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Over 1,000 prisoners were pardoned and others had their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment. Prisons remained severely overcrowded and conditions were deplorable. Women suffered discrimination and gender-based violence. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people continued to face discrimination. Health workers were particularly at risk from COVID-19 infection.

Background

In December, the President was re-elected for a second term.

The year was marked by the authorities' restriction of human rights and punitive measures in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a step to control the spread of COVID-19, the government introduced the Imposition of Restrictions Bill, which became law on 21 March and imposed measures notably restricting the rights to freedom of movement and peaceful assembly. Under an Executive Instrument (known as EI 164), adopted in June, anyone not wearing a face mask in public places faced a maximum fine of GHS60,000 (about US\$10,000) and/or a prison sentence of between four and 10 years.

Women's rights

Discrimination

The President's promise to ensure that the Affirmative Action Bill became law was not realized. The Bill sought to increase women's political participation.

Violence against women

Akua Denteh, a 90-year-old woman, was beaten to death in a mob attack on 23 July in Kafaba, a town in the East Gonja District in the Savannah Region, for alleged witchcraft. Between July and August, the police arrested several suspects alleged to have played a role in the killing. In August, the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection pledged to assist women in “witch” camps including by enrolling them onto Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programmes. The media reported that another woman, also accused of witchcraft, was attacked and seriously injured on 29 August in the Savannah Region.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people

LGBTI people continued to face discrimination. Consensual same-sex sexual relations between men remained criminalized. Religious and political leaders, and the media used hate speech against LGBTI people. This contributed to a climate of fear, hostility and intolerance towards the LGBTI community.

Right to health

Health workers

The limited availability of PPE to health workers and inadequate health care facilities due to insufficient investment in the health sector hindered efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, the Greater Accra Regional Hospital in the capital, which was designated as the main care facility for treating COVID-19 patients, had only four dedicated beds. In August, the privately funded Infectious Disease Isolation and Treatment Centre, which had 100 beds, was established at the Ga East Hospital in Accra. According to the Director General of the Ghana Health Service, as of July, about 2,065 health workers had been infected with coronavirus and six had died due to COVID-19 related complications.

Prison conditions

The President pardoned hundreds of prisoners in March and June in a bid to mitigate the dangers to health caused by overcrowding, particularly in light of the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who benefited were 1,555 first-time offenders who had already served half their sentences, as well as 15 seriously ill prisoners and 19 elderly

prisoners. Nine death row prisoners had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, while four prisoners had their life sentences commuted to 20-year terms. Nevertheless, prisons remained chronically overcrowded and conditions were poor. According to the World Prison Brief database, there were 13,333 inmates as of November. Prison Administration statistics showed that inmates were held in 44 prisons with a combined capacity of only 9,945. They were given insufficient, poor quality food and standards of medical care and hygiene were grossly inadequate.

Forced evictions

In April, during the lockdown period when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly supervised home demolitions in Old Fadama, a slum in Accra. An estimated 1,000 residents were made homeless and therefore also more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 as the government made no arrangements to provide alternative housing.

Environmental degradation

In January, environmental NGOs and activists filed a notice of civil action against the government for violating the constitutional right to life and dignity - which they argued includes the right to a safe and healthy environment - as a result of a proposed mining project in the Atewa Range Forest in the Eastern Region. This followed the government's signing a Memorandum of Understanding with China which would allow the latter access to bauxite in exchange for their financing infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges. According to the complainants, the mining project would have a negative impact on water supply, biodiversity and climate change adaptation. In November, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature passed a resolution urging the government to stop all mining related activities and other destructive activities in the Atewa forest and to establish the forest as a national park to ensure its preservation.

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