities generally respected these requirements.

Detainees may retain a lawyer of their choice; in criminal cases the government is obligated to provide an attorney if the defendant cannot afford one. Detainees are afforded prompt access to lawyers and to family members. Although there is no system of bail, courts routinely release defendants pending trial unless they are considered dangerous.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected this provision in practice.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is no specific court for human rights violations. Instead, cases are tried in the general court system. As members of the European Union (EU), citizens can appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in matters related to the state.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Human rights organizations, including the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, expressed concern over government proposals to increase the number of permitted surveillance methods available to the police. Human rights groups argued that allowing additional surveillance methods, such as bugging, would conflict with protection of the individual's right to privacy. During the year courts issued 893 and denied 13 permits for wiretapping.

An ombudsman in the prosecutor's office is responsible for protecting citizens' rights in court cases that involve use of invasive measures, such as camera surveillance or wiretapping. The ombudsman participates in the court review of all wiretapping and surveillance requests.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press. While the government generally respected these rights it prohibited certain types of expressions considered to be hate speech. The law on hate speech prohibits threats or expressions of contempt for a group or member of a group based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. On August 19, a regional newspaper published a cartoon showing Mohammed's head on the body of a dog, together with an editorial on freedom of expression. The publication prompted demonstrations, vandalism, and personal threats against the artist Lars Vilks and the editor of the newspaper Ulf Johansson. The prime minister commented on the event, emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression and freedom of speech. He also met representatives from the Swedish Muslim Council and 22 ambassadors from Muslim countries. Although several complaints of inciting ethnic hatred were filed against Vilks and Johansson, in September the chancellor of justice decided not to initiate legal proceedings, and Muslims, who had been planning further demonstrations, called them off, indicating that the dialogue underway made them unnecessary. Facing threats against his life, Vilks went into hiding in late September. Nevertheless through the end of the year, Vilks continued to pursue provocative new art projects in the name of defending freedom of expression; these projects have not provoked reaction from the Muslim community.

There have been efforts to use the hate-speech law to prevent the display of swastikas in public in recent years. In September 2006 the chancellor of justice requested that a residential search warrant be issued against one of the founding figures of the National Socialist Front because of his suspected involvement in the distribution of political campaign posters with swastikas. In April the investigation was dropped due to lack of evidence.

According to preliminary statistics from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 721 cases of hate speech were reported during the year. In 2006 there were 750 cases; 18 persons were prosecuted, and, while no one was sentenced to jail, most were fined.

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 peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.
According to Statistics Sweden, 83 percent of the population between ages 16 and 74 had Internet access.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

c. Freedom of Religion

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

The Swedish Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities subsidized 40 religious groups during the year, including numerous Christian churches, five Islamic organizations, the Jewish community, the Buddhist Cooperation Council, and a Shia Muslim organization.

Since 2005 the courts have upheld the rights of students and public employees to wear religious head coverings. In January and February, this right was upheld by the National Agency for Education when it was tested in Minerva School in Umea, and when the city of Stockholm agreed in an out-of-court settlement to pay approximately $4,100 (28,000 crowns) in compensation to a Muslim woman denied employment as a nurse at a home for the elderly because she wore a head scarf. In a private sector case in May, a supermarket in Frolunda denied employment to a Muslim woman because she wore a head scarf, but agreed to pay approximately $11,200 (76,000 crowns) in compensation in an out-of-court settlement. And the supermarket thereafter allowed employees to wear headscarves.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

During the year the media reported that individuals associated with the openly Nazi organization National Socialist Front Party perpetrated numerous discriminatory acts involving violence and harassment. The reports included cases of assault and hate speech, unauthorized demonstrations, illegal distribution of posters, illegal possession of weapons, disorderly conduct, and threats against the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights.

The Jewish community numbered approximately 18,500 to 20,000 persons; approximately half are estimated to be practicing members. In 2006 there were 134 reported cases of anti-Semitic crime, an increase of 23 from the previous year. The most frequent crime was "agitation against an ethnic group," with 48 reported incidents. There were 35 reported cases of "unlawful threat or molestation." Nazi symbols, such as Hitler salutes and the use of swastikas, were associated with 32 percent of reported anti-Semitic crimes.

In order to deal more effectively with hate crime complaints, police in Stockholm created a hate-crime hot line in June. At year's end the hot line was operating, but tangible results had not been reported.

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

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

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

The constitution and law prohibit forced exile, and the government did not employ it.

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. In practice the government provided some protection against "refoulement," the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they feared persecution. The government granted refugee status or asylum.

During the year the government also provided temporary protection to approximately 124 persons who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 protocol.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. In January 2006 the UN's special rapporteur on the right to health expressed concern that undocumented persons and asylum seekers hiding in the country lacked adequate access to health care; the rapporteur estimated that approximately 15,000 such persons were hiding in the country. The government publicly acknowledged the problem but at year's end had not yet taken concrete action.

Applications for asylum were often delayed, and the appeals process in the courts extended for several years in some cases.

The government returned asylum seekers from EU countries or from countries with which it maintained reciprocal−return agreements. In most cases persons returned had passed through or had asylum determinations pending in other EU countries. In many cases authorities deported asylum seekers within 72 hours of their arrival. Human rights organizations expressed concern that some asylum cases were adjudicated too quickly. Early in the year, the government approved the provision of financial repatriation support for asylum seekers who had been denied residence in the country. The amount authorized was $2,500 (17,250 crowns) per adult and $1,500 (10,350 crowns) per child, with a maximum of $7,100 (48,300 crowns) per family.

In April 2006 the government established a new appeals system that allows asylum seekers to appeal Migration Board rulings to two special migration appeals courts. Amnesty International (AI) criticized the new appeals system for failing to protect the asylum seeker's confidentiality, and in cases involving the Swedish Security Service, asylum seekers have not been able to access information used in the decision to expel them. AI also indicated that the judges lacked expertise on asylum issues and on the security situations in foreign countries. The government appointed a judge to investigate these issues.

The UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) received 10 complaints against the government of Sweden during the year, most concerning repatriation. The government's position was upheld in all six cases the committee ruled on during the year.

In 2005 the CAT found that the country had violated the UN Convention against Torture in connection with the 2001 forced repatriation of Egyptian nationals Ahmed Agiza and Mohammed Alzery. During the year the victims initiated lawsuits with the Chancellor of Justice claiming damages against the Swedish government. In March the government revoked the previous decision to expel Alzery, but in May the Migration Board, citing security concerns, turned down his application for residency.

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

The constitution and law provide 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

In parliamentary elections held in September 2006, voters turned the Social Democratic Party (SDP) out of power. The new government was a center-right coalition led by the Moderate Party. The SDP had dominated the political system for seven decades, and its members occupied a disproportionately large number of publicly appointed positions.

Political parties operate without restrictions or outside interference.

There were 165 women in the 349-seat parliament and 10 women in the 22−member cabinet.

No official statistics on minority representation were available because the law prohibits the government from holding information about the racial or ethnic background of its citizens. However, the Sami were not represented in the national parliament, and media reports stated that there was one ethnic minority member in the cabinet, and 17 members of parliament were born in other countries.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. The Prosecutor's Office has a special unit working on cases involving corruption. The unit initiated 51 investigations during the year, resulting in 11 prosecutions.

Public officials and political parties are subject to financial disclosure laws.

The constitution and law provide for public access to government information, and the government generally respected this provision in practice. The public has the right

of access to government documents unless they are subject to secrecy laws, according to which information may be withheld if its release poses a threat to national security or to individual or corporate privacy.

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

Domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restrictions, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. Although the government effectively enforced these laws, violence against women and children, trafficking in persons, and discrimination against resident foreigners, Roma, and homosexuals remained areas in need of improvement.

Women

Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal, and the government enforced the law effectively. The law stipulates more severe penalties for repeated crimes and if the perpetrator had a close relationship to the victim. Though the law is effectively enforced, the Swedish Helsinki Committee has contended that the country's legislation on rape does not correspond to the regulations in the European Convention on Human Rights. The National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) reported 3,483 rapes of persons over age 14, compared with 3,074 in 2006.

The NCCP reported 26,632 cases of assault against women. Approximately 86 homicide deaths of women and girls were reported during the year, most of them committed by men closely related to the victim. Authorities apprehended and prosecuted abusers.

The law provides victims with protection from contact with their abusers. When necessary, authorities helped women protect their identities or obtain new identities and homes; according to official statistics, some 1,000 individuals – mostly women - receive such services. Both national and local governments helped fund volunteer groups that provided shelter and other assistance for abused women, and both private and public organizations ran shelters and operated hot lines.

During the year the government launched a $118 million (800 million crowns), four-year action plan to combat violence against women, including honor-related violence. The plan focuses on improving victim protection, the quality of legal investigations, and the rehabilitation services offered to abusers. It also concentrates on increasing cooperation among relevant government authorities and enhancing public awareness. The National Police Board, the National Board for Youth Affairs, and the County Administrative Boards share responsibility for implementing the project. Also in July, the parliament passed a law amending the Social Services Act to place higher demands on the municipal social services for action in assisting women exposed to violence.

At year's end authorities estimated that 1,500-2,000 women had been subjected to honor-related violence (patriarchal violence often linked to cultural and religious convictions about female chastity and marriage). Honor-related violence exclusively involved immigrants from Muslim countries; the police have concentrated on educating law enforcement officers and prosecutors to increase awareness and improve detection and prevention. In 2006 the government established a national center to study male violence against females. The government provided secure housing for young women vulnerable to honor−related violence. In an interview in March, the country's first black cabinet minister, Nyamko Sabuni, an immigrant from Congo, described honor violence against women as reaching urgent proportions.

The law prohibits female genital mutilation (FGM), punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment; however, there were reports of FGM, usually by family members taking the victim abroad for the procedure.

Prostitution is legal; the purchase of sexual services, however, is illegal. In recent years the government has sought to curb prostitution by focusing on the demand rather than the supply, by arresting clients and not prostitutes. There were 188 reported cases of individuals buying sexual services during the year.

The law prohibits sexual harassment, and the government generally enforced this law in practice. Employers who do not investigate and intervene against harassment at work may be obliged to pay damages to the victim.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system, but some sectors of the labor market still showed significant gender disparities. During the year women's salaries averaged 85 percent of men's salaries, adjusting for age, education, and occupational differences.

The equal opportunity ombudsman (EOO), a public official, investigates complaints of gender discrimination in the labor market. Complaints may also be filed with the courts or with the employer. Labor unions generally mediated in cases filed with the employer. During the year the EOO's office registered 155 cases. Women filed approximately 80 percent of the cases; 50 percent of those cases concerned salaries. The number of discrimination complaints related to pregnancy rose to 30, compared with 22 in 2006.

Children

The government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded systems of public education and medical care. The government provided compulsory, free, and universal education for children up to 16 years old. It provided free, but not compulsory, public school for children up to 18 years old. Nearly 100 percent of school-age children attended school. The highest level achieved by most children was completion of high school.

The government also provided free medical care to all children at next to no cost.

Child abuse was a problem. At year's end, the NCCP reported 9,520 cases of abuse of children under the age of 15. Police reported 1,271 cases of child rape and 851 cases of sexual abuse of children, compared with 848 reported cases of rape and 654 reported cases of child sexual abuse in 2006.

The law prohibits parents or other caretakers from abusing children mentally or physically in any way. Parents, teachers, and other adults are subject to prosecution if they physically punish a child, including slapping or spanking. Children have the right to report such abuses to the police. The usual sentence for such an offense is a fine combined with counseling and monitoring by social workers. Authorities may remove children from their homes and place them in foster care.

During the year the government allocated funds to private organizations dedicated to children's rights, such as the non-governmental organization (NGO) Children's Rights in Society which offered counseling to troubled youth. After the Office of the Children's Ombudsman indicated that efforts to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the municipal level were insufficient, the government also commissioned the Agency for Administrative Development to increase cooperation among authorities responsible for children and to implement necessary improvements. In March Orebro University inaugurated a National Child Center, which will concentrate on raising awareness of the UN convention. The government continued to be active internationally in efforts to prevent child abuse.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were reports that persons were trafficked to, through, and within the country. Law enforcement officials and analysts estimated the number of trafficked women at 500 per year, cautioning, however, that it was not possible to obtain precise numbers. The National Police estimated that the number of women trafficked to the country during the year was consistent with 2006 levels.

The country continued to be a transit point, and to a lesser extent a destination, for trafficked women and children. Victims came primarily from Estonia, Russia, and Poland. Those transiting the country came primarily from the Baltic region, heading toward suspected destination countries Denmark, Germany, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. There were also occasional cases of trafficked women from South America and Thailand, some as young as 16. None of the cases involved young boys. Police reported an increase in unidentified children suspected to have been trafficked to the country; however, it was not clear whether they had been trafficked for sexual purposes. Some of these children came from Romania and Moldova.

Traffickers typically recruited victims in their countries of origin to work as cleaners, babysitters, or in similar employment abroad. Once in the country, traffickers isolated and intimidated victims and forced them to work as prostitutes in hotels, restaurants, massage parlors, or private apartments; some were locked up and their passports confiscated by their captors.

The law prohibits the trafficking of persons for sexual purposes, provides for sentences of two to 10 years' imprisonment for persons convicted of trafficking, and criminalizes attempting to traffic, conspiracy to traffic, and the failure to report such crimes. Authorities actively prosecuted trafficking cases. During the year police reported 15 cases of trafficking for sexual purposes, two of which led to convictions under the trafficking law in the first half of the year.

To prosecute traffickers, authorities continued to use primarily laws against procurement and an offense called "placing in distress," which can apply in cases where traffickers lure women from other countries under false pretenses. The laws on procurement and trafficking complement each other; however, the anti-trafficking law requires that prosecutors prove traffickers used "improper means." Judges commonly ruled that improper means were absent in cases involving victims who consented to being trafficked. Although consent is irrelevant under the anti-trafficking law, in practice judicial interpretation of the improper means criterion makes it difficult to obtain convictions. Prosecutors consequently continued to rely on the procurement laws for most convictions of traffickers. During the year there were 64 cases of procurement reported, many involving trafficking victims.

During the year 22 Chinese children disappeared after coming to Sweden to apply for asylum. The previous year authorities had convicted and sentenced a Chinese immigrant couple in Stockholm to two years in prison for human smuggling. That case involved the disappearance of approximately 120 Chinese children who had requested political asylum in the country since autumn 2004. Authorities reported that the children were smuggled out of the country to other European countries, but were unaware of their final destinations.

The government allocated funds to domestic and international NGOs to provide shelter and rehabilitation assistance to victims. Police and social services also provided funding. The law enables trafficking victims who cooperate with police investigations to receive at least six-month temporary residence permits, allowing access to the full range of social benefits. Victims who do not cooperate with police investigations are ineligible to receive temporary residence permits and are promptly deported.

The government has a special ambassador to combat human trafficking, tasked with strengthening international antitrafficking efforts. The country also actively participated in a Nordic-Baltic task force against human trafficking.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits employers from discriminating against persons with disabilities in hiring decisions, and prohibits universities from discriminating against students with disabilities in making admissions decisions. No other specific law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. There is a disability ombudsman.

Regulations for new buildings require full accessibility. Similar requirements exist for some public facilities but not all; many buildings and some means of public transportation remained inaccessible.

There were 1,012 reports of governmental discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or in the provision of other state services; most of the cases involved lack of access to public buildings. Difficulties in accessing apartments, pubs, and bars were the most frequent reports of societal discrimination against persons with disabilities. A study from the Swedish Federation of People with Mobility Impairments found that 30 percent of women with disabilities claimed to have been subjected to violence, threats, or sexual harassment.

Approximately 50 percent of the cases submitted to the disability ombudsman were filed in accordance with the reporting requirements under the Disability Act and were handled under mediation procedures rather than through formal court hearings. The majority of the cases involved lack of appropriate access to buildings, education, and health care facilities and services.

The country has a National Authority for Coordination of Disability Policy, and, in April 2006, passed a new law protecting children with disabilities from harassment in school.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Over a million persons in the country are foreign born, with the largest groups originating from Finland, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Iran. According to preliminary figures from Statistics Sweden, approximately 93,000 persons immigrated to the country during the year. This figure represents an approximately 3,500 person increase from the previous year and makes 2007 the record year for immigration. The largest single group came from Iraq.

Police registered reports of xenophobic crimes (numbers not available), some of which were related to neo-Nazism/white power ideology. The government investigated and prosecuted race-related crimes. Estimates placed the number of active neo-Nazis, or white supremacists, at approximately 3,000. The NGO EXPO estimated that fewer than 1,000 individuals attended the annual neo−Nazi/white supremacist march that took place in Salem in December. Neo-Nazi groups operated legally, but courts have held that it is illegal to wear xenophobic symbols or racist paraphernalia or to display signs and banners with provocative symbols at rallies, since the law prohibits incitement of hatred against ethnic groups.

The ombudsman for ethnic discrimination received 817 reports during the year compared to 757 in 2006. It should be noted, however, that beginning in 2006 discrimination cases filed by a group were registered as one case rather than as several individual cases, thus decreasing the total number of recorded cases. Workplace related discrimination cases increased by 18 percent from 2006.

In April 2006 the government initiated a two-year program aimed at improving minority integration and budgeted approximately $258 million (1.9 billion crowns) for its implementation. Key program areas include education, employment, and antidiscrimination.

The law recognizes Sami (formerly known as Lapps), Swedish Finns, Tornedal−Finns, Roma, and Jews as national minorities. The government supported and protected minority languages.

The government estimated the population of Roma to be 40-60,000. A governmental action plan directed the school authority to investigate the educational situation of

Romani children, many of whom drop out of school. In May 2006, following an antidiscrimination ombudsman report describing cases in which Romani children were allegedly removed from their homes on weak groundsand taken into state care, the government instructed the National Board of Health and Welfare to investigate the social authorities' care of Romani children. In the beginning of the year, the board concluded that Romani children were not being taken into custody on weak grounds and that Romani children were not taken into state care at a disproportionate rate. However, the board noted a lack of knowledge on minority policy among municipality-level social service providers.

There is a Special Delegation for Romani Issues consisting of representatives of Romani origin, experts on Romani issues, and representatives from Romani associations. The delegation worked to improve the situation of Roma in society and addressed such discrimination issues as social, political, and economic exclusion.

Indigenous People

There were approximately 20,000 Sami in the country, represented by a 31-member Sami-elected administrative authority called the Sami Parliament; the Sami were not represented in the national parliament. The Sami Parliament acts as an advisory body to the government and has decision-making powers in matters related to Sami culture, language, and schools. Parliament and government regulations govern its operations.

Longstanding tensions between Sami and the government over land and natural resources persisted, as did tensions between Sami and private landowners over reindeer grazing rights. Courts repeatedly ruled that Sami must compensate private landowners for use of their land for winter pastures. However, in September an appeals court dismissed a lawsuit brought by 100 landowners in the Umea region and ruled that the Sami villages had traditional rights to reindeer pasture in that area.

In January new legislation entered into force transferring some administrative authority over reindeer herding issues from the Ministry of Agriculture and county governments to the Sami Parliament.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were isolated incidents of societal violence and discrimination against homosexuals. The ombudsman against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation registered 47 reported cases during the year, compared with 45 cases in 2006. Additionally, the ombudsman's office initiated eight new discrimination investigations, compared to 11 new investigations in 2006. The government has a working group to promote equal rights for homosexuals, bisexuals, and transsexuals.

In March the EU criticized the government for not following EU regulations on discrimination, which allow interest groups to initiate discrimination cases and require landlords to follow antidiscrimination regulations when making rental decisions.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law entitles workers to form and join unions of their choice, without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers exercised this right in practice. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the government protected this right in practice. The law provides for collective bargaining, and workers exercised this right in practice. Approximately 80 percent of the workforce was under collective bargaining agreements. The law provides for the right to strike, as well as for employers to organize and conduct lockouts; workers and employers exercised these rights in practice. Public-sector employees also enjoy the right to strike, subject to limitations in the collective agreements protecting the public's immediate health and security.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children, and there were no reports that such practices occurred.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law and policies (including those on acceptable working conditions) protect children from exploitation in the workplace, and the government effectively implemented these laws and policies in practice. The law permits full-time employment at age 16 under the supervision of local authorities. Employees under age 18 may work only during the daytime and under supervision. Children as young as 13 may work part–time or in light work with parental permission. Union representatives, police, and public prosecutors effectively enforced these restrictions.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage law. Wages are set by annual collective bargaining contracts. Nonunion establishments generally observed these contracts as well. Substantial benefits (e.g., housing, childcare) provided by social welfare entitlement programs assured even the lowest-paid workers and their families a decent standard of living. Foreign companies employing workers from their country of origin at wage levels below minimums stipulated in domestic collective-bargaining contracts created frictions in the labor market. For example, a 2005 incident in which Swedish worker unions blocked Latvian workers from access to a work site in Vaxholm resulted in a court case in the European Court of Human Rights. The Swedish union contended that the construction workers did not have collective bargaining agreements with a Swedish union. In December the court decided in favor of the Latvian company, ruling that although labor unions have the right to take action, in this case they went too far in blocking the company for not having signed a Swedish collective bargaining agreement.

The legal standard workweek is 40 hours or less. Both the law and collective bargaining agreements regulate overtime and rest periods. The maximum allowable overtime per year is 200 hours. The law requires a minimum period of 36 consecutive hours of rest, preferably on weekends, during a period of seven days. The law also provides employees with a minimum of five weeks' paid annual leave. The government effectively enforced these standards.

The Work Environment Authority, a government–appointed board, issued occupational health and safety regulations, and trained union stewards and safety ombudsmen. Government inspectors monitored them. Safety ombudsmen have the authority to stop unsafe activity immediately and to call in an inspector. These rules were effectively enforced. Workplaces were generally safe and healthy. In law and practice, workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their future employment.

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