

BAHRAIN 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy. King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa, the head of state, appoints the cabinet, consisting of 23 ministers; nine of those ministers were members of the al-Khalifa ruling family. Parliament consists of an appointed upper house, the Shura (Consultative) Council, and the elected Council of Representatives, with 40 seats each. Approximately 52 percent of eligible voters participated in parliamentary elections held in November 2014. Turnout was significantly lower in opposition districts, due in part to a decision to boycott the elections by the main opposition political societies and a lack of confidence among opposition communities in the electoral system. The government did not permit international election monitors. Domestic monitors generally concluded the authorities administered the elections without significant procedural irregularities. There were, however, broader concerns regarding voting-district boundaries. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most serious human rights problems included citizens' limited ability to change their government peacefully; lack of due process in the legal system, including arrests without warrants or charges and lengthy pretrial detentions, used especially in cases against opposition members and political or human rights activists; and restrictions on free expression and assembly.

Other significant human rights problems included lack of judicial accountability for security officers accused by the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of committing human rights violations; defendants' lack of access to attorneys and ability to challenge evidence; prison overcrowding; violations of privacy; and other restrictions on civil liberties, including freedom of press and association. Societal discrimination continued against the Shia population, as did other forms of discrimination based on gender, religion, and nationality. The government at times imposed travel bans on political activists in conjunction with arrest charges and in some cases continued to enforce them after authorities had dropped charges or pardoned the individual. The government maintained the revocation of citizenship for 31 individuals whose citizenship it revoked in previous years, and it revoked citizenship from another 72 who were not otherwise charged with any crimes. There were reports of domestic violence against women and children. Despite government efforts at reform, the rights of foreign workers, particularly domestic workers, continued to be restricted, leaving them vulnerable to labor abuses and human trafficking.

Beginning in 2011 the country experienced a sustained period of unrest, including mass protests calling for political reform. Between February and April of that year, 35 persons, including police, died as a result of the unrest. The government has taken steps to address the “culture of impunity,” identified by the 2011 Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report, tasked with reviewing including allegations of police brutality, violence by protesters and demonstrators, arrests, disappearances, and torture earlier that year. Actions included prosecuting some law enforcement personnel involved in abuse, changing procedures to make law enforcement personnel accountable for their actions, and videotaping official interviews with detainees. The government maintained the Ombudsman’s Office in the Ministry of Interior, continued the Special Investigative Unit (SIU) in the Public Prosecutor’s Office, funded the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR), and supported the Commission on Prisoner and Detainee Rights (PDRC). International and local human rights organizations viewed the BICI report as the standard against which to measure the country’s human rights reforms and noted that the government had not fully implemented its recommendations, particularly those involving reconciliation, safeguarding freedom of expression, and accountability for abuses.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

In contrast with 2014, there were no reports government security forces committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

On May 31, six Ministry of Interior personnel, including three high-ranking officers, received jail terms ranging from one to five years for the November 2014 beating death of inmate Hasan al-Shaikh at Jaw Prison’s Reform and Rehabilitation Center.

Violent extremists perpetrated dozens of attacks against security officers and government officials during the year, killing three security officers and injuring many others. On July 28, a remotely detonated bomb in Sitra killed two police officers and wounded six others. On August 28, two homemade bombs in the village of Karanah killed a police officer and wounded seven others, including three civilians.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The constitution prohibits “harm[ing] an accused person physically or mentally.” Some domestic and international human rights organizations, as well as former detainees, reported instances of torture, abuse, and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Human rights groups reported prisoner accounts alleging security officials beat them, placed them in stress positions, humiliated them in front of other prisoners, deprived them of sleep and prayers, insulted them based on their religious beliefs, and subjected them to sexual harassment, including removal of clothing and threat of rape. Officials reportedly kept some detainees in solitary confinement, sometimes in extreme temperatures; poured cold water on them; and forced them to stand for long periods. Human rights organizations also reported authorities prevented some detainees from using toilet facilities, withheld food and drink, and denied medical treatment to injured or ill detainees and prisoners. Detainees also reported abuses and torture committed by security forces during searches and/or arrests at private residences. Most detainees alleging abuse were Shia. Detainees reported intimidation took place at the Ministry of Interior’s Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID) but claimed the most serious mistreatment took place at Jaw Prison after a riot in March. The ministry denied torture and abuse was systemic. The government reported it had equipped all interrogation rooms, including those at local police stations and the CID, with closed-circuit television cameras monitored at all times.

Some detainees at the CID reported security officials used physical and psychological mistreatment to extract confessions and statements under duress or to inflict retribution and punishment. In December 2014 the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission made an unannounced visit to the CID and found that officials kept some prisoners handcuffed for the duration of their time at the facility, provided food at irregular times, and restricted prisoner access to a single toilet. The group noted that while there were two interview rooms with video recording equipment, it was possible for interrogations to take place in other rooms.

The ombudsman reported it received 84 complaints against the CID and 83 against Jaw Prison from May 2014 to May. The ombudsman referred 40 of the cases against the CID and 24 against Jaw Prison for criminal or disciplinary procedures;

50 more cases were still under investigation. Defense attorneys reported authorities did not give them access to video evidence from interrogations.

Human rights groups reported authorities subjected children, sometimes under the age of 15, to various forms of mistreatment, including beating, slapping, kicking, and verbal abuse. The age of majority in Bahrain is 15, and the law considers all persons over this age to be adults. Authorities held detainees under the age of 15 at the Juvenile Care Center. When the PDRC visited the juvenile facility in January, there were 20 children in custody, including three detained for “protesting against public order and offending police officers.” The PDRC visited the CID in December 2014 and found that staff was not trained to treat special needs suspects or to treat those between the ages of 15 and 18 differently than adults.

On September 18, police fired rounds of tear gas in the Shia village of Malikiya; at least one canister landed in a soccer field where several teams of small children in uniforms were playing matches. Video captured the sound of the firing of five rounds and showed one canister landing near the children on the playing field. Social media widely distributed the video, but the government did not comment on the incident.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Human rights activists reported conditions in prisons and detention centers were harsh and sometimes life threatening due to overcrowding, physical abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care. Detainees and human rights organizations also reported abuse in official pretrial detention centers, as well as in Jaw Prison. Human rights groups alleged authorities mistreated youth at Jaw Prison.

Physical Conditions: Human rights organizations and prisoners reported gross overcrowding in detention facilities, especially at Jaw Prison. The government does not generally publish prison statistics; it noted, however, in 2014 that Jaw Prison held 2,626 inmates, more than twice its capacity of 1,200. In October the Ministry of Interior reported Jaw Prison had opened four new buildings during the year, raising the prison’s capacity to 2,337, and it had transferred male inmates under the age of 21 to new buildings for convicted youth at the Dry Dock facility. The ministry reported that as of October the prison population in Jaw Prison was eight persons above capacity. Observers reported that from 2013 to year’s end, the Jaw Prison population increased, perhaps to as high as 3,600 at times, while the

ombudsman reported the number of prison guards remained the same, at 23 for the day shift.

Human rights organizations estimated there were between 200 and 240 school-age boys in prison. The Interior Ministry held detainees under the age of 15 at the Juvenile Care Center, which according to a PDRC report was under capacity at the time of the commission's unannounced visit in January. In 2013 the Ombudsman's Office reported authorities held minors between ages 15 and 18 separately, but at the same facility as adults. In June authorities transferred convicted males between ages 15 and 20 from Jaw Prison into new buildings for convicted youth located at the Dry Dock facility but placed them in separate buildings from pretrial detainees, with one building for 15- to 17-year-olds and another for 18- to 21-year-olds. When a prisoner reaches the age of 21, authorities transferred the prisoner to the general population at Jaw Prison. On September 17, the Royal Charity Organization opened a branch of the Nasser Center for Rehabilitation and Vocational Training at Jaw Prison, and 37 incarcerated youth enrolled.

The government reported there were 11 prisoner deaths from May 2014 to May. The ombudsman investigated each death and detailed the circumstances in its annual report: four were determined to be from drug overdoses, two were the result of illness, two were suicides, one was reportedly due to natural causes, one death was still being investigated, and one was the November 2014 beating death of inmate Hasan al-Shaikh at Jaw Prison's Reform and Rehabilitation Center (see section 1.a.). Human rights organizations noted their concern about the health of prisoners with chronic medical conditions, including cancer.

Although the government reported potable water was available for all detainees and there were water coolers in all detention centers, there were reports of lack of access to water for drinking and washing, lack of shower facilities and soap, and unhygienic toilet facilities. There were also reports of air conditioning units not running in extremely hot weather. Human rights organizations reported food was adequate for most prisoners; however, those prisoners needing dietary accommodations due to medical conditions had difficulty receiving special dietary provisions. Other detainees reported physical abuse, verbal assault, and threats of sexual assault, as well as denial of sleep, prayer, and bathroom facilities.

There were no accommodations for persons with disabilities in prisons and detention centers. Human rights groups reported prisoners who became physically or mentally disabled while in custody relied on fellow prisoners for their care.

Prison overcrowding placed a strain on administration, leading to a high prisoner-to-guard ratio. Prisoners needing medical attention reported difficulty in alerting guards to their needs, and medical clinics at the facilities were understaffed. Prisoners with chronic medical conditions including sickle cell anemia, diabetes, and gout had difficulty accessing regular medical care. Those needing transportation to outside medical facilities reported delays in scheduling offsite treatment, especially those needing follow-up care for complex or chronic conditions. There were outbreaks of communicable diseases that spread quickly and severely, due to overcrowded conditions, lack of sanitation, and understaffed medical clinics.

On March 10, hundreds of prisoners at Jaw Prison participated in a riot. After the prison guard force was overwhelmed, prison officials called in Special Forces, according to the Ministry of Interior. Human rights organizations and social media postings identified the units as riot police. The ministry released video that showed prisoners shoved guards out of cellblocks, barricaded doors, and threw projectiles at police from the roof. The ministry reported the riot left 104 inmates and 141 police injured, with two police seriously wounded. Authorities reported no deaths. Human rights organizations reported authorities at the prison prevented injured inmates from receiving medical care. They also reported that authorities forced prisoners to cover bruises with clothing when receiving visitors after the riot or denied them visits until visible wounds had healed. The government denied these reports.

The riot caused significant damage to parts of the prison, forcing the prison administration to set up temporary shelters. In April human rights organizations reported that prisoners from the affected cellblocks were still living in tents in the prison yard with no toilet facilities. There were reports riot police physically and verbally mistreated them. Some inmates reported no access to showers for as long as three months. The Interior Ministry released video of one tent that showed prisoners in crowded conditions. There were also reports authorities partially shaved prisoners' heads to humiliate them, placed them in stress positions, made them mimic animals, and beat them. Detainees reported police who abused them self-identified as Jordanian Special Police Force (known as the Darak). Prosecutors charged more than 50 inmates in connection with the rioting. As of year's end, authorities reported the SIU continued to investigate alleged abuse in conjunction with the riot; the office had not announced any disciplinary or criminal proceedings.

Administration: The Ministry of Interior reported authorities registered the location of detainees from the moment of arrest. Authorities generally allowed prisoners to file complaints to judicial authorities without censorship, and officials from the Ombudsman's Office were available to respond to complaints. Human rights groups, however, reported some prisoners faced reprisals from prison staff for lodging complaints. Prisoners had access to visitors at least once a month, often more frequently, and authorities permitted them 30 minutes of calls each week, although authorities reportedly denied prisoners communication with lawyers and family members at times. Authorities generally permitted prisoners to practice their religion, but there were reports authorities sometimes denied prisoners access to religious services and prayer time.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities granted the Northern Ireland Cooperation Organization and other international organizations access to prison facilities throughout the year. Authorities permitted access for the NIHR, Ombudsman's Office, and PDRC, as well as the SIU. Some local and international human rights organizations expressed concern regarding the degree of independence of the domestic groups.

The SIU, formed in 2012, acted as a mechanism for the public to complain about prisoner mistreatment or conditions in prisons and detention facilities. The SIU reported it received 227 complaints through October, eight of which it referred to court; the remainder remained under investigation. The Office of the Ombudsman began monitoring prisons and detention centers in 2013, conducting announced and unannounced visits and accepting written and in-person complaints. From May 2014 until April, the office received 908 complaints. The ombudsman's annual report, released in June, described its work but did not list recommendations, unlike its first annual report.

On December 3, the NIHR published its second annual report, which covered 2014. The NIHR reported it received 88 complaints representing 119 complainants for 2014 and an additional 124 requests for assistance and legal advice. Separately, the NIHR reported it visited Jaw prison and interviewed more than 40 prisoners, and that it had followed complaints from inmates' families regarding alleged denial of medical treatment.

From the end of 2014 through 2015, the PDRC conducted unannounced visits at a number of detention facilities, including the CID, Juvenile Care Center, Women's Detention Center, Women's Reformation and Rehabilitation Center, and four police directorates; it posted reports on these facilities on its website. The PDRC

made visits to Jaw Prison during the year, but as of year's end, it had not published its findings.

Improvements: The Ombudsman's Office, PDRC, and SIU expanded the number of abuse cases each undertook to investigate and received greater access to prisons, to interview detainees and prisoners, and to question security personnel. The ombudsman opened a permanent office at Jaw Prison to accept prisoner complaints. New buildings at Jaw Prison helped reduce prison overcrowding, and prisoners 21 years old and younger were moved from Jaw Prison into new buildings at the Dry Dock facility. There were increased educational opportunities for prisoners of all ages. The Ministry of Interior reported that by year's end the medical clinic at Jaw Prison was open around the clock, its supply of medicines was increased, and the prison had a maintenance team available 24 hours a day. The ministry also increased security measures at detention facilities to reduce smuggling of contraband.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, although local and international human rights groups continued to report the practice of detaining individuals without notifying them at the time of the arrest of the legal authority of the person conducting the arrest, the reasons for the arrest, and the charges against them. Human rights groups claimed the Ministry of Interior conducted many arrests at private residences early in the morning without either presenting an arrest warrant or presenting an inaccurate or incomplete one, but government sources disputed these claims.

In 2013 the king tightened penalties for those involved in terrorism, banned demonstrations in the capital, allowed for legal action against political associations accused of inciting and supporting violence and terrorism, and granted security services increased powers to protect society from terrorism, including the ability to declare a State of National Safety. Human rights groups asserted the 2013 laws conflicted with protections against arbitrary arrest and detention, including for freedom of speech.

In December 2014 authorities summoned leading opposition society Wifaq secretary general Sheikh Ali Salman for questioning and detained him the next day over concerns about political statements. Authorities charged him with four crimes associated with that speech: inciting a change of government by force, inciting hatred of a segment of society, inciting others to break the law, and insulting the

interior ministry. On June 16, the criminal court acquitted Salman of inciting political change by force but sentenced him to two years for insulting the Ministry of Interior and two additional years for insulting a group of persons and inciting others to break the law. He appealed, and the case continued at year's end. He remained in custody at Jaw Prison. His legal team claimed that the prosecution entered falsified evidence, including altered transcripts of speeches, and that prison officials had prevented them from passing legal documents to Salman, complicating their ability to mount a defense. In November the UN working group on arbitrary detention determined that authorities had arbitrarily detained Salman.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for internal security and controls the public security force and specialized security units responsible for maintaining internal order. The coast guard is under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry. The Bahrain Defense Force is primarily responsible for defending against external threats, while the Bahrain National Guard is also responsible for both external and internal threats. Security forces effectively maintained order and generally responded in a measured way to violent attacks.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces during the year, although impunity remained a problem. In 2012 the government established the SIU to investigate and refer cases of security force misconduct to courts. In September the SIU reported it received 25 complaints that month, including 17 complaints of mistreatment and eight alleging torture. As of October the government reported the SIU had investigated 227 incidents, of which eight cases had gone to court; the rest were either still under investigation or were closed. Of those that went to court, one case was acquitted, and the SIU appealed the verdict. The Ministry of Interior reported as of year's end, 32 police officers were in jail, including 22 convicted in the security court and 10 convicted in civilian criminal courts. Another 21 officers awaited trial. The ministry also reported that, since issuance of the BICI report in 2011, the government fired 27 officers for misconduct and reassigned eight. The ministry generally did not release the names of officers convicted, demoted, reassigned, or fired for misconduct. Many human rights groups asserted that investigations into police abuse were slow and ineffective.

On January 20, police fired birdshot at close range at Mohsen Abdulla and reportedly injured him, while he was holding up a picture of Wifaq secretary general Sheikh Ali Salman during a protest. The Interior Ministry stated it was

investigating the incident, and press reported authorities had remanded an unnamed police officer to custody for seven days for the incident. There was no further information on the case at year's end.

On January 30, police shot at rioters in Diraz and hit 14-year-old Mohammed Mahdi al-Sawad, who was playing outside of his grandparent's house. The shotgun pellets reportedly blinded him in one eye. The SIU investigated the incident, but there was no further information at year's end.

In addition to establishing an independent Ombudsman's Office at the Ministry of Interior in 2012, the king issued a decree to create an independent Office for the Inspector General at the Bahrain National Security Agency. These independent offices were responsible for addressing cases of mistreatment and abuse; they were operational throughout the year. It was unclear what role the security agency's inspector general played in investigating complaints.

In 2012 the interior minister approved a new police code of conduct that requires officers to abide by 10 principles, including limited use of force and zero tolerance for torture and mistreatment. According to government officials, the code forbids the use of force "except when absolutely necessary." The Royal Police Academy included the code in its curriculum in 2012 and provided new recruits with copies in English and Arabic. The Ministry of Interior reported it took disciplinary action against officers who did not comply with the code.

The Interior Ministry's Ombudsman's Office maintained a hotline for citizens to report police abuse, but human rights groups reported many citizens hesitated to report abuse for fear of retribution. As of October the police hotline had received 268 calls. The ministry reported that as of October it had received five claims for compensation for damages caused by police; two were resolved through the courts and three were outstanding. The ombudsman handled a separate claim for damages to property due to police using tear gas; authorities compensated the complainant.

Starting in 2012 the Ministry of Interior participated in training courses at the International Institute of Higher Studies in Criminal Sciences in Siracusa, Italy. Ministry officers continued to receive human rights training.

In November the government reported that 504 community police recruits graduated from the Royal Police Academy during the year, bringing the total number of community police to approximately 1,500. The formation of the

community police program, which recruits individuals to work in their own neighborhoods, responded to the BICI report recommendation on integrating Shia citizens into police forces.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law stipulates law enforcement officials may arrest individuals without a warrant only if they are caught committing certain crimes for which there is sufficient evidence to press charges. Local activists reported police sometimes made arrests without presenting a warrant.

By law the arresting authority must interrogate an arrested individual immediately and cannot detain the person for more than 48 hours, after which authorities must either release the detainee or transfer the person to the Public Prosecutor's Office for further questioning. The Public Prosecutor's Office is required to question the detainee within 24 hours, and the detainee has the right to legal counsel during questioning. To hold the detainee longer, the Public Prosecutor's Office must issue a formal detention order based on the charges against the detainee.

Authorities may extend detention up to seven days for further questioning. If authorities require any further extension, they must bring the detainee before a judge, who may authorize a further extension not exceeding 45 days. The High Criminal Court must authorize any extensions beyond that period and any renewals at 45-day intervals. In the case of alleged acts of terror, law enforcement officials may detain individuals for five days, with a 10-day extension granted by the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the initial detention authorized by this office can be 60 days. A functioning system of bail provides maximum and minimum bail amounts based on the charges. The bail law allows the presiding judge to determine the amount within these parameters on a case-by-case basis. In most cases attorneys must seek a court order to confer with clients. The state provides counsel to indigent detainees.

According to reports by local and international human rights groups, authorities held some detainees for weeks with limited access to outside resources. There were cases in which authorities denied detainees access to lawyers, sometimes for long periods (and at times until the day of their trials), and authorities did not formally announce charges. The government sometimes withheld information from detainees and their families about the detainees' whereabouts for days or weeks. Judges often denied bail, even for nonviolent charges, and were not required to state a reason.

On August 18, authorities arrested former opposition member of parliament Sheikh Hassan Issa at the airport upon his return from abroad. According to Wifaq, investigators at the CID prohibited Issa's lawyers from speaking to him and from being present during his questioning. Authorities allowed Issa to meet with his lawyers only after the lawyers filed multiple requests.

Arbitrary Arrest: Human rights groups reported the Ministry of Interior sometimes arrested individuals for activities such as calling for protests, expressing their opinion either in public or on social media, and associating with persons of interest to law enforcement. Some of these detained individuals reported arresting forces did not show them warrants. There were some reports security forces searched homes and damaged property without providing compensation.

On July 2, police summoned a senior member of Wifaq and former president of the capital governorate's municipal council, Majeed Milad, to the Houra Police Station and arrested him. Prosecutors charged him with "incitement of hatred against the regime and contempt for the same," in connection with a speech he gave at a Ramadan gathering in Sitra. His lawyers told the judge in court that authorities had not allowed them to meet with him; the lawyers said that the Houra Police Station wanted permission from the Sitra Police Station for a visit, and the Sitra Police Station wanted a court order before it would give its permission. On November 11, a criminal court found him guilty and sentenced him to two-years in prison. His lawyers planned to appeal.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, it remained vulnerable to political pressures, especially in cases involving political opposition figures. The judiciary has two branches: the civil law courts deal with all commercial, civil, and criminal cases, including family issues of non-Muslims; and the sharia law courts handle personal status cases of Muslims. The government subdivided the sharia courts into Sunni and Ja'fari sharia courts. Royal family members and foreign judges serving on limited-term contracts (which are subject to government approval for renewal and residence in-country) were significantly represented among the approximately 160 judges. The Supreme Judicial Council is responsible for supervising the work of the courts, including judges, and the Office of the Public Prosecutor.

Trial Procedures

The constitution presumes defendants are innocent until proven guilty. By law authorities should inform detainees of the charges against them upon arrest. Civil and criminal trial procedures provide for a public trial. There are no jury trials. A panel of three judges makes the rulings. Defendants have the right to prompt consultation with an attorney of their choice within 48 hours (unless the government charges them pursuant to counterterrorism legislation). The government provides counsel at public expense to indigent defendants. No law governs defendants' access to government-held evidence, and such evidence was available at the discretion of the court. Defendants have the right to present witnesses and evidence on their behalf and question witnesses against them. Defendants are not compelled to testify or to confess guilt and have the right to appeal.

Women's legal rights varied according to Shia or Sunni interpretations of Islamic law (see section 6).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Human rights organizations and opposition groups reported authorities targeted many of those arrested because of their political activism. The government denied holding any political prisoners. Authorities held some high-profile prisoners separately from the general prison population; there were reports authorities held them in better conditions.

Beginning in 2011 the country experienced a period of prolonged unrest, including mass demonstrations calling for political reform. According to local human rights groups, authorities detained or imprisoned many individuals for activities related to these protests, including leaders or prominent members of political groups and societies. These included Ibrahim Sharif, former secretary general of the secular Wa'ad political society, and Shaikh Mohammed Ali al-Mahfoodh, secretary general of the dissolved Shia opposition political society Amal. International observers reported irregularities in their trials, and defense lawyers noted that confessions that they insisted authorities extracted through torture remained admissible in court. They also asserted the verdicts were politically motivated and based on the defendants' opposition to, and in some cases advocacy for the violent overthrow of, the government.

On June 19, authorities pardoned and released Ibrahim Sharif, but they rearrested him on new charges after 23 days (see section 2.a.). Many other political detainees remained in prison as of year's end.

On March 27, the Ministry of Interior arrested Fadhel Abbas, secretary general of the Democratic Unity Gathering Society (al-Wahdawi), in relation to a tweet sent by the al-Wahdawi political society that criticized the country's military involvement in Yemen. On June 28, he was sentenced to five years in prison for "spreading false information that could harm the military operations of Bahrain and its allies" in Yemen. Following Abbas' detention the ministry announced it had taken steps to dissolve the society for "undermining national security." He appealed, and his appeal continued at year's end.

See section 1.d. for information about the arrest and detention of Wifaq secretary general Sheikh Ali Salman, who was detained in December 2014 and remained in prison on appeal.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens may bring civil suits before a court seeking cessation of or damages for some types of human rights violations. In many such situations, however, the law prevents citizens from filing civil suits against security agencies.

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

Although the constitution prohibits such actions, the government violated prohibitions against interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence. Human rights organizations reported security forces sometimes entered homes without authorization and destroyed or confiscated personal property. Reports indicated security forces sometimes failed to identify themselves, to inform the arrested individual of the reasons for arrest, to show arrest warrants, or to inform family members of the reasons for arrest or location of arrested individuals. The law requires the government to obtain a court order before monitoring telephone calls, e-mail, and personal correspondence. Many Shia citizens and human rights organizations believed there were police informer networks, including ones that targeted or used children under 18 years of age.

Reports also indicated the government used computer programming to spy on political activists and members of the opposition inside and outside the country.

According to local and international human rights groups, security officials sometimes threatened detainees' family members with reprisals for the detainee's

unwillingness to cooperate during interrogations and refusal to sign confession statements.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, “provided that the fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine are not infringed, the unity of the people is not prejudiced, and discord and sectarianism are not aroused.” In practice the government limited freedom of speech and press through active prosecution of individuals under libel, slander, and national security laws that targeted civilian and professional journalists, and by passing legislation to limit speech in print and social media.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The law forbids any speech that infringes on public order or morals. While individuals openly expressed critical opinions regarding domestic political and social issues in private settings, those who publicly expressed such opinions often faced repercussions. During the year the government took steps against what it considered acts of civil disobedience, which included critical speech, under charges of unlawful assembly or “insulting the king.” In February 2014 the government issued an amendment to the penal code that increased penalties to no less than one year and no more than seven years in prison, plus a fine, for anyone who “offends the monarch of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the flag, or the national emblem.”

On July 11, authorities arrested former Wa’ad secretary general Ibrahim Sharif after he delivered a speech calling for reforms and making reference to the “embers of revolution.” The prosecutor charged Sharif with “promoting political change through forceful means.” His trial was underway at the end of the year. His arrest came 23 days after the king pardoned him for charges stemming from involvement in the 2011 unrest, for which Sharif had spent more than four years in prison (see section 1.e.).

In September 2014 authorities arrested women’s rights activist Ghada Jamsheer for a series of tweets about corruption at a local hospital and charged her with 10 different crimes, including defamation. Beginning in October 2014, she had a series of trials, which continued at year’s end. Jamsheer remained free on bail.

In December 2014 a court sentenced Zainab al-Khawaja to three years in prison and a fine of 3,000 dinars (\$8,100) for pulling a picture of the king off a courtroom wall and tearing it. Al-Khawaja appealed the verdict, and in October her sentence was reduced to one year. She was also sentenced in June to nine months in prison for trespassing; this case was pending appeal at year's end, and she remained free on bail.

Press and Media Freedoms: The government did not own any print media, but the Information Affairs Authority (IAA) and other government entities exercised considerable control over privately owned domestic print media.

The government owned and operated all domestic radio and television stations. Audiences generally received radio and television broadcasts in Arabic, Farsi, and English from countries in the region, including by satellite, without interference. The IAA reviewed all books and publications prior to issuing printing licenses. The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs reviewed books that discussed religion.

On August 6, the IAA suspended the independent newspaper *al-Wasat*, stating the paper violated the law with “repeated dissemination of information that affects national unity and the Kingdom’s relationship with other countries.” The IAA allowed the paper to resume publication on August 8.

Violence and Harassment: According to local journalists, authorities harassed, arrested, or attacked journalists and photographers due to their reporting. Authorities claimed some individuals who identified themselves as journalists and photographers, however, associated with violent opposition groups and produced propaganda and recruiting videos for these groups. The government refused visas to some international media representatives. The government sentenced several journalists and bloggers arrested in 2014 to prison for social media postings.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Government censorship occurred. IAA personnel actively monitored and blocked stories on matters deemed sensitive, especially those related to sectarianism, national security, or criticism of the royal family, the Saudi royal family, or the judiciary. Journalists widely practiced self-censorship. Some members of the media reported government officials contacted editors directly and told them to stop writing about certain subjects or told them not to publish a press release or story.

The press and publications law prohibits anti-Islamic content in the media and mandates imprisonment for “exposing the state’s official religion for offense and

criticism.” The law states that “any publication that prejudices the ruling system of the country and its official religion can be banned from publication by a ministerial order.”

Government authorities continued to ban several books that were part of the country’s 2012 international book fair. Index on Censorship, an international NGO that supports freedom of expression, reported the IAA’s Press and Publications Directorate banned and confiscated all copies of the book *Political Organizations and Societies in Bahrain*, coauthored by Bahraini writer Abbas al-Murshid, and another book by al-Murshid, *Bahrain in the Gulf Gazetteer*. Additionally, a number of books remained banned from 2010, including the Arabic translation of *The Personal Diary of Charles Belgrave* and *Unbridled Hatreds: Reading in the Fate of Ancient Hatreds*, by Bahraini author Nader Kadim.

Libel/Slander Laws: The government enforced libel and national security-related laws restricting freedom of the press. The penal code prohibits libel, slander, and “divulging secrets” and stipulates a punishment of imprisonment for no more than two years or a fine of no more than 200 dinars (\$540). Application of the slander law was selective.

National Security: National security-related law provides for fines of as much as 10,000 dinars (\$27,000) and prison sentences of at least six months for criticizing the king or inciting actions that undermine state security, as well as fines of up to 2,000 dinars (\$5,400) for 14 related offenses. Punishable activities include publicizing statements issued by a foreign state or organization before obtaining the consent of the IAA, publishing any reports that may adversely affect the dinar’s value, reporting any offense against a head of a state that maintains diplomatic relations with the country, and publishing offensive remarks about an accredited representative of a foreign country due to acts connected with the person’s position.

Internet Freedom

More than 90 percent of citizens had access to the internet. The government restricted internet freedom and monitored individuals’ online activities, including via social media, leading to legal action and punishment of some internet users.

On April 2, police arrested Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) president Nabeel Rajab for tweets that criticized Saudi-led bombing in Yemen and treatment of prisoners in Jaw Prison and held him in custody for investigation. On May 14,

he lost his appeal of the six-month sentence he received in connection with a previous arrest in October 2014, on charges of “publicly insulting official institutions.” On July 12, the king pardoned Rajab in connection with the 2014 arrest, and the Ministry of Interior released him. As of year’s end, the government maintained a ban prohibiting him from traveling outside the country. There was no further information on the investigation in connection with his April arrest.

In 2013 the Ministry of Communication blocked 70 websites in accordance with laws passed following parliament’s recommendations. The government stated that it took this action to prevent access to “terrorist materials,” but NGOs asserted many of the websites featured only political speech. As of year’s end, the websites were intermittently accessible.

In 2012 the governmental Telecommunications Regulatory Authority ordered service providers to block internet users’ access to websites officials considered antigovernment, anti-Islamic, or likely to incite sectarian tensions. Many of the blocked websites featured live-streaming audio or video content. The government sometimes blocked the websites of the BCHR, the online newspaper *Bahrain Mirror*, and the social forum *Bahrain Online*. Other websites reportedly blocked included sites that provided proxy or anonymity tools.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom and cultural events. Some academics engaged in self-censorship, avoiding discussion of contentious political issues.

Twelve teachers, including the president of the Bahrain Teachers’ Society Mahdi Abu Deeb, remained in prison following their dismissal from public positions as a consequence of the 2011 unrest.

Human rights advocates claimed the government unfairly distributed university scholarships and used anti-Shia bias when admitting students into certain programs. In 2011 the government instituted interviews into the university selection process, partially to correct for grade inflation, as there is no national standardized test to account for different grading practices across secondary schools; however, students reported authorities asked them about their and their families’ political beliefs as part of the interviews. The government maintained it distributed all scholarships and made all placements based on merit.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for the right of free assembly, but the law restricts the exercise of this right. The government limited and controlled political gatherings and denied permits for organized demonstrations. In contrast with last year, there were no authorized demonstrations, although the Ministry of Interior generally did not intervene in peaceful unauthorized demonstrations. The ministry reported it did not approve any major demonstrations during the year due to past failures by organizers to marshal their own events. Political societies, however, reported that, in contrast with prior years when the ministry rejected numerous permit requests submitted according to law through local police stations, police stations refused even to accept permit requests, whether delivered by hand, by registered post, or by fax. The opposition group Wifaq reported police refused to consider more than 131 applications from January through October; its last approval for a march came in December 2014.

According to the Interior Ministry, to obtain permission for a public gathering, three persons from the locality where the event will take place must sign a written request and submit it to the chief of public security three days in advance. The law outlines the locations and times during which it prohibits functions, including areas close to hospitals, airports, commercial locations, security-related facilities, and downtown Manama. In addition to the locations listed in the law, the chief of public security may change the time, place, or route of the event if there is a possibility that it would cause a breach to public order. The law states mourners may not turn funeral processions into political rallies and that security officials may be present at any public gathering.

The law states every public gathering shall have a committee consisting of a head and at least two members. The committee is responsible for supervising and preventing any illegal acts during the function. According to the law, the Ministry of Interior is not obligated to justify why it approves or denies requests to allow protests. The penal code penalizes any gathering “of five or more individuals” that is held for the “purpose of committing crimes or inciting others to commit crimes.” Lawyers asserted authorities should not prevent demonstrations in advance based on assumptions crimes would be committed. Authorities prohibited the use of vehicles in any demonstration, protest, or gathering unless organizers obtained special written permission from the head of public security.

Organizers of an unauthorized gathering faced prison sentences of three to six months. The minimum sentence for participating in an illegal gathering is one month, and the maximum is two years. Authorities gave longer sentences for cases where demonstrators used violence in an illegal gathering. The maximum fine is 200 dinars (\$540). The law regulates election campaigning and prohibits political activities at worship centers, universities, schools, government buildings, and public institutions. The government did not allow individuals to use mosques, maatams (Shia religious community centers), or other religious sites for political gatherings. During the year authorities questioned and detained some political society officials for discussing political matters in religious venues.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association, but the government limited this right. Although the government does not allow the formation of political parties, it authorized registered political societies to run candidates for office and to participate in other political activities.

In 2013 the minister of justice issued an order stipulating political societies should coordinate their contacts with foreign diplomatic or consular missions, foreign governmental organizations, or representatives of foreign governments with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which can elect to send a representative to the meeting. In July 2014 the government actively enforced the order when it summoned two leaders of Wifaq for questioning for meeting a visiting foreign official without seeking government permission. There were no further reports of the government enforcing this order.

The government required all groups to register, including civil society groups with the Ministry of Social Development, political societies with the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, and labor unions with the Ministry of Labor. The government decided whether a group was social or political in nature, based on its proposed bylaws. The law prohibits any activity by an unlicensed society, as well as any political activity by a licensed civil society group. A number of unlicensed societies were active in the country.

In 2013 the prime minister issued a decree directing government agencies to take action against “unlicensed organizations that provoke terrorist acts and sow sectarianism.” Following the decree the Ministry of Justice filed a lawsuit against individual members of the unlicensed Islamic Ulema Council. In June 2014 the High Administrative Court of Appeals upheld the High Administrative Court’s

decision to dissolve the council. In April the Court of Cassation rejected the Islamic Ulema Council's appeal.

To apply for registration, a political society must submit its bylaws signed by all founding members, a list of all members and copies of their residency cards, and a financial statement identifying the society's sources of funding and bank information. The society's principles, goals, and programs must not run counter to sharia or national interest, as interpreted by the judiciary, nor may the society base itself on sectarian, geographic, or class identity. A number of societies operated outside of these rules, and some functioned on a sectarian basis.

A civil society group applying for registration must submit its bylaws signed by all founding members, together with minutes of the founding committee's meetings containing the names, professions, places of residence, and signatures of all founding members. The law grants the Ministry of Social Development the right to reject the registration of any civil society group if it finds the society's services unnecessary, already provided by another society, contrary to state security, or aimed at reviving a previously dissolved society. Associations whose applications the authorities reject or ignore may appeal to the High Civil Court, which may annul the ministry's decision or refuse the appeal.

Many NGOs and civil society activists asserted the Ministry of Social Development routinely exploited its oversight role to stymie the activities of NGOs and other civil society organizations. While some local NGOs asserted bureaucratic incompetence characterized the ministry's dealings with NGOs, many others stated officials actively sought to undermine some groups' activities and imposed burdensome bureaucratic procedures on NGO board members and volunteers. The Justice and Interior Ministries must vet funding from international sources, and authorities sometimes did not authorize it.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

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

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government did not always respect these rights.

The government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern.

Foreign Travel: The law provides the government may reject for “reasonable cause” applications to obtain or renew passports, but the applicant has the right to appeal such decisions before the High Civil Court. Individuals, including citizens of other countries, reported authorities banned them from travel out of the country due to unpaid debt obligations or other fiduciary responsibilities with private individuals or with lending institutions. Authorities relied on determinations of “national security” when adjudicating passport applications. Authorities prevented several activists from leaving the country. For example, activists Nabeel Rajab and Ghada Jamsheer both reported travel bans in 2015; Jamsheer’s ban was eventually lifted.

Citizenship: Government decisions to revoke citizenship, as a punitive measure for both criminal and political cases, continued, and they may have resulted in statelessness for some individuals who do not hold dual nationality. While as of year’s end, the government had not initiated deportation procedures against any individuals whose citizenship it had revoked, some had been taken to court accused of living in the country illegally. Some of their family members, especially females and minor children, reported difficulties renewing their own passports and residence cards and obtaining birth certificates for children. In July 2014 the king ratified amendments to the law stipulating the government may revoke citizenship upon request by the interior minister and approval of the cabinet concerning any naturalized person who has violated specific conditions. There is no procedure for accused persons to mount a defense prior to having their citizenship revoked. The NIHR strongly criticized the government’s citizenship revocation policies in its 2013 annual report.

On January 31, the Bahrain News Agency (BNA) named 72 individuals who had their citizenship revoked but did not specify what violation each committed. The BNA instead provided a list of violations that may have led the authorities to act, including defaming the image of the regime and defaming brotherly countries. Authorities did not notify these individuals, who learned about the decision from the press.

In July 2014 the Interior Ministry's Immigration Directorate summoned 10 Bahrainis, whose citizenship the government revoked for politically motivated reasons in 2012 and against whom it filed criminal lawsuits, requesting them to defend their legal status and indicate whether they had found other citizens willing to sponsor them. In October 2014 a court found them guilty of being in the country without sponsors and fined each 100 dinars (\$270). Their appeal hearing continued on December 7.

In September 2014 a court adjourned an appeal brought by Ibrahim Karimi, who filed a constitutional challenge to his citizenship revocation--the only one to do so among the 31 whose citizenship was revoked in 2012. The court had not set a date for the next session of the case by year's end. On September 29, authorities arrested him on new charges related to social media postings and searched his house; authorities also again charged him with living in the country illegally.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: 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. 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. Such individuals generally had access to certain social services, education, and employment. The foreign minister told media in September that Bahrain had accepted "thousands" of Syrian refugees; however, UNHCR reported that as of June, there were 355 refugees registered with the agency.

Stateless Persons

Individuals generally derive citizenship from the father, but the king may confer or revoke it. The government charged individuals whose citizenship it revoked with violating immigration law. The law does not entitle noncitizen men who marry citizen women to citizenship, and as a result, the law does not grant children from such marriages citizenship. Human rights organizations reported that if a child's father was unknown, is stateless, or unable to present his documents from the country of his citizenship, the child is stateless, even if born in Bahrain to a Bahraini mother. It was unknown how many stateless persons resided in the country. Stateless persons had limited access to social services, education, and employment. There were reports authorities refused applications for birth certificates and passports for children whose Bahraini fathers were in prison

because the fathers were not able to submit the applications in person (see section 6, Children).

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Citizens have limited ability to choose their government and their political system. The constitution provides for a democratically elected Council of Representatives, the lower house of parliament. A constitutional amendment ratified in 2012 permits the king to dissolve the Council of Representatives, but it requires that he first consult the presidents of the upper and lower houses of parliament as well as the head of the Constitutional Court. The king also has the power to amend the constitution and to propose, ratify, and promulgate laws.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Approximately 52 percent of eligible voters participated in parliamentary elections held in November 2014. Turnout was significantly lower in opposition districts, due to a decision to boycott by the main opposition political societies, who expressed a lack of confidence that the elections would produce a parliament that they believed would address their concerns in a fully representative way. Among these concerns, the opposition contended the government delineated voter districts to provide for its desired electoral outcomes and marginalize opposition-majority districts. Prior to the election, in January 2014 the government relaunched the National Dialogue, which served as a forum for the government, legislature, and political societies to discuss political solutions to such issues, but it ended eight months later with little progress.

The government did not permit international election monitors. Domestic monitors generally concluded that authorities administered the elections without significant irregularities. There were, however, broader concerns regarding voting district boundaries and limitations on freedom of expression and association.

Violent oppositionists intimidated candidates, including through arson attacks on their personal property and businesses. Boycotters pressured other candidates to withdraw from the race.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The government did not allow the formation of political parties, but more than a dozen “political societies” developed political platforms, held internal elections, and hosted political gatherings.

Individuals active with opposition political society groups faced repercussions during the year (see section 1.e., Political Prisoners).

Participation of Women and Minorities: The November 2014 elections selected three women to parliament's 40-member lower elected house. In December 2014 the royal court appointed nine women to the Shura Council, the appointed 40-member upper house. Also in December 2014, the prime minister appointed a woman as a cabinet member (there are 23 cabinet seats). There were six female civil court judges, six female members of the Public Prosecutor's Office, and one female judge on the Constitutional Court.

Shia and Sunni citizens have equal rights before the law, but Sunnis dominated political life, while the majority of citizens are Shia. There were 13 Shia members in the newly elected parliament. The newly appointed Shura Council included 17 Shia members, one Jewish member, and one Christian member. Five of the appointed 23 cabinet ministers were Shia, including one of the deputy prime ministers.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not implement the law adequately, and some officials reportedly engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The law subjects government employees at all levels to prosecution if they use their positions to engage in embezzlement or bribery, either directly or indirectly. Penalties can be up to 10 years' imprisonment.

Corruption: The Bahrain National Audit Bureau is responsible for combating government corruption. Segments of its most recent report were released publicly in November; however, the full report was not published or made available online. The report noted the government's failure to implement the prior reports' recommendations, which detailed corruption, irregularities, and mismanagement in most government ministries.

Significant areas of government activity, including the security services and the Bahrain Defense Force, lacked transparency, and the privatization of public land continued to be a concern among opposition groups.

On March 8, legislators announced they were going to investigate alleged excessive expenditure of 400 million dinars (\$1.06 billion) of public funds by

government departments and state-linked companies. On May 19, the audit bureau released its 2014 report internally but not publicly. According to the media, the report said the bureau had referred five “major” cases of suspected corruption to the Public Prosecutor’s Office for investigation, but it gave no details on the cases. Unlike in previous years, the bureau did not report that it referred any corruption cases to criminal courts. On December 9, however, the Ministry of Interior announced it had transferred 64 corruption cases to the Public Prosecutor’s Office during the year.

Financial Disclosure: The law does not require government officials to make financial disclosures.

Public Access to Information: The government generally did not provide citizens access to government-held information. Most companies and ministries have public websites, but specific budgetary information, such as individual expenditures and income, was not available. Other officials resisted efforts in some parts of the government to improve transparency.

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

Government officials sometimes met with local human rights NGOs but generally were not responsive to the views of NGOs they believed were politicized and unfairly critical of the government.

Domestic human rights groups operated with some government restrictions. These groups included the Bahrain Human Rights Society, the primary independent and licensed human rights organization in the country; the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, which the government officially dissolved in 2004; and the unlicensed Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights. The unlicensed umbrella human rights organization Bahrain Human Rights Observatory also issued numerous reports and had strong ties to international human rights NGOs. The licensed Bahrain Human Rights Watch continued to issue numerous reports and had strong ties to international NGOs.

Some domestic and international human rights groups faced significant difficulties operating freely and interacting with international human rights organizations. Some international human rights activists reported authorities barred them from entering the country. The government maintained the five-day “working week” visa implemented in 2012 for representatives from international human rights

organizations, despite local organizations' objections that the majority of protests and incidents occurred during the weekend and the five-day visa would prevent foreign observers from accurately documenting and reporting on events. The government sometimes harassed and deprived local NGO leaders of due process. On February 16, masked police arrested Hussain Jawad, chairman of the European-Bahraini Organization for Human Rights, at his home, which they also searched. The officers did not present a warrant or inform him of the reason for his arrest or the search. Officials charged him with raising funds domestically and from abroad without authorization. His trial continued at year's end.

Government officials met with local human rights organizations ahead of the UN Human Rights Council sessions in March and September. Activists who participated in the meeting with government officials, or who participated in the council session, did not report increased harassment.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government permitted a visit by Amnesty International in January, but it barred entry to some representatives of international NGOs, including Human Rights Watch. Authorities cancelled the scheduled visit of Juan Mendez, UN special rapporteur for torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment, in 2013 and did not set a new date.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa continued chairing the High Coordinating Committee for Human Rights. The Foreign Ministry drafted the country's voluntary interim report for the Universal Periodic Review session in September 2014 and consulted with human rights NGOs beforehand.

In 2011 the government convened the BICI, whose staff included international human rights experts, and tasked it with investigating allegations of human rights violations--including reports of police brutality, arrests, disappearances, and torture, along with reports of violence by demonstrators against police--in early 2011. It presented recommendations for reform in late 2011, describing a "culture of impunity" in the security services and documenting excessive use of force, including torture and a range of other human rights violations by security forces during the unrest.

In line with the 2011 BICI report recommendations, the king issued a royal decree in 2013 to re-establish the country's National Human Rights Organization, now called the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR), to receive complaints

and investigate allegations of human rights violations. Throughout the year the NIHR conducted numerous human rights workshops, seminars, and training sessions, as well as prison visits, and referred numerous complaints to the Public Prosecutor's Office. It issued its first report in September 2014, containing a wide-ranging set of recommendations for government action to improve human rights conditions, and issued its second annual report in December. As of year's end, it had not yet issued its report on the Jaw Prison riot (see section 1.c., Prison and Detention Center Conditions). Although many observers viewed the NIHR as effectively resourced and independent, other human rights groups doubted the government would implement most of its recommendations and doubted its impartiality.

During the year the government also maintained the Ombudsman's Office within the Ministry of Interior, the SIU within the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Prisoner and Detainee Rights Commission in response to the BICI report's recommendations. These organizations worked with each other throughout the year.

Local and international observers and human rights organizations continued to view the BICI report as a standard against which to measure the country's progress on human rights reforms and expressed concern the government did not make significant progress on other BICI recommendations, including dropping charges against individuals engaged in nonviolent political expression, criminally charging security officers accused of abuse or torture, integrating Shia into security forces, and creating an environment conducive to national reconciliation.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution provides for equality, equal opportunity, and the right to medical care, welfare, education, property, capital, and work for all citizens. The government protected these rights unevenly, depending on an individual's social status, sect, or gender. The law deprives foreign workers, who comprised approximately one-half of the population, of many fundamental legal, social, and economic rights.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal. The law does not address spousal rape. Penalties for rape include life imprisonment and execution in cases where the victim is a minor younger than 16 years old or in cases where the rape leads to

the victim's death. From January through October, the Public Prosecutor's Office referred 45 cases of sexual harassment, which can include rape, to courts. There were reports of instances in which employers allegedly raped female domestic workers, but the victim did not seek legal redress, since victims cannot prove guilt in court without the testimony of witnesses to the crime. The Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS) temporarily sheltered approximately 150 women, most of whom were domestic workers, including at least one woman who reported rape. The society estimated hundreds of cases went unreported because domestic workers had difficulty leaving their places of work, or might not possess their passports or other identification needed to open a case.

No government policies or laws explicitly address domestic violence. Human rights organizations alleged spousal abuse of women was widespread. According to the BCHR, 30 percent of women had experienced some form of domestic abuse. Women rarely sought legal redress for violence due to fear of social reprisal or stigma. Authorities devoted little public attention to the problem. The government maintained the Dar al-Aman Shelter for women and children who were victims of domestic violence. The shelter had 16 apartments with accommodations for two women in each apartment. The shelter accommodated citizens and noncitizens and provided transportation for children to attend schools. Authorities stationed a policewoman at the shelter, which authorities did not identify on its exterior, to provide security. Victims of domestic violence had difficulty knowing who to contact or how to proceed when filing a complaint. Procedures required interviews of both the victim and the accused at the same police station; there were no provisions in place to prevent accused family members from having access to their victims.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law does not prohibit FGM/C, and there were no reports of the abuse.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: "Honor" killings are punishable under the law, but the penal code provides a lenient sentence for the killing of a spouse caught in the act of adultery, whether male or female. There were no reports of honor killings during the year.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment, including insulting or committing an indecent act towards a woman in public, with penalties of prison and fines. The government reported that from January through October, there were 164 cases of reported sexual harassment, and the Public Prosecutor's Office transferred 45 to court. Of those, 15 resulted in convictions; the remaining 30

cases were pending at year's end. Although the government sometimes enforced the law, sexual harassment remained a widespread problem for women, especially foreigners employed as domestic workers and in other low-level service jobs.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Health centers required women to obtain spousal consent to undergo sterilization; this consent requirement did not apply for provision of other family planning services.

Discrimination: Women faced discrimination under the law. A woman cannot transmit nationality to her spouse or children (see section 2.d., Stateless Persons). Women have the right to initiate divorce proceedings, but both Shia and Sunni religious courts may refuse the request, although the refusal rate was significantly higher in Shia courts than in Sunni courts, with Shia courts often refusing to grant the divorce due to differences in legal codes. In divorce cases, the courts routinely granted mothers custody of daughters younger than age nine and sons younger than age seven. Custody usually reverted to the father once girls and boys reached the ages of nine and seven, respectively. Regardless of custody decisions, the father retains guardianship, or the right to make all legal decisions for the child, until a child reaches the age of 21. A noncitizen woman automatically loses custody of her children if she divorces their citizen father "without just cause."

The basis for family law is sharia as interpreted by Sunnis and Shia. Only Sunni family law is codified, while Shia maintain separate judicial bodies composed of religious jurists charged with interpreting sharia. It was not always clear which courts have jurisdiction in Sunni-Shia marriages.

Women may own and inherit property and represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shia women may inherit all of their husband's property, while Sunni women inherit only a portion, as governed by sharia, and the brothers or other male relatives of the deceased divide the balance. Better-educated families used wills and other legal tools to mitigate the discriminatory effects of these rules.

Labor laws prohibit discrimination against women, but discrimination against women was systemic, especially in the workplace (see section 7.d.). The law prohibits wage discrimination based on gender. Although women held positions of authority in the government and private sector, they did not have proportional

representation. Cultural barriers and religious tradition sometimes hampered women's rights.

On June 1, Shia and Sunni mosques announced they would stop women from entering mosques after bomb attacks in Saudi Arabia targeted Shia mosques. Observers reported the ban on women to be a safety measure to prevent male bombers from entering mosques dressed as women. The ban, however, was short-lived.

Children

Birth Registration: Individuals derive citizenship from one's father or by decree from the king. Women cannot transmit their nationality to their children, rendering stateless some children of citizen mothers but noncitizen fathers (see section 2.d., Stateless Persons). Authorities do not register births immediately. From birth to the age of three months, the mother's primary health-care provider holds registration for the children. Upon reaching three months, authorities register the birth with the Ministry of Health Birth Registration Unit, which then issues the official birth certificate. The birth certificate does not include the child's religion. Children not registered before reaching their first birthday must obtain a registration by court order. The government does not provide public services to a child without a birth certificate.

The wife of imprisoned Wifaq secretary general Sheikh Ali Salman was unable to get a birth certificate and other civil documents for their young child while her husband was in prison. She reported that various authorities told her Salman would have to come into each of their offices in person to sign the applications. The Ministry of Interior did not facilitate transportation of prisoners to government offices to address administrative or financial matters, nor did it make these types of services available in detention facilities.

Education: Schooling is compulsory for children through age 14 and is provided free of charge to citizens and legal residents through grade 12. Authorities segregated government-run schools by gender, although the schools educated girls and boys with the same curricula and textbooks. Islamic studies based on Sunni doctrine are mandatory for all Muslim public school students and are optional for non-Muslim students; however, there is little provision for parents to request alternate religious instruction, including for the large population of Shia enrolled in public schools.

Child Abuse: NGOs reported an increase in child abuse cases in recent years, but they were unsure whether it reflected increases in abuse or greater willingness to report it. Sharia courts, not civil courts, address crimes involving child abuse, including violence against children. NGOs expressed concern over the lack of consistently written guidelines for prosecuting and punishing offenders and the leniency of penalties in child abuse cases. In March prosecutors reported they had received 33 cases of sexual abuse of children from the first of the year, many of whom family members had assaulted. Prosecutors also investigated three cases involving children lured online. In August the Ministry of Social Development released its report for 2014, which stated it had referred 119 boys and 98 girls under the age of 15 to its child protection unit for sex abuse cases and another 254 boys and 70 girls for physical abuse. The center received 44 cases of physical abuse on children under the age of five.

There were reports police approached children outside of schools and threatened or coerced them into becoming police informants.

Early and Forced Marriage: According to law the minimum age of marriage is 15 years for girls and 18 for boys, but special circumstances allow marriages below these ages with approval from a sharia court. The government made concerted efforts to draw attention to the dangers of early marriage for girls and the adverse effect on children's health.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: See information for girls under 18 in Women's section above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits exploitation of a child for various crimes, including prostitution. Penalties include imprisonment of no less than three months if the accused used exploitation and force to commit the crime and up to six years if the accused exploited more than one child, as well as penalties of at least 2,000 dinars (\$5,400) for individuals and at least 10,000 dinars (\$27,000) for organizations. Penalties vary depending on the specific law involved. The law also prohibits child pornography. There is no minimum age for consensual sex, as the law assumes there is no consensual sex outside of marriage.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html and country-

specific information
at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/bahrain.html.

Anti-Semitism

According to community members, there were between 36 and 40 Jewish citizens (six families) in the country. Some anti-Jewish political commentary and editorial cartoons occasionally appeared in print and electronic media, usually linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, without government response.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Persons with Disabilities

The law stipulates equal treatment for persons with disabilities with regard to employment, and violations of the law are punishable with fines. It was unclear whether the government enforced these laws. According to the government, it re-established in 2012 a committee originally formed in 2011 to care for persons with disabilities and included representatives from all relevant ministries, NGOs, and the private sector. The committee is responsible for monitoring violations against persons with disabilities; it was unclear whether the committee acted on any incidents during the year.

Authorities mandated a variety of governmental, quasi-governmental, and religious institutions to support and protect persons with disabilities. New public buildings in the Central Municipality must include facilities for persons with disabilities. The law, however, does not outline specific criteria for what authorities required for facilities to be accessible for persons with disabilities. The law does not mandate access to other nonresidential buildings for persons with disabilities. There was no information available regarding a law providing access for persons with disabilities to information and communication.

There was no information available on the responsibilities of government agencies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities or on actions taken by government agencies to improve respect for their rights. According to anecdotal evidence, however, such persons routinely lacked access to education and employment. The one government school for children with hearing disabilities did not operate past

the 10th grade. Some public schools had specialized education programs for children with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, speech disabilities, and Down syndrome, but the government did not fund private programs for children who could not find appropriate programs in public schools.

Eligible voters can vote either in their regular precincts or in a general polling station. The local precincts, which are mostly in schools, sometimes offered problems to those with mobility disabilities; however, the general polling stations are in public spaces such as malls, which allow for assistance devices. One candidate with disabilities in the November 2014 parliamentary election complained that access restrictions separated him from the other candidates at a function, as there was no ramp for his wheelchair to access the stage. There were also complaints there were no provisions made for those who were restricted to their house or a hospital to vote, as there was no absentee ballot system.

The law requires the government to provide vocational training for persons with disabilities who wish to work. The law also requires employers of more than 100 persons to hire at least 2 percent of its employees from the government's list of workers with disabilities. The government did not monitor compliance. The government placed persons with disabilities in some public-sector jobs.

In 2013 Minister of Social Development and Chairperson for the High Committee for Persons with Disabilities Fatima Mohammed al-Balooshi announced the launch of a National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in cooperation with the UN Development Program. At year's end the Ministry of Labor and Social Development continued to work with the UN agency on support activities connected to the strategy.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law grants citizenship to Arab applicants who have resided in the country for 15 years and non-Arab applicants who have resided in the country for 25 years. There was a lack of transparency in the naturalization process, and there were numerous reports authorities did not apply the citizenship law uniformly. There were allegations the government allowed foreign Sunni employees of the security services who had lived in the country for fewer than 15 years to apply for citizenship. There were also reports authorities had not granted citizenship to Arab Shia who had resided in the country for more than 15 years and non-Arab foreign residents who had resided more than 25 years. There were reports of general

discrimination, especially in employment practices, against Shia citizens of Persian ethnicity (Ajam).

Although the government asserted the labor code for the private sector applies to all workers, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and international NGOs noted foreign workers faced discrimination in the workplace (see section 7).

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

The law does not criminalize same-sex sexual activity between consenting persons who are at least 21 years of age. Society did not accept lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) activities, such as same-sex relationships and same-sex sexual activity, and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity occurred. There were no open manifestations of LGBTI activity in the country, such as gay pride parades. On rare occasions courts approved the issuance of new legal documents for those who have undergone gender reassignment surgeries.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

The media reported few cases of HIV/AIDS. There were no known reports of societal violence or discrimination against persons based on HIV/AIDS status, but medical experts acknowledged publicly that discrimination existed. The government mandated screening of newly arrived migrant workers for infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. At times in the past, the government deported migrant workers found to be HIV/AIDS positive, but the status of deportations during the year was unclear.

Other Societal Violence and Discrimination

The Ministry of Social Development continued to implement its national social and economic reconciliation plan Wi'da Wa'da. The ministry funded 20 local NGOs to promote reconciliation and solidarity and organized periodic workshops related to national unity and communication between all parties. The ministry established a High Committee for Advising Youth and Resolving Criminal Cases for youth involved in violent activity. The committee sought to limit children's participation in violent protests. Its strategy included organizing family consultations, ensuring students attend school, and holding parents responsible for their children's behavior.

The government's 2013 BICI follow-up report noted the Ministry of Education continued to work with United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization experts on incorporating human rights principles in textbooks. The report also indicated the ministry had signed cooperation agreements with the International Bureau of Education in Geneva.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution and labor code recognize the right to form independent trade unions and the right to strike, with significant restrictions. The law does not provide for the right to collective bargaining.

The law prohibits trade unions in the public sector. Public sector workers may join private sector trade unions and professional associations, although these entities cannot bargain on their behalf. The law also prohibits members of the military services and domestic workers from joining unions. Foreign workers, who comprised approximately 60 percent of the workforce, may join unions if they work in a sector that allows unions, although the law reserves union leadership roles for citizens. The law prohibits unions from engaging in political activities and requires all trade unions to affiliate with one of the country's two legal federations, the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) or the Bahrain Free Labor Union Federation (BFLUF).

The law specifies only a trade union can organize and declare legal strikes and imposes excessive requirements for legal strikes. The law prohibits strikes in 10 "vital" sectors--the scope of which exceeds international standards--including the oil, gas, education, telecommunications, transportation, and health sectors, as well as in pharmacies and bakeries. The law makes no distinction between "vital" and "nonvital" employees within these sectors. Workers must approve a strike with a simple majority by secret ballot and provide 15 days' notification to the employer before conducting a strike.

A 2012 law significantly amended the labor code as it pertains to trade unions and federations. The law allows multiple trade union federations but prohibits multisector labor federations and bars individuals convicted of violating criminal laws that lead to trade union or executive council dissolution from holding union leadership posts. The amendment gives the minister of labor, rather than the

unions, the right to select the federation to represent workers in national-level bargaining and international forums. In June 2014 authorities amended the private sector labor law, replacing “GFBTU” wherever it appeared in the legislation with the phrase “the appropriate federation designated by the minister of labor.” The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination, nor does it require re-instatement of workers fired for union activity.

The government generally respected freedom of association. Relations between the main federations and the Ministry of Labor were publicly contentious at times. The government sometimes interfered in GFBTU activities. The GFBTU alleged that the government intended the legal amendments allowing the minister of labor to select a representative union to undermine its position as the country’s representative labor federation. The ministry had consistently designated the GFBTU as the country’s representative, but during the year it designated the BFLUF to represent the country before the Arab Labor Organization.

Following a revision to the law, which provides for multiple trade union federations, in 2012 authorities established a second federation, BFLUF. Some workers and union affiliates complained union pluralism had resulted in company management interfering in union dues collection and workers’ chosen union affiliation, and in management choosing to negotiate with the union they found most favorable--to the detriment of existing collective bargaining agreements and the legitimate voice of workers.

During the year the government made efforts to provide for the re-instatement of workers dismissed or suspended during the 2011 State of National Safety. It continued working with the tripartite committee, formed in 2011 and consisting of a representative from the Ministry of Labor, the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and GFBTU, to address dismissals and reinstatements as part of the government’s response to recommendations set forth in the 2011 BICI. In March 2014, after signing a second tripartite agreement, the ILO dismissed the complaint filed in 2011. This agreement identified 165 cases to be resolved, and all parties reported positive progress on those reinstatements. Some re-instated workers, however, alleged some companies insisted they sign loyalty pledges and agreements to not strike, despite such requirements being illegal. Workers reported many cases of discrimination in hiring and promotion, including in the public sector. Some civil service employees, including in the Ministry of Education, reported authorities questioned them about their outside activities.

On February 28, more than 100 foreign workers of Mercury Middle East went on strike for nonpayment of salaries. On March 13, with the intervention of diplomats and the Labor Ministry, the strikers received their back wages.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor except in national emergencies, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. There were reports of forced labor in the construction and service sectors. The labor law covers foreign workers, except domestic workers, but enforcement was lax, and cases of debt bondage were common. There were also reports forced labor practices occurred among domestic workers and others working in the informal sector; labor laws did not protect most of these workers. In 2012 the government amended the labor law to provide domestic workers the right to see their terms of employment.

In many cases employers withheld passports, restricted movement, substituted contracts, or did not pay wages; some employers also threatened workers and subjected them to physical and sexual abuse. The Ministry of Labor reported complaints from domestic workers, mostly of unpaid wages. In 2013 the Ministry of Social Development took steps to fulfill its legal obligation under the trafficking in persons law to identify and protect foreign victims of trafficking, including by creating comprehensive guidelines and training government officials on the framework to protect trafficking victims.

Estimates of the proportion of migrant workers in the country under illegal “free visa” arrangements--a practice that can contribute to debt bondage--ranged from 10 to 25 percent. In numerous cases employers withheld salaries from foreign workers for months or years and refused to grant them permission to leave the country. Fear of deportation or employer retaliation prevented many foreign workers from complaining to authorities.

On June 28, the Labor Market Regulatory Authority announced an amnesty from July 1 through the end of the year aimed at allowing workers without work permits to either legalize their presence in Bahrain or return home without being “blacklisted.”

Also see the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 15 years, and the minimum age for hazardous work is 18. Children under 18 may not work in industries the Ministry of Health deemed hazardous or unhealthy, including construction, mining, and oil refining. Minors under the age of 18 may work no more than six hours a day--no more than four days consecutively--and may be present on the employment premises no more than seven hours a day. The Ministry of Labor made rare exceptions on a case-by-case basis for juveniles ages 14 or 15 who had an urgent need to assist in providing financial support for their families. Child labor regulations do not apply to family-operated businesses in which the only other employees are family members.

A 2012 labor law requires that before the Labor Ministry makes a final decision on allowing a minor to work, the prospective employer must present documentation from the minor's guardian giving the minor permission to work, proof the minor underwent a physical fitness examination to confirm suitability, and assurance from the employer the minor would not work in an environment the ministry deemed hazardous. Generally, the government effectively enforced the law.

There were some non-Bahraini children employed as domestic servants. Observers believed some Bahraini children worked in family-run businesses, but the practice did not appear widespread.

Also, see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/.

d. Discrimination with Respect for Employment and Occupation

The constitution provides for equality between men and women in political, social, cultural, and economic spheres without breaching the provisions of Islamic canon law. There are no specific protections regarding race, disability, language, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, HIV-positive status or having other communicable diseases, or social status. The government lacked any specific implementing regulations or processes to identify proactively cases of discrimination or to address and seek remedy for any cases of which they might become aware.

The government took steps to promote women's participation in the workforce, although women continued to face discrimination there, especially in fields

traditionally dominated by men, including leadership positions. Women reported having to work twice as hard as men to get recognition at work and often faced hiring difficulty because of a perception they would become pregnant or their family lives would interfere with their work.

As in 2014 the Ministry of Social Development continued to fund the Disabled Services Center, which helped train and find work for Bahrainis with disabilities. It remained rare, however, for persons with disabilities to find employment in positions of responsibility. Many work places remained difficult to access for those needing assistance due to a lack of ramps, narrow doorways, and unpaved parking lots.

Many of the workers in the country were foreign workers. There are no provisions to provide for equality in the hiring process. It was common for employers to advertise positions for specific nationalities or languages without justifying why only persons from that specific nationality or language group would be acceptable. Even for blue-collar jobs, such as those in fast food restaurants, it was common for employers to hire lower-level crew from one nationality and managerial staff from a second nationality.

Government institutions sometimes based their hiring decisions on a person's nationality, often without regard to qualifications. Some Bahraini teachers complained authorities ignored them for public school teaching jobs because authorities hired foreign teachers instead. Well qualified Bahrainis reported being paid less than certain foreign workers because those workers were of a preferred nationality.

Lack of transparency in hiring processes, especially for government positions, led to many complaints of discrimination based on sect or ethnicity. Human rights organizations reported managers sometimes did not hire qualified applicants because of the neighborhoods where they lived or their family names.

Shia reported unemployment in their communities was much higher than government estimates. Several international firms reported pressure not to promote Shia to positions of responsibility within their companies. Shia perceived that employers subjected them to different standards, and employers were more likely to fire them. Sunni citizens often received preference for employment in sensitive government positions, notably in the managerial ranks of the civil service and the military. Shia asserted they were unable to obtain government positions, especially in the security services, because of their religious affiliation.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national private-sector minimum wage. A standardized government pay scale covers public sector workers, with a set minimum of 300 dinars (\$810) per month. Citizens who earned less received a government stipend to offset the difference. There is no minimum wage for foreign workers in the public sector, although the government issued “guidelines” advising employers in the public and private sectors to pay a minimum of 150 dinars per month (\$405). There was no official poverty level.

Subject to the provisions of the private sector law, employers may not employ a worker for more than 48 hours per week. Employers may not employ Muslim workers during the month of Ramadan for more than six hours per day or 36 hours per week. The standard workday is eight hours, with a maximum of 10 hours allowed. Overtime rates are time-and-a-quarter during the day and time-and-a-half during the evening. It is mandatory for workers to receive 24 consecutive hours off per week, and the day set for weekly rest is Friday. If employers require a worker to work on a mandatory rest day, employers will pay the worker at time-and-a-half. A worker may not work on mandatory rest days for two consecutive weeks without personal written consent.

The Ministry of Labor sets occupational safety and health standards. The labor law and relevant protections apply to citizens and noncitizens alike, with the exception of domestic workers. The revised labor law improved the legal situation for many workers as it pertains to access to contracts and additional holidays, although it excludes domestic workers from the majority of protections.

The Labor Ministry is responsible for enforcing the labor law and mandating acceptable conditions of work. During the year the government employed 23 labor inspectors and eight safety inspectors. The ministry enforced occupational safety and health standards; it also used a team of eight engineers from multiple specialties primarily to investigate risks and standards at construction sites, which were the vast majority of worksites.

Several circumstances prompt inspections: a complaint made to the ministry; notification of a new worksite made to the ministry; a media article about a new worksite; or discovery of a new worksite by an inspector in an assigned geographic area.

Inspectors have the authority to levy fines and close worksites if employers do not improve conditions by specified deadlines. Penalties for violators range from 500 dinars (\$1,350) to 1,000 dinars (\$2,700) per violation or per worker affected, or both, as determined by a judge. A judge may also sentence violators to a minimum of three months in prison. For repeat violators the court may double the penalties. The ministry reported an unspecified number of violators were serving sentences related to labor condition violations during the year.

Despite the improvements NGOs feared resources for enforcement of the laws remained inadequate for the number of worksites and workers, that many worksites would not be inspected, and that the regulations would not necessarily deter violations.

A ministerial decree prohibits outdoor work between noon and 4 p.m. during July and August because of heat conditions. Authorities enforced the ban among large firms but, according to local sources, violations were common among smaller businesses. After inspecting 16,563 work sites, the Ministry of Labor reported 98 percent of inspected companies complied with regulations and 265 firms broke the law.

The government and courts generally worked to rectify abuses brought to their attention. Workers could lodge complaints with the Labor Ministry. The ministry reported it received 2,684 complaints brought during the year. Labor officials stated they resolved most cases through mediation. By law authorities who cannot settle complaints through arbitration must refer them to the court within 15 days. The vast majority of cases involving abused domestic workers did not reach the ministry or the public prosecutor.

In April the Ministry of Labor reported there were more than 3,000 registered labor camps housing more than 150,000 workers. The ministry conducted 500 inspections every year and found 90 percent of camps in compliance with regulations. It also reported, however, as many as 60 percent of workers were living in unregistered labor camps. Inspectors do not have the right to enter private buildings to inspect conditions. The Labor Ministry advised the Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs, and Urban Planning and the Ministry of Housing when it received complaints of poor conditions in such housing. The Migrant Workers Protection Society reported it visited unregistered camps and accommodations, including ones that were potentially dangerous, such as places with 35 persons sharing three rooms.

The government continued to conduct workers' rights awareness campaigns. It published pamphlets on foreign resident workers' rights in several languages, provided manuals on these rights to local diplomatic missions, and operated a telephone hotline for victims.

Violations of wage, overtime, and occupational safety and health standards were common in sectors employing foreign workers, such as construction, automotive repair, and domestic service. Unskilled foreign workers, mostly from South and Southeast Asia, were approximately 60 percent of the total workforce (76 percent of the private sector workforce). These workers were also vulnerable to dangerous or exploitive working conditions. According to NGOs, workplace safety inspection and compliance were substandard.

Local sources reported that lack of awareness of terms of employment remained a problem. Some foreign workers arrived in the country at the invitation of an employer who sponsored their visas but then switched jobs. Some of these workers continued to pay a portion of their salaries to their former employer who continued legally responsible for their visas.

The labor law does not fully protect domestic workers, and this group was particularly vulnerable to exploitation. In 2012 the government amended the labor law to expand the rights of domestic employees, not covered under the previous law. The labor law requires domestic employees have an agreement with their employer with "clear contractual terms" and provides penalties for violators. The amendments, however, do not accord domestic employees many of the rights the law provides to other private sector workers, including limits on daily and weekly working hours and weekly days off.

There were credible reports employers forced many of the country's 70,000 domestic workers, most of them women, to work 12- to 16-hour days and surrender their identity documents to employers. Employers permitted very little time off, left them malnourished, and subjected them to verbal and physical abuse, including sexual molestation and rape. Reports of employers and recruitment agents beating or sexually abusing foreign women working in domestic positions were common. The press, embassies, and police received numerous reports of abuse.

The vast majority of cases involving abused domestic workers did not reach the Ministry of Labor or Public Prosecutor's Office for a variety of reasons. Most victims were too intimidated to sue their employers, although they had the right to

do so. Some NGOs and activists reported that workers involved in a dispute with their employer were given the option to either leave the country or face jail time if the employer filed a counter-suit against them; in many cases the worker left the country, and the potentially abusive employer was able to bring in additional domestic workers with no repercussions. NGOs also reported the court system made it difficult for workers, who frequently did not have permanent home addresses in the country, to receive notices about their cases once they filed them. Additionally, if employees needing visa sponsorship file a case against their employers, they are unable to request a transfer of their sponsorship to a new employer. If employees stay in the country, they may be able to work for other employers unofficially. Once they depart the country, however, they will not be able to get a work visa with a new sponsor until the case with the previous employer is resolved.

During the year the MWPS shelter provided more than 120 female domestic workers with temporary housing and assistance with their cases. The majority of women in these cases sought assistance with unpaid wages and complaints of physical abuse. The MWPS continued to support victims who took their cases to court, but by law victims can receive only outstanding unpaid wages--no criminal damages are possible unless the victim has alleged a crime found in the criminal penal code has occurred, such as physical abuse or rape. While NGOs confirmed some cases were successful, compensation was meager. The government-run Dar al-Amen shelter provided assistance to an additional 83 domestic workers through the month of September.

The Ministry of Labor reported 25 deaths in workplace accidents and 195 injuries during 2014, the last year data for which available. The deaths were due to a combination of inadequate enforcement of standards, violations of standards, inadequate safety procedures, worker ignorance of those procedures, and inadequate safety standards for equipment. According to NGO sources, most accidents were in the construction sector, which employed more Bangladeshis and Pakistanis than other nationalities.

The MWPS noted suicide attempts were common among Indian workers but claimed the media underreported them.

Conditions in the many unregistered or illegal worker camps were often poor. Safety of accommodations and quality of life for workers were problems that continued to be a major concern at source country embassies.

While some workers can remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, the level of freedom workers enjoy directly relates to the type of work they do. Foreign laborers and domestic workers have the most difficulty removing themselves from dangerous situations and have the fewest protections from firing. Both sets of workers rely on employers for not just housing, but also food, clothing, and transportation. They are also the least equipped to file a complaint due to language barriers, level of education, and inability to produce a government issued identification card, which many employers retain.