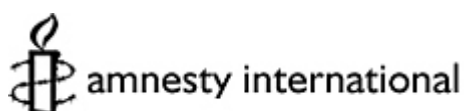


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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Kuwait

STATE OF KUWAIT

Head of state: al-Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah

Head of government: al-Shaikh Nasser Mohammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah

Death penalty: retentionist

Population: 3 million

Life expectancy: 77.5 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f): 11/9 per 1,000

Adult literacy: 94.5 per cent

Migrant workers faced exploitation and abuse despite legal reforms. Critics of the government and ruling family were harassed. Thousands of Bidun remained stateless and so were unable to access their full range of rights. At least three people were sentenced to death; no executions were reported.

Background

National elections were held in May after the government resigned in March. Sixteen women stood as candidates for the 50-seat National Assembly (*Majlis al-Umma*), four of whom became the first women ever to win seats. Formal political parties remained banned.

Freedom of expression

Critics of the government and the ruling family were harassed.

- Muhamad Abdulqader al-Jasem, a journalist and well-known critic of the Prime Minister, was arrested in November and detained by the Interior Ministry's Criminal Investigation Department for 12 days and then released on bail for remarks he made at a private meeting.

Counter-terror and security

In August, the authorities said they had arrested six men suspected of belonging to an al-Qa'ida cell that was planning to attack a US base in Kuwait and a government building linked to the security services. In December, following acknowledgement by the court that the accused had been ill-treated, charges against the men were deemed unsafe and prosecutors ordered an investigation into the allegations of ill-treatment. A further hearing was scheduled for January 2010.

In October and December respectively, Khaled al-Mutairi and Fouad al-Rabia were released from US detention at Guantánamo Bay and returned to Kuwait. Neither was reported to have been detained on return, although the government established a "rehabilitation" centre, apparently to be used for Guantánamo detainees and others, near the Central Prison in Sulaybiya. Two other Kuwaitis, Fawzi al-Odah and Faiz al-Kandari, continued to be held at Guantánamo.

Women's rights

In October, the Constitutional Court ruled that the 1962 law requiring a husband's permission for a woman to obtain a passport contravened constitutional provisions guaranteeing personal freedom and gender equality.

Migrants' rights

In December, parliament agreed to amend a 1964 labour law in order to introduce a minimum wage for some jobs, increase annual leave, prohibit arbitrary dismissal, and prescribe penalties for people who trade visas or recruit workers but fail to provide employment. The new law, if approved by the Amir, would also establish an official not-for-profit body to oversee employment arrangements and conditions for migrant workers. However, it appeared that the new law would not apply to domestic workers, mostly women, who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

- In March, a Filipina domestic worker was reported to have been hospitalized after she was raped and repeatedly assaulted; the police rejected her employers' allegation that she had attempted suicide.

Death penalty

At least three people were sentenced to death for murder; no executions were reported.

- May Membriri Vecina, a Filipina domestic worker, returned to the Philippines in June following a pardon by the Amir. She had been sentenced to death in July 2007 after being convicted of murdering her employer's youngest child. At her trial, she alleged that her employer had physically and mentally abused her, causing her to become mentally ill. Her sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment in June 2008.

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