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Cote D'Ivoire Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

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COTE D'IVOIRE

Cote D'Ivoire is a centralized republic dominated by a strong presidency. Members of a single political party, the Democratic Party of Cote D'Ivoire (PDCI) have occupied both the presidency and a majority of seats in the national legislature since independence in 1960, although other parties have been legal since 1990. Upon the death in 1993 of Felix Houphouet-Boigny, who had been President since independence, National Assembly President Henri Konan Bedie became President by constitutional succession and served out the remainder of Houphouet's term. Due to concerns about 1994 changes to the candidacy requirements of the electoral code that excluded a leading opposition rival to Bedie, and about irregularities in voter registration, the major opposition parties staged an "active boycott" of the 1995 presidential election, both declining to participate and trying to interfere with the voting process; however, President Bedie won 96 percent of the vote. The opposition parties and Bedie then reached an accord that allowed for full party participation in legislative elections later in 1995. These elections were marred by irregularities in voter registration; they were suspended in 3 of the 175 districts due to interethnic violence, and results in another 3 districts were invalidated, but make-up

elections in 1996 were orderly and transparent. The PDCI continued to control more than the 80 percent of National Assembly votes needed to amend the Constitution. In June the National Assembly enacted amendments to the Constitution that further increased the already preponderant power of the presidency and were criticized widely. However, in December, after negotiations with a major opposition party, the President signed any agreement obliging him to rescind some of these powers in a second round of constitutional amendments. The judiciary is subject to executive branch and other outside influence.

Security forces include the army, navy, and air force, all under the Ministry of Defense; the Republican Guard, a well-funded 1,200-man presidential security force; the national police (Surete); and the Gendarmerie, a branch of the armed forces with responsibility for general law enforcement, maintenance of public order, and internal security, including suppression of violent crime. A National Security Council, formed in August 1996 and chaired by the former commandant of the gendarmerie, coordinates security policy, both internal and external. A Security Staff (L'Etat Major de la Surete) collects and distributes information about crime and coordinates the activities of the security forces in times of crisis. The Special Anticrime Police Brigade (SAVAC) continued its operations. The armed forces traditionally have accepted the primacy of civilian authority. Seven of the 18 members of the military forces accused of plotting a coup in 1995 were dismissed from the military forces, then released from detention in 1996. Four other officers who had been suspended were reinstated in April. Security forces, including the SAVAC, committed numerous human rights abuses.

The economy is largely market-based but heavily dependent on the agricultural sector. Most of the rural population remains dependent on smallholder cash crop production. Principal exports are cocoa, coffee, and wood. Fewer than half of adults are literate. Recorded Gross National Product per capita in 1997 was about \$680 on a money basis. Economic growth has resumed since a large currency devaluation in 1994, although it has been unevenly distributed. The Government increased the always large but previously diminishing share of its operating expenditures devoted to basic health services and education. However, economic growth continued to be impeded by widespread corruption rooted in a lack of transparent and accountable governance. The Government continued to receive substantial assistance from international financial institutions.

The Government's human rights record was characterized by serious problems and abuses in a number of areas. The Government enacted constitutional amendments that further restricted citizens' rights to change their government, only some of which the President subsequently agreed to rescind. Members of the security forces committed extrajudicial killings, and the security forces beat and abused detainees and used force to disperse protestors. The Government also used arbitrary arrest and detention and often failed to bring perpetrators of these abuses to justice. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening, although they improved in some respects, and international humanitarian organizations recently reported better access to the prison system. Prolonged detention was a problem. The judiciary did not ensure due process and was subject to executive branch influence, particularly in political cases; however, in December the Government released all known political prisoners and detainees. Security forces infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and movement; however, it did not substantially restrict freedom of assembly during the second half of the year. Despite some formal restrictions on freedom of association, the Government generally permitted it in practice. Between one-fifth and one-third of the country's adult population, including many lifelong residents of the country, remained politically disenfranchised noncitizens. Discrimination and violence against women, abuse of children, and female genital mutilation (FGM) remained problems, although a new law made FGM a crime. The minority Baoule ethnic group's longstanding domination of the ruling party and the State, which has exacerbated sometimes violent ethnic tensions, continued. Societal discrimination based on ethnicity remained a problem. Child labor and forced child labor are problems.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no reports of politically motivated killings by government forces. However, as violent civil crime remained widespread, the security forces frequently resorted to lethal force and committed numerous extrajudicial killings. Credible media reports indicate that the Special Anticrime Police Brigade continued its shoot-to-kill policy when pursuing criminal suspects. According to estimates in a government-owned daily newspaper, about 78 persons were killed in the first quarter of 1997 alone. The Government did not prosecute SAVAC or police personnel for these killings.

On May 14, police shot and killed Ellele Sombo Mages, a 17-year-old schoolboy, during a protest at a high school in Anyama over the expulsion of a student for failure to pay what the student union and

the Ministry of Education said were unauthorized fees (see Section 1.c). Following widespread student protests about this killing, police sergeant Kouakou Souassi was charged with Sombô's death. In October a military tribunal sentenced the sergeant to 10 years' imprisonment.

Police reportedly killed three taxi or truck drivers and seriously injured four such drivers during the year.

On September 10, a policeman killed Assane Sanogo, a taxi driver, in Abidjan, allegedly during a petty extortion attempt. On September 18, following a five-day general strike by taxi and bus drivers to protest the killing, police officer Firmin Adou was arrested and charged with Sangono's murder. The Government also acceded to the drivers' other demands, including a compensation payment to Sangono's widow and son.

At an unknown time and place, Police lieutenant Diaby Mamadou and officers Fofana and Korahi allegedly beat and killed Zeze Patrice, a man whom they suspected of having embezzled the proceeds of a vehicle sale. The police reportedly tried to beat the truth out of him. Zeze Patrice was paralyzed after the beating and later died. On October 12, the three police officers were arrested and jailed at Abidjan military prison.

On October 15, another taxi driver, Kassim Oumare, died in police custody. Police authorities announced that he had hanged himself in his cell by his shoelaces. According to press reports, Kassim had been in detention since the night of October 12, when his vehicle injured Coulibaly Yacouba, an officer of the Riot Police Brigade (BAE). Coulibaly Yacouba died after being shot four times by police sergeant Gohoun Gnapié, who mistook him for a thief. Kassim Oumare's death came 2 days after an incident in which BAE personnel beat several taxi drivers and damaged nine taxis in the Toit-Rouge quarter of Abidjan in retaliation for Yacouba's death (see Section 1.c.). Gohoun Gnapié was arrested. At year's end, no arrests had been made in Kassim Oumare's death. However, Dignité, the independent trade union that represents most taxi and truck drivers, filed a civil suit against the Minister of Security and the Prefect of Police in connection with Oumare's death.

On December 15, gendarmes arrested Camara Yaya and several others at a roadblock for possessing a small amount of cocaine and took them to the gendarmerie school. The gendarmes forced the detainees to run laps around the courtyard. Camara complained of poor health and stopped running, whereupon the gendarmes reportedly beat and killed him. Camara's family published an open letter to President Bedie demanding the arrest and punishment of the gendarmes responsible, but they were not known to have been arrested at year's end.

On December 23, police took Jean Claude Lama, a 16-year-old street child, from a roadblock to the first police precinct in Plateau district. The following morning the police commissioner announced that Lama had hanged himself in his cell. Friends of Lama said that he was looking forward to celebrating Christmas with them, and accused police of beating Lama on the night of his death. At year's end, no arrests had been made in the case, which authorities called a suicide.

At least four other prisoners are known to have died in custody, three in Toumodi and one in Bouaké, as a direct result of harsh prison conditions; credible reports indicate that more than 700 persons died in prison in 1997 from all causes (see Section 1.c.).

There were no developments in the case of six detainees who died in prison in 1996. They had been held since the "active boycott" of the 1995 presidential election. Another active boycott prisoner, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment, died in prison in Bouake on August 16. However, in December the National Assembly voted unanimously to grant amnesty to all 28 persons still in prison for infractions related to the active boycott, of whom 18 had been tried, convicted, and sentenced, and 10 were still awaiting trial. (See Section 1.d.)

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The country acceded to the Convention Against Torture in 1995, but has enacted no implementing legislation. Although the Penal Code contains general strictures against violence against persons, neither the Constitution nor the Penal Code is known to provide specific protection for persons in custody against torture or other mistreatment, and police sometimes beat detainees or prisoners as punishment, or to extract confessions, according to local human rights groups. There were no public reports of government officials being tried for these abuses.

Jurists' union officials reported that police continue to beat suspects to obtain confessions and that suspects are afraid to press charges against the police officers involved. Press photographs regularly show criminal detainees with swollen or bruised faces and bodies. Several persons detained in Abidjan in April complained that police beat them (see Section 1.d.).

Police frequently used violence to restrain demonstrators. Riot police used tear gas and truncheons against protesting students on several occasions during the first half of the year. On at least one occasion police used lethal force against student protesters (see Sections 1.a. and 2.b.). Police used tear gas to quell a protest in May.

In two cases, military personnel were disciplined for physically abusing civilians. In June four soldiers were jailed for 30 days for beating an imam (Muslim religious leader) in a mosque during an attempt to arrest a thief. In August three members of the Republican Guard were tried for beating a man in an off-duty nightclub incident.

On October 12, following the death of a Riot Police officer who had been injured by a taxi (see Section 1.a.), members of the Riot Police Brigade damaged nine taxis and beat several taxi drivers in the Toit-rouge quarter of Abidjan. BAE officers involved were arrested, and the Minister of Security promised to have the damaged taxis repaired. Whether that promise was kept, and whether the BAE officers were punished, are not known.

Police routinely harassed and abused noncitizen Africans (see Section 5).

In December the Government enacted legislation allowing lawyers to assist their clients at the stage of preliminary police hearings, that is, during the early stages of detention when torture and abuse may be most likely.

Prison conditions are harsh and life threatening. Problems include overcrowding, malnutrition, a high incidence of infectious disease, and lack of treatment facilities and medications. These conditions are responsible in part for a high prisoner death rate throughout the prison population. HIV/AIDS reportedly is also a significant mortality factor. It was credibly reported that more than 700 prisoners died in 1997. Comparably complete information for 1998 was not yet available at year's end, but at least 60 prisoners are known to have died during the year. Several journalists released from prison in 1996 reported that white-collar prisoners are afforded special treatment. The Government has offered access to prisons to nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) that seek to provide food and medical care to prisoners.

According to the Ivorian Human Rights League (LIDHO), conditions at the main prison of Abidjan have been especially hazardous for women, who were housed together with violent and nonviolent male criminals, as well as with minors. However, during the year the prison began to separate female and male prisoners and to maintain female guards for female prisoners and male guards for male prisoners. There continued to be occasional credible reports of childbirth in prison. However, during the year, unlike past years, there were no reports that guards raped female prisoners. Nevertheless, there were still reports that female prisoners engaged in sexual relations with their wardens in exchange for food and more privileges. There are still no health facilities for women, and reportedly a number of women have given birth at the prison without medical attention.

Unlike previous years, humanitarian NGO's did not report difficulty in gaining access to prisons. Several humanitarian NGO's, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, Prisonniers Sans Frontieres, and Medecins Sans Frontieres, had access to the prisons and visited them during the year to provide food and medical care to prisoners. However, none of these NGO's was specifically monitoring human rights conditions in the prisons. The LIDHO, which does monitor human rights conditions in prisons, did not visit prisons during the year because it remained unable to do so without giving advance notice; the LIDHO has applied for authorization to visit prisons at any time without advance notice, but has not received it.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Government arbitrarily arrests and detains citizens. Under the Code of Penal Procedure, a public prosecutor may order the detention of a suspect for only 48 hours without bringing charges. A magistrate may order detention for up to 4 months but also must provide the Minister of Justice with a written justification for continued detention on a monthly basis. However, the law often is violated. Police have held persons for more than 48 hours without bringing charges. According to a member of a jurists' union, this practice is common, and magistrates often are not able to verify that those not charged are released.

Defendants do not have the right to a judicial determination of the legality of their detention. A judge may release pretrial detainees on provisional liberty, if the judge believes that the suspect is not likely to flee. The Attorney General in 1996 referred in public to the long detention periods suffered by prisoners awaiting trial in the country's principal prison, the MACA, listing a total prisoner population of 4,600, of whom 1,741 were detainees who had yet to be tried. Of the detainees, 470 had been detained for more than 2 years, 60 for at least 4 years, and 39 others between 5 and 12 years. Based on these figures, pretrial detainees at that time made up about 35 percent of the prison population. However, a

law enacted in December limits pretrial detention to 10 months in civil cases and 22 months in criminal cases; if these limits are exceeded, the prisoner must be released on provisional liberty with no bail, and if the responsible judge takes no action, the prison director must act to free the suspect or face sanctions.

Ten persons arrested in connection with the active boycott of the 1995 presidential campaign were still in prison and awaiting trial, and more than 100 more were on provisional liberty but awaiting trial on charges related to the active boycott, when, in December, the Government enacted a law granting amnesty to all persons convicted or charged in connection with that incident (see Section 3). An estimated 450 such persons originally were arrested. None was known to remain in custody at year's end.

Favide Innocent, a Beninese car importer arrested in 1994 pursuant to an extradition request by the Government of Togo, remained in detention in the MACA although various courts had ordered his release on several occasions, most recently in April. In November Innocent staged a hunger strike to protest his continued detention. However, he remained detained at year's end.

Although it is prohibited by law, police restrict access to some prisoners. Despite the frequency of arbitrary arrest, there is no accurate total of suspects held. In April police held over 800 unemployed persons and vagrants in investigative detention in Abidjan, after arresting many persons in an effort to identify criminals. Several persons reported that police beat them.

The military personnel arrested on charges of coup plotting in 1995 and released 14 months later remained at liberty, and four were reinstated. No additional members of the military services were detained without charges.

The Government does not use forced exile as a means of political control.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, in practice the judiciary is subject to executive branch and other outside influences. Although the judiciary is independent in ordinary criminal cases, it follows the lead of the executive in national security or politically sensitive cases. Judges serve at the pleasure of the executive and reports that they submit to political pressure are credible. One jurist claims that he was transferred out of Abidjan because of his public appeals for a more independent judiciary.

The formal judicial system is headed by a Supreme Court and includes the Court of Appeals and lower courts.

Military courts do not try civilians. Although there are no appellate courts within the military court system, persons convicted by a military tribunal may petition the Supreme Court to set aside the tribunal's verdict and order a retrial.

In rural areas, traditional institutions often administer justice at the village level, handling domestic disputes and minor land questions in accordance with customary law. Dispute resolution is by exten-

ded debate, with no known instance of resort to physical punishment. The formal court system increasingly is superseding these traditional mechanisms. In 1996 a Grand Mediator was appointed to settle disputes that cannot be resolved by traditional means. This office appears designed to bridge traditional and modern methods of dispute resolution. During the year, 149 disputes including land rights disputes were submitted to it.

The law provides for the right to public trial, although key evidence sometimes is given secretly. The presumption of innocence and the right of defendants to be present at their trials often are not observed. Those convicted have the right of appeal, although higher courts rarely overturn verdicts. Defendants accused of felonies or capital crimes have the right to legal counsel, and the judicial system provides for court-appointed attorneys; however, no free legal assistance is available. In practice many defendants cannot afford private counsel, and court-appointed attorneys are not readily available.

In December the Government granted amnesty for all offenses committed by all persons in connection with the active boycott of the 1995 election. As a result, 33 persons arrested during the 1995 active boycott disturbances, who were serving terms ranging from 3 years' to life imprisonment, were released on December 24. There were no other reports of political prisoners.

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

The Code of Penal Procedure specifies that a police official or investigative magistrate may conduct searches of homes without a judicial warrant if there is reason to believe that there is evidence on the premises concerning a crime. The official must have the prosecutor's agreement to retain any evidence seized in the search and is required to have witnesses to the search, which may not take place between 9:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. In practice police sometimes use a general search warrant without a name or address. On occasion police have entered homes of non-Ivorian Africans (or apprehended them at large), taken them to local police stations, and extorted small amounts of money for alleged minor offenses.

Security forces reportedly monitored some private telephone conversations, but the extent of the practice is unknown. Government authorities monitored letters and parcels at the post office for potential criminal activity, and are widely believed to monitor private correspondence, although no evidence of this has been produced. The Government used students as informers at the University of Abidjan (see Section 2.a.).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of expression, and private newspapers frequently criticize government policies, the Government imposes significant restrictions. The two government-owned daily newspapers, *Fraternité Matin* and *Ivoir' Soir*, offer little criticism of government policy, while government-owned radio and television offer none at all. While private newspapers (8 daily, 19 weekly), opposition leaders, and student groups voice their disapproval of government or presidential actions frequently and sometimes loudly, the Government does not tolerate what it considers insults

or attacks on the honor of the country's highest officials. A law enacted in 1991, soon after the Government first allowed substantial numbers of private newspapers to operate, authorizes the State to initiate criminal libel prosecutions against persons who insult the President, the Prime Minister, foreign chiefs of state or government or their diplomatic representatives, or defame institutions of the State, or undermine the reputation of the nation. In addition, the State may criminalize a civil libel suit at its discretion and at the request of the plaintiff. Criminal libel is punishable by 3 months to 2 years in prison. Journalists exercise considerable self-censorship.

In October, a former minister filed a libel suit against staff of a private Abidjan-based daily newspaper, *Le Jour*, which had reported allegations of his involvement in a pedophilia scandal (see Section 5). In the same month, the Government announced that it would henceforth initiate criminal libel prosecutions only on behalf of the President, and would punish criminal libel convictions by fines rather than imprisonment except in cases of libel against the President. The preponderance of state-initiated criminal libel prosecutions of journalists since 1991 have alleged libel against the President.

In June government prosecutors briefly detained and initiated criminal libel charges against Guy Badieto and Jean-Louis Pebe, two journalists of the Abidjan-based weekly newspaper *L'Argument*. In May that newspaper had reported that President Beale's wife had accepted a bribe to induce officials to free a businessman being prosecuted for swindling the Government (see Section 3). In November, when the case came to trial, the judge dismissed the charges on the grounds that the President's wife had not filed charges herself and is not among the officials on behalf of whom the State can bring criminal libel charges. By year's end, the Government had not appealed the dismissal, and the President's wife had not filed a libel suit.

In an August letter to the publisher of *Notre Voie*, a private Abidjan-based daily newspaper affiliated with a major opposition party, the Minister of Communications cautioned that a series of articles on domestic political repression by the security forces that the newspaper had announced it would soon publish "might harm national security" and violate provisions of the 1991 press law that forbid the publication of national defense secrets.

On the night of October 11, the Abidjan offices of *Notre Voie* and an affiliated daily, *Actuel*, were entered forcibly and burglarized by three armed and hooded persons who stripped and beat the night guard and removed files on corruption involving senior government officials and ethnic discrimination in the armed forces, but left telephones, computers, and facsimile machines untouched. In 1995 the offices of *Notre Voie*, then called *La Voie*, had been burned by persons unknown. No arrest warrants have been issued in either case.

Both because literacy is far from universal, and because newspapers and television are relatively expensive, radio is the most important medium of mass communication. The Government-owned broadcast media company, Radiodiffusion Television Ivoirienne (RTI), owns two major radio stations; only the primary government radio station is broadcast nationwide. There are also four major private domestic radio stations: Radio France Internationale (RFI), British Broadcasting Company (BBC), Africa Number One and Radio Nostalgie. They broadcast on FM in Abidjan only, except for RFI which in November signed an agreement with RTI to allow it to broadcast via relay antennas to the north and center of the country. The RFI and BBC stations broadcast only internationally produced programming. The Africa Number One station, which is 51 percent domestically owned, broadcasts 6

hours a day of domestically produced programming; the rest of the time it broadcasts programming from Africa Number One's headquarters in Libreville, Gabon. Radio Nostalgie is 51 percent owned by Radio Nostalgie France. The RFI, BBC, and Africa Number One stations all broadcast news and political commentary about Cote d'Ivoire. The private stations have complete control over their editorial content. However, no major private domestic radio station is known to be commonly critical of the Government in its editorials, and no journalist of any such station is known to have been prosecuted for libel, cautioned or harassed by the Government or members of the security forces.

Radio station license applications are adjudicated by a commission under the Ministry of Information, which has accepted applications and awarded licenses only once, in 1993. On that occasion, the commission denied 7 of 12 applications on a variety of grounds, including, in one case, affiliation with a major opposition political party.

During the year, the Government also authorized 43 community radio stations with very limited broadcast strength. Catholic church groups began to operate four community radio stations: Radio Espoir in Abidjan, Radio Paix Sanwi in Aboisso, Radio Notre Dame in Yamoussoukro, and Radio Dix-Huit Montagnes in Man. No Muslim station is yet broadcasting because the Government required that all major Muslim associations agree to share a single frequency; however, a Muslim association closely associated with the ruling party dissented (see Section 5).

There are two television stations that broadcast domestically produced programs. Both are owned and operated by the Government. Only one is broadcast nationwide. The only private television station, Canal Horizon, is foreign-owned and broadcasts no domestically produced programs. The Government has not accepted any applications to establish a privately owned domestic television station.

The National Council of Audiovisual Communication, established in 1991 and formally organized in 1995, is responsible for regulating media access during the 2-week formal political campaign period and for resolving complaints about unfair media access. However, members of the ruling PDCI make up the majority of the membership of the council.

The Government does not restrict access to or distribution of electronic media. There are three domestic Internet service providers, which have begun operations since 1996. All three are private. The licensing requirements imposed by the government telecommunications regulatory body, ATCI, reportedly are not unduly restrictive.

The Government continues to exercise considerable influence over the official media's program content, news coverage, and other matters, using these media to promote government policies. Much of the news programming was devoted to the activities of the President, the Government, the PDCI, and pro-Bedic groups.

The case of 13 employees of the government broadcast media company, RTI, who had participated in April 1997 in a strike that reportedly caused an interruption of RTI broadcasting, came to trial in November. The RTI employees were tried on charges, filed in May 1997, of disturbing public order, willful destruction of public property, and interfering with public services (see Section 6.a.). The judge had not announced a verdict by year's end.

There were numerous student protests during the year (see Section 5.).

There is no known law specifically concerning academic freedom, although academics have cited laws of French origin concerning the operations of universities to support their claims of academic freedom. In practice the Government tolerates much academic freedom, but also inhibits political expression through its proprietary control of most educational facilities, even at the postsecondary level. Many prominent scholars active in opposition politics have retained their positions at state educational facilities. However, some teachers and professors suggest that they have been transferred or fear that they may be transferred to less desirable positions because of their political activities. According to student union statements, government security forces continued to use students as informers to monitor political activities at the University of Abidjan.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, in practice, the Government sometimes restricted this right during the first half of the year.

Groups that wish to hold demonstrations or rallies are required by law to submit a notice of their intent to do so to the Ministry of Security or the Ministry of Interior 48 hours before the proposed event. No law expressly authorizes the Government to ban public meetings or events for which advance notice has been given in the required manner. Nevertheless, the Government has sometimes denied the opposition permission to meet in public outdoor venues. In January the Government prohibited a February march planned by strikers belonging to Dignité, an independent federation of trade unions. However, the Government banned no other public events or meetings during the year. In September opposition parties held large public demonstrations against recent government-sponsored constitutional changes (see Section 3). Although the Government warned of dire consequences in the event of violence, it did not ban the demonstrations, and no violence occurred.

Police repeatedly used violence to break up demonstrations of which the advance notice required by law had not been duly given. During the first half of the year, police forcibly suppressed many student demonstrations (see Section 1.c). Police generally used nonlethal force such as tear gas against demonstrators, and a police officer who killed a student protestor in May was tried and punished (see Section 1.a.).

A 1992 Antivandalism Law holds organizers of a march or demonstration responsible if any of the participants engage in violence. A leading civil rights NGO, the LIDHO, and all major opposition parties condemned the law as unduly vague and as one that imposed punishment on some persons for *1.e* crimes of others.

During the second half of the year, the Government neither banned nor broke up any public meetings or demonstrations, and did not invoke the Anti-Vandalism Law.

The Government restricts freedom of association formally, but generally respects it in practice. Opposition parties assert that the Constitution permits private associations to form. The Government rejects this interpretation and requires all organizations to register before commencing activities. In order to obtain registration, political parties must provide information on their founding members and produ-

ces internal statutes and political platforms consistent with the Constitution. At year's end, there were approximately 90 legally recognized political parties, of which 3 were represented in the National Assembly. There were no reports in the past 5 years of denial of registration. The law prohibits the formation of political parties along ethnic or religious lines.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and there are no known impediments to religious expression. No faith is favored officially. The Government permits the open practice of religion, and there are no restrictions on religious ceremonies or teaching.

According to a 1988 census, only about 25 percent of citizens were Muslim, about 23 percent were animist, and 31 percent were Christian; 13 percent practiced no religion. However, Muslims make up a substantially larger proportion of the total population including noncitizens. Nevertheless, some Muslims feel that their religious or ethnic affiliation makes them targets of discrimination by the Government with regard to both employment and the renewal of national identity cards (see Section 5). During the year, the Catholic Church began to operate community radio stations, but Muslims' efforts to gain authorization to operate similar stations have been unsuccessful (see Section 2.a.).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

Although neither the Constitution nor any law provides for freedom of movement, the Government does not generally restrict internal travel; however, uniformed police, gendarmes, and water, forestry and customs officials commonly erect and man roadblocks on major roads where they demand that passing motorists or passengers produce identity and vehicle papers and regularly extort small amounts of money or goods for contrived or minor infractions. The killing of a taxi driver by a policeman in September occurred at such a roadblock during such an extortion attempt (see Section 1.a.).

Citizens normally may travel abroad and emigrate freely and have the right of voluntary repatriation. There are no known cases of revocation of citizenship.

The country is a party to the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, but has not enacted implementing legislation. The only current domestic statute is the 1990 immigration law, which includes refugees without specifying a separate legal status for them. Nevertheless, the Government respects the right to first asylum and does not deny recognition to refugees, either by law or custom. An estimated 124,000 Liberian refugees remain in the country; from 150,000 to 200,000 refugees have returned either under United Nations auspices or independently. There are also several thousand refugees from Sierra Leone and the Great Lakes region, including Rwanda and Burundi. There were no reports of persons who had a valid claim to asylum or refugee status being involuntarily repatriated to a country where they feared persecution.

The Government cooperates with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in health, education, and food distribution programs for refugees.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

Although the Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully through democratic means, the Government limited this right in practice. Although opposition parties were legalized in 1990, the ruling PDCI party has controlled both the presidency and the national assembly continuously since independence in 1960, and no president has ever left office in consequence of an election. Between one-fifth and one-third of the country's adult population, including many lifelong residents of the country, are politically disenfranchised noncitizens (see Section 5).

In 1994 the Government enacted changes to the Electoral Code that included more restrictive paren-tage and residency requirements. These changes had the effect of excluding from the 1995 presiden-tial election Alassane Ouattara, a major potential rival to President Bedie. Citing concern about these changes in the electoral code, and about irregularities in the voter registration process, the major op-position parties boycotted and tried to disrupt the 1995 presidential election, in which Bedie was re-elected with 96 percent of the vote.

Presidential and legislative elections are held every 5 years by balloting that is officially described as secret, but allows a voter to leave a polling place with evidence of how he voted. At polling places on election day, registered citizens receive a package of color-coded cards, containing one card for each candidate. Each citizen votes, alone inside a closed booth, by depositing into a sealed ballot box an envelope containing one of these cards. However, the voter is free to carry the unused cards from his package out of the polling place. Consequently voters can and sometimes do present these unused ballots as proof of how they voted to agents of candidates who pay them for their votes. This balloting system tends to favor an incumbent party that can draw directly or indirectly on the resources of the State to reward those who vote for its candidates. During negotiations with the ruling party late in the year, a leading opposition party demanded unsuccessfully that single and fully secret ballots be used in future elections.

The number of registered voters in districts of the National Assembly, each of which elects one representative, varies by as much as a factor of 10; these inequalities systematically favor the ruling party. National Assembly elections held in 1995 were marred both by violent incidents and by flaws in the electoral process, which were noted by both international and domestic observers. In March legislative by-elections were held in three districts. ONE, a domestic NGO that monitors elections, cited irregularities in election list compilation and voting card distribution; these irregularities favored the ruling party candidates. In the district of Azaguié, a crowd attacked two polling station supervisors found in the cars of the ruling party candidates for the offices of mayor and National Assembly representative at midnight on the eve of the election. Ruling party candidates won in all three districts, and continued to occupy more than the 80 percent of the seats in the National Assembly needed to amend the Constitution.

In practice the presidency consistently has dominated the State. In the name of ruling party discipline, the PCDI-controlled National Assembly has always enacted with very few modifications most bills submitted by the Government. Moreover, members of the National Assembly seldom have initiated legislation, and the National Assembly only rarely has enacted legislation introduced by a member rather than by the Government. Nevertheless, early in the year, when the Government proposed constitutional amendments that would further increase the power of the presidency, many of the 175-seat National Assembly's 149 PCDI members initially indicated that they would oppose them. However, they changed their minds after lunches on June 12 and June 25 to which the President, who is also

president of the PCDI, invited all ruling party National Assembly members. At the June 25 lunch, each guest received an envelope containing about \$900 (500,000 CFA francs).

At the end of June, the National Assembly enacted amendments to the Constitution, largely proposed by the President, that diminish the authority of the Prime Minister relative to the President, authorize the President to annul elections or to postpone announcing election results, extend the presidential term from 5 to 7 years, mandate the creation of a second legislative chamber (senate) in which one-third of the members are to be appointed by President, provide for the president of the senate to succeed the President in the event of his death or incapacitation, and write into the Constitution the presidential eligibility restrictions of the 1994 electoral code. Diverse domestic and international observers--including a leading domestic human rights NGO (LIDHO), an antiracist NGO (Notre Nation), and the French Socialist Party--criticized these constitutional amendments publicly for tending both to limit the right of citizens to change their government and to increase the already preponderant power of the presidency.

To protest these amendments, the major opposition parties boycotted the National Assembly's vote on them, and organized large street demonstrations in September (see Section 2.b.) that began in Abidjan and continued across the country. The new constitutional amendments continued to draw widespread criticism and stimulate opposition to the Government. On December 16, as part of a formal written accord between the ruling party and a major opposition party, President Bedie agreed to renounce, in a second round of constitutional amendments, some of the powers conferred on him by the June constitutional amendments, including: the power to postpone announcements of election results; the power to annul elections; and the power to appoint one-third of the Senate, all members of which are now to be elected. However, all the other June constitutional amendments remained fully effective.

As part of the same accord, President Bedie agreed to an amnesty for all offenses committed in connection with the "active boycott" of the 1995 presidential election (see Sections 1.d. and 1.e.).

Elections for local PDCI party officials held in August and September led to allegations of serious irregularities in Treichville and Koumassi and to violence that left candidates injured in Koumassi.

In November, Roger Nasra, a businessman on trial for having defrauded the Government of nearly \$2 million in 1995, testified that he had given that money back to a senior official of the state treasury for diversion to President Bedie's 1995 reelection campaign. The treasury official denied the charges.

Government and opposition observers both have indicated that almost half of citizens do not have national identity cards, without which they cannot vote. The Government enacted and began to implement a law that simplified and greatly reduced the cost of the process by which citizens obtain national identity cards. This was intended to increase voter eligibility and registration. However, the same law also tripled the cost of residence permits required of noncitizens.

The major opposition parties continued to demand that elections be organized and supervised by an electoral commission independent of the Government, as domestic and international election-monitoring NGO's have recommended. The Government continued to reject this demand.

Citizens' ability to elect subnational governments is limited. The State is highly centralized. Subnational government entities exist on several levels, including 16 regions, 58 departments, 230 subprefectures, and 196 communities. However, at all levels except for communities, which are headed by mayors elected for 5-year terms, and traditional chiefdoms, which are headed by elected chiefs, all subnational government officials are appointed by the central Government. Subnational governments generally must rely on the central Government for much of their revenues, but mayors have autonomy to hire and fire community administrative personnel.

Although there are no legal impediments to women assuming political leadership roles, only 14 of the 175 National Assembly deputies are women. Women hold 3 of the 17 leadership positions in the Assembly. There are 3 women in the 36-member presidential Cabinet named in August, and 3 members of the Supreme Court are women.

There are no legal impediments to the exercise of political rights by any of the more than 60 ethnic groups in the country. However, it is widely believed that the Baoule and other ethnic groups that have tended to support the ruling party are overrepresented in both mid-level and low-level appointed positions throughout the public sector. Since independence Baoules have always held the positions of President and Defense Minister.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

The LIDHO, a human rights NGO formed in 1987 and recognized by the Government in 1990, has investigated alleged violations of human rights actively and issued press releases and reports, some critical of the Government. Other groups such as Amnesty International and the International Movement of Democratic Women also monitored government human rights abuses and published press releases critical of them.

The Government has cooperated with international inquiries into its human rights practices, which have been chiefly in the area of prison conditions (see Section 1.c.).

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, or religion is prohibited by law, but in practice women occupy a subordinate role in society. Muslims complain of governmental discrimination (see Section 2.c.), societal ethnic discrimination is a problem, and the Baoule ethnic group dominates the ruling party and through it, the Government.

Women

Representatives of the Ivorian Association for the Defense of Women (AIDF) state that spousal abuse (usually wife beating) occurs frequently and often leads to divorce. An AIDF survey found that many women refused to discuss their experience of domestic violence; of women who completed the AIDF interview process, nearly 90 percent had been beaten or struck on at least one occasion. Doctors state that they rarely see the victims of domestic violence. A severe social stigma is attached to such violence, and neighbors often intervene in a domestic quarrel to protect a woman who is the known ob-

ject of physical abuse. The courts and police view domestic violence as a family problem, unless serious bodily harm is inflicted or the victim lodges a complaint, in which case they may initiate criminal proceedings. Women's advocacy groups have protested the indifference of authorities to female victims of violence and called attention to domestic violence and female genital mutilation. The groups also reported that women who are the victims of rape or domestic violence are often ignored when they attempt to bring the violence to the attention of the police. The Government does not collect statistics on the rape or other physical abuse of women. The Government has no clear policy regarding spouse abuse beyond the strictures against violence in the civil code. In December the National Assembly enacted a Law Concerning Crimes against Women, which forbids and provides criminal penalties for forced or early marriage and sexual harassment, but says nothing about spouse abuse. The AIDF also is active in opposing forced marriage and advancing the rights of female domestic workers.

In rural areas, women and men divide the labor, with men clearing the land and attending to cash crops like cocoa and coffee, while women grow vegetables and other staples and perform most menial household tasks. Government policy encourages full participation by women in social and economic life, but there is considerable informal resistance among employers to hiring women, whom they consider less dependable because of their potential pregnancy. Women are underrepresented in some professions and in the managerial sector as a whole. Some women also encounter difficulty in obtaining loans, as they cannot meet the lending criteria mandated by banks. These criteria include such elements as title to a house and production of profitable cash crops, specifically coffee and cocoa. However, women in the formal sector are paid on an equal scale with men.

Children

Primary education is compulsory, but this requirement is not enforced effectively. Many children leave school after only a few years. There is a parental preference for educating boys rather than girls, which is noticeable throughout the country but more pronounced in rural areas. The primary school enrollment rate for girls is increasing in the northern part of the country. In part to combat low enrollment rates for girls, in January the Government instituted new measures against statutory rape of students by school teachers. In January the Minister of National Education stated that almost one-third of the 66 percent primary and secondary school dropout rate was attributable to pregnancies, and that many of the sexual partners of female students were teachers, to whom girls sometimes granted sexual favors in return for good grades or money. During 1990-1996, 79 percent of males and 58 percent of females of primary school age reportedly were enrolled, according to UNICEF statistics.

Students at universities and secondary schools staged many demonstrations and protests about educational issues. In January the Government closed all schools at all levels, including primary school, for 10 days, following particularly widespread demonstrations. However, student protests became less common during the second half of the year, and far fewer school days were lost to protests and demonstrations than during 1997, as the Government developed a working dialog with a new student union, FESCI, which the Government had recognized in late 1997. The Government increased its spending on education, and tried and punished a police sergeant who shot and killed a student demonstrator (see Section 1.a.).

Cities, especially Abidjan, have large populations of street children. Some children are employed as domestics and are subject to sexual abuse, harassment, and other forms of mistreatment by their employers, according to the AIDF and press reports (see Section 6.d).

In September an Abidjan daily newspaper reported allegations by a 14-year-old boy that he had been sodomized repeatedly over many months by a network of pedophiles that included former Minister of Economic Infrastructure Ezan Akele and a foreign ambassador. Leading human rights organizations, including the LIDHO, demanded that the alleged pedophiles not be shielded from prosecution. As of year's end, no charges had been filed.

At least hundreds and perhaps thousands of Malian children were trafficked and sold into forced labor on Ivorian plantations (see Section 6.c).

The Ministries of Health and of Employment, Public Service and Social Security seek to safeguard the welfare of children, and the Government also has encouraged the formation of NGO's such as the Abidjan Legal Center for the Defense of Children. In 1996 the Government announced a series of measures aimed at reducing the population of street children. These steps include holding parents legally and financially responsible for their abandoned children and the development of training centers where children can learn a trade. However, no such centers have yet opened.

Female genital mutilation, which is widely condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is a serious problem. Until December there was no law that specifically prohibited FGM, which was considered illegal only as a violation of general laws prohibiting crimes against persons. However, the Law Concerning Crimes against Women enacted in December specifically forbids FGM subject to criminal penalties of imprisonment for up to 5 years and a fine of from roughly \$650 to \$3,500 (360,000 to 2 million CFA francs); double penalties apply for medical practitioners. FGM is practiced particularly among the rural population in the north and west. The procedure usually is performed on young girls or at puberty as part of a rite of passage; it is almost always done outside modern medical facilities and techniques and hygiene do not meet modern medical standards. In August a young girl died in Seguela from complications after FGM. According to the World Health Organization, as many as 60 percent of women have undergone FGM.

Women's advocacy organizations have sponsored campaigns against FGM, forced marriage and marriage of minors, patterns of inheritance that exclude women, and other practices considered harmful to women and girls. In 1997 the Ministry of the Family and Women's Affairs organized a seminar on FGM. In some areas traditional authorities, who generally have upheld the practice, began to take part in public demonstrations against FGM.

People With Disabilities

Until recently there were no laws mandating accessibility to buildings, transportation or other public services by the disabled. However, on October 30, the National Assembly enacted a law, sponsored by the President's wife, that requires the State to educate and train the disabled, to hire them or help them find jobs, to design houses and public facilities for wheelchair access, and to adapt machines, tools, and work spaces for access and use by the disabled. The law covers individuals with physical, mental, visual, auditory, and cerebral motor disabilities. Laws also exist that prohibit the abandon-

ment of the mentally or physically disabled and enjoin acts of violence directed at them. Traditional practices, beliefs, and superstitions vary, but infanticide in cases of serious birth disabilities is less common than in the past. Disabled adults are not specific targets of abuse, but they encounter serious difficulties in competing with able-bodied workers. The Government supports special schools, associations, and artisans' cooperatives for the disabled, but crippled persons still beg on urban streets and in commercial zones.

National Racial/Ethnic minorities

The country's population of about 15 million is ethnically diverse. The citizenry--which excludes the large noncitizen part of the population--is made up of five major families of ethnic groups. The Akan family made up more than 40 percent of the citizenry, according to the 1988 census; the largest Akan ethnic group, and the largest ethnic group in the country, was the Baoule, to which perhaps one-fourth of all citizens belong. About 25 percent of citizens belong to the Mande family, of which the Malinke are the largest group. About 15 percent of citizens belong to the Krou family, of which the Bete are the largest group. Slightly more than 15 percent also belong to the Voltaiic family, of which the Senoufo are the largest group. Major ethnic groups generally have their own primary languages and their non-urban populations tend to be concentrated regionally.

However, between one-fifth and one-third of the population are Africans, mostly from poorer neighboring countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso, who may not claim citizenship legally. Birth on Ivorian national territory does not confer citizenship. The ethnic composition of the whole population including these non-citizens is quite different from that of the citizenry alone.

Societal discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is sometimes practiced by members of all ethnic groups. Urban neighborhoods still have readily identifiable ethnic characteristics, and major political parties tend to have readily identifiable ethnic and regional bases, although interethnic marriage is increasingly common in urban areas.

Some ethnic groups include many noncitizens, and their share of the electorate would be increased by enfranchising noncitizens. Other ethnic groups--such as the Baoule--include few noncitizens, and their share of the electorate would be decreased by enfranchising non-citizens. There are societal and political tensions between these two sets of ethnic groups. This cleavage corresponds to some extent to regional differences; ethnic groups that include many noncitizens are found chiefly in the north. Members of northern ethnic groups that are found in neighboring countries as well as in Cote d'Ivoire are often required to document their citizenship, whereas members of ethnic groups seldom found in other countries, including the Baoule, reportedly do not have this problem. Police routinely abuse and harass non-citizen Africans residing in the country. Official harassment reflects the frequently encountered conviction that foreigners are responsible for high local crime rates, as well as concern for Ivorian national identity.

Election law changes in 1994 limited presidential candidates to those who could prove that both parents had been born in Cote d'Ivoire. This restriction was incorporated into the Constitution in June. In July the Government tripled the cost of the residence permits that noncitizens whom the Government regards as nationals of other West African countries are required to carry, while greatly reducing the cost of national identification cards for citizens. This discriminatory law tended to perpetuate

the political disenfranchisement of noncitizens by making it harder for them to become citizens. It also tended to entrench the electoral power of ethnic groups, such as the Baoule, that include relatively few noncitizens.

Differences between members of the Baoule group and other ethnic groups, especially the Bete, are a major source of political tensions and have repeatedly erupted into violence, most recently in 1997. Many members of the Baoule group, which has long inhabited the east-central region, have settled in towns and on previously uncultivated land in other areas, especially in more westerly regions. In the past, the Government generally has viewed use of land as conferring *de facto* ownership of land. However, in December, the National Assembly enacted a new Land Use Law that establishes that land title does not transfer from the traditional owner to the user simply by virtue of use.

Members of the Baoule ethnic group dominate the ruling PDCI party, and are widely believed to hold disproportionate numbers of positions in the public sector, including the security forces, the civil service, and state-owned businesses (see Section 3). In September, a non-Baoule army officer complained publicly, in a letter published by a private newspaper, about ethnic discrimination against non-Baoules in the armed forces; he was reprimanded by the Ministry of Defense. Security forces were accused of favoring Baoules in 1997 violence between members of the Baoule and Guere ethnic groups.

In May the Government ordered the Dozos, a traditional group of hunters from the north and northwest regions, to cease activities "outside the geographic and cultural sphere of their origin," and to surrender any modern weapons. Some reports pointed out that the Government's order came shortly after Dozos, some of whom long had served as bodyguards for ruling party politicians, began to perform security functions for opposition party leaders and rallies. However, government and Dozo spokespersons indicated that the Government's order responded to infiltration of the Dozos by "false Dozos" who had begun to use excessive force in their private security roles.

In July members of the Agni ethnic group burned villages of descendants of Bozo immigrants in a fishing rights dispute and drove many Bozos back to their ancestral areas in Mali.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides workers with the right to form unions. Registration of a new union requires 3 months. For almost 30 years, the government-sponsored labor confederation, the General Union of Workers of Cote d'Ivoire (UGTCl), dominated most union activity. The UGTCl's hold on the labor movement loosened in 1991 when several formerly UGTCl-affiliated unions broke away and became independent. In 1992 11 formerly independent unions joined together to form the Federation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Cote d'Ivoire. There are now also two other registered labor federations not affiliated with the Government.

Although unions are legally free to leave the UGTCl and join another federation, in practice the choice is restricted by anti-competitive official discrimination in favor of the government-affiliated UGTCl. On September 26, after a 3-year struggle and thanks to intervention by the International La-

bor Organization, labor inspectors were obliged to organize an election of union delegates at the Sip Cata company in San Pedro, and to allow Dignite, an independent federation affiliated with a major opposition party, to compete with the UGTCL. Dignite's candidates won the election, and the union switched its affiliation to Dignite.

The right to strike is provided by the Constitution and by statute. The Labor Code requires a protracted series of negotiations and a 6-day notification period before a strike may take place, effectively making legal strikes difficult to organize. The UGTCL seldom calls strikes, but it is in disagreement with the Government's plan to promote only 5 percent of civil servants, following an 18-year blockade of promotion for all civil servants. Non-UGTCL unions called strikes, although not so frequently as in the past. In September taxi drivers in Abidjan struck to protest the killing of a taxi driver by a policeman (see Section 1.a.).

Thirteen employees of the government broadcast media company, RTI, who had participated in April 1997 in a strike that reportedly caused an interruption of RTI broadcasting, were tried in November and December on charges, filed in May 1997, of disturbing public order, willful destruction of public property, and interfering with public services. They had been detained for 3 months in 1997. The judge had reached no verdict by year's end.

Unions are free to join international bodies.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Labor Code grants all citizens, except members of the police and military, the rights to join unions and to bargain collectively. Collective bargaining agreements are in effect in many major business enterprises and sectors of the civil service. In most cases in which wages are not established in direct negotiations between unions and employers, salaries are set by job categories by the Ministry of Employment and Civil Service. Labor inspectors have the responsibility to enforce a law that prohibits antiunion discrimination. There have been no known prosecutions or convictions under this law.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

Forced labor is prohibited by law; however, the International Labor Organization's Committee of Experts in its 1993 annual report questioned a decree that places certain categories of prisoners at the disposal of private enterprises for work assignments without their apparent consent. There has been no change in this decree.

The law prohibits forced and bonded child labor; however, the Government does not enforce that prohibition effectively. In September a private Abidjan daily newspaper exposed the widespread practice of importing and indenturing of Malian boys for field work on Ivorian plantations under abusive conditions. For example, children recruited by Malians in the border town of Skiasso were promised easy and lucrative jobs in Cote D'Ivoire, transported across the border, and then sold to other Malians who dispersed them throughout the plantations of the central region. These children

were forced to work 12-hour days in the fields and were locked at night in crowded sheds, with their clothing confiscated. The Governments of Mali and Cote D'Ivoire confirmed the reports. The Government of Mali took steps to halt this trafficking and repatriate the children to Mali. By year's end, about 100 children from Mali had been returned to their families. The Government of Mali arrested five persons in Sikasso who were responsible for trafficking.

The extent of this practice was difficult to estimate, because many Malian adults also worked on Ivorian plantations in the same area under difficult conditions. Mali was not the only source of forced child labor used in the country. In March police in Togo arrested four Beninese traffickers taking 22 Beninese children to Cote D'Ivoire by way of Togo.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

In most instances, the legal minimum working age is 16. However, the Ministry of Employment and Civil Service enforces this provision effectively only in the civil service and in large multinational companies. Labor law limits the hours of young workers, defined as those under the age of 18. However, children often work on family farms, and some children routinely act as vendors, shoe shiners, errand boys, car watchers, and washers of car windows in the informal sector in cities. There are reliable reports of some use of child labor in informal-sector mining and also of children working in "sweatshop" conditions in small workshops. Primary education is mandatory but far from universally enforced, particularly in rural areas. Many children leave the formal school system when they are between the ages of 12 and 14, having failed secondary school entrance exams.

Although the Government prohibits forced and bonded child labor, it does not enforce this prohibition effectively. There was widespread abuse of foreign children for forced labor on agricultural plantations (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The Government administratively determines monthly minimum wage rates, which were last adjusted in 1996. A slightly higher minimum wage rate applies for construction workers. The Government enforces the minimum wage rates only for salaried workers employed by the Government or registered with the social security office. Minimum wages vary according to occupation, with the lowest set at approximately \$67.90 (36,607 CFA Francs) per month, which is insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The majority of the labor force works in agriculture or in the informal sector where the minimum wage does not apply.

Through the Ministry of Employment and the Civil Service, the Government enforces a comprehensive Labor Code that governs the terms and conditions of service for wage earners and salaried workers and provides for occupational safety and health standards. Those employed in the formal sector generally are protected against unjust compensation, excessive hours, and arbitrary discharge from employment. The standard legal workweek is 40 hours. The law requires overtime payment on a graduated scale for additional hours. The Labor Code provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week.

Government labor inspectors can order employers to improve substandard conditions, and a labor court can levy fines if the employer fails to comply with the Labor Code. However, in the large informal sector of the economy involving both urban and rural workers, the Government's occupational health and safety regulations are enforced erratically, if at all. Workers in the formal sector have the right, under the Labor Code, to remove themselves from dangerous work situations without jeopardy to continued employment by utilizing the Ministry of Labor's inspection system to document dangerous working conditions. However, workers in the informal sector ordinarily cannot remove themselves from such labor without risking the loss of their employment.

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