

THE WORLD'S MOST REPRESSIVE REGIMES 2003

A Special Report to the 59th Session of the
United Nations Commission on Human Rights
Geneva, 2003

Excerpted from

Freedom in the World 2003
The Annual Survey of Political Rights & Civil Liberties



Freedom House
Washington • New York
Belgrade • Bishkek • Bratislava • Bucharest
Budapest • Kyiv • Rabat
Tashkent • Warsaw



Board of Trustees

R. James Woolsey, *Chairman*

Max M. Kampelman, *Chairman Emeritus*

Bette Bao Lord, *Chairman Emeritus*

Ned W. Bandler, *Vice Chairman*

Mark Palmer, *Vice Chairman*

Walter J. Schloss, *Treasurer*

Kenneth L. Adelman, *Secretary*

Peter Ackerman	J. Brian Atwood
Barbara Barrett	Zbigniew Brzezinski
Peter Collier	Alan Dye
Stuart Eizenstat	Sandra Feldman
Thomas Foley	Malcolm S. Forbes, Jr.
Theodore J. Forstmann	Norman Hill
Samuel P. Huntington	John T. Joyce
Kathryn Dickey Karol	Jeane J. Kirkpatrick
Anthony Lake	Mara Liasson
Jay Mazur	John Norton Moore
Diana Villiers Negroponte	P.J. O'Rourke
Orlando Patterson	Susan Kaufman Purcell
J. Danforth Quayle	Bill Richardson
Ruth Wedgwood	Wendell L. Willkie II

Andrew Young

Richard Sauber
Of Counsel

Jennifer Windsor
Executive Director

Survey Team
Freedom in the World 2003

Adrian Karatnycky, *General Editor*

Aili Piano, *Managing Editor*

Martin Edwin Andersen	Gordon Bardos
Peter Doran	Gary Gambill
Michael Gold-Biss	Michael Goldfarb
Michael Gordon	Charles Graybow
Kelli Henry	Karin Deutsch Karlekar
Edward McMahon	Amy Phillips
Arch Puddington	Amanda Schnetzer

Cindy Shiner

Trish Fox, *Proofreader*

Linda Stern, *Copy Editor*

Mark Wolkenfeld, *Production Coordinator*

Advisory Board
Freedom in the World 2003

Central and Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union

Alexander Motyl, *Rutgers University*

Charles Gati, *Johns Hopkins University*

Asia Pacific

Ashutosh Varshney, *University of Michigan*

Bridget Welsh, *Johns Hopkins University*

Middle East, North Africa

Daniel Brumberg, *Georgetown University*

Daniel Pipes, *Middle East Forum*

Sub-Saharan Africa

Thomas Lansner, *Columbia University*

Peter Lewis, *American University*

Latin America

David Becker, *Dartmouth College*

Arturo Valenzuela, *Georgetown University*

Western Europe

Andrew Moravcsik, *Harvard University*

Methodology

Kenneth Bollen, *University of North Carolina*

Larry Diamond, *Hoover Institution*

Jeane Kirkpatrick, *American Enterprise Institute*

Seymour Martin Lipset, *George Mason University*

Alexander Motyl, *Rutgers University*

Joshua Muravchik, *American Enterprise Institute*

Jack Snyder, *Columbia University*

Copyright © 2003 by Freedom House

Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved. No part of this pamphlet may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For permission, write to:

Freedom House
120 Wall Street, 26th Floor
New York, NY 10005
Tel: 212-514-8040
Fax: 212-514-8055

First published in 1999.

Contents

Introduction	vii
Country Reports	1
Burma	1
China	7
Cuba	17
Equatorial Guinea	23
Eritrea	27
Iraq	31
Laos	37
Libya	43
North Korea	49
Saudi Arabia	55
Somalia	61
Sudan	65
Syria	73
Turkmenistan	79
Uzbekistan	85
Vietnam	93
China (Tibet)	100
Morocco (Western Sahara)	107
Russia (Chechnya)	111
Appendix A: Table of Independent Countries	A-1
Appendix B: Methodology	B-1
Appendix C: About Freedom House	C-1

Introduction

Freedom House appears before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its session in Geneva this year to present its findings on the state of political rights and civil liberties and to highlight areas of great urgency and concern. In this year's report, Freedom House again places its focus on the most repressive regimes in the world.

The reports that follow are excerpted from the Freedom House survey *Freedom in the World 2003*. The ratings and accompanying essays are based on information received through the end of December 2002. The 16 countries and three territories in this year's study rank at or near the bottom of the list of 192 countries and 18 major related and disputed territories that are surveyed annually by Freedom House.

Included in our list are nine countries that are judged to be the "worst of the worst" in terms of their civil liberties and political rights: Burma, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Turkmenistan. They are joined by two territories, Chechnya and Tibet, whose inhabitants suffer from intense repression. These states and regions received the Freedom House survey's lowest rating: 7 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties. Within these entities, state control over daily life is pervasive and intrusive, independent organizations and political opposition are banned or suppressed, and fear of retribution is a factor of daily life. In the case of Chechnya, the rating reflects the condition of a vicious conflict that has disrupted normal life and resulted in tens of thousands of victims within the civilian population.

There are, additionally, seven other countries near the bottom of Freedom House's list of the most repressive states: China, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Laos, Somalia, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. These states differ from the "worst of the worst" because they offer some very limited scope for private discussion, while severely suppressing opposition political activity, impeding independent organizing, and censoring or punishing criticism of the state. The territory of Western Sahara is also included in this group.

Introduction

The states on this year's "most repressive regimes" list span a wide array of cultures, civilizations, regions, and levels of economic development. They include countries from the Americas, the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and East Asia.

Brutal human rights violations continued to take place in nearly every part of the world in 2002. Of the 192 countries in the world, 89 (nearly half) are Free and can be said to respect a broad array of basic human rights and political freedoms. A further 55 are Partly Free, with some abridgments of basic rights and weak enforcement of the rule of law, and 48 countries (a quarter of the world's total) are Not Free and suffer from systematic and pervasive human rights violations.

This report from Freedom House to the United Nations paints a picture of severe repression and unspeakable violations of human dignity. But the grim reality depicted in this report stands in sharp contrast to the gradual expansion of human liberty over the last twenty-five years. Today, there are more Free countries than at any time in history, and the number—which grew by four this year with the addition of Brazil, Lesotho, Senegal, and Serbia-Montenegro (formerly Yugoslavia)—is rapidly approaching a majority. As significantly, there are 121 electoral democracies, representing 63 percent of the world's countries, the highest number and proportion in the 30-year history of the survey and up from 41 percent in 1986. This progress is in no small measure the consequence of the influence of the global pro-democracy and human rights movements that have supported courageous activists on the ground.

Increasingly, it is clear that countries that make the most measured and sustainable progress toward long-term economic development are those that are characterized by good governance and the absence of massive corruption and cronyism, conditions that are only possible in a climate of transparency, civil control, and a vigorously independent media—all requisites of a multiparty democracy. In part, for this reason, the U.S. Administration has announced that it will examine which states "rule justly" and will use Freedom House's ratings for political rights and civil liberties in determining which developing countries are eligible for enhanced foreign assistance under the proposed Millennium Challenge Account.

The dramatic expansion of democratic governance over the last several decades has important implications for the United Nations and other international organizations. Today, states that respect basic freedoms and the rule of law have

greater potential than ever to positively influence the functioning of global and regional institutions. But they can only achieve that potential within international bodies by working cooperatively and cohesively on issues of democracy and human rights.

In 2002, Freedom House and the U.S.-based Council on Foreign Relations sponsored an Independent Task Force on the UN. It recommends the establishment of a democracy group at the UN to promote the values of human rights and democracy and to ensure that countries committed to respect for these fundamental principles occupy leadership positions within the UN system.

We hope that the 2003 Geneva meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights can be an occasion for cooperation by democratic member states that can lead to the emergence of such a bloc. Democratic cooperation can best ensure that the attention of the UN Commission on Human Rights is properly focused on the countries with the world's worst human rights records, many of which, regrettably, have escaped criticism in recent years.

At the same time, Freedom House hopes that in distributing information about the "most repressive" states, we are bringing the violations of these states to the attention of the UN Commission on Human Rights. In this fashion, we are playing a modest role in aiding activists engaged in struggles for human dignity and freedom and hastening the day when dictatorships will give way to genuine pluralism, democracy, and the rule of law—the bedrock not only of political rights and civil liberties, but also of lasting economic prosperity.

Additional information about Freedom House and its reports on the state of political rights and civil liberties around the world can be obtained at www.freedomhouse.org.

Jennifer Windsor
Executive Director, Freedom House
March 2003

Libya

Political Rights:	7
Civil Liberties:	7
Status:	Not Free

Overview:

Libyan leader Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi continued his campaign for regional and international respectability in 2002. His attempts to position himself as a pan-African leader built upon recent efforts to break Libya out of international isolation, further burnishing his image as a continental gadfly. Libya seemed to cooperate with the United States on the war against terrorism. Nevertheless, the United States classified it as a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction. Libya offered a compensation package to the families of the victims of the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing in 1988, but conditioned this offer on the complete removal of international sanctions against the country. At year's end, Libya was slated to chair the UN Commission on Human Rights.

After centuries of Ottoman rule, Libya was conquered by Italy in 1912 and occupied by British and French forces during World War II. In accordance with agreements made by Britain and the United Nations, Libya gained independence under the staunchly pro-Western King Idris I in 1951. Qadhafi seized power in 1969 amid growing anti-Western sentiment toward foreign-controlled oil companies and military bases on Libyan soil.

Qadhafi's open hostility toward the West and his sponsorship of terrorism have earned Libya the status of international pariah. Clashes with regional neighbors, including Chad over the Aozou strip and Egypt over their common border, have led to costly military failures. Suspected Libyan involvement in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland prompted the United Nations in 1992 to impose sanctions, including embargoes on air traffic and the

Libya

import of arms and oil production equipment. The United States has maintained unilateral sanctions against Libya since 1981 because of the latter's sponsorship of terrorism.

With the economy stagnating and the internal infrastructure in disrepair, Qadhafi began taking steps in 1999 to end Libya's international isolation. He surrendered two Libyan nationals suspected in the Lockerbie bombing. He also agreed to pay compensation to the families of 170 people killed in the 1989 bombing of a French airliner over Niger. In addition, he accepted responsibility for the 1984 killing of British police officer Yvonne Fletcher by shots fired from the Libyan Embassy in London, and expelled from Libya the Palestinian terrorist organization headed by Abu Nidal. The United Nations suspended sanctions in 1999, but stopped short of lifting them permanently because Libya has not explicitly renounced terrorism. The United States eased some restrictions to allow American companies to sell food, medicine, and medical equipment to Libya, but maintained its travel ban. Britain restored diplomatic ties with Libya for the first time since 1986; the Libyan embassy in Britain reopened in March 2001. The EU lifted sanctions but maintained an arms embargo.

The two Lockerbie suspects went on trial in May 2000 under Scottish law in the Netherlands. One, a Libyan intelligence agent named Abdel Basset Ali Mohammed al-Megrahi, was convicted of murder in January 2001 and sentenced to life imprisonment. The other was acquitted for lack of evidence and freed. Following the trial, the Arab League called for a total lifting of UN sanctions; all 22 of its members agreed to disregard them. The United States and Britain reiterated their demand that Libyan authorities renounce terrorism, take responsibility for the attack, and pay compensation to the victims' families. Libya has consistently denied government involvement in the attack.

Once a leading advocate of pan-Arab unity, Qadhafi received little Arab support in the wake of Lockerbie and turned instead to promoting a united Africa. In 2001 he worked with Egypt on a peace plan for Sudan and mediated disputes between Sudan and Uganda, and Eritrea and Djibouti. He also sent troops to the Central African Republic (CAR) to support President Ange Felix Patasse in the wake of a failed coup.

While working to improve his image abroad, Qadhafi has become increasingly isolated at home. Ethnic rivalries among senior junta officials have been reported, while corruption, mismanagement, and unemployment have eroded

support for the regime. Disaffected Libyans see little of some \$10 billion per year in oil revenue and have yet to reap the benefits of suspended UN sanctions as potential investors from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East stream in seeking oil contracts. Economists stress the need for deregulation and privatization, and Qadhafi has gradually lifted some state controls on the economy. He has also tried to encourage foreign investment in agriculture and tourism as well as oil. In 2001, as part of an ongoing investigation apparently aimed at cleaning up Libya's image, 47 government and bank officials, including the finance minister, were sent to prison for corruption.

Early in 2002, Libyan officials held talks with American counterparts in London over removing Libya from the U.S. State Department's list of countries that sponsor terrorism. While a State Department report published in the spring did indicate that Libya was taking steps "to get out of the terrorism business," Libya was not removed from the official list. Whatever progress Libya has made in this area—including its relative cooperation with the United States in the war against terrorism—was offset later in the year when the United States accused Libya of proliferating weapons of mass destruction.

Expanding its image-rehabilitation drive, the government in May offered a \$2.7 billion compensation package to the families of the 270 victims of the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing. However, Libya tied dispensation of the money to a removal of all outstanding sanctions against it and its removal from the U.S. State Department's terrorism-sponsors list.

In October Qadhafi sent troops to protect President Patasse's palace while Libyan jets bombed rebel-held areas of Bangui, the CAR's capital. Analysts speculated Qadhafi's military support was either part of his recent efforts at positioning himself as an African power broker or an attempt to leverage his access to the CAR's mineral resources.

Qadhafi's vision of a unified African state came into clearer focus in July with the formation of the African Union (AU), and Libya's inclusion on the steering committee of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Libya's inclusion in an economic recovery plan predicated on transparent governance and respect for human rights generated much controversy abroad; most Libyans suffer rampant corruption, mismanagement, and severe restrictions on their political and civic freedom. The union is largely the product of Qadhafi's enthusiasm, and his promises of generous financial aid to many regional leaders have undoubtedly secured their support.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Libyans cannot change their government democratically. Colonel Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi rules by decree, with almost no accountability or transparency. Libya has no formal constitution; a mixture of Islamic belief, nationalism, and socialist theory in Qadhafi's *Green Book* provides principles and structures of governance, but the document lacks legal status. Libya is officially known as a *jamahiriyah*, or state of the masses, conceived as a system of direct government through popular organs at all levels of society. In reality, an elaborate structure of revolutionary committees and people's committees serves as a tool of repression. Real power rests with Qadhafi and a small group of close associates that appoints civil and military officials at every level. In 2000, Qadhafi dissolved 14 ministries, or General People's Committees, and transferred their power to municipal councils, leaving 5 intact. While some praised this apparent decentralization of power, others speculated that the move was a power grab in response to rifts between Qadhafi and several ministers.

The judiciary is not independent. It includes summary courts for petty offenses, courts of first instance for more serious offenses, courts of appeal, and a supreme court. Revolutionary courts were established in 1980 to try political offenses, but were replaced in 1988 by people's courts after reportedly assuming responsibility for up to 90 percent of prosecutions. Political trials are held in secret, with no due process considerations. According to the U.S. State Department, Libya employs summary judicial techniques to suppress local opposition. Arbitrary arrest and torture are commonplace.

The death penalty applies to a number of political offenses and "economic" crimes, including currency speculation and drug- or alcohol-related crimes. Libya actively abducts and kills political dissidents in exile. The public practice of law is illegal.

In August, the government released from jail several prisoners of conscience affiliated with the banned Islamic Liberation Party. In August 2001, officials released 107 political prisoners, including one who had served 31 years in connection with an attempted coup in 1970. Hundreds of other political prisoners reportedly remain in prison. Some have been in jail for more than ten years without charge or trial. The government does not allow prison visits by human rights monitors.

Earlier in the year, Libya was nominated by the Africa group at the United Nations to chair the UN Commission on Human Rights. The nomination

elicited outcry by rights groups, which appealed to the African Union to select a more suitable candidate. After its nomination as chair for the UN Commission on Human Rights, Libya indicated it would invite UN and other human rights monitors to visit Libya. It also declared its intention to review the role of the people's courts.

In February, a Libyan court ruled there was no evidence to indicate that seven foreign medical workers were deliberately infecting children with AIDS. Qadhafi had previously accused one Palestinian and six Bulgarian health workers of carrying out a conspiracy to undermine Libya's national security. The matter was referred to a criminal court.

Free media do not exist in Libya. Publication of opinions contrary to government policy is forbidden. The state owns and controls all media and thus controls reporting of domestic and international issues. Satellite television is widely available; access to Western news channels such as CNN is available, but foreign programming is sometimes censored. International publications are censored and sometimes prohibited. Internet access is available via one service provider, which is owned by Col. Qadhafi's son.

Academic freedom is severely restricted. Elementary, middle, and high schools are subject to intensive political indoctrination. In December, the revolutionary committee of the department of politics and economics at Garyounis University in Benghazi reportedly "purified" the department of so-called subversive elements.

Limited public debate occurs within government bodies, but free expression and the right to privacy are not respected. An extensive and pervasive security apparatus exists, including local "Revolutionary Committees" and "Purification Committees" that monitor individual activities and communications.

Independent political parties and civic associations are illegal; only associations affiliated with the regime are tolerated. Political activity considered treasonous is punishable by death. Public assembly must support and be approved by the government. Instances of public unrest are rare.

About 98 percent of Libyans are Sunni Muslim. Islamic groups whose beliefs and practices differ from the state-approved teaching of Islam are banned. The government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions. According to the U.S. State Department, small communities of Christians worship openly. The largely Berber and Tuareg minorities face discrimination, and Qadhafi

Libya

reportedly manipulates, bribes, and incites fighting among tribes in order to maintain power.

Qadhafi's pan-African policy has led to an influx of African immigrants in recent years. Poor domestic economic conditions have contributed to resentment of these immigrants, who are often blamed for increases in crime, drug use, and the incidence of AIDS. In late September 2000, four days of deadly clashes between Libyans and other African nationals erupted as a result of a trivial dispute. Thousands of African immigrants were subsequently moved to military camps, and thousands more were repatriated to Sudan, Ghana, and Nigeria. Security measures were taken, including restrictions on the hiring of foreigners in the private sector. The incident proved an embarrassment to Qadhafi, who blamed "hidden forces" for trying to derail his united-Africa policy.

Women's access to education and employment have improved under the current regime. However, tradition dictates discrimination in family and civil matters. A woman must have her husband's permission to travel abroad.

Arbitrary investment laws, restrictions on foreign ownership of property, state domination of the economy, and continuing corruption are likely to hinder growth for years to come.

Independent trade unions and professional associations do not exist. The only federation is the government-controlled National Trade Unions Federation. There is no collective bargaining, and workers have no legal right to strike.