



Amnesty International Report 2016/17 - Ghana

Publisher [Amnesty International](#)

Publication Date 22 February 2017

Cite as Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2016/17 - Ghana*, 22 February 2017, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58b033f815.html> [accessed 2 June 2017]

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Republic of Ghana

Head of state and government: **John Dramani Mahama**

Concerns were raised about the rights of women and children, discrimination against people with disabilities, and legal shortcomings in relation to human rights protection. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people continued to face discrimination, violence and police harassment. Death sentences were handed down.

BACKGROUND

In June, Ghana's human rights record was reviewed for the first time by the UN Human Rights Committee to assess compliance with its obligations under the ICCPR.

In September, Ghana ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture, which establishes a system of regular visits to places of detention as a measure to protect detainees and prisoners from torture or other ill-treatment. General elections took place in December; Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party was elected President.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In February, the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunication Messages Bill (2015) was put before Parliament. It proposes the interception of all communications for the undefined purposes of "protecting national security" and "fighting crime generally". Civil society raised concerns that the lack of clear definition would give authorities wide discretion to intercept communications, and said that the bill lacked sufficient safeguards.

The Human Rights Committee stated that Ghana should expedite the enactment of the Right to Information Bill and ensure that its provisions conform to the ICCPR.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Human Rights Committee raised concerns about legislative provisions that discriminate against women in relation to property ownership, access to formal credit and inheritance. It noted delays in the adoption of the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, which was put forward in 2013. It made recommendations concerning domestic violence, including further legislation to enhance implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2007, increased social services and shelters for survivors of domestic violence, and improved investigation and prosecution of cases.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Human Rights Committee and civil society organizations remained concerned at the persistence of child labour. The Committee called for investigations into the worst forms of child labour and better public sensitization campaigns on the issue.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

The Human Rights Committee recommended that Ghana establish an independent mechanism to investigate alleged misconduct by police officers, as well as measures to ensure that its law and practice comply with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

The Human Rights Committee raised concern at the stigmatization and discrimination faced by people with disabilities, which it cited as major contributing factors to the inadequate treatment of patients with mental health illness and the poor conditions at public psychiatric institutions. It also expressed concern at the hundreds of unregistered private "prayer camps" to deal with illness, particularly mental illness, which operated with little oversight and no state regulation. It noted reports regarding the use of torture and other ill-treatment in such camps, including shackling and forced fasting.

RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PEOPLE

Consensual same-sex relations between men remained a criminal offence. Local organizations reported that LGBTI people continued to face police harassment as well as discrimination, violence and instances of blackmail in the wider community.

DEATH PENALTY

Courts continued to hand down death sentences, although the last execution was in 1993. Ghana retains the mandatory death penalty for some offences despite the Human Rights Committee's condemnation of mandatory death sentences. The main death row facility for men remained overcrowded and inmates continued to be denied access to activities such as sport and education.

Proposals made by the Constitutional Review Implementation Committee to abolish the death penalty continued to be stalled as a result of delays in the constitutional review process.

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