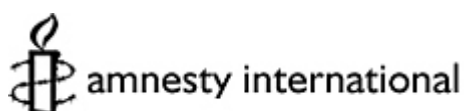


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Amnesty International Report 2008 - Kuwait

STATE OF KUWAIT

Head of State: al-Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah
Head of government: al-Shaikh Nasser Mohammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah
Death penalty: retentionist
Population: 2.8 million
Life expectancy: 77.3 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 11/11 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 93.3 per cent

Migrant workers, particularly women domestic servants, suffered a wide range of abuses with little hope of redress. Death sentences continued to be imposed and carried out.

Migrant workers

Migrant workers, who make up a large proportion of Kuwait's workforce, continued to suffer a wide range of abuses. Most vulnerable were the many thousands of women employed as domestic servants, mostly nationals of south and south-east Asian countries. They suffered double discrimination, as women and because domestic workers continued to be excluded from the protections afforded to other expatriate workers under the 1964 labour law. Women domestic workers commonly worked excessive hours for little pay and alleged that they were subject to physical and other abuse, including sexual abuse, at the hands of their employers, against which, in practice, they often had no remedy. The minimum wage for foreign domestic workers was reported to be less than half that set for other foreign workers and only a third of the minimum wage paid to Kuwaiti nationals.

A standardized contract for foreign domestic workers introduced in October 2006 led to some improvements, although it appeared to have worsened the situation for domestic workers facing physical or other abuse by their employer by banning them from transferring to a different employer. Under the contract, domestic workers who leave their employer or are dismissed will be deported.

- In February, some 1,300 Bangladeshi women employed as cleaners by a private company went on strike against non-payment of wages and poor living conditions.

'War on terror'

Two former inmates at the US detention facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, were released in March after being acquitted of terrorism-related charges. Omar Rajab Amin and Abdullah Kamel al-Kandari had been arrested on their return to Kuwait in September 2006. The acquittals were confirmed by the Court of Appeal in May and brought to eight the number of Kuwaitis returned from Guantánamo and acquitted of all charges by Kuwaiti courts.

Four other Kuwaitis continued to be held at Guantánamo.

In June, the Court of Cassation commuted the death sentences of four men – Mohammad Saad, Abdullah Saad, Mohammad Issa and Salah Abdullah – who had been convicted in 2005 on terrorism-related charges, including membership of the Peninsula Lions' Brigade, a group allegedly linked to al-Qa'ida. They and other defendants who had been sentenced with them alleged that they had been tortured during pre-trial interrogation. One reportedly alleged that the State Security Department had "imported" foreign experts to torture them. At the hearing before the Court of Cassation, Mohammad Saad reportedly removed his shirt to expose scars that he said were caused by torture inflicted while he was detained by the State Security Department. No independent investigation into the defendants' torture allegations was known to have been initiated.

Freedom of expression

- Basher al-Sayegh, editor of the daily Al-Jarida newspaper, was arrested in August after a comment criticizing the Emir was posted on a website he hosted, even though he removed the comment within hours. Jassim al-Qames, a journalist who tried to photograph the arrest, was also detained and alleged that he was assaulted by security officials. Both men were released within three days.

Death penalty

At least one person, a Pakistan national convicted of drug smuggling, was hanged. At least one person, a Filipina domestic worker convicted of murdering her employer's son, was sentenced to death. The death sentence imposed on another Filipina domestic worker, Marilou Ranario, was commuted to life imprisonment by the Emir in December in response to a direct appeal for clemency by the President of the Philippines. Marilou Ranario was convicted of murdering her Kuwaiti employment sponsor in 2005.

In December, the Court of Appeal confirmed the death sentence imposed on a member of the ruling al-Sabah family, identified only as Talal, after he was convicted of drug smuggling in December 2006.

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