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LEBANON 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic based on the 1943 National Pact, which apportions governmental authority among a Maronite Christian president, a Shia speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (parliament), and a Sunni prime minister. Observers considered the 2009 parliamentary elections peaceful, free, and fair. The parliament since twice-postponed parliamentary elections, initially scheduled for 2013. The elections were rescheduled for June 2017. Civilian authorities maintained control over the armed forces and other security forces, although the designated terrorist group Hizballah, Palestinian security and militia forces, and other extremist elements operated outside the direction or control of government officials.

Following the influx of refugees since the start of the crisis in Syria in 2011, Lebanon experienced increased spillover violence, including several rounds of fighting initiated by the extremist groups the Da'esh and al-Nusra Front (Nusra).

The most significant human rights abuses during the year were torture and abuse by security forces, harsh prison and detention center conditions, and limitations on freedom of movement for Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

Other human rights abuses included lengthy pretrial detention; a judiciary subject to political pressure and long delays in trials; violation of citizens' privacy rights; some restrictions on freedoms of speech and press, including intimidation of journalists; some restrictions on freedom of assembly; reports of harassment of Syrian political activists and other refugees; restrictions on citizens' ability to change their government; official corruption and lack of transparency; widespread violence against women; societal, legal, and economic discrimination against women; societal and legal discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals; trafficking in persons; discrimination against persons with disabilities; systematic discrimination against Palestinian refugees and minority groups; killings related to societal violence; restricted labor rights for and abuse of migrant domestic workers; and child labor.

Although the legal structure provides for prosecution and punishment, government officials enjoyed a measure of impunity for human rights abuses.

Despite the presence of Lebanese and UN security forces, Hizballah retained significant influence over parts of the country, and the government made no tangible progress toward disbanding and disarming armed militia groups, including Hizballah. Palestinian refugee camps continued to act as self-governed entities and maintained security and militia forces not under the direction of government officials. Da'esh and Nusra maintained a significant military presence along Lebanon's eastern border, particularly near the city of Aarsal, and conducted suicide bombing attacks.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. Islamist extremist groups, however, committed numerous unlawful killings.

The country was increasingly affected by the Syrian crisis, which further polarized its politics, paralyzed many state institutions, generated a massive humanitarian refugee crisis, depressed the economy, inflamed sectarian tensions, and degraded national security. The continued spillover of violence led to the unlawful deprivation of life throughout the country, particularly in Tripoli, Aarsal, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, by nonstate actors, including gangs and terrorist organizations.

On January 10, two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a crowded cafe in the Alawite-dominated area of Jabal Mohsen, killing nine persons and injuring more than 30. Nusra claimed responsibility for the attack.

The recurring conflict in the northern city of Tripoli between the generally pro-Syrian regime Alawite residents of Jabal Mohsen and the nearby generally pro-Syrian opposition Sunni district of Bab al-Tabbaneh continued. On March 3, an unknown assailant shot and killed Bader Eid, brother of Alawite and pro-Asad Ali Eid, head of the Arab Democratic Party. Press reported that "The Gathering of Kuweikhat Youth," an unknown group from Akkar, claimed responsibility on social media; however, the accuracy of this report was unknown.

In August 2014 clashes erupted between army personnel and Islamist militants aligned with Da'esh and Nusra in Aarsal. Nineteen Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) members and 40 to 45 Syrians and Lebanese died; 90 to 100 individuals were

injured. Islamist militants took 29 LAF and Internal Security Forces (ISF) members hostage, executed four, released six, and kept the remainder prisoner. On December 1, 2015, 16 Lebanese servicemen held by Nusra were released in a prisoner exchange with the LAF; nine servicemen continued to be held captive by Da'esh.

On November 5, Da'esh killed seven Sunni religious figures in Aarsal, reportedly due to their cooperation in prisoner hostage negotiations with the government and Nusra.

On November 12, Da'esh claimed responsibility for two suicide bombings in the Burj al-Barajeneh neighborhood (Dahiyeh suburbs) of Beirut that killed 43 and injured more than 200 persons. Da'esh claimed the attack was specifically targeting “heretics” in a predominantly Shiite area and vowed to continue attacks.

In 2013 the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which operated based upon an agreement between the United Nations and the government, indicted Hassan Habib Merhi, a Hizballah member, as a fifth suspect in the 2005 killing of former prime minister Rafik Hariri and 22 other individuals. In 2011 the STL indicted four individuals, Mustafa Amine Badreddine, Hussein Hassan Oneissi, Salim Jamil Ayyash, and Assad Hassan Sabra, all of whom were Hizballah operatives suspected of collaborating in the 2005 killings. Due to the incidents’ similar nature and gravity, the STL also established jurisdiction over the 2005 killing of former Communist Party leader George Hawi and attacks on former ministers Elias Murr and Marwan Hamadeh. Government authorities, however, notified the STL that they were unable to detain or serve the accused with the indictments in that case. In January 2014 the STL opened its first trial in the case of Ayyash and other defendants. During the year the government discreetly paid its dues to the STL, despite rumors that the government would forego paying to avoid provoking Hizballah.

b. Disappearance

There were no confirmed reports of politically motivated disappearances during the year.

Syrians who fled to Lebanon from civil war, including political activists and other refugees, risked being targeted, harassed, and arrested by Lebanese security services, as well as by others. Syrian opposition activists asserted that Syrian agents in Lebanon targeted them. They claimed they had to operate clandestinely

for their protection. Additionally, retaliatory sectarian kidnappings occurred as a result of Da'esh's and Nusra's actions in Arsal.

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

The law does not specifically prohibit all forms of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and there were reports security officials employed such practices. The penal code prohibits using acts of violence to obtain a confession or information about a crime, but the judiciary rarely investigated or prosecuted allegations of such acts. According to domestic and international human rights groups, security forces abused detainees and used torture to obtain confessions or encourage suspects to implicate other individuals.

Human rights organizations reported that torture occurred in certain police stations, in the Ministry of Defense's detention facilities, and in the Information Branch of the ISF. The government denied the use of torture, although authorities acknowledged violent abuse sometimes occurred during preliminary investigations at police stations or military installations, where suspects were interrogated without an attorney. Such abuse reportedly occurred in multiple units despite national laws prohibiting judges from accepting confessions extracted under duress.

Reports the ISF threatened, mistreated, and tortured drug users, persons involved in prostitution, and LGBTI persons in their custody were common. The most common forms of abuse reported were blows from fists, boots, or implements, such as sticks, canes, and rulers. The ISF responded to similar claims in prior years and stated the reports defamed the organization and called for verification of unproven allegations, although evidence in some cases, including video evidence, proved the use of torture in some facilities.

Former prisoners, detainees, and reputable local human rights groups reported that methods of torture and abuse included continuous blindfolding, hanging detainees by wrists tied behind their backs, violent beatings, blows to the soles of the feet, electric shocks, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, immersion in cold water, extended periods of sleep deprivation, being forced to stand for extended periods, threats of violence against relatives, and deprivation of clothing, food, and toilet facilities. Allegations that the ISF specifically targeted the LGBTI community for abuse were common.

On June 20, a video of ISF officers beating inmates at the country's largest prison, Roumieh Prison, was posted to YouTube. The officers beat the men severely with a rod. One guard groped a prisoner before hitting him and another prisoner. Another video showed a guard striking another prisoner, then ordering the prisoner to kiss his feet before kicking him in the face with his boot. In response to the public outcry, Interior Minister Nouhad Mashnouq condemned the torture of the inmates, asserting that he would take action, and Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi pledged to pursue the investigation until the last perpetrator was in custody. As of December 1, the three guards seen in the prison video were in custody and on trial for beating the prisoners, while a fourth, the cameraman, was exonerated and released.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions were harsh, and prisoners often lacked access to basic sanitation. In some prisons, such as the central prison in Roumieh, conditions were life threatening. Facilities were not adequately equipped for persons with disabilities.

Physical Conditions: As of December 8, there were 6,502 prisoners and detainees, including pretrial detainees and remanded prisoners, in facilities built to hold 3,500 inmates. Roumieh Prison, with a designed capacity of 1,500, held approximately 3,210 persons. Authorities often held pretrial detainees together with convicted prisoners. Men and women were held separately in similar conditions, and ISF statistics indicated that 132 minors and 283 women were incarcerated.

Sanitary conditions in overcrowded prisons were poor, and they worsened in Roumieh following a destructive riot in 2011. According to a government official, most prisons lacked adequate sanitation, ventilation, and lighting, and temperatures were not regulated consistently. Prisoners lacked consistent access to potable water (as do many Lebanese citizens). Roumieh prisoners often slept 10 in a room originally built to accommodate two prisoners. Basic medical care at Roumieh improved with better equipment and training, but staffing continued to be inadequate, and working conditions were poor. Additionally, the medical facilities were extremely overcrowded. According to ISF statistics, 10 prisoners died from natural causes during the year. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) complained of authorities' negligence and failure to provide appropriate medical care to prisoners, which may have contributed to some of the deaths. The ISF reported that none died of police abuse and that there were no cases of rape in prisons during the year.

There were reports of female prisoners exchanging sex in return for “favors,” such as cigarettes, food, more comfortable conditions in their cells, or a more lenient police report.

Administration: Recordkeeping was not adequate. In many prisons inmates who completed their sentences were not released due to poor recordkeeping. Some juveniles benefitted from alternative sentencing. Although there is a legal means to impose a sentence of probation or supervised release for adults in lieu of incarceration, it was not applied. A person sentenced to imprisonment for more than six months may obtain a sentence reduction upon demonstrating that he has had good behavior, that he does not pose a threat to himself or others, and that he has met certain conditions depending on the category of crime and the release order. The Commission on the Reduction of Sentences considered sentence reduction requests. A chamber of the Court of Appeals, which made the final decision on whether to reduce a sentence, reviewed the commission’s recommendations.

There were no prison ombudsmen. Authorities did not implement a 2005 law establishing an ombudsman to serve on behalf of citizens. The ISF, however, posted signs in detention facilities stating detainees’ rights and had an inspection unit. The Minister of Interior assigned a general-rank official as the commander of the inspection unit and a colonel-rank official as the commander of the medical and human rights unit. The units were instructed to investigate every complaint. After completing an investigation, authorities transferred the case to the inspector general for action in the case of a disciplinary act or to a military investigative judge for additional investigation. If investigators found physical abuse, the military investigator assigned a medical team to confirm the abuse and the judge ruled at the conclusion of the review. There were no statistics available at year’s end regarding the number of complaints, investigations, and disciplinary or judicial actions taken.

Families of prisoners normally contacted the Ministry of Interior to report complaints, although prison directors could also initiate investigations. According to a government official, prison directors often protected officers under investigation.

The ISF’s Committee to Monitor against the Use of Torture and Other Inhuman Practices in Prisons and Detention Centers conducted a minimum of one or two

prison visits per week. The parliamentary human rights committee was responsible for monitoring the Ministry of Defense detention center.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison and detention conditions by local and international human rights groups and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and such monitoring took place. During 2014 the ICRC visited 6,500 prisoners in 29 prisons and detention centers.

Nongovernmental entities, such as Hizballah and Palestinian militias, also operated unofficial detention facilities, but no information about these facilities was available.

Improvements: Authorities made some minor improvements in block B of Roumieh Prison, including painting, installing a new bathroom and sinks, as well as televisions and fans. The kitchen of Roumieh Prison received new cooking equipment, and the number of public telephones with phone cards was increased to 10. The ISF reported that Tripoli Prison was equipped with a ventilation system and energy solar system during the year. A public library, gym, and a medical center were set up inside the Zahle Prison. The quality and quantity of the food in Jbeil Prison improved during the year. A public telephone with a phone card was installed in Jbeil and Marjeyoun prisons. The electricity network in the women's Baabda Prison was repaired and cameras were installed.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law requires judicial warrants before arrests except in cases of active pursuit. Nonetheless, the government arbitrarily arrested and detained persons.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The ISF, under the Ministry of Interior is responsible for law enforcement. The General Directorate for State Security, reporting to the prime minister, and the Directorate of General Security (DGS), under the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for border control. The LAF, under the Ministry of Defense, is responsible for external security but also may arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds. All of these organizations collected information on groups deemed possible threats to state security. Each security apparatus has its own internal mechanisms to investigate cases of abuse and misconduct. A 2012 ISF code of conduct defines the obligations of ISF members and the legal and ethical

standards by which they must abide in performing their duties. Various security forces underwent training on the code. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces. Government security force officials, however, reportedly enjoyed a measure of implicit impunity due to the lack of publicly available information on the outcome of prosecutions. The government lacked mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There are internal complaint mechanisms within the security forces.

In accordance with UN Security Resolutions 425 and 426, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established in 1978 to confirm the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, restore peace and security, and assist the government in restoring its authority over its territory. UN Security Resolution 1701 stated UNIFIL was to monitor (per UN resolutions) cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hizballah after their 2006 war, accompany the LAF in deploying in southern Lebanon, assist in providing humanitarian access to civilians and safe return of displaced, and assist the government in securing its borders.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law generally requires a warrant for arrest and provides the right to a medical examination and referral to a prosecutor within 48 hours of arrest. If authorities hold a detainee longer than 48 hours without formal charges, the arrest is considered arbitrary, and the detainee must be released or a formal extension requested. The code of criminal procedures provides that a person may be held in police custody for investigation for 48 hours, unless the investigation requires additional time, in which case the period of custody may be renewed for another 48 hours.

The code of criminal procedures also states that from the moment of arrest a suspect or the subject of a complaint has the right to contact a member of his family, his employer, an advocate of his choosing, an acquaintance, or an interpreter, and undergo a medical examination on the approval of the general prosecutor. It does not mention, however, whether a lawyer may attend preliminary questioning with the judicial police. In practical terms, the lawyer may not attend the preliminary questioning with judicial police. Under the framework of the law, it is possible for a suspect to be held at a police station for hours before being granted the right to contact an attorney. If the suspect lacks the resources to obtain legal counsel, authorities must provide free legal aid. The law does not, however, require the judicial police to inform an individual who lacks

legal counsel that one may be assigned through the Bar Association, whether in Beirut or Tripoli.

The law does not require authorities to inform individuals they have the right to remain silent. Many provisions of the law simply state that if the individual being questioned refuses to make a statement or remains silent, this should be recorded and that the detainee may not be “coerced to speak or to undergo questioning, on pain of nullity of their statements.”

The law states the period of detention for a misdemeanor may not exceed two months. This period may be extended by a maximum of two additional months. The initial period of custody may not exceed six months for a felony, but the detention may be renewed. Excluded from this protection are suspects accused of homicide or with a previous criminal conviction, drug crimes, endangerment of state security, violent crimes, and crimes involving terrorism.

Officials responsible for prolonged arrest may be prosecuted on charges of depriving personal freedom, but authorities rarely filed charges. The law requires authorities to inform detainees of the charges filed against them. A suspect caught in the act of committing a crime must be referred to an examining judge, who decides whether to issue an indictment or order the release of the suspect. By law bail is available in all cases regardless of the charges, although the amounts required may be prohibitively high.

Authorities failed to observe many provisions of the law, and government security forces, as well as extralegal armed groups such as Hizballah, continued the practice of extrajudicial arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention. Additionally, the law permits military intelligence personnel to make arrests without warrants in cases involving military personnel or involving civilians suspected of espionage, treason, or weapons possession.

Arbitrary Arrest: According to local NGOs, there were no clear cases of arbitrary detention of citizens, but cases from previous years continued. Civil society groups reported authorities frequently detained foreign nationals arbitrarily.

Pretrial Detention: According to ISF statistics, 3,853 of the 6,502 persons in prison were in pretrial detention as of December 8. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about arbitrary pretrial detention without access to legal representation and refused to support construction of prisons until the serious problem of arbitrary pretrial detention was resolved.

According to a study by the Lebanese Center for Human Rights, detainees spent one year on average in pretrial detention prior to sentencing. Individuals accused of murder spent on average 3.5 years in pretrial detention. Many Salafist prisoners remained in prolonged pretrial detention, including detainees from the Nahr el-Bared fighting in 2007.

State security forces and autonomous Palestinian security factions subjected Palestinian refugees to arbitrary arrest and detention.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the judiciary was subjected to political pressure, particularly in the appointment of key prosecutors and investigating magistrates. Influential politicians and intelligence officers intervened at times and used their influence and connections to protect supporters from prosecution. Persons involved in routine civil and criminal proceedings sometimes solicited the assistance of prominent individuals to influence the outcome of their cases.

Trial Procedures

Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Trials are generally public, but judges have the discretion to order a closed court session. There is no trial by jury. Defendants have the right to be present at trial, to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and to question witnesses against them. Defendants may present witnesses and evidence, and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Defendants have the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt; they have the right of appeal.

The Military Court has jurisdiction over cases involving the military as well as those involving civilians accused of espionage, treason, weapons possession, and draft evasion. Civilians may be tried on security charges, and military personnel may be tried on civil charges. The Military Court has a permanent tribunal and a cassation tribunal. The latter hears appeals from the former. A civilian judge chairs the higher court. Defendants on trial under the military tribunal have the same procedural rights as defendants in ordinary courts. Human rights groups expressed concerns about the trial of civilians in military courts, the extent to which they were afforded full due process, and the lack of review of verdicts by ordinary courts.

Because of an agreement struck between the Lebanese government and late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Lebanese security forces do not enter Palestinian camps in Lebanon; they remain outside the entrance and check vehicles and identification. As a result the camps, particularly Ain el-Helweh, had the reputation of being lawless enclaves on Lebanese territory, and Lebanese authorities stated foreign and local jihadis found refuge among them.

The Palestinian factions that theoretically provided security in the camps often fought each other for control, and these groups generally also controlled the justice systems in the camps. Governance varied greatly, with some camps under the control of joint Palestinian security forces, while others were heavily influenced by local militia strongmen. Palestinian groups in refugee camps operated an autonomous and arbitrary system of justice outside the control of the state. For example, local popular committees in the camps attempted to resolve disputes through informal mediation methods but occasionally transferred those accused of more serious offenses (murder, terrorism, etc.) to state authorities for trial. Several Palestinian factions formed a joint security force to help maintain stability and security within the Ain el-Helweh camp, but this force was increasingly challenged for control of the camp by upstart Islamist groups.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent judiciary in civil matters, but civil lawsuits seeking damages for government human rights violations were seldom submitted to it. During the year there were no examples of a civil court awarding a person compensation for such violations.

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

The law prohibits such actions, but authorities frequently interfered with the privacy of persons regarded as enemies of the government. There were reports security services monitored private e-mail and other digital correspondence.

The law provides for the interception of telephone calls with prior authorization from the prime minister at the request of the minister of interior or minister of defense.

Militias and non-Lebanese forces operating outside the area of central government authority also frequently violated citizens' privacy rights. Various nonstate actors, such as Hizballah, used informer networks and telephone monitoring to obtain information regarding their perceived adversaries.

LAF forces raiding Syrian refugee settlements caused destruction of physical property while making arrests.

Personal status was legally handled by religious courts, which applied religious laws of the various confessions and occasionally interfered in family matters such as child custody in the case of divorce. Refugee birth registrations require families to register birth certificates with Lebanese ministries, which remained inaccessible because the ministries require proof of legal residence and legal marriage.

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

Da'esh and other extremist groups conducted an offensive in the town of Aarsal, a key refugee hub in the Bekaa Valley, in August 2014. To protect civilians, the army evacuated Aarsal, resulting in the displacement of tens of thousands of citizens and Syrian refugees during the counteroffensive. Some displaced civilians received assistance from aid groups. The military closed the town for several days to human rights groups, limiting their ability to investigate the army's conduct.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and press and stipulates that restrictions may be imposed only under exceptional circumstances. The government generally respected these rights, but there were some restrictions, particularly regarding political and social issues.

Freedom of Speech: Individuals were free to criticize the government but were legally prohibited from publicly criticizing the president (a post which was vacant throughout the year) and foreign leaders. Authorities also hindered the expression of certain views.

Press and Media Freedoms: Independent media outlets were active and expressed a wide variety of views. The majority of outlets had political affiliations, which

hampered their ability to operate freely in areas dominated by other political groups and affected their reporting. Local, sectarian, and foreign interest groups financed media outlets that reflected their views. The law restricts the freedom to issue, publish, and sell newspapers. Publishers must apply for and receive a license from the Ministry of Information in consultation with the press union.

The law governing audiovisual media bans live broadcasts of unauthorized political gatherings and certain religious events and prohibits the broadcast of “any matter of commentary seeking to affect directly or indirectly the well-being of the nation’s economy and finances, material that is propagandistic and promotional, or promotes a relationship with Israel.” Media outlets must receive a license from the Council of Ministers, based on a recommendation by the minister of information, to broadcast direct and indirect political news and programs. The law also prohibits broadcasting programs that seek to affect the general system, harm the state or its relations with Arab and other foreign countries, or have an effect on the well-being of such states. The law also prohibits the broadcast of programs that seek to harm public morals, ignite sectarian strife, or insult religious beliefs.

On September 18, the STL found Karma Khayat, the deputy chief executive officer and deputy news director of Al-Jadeed TV, guilty of contempt of court by ignoring a court order to remove broadcasts made in 2012 about purported confidential STL witnesses from the station’s website. The STL acquitted Khayat of the more serious offence of intimidating witnesses. The station was acquitted of corporate liability on both counts. It was the first judgment handed down by the STL.

Violence and Harassment: On May 17, an unknown assailant beat Saida Net website journalist Hilal Hibli. An unknown person threatened journalist Dima Sadek’s mother on May 15 after her daughter published a comment on her Facebook page criticizing the sentencing of former minister of information and U.S.-designated global terrorist Michel Samaha; Sadek was forced to delete the comment.

In civil society-led protests on August 22 and 23 against the government’s handling of garbage collection services, security forces injured an estimated 10 journalists, hitting them with batons, throwing stones at them, and deliberately damaging their equipment. On September 20, politically affiliated gangs assaulted journalist Osama Kaderi of *Al-Akhbar* newspaper. The gangs reportedly objected to negative depictions of political leaders during the garbage protests in Beirut’s Martyr’s Square.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The law permits, and authorities selectively used, prior censorship of pornographic material, political opinion, and religious material considered a threat to national security or offensive to the dignity of the head of state or foreign leaders. The DGS reviewed and censored all foreign newspapers, magazines, and books to determine admissibility into the country. Political violence and extralegal intimidation led to self-censorship among journalists.

The law includes guidelines regarding materials deemed unsuitable for publication in a book, newspaper, or magazine. Any violation of the guidelines could result in the author's imprisonment or a fine.

Authors could publish books without prior permission from the DGS, but if the book contained material that violated the law, the DGS could legally confiscate the book and put the author on trial. In some cases authorities might deem the offending material a threat to national security. Such offenses were not taken to trial based on the publication law, but rather on the basis of criminal law or other statutes. Publishing a book without prior approval and that contained unauthorized material could put the author at risk of a prison sentence, fine, and confiscation of the published materials.

Authorities of any of the recognized religious groups could request the DGS to ban a book. The government could prosecute offending journalists and publications in the publications court.

On January 14, the attorney general issued a search and investigation warrant against Syrian journalist Faisal El-Kassem, after he insulted the Lebanese army on social media. On January 19, the DGS censorship bureau banned the distribution of that day's editions of two French daily newspapers, *Le Monde* and *Liberation*, after they republished cartoons from the weekly French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* that the DGS deemed offensive to religions. On April 18, an ISF officer prevented Future TV correspondent Salman al-Andari from filming in front of Roumieh Prison, the site of prisoner abuse allegations. On September 1, riot police forcibly ejected journalists covering the antigarbage civil society protest movement's occupation of the Environment Ministry building, while clearing the building of protesters who blamed the minister for the crisis. Police officers hit journalists inside and outside the building and confiscated their equipment or rendered it inoperable.

Libel/Slander Laws: The 1991 security agreement between the Lebanese and Syrian governments, still in effect at year's end, contained a provision prohibiting the publication of any information deemed harmful to the security of either state.

In October authorities arrested a Palestinian woman for defamation against the army in accordance with article 403 of the penal code after she gave an interview alleging rape and torture at the hands of LAF officers in 2013. The woman was released on bail, and at year's end the investigative judge was determining whether to press charges in court.

Nongovernmental Impact: Radical Islamist groups sometimes sought to inhibit freedom of the press through coercion and threat of violence.

Internet Freedom

The law does not restrict access to the internet. There was a perception among knowledgeable sources, however, that the government monitored e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and internet chat rooms where individuals and groups engaged in the expression of views. The government reportedly censored some websites to block online gambling, pornography, and religiously provocative material, but there were no verified reports the government systematically attempted to collect personally identifiable information via the internet. Digital activists circulated leaked correspondence among government institutions showing that intelligence agencies sought to purchase spyware.

In the absence of laws governing online media and activities on the internet, the ISF's Cyber Crimes Unit and other state agencies summoned journalists, bloggers, and activists to question them about tweets, Facebook posts, and blog posts critical of political figures.

Restrictions on freedom of speech concerning the president applied to social media communications on Facebook and Twitter, which authorities considered a form of publication rather than private correspondence. There were also reports of political groups intimidating individuals and activists for their online posts. In August an online campaign targeted activist and blogger Assaad Thebian, one of the main figures in the antigarbage, anticorruption civil society movement called "You Stink," over Facebook posts he had written in 2013 and 2014 about religious festivals. The online campaign, allegedly organized by the Free Patriotic Movement political party, accused Thebian of defaming religious rites through his social media postings; no action was taken following the initial accusations.

Internet access was available and widely used by the public. According to the International Telecommunication Union, internet penetration was 74.7 percent in 2014.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There are no government restrictions specific to academic freedom, but libel and slander laws apply. The government censored films, plays, and other cultural events. The DGS reviewed all films and plays and prohibited those deemed offensive to religious or social sensibilities. DGS's decision-making process lacked transparency and was influenced by the opinions of religious institutions and political groups. Cultural figures and those involved in the arts practiced self-censorship to avoid being detained or refused freedom of movement. On May 31, during the Cabriolet short film festival, the DGS refused to grant the movie *Solitaire* a screening permit. In January the NGO March said the censorship bureau banned several of its play scripts; DGS stated it conditioned its approval to changes to the texts.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provided for freedom of assembly with some conditions established by law, but the government sometimes restricted this right. Organizers are required to obtain a permit from the Interior Ministry three days prior to any demonstration. In previous years the ministry sometimes did not grant permits to groups that opposed government positions, but there were no known examples of this restriction being applied during the year.

Security forces occasionally intervened to disperse demonstrations, usually when clashes broke out between opposing protesters.

On August 19, police authorities clashed with civil society activists from the "You Stink" movement who were protesting the government's paralysis over the accumulation of trash in the streets, the government's discussion of allegedly corrupt bids to solve the trash crisis, and the government's inability to resolve the crisis. Security authorities used force to disperse the protesters; security forces fired water hoses, and kicked and beat protesters with batons to stop them from tearing down the barbed wire separating them from the parliament building.

Human rights NGOs reported that the police actions injured hundreds of citizens, and many demonstrators went to the hospital. The Ministry of Interior conducted an internal investigation into the use of violence and referred two ISF officers to the Disciplinary Council. Six officers faced disciplinary measures as a result of “an excessive use of force.”

On September 16 and September 20, during additional antigarbage civil society demonstrations in Beirut, politically affiliated gangs attacked peaceful protesters for insulting political leaders by name.

Antigarbage protests continued on smaller scales throughout October, and from August to October many protesters were detained. Security forces ultimately released all demonstrators after their initial detention periods. The total number of protesters security forces detained and the number facing charges was unknown.

NGOs that advocated for women’s rights, particularly those focused on combating domestic violence, organized protests and media campaigns that met with some interference by the security forces.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association with some conditions established by law, and the government generally respected the law.

No prior authorization is required to form an association, but the Interior Ministry must be notified for it to be recognized as legal, and the ministry must verify that the organization respects public order, public morals, and state security. The ministry sometimes imposed additional inconsistent restrictions and requirements and withheld approval. In some cases the ministry sent notification of formation papers to the security forces to initiate inquiries on an organization’s founding members. Organizations must invite ministry representatives to any general assembly where members vote on bylaws, amendments, or positions on the board of directors. The ministry must then validate the vote or election. Failure to do so may result in the dissolution of the organization by a decree issued by the Council of Ministers.

The cabinet must license all political parties (see section 3).

Independent NGOs in areas under Hizballah's sway faced harassment and intimidation, including social, political, and financial pressures. Hizballah reportedly paid youth who worked in "unacceptable" NGOs to leave the groups.

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 law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights for citizens but placed extensive limitations on the rights of Palestinian refugees and during the year placed additional restrictions on Syrian refugees. As of November the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered 1,070,189 Syrian refugees. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided assistance to Palestinian refugees registered in Lebanon (officially just under 450,000 individuals but estimated to be 300,000), as well as to those Palestinian refugees who were registered in Syria and who fled to Lebanon after 2011 and were recorded with UNRWA (approximately 42,000).

In-Country Movement: The government maintained security checkpoints, primarily in military and other restricted areas. Hizballah also maintained checkpoints in certain Shia-majority areas. Government forces were usually unable to enforce the law in the predominantly Hizballah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut and did not typically enter Palestinian refugee camps. According to UNRWA, Palestinian refugees registered with the Interior Ministry's Directorate of Political and Refugee Affairs could travel from one area of the country to another. The directorate, however, had to approve the transfer of registration of residence for refugees who resided in camps. UNRWA stated the directorate generally approved such transfers. In 2012 authorities revoked the requirement to obtain an access permit to enter the Nahr el-Bared camp, and Lebanese and Palestinians entering the camps needed only to show their identity cards at LAF checkpoints outside the camp.

Under entry regulations that became effective in January, Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR must pay a renewal fee of 300,000 lira (\$200) for each person age 15 or above for each additional 12 months the persons wishes to remain

in the country. In light of decreasing refugee resources, renewal fees were prohibitive, and most refugees had difficulty affording the fees. Similarly, despite DGS announcements that Palestinian refugees from Syria could renew their status for three months upon payment of 300,000 Lebanese pounds (\$200), implementation was inconsistent and the cost prohibitively high for most of them. In addition to the fee, refugees must provide legal housing documents, sign a pledge not to work, and in some cases obtain a Lebanese sponsor. Due to these regulations, many refugees were unable to renew their legal documents, which significantly affected their freedom of movement owing to regular arrests at checkpoints. By November the UN's joint household assessments of 100,000 families indicated that 87 percent refugee households had at least one member without legal status. Refugees from Syria reported that if they were stopped at a checkpoint and lacked valid visas or documents, they were often detained and sent to the DGS detention center, a substandard facility located under a highway overpass in Beirut. Authorities often held detainees for up to a week and required them to pay high fines before releasing them.

Internally Displaced Persons

Fighting in 2007 destroyed the Nahr el-Bared camp, displacing 30,000 Palestinian refugees. As of October, UNRWA reported that 9,247 Palestinian refugees returned to housing units in Nahr el-Bared camp, while another 12,737 were living in areas adjacent to the camp. The whereabouts of the remaining displaced Palestinian refugees was not known.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the country is not a party to either the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees or the 1967 protocol.

While 450,000 Palestinian refugees were officially registered with UNRWA, many estimated the number to be less than 300,000 due to emigration. One-half of refugees were under age 25, two-thirds lived below the poverty line, and one-third suffered from chronic illness. Palestinian refugees were prohibited from accessing public health and education services or owning land and were barred from employment in many fields, making refugees dependent upon UNRWA as the sole provider of education, health care, and social services. A 2010 labor law revision expanded employment rights and removed some restrictions on Palestinian refugees; however, this law was not fully implemented, and Palestinians remained

barred from working in most skilled professions, including almost all those that require membership in a professional association.

As of November 30, there were 1,070,189 Syrians registered with UNHCR, fleeing the civil war that broke out in 2011. There were no formal refugee camps in Lebanon for Syrians. Many Syrian refugees resided in temporary tent settlements, with host families, or in unfinished buildings. More than two-thirds of Syrian refugees in Lebanon lived in extreme poverty. A UN assessment of more than 4,000 refugee households found that an estimated 70 percent lived below the Lebanese extreme poverty line of \$3.84 per day. According to the study, the refugees borrowed to cover even their most basic needs, including rent, food, and health care, putting nearly 90 percent of them in debt.

On January 5, new government regulations banned the entry of all Syrian refugees unless they qualified for undefined “humanitarian exceptions.” UNHCR nevertheless continued to register Syrian refugees, and in the first quarter of the year registered 2,626 new arrivals who managed to enter after the cut-off date and 36,189 who were already in the country before the cut-off date. Accusing UNHCR of deception, the Ministry of Social Affairs on April 24 directed UNHCR to deregister the 2,626 new arrivals. On May 4, the ministry further directed UNHCR to cease all registrations, including registrations of those who had arrived before January 5, until a mechanism could be established to deal with “humanitarian exceptions.” Due to the government’s instruction to UNHCR to suspend registration as of May 6, there were no Syrians awaiting registration.

UNRWA reported that the DGS issued some Palestinian refugees from Syria departure orders despite having paid the renewal fee. Legal status in Lebanon was critical for protection from the authorities, as it ensured they could pass through checkpoints, including to and from camps, complete civil registration processes, and receive official exam results for students.

There was also a limited influx of Iraqi refugees who entered the country seeking to escape violence from the fight against Da'esh. As of November 28, there were 13,122 Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR in Lebanon.

Refugee Abuse: Multiple NGOs and UNHCR shared reports of sexual harassment and exploitation by government employers and landlords of refugees, including paying workers below the minimum wage, working excessive hours, debt bondage, and pressuring families into early marriage for their daughters or nonconsensual sex.

The government lacked the capacity to provide adequate protection for refugees. Refugees regularly reported abuse by members of political parties and gangs, often without official action in response. Additionally, LAF raids on settlements often resulted in harassment and destruction of personal property.

According to UNHCR domestic courts often sentenced Iraqi and African refugees registered with UNHCR to one month's imprisonment and fines instead of deporting them for illegal entry. After serving their sentences, most refugees remained in detention unless they found employment sponsors and the DGS agreed to release them in coordination with UNHCR.

Employment: A pledge to not work is a requirement for Syrian refugees to obtain residency permits. Syrians who were not refugees were allowed to work, provided they had a sponsor for a work permit and could pay the associated fees.

A 2010 amendment to the social security law created a special account to provide end-of-service indemnities or severance pay to Palestinian refugees who retired or resigned. These benefits were available only to Palestinians working in the legal labor market. Palestinians did not benefit from national sickness and maternity funds or the family allowances fund. UNRWA continued to bear the cost of any medical, maternity, or family health-care expenses (excluding worker's compensation). The law provides for benefits only from 2010 onward.

Access to Basic Services: The government did not consider local integration of any refugees a viable, durable solution. After Syrians and Palestinians, Iraqis were the third-largest group of refugees in the country.

The law considers UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees to be foreigners, and in several instances they received poorer treatment than other foreign nationals. UNRWA has the sole mandate to provide health, education, social services, and emergency assistance to the 450,000 registered Palestinian refugees residing in the country. The amount of land allocated to the 12 official Palestinian refugee camps in the country has changed only marginally since 1948, despite a four-fold increase in the population. Consequently, most Palestinian refugees lived in overpopulated camps, some of which were heavily damaged during past conflicts. In accordance with agreements with the government, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) security committees provided security for refugees in the camps, with the exception of the Nahr el-Bared camp. A comprehensive, multi-year plan to rebuild the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp and surrounding communities in eight stages

began in 2008 and was in process, but remaining reconstruction was not fully funded, and only 60 percent of the required donations were secured by year's end.

A 2001 amendment to a 1969 decree barring persons who are explicitly excluded from resettling in the country from owning land and property was designed to exclude Palestinians from purchasing or inheriting property. Palestinians who owned property prior to the law entering into force were unable to bequeath it to their heirs, and individuals who were in the process of purchasing property in installments were unable to register the property.

Palestinian refugees residing in the country could not obtain citizenship and were not citizens of any other country. Palestinian refugee women married to Lebanese citizens were able to obtain citizenship and transmit citizenship to their children. Palestinian refugees, including children, had limited social and civil rights and no access to public health, education, or other social services. Children of Palestinian refugees faced discrimination in birth registration, and many had to leave school at an early age to earn an income.

Palestinians who fled Syria since 2011 received limited basic support from UNRWA, including food aid, cash assistance, and winter assistance. Authorities permitted their children to enroll in UNRWA schools and access UNRWA health clinics. As of November there were approximately 42,000 Palestinians refugees from Syria recorded with the agency.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education facilitated the enrollment of more than 157,000 Syrian students in public schools in the 2015-16 academic year, and enrollment continued at year's end. Donor funding was available to support 200,000 children to enroll; however, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated there were approximately 510,000 school-age Syrian refugee children. UN agencies covered school-related expenses, such as school fees, books, and uniforms. Syrian refugees had access to many government and private health centers and local clinics for primary care services, and UN agencies and NGOs funded the majority of associated costs. Syrian refugees had access to a limited number of UNHCR-contracted hospitals for emergency care.

Iraqi refugees had access to both the public and private education systems. UNHCR reported that 739 Iraqi children were registered in public schools, and it provided grants to the children's families to help defray the costs associated with attending school. Iraqi refugees also had access to the primary health-care system. UNHCR, through NGOs, provided secondary health care.

Temporary Protection: The government did not provide a temporary protection regime for asylum seekers, and it regularly deported refugees and asylum seekers who may have had valid claims to protected status. According to UNHCR, 331 refugees and asylum seekers were detained during the year, of whom 176 remained in detention as of October 15. During the year the DGS deported 15 persons despite UNHCR objections.

UNHCR continued to intervene with authorities to request the release of persons of concern who were detained either beyond their sentence or for illegal entry or presence.

Stateless Persons

Citizenship is derived exclusively from the father, resulting in statelessness for children of a citizen mother and a noncitizen father when registration under the father's nationality is not possible. This discrimination in the nationality law particularly affected Palestinians and increasingly Syrians from female-headed households. Additionally, some children born to Lebanese fathers may not have had their births registered due to a lack of understanding of the regulations or administrative obstacles. The problem was compounded since nonnational status was a hereditary circumstance that stateless persons pass to their children. There were no official statistics on the size of the stateless population.

Approximately 3,000 to 5,000 Palestinian refugees were not registered with UNRWA or the government. Also known as undocumented Palestinians, most of these individuals moved to the country after the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan in 1971. Palestinians faced restrictions on movement and lacked access to fundamental rights under the law. Undocumented Palestinians, who were not registered in other fields, were not necessarily eligible for the full range of services provided by UNRWA. Nonetheless, in most cases UNRWA provided primary health care, education, and vocational training services to undocumented Palestinians. The majority of undocumented Palestinians were men, many of them married to UNRWA-registered refugees or Lebanese citizen women, who could not transmit refugee status or citizenship to their husbands or children.

The Directorate of Political and Refugee Affairs continued to extend late registration to Palestinian refugee children under age 10. It previously was the directorate's policy to deny late birth registration to Palestinian refugee children who were above age two. Children between age 10 and 20 were registered only

after the following were completed: a DNA test, an investigation by the DGS, and the approval of the directorate.

Approximately 1,000 to 1,500 of an estimated 100,000 Kurds living in the country lacked citizenship, despite decades of family presence in the country. Most were descendants of migrants and refugees who left Turkey and Syria during World War I but were denied citizenship to preserve the country's sectarian balance. The government issued a naturalization decree in 1994, but high costs and other obstacles prevented many individuals from acquiring official status. Some individuals who received official status had their citizenship revoked in 2011, as a result of a presidential decree. Others held an "ID under consideration" document without date or place of birth.

Stateless persons lacked official identity documents that would permit them to travel abroad and could face difficulties traveling internally, including detention for not carrying identity documents. They had limited access to the regular employment market and no access to many professions. Additionally, they could not access public schools or public health-care facilities, register marriages or births, and own or inherit property.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Although the law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, lack of government control over parts of the country, defects in the electoral process, prolonged extension of parliament's mandate, and corruption in public office significantly restricted this ability. The president and parliament nominate the prime minister, who, with the president, chooses the cabinet.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2013 parliament postponed legislative elections to November 2014 and later rescheduled them for June 2017. Observers concluded that the 2009 parliamentary elections were generally free and fair, with minor irregularities, such as instances of vote buying. The NGO Lebanese Transparency Association reported its monitors witnessed election fraud through cash donations on election day in many electoral districts.

Political Parties and Political Participation: All major political parties and numerous smaller ones were almost exclusively based on confessional affiliation, and parliamentary seats were allotted on a sectarian basis.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There were significant cultural barriers to women's participation in politics. Prior to 2004, no woman held a cabinet position, and there have been only four female ministers since then. During the year one woman served in the cabinet. Only four of 128 members of parliament were women, and all were close relatives of previous male members. With a few notable exceptions, leadership of political parties effectively excluded women, limiting their opportunities for high office.

Minorities participated in politics to some extent. Regardless of the number of its adherents, every government-recognized religion, except Coptic Christianity, Ismaili Islam, and Judaism, was allocated at least one seat in parliament. Three parliamentarians representing minorities (one Syriac Orthodox Christian and two Alawites) were elected in the 2009 elections. None of the minority parliamentarians were women. These groups also held high positions in government and the LAF. Since refugees are not citizens, they have no political rights. An estimated 17 Palestinian factions operated in the country, generally organized around prominent individuals. Most Palestinians lived in refugee camps that one or more factions controlled. Palestinian refugee leaders were not elected, but there were popular committees that met regularly with UNRWA and visitors.

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 often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity and on a wide scale. Government security officials, agencies, and police were subject to laws against bribery and extortion. The lack of strong enforcement limited the laws' effectiveness.

Corruption: Observers widely considered government control of corruption to be poor. Types of corruption generally encountered included systemic patronage; judicial failures, especially in investigations of politically motivated killings; electoral fraud facilitated by the absence of preprinted ballots; and bribery. Bribes customarily accompanied bureaucratic transactions. In addition to regular fees, customers paid bribes for driver's licenses, car registrations, or residential building permits. Syrian refugees reportedly paid bribes to shopkeepers or municipal

officials for a variety of services, for example, to receive consignment of aid or facilitate their registration.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires the president of the republic, the president of the Chamber of Deputies, and the president of the Council of Ministers to disclose their financial assets in a sealed envelope deposited at the Constitutional Council, but the information is not made available to the public. Judges disclose their financial assets in a sealed envelope at the Higher Judicial Council, and civil servants deposit their sealed envelopes at the Civil Servants Council, but the information is also not available to the public.

A 2011 report by the Lebanese Transparency Association claimed corruption was institutionalized. Since parliament had not passed a budget since 2005, there was limited parliamentary or auditing authority oversight of revenue collection and expenditures.

Public Access to Information: There were no laws regarding public access to government documents, and the government generally did not respond to requests for documents.

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

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials generally were not responsive to these groups' views, and there was limited or no accountability for human rights violations.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The parliamentary Committee on Human Rights struggled to advance legislative proposals to make legal changes to guide ministries in protecting specific human rights or, for example, improving prison conditions. The Ministry of Interior had a human rights department to enhance and raise awareness about human right issues within the ISF, train police officers on human right standards, and monitor and improve prison conditions. The ministry staffed the department with two officers, two sergeants, and an information technology specialist, in addition to the department's head. The department was not adequately resourced. Its leadership maintained high standards of professionalism, but due to the integrated structure, the department's independence could not be assured.

In April 2014 the ISF launched a revised complaint mechanism allowing citizens to track complaints and receive notification of investigation results. Citizens may file formal complaints against any ISF officer in person at a police station, through a lawyer, by mail, or online through the redesigned ISF website. At the time a complaint is filed, the filer receives a tracking number that may be used to check the status of the complaint throughout the investigation. The complaint mechanism provides ISF the ability to notify those filing complaints of the results of its investigation.

The LAF has a human rights unit that engaged in human rights training through the Department of Defense's Defense Institute of International Legal Studies. The unit worked to ensure the LAF operates in accordance with major international human rights conventions.

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

The law provides for equality among all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. Although the government generally respected these provisions, they were not enforced, especially with regard to economic matters, and aspects of the law and traditional beliefs discriminated against women. The law does not protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape. While the government effectively enforced the law, its interpretation by religious courts precluded full implementation of civil law in all provinces. Rape and domestic violence were underreported. The minimum prison sentence for a person convicted of rape is five years, or seven years for raping a minor. According to the penal code, the state would not prosecute a rapist and would nullify his conviction if the rapist married his victim. The law does not criminalize spousal rape. According to the domestic NGO KAFA (Enough Violence and Exploitation), 80 percent of domestic-violence victims the NGO assisted suffered spousal rape.

In April 2014 parliament passed legislation for the Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence. The law criminalizes domestic violence, but it does not specifically provide protection for women. The law does not criminalize spousal rape but rather the use of threats or violence to claim a

“marital right to intercourse,” and it does not criminalize the nonconsensual violation of physical integrity. The maximum sentence under this law is 25 years’ imprisonment if one of the spouses commits homicide.

A 2010 UN Population Fund assessment estimated there were high rates of domestic violence in the country. Despite a law that sets a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for battery, some religious courts may legally require a battered wife to return to her home despite physical abuse. Foreign domestic workers, usually women, often were mistreated, abused, and in some cases raped or placed in slavery-like conditions (see section 7.c.). Some police, especially in rural areas, treated domestic violence as a social, rather than criminal, matter.

The government provided legal assistance to domestic violence victims who could not afford it, and police response to complaints submitted by battered or abused women improved. The NGOs Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women and KAFA offered counseling and legal aid and raised awareness about the problem. In 2014 KAFA assisted victims in 649 cases of violence, the majority of which concerned domestic violence.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: In contrast with 2014, there were no reports of honor killings.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment, but authorities did not enforce the law effectively, and it remained a widespread problem. According to the UN Population Fund, the labor law does not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace; it merely gives a male or female employee the right to resign without prior notice from his or her position in the event that an indecent offense is committed towards the employee or a family member by the employer or his or her representative, without any legal consequences for the perpetrator. Legal consequences are cited in the penal code and the criminal procedure.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and have the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Some women in rural areas faced social pressure on their reproductive choices due to long-held conservative values.

Discrimination: Women suffered discrimination under the law and in practice. Social pressure against women pursuing some careers was strong in some parts of society. Men sometimes exercised considerable control over female relatives,

restricting their activities outside the home or their contact with friends and relatives. In matters of child custody, inheritance, and divorce, personal status laws provide unequal treatment across the various confessional court systems but generally discriminate against women. For example, Sunni civil courts applied an inheritance law that provides a son twice the inheritance of a daughter. Religious law on child custody matters favors the father in most instances. Nationality law also discriminates against women, who may not confer citizenship to their spouses and children, although widows may confer citizenship to their minor children. By law women may own property, but they often ceded control of it to male relatives due to cultural reasons and family pressure.

The law provides for equal pay for equal work for men and women, but in the private sector there was discrimination regarding the provision of benefits. Only 26 percent of women, compared with 76 percent of men, were in the formal labor force, and these women earned on average 61 percent of what men earned for comparable work (see section 7.d.).

The Women's Affairs Division in the Ministry of Social Affairs undertook some projects to address sexual or gender-based violence, such as providing counseling and shelter for victims and training ISF personnel to combat violence in prisons. In 2012 the government began commissioning women as ISF officers.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women, headed by the president's wife, is the highest governmental body addressing women's issues. Due to the continuing presidential vacancy, this post remained vacant.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived exclusively from the father, which may result in statelessness for children of a citizen mother and noncitizen father who may not transmit his own citizenship (see section 2.d.). If a child's birth is not registered within the first year, the process for legitimating the birth is long and costly, often deterring families from registration. Syrian refugees faced numerous challenges registering their births because of the country's complicated registration system. Refugees without valid residency papers were not permitted to register their child's birth, preventing them from obtaining necessary documents for passports.

Some refugee children and the children of foreign domestic workers also faced obstacles to equal treatment under the law. NGOs reported discrimination against them, although some could attend public school.

Education: Education for citizens is free and compulsory through the primary phase. Noncitizen children, including those born of noncitizen fathers and citizen mothers and refugees, lack this right. Certain public schools had quotas for noncitizen children, but there were no special provisions for children of female citizens, and spaces remained subject to availability. Boys and girls had nearly equal rates of primary education, with women outnumbering men in secondary and tertiary education. Authorities permitted Syrian refugee children to enroll in public schools; however, the Ministry of Education limited enrollment to 100,000 Syrian students in public schools for the 2014-15 school year but aimed to reach 200,000 in the 2015-16 school year. UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education learning program began during the year, enrolling nearly 7,000 students in catch-up classes to be grade-level ready for formal enrollment. Informal education was not recognized by the ministry, limiting the number of opportunities for refugee children to receive accredited education or a pathway to enroll once they achieved grade-level proficiency.

Child Abuse: According to a 2012 study by KAFA in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, more than 885,000 children were victims of psychological abuse, of whom 738,000 were also victims of physical abuse and 219,000 were victims of sexual abuse. The Ministry of Social Affairs had a hotline to report cases of child abuse.

Syrian refugee children were vulnerable to child labor and exploitation.

Children reportedly joined local gangs engaged in sectarian violence in the northern part of the country.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age for marriage is 18 for men and 17 for women. Family matters are governed by confessionally determined personal status law, and minimum ages acceptable for marriage differ accordingly. UNHCR reported early and forced marriage was common in the Syrian refugee community. According to a study conducted by the Heartland Alliance in 2014, the marriages were not official but usually endorsed by sheikhs in the refugee community, often encouraged with a bribe. These sheikhs were not linked to the country's Sunni family courts, and the marriages had no legal standing.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The penal code prohibits and punishes commercial sexual exploitation, child pornography, and forced prostitution. Prescribed punishment for commercial sexual exploitation of a person under age 21 is imprisonment for one month to one year and fines between 50,000 and 500,000 lira (\$33 and \$333). The maximum sentence for commercial sexual exploitation is two years' imprisonment. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18, and statutory rape penalties include hard labor for a minimum of five years and a minimum of seven years' imprisonment if the victim is younger than 15. Imprisonment ranges from two months to two years if the victim is between ages 15 and 18. The government generally enforced the law. As of September 30, the ISF investigated nine cases of human trafficking involving 11 victims of sexual exploitation and child trafficking and referred them to the judiciary. The DGS investigated 78 suspected cases of trafficking involving nonpayment of wages, physical abuse, and rape or sexual abuse. Many of these cases were of children, although the statistics did not distinguish between child and adult victims. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice referred cases involving 89 suspected traffickers to the Public Prosecutor's Office, of which 72 individuals were charged under the antitrafficking law for alleged forced prostitution, forced labor, and forced child begging.

Displaced Children: The Ministry of Education and Higher Education opened 200,000 places in the public school system available to Syrian refugee children in the 2015-16 academic year. As of November, 157,000 Syrian refugee children had enrolled in public schools. NGOs often used informal education to assist students not performing at grade-level, but the ministry opposed nonformal education, which limited access to education for refugees and prompted many NGOs to terminate programs. UNICEF aimed to increase enrollment in accelerated learning programs to 90,000 in the 2015-16 academic year.

Some refugee children lived and worked on the street. Given the poor economic environment, limited freedom of movement and little opportunity for livelihoods for adults, many Syrian refugee families relied on children to be able to earn money for the family (see section 7.c.). Refugee children were at greater risk of exploitation and child labor, since they had greater freedom of movement compared to their parents, who often lacked residency permits.

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

specific information

at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/lebanon.html.

Anti-Semitism

At year's end there were approximately 100 Jews living in the country and 6,000 registered Jewish voters who lived abroad but had the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

The national school curriculum materials did not contain materials on 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

Although prohibited by law, discrimination against persons with disabilities continued. Employment law defines a "disability" as a physical, sight, hearing, or mental disability. The law stipulates that at least 3 percent of all government and private sector positions be filled by persons with disabilities, provided such persons fulfill the qualifications for the position; however, no evidence indicated it was enforced. Employers are legally exempt from penalties if they provide evidence no otherwise qualified person with disabilities applied for employment within three months of advertisement. The law mandates access to buildings by persons with disabilities, but the government failed to amend building codes. Many persons with mental disabilities received care in private institutions, several of which the government subsidized (see section 7.d.).

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Council of Disabled is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. According to the president of the Arab Organization of Disabled People, little progress had occurred since parliament passed the law on disabilities in 2000. Approximately 100 relatively active but poorly funded private organizations provided most of the assistance received by persons with disabilities.

Depending on the type and nature of the disability, children with a disability may attend mainstream school. Due to a lack of awareness or knowledge, school staff

often did not identify a specific disability in children and could not adequately advise parents. In such cases children often repeated classes or dropped out of school.

A 2002 Ministry of Education and Higher Education decree for new school building construction stipulates: “Schools should include all necessary facilities in order to receive the physically challenged.” Nonetheless, the public school system was ill equipped to accommodate students with disabilities. Problems included a poor regulatory framework; poor infrastructure that was not accessible to persons with disabilities; curricula that did not include material to assist children with disabilities; laboratories and workshops that lacked the equipment required for children with disabilities; laboratories that lacked space and access for persons with disabilities, especially those using wheelchairs; teaching media and tools that relied increasingly on computers and audiovisual material that were not accessible to students with disabilities, including students who were blind, deaf, and those with physical disabilities; and lack of accessible transportation to and from schools.

Some NGOs (often managed by religious entities) offered education and health services for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Affairs contributed to the cost, although the ministry often delayed payments to the organizations. According to the ministry, it supported school attendance, vocational training, and rehabilitation for approximately 8,000 persons in 2014.

In the 2009 election, a Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union study showed only six of the country’s 1,741 polling stations satisfied all criteria for accessibility.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

A 2011 report funded by the EU and written by a coalition of local human rights organizations, *A Culture of Racism in Lebanon*, identified a widespread pattern of discrimination against persons who did not appear to be ethnically Lebanese. Lebanese of African descent attributed discrimination to the color of their skin and claimed harassment by police, who periodically demanded to see their papers. Foreign Arab, African, and Asian students, professionals, and tourists reported being denied access to bars, clubs, restaurants, and private beaches.

Syrian workers, usually employed as manual laborers and construction workers, continued to suffer discrimination, as they did following the 2005 withdrawal of Syrian forces from the country. Many municipalities enforced a curfew on

Syrians' movements in their neighborhoods in an effort to curb an increased number of robberies and to control security.

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

Official and societal discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTI) persons persisted. There is no all-encompassing antidiscrimination law to protect LGBTI persons. The law prohibits “unnatural sexual intercourse,” an offense punishable by up to one year in prison but rarely applied; however, it often resulted in a fine. The Ministry of Justice did not keep records on these infractions. There were no reports authorities imprisoned anyone for violation of this law during the year.

Various NGOs, including Helem, AFE, and Marsa, hosted regular meetings in a safe house, provided counseling services, and carried out advocacy projects for the LGBTI community.

Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or lack of access to education or health care based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The government did not collect such information, and individuals who faced problems were reluctant to report incidents due to fear of additional discrimination. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. During the year Marsa reported that a worker lost his job after informing the company's human resources department that he was HIV positive. During the year Oui Pour La Vie, an NGO working on the issue of stigma and discrimination against LGBTI persons, reported employers expelled two transgender women and one gay person from their work because of their gender identity and sexual orientation (see also section 7.d.).

NGOs claimed LGBTI persons underreported incidents of violence and abuse due to negative social stereotypes. Observers received reports from LGBTI refugees of physical abuse by local gangs, which the victims did not report to the ISF; observers referred victims to UNHCR-sponsored protective services.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

As in previous years, there were reports of incidents of societal violence and interreligious strife. Observers reported Shia militias, most notably Hizballah, harassed unfamiliar refugees entering territories under their control. The rise of

Da'esh, Nusra, and other extremist groups led to repeated fighting between the LAF and these groups. The same extremist groups also attacked Hizballah positions in the Bekaa Valley. Political leaders across the country condemned the action of extremist groups.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of private sector workers to form and join trade unions, strike, and bargain collectively but places a number of restrictions on these rights. The Ministry of Labor must approve the formation of unions, and it controlled the conduct of all trade union elections, including election dates, procedures, and ratification of results. The law permits the administrative dissolution of trade unions and bars trade unions from political activity. Unions have the right to strike after providing advance notice to and receiving approval from the local governor. Organizers of a strike (at least three of whom must be identified by name) must notify the governor of the number of participants in advance and the intended location of the strike, and 5 percent of a union's members must take responsibility for maintaining order during the strike.

There are significant restrictions on the right to strike. The law excludes public sector employees, domestic workers, and agricultural workers; therefore, they neither have the right to strike nor to join and establish unions. The law prohibits public sector employees from any kind of union activity, including striking, organizing collective petitions, or joining professional organizations. Despite this prohibition public sector employees succeeded in forming leagues of public school teachers and civil servants that created the Union of Coordination Committees (UCC), which along with private school teachers, demanded better pay.

The law protects the right of workers to bargain collectively, but a minimum of 60 percent of workers must agree on the goals beforehand. Collective bargaining agreements must be ratified by two-thirds of union members at a general assembly. The Union of Syndicates of Bank Employees and the Association of Banks renewed their collective agreement in 2013; the union requested to start negotiations to renew it. The union complained that many banks did not comply with the agreement. Employees of the Port of Beirut and the American University of Beirut Medical Center, among others, also had collective agreements with their employers.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. Under the law, when employers misuse or abuse their right to terminate a union member's contract, including for union activity, the worker is entitled to compensation and legal indemnity and may institute proceedings before a conciliation board. The board adjudicates the case, after which an employer may be compelled to reinstate the worker, although this protection was available only to the elected members of a union's board. Anecdotal evidence showed widespread antiunion discrimination, although this issue did not receive significant media coverage. Most flagrant abuses occurred in banking, private schools, retail businesses, daily and occasional workers, and the civil service. In August 2014 the Ministry of Education issued certificates of success for all students who had undergone official exams in an antiunion measure against teachers and the Union of Coordination Committee that continued to protest and demand improved conditions.

By law foreigners with legal resident status may join trade unions. The migrant law permits migrant workers to join existing unions (regardless of nationality and reciprocity agreements) but denies them the right to form their own unions. They do not enjoy full membership as they may neither vote in trade union elections nor run for union office. Certain sectors of migrant workers, such as migrant domestic workers, challenged the binding laws supported by some unions by forming their own autonomous structures that act as unions.

Palestinian refugees generally may organize their own unions on an ad hoc basis. Because of restrictions on their right to work, few refugees participated actively in trade unions. While some unions required citizenship, others were open to foreign nationals whose home countries had reciprocity agreements with Lebanon.

The government's enforcement of applicable laws was weak, including with regard to prohibitions on antiunion discrimination.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not always respected. The government and other political actors interfered with the functioning of worker organizations, in particular the main federation, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL). The CGTL is the only national confederation recognized by the government, although several unions boycotted or unofficially or officially broke from the CGTL and no longer recognized it as an independent and nonpartisan representative of workers. The UCC, a grouping of public and private teachers as well as civil servants, largely overshadowed the CGTL, notably in pushing the government to pass a promised revised salary scale. Although UCC strikes and demonstrations prompted the government to send the

revised salary scale proposal to parliament, parliament (which began meeting regularly again during the year) had yet to approve the proposal.

The law permits unions to conduct activities free from interference, but the Ministry of Labor interfered in union elections. Government officials and other political figures sought to influence union activities. In the past government officials encouraged the establishment of unions for political purposes to gain control of the CGTL.

Antiunion discrimination and other instances of employer interference in union functions occurred. Some employers fired workers in the process of forming a union before the union could be formally established and published in the official gazette.

Workers submitted a request to form the first domestic workers union in December 2014. The request was not recognized by year's end.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not effectively enforce the law, although the government made some efforts to prevent or eliminate it.

Children, foreign workers employed as domestic workers, and other foreign workers sometimes worked under forced labor conditions. The law provides protection for domestic workers against forced labor, but domestic work is excluded from protections under the labor law and vulnerable to exploitation. In violation of the law, employment agencies and employers routinely withheld foreign workers' passports, especially in the case of domestic workers, sometimes for years. According to the Beirut Bar Association, authorities jailed one employer for a year for withholding an employee's passport. To mitigate this practice, the DGS began handing back passports to the worker rather than the employer. According to NGOs assisting migrant workers, some employers withheld salaries for the duration of the contract, which was usually two years.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 14, and the law prescribes the occupations that are legal for juveniles, defined as children between ages 14 and 18. The law requires juveniles to undergo a medical exam by a doctor certified by the Ministry of Public Health to assure they are physically fit for the type of work they are asked to perform. The law prohibits employment of juveniles for more than seven hours per day or from working between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., and it requires one hour of rest for work lasting more than four hours. The law, updated by Decree 8987 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, prohibits specific types of labor for juveniles, including informal “street labor.” It also lists types of labor that, by their nature or the circumstances in which they are carried out, are likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children under 16, as well as types of labor that are allowed for children over 16, provided they are offered full protection and adequate training.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing child labor requirements through its Child Labor Unit. Additionally, the law charges the Ministry of Justice, the ISF, and the Higher Council for Childhood with enforcing laws related to child trafficking, including commercial sexual exploitation of children and the use of children in illicit activities. The HCC is also responsible for referring children held in protective custody to appropriate NGOs to find safe living arrangements. The Ministry of Labor employed approximately 90 labor inspectors, whom are also called upon to undertake child labor inspections. Overall, the government did not enforce child labor laws effectively, in part because of inadequate resources. The penalty is 50,000 lira (\$33) per infraction. The penal code calls for penalties for those who abrogate child labor laws ranging from a fine of 250,000 lira (\$165) to one- to three-months’ imprisonment and closure of the offending establishment. Advocacy groups did not consider these punishments sufficient deterrents.

The government made efforts to prevent child labor and remove children from such labor during the year. Throughout the year the Ministry of Social Affairs and the HCC held awareness campaigns in schools and workshops for social workers who handle and journalists who cover child-related issues.

Child labor occurred, including in its worst forms. While up-to-date statistics on child labor were unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggested the number of child workers rose during the year and that more children worked in the informal sector, including commercial sexual exploitation, as UNHCR noted (see section 6, Children).

Child labor, including refugee children, was predominantly concentrated in the informal sector, including in small family enterprises, mechanical workshops, carpentry, construction, manufacturing, industrial sites, welding, agriculture including tobacco, and fisheries. Anecdotal evidence also suggested child labor was prevalent in Palestinian refugee camps and among Iraqi refugees and Romani communities, and most prevalent in the Syrian refugee community. Some children were involved in the worst forms of child labor, such as street work including begging, selling goods, polishing shoes, and washing car windows, as well as forced labor, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. The International Labor Organization noted abuses involving the use, recruitment, and exploitation of children in political protests and militant activities in North Lebanon and some areas of Beirut.

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

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment or Occupation

The law provides for equality among all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. The law does not specifically provide for protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, or other communicable diseases.

Although the government generally respected these provisions, they were not enforced, especially in economic matters, and aspects of the law and traditional beliefs discriminated against women. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, persons with disabilities, foreign domestic workers, and LGBTI and HIV-positive persons (see section 6).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The legal minimum wage, last raised in 2012, was 675,000 lira (\$450) per month in the private sector.

The law prescribes a standard 48-hour workweek with a weekly rest period that must not be less than 36 consecutive hours. The law stipulates 48 hours work as the maximum per week in most corporations except agricultural enterprises. A 12-hour day is permitted under certain conditions, including a stipulation that overtime pay is 50 percent higher than pay for normal hours. The law does not set limits on compulsory overtime. The law includes specific occupational health and

safety regulations and requires employers to take adequate precautions for employee safety.

Domestic workers are not covered under the labor law or other laws related to acceptable conditions of work. Such laws also do not apply to family concerns, day laborers, temporary workers in the public sector, or workers in the agricultural sector.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing regulations related to acceptable conditions of work but did so unevenly. The ministry employed approximately 90 inspectors, made up of both inspectors and assistant inspectors, as well as administrators and technicians, who handle all inspections of potential labor violations. The number of inspectors, available resources, and legal provisions were not sufficient to deter violations, nor was the political will for proper inspections in other cases. Interference with inspectors affected the quality of inspections and issuance of fines for violators was common. The law stipulates that workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, although government officials do not protect employees who exercised this right.

Workers in the industrial sector worked an average of 35 hours per week, while workers in other sectors worked an average of 32 hours per week. Some private sector employers failed to provide employees with family and transportation allowances as stipulated under the law and did not register them with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF).

Some companies did not respect legal provisions governing occupational health and safety in specific sectors, such as the construction industry. Workers could report violations to the CGTL, Ministry of Labor, NSSF, or through their respective unions. In most cases they preferred to remain silent due to fear of arbitrary dismissal.

Violations of wage, overtime, and occupational health and safety standards were most common in the construction industry and among migrant workers, and particularly with foreign domestic workers.

Foreign migrant workers arrived in the country through local recruitment agencies and source-country recruitment agencies. Although the law requires recruitment agencies to have a license from the Ministry of Labor, the government did not adequately monitor their activities. A sponsorship system tied foreign workers'

legal residency to a specific employer, making it difficult for foreign workers to change employers. If employment was terminated, a worker lost residency. This circumstance made many foreign migrant workers reluctant to file complaints to avoid losing their legal status.

There was no official minimum wage for domestic workers. Official contracts stipulated a wage ranging from 150,000 to 450,000 lira (\$100 to \$300) per month for domestic workers, depending on the nationality of the worker. A unified standard contract, which was registered with the DGS for the worker to obtain residency, granted migrant domestic workers some labor protections. The standard contract covered uniform terms and conditions of employment, but the section covering wages was completed individually.

Some employers mistreated, abused, and raped foreign domestic workers, who were mostly of Asian and African origin. Domestic workers often worked long hours and, in many cases, did not receive vacations or holidays. Victims of abuse may file civil suits or seek other legal action, often with the assistance of NGOs, but most victims, counseled by their embassies or consulates, settled for an administrative solution that usually included monetary compensation and repatriation.

Authorities did not prosecute perpetrators of abuses against foreign domestic workers for a number of reasons, including the victims' refusal to press charges and lack of evidence. Authorities settled an unknown number of other cases of nonpayment of wages through negotiation. According to source-country embassies and consulates, many workers did not report violations of their labor contracts until after they returned to their home countries, since they preferred not to stay in the country for a lengthy judicial process.

In 2012 Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International television released a video by an anonymous bystander in which a labor recruiter, identified as Ali Mahfouz, physically abused Ethiopian domestic worker Alem Dechasa-Desisa outside the Ethiopian consulate in Beirut. Dechasa-Desisa subsequently committed suicide at the Deir el-Saleeb psychiatric hospital. Following the investigation the Beirut prosecutor general charged Mahfouz with contributing to and causing Dechasa-Desisa's suicide, and the case was referred to the Beirut penal court. By year's end, however, the Ministry of Labor had not reported any action against Mahfouz's labor agency.

While licensed businesses and factories strove to meet international standards for working conditions with respect to occupational safety and health, conditions in informal factories and businesses were poorly regulated and often did not meet these standards. The Ministry of Industry is responsible for enforcing regulations to improve safety in the workplace. The regulations require industries to have three types of insurance (fire, third-party, and workers policies) and to implement proper safety measures. The ministry has the authority to revoke a company's license if its inspectors find a company noncompliant.

The law requires businesses to adhere to safety standards, but it was poorly enforced and did not explicitly permit workers to remove themselves from dangerous conditions without jeopardy to their continued employment.