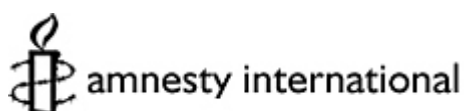


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Amnesty International Report 2007 - Kuwait

STATE OF KUWAIT

Head of state: al-Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah (replaced Shaikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah in January, who replaced al-Shaikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah earlier in January)

Head of government: al-Shaikh Nasser Mohammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah (replaced al-Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah in February)

Death penalty: retentionist

International Criminal Court: signed

Women participated in National Assembly elections for the first time. Five former Guantánamo Bay detainees were acquitted and other "security detainees" began appeals against their convictions. Migrant workers faced a wide range of abuses. At least 10 people were executed for murder and drug smuggling. At least six others were under sentence of death. There were reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention.

Background

The Emir dissolved the National Assembly in May following a dispute by parliamentarians over electoral reform. Parliamentary elections, scheduled for 2007, were held in June. A majority of elected seats were won by opposition MPs, and in July the Assembly approved an electoral reform bill designed to reduce electoral corruption and reduce the number of constituencies from 25 to five.

Women's rights

The parliamentary elections allowed women to exercise their newly acquired political rights in national elections for the first time. Earlier in the year, a municipal council by-election saw women in Salmiya district participating in a local election for the first time.

'War on terror'

In September, two Kuwaiti nationals, Abdullah Kamel al-Kandari and Omar Rajab Amin,

were returned to Kuwait from US detention in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and were believed to be detained pending trial on terrorism-related charges.

In May, the Criminal Court acquitted five Kuwaiti nationals, Abdulaziz al-Shimmari, Adel al-Zamel, Mohammad al-Deehani, Saad al-Azmi and Abdullah al-Ajmi, who had been returned from Guantánamo Bay in November 2005, of the charges of "belonging to al-Qa'ida" and "committing an act of aggression against a friendly foreign nation, thus endangering Kuwait's foreign relations". During the trial the men protested their innocence, and said that they had confessed under torture by US interrogators in Guantánamo Bay to being members of al-Qa'ida and the Taleban.

In December, the Court of Cassation quashed former Guantánamo Bay detainee Nasser Najd al-Mutairi's five-year prison sentence for belonging to al-Qa'ida, seeking to take up arms against a friendly state and possessing weapons. He had been acquitted of the charges by a lower court in June 2005, but the Appeals Court overturned the verdict in November 2005.

In September, the Appeals Court reopened the trial of some 28 of 37 individuals who had been tried the previous year on terrorism-related charges, including membership of the Peninsula Lions Brigade, a group allegedly linked to al-Qa'ida. In November, the death sentences against four defendants were upheld, and the death sentences that had been imposed on two others were commuted to life imprisonment.

Migrant workers

There were new reports of abuses against migrant workers. In May the authorities opened an investigation into a complaint filed by the Indian Embassy which alleged that 60 Indian nationals had faced abuses by an unidentified company, including non-payment of salaries, forced overtime without pay, and denial of medical facilities.

In July, a new law intended to curtail abuses against domestic migrant workers came into effect, requiring contracts stipulating working conditions for domestic workers to be signed by the government's domestic labour office, the sponsor and the worker.

Freedom of expression and association

In May, the 15 founders of the Ummah Party were acquitted of breaching laws on the press and public gatherings. One individual was fined for "circulating publications without prior authorization".

In May, the Constitutional Court revoked restrictions in force since 1979 on public gatherings.

In March, a new press law gave power to license and suspend publications to the courts. It failed to repeal provisions that allowed for the imprisonment of journalists.

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