

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe is a multiparty constitutional democracy. Legislative elections on September 25 produced a peaceful transfer of power to the Independent Democratic Action party from a coalition of other parties. In September 2021, voters elected President Carlos Manuel Vila Nova as head of state. International observers deemed the presidential and legislative elections generally free and fair.

The public security police and judicial police maintain internal security. The public security police report to the Ministry of Defense and Internal Order, and the judicial police report to the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Human Rights. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; serious government corruption; and a lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence and violence against children.

The government took some steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed abuses, including corruption.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were several reports that agents of the government committed arbitrary and unlawful killings.

Four civilians died while in the custody of military forces on November 25 in the wake of an attack on an army barracks, which the government claimed was an attempted coup d'état. Three of the suspected attackers were captured at the barracks, where they were reportedly beaten and killed. A fourth individual, Arlecio Costa, was arrested at home the same day by military forces on allegations of involvement in the attack. He later died after reportedly falling out of a truck while in military custody. Videos and photographs of the alleged beatings circulated widely on social media. At year's end, judicial authorities were investigating the attack and deaths with the assistance, at government request, of investigators and forensic experts from Portugal.

In a March 2021 case, Nelson Rita das Neves died at the hospital after being beaten in a cell while in the custody of judicial police. The public attorney general brought criminal charges against seven police investigators in the case. Their trials were underway at year's end, with three of the accused investigators facing up to 24 years in prison on charges that included homicide.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

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

Although the constitution and law prohibit such practices, videos and photographs that circulated widely on social media purported to show military forces employing such practices during interrogation of a detainee suspected of instigating the November 25 army barracks attack (see section 1.a.).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh due to overcrowding and failing infrastructure. The country's single prison operated at 20 percent over capacity.

Abusive Physical Conditions: There was one prison in the capital city, a separate detention center in Campo Grande, and police stations had small detention areas to hold detainees for periods shorter than 72 hours. Authorities held pretrial and

convicted prisoners separately. Juveniles were held together with adults. Women prisoners were held in a separate part of the prison. The needs of prisoners with disabilities went unmet.

There were no reported prisoner deaths in the central prison or detention center.

Although there was a lack of basic medicines, the prison had three full-time nurses and two doctors who visited patients during the week. There were also two psychologists and one sociologist on staff. Prisoners with medical emergencies were taken to the national hospital.

Some rooms in the prison were so decrepit they were unusable. High temperatures were typical, and ventilation was insufficient. Sanitation and kitchen conditions also needed improvement.

Administration: Legal representatives from the prosecutor's staff and court personnel were available to address prisoner grievances. Prisoners and detainees may submit complaints without censorship and request investigation of allegations of inhuman conditions. No allegations were submitted during the year.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government limited visits to the prison, including family visits, allowing four periods for family visits each week. To mitigate the impact of the restrictions, two telephones were made available to the prisoners to call their families and relatives, although prison psychologists and guards monitored the calls.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent nongovernmental and international human rights monitors, as well as church and charitable organization representatives, to visit the prison. The latter often provided food, soap, and other necessities to prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. They provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court and obtain prompt release and compensation if unlawfully detained. The government generally observed these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires arrest warrants issued by a judge to apprehend suspects unless the suspect is caught in the act of committing a crime. The law also requires the government to file charges within 48 hours of detention, and authorities generally respected this requirement. Authorities informed detainees promptly of charges against them and allowed them access to family members. There is a functioning bail system. Authorities allowed detainees prompt access to a lawyer. The government teamed with the bar association to provide indigent defendants with legal representation at no cost, although lawyers reported government funding was often insufficient to cover their fees.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention continued to be a problem in some criminal cases, with most such periods ranging from three to six months. The length of pretrial detention generally did not equal or exceed the maximum sentence for the alleged crime. More than one-fifth of inmates were pretrial detainees. An understaffed and inefficient judicial system added to the delay. A renovated wing of the prison allowed authorities to separate pretrial detainees from convicted criminals, who were previously held together.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Judges were appointed directly by the National Assembly, leaving them potentially vulnerable to ruling party influence. Authorities generally respected and enforced court orders.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

By law individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through the criminal and civil court system. Plaintiffs may file lawsuits seeking damages for human rights abuses; there are also administrative remedies for alleged wrongs. There is no regional body, however, to which individuals and organizations may appeal adverse court rulings.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press, and the government generally respected this right. A somewhat independent press and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, although the press was occasionally susceptible to political influence and manipulation. The law grants all opposition parties access to state-run media, including a minimum of three minutes for each party per month on television. Some opposition leaders claimed the minimum time allotment was often not respected and that the government edited content presented during that time.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Journalists claimed to need to practice self-censorship, particularly at government-owned media entities, which were the country's most significant news sources. Journalists indicated that top editors and producers at government-owned media outlets were typically linked to the ruling political party, which colored reporting on all politically sensitive topics. Reporters at private news outlets also reported self-censoring their work mostly

due to lack of formal training and understanding of freedom of the press principles. Journalists at private media outlets cited pressure from government officials but could point to no political or judicial actions against these outlets. Journalists also indicated that obtaining access to official sources, mainly legal documents, continued to be a challenge.

Libel/Slander Laws: Libel, slander, and blasphemy are treated as criminal offenses. There were no cases of persons being arrested for or charged with libel, slander, or blasphemy during the year.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these related rights.

e. Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. During the year there were no reports of refugee or asylum requests.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Legislative elections on September 25 were followed by a peaceful transfer of power from a political coalition to a new government led by the Independent Democratic Action party. International observers deemed the elections transparent, adequately organized, and generally free and fair.

Political Parties and Political Participation: While government funds by law cannot be used for campaign purposes, civil society groups noted that the ruling party used government vehicles to attend campaign events.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit the participation of women or members of historically marginalized groups in the political process, and they did participate. Cultural and social factors, however, limited women's political participation.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government generally did not implement the law effectively. The government continued to investigate corruption allegations against several former high-ranking officials, although none were tried. At year's end, the attorney general was investigating approximately 10 criminal cases involving public corruption. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

Corruption: Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Among the cases under investigation, the Court of Audit in May found several instances of financial irregularities related to the nation's fight against COVID-19 and requested that the Ministry of Health transfer 979,000 new dobra (\$42,000) to a separate account under independent state oversight. Many citizens reportedly

viewed police as ineffective and corrupt, and feared retaliation if they reported corrupt police officers.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A small number of domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Human Rights Committee, under the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, was moderately effective. This committee reported no human rights abuses during the year but was active in advocating for changes to law and policy in support of human rights.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape, of men and women is illegal and punishable by two to 12 years' imprisonment. Prosecution was most common when there was evidence of violent assault, or the survivor was a child.

The law prescribes penalties ranging from imprisonment for three to eight years for domestic violence resulting in harm to the health of the victim, to incarceration for eight to 25 years when such violence leads to loss of life. Although the number of reports was steadily increasing, there was no data on the number of prosecutions or convictions for domestic violence. The government changed the law to enhance penalties in domestic violence cases and to allow persons other than the victim to file a criminal complaint, giving police and prosecutors greater ability to pursue cases. The government did not enforce rape and domestic violence laws effectively.

There were widespread reports of domestic violence. According to a report by the

National Institute of Statistics, the Ministry of Health, and the nongovernmental organization Inner City Fund Macro, approximately one-third of women experienced intimate-partner physical abuse, sexual violence, or both at least once in their lifetime. Many women were reluctant to take legal action because of the cost, a general lack of confidence in the legal system to address their concerns effectively, fear of retaliation, and, in many cases, ignorance of their legal rights.

The Office of Women's Affairs, under the Prime Minister's Office, and UNICEF maintained a counseling center and small shelter with a domestic violence hotline, but the facility was closed for part of the year due to lack of funding, and its future remained uncertain. In prior years the Gender Equality Institute within the Office of Women's Affairs conducted awareness workshops and seminars to educate women on their rights, but lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of funding precluded these efforts. There was an increase in police reports of gender-based violence against both women and girls during COVID-19 lockdowns. The institute also trained police, medical professionals, court officials, and lawyers on how to recognize and respond to domestic abuse.

The government in November announced the creation of the Ministry of Women's Rights.

Sexual Harassment: While the law prohibits sexual harassment, the government did not always enforce the law. In cases of sexual harassment involving violence or threats, the law prescribes penalties of one to eight years' imprisonment. The maximum penalty for conviction in other cases of sexual harassment is three years' imprisonment.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. The country has no law, regulation, or government policy that interferes with couples' or individuals' right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children.

The government encouraged the use of contraception and family planning, but sociocultural barriers affected the use of family planning. There were reports that some men prevented their partners from using contraceptives, sometimes through intimidation. Emergency contraception was available as part of the mix of

contraception methods.

The country had several healthcare centers, two of which were equipped to provide emergency obstetrical and neonatal care. These two centers served approximately 35 percent of the population. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reinforced the capacity of 37 of the country's 38 health facilities to provide at least four modern contraceptive methods, as well as voluntary counseling and testing. UNFPA also supplied maternity wards with medicines and strengthened the capacity of 19 health centers to provide emergency obstetrical and neonatal care.

According to a UNFPA report, several indicators related to child and maternal health improved. For example, 93 percent of births were attended by a health professional and 97 percent of health facilities provided maternal and child health services and family planning. Many family-planning needs, however, remained unmet and early pregnancy remained high at 27 percent.

There were no special health services for survivors of sexual violence; the central hospital and health center was able to provide these services, including emergency contraception as part of the clinical management of rape. There were no reports of legal, social, or cultural barriers, including harmful practices, related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene that impacted women and girls' ability to participate equally in society, including any limits on a girl's access to education. In 2021, the government repealed regulations prohibiting pregnant teenagers from attending high school with their peers.

Discrimination: While the constitution and law nominally provide the same legal status and rights for women and men, the laws do not specifically recognize legal equality in family, child custody, businesses and property ownership or management, nationality, or inheritance matters. Discrimination did not generally occur in access to credit or housing.

While many women had access to opportunities in education, business, and government, women – particularly older women and those living in rural areas – generally encountered significant societal discrimination. Traditional beliefs left women with most childcare responsibilities. Nevertheless, younger women had increasing access to educational and professional opportunities compared with

their elders.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The constitution provides that all citizens are equal before the law regardless of race or ethnicity. There were no reports of the government failing to enforce the law effectively.

Children

Birth Registration: Children born in and outside the country acquire citizenship at birth if either parent is a citizen. By law, children born in a hospital are registered on site. If not born in a hospital, the child must be registered at the nearest precinct office. Parents who fail to register a birth may be fined, and failure to register a birth could hinder access to education because having a personal identification record was required to enroll in school.

Education: In 2021, the government repealed regulations prohibiting pregnant teenagers from attending high school with their peers (see Reproductive Rights, above). There were no significant differences in school attendance or completion between boys and girls, although girls attended and completed school at slightly higher rates than boys. The Ministry of Education mandates compulsory school attendance through the ninth grade, and the government granted some assistance to several thousand low-income families to keep their children in school.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits child abuse, but it was not enforced effectively. The UN reported 84 percent of children experienced violent discipline, and 14 percent experienced severe physical punishment. Orphans and abandoned children were particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage without parental consent is 18. With parental consent, girls may marry at age 14 and boys at age 16. According to UNICEF, 35 percent of girls are married before age 18 and 8 percent married before age 15.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits statutory rape and child pornography, but there were no reports of enforcement of the law. The

government also uses kidnapping and forced labor laws to prosecute sexual exploitation of children. The penalty for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of children younger than age 14 is two to 10 years' imprisonment, and the penalty for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of minors between ages 14 and 18 is up to three years' imprisonment. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18. In past years there were reports of children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. There were reports of increased cases of child sexual abuse since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and prison officials reported approximately 30 percent of prisoners were being held for child sexual abuse crimes.

Antisemitism

There was no known Jewish community, and there were no reports of antisemitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

There were no confirmed reports that traffickers exploited domestic or foreign victims.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law does not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct. There were no reports of other laws being enforced to have an unequal effect on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Individuals: There were no reports of violence targeting LGBTQI+ persons.

Discrimination: Antidiscrimination laws do not explicitly extend protections to LGBTQI+ persons based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics. There were occasional reports of societal discrimination, primarily rejection by family and friends, against LGBTQI+ persons. There were occasional

reports of employment discrimination based on LGBTQI+ status but were difficult to verify.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The ability to update gender markers to match one's gender identity was not available on legal or identifying documents.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: There were no reports of so-called conversion therapy practices.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: While there were no official impediments, LGBTQI+ organizations did not exist, and societal norms were often not accepting of LGBTQI+ persons. An individual's LGBTQI+ status was widely considered a taboo subject.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, or transportation on an equal basis with others. The law generally prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities; however, it does not mandate access to most buildings, transportation, or other services for persons with disabilities. By law, school buildings must be accessible to persons with disabilities, and renovations to bring schools into compliance were underway as of year's end. The government did not provide information and communication on disability concerns in accessible formats. Most children with disabilities attended the same schools as children without disabilities, but many did not attend school due to lack of resources and teacher training.

Persons with disabilities experienced discrimination in employment and occupation (see section 7.d.).

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Communities and families stigmatized and shunned persons with HIV and AIDS. Nongovernmental organizations held awareness-raising campaigns and interventions with employers to address discrimination against employees with HIV and AIDS.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. While the law recognizes the right to collective bargaining, there are no regulations governing this right. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination or acts of interference committed by employers against trade unions. While the law provides for the right to strike, including by government employees and other essential workers, this right is strictly regulated.

The provisions regulating strikes require agreement by a majority of workers before a strike may be called, and replacement workers may be hired without consultation with trade unions to perform essential services if an enterprise is threatened by a strike. The law provides a list of specific minimum or essential services. In the event of disagreement between employer and union in determining what constitutes “minimum service,” a decision is made by an arbitration tribunal appointed by the minister of labor. The law also requires compulsory arbitration before striking for certain services, including postal, banking, and loan services. The law prohibits retaliation against strikers and requires reinstatement of workers fired for legal union activity. The government and employers generally respected freedom of association. Worker organizations were restricted in the military and police forces, but generally were independent of government and political parties.

The government did not effectively enforce the law, and labor organizers received reports of retaliation against workers for participating in labor actions. The penalties for such abuses were commensurate with those for other similar violations but were never applied against violators. The lack of prosecutions for acts of antiunion discrimination or acts of interference against trade union organizations reportedly contributed to discrimination.

Workers’ collective bargaining rights remained relatively weak and little used due to the government’s role as the principal employer in the formal wage sector and key interlocutor for organized labor on all work-related matters, including union rights and restrictions. The two labor unions, the General Union of Workers of

Sao Tome and Principe and the National Organization of Workers of Sao Tome and Principe, negotiated with the government on behalf of their members as needed.

In June the National Organization of Workers reached a collective bargaining agreement with the government to increase the minimum wage for public-sector workers from 1,100 to 2,500 New Dobra (\$47 to \$107) per month.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, including by children. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Inspections were insufficient to enforce compliance, especially in the large informal sector. There were no official reports of forced or compulsory labor.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all the worst forms of child labor. The law protects children from exploitation in the formal sector. The minimum employment age is 18 for full-time work and 14 for nonhazardous work. The law includes a list of hazardous work prohibited for children, encompassing 11 occupational categories, such as fishing, carpentry, construction, and street vending. Some children younger than 14 performed hazardous work on family-owned farms. Many children younger than 18 worked in family-owned businesses.

Employers in the formal wage sector generally respected the legally mandated minimum employment age. Exceptions included apprentice-type work such as car repair and carpentry; some employers abused this status. Children worked in informal commerce, including street hawking. In past years, there were reports of children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation (see section 6).

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Human Rights are responsible for enforcing child labor laws. The government did not effectively enforce the law in all sectors. Child labor is punishable by three to 10 years' imprisonment, commensurate with penalties for other serious crimes. Inspection was insufficient to enforce compliance, and labor leaders said there was little data regarding the number of children involved in child

labor. Penalties were never applied against violators. Protections against child labor did not apply in the informal sector.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, sex, and religious belief. Additionally, the constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination based on political affiliation, social origin, and philosophical conviction. Leaders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church complained that some of their members who were public school teachers faced discipline for not attending planning sessions on Saturdays when they normally worship and rest from work. The law does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, HIV status, or refugee status in employment.

The government did not effectively enforce the law, and societal discrimination against women affected their wages and employment prospects. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations, and inspection was insufficient to enforce compliance, especially in the large informal sector, and were never applied against violators.

The law does not distinguish between migrant workers and citizens in terms of protections, wages, and working conditions.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The minimum wage for public employees was above the poverty line. There is a minimum wage in the private sector that varies by sector and was above the poverty line. The legal workweek is 40 hours, with 48 consecutive hours per week mandated for rest. According to the law, workers earn 22 days of annual leave per year. Shopkeepers who wish to keep their stores open more than 40 hours a week may ask for an exception, which if granted requires them to pay their workers overtime or have them work in shifts. The law provides for compensation for overtime work. The law specifies occupations in which civil servants may work second jobs, which was a common practice. Private sector security guards often worked longer than the legal maximum, with some reports of

24-hour shifts according to labor leaders.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law prescribes appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards for all sectors. By law workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities had limited capacity to enforce this right. As the largest employer, the government set the standards on hours of work, and it effectively enforced OSH standards in the public sector. Working conditions on many of the largely family-owned cocoa farms were unregulated and harsh, with long hours for workers and exposure to the elements and hazardous conditions. Salaries depended heavily on the international price of cocoa. Cooperatives supported farmers during times of low international cocoa prices.

In construction, few workers were outfitted with appropriate personal protective equipment (boots, helmet, or gloves) and accidents were rarely reported to labor unions. In the fishing sector, many workers did not have life vests, compasses, or safe boats. There were government programs to sell some of this equipment at greatly reduced costs or to provide it for free.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce the law. The Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Human Rights, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs are responsible for enforcement of appropriate OSH standards and for identifying unsafe situations. Ministry of Labor inspectors have the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions but were insufficient in number and training to enforce compliance. Inspectors lacked the necessary financial and human resources, as well as basic equipment, to conduct regular inspections. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations and were never applied against violators. Laws do not cover the informal sector.

Informal Sector: Although little data was available, researchers estimated that 90 percent of workers were in the informal sector. The informal sector included jobs in agriculture; fishing; tourism and hospitality; retail trade such as market vending; manufacturing, including food production, shoes, cosmetics, and small household goods; services such as beauty salons and money changers; and transportation such as driving taxis and motorbike taxis. Although informal workers are covered by

minimum wage laws and the self-employed can voluntarily join some social protection programs by paying contributions, most did not, and there was no enforcement of minimum wage or monitoring of working conditions.

Some informal workers have organized trade unions, including fish sellers, informal traders, motorbike taxi drivers, and port and dock workers. Informal worker unions advocated member interests in discussions on government fees and licenses, and sometimes provided access to credit or protective equipment at reduced cost.