

SYRIA 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President Bashar Asad has ruled the Syrian Arab Republic since 2000. The constitution mandates the primacy of Baath Party leaders in state institutions and society. Asad and Baath party leaders dominated all three branches of government. Neither the 2014 presidential election won by Asad, nor the geographically limited 2012 parliamentary elections won by the Baath Party, reflected the unimpeded or uncoerced will of the electorate. In government-controlled areas, Asad made key decisions with counsel from a small number of military and security advisors, ministers, and senior members of the ruling Baath Party. The government routinely violated the human rights of its citizens as the country witnessed major conflict.

The government maintained effective control over its uniformed military, police, and state security forces but did not consistently maintain effective control over paramilitary; nonuniformed progovernment militias, such as the National Defense Forces; the Bustan Charitable Association; or “shabiha,” which often acted autonomously without oversight or direction from the government.

The government’s use of lethal force to quell peaceful civil protests calling for reform and democracy precipitated a civil war in 2012. The civil war continued during the year. The government maintained control over the coastal governorates and those in and around Damascus and regularly attacked areas under opposition control. Different opposition groups with varying ideologies and goals controlled several parts of the north and areas in the Golan Heights, in many cases establishing new or reconstituted governance structures, including irregularly constituted courts. Most notably, the terrorist organization Da’esh increasingly took control of the eastern governorates Deir al-Zour and Raqqa in 2014. Subsequently, Da’esh announced the establishment of what it deemed an Islamic “caliphate” with Raqqa as its capital. Da’esh also maintained limited presence in other governorates in the north and south and around Damascus. Other areas of the country remained contested, including the northeastern areas dominated by ethnic Kurds and the Turkish border region.

The Asad government reportedly continued to use indiscriminate and deadly force against civilians, conducting air and ground-based military assaults on cities, residential areas, and civilian infrastructure. Attacks reported against schools, hospitals, mosques, churches, synagogues, and houses were common throughout

the country. The United Nations estimated the fighting had resulted in the deaths of more than 250,000 persons since 2011. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reported the government killed 15,748 persons during the year, and Da'esh was responsible for 2,098 deaths. The humanitarian situation reached severe levels. As of December there were more than 4.3 million Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in neighboring countries with more than 6.5 million persons displaced internally. The government frequently blocked access for humanitarian assistance to civilian areas, particularly areas held by opposition groups.

The most egregious human rights problems stemmed from the state's widespread disregard for the well-being of a majority of its citizens. This manifested itself in a complete denial of citizens' ability to change their government, a breakdown in law enforcement's ability to protect the majority of citizens from state and nonstate violence, and the reported indiscriminate use of violence against civilians and civilian institutions. The government arbitrarily and unlawfully killed, tortured, and detained persons on a wide scale. Government forces reportedly conducted attacks on civilians in hospitals, residential areas, schools, and camps holding internally displaced persons (IDPs); these attacks included bombardment with improvised explosive devices, commonly referred to as "barrel bombs" (containing a combination of jet fuel and TNT, usually dropped by a helicopter). The government reportedly continued the use of torture and rape, including of children. It reportedly used the massacre of civilians, as well as their forced displacement, rape, and starvation, as military tactics. Government authorities rigorously denied citizens the ability to exercise civil liberties and freedoms of expression, movement, peaceful assembly and association, and the right to a fair public trial. Government authorities reportedly detained without access to fair trial tens of thousands of individuals including those associated with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), human rights activists, journalists, humanitarian aid providers, religious figures, and physicians.

Other continuing human rights problems included: restrictions on religious observance and movement; abuse of refugees and stateless persons; prevention of NGOs and individual activists, especially those working on civil society and democracy matters, from organizing; restrictions on access for medical providers to persons in critical need; rampant governmental corruption; violence and societal discrimination against women and minorities; and restrictions on workers' rights.

Impunity was pervasive and deeply embedded in the security forces and elsewhere in the government, since the government did not attempt to investigate, punish,

arrest, or prosecute officials who violated human rights. The government often sheltered and encouraged those in its ranks to commit abuses.

According to credible reports, government-linked paramilitary groups engaged in frequent violations and abuses, including massacres, indiscriminate killings, kidnapping of civilians, arbitrary detentions, and rape as a war tactic. Government-affiliated militias, including the terrorist organization Lebanese Hizballah, supported by Iran, repeatedly targeted civilians.

Some extremist opposition groups, including armed terrorist groups, such as the al-Qaida-linked Jabhat al-Nusra, also committed a wide range of abuses, including those involving massacres, bombings, and kidnappings; unlawful detention; torture; executions; and forced evacuations from homes based on sectarian identity. Da'esh took control of the eastern governorates of Raqqa and Deir al-Zour, where it committed massive abuses, according to numerous human rights organizations, the media, UN reports, and Da'esh itself. According to the media and eyewitnesses, these abuses included mass executions; stonings of women and men accused of adultery; crucifixions of civilians; public executions of foreign journalists, aid workers, and those suspected of "being gay." Human trafficking and the forcible recruitment and use of children in the conflict increased. There were reports of forced marriages of women and girls for sexual slavery among Da'esh fighters.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were numerous reports the government and its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings in relation to the civil war (see section 1.g.).

The government continued its use of helicopters and airplanes to conduct aerial bombardment and shelling. Over five days in February, government forces reportedly indiscriminately bombed Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus governorate, killing 143 individuals, including 28 women and 29 children.

The SNHR reported more than 11,000 persons died due to torture in government facilities between early 2011 and June. The SNHR reported the government killed 15,748 persons, including 12,044 civilians, during the year. Nongovernment forces, including both extremist groups such as Da'esh and nonextremist rebel

groups, also committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, with SNHR reporting that Da'esh is responsible for 2,098 deaths, including 1,366 civilians (see section 1.g.).

b. Disappearance

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) reported the number of forced disappearances remained high. The majority of disappearances reported by activists, human rights observers, and international NGOs appeared to be politically motivated. In August the SNHR attributed 96 percent of the estimated 65,000 forced disappearances to the government. The government reportedly targeted critics, specifically journalists, medical personnel, antigovernment protesters, their families, and associates. The COI reported that government forces continued to engage in mass arrests of wounded persons attempting to leave besieged areas at checkpoints and in areas that fell under their control. The government reportedly arrested fighting-age, especially Sunni, men perceived to be associated with opposition groups. The COI noted that the families of disappeared persons often feared to approach authorities to inquire about the whereabouts of their relatives; those who did so had to pay large bribes to learn the whereabouts of relatives or faced systematic refusal by authorities to disclose information about the fate of disappeared individuals. The COI reported that the large number of missing men contributed to a sharp rise in female-headed households and increased the number of female IDPs and refugees.

Amnesty International (AI) reported that the government provided no further information on the thousands of individuals who had disappeared since the start of the conflict or the 17,000 persons who had disappeared since the 1970s. Human rights groups' estimates of the total number of disappearances since 2011 varied widely, but all estimates pointed to disappearances as a pervasive and common practice. AI estimated that authorities forcibly abducted more than 65,000 persons since the start of the conflict, including 58,000 civilians and 7,000 members of armed groups. A number of prominent political prisoners remained missing (see section 1.e.).

Antigovernment, armed extremist groups conducted kidnappings, particularly in the northern areas, targeting religious leaders, aid workers, suspected government affiliates, journalists, and activists. According to the COI, reports of enforced disappearances in territory held by Da'esh, particularly Raqqa and Aleppo, also increased.

The COI also reported many individuals changed their routes to and from work or refused to leave their homes due to fear of enforced disappearances facilitated through checkpoints.

Nongovernment forces, including both extremist groups such as Da'esh and nonextremist rebel groups, also abducted individuals (see section 1.g.).

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

Syrian domestic law prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and the penal code provides up to three years' imprisonment for violations. Nonetheless, activists, the COI, and local NGOs reported thousands of credible cases of government authorities engaging in frequent torture to punish perceived opponents, including during interrogations. Observers reported most cases of torture or mistreatment occurred in detention centers operated by each of the government's security service branches. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the COI reported regular use of detention and torture of government opponents at checkpoints and facilities run by the Air Force, the Political Security Division, the General Security Directorate, and the Military Intelligence Directorate. They identified specific detention facilities where torture occurred, including the Mezzeh airport detention facility, Military Security Branches 215 (the "raids branch"), 227 (the Damascus regional branch), 235 (the "Palestine branch"), 248 and 291 (the intelligence branches in Kafr Sousa), Adra and Sednaya Prisons, the Harasta Air Force Intelligence Branch, Harasta Military Hospital, Mezzeh Military Hospital 601, and Tishreen Military Hospital. The COI also reported the Counterterrorism Court and field military courts' reliance on forced confessions and information acquired through torture to obtain convictions. A large number of torture victims reportedly died in custody; the SNHR reported that 1,546 individuals died due to torture in government facilities during the year (see section 1.a.).

Activists cited thousands of credible cases of security forces abusing and torturing prisoners and detainees and maintained that many instances of abuse went unreported. Some victims reportedly died from torture; others declined to allow reporting of their names or details of their cases due to fear of government reprisal.

In 2013 a defector from the government, a former military police photographer known as "Caesar," smuggled out thousands of photographs from inside government detention centers dating from 2011 to 2013. According to a December

2015 HRW report, a review and forensic analysis by HRW of 28,707 of the photographs identified at least 6,786 deceased detainees showing signs of torture and severe malnourishment. The COI asserted the methods of torture and the conditions of detention, as evidenced in the photographs in Military Hospital No. 601 in Damascus, supported the commission's longstanding findings of systematic torture and deaths of detainees.

The COI noted that during the year torture methods remained consistent. These included beatings on the head, bodies, and soles of feet (falaqua) with wooden and metal sticks, hoses, cables, belts, whips, and wires. Authorities also reportedly sexually assaulted detainees; administered electric shocks, including to their genitals; burned with cigarettes; and placed detainees in stress positions for prolonged periods of time. A substantial number of male detainees reported being handcuffed and then suspended by their wrists from the ceiling or a wall for hours.

Other reported methods of physical torture included removing nails and hair; stabbings and cutting off body parts, including ears and genitals. Numerous human rights organizations reported other forms of torture, including forcing objects into the rectum and vagina, hyperextending the spine, and putting the victim onto the frame of a wheel and whipping exposed body parts. In addition, officers reportedly continued the practice of "shabeh" in which they stripped detainees naked, hung them for prolonged periods from the ceiling, and administered electrical shocks. In May HRW visited an abandoned government detention facility in Raqqa and reported that they witnessed evidence of torture instruments, including a wooden limb-stretching device known as "bsat al-reeh." Detainees emphasized that authorities not only beat them during interrogations, but that prison guards also beat them in their cells.

Medical professionals reported witnessing persons being burned alive in government detention facilities. State authorities reportedly issued fabricated death certificates with the apparent intent of disguising the cause and location of death and of preventing any official record of the use of torture. Numerous NGOs asserted that the practice of returning corpses to family members to announce their deaths continued, and corpses exhibited signs of torture.

The use of psychological torture by the government also reportedly increased. One commonly reported practice was detention of victims overnight in cells with corpses of previous victims. The SNHR reported that psychological torture methods included forcing prisoners to witness the rape of other prisoners,

threatening the rape of family members (in particular female family members), forced undressing, and insulting prisoners' beliefs.

Various NGOs, including HRW, AI, and the SNHR, continued to report widespread instances of rape and sexual abuse, including of minors. The COI reported receiving reports of interrogators raping and sexually abusing male detainees held in Branch 285 of the General Directorate of Intelligence in Damascus. The COI also reported that government personnel raped and used other forms of sexual violence against women in detention facilities as well as at checkpoints. A July SNHR report noted that Hama State Security Branch officials raped women held in their custody.

Reports from multiple UN and NGO sources indicated the number of cases of rape and other extreme sexual violence against women during the year ranged from the high hundreds to thousands. According to the COI, the government and affiliated militias systematically perpetrated rape and other inhuman attacks against civilian populations in Deir al-Zour, Dara'a, Hama, Damascus, and Tartus governorates. Detention centers were the most common location for abuse. In several interviews with the COI, former female prisoners reported being forced to perform oral sex on interrogators and witnessing the rape of other inmates. One woman interviewed by the SNHR reported that three different men consecutively raped her while she was in detention. Attacks also occurred during military raids and at checkpoints. These cases of mostly government-sponsored violence included instances in which multiple attackers, usually soldiers and shabiha, reportedly gang-raped women in their homes, sometimes in front of family members. Such incidents reportedly took place in private homes or in situations of formal and informal custody. The COI also reported instances of rape of and sexual assault on men and boys.

There were widespread reports government security forces engaged in abuse and inhuman treatment of prisoners. According to the COI, most were civilians initially held at checkpoints or taken prisoner during military incursions. While the majority of accounts concerned male detainees, there were increased reports of female detainees suffering abuse in government custody. The frequency, duration, and severity of the reported abuse suggested victims' sustained long-term psychological and physical damage.

The COI reported that, beginning in 2011 and continuing through the year, security forces subjected detainees to mistreatment in military hospitals, often obstructing medical care or exacerbating existing injuries as a technique in abuse and interrogation. There were multiple reports of deaths in custody at the Mezzeh

airport detention facility, Military Security Branches 215 and 235, and Sednaya Prison. Authorities consistently directed families of detainees seeking information to the Qaboun Military Police and Tishreen Military Hospital. In most cases, authorities reportedly did not return the bodies of deceased detainees to their families. Authorities reportedly buried many victims in the Najha cemetery.

There continued to be a significant number of reports of exceptionally brutal cases of abuse of children by the government. The COI noted regular reports of detention and torture of children under the age of 13, in some cases as young as 11, in government detention facilities. Officials reportedly targeted and tortured children because of their familial relations, or assumed relationships, with political dissidents, members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and activist groups. The UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict reported that child detainees, largely boys, including those as young as 14, suffered similar or identical methods of torture practiced on adults, including electric shock, beatings, stress positions, threats, and acts of sexual assault. According to witnesses, authorities continued to hold a number of children to compel parents and other relatives associated with opposition fighters to surrender to authorities.

Although authorities held fewer women and girls in detention than men, the SNHR estimated the number of female detainees in government prisons between the beginning of the uprising in 2011 and October to be at least 8,614. The SNHR estimated that government forces were responsible for at least 7,500 incidents of sexual abuse during the year.

A July SNHR report included testimony from a woman arrested because her husband was a local activist. The report noted that authorities tortured her continuously for three days. On the fourth day of her arrest, the beating and cursing stopped, but the raping started of her and six other women and lasted for 24 days.

Nongovernment forces, including both extremist groups such as Da'esh and nonextremist rebel groups, also engaged in physical abuse, punishment, and torture of individuals (see section 1.g.).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions remained harsh and in many instances were life-threatening. The government prohibited independent monitoring of prison or detention center conditions. Reports of mistreatment and abuse of prisoners were

common. The COI reported that observers most often cited detention centers and prisons as locations for sexual violence and that authorities used the threat of rape as a tool to coerce confessions.

Physical Conditions: In December the SNHR reported that since 2011 it documented the arrest of more than 117,000 individuals and estimated that authorities have detained more than 215,000 persons; the SNHR attributed 99 percent of those detentions to the government. According to HRW, released detainees consistently reported abuse and torture in detention facilities and prison conditions that often led to deaths in custody. According to the COI, government detention facilities lacked food, water, space, hygiene, and medical care. Poor conditions were so consistent that the COI concluded they reflected state policy.

According to local and international NGOs, the government held prisoners and detainees in severely cramped quarters with little or no access to restroom facilities, hygiene, medical supplies, or adequate food. According to four detainees interviewed by HRW, authorities used small cells intended for solitary confinement to house as many as five prisoners. Due to the extremely crowded nature of these cells, only two prisoners could sleep at once, while the others remained standing.

Reports from multiple international NGO sources suggested that there were also many informal detention sites and that authorities held thousands of prisoners in converted military bases and in civilian infrastructure, such as schools, stadiums, and in unknown locations. Activists asserted the government also housed arrested protesters in factories and vacant warehouses that were over-crowded and lacked adequate sanitary facilities. Authorities imprisoned female detainees in squalid, insect-infested cells and subjected them to torture and inhuman treatment. Medical care, if available at all, was inadequate and did not address women's medical and physiological needs.

Prior to the 2011 protests, the government usually held pretrial detainees separately from convicted prisoners, although authorities commonly held juveniles, adults, pretrial detainees, and convicted prisoners together in inadequate spaces during the year. The COI reported that authorities held children as young as eight in prison with adults.

In some cases authorities transferred detainees from unofficial holding areas to facilities of the intelligence services. Detention conditions at security and intelligence service facilities continued to be the harshest, especially for political or

national security prisoners. Facilities lacked proper ventilation, lighting, access to potable water or adequate food, medical staff and equipment, and sufficient sleeping quarters. According to the COI, most former detainees reported inadequate food, with some losing half their body weight while detained.

Prison authorities used violence to control inmates, including the employment of tear gas and live ammunition. The government also continued targeting prisons in its attacks.

Inside prisons and detention centers, the prevalence of death from disease remained high due to unsanitary conditions and the withholding of medical care and medication. Local NGOs and medical professionals reported that authorities denied medical care to prisoners with pre-existing health needs, such as diabetes, asthma, and breast cancer, and denied pregnant women any medical care. Authorities retaliated against prisoners who requested attention for the sick. Released prisoners commonly reported sickness and injury resulting from such conditions. Information on conditions and care for prisoners with disabilities was unavailable.

In 2014 the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the media reported that the Aleppo Central Prison was at the center of a battle between government forces and armed opposition groups. The prison reportedly held 2,500 inmates, including 75 women and an unknown number of juveniles. From mid-2013 until May 2014, the armed rebel group Ahrar al-Sham, as well as Jabhat al-Nusra and other armed groups, besieged the prison, resulting in severe conditions and abuse for inmates. In May 2014 government forces retook the prison; a political detainee died during the celebration. In a reply letter to the OHCHR, the government stated it released 937 inmates during the siege and released an additional 363 prisoners who were pardoned or completed their sentence. The OHCHR reported that the whereabouts of a number of prisoners and detainees remained unknown, which could amount to enforced disappearance.

According to the COI, conditions in detention centers run by nonstate actors such as Da'esh violated international law. Detainees in such centers in Raqqa reported that Da'esh held them in crowded, insect-infested cells with neither light nor bedding. Da'esh reportedly denied prisoners access to adequate food or legal counsel and prevented communication outside the facility. Da'esh appropriated former-government prison facilities for its use, such as those in al-Bab and Jarablus in Aleppo.

Conditions in detention centers operated by various opposition groups were not well known, but the COI and local NGOs transmitted accounts of arbitrary detention, torture, inhuman treatment, and abuse.

Administration: The government made no serious attempts to improve recordkeeping or offer alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders. There were no credible mechanisms or avenues for prisoners to complain or submit grievances, and authorities routinely failed to investigate allegations or document complaints or grievances. Activists reported there was no ombudsman to serve on behalf of prisoners and detainees. The law provides for prompt access to family members, but NGOs and families reported inconsistent application of the law, with some families waiting as long as a year to see relatives. The government continued to detain thousands of prisoners without charge and incommunicado in unknown locations.

In areas where government control became weak or nonexistent, such as in parts of the north, south, and east, localized corrections structures emerged. There were varied reports of control and oversight, and both civilian and religious leaders were in charge of facility administration. Former police forces or members of armed opposition groups operated facilities in areas under the control of opposition forces. Nonstate actors often did not understand due process and lacked sufficient training to run facilities.

Independent Monitoring: The government prohibited most independent monitoring of prison or detention center conditions, and diplomatic and consular officials had less access than in previous years. Some opposition forces invited the COI to visit localized facilities they administered and allowed some international human rights groups, including HRW, to visit. The International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent continued to negotiate with all parties, except Da'esh, to gain access to detention centers across the country.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, although a 2011 decree allows the government to detain suspects for up to 60 days without charge if suspected of “terrorism” and other related offenses. Arbitrary arrests increased according to local news sources, and several human rights organizations reported detentions in the tens of thousands. According to the COI, reports of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, mainly of men and boys above the age of 10,

increased and occurred at checkpoints operated by the army, security services, or the paramilitary National Defense Force (NDF).

HRW reported the government continued to use the counterterrorism law to arrest and convict nonviolent activists on charges of aiding terrorists in trials that violated basic due process rights. Although authorities reportedly brought charges under the guise of countering violent militancy, allegations included peaceful acts such as distributing humanitarian aid, participating in protests, and documenting human rights abuses.

National security forces failed to respond to or protect large regions of the country from violence. AI reported that armed groups detained suspected government supporters, local activists, foreign journalists, aid workers, and others. The COI also reported that nonstate armed groups, including Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra, took hostages, especially women and children, to force prisoner exchanges with the government or other armed groups or for ransom (see section 1.g.).

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The government's multiple security branches traditionally operated autonomously with no defined boundaries between their areas of jurisdiction. Military Intelligence and Air Force Intelligence reported to the Ministry of Defense, the Political Security Directorate reported to the Ministry of Interior, and the General Intelligence Directorate reported directly to the Office of the President. The Interior Ministry controlled the four separate divisions of police forces: emergency police, traffic police, neighborhood police, and riot police.

Government-affiliated shabiha forces re-organized and in 2013 rebranded themselves as the NDF. These groups engaged in armed conflict and arrested, detained, and tortured those suspected of supporting the opposition. The NDF integrated with government-affiliated forces. There also were other progovernment militias outside the NDF.

Impunity continued to be a widespread problem. The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces could issue arrest warrants for crimes committed by military officers, members of the internal security forces, or customs police during their normal duties; military courts must try such cases. There were no known prosecutions or convictions of police and security force personnel for abuse or corruption, however, and security forces operated independently and generally

outside the control of the legal system. There were no reported government actions to reform the security forces or police.

Opposition forces established irregularly constituted courts and detention facilities in areas under their control, which varied greatly in organization and adherence to judicial norms. Some groups upheld the penal code, others followed a 1996 draft Arab League Unified Penal Code based on sharia (Islamic law), while others implemented a mix of customary law and sharia. The experience, expertise, and credentialing of opposition judges and religious scholars also varied widely and often subjected to the orders of dominant armed militias in the area.

Da'esh claimed that it based administration of justice in the territory it controlled on religious law. Da'esh purportedly authorized its police forces known as "hisbah" to administer summary punishment for violations of Da'esh's morality code. Men faced beatings for smoking, possessing alcohol, listening to music, trading during prayer times, and not fasting during Ramadan. Da'esh punished others for accompanying "improperly dressed" female relatives.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law generally requires a warrant for arrest in criminal cases, but police often cited emergency or national security justifications for acting without a warrant, permitted under the law. Police usually brought arrested individuals to a police station for processing and detention until a trial date was set. The law stipulates that the length of time authorities may hold a person without charge is limited to 60 days, but according to various NGOs, activists, and former detainees, police held many individuals for longer periods or indefinitely. Civil and criminal defendants have the right to bail hearings and possible release from detention on their own recognizance. The legal system inconsistently applied this right, particularly with pretrial detainees. At the initial court hearing, which can be months or years after the arrest, the accused may retain an attorney at personal expense or the court may appoint an attorney, although authorities do not assure lawyers access to their clients before trial. According to local human rights organizations, denial of access to a lawyer was common.

In cases involving political or national security offenses, authorities reportedly often made arrests in secret with cases assigned in an apparently arbitrary manner to military, security, or criminal courts. This practice was common. The government reportedly detained suspects incommunicado for prolonged periods without charge or trial and denied them the right to a judicial determination of their

pretrial detention. In most cases authorities reportedly did not inform detainees of charges against them until their arraignment, often months after their arrest. Security detainees did not have access to lawyers before or during questioning or throughout preparation and presentation of their defense. The number of suspects accused of political and national security offenses has reportedly increased over previous years.

The government often reputedly failed to notify foreign governments when it arrested, detained, released, or deported their citizens, especially when the case involved political charges. The government also failed to provide consular access to foreign citizens known to be in its prisons and, on numerous occasions, claimed these individuals were not in their custody or even in the country.

Arbitrary Arrest: Security forces continued their previous practices and reportedly increased arbitrary arrests, but detainees had no legal redress. Reports continued of security services arresting relatives of wanted persons to pressure individuals to surrender. Police rarely issued or presented warrants or court orders before an arrest. According to reports, the security branches secretly ordered many arrests and detentions. Activists and international humanitarian organizations stated that government forces continued to conduct security raids in response to antigovernment protests throughout urban areas. In areas under government control, security forces engaged in arbitrary arrests. The SNHR reported that government forces launched widespread arrest and raid campaigns in November to force military recruitment on young men. The COI reported that authorities arbitrarily arrested men and boys over the age of 12 at some checkpoints. Often authorities cited no reason for arresting civilians.

Checkpoints operated by the government were another commonly reported location for arbitrary arrests, sometimes resulting in transfer to a long-term detention facility or disappearance. Government military and security forces reportedly arrested men at checkpoints solely for being of military age. According to the COI, there continued to be frequent accounts of enforced disappearances following arrest at checkpoints. Authorities subjected both men and women to arbitrary arrests at checkpoints.

Multiple reports from local and international NGOs stated that the government prevented the majority of those detained from contacting their relatives or obtaining a lawyer. When authorities occasionally released detainees, it was often without any formal judicial procedures. Hundreds of detainees interviewed by

human rights groups stated that authorities arrested, detained, questioned, and released them after months of detention without seeing a judge or being sentenced.

The SNHR reported that Da'esh also kidnapped many individuals in areas under its control. It also alleged that Kurdish forces kidnapped Arab civilians, activists, and politicians.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention remained a serious problem. Authorities reportedly held many detainees incommunicado for years before bringing them to trial. A shortage of available courts and lack of legal provisions for speedy trial or plea-bargaining also contributed to lengthy pretrial detentions. There were numerous reported instances when the length of detention exceeded the sentence for the crime. Percentages for prison/detainee population held in pretrial detention and the length of time held were not available during the year.

Amnesty: In July the government announced a general amnesty for those who deserted the army or avoided conscription since the start of the conflict in 2011. Authorities announced they would release 430 prisoners, many detained under “antiterror” laws, on Eid al-Fitr. The Violations Documentation Center (VDC) reported that authorities slowed the release of many detainees due to procedural matters. As with previous amnesties, several NGOs and activists criticized the decree as extremely limited and applying mostly to common criminals while excluding those charged with political crimes. In December the government reportedly released 270 detainees as part of a special pardon. The SNHR recorded the release of 268 detainees during prisoner exchanges. No other general releases occurred during the year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but authorities regularly subjected courts to political influence, and outcomes of cases with political context appeared predetermined. An estimated 95 percent of government judges were Baathists or closely aligned with the Baath Party.

Trial Procedures

The law presumes defendants innocent. Defendants have the right to prompt, detailed notification of the charges against them with interpretation as necessary, although authorities did not verifiably enforce this right, and a number of detainees' families mentioned that the accused were unaware of the charges facing

them. Trials are public, except for those involving juveniles or sexual offenses. There are no juries. The law entitles defendants before civil and criminal courts to representation of their choice; the courts appoint lawyers for indigents. Defendants and their attorneys nominally have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. It was unknown if attorneys had adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. Human rights lawyers noted, however, that in some politically charged cases, the government provided prosecution case files to defense lawyers that did not include any evidence. Defendants can present evidence and confront their accusers. Defendants cannot legally be compelled to testify or confess guilt, but family members and NGOs reported that torture or intimidation from judges and prosecutors sometimes elicited false confessions. Persons who were convicted could appeal verdicts to a provincial appeals court and ultimately to the Court of Cassation.

Not all citizens enjoyed these rights equally, in part because interpretations of religious law provide the basis for elements of family and criminal law and discriminate against women. Some personal status laws applied sharia law regardless of the religion of those involved. In addition, news media and NGO reports suggested the government denied some, and in certain cases all, of these protections to those accused of political crimes or violence against the government. Sentences for persons accused of antigovernment activity tended to be harsh, with violent offenders and nonviolent offenders receiving similar punishments. The VDC reported that the number of cases referred to the Counterterrorism Court (CTC) exceeded 80,000 by April, two-and-a-half years after it began accepting cases. According to the SNHR, the majority of those tried received five- to 20-year prison sentences. The government did not permit defendants before the CTC to have legal representation, although activists reported individuals charged under the counterterrorism law could retain attorneys to move their trial date.

In opposition-controlled areas, legal or trial procedures varied by locale. Local human rights organizations reported that local governing structures assumed these responsibilities. HRW reported that civilians administered these processes employing customary sharia laws in some cases and national laws in others. Sentencing by opposition sharia councils sometimes resulted in public executions, without an appeals process or visits by family members.

According to local NGOs, opposition-run sharia councils continued to discriminate against women, not allowing them to serve as judges or lawyers, or to visit detainees. In the territory it controlled, Da'esh purported to establish what it

deemed to be courts to preside over its interpretation of religious law, with judges with unknown credentials based on an unknown selection process.

The Aleppo Sharia Commission, associated with Jabhat al-Nusra and other armed opposition forces, operated a court system with courts on civil, criminal, military, and civilian affairs. These courts reportedly followed the Unified Arab League draft code rather than the country's legal code. In Dara'a, opposition forces formed the Unified Judicial Sharia Commission, also known as the Gharz Court, which has courts on criminal, transactions, and civil affairs.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The government detained critics and charged them with a wide range of political crimes, including terrorism. The number of political prisoners and detainees, both citizens and foreigners, was difficult to determine due to a lack of government information and because different security services maintained their own incarceration facilities that held significant numbers of such detainees. Authorities continued to refuse to divulge information regarding numbers or names of persons detained on political or security-related charges. The VDC documented that authorities have detained more than 63,000 individuals, including at least 202 activists, since the beginning of the conflict. Authorities generally held them without charge or trial, and the government did not inform their families. If authorities tried them, political detainees appeared in criminal courts for such charges. The government did not grant international organizations access to political prisoners.

Prison conditions for political or national security prisoners, especially accused opposition members, reportedly continued to be much worse than those for common criminals. According to local NGOs, authorities deliberately placed political prisoners in crowded cells with convicted and alleged felons and subjected them to verbal and physical threats and abuse. Political prisoners also reported they often slept on the ground due to lack of beds and faced frequent searches. According to reports from families, authorities refused many political prisoners access to family and counsel. Some former detainees and human rights observers reported the government denied political prisoners access to reading materials, including the Quran, and prohibited them from praying in their cells.

Many prominent civilian activists and journalists whom authorities detained or forcibly disappeared following the 2011 protests reportedly remained in detention. Although the government released human rights defender Mazen Darwish and his

colleagues Hani al-Zitani and Hussein Ghareer in the summer, at year's end there were no known developments in many cases of reported disappearances from prior years, including the following persons believed to have been forcibly disappeared by government forces: Abdel Aziz Kamal al-Rihawi; Alawite opposition figure Abdel Aziz al-Khair; Kurdish activist Berazani Karro; journalist Kamal Sheikho; Yassin Ziadeh, brother of dissident Radwan Ziadeh; human rights lawyer Khalil Ma'touq and his assistant Mohamed Zaza; and Bassel Khartabil. There have not been any updates in the kidnappings of the following persons believed to have been abducted by Da'esh, armed opposition, or unidentified armed groups: activists Razan Zaitouneh, Wael Hamada, Samira Khalil, and Nazim Hamadi; religious leaders Bolous Yazigi and Yohanna Ibrahim; and peace activist Paulo Dall'Oglio. These individuals were among the estimated thousands of disappearances reported by activists and media.

HRW reported that courts continued to detain activists under the Counterterrorism Law implemented following the lifting of the Emergency Law in 2011. The government established the CTC under the Ministry of Justice to apply the law. Authorities held some detainees under this law at Adra central prison in Damascus pending trial. The amnesties enacted in 2013 and June 2014 included some detainees held under counterterrorism charges, but NGOs and activists reported that the government released very few such individuals under the amnesties. Authorities later re-arrested many of those released.

Local NGOs reported Da'esh detained and harassed domestic human rights activists, humanitarian aid workers, and religious figures. The COI reported that, in Raqqa, Da'esh detained hundreds of prisoners, including women and community activists, who opposed its rule.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Government civil remedies for human rights violations were functionally nonexistent. In areas under their control, opposition groups had not organized consistent civil judicial procedures. Da'esh and other extremist groups had no known civil judicial mechanisms in the territories they controlled.

Property Restitution

Security forces routinely seized detainees' property and personal items. With the onset of civil unrest, authorities increased confiscation of personal telephones, computers, and electronics. Security forces did not catalog these items in

accordance with the law, and although detained individuals had the right to retrieve their confiscated belongings after release, authorities often did not return the property. According to media reports and activists, government forces also seized property left by refugees or internally displaced persons.

According to humanitarian aid workers, Da'esh seized property from international and local aid workers at checkpoints that Da'esh controlled throughout the country.

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

The law prohibits such actions, but they occurred routinely. Police frequently bypassed search warrant requirements in criminal cases by citing security reasons or emergency grounds for entry into private property. Random home raids occurred in large cities and towns of most governorates where the government maintained a presence, usually following large antigovernment protests or opposition attacks against government targets.

The government continued to open mail addressed to both citizens and foreign residents and routinely monitored internet communications, including e-mail (see section 2.a.).

The government continued to bar membership in some political organizations, including Islamist parties, and often arrested their members (see section 3).

g. Use of Excessive Force and Other Abuses in Internal Conflicts

The government, opposition groups, and Da'esh escalated their use of force during the year. The OHCHR reported that more than 250,000 persons have died since the start of protests in 2011. In October the SNHR reported that the government used a “scorched earth” campaign, which SNHR said targeted at least 484 vital civilian infrastructure facilities in the first nine months of the year. Of these, 84 percent were under opposition control and 16 percent were in Da'esh-controlled areas. In December the SNHR reported that Russian airstrikes, which began at the end of September on Hama, Homs, Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia, and Raqqa governorates, had killed at least 832 civilians.

Killings: The government reportedly committed the majority of killings throughout the year (see section 1.a.). Extremist groups operating in spaces vacated by government forces also committed a large number of abuses and violations. In 2012 several opposition commanders reportedly drafted and

endorsed codes of conduct in an effort to curb violations and killings. Adherence to such standards was uneven, however. Media reports and videos from the country reported the deliberate killing by Da'esh and opposition forces of unarmed prisoners, including government soldiers. In some cases informal courts reportedly tried prisoners in an irregular fashion, such as facing a sharia council prior to execution, according to reports from international NGOs and the COI.

Government killings and use of lethal tactics reportedly increased during the year. The government continued its use of helicopters and airplanes to conduct aerial bombardment and shelling. The UN Security Council passed multiple resolutions calling on the government to end the indiscriminate use of barrel bombs. The SNHR reported that the government was responsible for the death of 12,044 civilians during the year, and Da'esh killed 1,366 civilians.

There were numerous reports of barrel bombings in Dara'a governorate on a regular basis. On March 17, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the government dropped a barrel bomb containing poisonous chlorine gas on a residential neighborhood in Sarmeen, an opposition-controlled town near the Turkish border, killing a family of six and injuring scores of residents.

According to a November report from the SNHR, on October 14, government helicopters dropped a barrel bomb on Dael town in Dara'a suburbs, which was under the control of the armed opposition, and killed three individuals, including a pregnant woman and her child.

In a December report, HRW reported that government forces used cluster munitions on at least 20 occasions since Syria and Russia began their joint offensive on September 30. For example, government forces and their allies dropped cluster munitions on Douma on December 14, killing at least five civilians, according to an activist. Activists indicated that cluster munitions were difficult to document, given that they do not cause significant damage to buildings and explode leaving few remnants.

Progovernment militias reportedly continued to carry out mass killings. According to the SNHR, government-affiliated sectarian militias perpetrated massacres in Homs and Aleppo. In a June report on ethnic massacres, the SNHR noted that, on February 7, sectarian militia raided homes in the as-Sabil neighborhood of Homs, killing 14 civilians, including four children and five women. In addition, on February 21, Shiite militia reportedly kidnapped 320 individuals from two Aleppo

villages and used them as human shields while retreating; fighting in this incident killed 48 civilians.

Opposition forces reportedly increased their killing of government forces, suspected government supporters, and members of minority communities through large-scale attacks and the use of snipers. According to the COI, opposition forces positioned military facilities and equipment in civilian areas.

Activists and NGOs reported Da'esh continued to engage in widespread and serious violations and abuses. According to the SNHR, Da'esh forces raided al-Mab'oujda village in Hama, where most residents were Ismaili, killing 36 civilians and kidnapping a large number of residents. Da'esh forces reportedly continued to attack Kurdish communities in Kobane. According to the COI, in June Da'esh forces summarily executed approximately 250 civilians in Kobane.

In June the UN Secretary-General reported that Da'esh carried out door-to-door searches in Palmyra for suspected government agents and executed at least 14 civilians for suspected affiliation with the government. During the summer the SNHR reported on an August 2014 Da'esh attack on Deir al-Zour that resulted in the death of 91 civilians and subsequent execution of 276 others. The SNHR also estimated that Da'esh tortured 29 individuals to death.

Other Syrian armed groups engaged in abuses. According to the COI, Jabhat al-Nusra killed more than 20 Druze in a massacre in Idlib in June. The SNHR attributed 132 civilian deaths to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and other Kurdish groups.

Abductions: The government was reportedly responsible for the majority of disappearances during the year. Armed extremist groups not affiliated with the government also reportedly kidnapped individuals, particularly in the northern areas, targeting religious leaders, aid workers, suspected government affiliates, journalists, and activists. The SNHR estimated there were more than 65,000 forcible disappearances by the government between early 2011 and August. The SNHR attributed more than 1,100 disappearances to Da'esh, 876 to al-Nusra Front, 352 to the PYD and other Kurdish forces, and 211 to other militant groups in the country.

In August 2014 Da'esh reportedly abducted thousands of Yezidi women from Iraq and brought them to Syria for sale in markets or as rewards for Da'esh fighters. Held as slaves, Da'esh fighters subjected them and other captured women and girls

to repeated sexual violence, forced marriages, and coerced abortions. In interviews with the COI, they described multiple rapes by several men, including incidents of gang rape. Numerous NGOs and activists also reported that Da'esh fighters raped women in Da'esh-held areas or forced them to marry Da'esh fighters. As of September most of the abducted girls and women remained in Da'esh custody.

In October Da'esh reportedly executed three Assyrian Christians kidnapped with a larger group from their villages near the Khabour River in February.

The location and status of Khalil Arfu and Sukfan Amin Hamza from Derek, Hasakah governorate, and members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party remained unknown.

The COI reported that a dramatic rise in hostage taking, which was often sectarian in nature, triggered reprisals and fueled intercommunal tension. Antigovernment armed groups abducted civilians and members of government forces to enable prisoner exchanges and for ransom money to purchase weapons.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: According to reports, the government and its affiliated militias consistently engaged in physical abuse, punishment, and torture of both opposition members and civilians. Government agents targeted individuals with previous ties to foreign governments that favored the opposition; it also targeted family members and associates of such individuals. Government officials reportedly abused prisoners and detainees, as well as injured and sick persons, and raped women and men as a tactic of war. In addition, according to the COI, the “Caesar photographs” smuggled out of the country in 2014 by a former government photographer documented the torture and severe malnourishment of more than 11,000 deceased detainees between 2011 and 2013.

The SNHR reported that authorities forced prisoners to witness the rape of other prisoners, threatened them with the rape of family members (in particular female family members), forced them to undress, and insulted their beliefs. According to the COI, the government and affiliated militias systematically perpetrated rape and other attacks on civilian populations in Deir al-Zour, Dara'a, Hama, Damascus, and Tartus governorates. Detention centers were the most common location for reported abuse, but attacks also occurred during military raids and at checkpoints. Reports included instances in which multiple attackers, usually soldiers and shabiha, gang-raped women in their homes, sometimes in front of family members. Observers believed sexual violence was widespread and underreported. The SNHR estimated government forces were responsible for at least 7,672 incidents of

sexual abuse since the beginning of the conflict. The SNHR noted an increased use of sexual violence against women before granting permission to depart besieged areas or to return with medical supplies and food.

There were widespread reports that Da'esh also engaged in abuses and brutality. According to the COI, Da'esh increased brutal treatment of those it captured in Raqqa, Deir al-Zour, and Aleppo. Da'esh frequently punished victims publicly and forced residents, including children, to watch executions and amputations. In Aleppo and Raqqa, the COI and media also reported that Da'esh members tied men to a board or crucifix and displayed them publicly before beatings and lashings. Activists, NGOs, and the media reported numerous accounts of women in Da'esh-held territory facing arbitrary and severe punishments, including execution by stoning. Da'esh also committed abuses systematically against captured FSA and Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) fighters. Da'esh fighters reportedly beat captives (including with cables) during interrogations and killed those held in its detention centers in Raqqa and Aleppo governorates. Da'esh also beat persons because of their dress; several sources reported Da'esh members beat women for not covering their faces. Da'esh justified its use of corporal punishment, including amputations and lashings, under religious law.

The COI also reported that armed groups, under the banner of the FSA, tortured and executed suspected government agents, members of the shabiha, and collaborators. The COI noted that some opposition groups subjected detainees suspected of being members of progovernment militias to severe physical or mental pain and suffering to obtain information or confessions, or as punishment or coercion. The report also noted instances in which extremist groups Jabhat al-Nusra and Da'esh arbitrarily detained and tortured individuals passing through checkpoints along the country's northern border. Jabhat al-Nusra, following its April attack on Ishtabraq, detained children and women in Harim Prison. The COI reported that Jabhat al-Nusra tortured women and children in the prison.

Child Soldiers: Several sources documented the continued recruitment and use of children in combat. The COI reported that progovernment militias enlisted children as young as 13. The COI reported the government sometimes paid children between the ages of six and 13 to be informants, exposing them to danger. There were no new reports during the year of combatants recruiting boys between the ages of 12 and 14 to conduct surveillance in Aleppo.

HRW reported opposition forces used children under the age of 18 as fighters. According to HRW, numerous groups and factions failed to prevent the enlistment

of minors, while Da'esh and Jabhat al-Nusra actively recruited children as fighters. In October Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently reported that Da'esh forcibly recruited boys who were 14 years of age and older from northern Raqqa governorate and threatened those who refused with punishment. According to the COI, Islamic Front-affiliated and other armed groups "recruited, trained, and used children in active combat roles." Jaish al-Mujahideen enlisted minors younger than 18, according to the COI. A Da'esh camp near Aleppo trained children as young as 14. In Raqqa, according to the COI and press reports, Da'esh recruited and enlisted children as young as 10. HRW noted that Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and YPG militias enlisted fighters under the age of 18.

The COI report noted that some FSA units, such as in Deir al-Zour governorate, rejected the use of child soldiers. The COI report also confirmed that the YPG demobilized child soldiers from its ranks and began monitoring adherence to its commitment to eliminate children from fighting. Nevertheless, some local groups reported YPG and Asayish forces abused and forcibly recruited children.

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

Other Conflict-related Abuses: Both the government and opposition forces impeded the flow of humanitarian assistance. According to the UN Office for Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), by the end of the year an estimated 4.5 million persons remained in areas difficult to reach, including 360,000 located in besieged areas impossible to access. The COI reported that government forces, opposition forces, and Da'esh all employed sieges to devastating effects, deliberately restricting the passage of relief supplies and access by humanitarian agencies. Acute restrictions on food and medicine reportedly caused malnutrition-related deaths as well as outbreaks of hepatitis, cutaneous leishmaniasis, typhoid, cholera, and dysentery. For example, government forces' siege of Zabadani, which began in July, resulted in severe malnutrition and deaths, particularly of children. The COI reported that government forces continued to besiege rebel-held areas in southern and eastern Damascus to render the conditions of life unbearable and force civilians to flee. In areas where combatants reached local truces, such as Moadamiya, civilians continued to suffer from shortages of food and medicine. In March *The Guardian* reported that the government subjected residents of the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp to a siege that left 18,000 civilians at severe risk of starvation with extremely limited access to medical care and potable water. The government refused the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and NGOs entry to the camp to provide humanitarian

aid to Yarmouk residents. The government also failed to provide visas to international humanitarian workers and created unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles to relief delivery. The COI and the media reported that opposition groups also surrounded towns and limited access to supplies such as food in Afrin, Nubl, Zahra, and other locations. Da'esh imposed a siege of government-controlled areas of Deir al-Zour.

The COI found that the government detained many Red Crescent volunteers and medical staff on the pretext of “having supported terrorists.” According to reports, the government’s continued indiscriminate bombardment destroyed and damaged health-care facilities in opposition-held areas, such as the Hama governorate and Aleppo city. According to the COI, the Islamic Front and Jaish al-Mujaheddin stopped or limited electricity and water to several neighborhoods in Aleppo.

According to reports, government forces as well as Da'esh routinely kidnapped and detained aid providers and severely restricted humanitarian access to territories under their respective control. In December the UN Secretary-General reported that armed groups expelled humanitarian workers from areas they held and that 29 UN staff members were detained or missing, including 27 UNRWA staff members. Activists reported aid workers in Da'esh-controlled territory were at high risk of abduction or violence.

Government forces, Da'esh, and opposition forces reportedly attacked civilian institutions including schools, hospitals, religious establishments, and bakeries.

According to the SNHR, the government destroyed 850,000 buildings between 2011 and September 2014 and was responsible for damaging 2.5 million structures. The SNHR noted 45 percent of the country’s hospitals were not functioning due to government shelling and looting, and in many opposition-held areas, even fewer hospitals were functional. It also noted fighting destroyed or put out of service more than 85 percent of the hospitals in Raqqa as well as at least 75 percent of the hospitals in Deir al-Zour, Rif Damascus, and Homs governorates. The World Health Organization reported the conflict negatively affected 60 percent of all hospitals.

Observers and international aid organizations reported that the government specifically targeted health-care workers, medical facilities, ambulances, and patients and restricted access to medical facilities and services to civilians and prisoners. The COI also reported that government sniper fire and military assaults on medical facilities intentionally targeted sick and injured persons as well as

pregnant women and persons with disabilities. According to reports, the government deliberately obstructed the efforts of sick and injured persons to obtain help, and many such individuals elected not to seek medical assistance in hospitals due to fear of arrest, detention, torture, or death. Government forces also reportedly targeted medical professionals for arrest. In a December press release, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) documented the deaths of 697 medical personnel and 336 attacks on 240 medical facilities between March 2011 and November 2015; PHR attributed 90 percent of the attacks to the government and its allied forces.

Government and opposition forces reportedly used civilians, including women and children, to shield combatants.

According to the United Nations, by the end of the year there were more than 6.5 million IDPs and 4.3 million refugees due to violence as well as conflict-related destruction of property and government targeting of local populations. The government did not provide sustainable access for services to the IDP population and did not offer IDPs assistance or protection (see section 2.d.).

All participants in the conflict used provocative sectarian rhetoric, which the COI warned risked inciting mass indiscriminate violence. According to the COI, the rise in government-supported militias composed mostly of religious minorities and the positioning of these militias within their respective supportive communities fostered sectarian hostilities.

The COI noted mass displacements of communities under Da'esh control, where Da'esh officials warned residents to conform to Da'esh standards or leave. Communities experienced discriminatory sanctions, including specialized religious taxes (jizya), forced religious conversions, destruction of religious sites, and expulsion of minority communities. In October AI reported that YPG forces forcibly displaced Arab residents in Kurdish areas.

International media reported widely on government and nongovernment forces attacking and destroying religious as well as UNESCO world heritage sites. The UN Training and Research Agency reported in December 2014 that fighting had damaged 290 heritage sites. The SNHR documented the destruction of 216 places of worship due to government violence throughout the year. According to monthly SNHR reporting, government forces continued to target mosques and churches. Government forces also pillaged and destroyed property, including homes, farms, and businesses of defectors and opposition figures.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

While the constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, the government severely restricted these rights, often reportedly terrorizing, abusing, or killing those who attempted to exercise these rights.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The government routinely characterized expression as illegal, and individuals reportedly could not criticize the government publicly or privately without fear of reprisal. The government also reportedly stifled criticism by invoking penal code articles prohibiting acts or speech inciting sectarianism. It reportedly monitored political meetings and relied on informer networks.

Press and Media Freedoms: The government continued to exercise extensive control over local print and broadcast media, and the law imposes strict punishment for reporters who do not reveal their government sources in response to government requests. A number of quasi-independent periodicals, usually owned and produced by individuals with government connections, published during the year. In January 2014 the government began allowing on a very limited basis the use of Kurdish in state-run universities, following a decades-long, mostly ineffective ban prohibiting all Kurdish-language publications (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

The government owned some radio and most local television companies, and the Ministry of Information closely monitored all radio and television news and entertainment programs to provide for adherence to government policies. Despite restrictions on ownership and use, citizens widely used satellite dishes, although the government jammed some Arab networks.

Books critical of the government were illegal.

Violence and Harassment: Government forces reportedly detained, arrested, and harassed journalists and other writers for works deemed critical of the state. Harassment included attempts at intimidation, banning such individuals from the country, dismissing journalists from their positions, and ignoring requests for continued accreditation. According to reports, the government routinely arrested journalists who were either associated with or writing in favor of the political

opposition or the FSA and instigated attacks against foreign press outlets throughout the country.

The government and Da'esh routinely targeted and killed both Syrian and foreign journalists, according to the COI. According to Freedom on the Net and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Syria remained the most deadly and dangerous country in the world for journalists. During the year the CPJ documented the deaths of 71 journalists where it confirmed the motive and 23 where it could not confirm the motive. According to the CPJ, the majority of reporters killed were covering politics and human rights issues. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) estimated that 49 journalists were killed between early 2011 and November. The RSF also reported the deaths of 142 netizens and citizen journalists. According to the SNHR, government forces killed 57 media activists.

According to the RSF, eight journalists and 17 netizens remained in prison. The CPJ reported that seven journalists remained in government detention. The reason for arrests was often unclear. Arbitrary arrest raised fears that authorities could arrest internet users at any time for simple online activities perceived to threaten the government's control, such as posting on a blog, tweeting, commenting on Facebook, sharing a photo, or uploading a video.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government continued to strictly control the dissemination of information, including developments regarding fighting between the government and armed opposition, and prohibited most criticism of the government and discussion of sectarian problems, including religious and ethnic minority rights. The Ministries of Information and Culture censored domestic and foreign publications prior to circulation or importation and prevented circulation of content determined critical or sensitive. The government prohibited publication or distribution of any material security officials deemed threatening or embarrassing to the government. Censorship was usually greater for materials in Arabic.

Local journalist contacts reported they engaged in extensive self-censorship on subjects such as criticism of the president and his family, the security services, or Alawite religious groups. The government required both domestic and foreign journalist who did not observe these guidelines to leave the country or targeted them for arrest, torture, or execution.

Libel/Slander Laws: Although the 2011 media law prohibits imprisoning journalists for practicing their profession, the government continued to detain and

arrest journalists who opposed the government. The government charged some of these individuals under libel laws.

National Security: The government cited laws protecting national security to restrict media distribution of material that criticized government policies or public officials.

Nongovernmental Impact: Opposition forces kidnapped and killed journalists. According to the RSF and the SNHR, the PYD subjected journalists to harassment and detention. According to the COI, Da'esh abducted journalists and activists working to document its abuses in territories under its control. According to the SNHR, Da'esh killed 16 journalists and held others in detention and Jabhat al-Nusra killed one. The SNHR also reported that opposition groups killed eight media activists and injured 18, and it alleged that Russian forces killed two media activists. Authorities made no progress in resolving the cases reported by the CPJ of two journalists kidnapped by Da'esh from the Kurdish media network or the three Orient News employees abducted by unidentified armed men. There was no progress made in resolving the killing of al-Arabiya TV correspondent Mohamed Saeed al-Khatib.

Internet Freedom

According to this year's *Freedom on the Net Report*, the country remained one of the most dangerous and repressive environments for internet users in the world. The government controlled and restricted the internet and monitored e-mail and social media accounts. Individuals and groups could not express views via the internet, including by e-mail, without prospect of reprisal. The government applied the media law, as well as the general legal code, to regulate internet use and prosecute users.

The government often monitored internet communications, including e-mail and interfered with and blocked internet service, SMS messages, and two-step verification messages for password recovery or account activation. The government employed sophisticated technologies and hundreds of computer specialists for filtering and surveillance purposes, such as monitoring e-mail and social media accounts of detainees, activists, and others. The government did not attempt to restrict the security branches' monitoring and censoring of the internet. The security branches were largely responsible for restricting internet freedom and access; internet blackouts often coincided with security force attacks. The

government censored websites related to the opposition, including the websites for local coordination committees as well as media outlets.

Many areas no longer had internet access because of continued violence and damage to infrastructure largely perpetrated by the government, especially in the north and east. The government also restricted or prohibited internet access in areas under siege. It obstructed connectivity through its control of key infrastructure, at times shutting the internet and mobile telephone networks entirely or at particular sites of unrest. There was generally little access to state-run internet service in besieged areas unless users could capture signals clandestinely from rooftops near government-controlled areas. Some towns in opposition-held areas had limited internet access via satellite connections. Some activists reportedly gained access independently to satellite internet or through second and third-generation (3G) cell phone network coverage. The government blacked out internet services for 48 hours following a September 4 bomb attack that killed Druze leader Sheikh Wahed Bal'ous in al-Suwaida.

The government meanwhile expanded its efforts to use social media, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, to spread progovernment propaganda and manipulate online content. Government authorities routinely tortured and beat journalists to extract passwords for social media sites, and the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA), a group of progovernment computer hackers, frequently launched cyber-attacks on websites to disable them and post progovernment material. In addition to promoting hacking and conducting surveillance, the government and groups that it supported, such as the SEA, reportedly planted malware to target human rights activists, opposition members, and journalists. Local human rights groups blamed government personnel for instances in which malware infected activists' computers.

Observers also accused the SEA of slowing internet access to force self-censorship on government critics and diverting e-mail traffic to government servers for surveillance. Media reports have indicated that the SEA hacked *The Washington Post's* mobile site in May, and the SEA claimed responsibility for hacking a foreign armed force's public website in June.

Da'esh forces restricted access to internet cafes, especially for women, confiscated cell phones and computers, and instituted strict rules for journalists to follow or face punishment. Da'esh also increased cyber-attacks on journalists and groups documenting human rights abuses.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom and cultural events. Authorities generally did not permit teachers to express ideas contrary to government policy. The Ministry of Culture restricted and banned the screening of certain films.

Da'esh and Jabhat al-Nusra sought to severely restrict academic freedom and to curtail cultural events considered un-Islamic. Media sources reported that schools in Da'esh-controlled Raqqa banned several academic subjects, including chemistry and philosophy.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for the right of assembly, but the government restricted this right. Even after the 2011 repeal of the emergency law, a subsequent 2011 presidential decree grants the government broad powers over freedom of assembly.

The Ministry of Interior requires permission for demonstrations or any public gathering of more than three persons. As a rule the ministry only authorized demonstrations by the government or affiliated groups or the Baath Party, orchestrating them on numerous occasions. The government continued to use excessive force against peaceful demonstrators.

In opposition-held areas, extremist armed opposition groups targeted activists, protesters, documentation groups, and media groups for detention, hostage taking, harassment, and executions. The COI reported that residents in Da'esh-controlled parts of Aleppo and Raqqa noted severe restrictions on assembly.

According to Kurdish activists and press reporting, the PYD and the YPG violently suppressed freedom of assembly and severely limited freedom of speech in areas under their control.

Freedom of Association

The constitution permits private associations but grants the government the right to limit their activities. The government restricted freedom of association, requiring prior registration and approval for private associations and restricting the activities

of associations and their members. The executive boards of professional associations were not independent of the government.

The government often denied requests for registration or failed to act on them, reportedly on political grounds. None of the local human rights organizations operated with a license, but many functioned under organizations that had requisite government registration. The government continued to block the multiyear effort by journalists to form a countrywide media association. The government selectively enforced the 2011 decree allowing the establishment of independent political parties, allowing only progovernment groups to form official parties (see section 3). According to local human rights groups, opposition activists declined to organize parties, fearing the government would use party lists to target opposition members.

Under the authority of laws that criminalize membership and activity in illegal organizations as determined by the government, security forces detained hundreds of persons linked to local human rights groups and prodemocracy student groups. The government also searched these individuals' personal and social media contacts for further potential targets.

According to media reports and former residents of Da'esh-controlled areas, Da'esh did not permit the existence of associations that opposed the structures or policies of the "caliphate."

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 movement "within the territories of the state unless restricted by a judicial decision or by the implementation of laws." The government, Da'esh, and other armed groups, however, restricted internal movement and travel and instituted security checkpoints to monitor such travel throughout the regions under their respective control. Government sieges in Homs, Damascus, Rif-Damascus, Deir al-Zour, and Idlib governorates resulted in documented cases of death, starvation, and severe malnutrition (see section 1.g.). Opposition forces imposed sieges on government-held areas in Aleppo

governorate, cutting off water, electricity, fuel, and medicine. In areas under its control, Da'esh restricted the movement of government supporters or assumed supporters, especially the Alawi and Shia populations. Other opponents of the government also restricted the movement of such individuals, but to a lesser extent.

In-country Movement: The government besieged cities throughout the country, reportedly blocking humanitarian access and leading to severe malnutrition, lack of access to medical care, and death, particularly in Zabadani, Douma, and Eastern Ghouta (see section 1.g.). According to OCHA, more than 360,000 inhabitants remained in besieged areas at year's end. The violence, coupled with significant cultural pressure, severely restricted the movement of women in many areas. In addition, the law allows certain male relatives to place travel bans on women (see section 6, Women).

The government inconsistently cooperated with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers. The government provided some cooperation to UNRWA.

The government relied on security checkpoints to monitor and limit movement and expanded them into civilian areas. The government also barred foreign diplomats from visiting most parts of the country and rarely granted them permission to travel outside Damascus. The consistently high level and unpredictability of violence severely restricted movement throughout the country.

Da'esh and opposition groups also controlled movement, including with checkpoints.

Government forces reportedly used snipers to prevent protests, enforce curfews, target opposition forces, and in some cases to prevent civilians from fleeing besieged towns. The SNHR reported that government snipers killed a special needs individual attempting to leave the besieged town of Madaya on September 28. According to the COI, the drive through long desert detour routes exposed passengers and drivers to arbitrary arrest, unlawful search and seizure of property, demands for bribes, and detention and execution at checkpoints administered by Da'esh, the government, and other armed actors. Government forces failed to maintain its supply lines, and rebel forces broke the encirclement during the year, but the government renewed its military offense in October.

Da'esh reportedly did not permit female passengers to traverse territory it controlled unless accompanied by a close male relative, and it imposed severe restrictions on women's attire in public.

Foreign Travel: While citizens have the right to travel internationally, the government denied passports and other vital documents based on the applicant's political views, association with opposition groups, or ties to geographic areas where the opposition dominated. The government also imposed exit visa requirements and routinely closed the Damascus airport and border crossings, claiming the closures were due to violence or threats of violence. In addition, the government often banned travel by human rights or civil society activists, their families, and affiliates. Many citizens reportedly learned of the ban against their travel only when authorities prevented them from departing the country. The government reportedly applied travel bans without explanation or explicit duration, including in cases when individuals sought to travel for health reasons. The government comprehensively banned international travel of opposition members, often targeting any such individual who attempted to travel. Local media and human rights groups repeatedly stated that opposition activists and their families hesitated to leave the country, fearing attacks at airports and border crossings.

There were reports Da'esh destroyed Syrian passports and legal records and produced its own passports, not recognized by any country or entity. These policies disproportionately affected children, because many left the country before obtaining a passport or identification card. In addition, Syrians born abroad to parents who fled the conflict and remained in refugee camps generally did not have access to Syrian citizenship documents.

Women over 18 have the legal right to travel without the permission of male relatives, but a husband may file a request with the Interior Ministry to prohibit his wife from departing the country.

Da'esh explicitly prohibited women from foreign travel.

Emigration and Repatriation: On their return to the country, both persons who unsuccessfully sought asylum in other countries and those who had previous connections with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood faced prosecution. The law provides for the prosecution of any person who attempts to seek refuge in another country to evade penalty in Syria. The government routinely arrested dissidents and former citizens with no known political affiliation who attempted to return to the country after years or even decades of self-imposed exile. Many emigrants

who did not complete mandatory military service could pay a fee to avoid conscription while visiting the country, but this option tended to vary by ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Authorities exempted from military service without payment persons of Syrian origin born in a foreign country but able to demonstrate service in the army of the country of birth.

Internally Displaced Persons

The government did not relocate IDPs and provided inconsistent protection and assistance.

By the last quarter of the year, the United Nations estimated there were more than 6.5 million IDPs in the country. The figures on the IDP population varied widely, since many areas were inaccessible; actual figures may have been higher. Displacement increased dramatically during the year as violence intensified. UN humanitarian officials reported that most IDPs sought shelter in private homes, schools, and other overcrowded public buildings, many with inadequate sanitation and irregular delivery of relief supplies. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) functioned as the main partner for international humanitarian organizations working inside the country to provide humanitarian assistance in both government- and opposition-controlled areas. Access difficulties--including those imposed by the government, Da'esh, and opposition groups--hindered the delivery of aid to persons in need. The SARC and UN agencies sought to increase the flow of assistance to opposition-held areas to meet growing humanitarian needs. The government routinely disrupted the supply of humanitarian aid to rebel-held areas, particularly medical assistance (see section 1.g.).

International organizations, such as the World Food Program and International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, attempted to continue providing food and medical assistance, but the government, Da'esh, and some opposition groups actively resisted this assistance in many cases. UN agencies also reported opposition forces interfered with the provision of humanitarian assistance to some government-held areas.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. UNHCR and UNRWA were able to maintain limited protection areas for refugees and asylum seekers, although violence increasingly hampered access to vulnerable

populations. In coordination with both local and international nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations continued to provide such individuals essential services and assistance.

UNHCR estimated that at least 95,000 mainly Yezidi Iraqis entered the country following Da'esh attacks on Sinjar District in Iraq, beginning in August 2014. Many initially fled to Mount Sinjar but managed to evacuate the mountain with the assistance of military strikes led by the Western coalition and support from Syrian Kurdish groups, who transported many Yezidis into the country. While the majority of these persons returned to Iraq through the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, UNHCR estimated that approximately 3,000 continued to reside in Newroz Camp in the Malkia area; others moved to villages in the cities of Malkia, Qamishly, Amuda, and Derbasia.

Refugee Abuse: Refugee abuse occurred, including detentions and disappearances of refugees and refugee children. Some refugee populations reported fear of abuse by combatants in the civil war due to nationality or religion. In addition, both government and opposition forces reportedly besieged Palestinian refugee camps, neighborhoods, and sites throughout the country, which resulted in severe malnutrition and lack of access to medical care and humanitarian assistance. The government reportedly cut off humanitarian aid and access to the predominantly Palestinian neighborhood of Yarmouk in 2013, leaving 18,000 civilians without medical care and at risk of starvation. Following Da'esh's incursion into the camp in April, humanitarian access to Yarmouk and environs worsened. UNRWA did not have access to Yarmouk after March 28. In June UNRWA condemned the aerial bombardment of one of its facilities in Khan Eshieh Palestine refugee camp, situated in the southwest of rural Damascus. According to UNRWA, the attack killed one Palestinian refugee and injured an unconfirmed number. The injured included at least one child who had been participating in summer activities in an UNRWA facility when a large explosion directly hit an UNRWA school next door, destroying the building.

Employment: The law does not explicitly permit refugees, except for Palestinians, the right to work. While the government rarely granted non-Palestinian refugees a work permit, many refugees found work in the informal sector as guards, construction workers, street vendors, and in other manual jobs.

Access to Basic Services: The law allows for the issuance of identity cards to Palestinian refugees and the same access to basic services provided to citizens.

The government also allowed Iraqi refugees access to publicly available services, such as health care and education.

Stateless Persons

Approximately 160,000 “unregistered” Kurds remained in the country without a national identity, according to the most recent estimate from 2011. The government considered the Kurds to be foreigners, which denied them access to services. Following the 1962 census, approximately 150,000 Kurds lost their citizenship. A legislative decree ordained the single-day census in 1962, and the government executed it unannounced with regard to the inhabitants of al-Hasakah governorate. Government justification for this measure was to identify Kurds who had entered the country since 1945. Anyone not registered for any reason or without all required paperwork became “foreign” from that day onward. In similar fashion authorities recorded anyone who refused to participate as “undocumented.” Because of this loss of citizenship, these Kurds and their descendants lacked identity cards and could not access government services, including health care and education. They also faced social and economic discrimination. Stateless Kurds do not have the right to inherit or bequeath assets, and their lack of citizenship or identity documents restricted their travel to and from the country.

In 2011 President Asad issued a decree declaring that stateless Kurds in al-Hasakah governorate who were registered as “foreigners” could apply for citizenship. UNHCR reported that an unknown number of stateless Kurds eligible under the decree received citizenship documents. The decree, however, did not extend to the approximately 160,000 “unregistered” stateless Kurds. The change from 150,000 to 160,000 reflected an approximate increase in population since the 1962 census.

Children derive citizenship solely from their father. Because women cannot confer nationality on their children, an unknown number of children whose fathers were missing or deceased due to the continuing conflict were at risk of statelessness. Mothers could not pass citizenship to children born outside the country, including in neighboring countries operating refugee camps.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Although the constitution provides the ability for citizens to change their government periodically through free and fair elections based on universal and equal suffrage, citizens were not able to exercise that ability. Outcomes do not

reflect the unimpeded or uncoerced will of the electorate because of the underlying circumstances of elections.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In May 2014 Bashar Asad, Hassan al-Nouri, and Maher Hajjar registered as candidates for the June 3 presidential election administered in disparate areas of the country; the majority of citizens could not access polling places because of violence or displacement. The process, in which Asad received 88.7 percent of the vote, was neither free nor fair by international standards. Voters faced intimidation by security elements, and the government forcibly transported state employees in Damascus to polling centers, according to observers and the media. Media reports described low overall voter turnout, even among those living in relatively stable areas with access to polling stations. Authorities only allowed persons in government-controlled territory, certain refugee areas, and refugees who left the country after obtaining official permission to vote. According to a June 2014 report of Human Rights First, Hizballah threatened Syrian refugees if they did not vote for Asad. Security forces increased security measures in Damascus and surrounding areas under government control to maximize voter turnout. Nonetheless, violence continued throughout the country, and some armed opposition groups fired missiles at government-controlled areas during the voting period.

In August the National Coalition for the Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces held internal elections in Istanbul, resulting in the re-election of the Syrian Opposition Coalition President, Khaled Khoja, as well as two vice presidents, one of whom was a woman, Nagham al-Ghadri.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution provides that the Baath Party is the ruling party and assures that it has a majority in all government and popular associations, such as workers' and women's groups. The Baath Party dominated the 250-member People's Council, holding 134 of the 250 parliament seats following the 2012 election. The Baath Party and nine other smaller satellite political parties constituted the coalition National Progressive Front. A 2011 decree allows establishment of additional political parties, although it forbids those based on religion, tribal affiliation, or regional interests.

Membership in the Baath Party or close familial relations with a prominent party member or powerful government official assisted in economic, social, and educational advancement. Party or government connections made it easier to gain

admission to better schools, access lucrative employment, and achieve greater advancement and power within the government, the military, and the security services. The government reserved certain prominent positions, such as provincial governorships, solely for Baath Party members.

The government showed little tolerance for other political parties. The government harassed parties such as the Communist Union Movement, the Communist Action Party, and the Arab Social Union, and it arrested their members. Police arrested members of Islamist parties. Reliable data on illegal political parties was unavailable.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women and minorities generally participated in the political system without formal restriction, although significant cultural and social barriers largely excluded women from decision-making positions. The government, formed after the 2014 election, included three female members: Vice President Najah al-Attar; Minister of State for Environmental Affairs Nazira Serkis; and Minister of Social Affairs Kinda al-Shammatt. There were 30 female members of parliament. There were Christian, Druze, and Kurdish members in parliament. Alawites, the ruling religious minority, held greater political power than other minorities in the cabinet as well as greater power than the majority Sunni sect in the cabinet.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

Although the law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Corruption continued to be a pervasive problem in police forces, security services, migration management agencies, and throughout the government.

Corruption: Due to the lack of free press and of opposition access to instruments of government and the media, there was almost no detailed information about corruption, except petty corruption. There were reports of prison guards demanding bribes from prisoners and their visitors. Visiting family members who paid higher bribes enjoyed visits to detainees without police surveillance. The price of bribes continued to rise from previous years. Human rights lawyers and family members of detainees stated that government officials in courts and prisons solicited bribes for favorable decisions and provision of basic services. Traffic police officers regularly solicited bribes from drivers, and child laborers reported bribing police to avoid arrest.

Financial Disclosure: There are no public financial disclosure laws for public officials. The prime minister's Central Commission for Control and Inspection is the main administrative body responsible for coordinating and monitoring public sector corruption. Each government body, including the ministries, has a Control and Inspection Department that reported directly to the Central Commission.

Public Access to Information: The media law provides for access to information from ministries and other government institutions. The law contains ambiguous provisions for nondisclosure, including forbidding access to information that "affects national unity and national security." The law obliges authorities to respond to requests within seven days of receiving an inquiry. The law requires administrative judiciary courts to investigate total or partial refusals of information requests and issue a decision within one month. It does not stipulate penalties for noncompliance. There was no evidence the government implemented the law during the year.

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

The government restricted attempts to investigate alleged human rights violations and actively refused to cooperate with any independent attempts to investigate alleged violations. The government did not grant permission for the formation of any domestic human rights organizations. Nevertheless, hundreds of such groups operated illegally in the country. There were reports the government harassed domestic human rights activists by subjecting them to regular surveillance and travel bans. The government normally responded to queries from human rights organizations and foreign embassies regarding specific cases by reporting that the case was still under investigation, that the prisoner in question had violated national security laws, or, if the case was in criminal court, that the executive branch could not interfere with the allegedly independent judiciary. The government reportedly sought out members of domestic human rights organizations for property seizures, harassment, detention, arrest, torture, and execution.

The government was highly suspicious of international human rights NGOs and did not allow them into the country. Reports and media interviews with government officials indicated the government denied committing any human rights violations. It reportedly denied other organizations access to several locations where government agents launched assaults on antigovernment protesters

or allegedly held prisoners detained on political grounds. According to reports, the government also actively restricted the activities of humanitarian aid organizations, especially along supply routes and access points near opposition-controlled areas (see section 1.g.).

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government continued to deny access to the UN Commission of Inquiry, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to document and report on human rights violations and abuses in the country. It did not cooperate fully with numerous UN bodies, resulting in restrictions on access for humanitarian organizations, especially to opposition-controlled areas.

In November the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons reported the findings of its Fact Finding Mission (FFM) to the UN that combatants again used chemical weapons. In its report the FFM was confident that an attack exposed at least two persons to sulfur mustard in Marea on August 21 and stated further that it was “very likely that the effects of sulfur mustard resulted in the death of a baby” during this incident. In addition, the FFM report stated that incidents in Idlib between March 16 and May 20 “likely involved the use of one or more toxic chemicals as a weapon” with an “outcome of exposure [that] was fatal in six cases in Sarmin.”

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

The constitution provides for equal rights and equal opportunity for all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. The government did not enforce the law effectively or make any serious attempt to do so. Women faced widespread violence, discrimination, and significant restrictions on their rights. Da’esh imposed severe restrictions on women’s personal conduct, attire, and freedom of movement in the territory it controlled (see section 1.g.).

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is a felony, subject to punishment by at least 15 years in prison, but the government did not enforce the law. The law further stipulates that, if the rapist marries the victim, the rapist receives no punishment. The victim’s family sometimes agreed to this arrangement to avoid the social stigma attached to rape. There are no laws against spousal rape. Observers of the refugee crisis reported women, men, and community leaders consistently identified

sexual violence as a primary reason their families fled the country. The COI reported rape was widespread, and government and progovernment forces used rape to terrorize and punish women, men, and children perceived as associated with the opposition (see section 1.g.). The COI concluded that underreporting and delayed reporting of sexual violence was endemic, rendering an assessment of its magnitude difficult. Reports by the SNHR, HRW, and other NGOs included interviews with female former prisoners, who reported that rape by guards and security forces was common in detention facilities.

The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, and violence against women was extensive and generally went unpunished. Victims did not report the vast majority of domestic violence and sexual assault cases. Victims traditionally were reluctant to seek assistance outside the family due to fear of social stigmatization. Security forces consistently treated violence against women as a social rather than a criminal matter. Observers reported that, when some abused women tried to file a police report, police did not investigate their reports thoroughly, if at all, and that in other cases police officers responded by abusing the women, including by sexual harassment, verbal abuse, hair pulling, and slapping.

In the past several domestic violence centers operated in Damascus, and the government licensed and affiliated them with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Local NGOs reported, however, that many centers no longer operated due to the conflict. There were no known government-run services for women outside Damascus. According to local human rights organizations, local coordination committees and other opposition-related groups offered programming specifically for protection of women; NGOs did not integrate these programs throughout the country, and none reported reliable funding.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): There is no law against FGM/C. Observers provided no reports of FGM/C.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The law permits judges to reduce legal penalties for murder and assault if the defendant asserts an “honor” defense, which often occurred. The government kept no official statistics on use of this defense in murder and assault cases. There were no officially reported “honor” killings during the year, but local human rights groups asserted the practice continued, reportedly at previous levels, despite or even because of the continuing violence. NGOs working with refugees reported families reportedly killed some rape victims inside the country, including those raped by government forces, for reasons of

“honor.” NGOs also reported the conflict led to a significant rise in “honor” killings due to the pervasive use of rape by government forces and sexual slavery and exploitation by Da’esh.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment and specifies different punishments, depending on whether the victim is a minor or an adult. The government did not enforce the law. Due to social and cultural pressures, victims rarely reported sexual harassment.

Reproductive Rights: The government generally respected the ability of couples and individuals to decide freely the number, spacing, and timing of their children and manage their reproductive health, including the right to have the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Outside of Damascus, women reportedly had little to no regular access to contraception and maternal health services, such as skilled attendance during pregnancy and childbirth, prenatal care, or essential obstetric and postpartum care. Activists reported government detention centers did not afford medical care to women during pregnancy or birth.

Female victims subjected to sexual violence lacked access to immediate health care. Consequences included severe physical injuries, psychosocial trauma, unwanted pregnancies, social stigmatization, and infection with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The destruction of hospitals further complicated access to health care. The lack of contraceptives caused many rape victims to face physical, social, and psychological consequences of both rape and any ensuing pregnancy.

Violence throughout the country made accessing medical care and reproductive services both costly and dangerous, and the COI reported that the government and armed extremists sometimes denied pregnant women passage through checkpoints, forcing them to give birth in unsterile and often dangerous conditions, without pain medication or adequate medical treatment. In March the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that half a million women in the country and in nearby refugee camps were pregnant and needed care. It also estimated that 70,000 would likely experience complications related to pregnancy or delivery. The UNFPA provided reproductive health services to women by distributing reproductive health kits. According to numerous sources, government forces deliberately denied medical care to persons in areas controlled by the opposition.

According to a CEDAW civil society report, an increasing number of women opted to give birth through Caesarian section to control the timing of delivery, avoiding the possibility of being harassed at government checkpoints, or traveling in insecure environments while in labor.

Discrimination: Although the constitution provides for equality between men and women and the “right of every citizen to earn his wage according to the nature and yield of the work,” the law does not explicitly stipulate equal pay for equal work. Moreover, a number of sections of family and criminal law do not treat men and women equally. Before the conflict began, only 16 percent of women participated in the formal labor force, compared with 72 percent of men. Female employment participation decreased as violence and insecurity increased. In previous years the government sought to overcome traditional discriminatory attitudes toward women and encouraged women’s education by providing equal access to educational institutions, including universities.

The Commission for Family Affairs, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor shared responsibility for attempting to afford equal legal rights to women. Governmental involvement in civil rights claims, including cases against sexual discrimination, was stagnant, and most claims went unanswered.

Personal status, retirement, citizenship, and social security laws discriminate against women. Men constituted the vast majority of the judiciary, and NGOs suggested this circumstance led to discriminatory treatment of women by federal courts. Under criminal law, if a man and a woman separately commit the same criminal act of adultery, the woman’s punishment is double that of the man’s. The law generally permits women to initiate divorce proceedings against their spouses, although some Christian sects strongly discouraged both women and men from doing so. For Muslims personal status law treats men and women differently. Some personal status laws mirror Islamic law regardless of the religion of those involved in the case. The law does not entitle a divorced woman to alimony in some cases, such as if she gave up her right to alimony to persuade her husband to agree to the divorce. In addition, under the law a divorced mother loses the right to guardianship and physical custody of her sons when they reach the age of 13 and of her daughters at age 15, when guardianship transfers to the paternal side of the family.

The government’s interpretation of Islamic law is the basis of inheritance law for all citizens except Christians. Accordingly, courts usually granted Muslim women half of the inheritance share of male heirs. In all communities, male heirs must

provide financial support to female relatives who inherit less. If they do not, women have the right to sue. During the year there were reports that, in some regions, custom prevailed over the law and women received no inheritance. A woman's husband, or male relative in a husband's absence, may request that the government prohibit his wife's travel abroad.

Women participated actively in public life and in most professions, including the armed forces, although violence in many regions reduced women's access to the public sphere. Women and men have equal legal rights in owning or managing land or other property, although cultural and religious norms impeded women's rights, especially in rural areas. Various sources observed that women constituted a minority of lawyers, university professors, and other professions. While women served in the judiciary, parliament, and high levels of government, the government often denied them decision-making positions (see section 3). According to several organizations, women were underrepresented in the judiciary, as only 13 percent of judges prior to the start of the civil war were women. The SNHR suggested that few, if any, women participated as judges in the courts.

Some opposition groups forbade women from participating equally in irregularly constituted courts (Aleppo governorate). Women did not hold an equal share of political positions in local opposition governance bodies but remained active in civil society, humanitarian assistance delivery, media, and education. Women did not have significant representation on local or provincial councils, accounting for only 3.2 percent of leadership positions, according to NGOs.

Some opposition groups and extremist elements reportedly banned women from teaching and girls from attending school, particularly in Da'esh-controlled Deir al-Zour governorate. According to activists from Raqqa, Da'esh segregated classrooms and removed women from the local councils in territories it controlled.

According to several groups, including HRW, extremist armed groups placed discriminatory restrictions on women and girls in Aleppo, al-Hassakah, Idlib, and Raqqa governorates. Such restrictions included strict dress codes, limitations on women's engagement in public life and ability to move freely, and constraints on their access to education and employment. Jabhat al-Nusra and Da'esh insisted that women follow a strict dress code that mandated wide cloaks and headscarves and that prohibited jeans, close-fitting clothing, and cosmetics. According to interviewees, members of these groups forbade women to go out in public without a male family member accompanying them in Idlib City, Ras al-Ayn, Tel Abyad (which was no longer in Da'esh control by year's end), and Tel Aran. Authorities

threatened women and girls who did not abide by the restrictions with punishment and, in some cases, blocked them from using public transportation, accessing education, and buying bread. Refugees from Idlib city, Tel Abyad, and Tel Aran related that Jabhat al-Nusra and Da'esh banned women from working outside the home.

In areas under its control, Da'esh published a "Civilization Document" with 16 points that a woman must follow or face the death penalty. They included staying at home and not leaving it without an immediate male relative (mahram); wearing a wide cloak, full face veil, and head scarf; closing hair salons; not sitting on chairs in public; and not seeing male doctors. Da'esh established the "al-Khanssaa" brigade, an all-female police force in Raqqa, composed mostly of noncitizen women who enforced these regulations, sometimes violently, among women.

There were limited reports of women actively participating in hostilities, including in armed Kurdish opposition groups and the mostly secular "Mother Aisha Brigade," considered part of the moderate armed opposition in Aleppo. There also were limited reports of female Da'esh members actively participating in armed hostilities. In Raqqa, Da'esh enlisted some women into the "al-Khanssaa" brigade, to staff checkpoints, enforce Da'esh laws, and participate in some house raids.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship solely from their father. In large areas of the country where civil registries were not functioning, authorities did not register births. The government did not register the births of Kurdish noncitizen residents, including stateless Kurds (see section 2.d., Stateless Persons). Failure to register resulted in deprivation of services.

Education: The government provided free public education to citizen children from primary school through university. Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of six and 12. Noncitizen children could also attend public schools at no cost but required permission from the Ministry of Education.

The conflict increasingly hampered the ability of children to attend school. OCHA estimated that citizens could not use one in four schools because they were damaged, destroyed, or in use as shelters for IDPs or for military purposes. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 52,500 teachers had left their posts in the first four years of the conflict. It also estimated that 2.4 million schoolchildren between the ages of three and 17 were no longer attending school.

Societal pressure for early marriage and childbearing interfered with girls' educational progress, particularly in rural areas, where dropout rates for female students remained high.

According to several reports, Da'esh segregated classrooms (including teachers) by gender, dismissed students for dress code violations, imposed its curriculum on teachers, and closed private schools and educational centers. According to local sources, Da'esh forces restricted young women in Raqqa from traveling to complete their university exams. Da'esh also banned several basic education subjects, such as chemistry.

While Palestinians and other noncitizens, including stateless Kurds, could generally send their children to school and universities, stateless Kurds were ineligible to receive a degree documenting their academic achievement.

Child Abuse: The country lacked a formal law protecting children from abuse. There were reports of government forces sexually assaulting, torturing, detaining, and killing children (see sections 1.a., 1.b., 1.c., and 1.g.). HRW reported that government teachers and principals interrogated and in some cases beat students who expressed antigovernment sentiments. In addition the United Nations, HRW, and local news sources reported that government forces used children as human shields.

Da'esh subjected children to extremely harsh punishments, including execution (see section 1.g.).

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age for marriage is 18 for men and 17 for girls. A boy or girl who is 15 or older may marry if a judge deems both parties willing, "physically mature," and if the fathers or grandfathers of both parties consent. Although underage marriage declined considerably in past decades, it was common and occurred in all communities, albeit in greater numbers in rural and less developed regions. The media and NGOs reported that early marriage, particularly among girls, was increasing among Syrian refugee populations.

Da'esh systematically abducted and sexually exploited Yezidi girls in Iraq and transported them to Syria for forced marriage (see section 1.g. and section 6, Women).

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The age of sexual consent, in accordance with the law, is 15. Premarital sex is illegal, but observers reported authorities did not

enforce the law. Rape of a child under the age of 15 is punishable by up to 21 years in prison. There were no reports of government prosecution of child rape cases.

Media and NGOs claimed that sexual exploitation of girls under the age of 15 remained widespread. In refugee communities, some families reportedly prostituted young women and girls due to economic desperation. There were also reports that local government officials and aid workers sexually exploited women and girls in refugee camps.

The penal code stipulates penalties for those found guilty of certain forms of child abuse associated with trafficking crimes, including kidnapping and forced prostitution, both of which carry a penalty of up to three years in prison. The law considers child pornography a trafficking crime, but the penalties for child pornography were unknown. It was also unclear if there had been any prosecutions for child pornography or if the law was enforced.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

Anti-Semitism

NGOs estimated fewer than 20 Jews remained in the country. According to the media and the Syrian American Council, in late May 2014 government forces destroyed the Eliyahu Hanabi synagogue, the country's oldest, in an artillery attack on Jobar, a rebel-held neighborhood in Damascus. Government and opposition forces accused each other of burning and looting the Jobar synagogue.

The national school curriculum did not include materials on tolerance education or the Holocaust.

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 prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities and seeks to integrate them into the public sector workforce, but the government did not

effectively enforce these provisions. The law protects persons with disabilities from discrimination in education, access to health care, or provision of other state services, and it reserves 4 percent of government-sector jobs and 2 percent of private-sector jobs for persons with disabilities. Private businesses are eligible for tax exemptions after hiring persons with disabilities. The law does not address specific disabilities.

Authorities did not fully document the number of persons with disabilities, but the conflict negatively affected persons with disabilities and increased their numbers through injuries. The SNHR reported the deaths of hundreds of citizens with pre-existing health conditions who could not access medical facilities due to conflict-related travel restrictions, including both government and extremist checkpoints. In other instances, government blockades prevented the movement of medical supplies and persons to opposition-held areas and prevented persons with medical needs from seeking appropriate treatment.

The government did not effectively work to provide access for persons with disabilities to buildings, communication, or information. Along with their peers, the conflict increasingly hampered the ability of children with disabilities to attend primary and secondary school in addition to seeking higher education.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor is responsible for assisting persons with disabilities and worked through dedicated charities and organizations to provide assistance.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

As in previous years, the government actively restricted national and ethnic minorities from conducting traditional, religious, and cultural activities. The Kurdish population, citizens and noncitizens, faced official and societal discrimination and repression as well as government-sponsored violence. Government forces arrested, detained, and reportedly tortured numerous Kurdish activists during the year.

The government continued to limit the use and teaching of the Kurdish language. It also restricted publication of books and other materials in Kurdish, Kurdish cultural expression, and at times the celebration of Kurdish festivals. Authorities continued enforcement of a 2009 government rule requiring that at least 60 percent of the words on signs in shops and restaurants be in Arabic (see section 2.a.).

Clashes between Kurdish groups and Da'esh continued during the year. In October 2014 at least 190,000 residents of the Kurdish town of Kobane fled ahead of a Da'esh offensive, according to media reports. The fighting near Kobane reportedly killed more than 650 persons. According to an HRW report, in May 2014 Da'esh abducted 153 Kurdish children when they attempted to return to Kobane after completing year-end exams in Aleppo. Coalition forces cleared Kobane of Da'esh earlier in the year, but Da'esh fighters briefly returned in June, disguising themselves as Kurdish forces to massacre approximately 250 civilians.

The Alawite community, to which Bashar Asad belongs, enjoyed privileged status throughout the government and dominated the state security apparatus and military leadership. Nevertheless, the government reportedly also targeted Alawite opposition activists for arbitrary arrest, torture, detention, and killing. Extremist opposition groups targeted Alawite communities on several occasions for their perceived progovernment stance.

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

The penal code prohibits homosexual relations, defined as “carnal relations against the order of nature,” and provides for at least three years’ imprisonment for violations. The law specifically criminalizes any sexual act that is “contrary to nature.” In previous years police used this charge to prosecute lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. There were no reports of prosecutions under the law during the year, although reports indicated the government arrested dozens of gay men and lesbians over the past several years on charges, such as abusing social values; selling, buying, or consuming illegal drugs; and organizing and promoting “obscene” parties.

Although there were no known domestic NGOs focused on LGBTI matters, there were several online networking communities, including an online LGBTI-oriented magazine. Human rights activists reported there was overt societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in all aspects of society. There were also reports of extremist groups threatening LGBTI activists.

Local media reported numerous instances in which security forces used accusations of homosexuality as a pretext to detain, arrest, and torture civilians. The frequency of such instances was difficult to determine, since police rarely reported their rationale for arrests. Furthermore, social stigma prevented many victims of such abuse from coming forward, even when accusations were false.

In February photos and videos began appearing on social media that showed Da'esh pushing men suspected of “being gay” from rooftops in Raqqa. In April Da'esh released images on social media showings members stoning men to death for being gay. In June the UN Secretary-General reported that Da'esh blindfolded and threw a man off a building on May 17 for being gay.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

There were no reports of violence or discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS, but human rights activists believed such cases were widely underreported. The government, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization did not maintain current data on the number of persons infected with HIV/AIDS living in the country. Observers, however, expected the HIV/AIDS rate of infection to rise with increased sexual violence in the country.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

While the law provides for the right to form and join unions, conduct legal labor strikes, and bargain collectively, there were excessive restrictions on these rights. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination, but the law also allows employers to fire workers at will.

The law requires all unions to belong to the government-affiliated General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU). Restrictions on freedom of association also included fines and prison sentences for illegal strikes. The government could impose forced labor as punishment on individuals who caused “prejudice to the general production plan.” The law prohibits strikes involving more than 20 workers in certain sectors, including transportation and telecommunication, or strike actions resembling public demonstrations.

The law requires that government representatives be part of the bargaining process in the public sector, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor could object to, and refuse to register, any agreements concluded. The labor code and relevant protections do not apply to workers covered under the Civil Service Law, under which employees neither have nor are considered to need collective bargaining rights. The labor code does not apply to domestic servants, agricultural workers, NGO employees, or informal sector workers. There are no legal protections for

self-employed workers, although they comprised a significant proportion of the total workforce. Foreign workers may join the syndicate representing their profession but may not run for elected positions, with the exception of Palestinians, who may serve as elected officials in unions.

The government did not enforce applicable laws effectively or make any serious attempt to do so during the year.

The Baath Party dominated the GFTU, and Baath Party doctrine stipulates that its quasi-official constituent unions protect worker rights. The GFTU president was a senior member of the Baath Party, and he and his deputy could attend cabinet meetings on economic affairs. In previous years the GFTU controlled most aspects of union activity, including which sectors or industries could have unions. It also had the power to disband union governing bodies. Union elections were generally free of direct GFTU interference, but successful campaigns usually required membership in the Baath Party. Because of the GFTU's close ties to the government, the right to bargain collectively did not exist in practical terms. Although the law provides for collective bargaining in the private sector, past government repression dissuaded most workers from exercising this right.

There was little information available on employer practices with regard to antiunion discrimination. Unrest and economic decline during the year caused many workers to lose their private sector jobs, giving employers the stronger hand in disputes.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law does not prohibit all forms of forced or compulsory labor, and such practices existed. There was little information available on government efforts to enforce relevant laws during the year.

The PYD-affiliated Kurdish security forces reportedly captured unknown numbers of men and women between the ages of 18 and 30 at checkpoints and from residences in Kurdish areas and compelled them to fight for the YPG. Some foreigners, including migrants from Central Asia, children, and western women, were reportedly forced, coerced, or fraudulently recruited to join extremist fighters, including Da'esh.

Syria was a destination and transit country for women and children trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. The government did not fully

comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and was not making significant efforts to do so.

Following the February Da'esh incursion into Assyrian villages in Hasakah, Da'esh captured up to 30 Assyrian Christian women and forced them into sexual slavery. Da'esh has also abducted thousands of Yezidi women and girls from Iraq and forcibly brought them to Syria for forced marriage, domestic servitude, systematic rape, and sexual violence. According to the COI, Da'esh restricted medical professionals' work and in some cases forced doctors to stop working in public hospitals or private clinics and instead work for Da'esh to treat its combatants.

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 labor law provides for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace. The minimum age for most types of nonagricultural labor is 15 or the completion of elementary schooling, whichever occurs first, and the minimum age for employment in industries with heavy work is 17. Parental permission is required for children younger than 16 to work. Children under 18 may work no more than six hours a day and may not work overtime or during night shifts, weekends, or on official holidays. Restrictions on child labor do not apply to those who work in family businesses and do not receive a salary.

There was little publicly available information on enforcement of child labor laws. The government generally did not make significant efforts to prevent or eliminate child labor. Independent information and audits regarding government enforcement were not available.

Child labor occurred in the country in both informal sectors, such as begging, domestic work, and agriculture, as well as in positions related to the conflict, such as lookouts, spies, and informants. Conflict-related work subjected children to significant dangers of retaliation and violence. Prior to the start of protests in 2011, there was progress in removing children from bonded agricultural labor organizations and street begging schemes, although the outbreak of civil war halted that progress.

The government continued to forcibly recruit and use child soldiers; it also failed to protect and prevent children from recruitment and use by government, armed opposition forces, and designated terrorist organizations such as Da'esh.

Children displaced within the country continue to be subjected to forced labor, particularly by organized begging rings. According to a UNICEF report released during the year, some 2.7 million such children were out of school, a figure swollen by children who were forced to work instead. Save the Children and UNICEF reported that more than 75 percent of the country's households had children working rather than attending school since the civil war began.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender, although personal status and penal laws continued to discriminate. Since homosexuality is a legally prohibited activity (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity), many persons faced discrimination due to their sexual orientation. The constitution prohibits discrimination against persons on the basis of race, color, gender, marital status, belief, political opinion, trade union membership, nationality, descent, clothing or dress style, or disability. There were no reports of government activities to encourage participation or prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to certain ethnic groups (see section 6, National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law divides the public sector monthly minimum wage into five levels based on job type or level of education, varying between 9,765 and 14,760 Syrian pounds (\$44 to \$67) per month. Benefits included compensation for meals, uniforms, and transportation. Most public sector employees relied on bribery to supplement their income. Private sector companies usually paid much higher wages, with lower-end wage rates semiofficially set by the government and employer organizations. Many workers in the public and private sectors took additional manual jobs or relied on their extended families to support them.

The public sector workweek was 35 hours, and the standard private sector workweek was 40 hours, excluding meals and rest breaks. Hours of work could increase or decrease, based on the industry and associated health hazards. The law provides for at least one meal or rest break totaling no less than one hour per day.

Employers must schedule hours of work and rest such that workers do not work more than five consecutive hours or 10 hours per day in total. Employers must provide premium pay for overtime work.

The government set occupational safety and health standards. The labor code includes provisions mandating that employers take appropriate precautions to protect workers from hazards inherent to the nature of work.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor is responsible for enforcing the minimum wage and other regulations pertaining to acceptable conditions of work. It did not effectively enforce standards. The Ministries of Health and of Social Affairs and Labor designated officials to inspect worksites for compliance with health and safety standards. Workers could lodge complaints about health and safety conditions with special committees established to adjudicate such cases. Wage and hour regulations as well as occupational health and safety rules do not apply to migrant workers, rendering them more vulnerable to abuse.

There was little information on government enforcement of labor laws or working conditions during the year. There were no health and safety inspections reported, and even previously routine inspections of tourist facilities such as hotels and major restaurants no longer occurred. The enforcement of labor laws was lax in both rural and urban areas, since many inspector positions were vacant due to the violence. The law did not protect workers who chose to extricate themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety from losing their employment.

Foreign workers, especially domestic workers, remained vulnerable to exploitative conditions. The violence affected foreign workers, some of whom found it difficult to leave the country. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor is in charge of regulating employment agencies responsible for providing safe working conditions for migrant domestic workers, but the scope of oversight was unknown. In large cities, Asian domestic workers sometimes overstayed their visas and continued to work in the country for years. The continued unrest resulted in the large-scale voluntary departure of foreign workers as demand for services significantly declined.