

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	97
Land:	Jordan
Kilde:	U.S Department of State
Titel:	Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2007
Udgivet:	11. marts 2008
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	15. april 2008



Jordan

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2007](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

March 11, 2008

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Abdullah II bin Hussein with a population of approximately 5.9 million. The constitution concentrates executive and legislative authority in the king. The parliament consists of the 55-member House of Notables (Majlis al-Ayan), appointed by the king, and a 110-member elected lower house, the Chamber of Deputies (Majlis al-Nuwab). On November 20, nationwide multiparty parliamentary elections were held, which by and large went smoothly; however, local observers alleged some irregularities. Authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces, although there were some instances in which domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) accused members of the police and security forces of committing human rights abuses.

While the government respected human rights in some areas, its overall record continued to reflect problems. The government restricted citizens' right to change their government. Domestic and international NGOs reported torture, arbitrary arrest, and prolonged detention. Impunity, denial of due process of law, and limited judicial independence remained problems. Infringements on citizens' privacy rights continued. The government harassed members of opposition political parties and restricted freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, movement, and some religious practices. Legal and societal discrimination existed against women and persons of Palestinian origin. Restrictions on labor rights and abuse of foreign workers remained problems.

During the year the government enacted legislation aimed at protecting human rights. On August 1, the government enacted into law the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). On October 9, the government amended Article 208 of the penal code, redefining the statute to include psychological harm, broadening its applicability to all public officials, and increasing the penalties for torture.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed politically motivated killings; however, on May 10, Firas Zeidan died in police custody in Aqaba after a four-day detention. Although forensic examiners initially claimed he died of a drug overdose, Zeidan's family brought the case to the attention of the government, which ordered an investigation and a new autopsy. According to the final of four autopsy reports, Zeidan's lung collapsed, and 15 to 20 percent of his body was covered with bruises and contusions. During an August visit, Human Rights Watch (HRW) interviewed six prisoners formerly detained with Zeidan, who stated both that prison guards beat him and that current prison staff intimidated prisoners not to testify if called upon. The government investigated the case, removed the prison director, arrested and charged three prison guards, and suspended one guard from duty. The trial remained ongoing at year's end.

On August 23, guards in the Swaqa prison reportedly beat and killed prisoner Ala Abu Tair. Autopsy results confirmed that his body was heavily bruised but stated that the proximate cause of death was a heart attack. In response, the government removed the prison director and opened an investigation into the alleged beatings, which remained ongoing at year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, but domestic and international NGOs alleged torture and mistreatment of prisoners in police and security detention facilities.

On October 9, the government amended Article 208 of the penal code, thereby redefining the statute to include psychological harm; broadening its applicability to all public officials, including prison wardens and police officers; and increasing the penalties for torture used to extract information from six months to three years' imprisonment including hard labor if serious injury occurs. At year's end no official had been tried under the revised statute.

On January 5, Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, submitted his final report to the UN based on his July 2006 visit to the country. Nowak described police and security forces as practicing "widespread" torture based on "consistent and credible allegations," which he stated were substantiated by forensic medical evidence.

On April 11, the Arab Organization for Human Rights issued a report complaining of torture in government detention facilities.

On May 24, Amnesty International (AI) published a report alleging torture and ill-treatment in government detention centers.

Following visits to five prisons in late August, HRW cited interviews with more than 100 prisoners who claimed they were beaten with electrical cables and truncheons and hung in iron cuffs for several hours. The report also stated that "Jordanian jailers routinely subject prisoners to illegal beatings that sometimes turn into torture." Other NGOs alleged that guards kicked prisoners with boots. Several sources reported that prison guards shaved the beards of inmates, including prisoners who maintain beards for religious beliefs. According to HRW, prisoners reported that self-mutilation was a common form of protest against alleged mistreatment because in the prisoners' view the official complaints mechanism was not adequate. For example, on August 26, according to HRW, more than 360 inmates slashed themselves with sharp implements during a surprise HRW visit to the Swaqa prison.

During the year defendants in several cases before the State Security Court claimed that they were tortured while in custody. An April 10 report covering 2006 by the National Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) reported 46 complaints of mistreatment or torture at prisons and detention centers administered by the Public Security Directorate (PSD); in 2005 there were 70 reported complaints, and in 2004 there were 250. The NCHR report recounted allegations of mistreatment and abuse in General Intelligence Directorate (GID) facilities, although it did not provide specific information on these complaints. Government officials denied many allegations of abuse or testimonies under duress, asserting that many defendants claimed abuse in order to shift the focus away from their crimes.

During the year human rights activists alleged a number of cases of abuse in police custody.

On March 1, the *Jordan Times* reported that five witnesses testified before the State Security Court that they saw marks of torture on two defendants' bodies. The defendants subsequently retracted confessions that they claimed were given under duress.

On May 23, Nidal Momani, Tharwat Draz, and Sattam Zawahra claimed they were beaten and psychologically pressured to confess to participating in plots to kill a foreign leader during the leader's November 2006 visit to the country. The State Security Court granted the accused two additional weeks to provide new testimony. At year's end the court had not returned a verdict.

On August 23, guards in the Swaqa prison reportedly beat several hundred inmates on the orders of new prison warden Majid al-Rawashda, resulting in the death of one prisoner. On August 27, the government-funded NCHR visited Swaqa, interviewed the prisoners, and subsequently issued a report criticizing the prison administration and documenting evidence of beatings and mistreatment. On August 27, the government removed Rawashda and launched an investigation, the results of which had not been made public at year's end.

On August 29, five individuals abducted former Islamist lawmaker Ali Utoum, threw him in a van while he was walking to a mosque outside his home in Irbid, and beat him. The Associated Press reported that Utoum was beaten because he was "outspoken against government policies." A PSD spokesperson denied government involvement and promised a full investigation, which was ongoing at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prisons were overcrowded and understaffed with poor sanitary conditions and inadequate food and health care, according to the NCHR and other NGOs. The government permitted independent local and international human rights observers to conduct private interviews in prisons.

On July 16, the Arab Organization for Human Rights released a report criticizing prison conditions, citing the lack of cold drinking water, the ambient temperature, and the treatment of juveniles.

On December 24, the NCHR released its annual report on prison conditions, criticizing poor prison conditions and the government for not responding to previous recommendations. The report counted 867 prison riots throughout the year, primarily to protest poor treatment and conditions.

On April 1, the PSD relocated 700 men from the Jweideh prison in response to overcrowding.

The government generally held men, women, and juveniles in separate prison and detention facilities. The GID held some persons detained on national security grounds in separate detention facilities, and the government held other security detainees and prisoners in regular prisons. Security prisoners often were separated from common criminals in prisons but not in pretrial detention centers, and conditions for such prisoners did not differ significantly.

The government permitted local and international human rights observers to visit prisons. During the year International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited prisoners and detainees in all prisons, including those held by the GID and the military intelligence directorate, according to standard ICRC modalities. During the year the NCHR made 53 visits to prisons. On March 26, PSD opened two of its correctional facilities (Swaqa and Muwaqqar) to local journalists. In late August HRW, the Adaleh Center, and the

Human and Environment Observatory visited five correctional centers and the GID detention facility.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the government did not always observe these prohibitions. The law provides that citizens are subject to arrest, trial, and punishment for the defamation of heads of state or public officials and dissemination of "false or exaggerated information outside the country that attacks state dignity."

Some human rights groups continued to voice concern over the 2006 Prevention of Terrorism Act, complaining that its definition of terrorism might lead nonviolent critics of the government to be arrested or detained indefinitely under the provisions of the act. At year's end the government had not made use of the act.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The PSD controlled general police functions. The PSD, GID, and the military shared responsibility for maintaining internal security and monitored security threats. The PSD reports to the interior minister with direct access to the king when necessary, and the GID in practice reports directly to the king. Security and policing activities were effective.

Corruption within the PSD was not a significant issue, and there were mechanisms in place to investigate police abuses. There were allegations of police impunity for both the PSD and GID. The PSD's preventative security office investigated officers' performance. Incidents of poor officer performance ultimately were reported to the PSD director's office. Citizens may file complaints of police abuse or corruption to one of the PSD's eight offices of complaints and human rights. The head of each office reported directly to the PSD director. During the year citizens filed 96 complaints against PSD personnel. New officers in training received special instruction on preventing corruption and human rights abuses.

Arrest and Detention

Criminal laws generally require warrants; however, in most cases, suspects may be detained for up to 48 hours in the absence of a warrant. Police made several arrests during the year prior to obtaining warrants. The criminal code requires that police notify legal authorities within 48 hours of an arrest and that legal authorities file formal charges within 10 days of an arrest; however, the courts routinely granted requests from prosecutors for 15-day extensions, as provided by law. This practice generally extended pretrial detention for protracted periods. The penal code allows for a functional bail system of conditional release. Detainees were not always allowed prompt access to a lawyer of their choice but were generally permitted visitation by family members. There were allegations of incommunicado detention, particularly in GID facilities.

The State Security Court gives the judicial police authority to arrest and keep persons in custody for a period of seven days, when necessary, in any crimes under the jurisdiction of the court, which includes many misdemeanors. In cases involving state security, the security forces arrested and detained citizens without warrants or judicial review. The authorities frequently held defendants in lengthy pretrial detention, did not provide defendants with the written charges against them, and did not allow defendants to meet with their lawyers, at times until shortly before trial. Defendants before the State Security Court usually met with their attorneys only one or two days before their trial. The criminal code prohibits pretrial detentions for certain categories of misdemeanors. At year's end, according to the NCHR, 707 inmates were in detention without charge.

On June 7, the head of the Jordanian Professional Associations sent a letter to the prime minister to investigate complaints by the families of four individuals he claimed had been detained for more than three years without charge. At year's end there was no public response to this letter.

There have been no developments in the case of extremist Issam al-Barqawi, also known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who has remained in detention without trial since 2005. At year's end the State Security Court reported that it continued to prepare his case for prosecution. In 2005 Maqdisi was arrested and detained for six months following his acquittal on charges of plotting subversive acts and possessing explosives as part of an alleged terrorist plot. Later in 2005 he was rearrested and charged for allegedly contacting terrorist groups and charged with plotting subversive acts.

In the past, human rights activists reported that the government detained journalists and Islamists for varying amounts of time for what appeared to be political reasons. Detainees were kept in solitary confinement and were denied access to lawyers.

Local governors have the authority to invoke the Crime Prevention Law, which allows them to place individuals in administrative detention (in prison), or under house arrest, for up to one year without formally charging them. House arrest may require persons to report daily to a local police station and impose a curfew. Persons who violate the terms of their house arrest may be imprisoned for up to 14 days. NCHR objected to the increasing number of administrative detentions, noting that 11,597 persons were detained in 2006.

On May 24, AI reported that tens of individuals were arrested and detained incommunicado during the preceding year for political reasons. In its April report, the Arab Organization for Human Rights (ACHR) alleged that the government conducted late night raids on homes and made arbitrary arrests between the hours of 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary. In practice there was an independent decision-making body; however, the judiciary's

independence was compromised due to family and tribal influence. The Judicial Council, a committee led by the president of the Court of Cassation, is comprised of other high-ranking judges from various courts and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). This council approves judicial appointments after the initial nominations by the MOJ and assigns and evaluates judges. The Judicial Council lacks the internal capacity that would ensure its independence.

The judicial system consists of civil, criminal, commercial, security, and religious courts. Most criminal cases are tried in civilian courts, which include the Court of Appeal, the High Court of Justice, and the Court of Cassation. The State Security Court, composed of both military and civilian judges, has jurisdiction over offenses against the state and drug-related crimes. Penal laws grant the same rights to defendants arrested by the security agencies as others who are arrested. The religious courts are subdivided into Shari'a (Islamic law) courts and tribunals for non-Muslims. Shari'a courts have jurisdiction over all matters relating to the personal status of Muslims, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Christian courts have jurisdiction over marriage and divorce cases among Christians, but Shari'a law is applied in inheritance cases.

Trial Procedures

The law provides that all civilian court trials are open to the public unless the court determines otherwise. Juries were not used. Defendants were entitled to legal counsel, could present witnesses on their behalf and question witnesses presented against them, and had the right to appeal. Public defenders were provided if the defendant was unable to hire legal counsel. All citizens were accorded these rights. Civil, criminal, and commercial courts accord equal weight to the testimony of men and women; however, in Shari'a courts the testimony of two women was equal to that of a man in most circumstances. Defense attorneys were guaranteed access to government-held evidence relevant to their clients' cases.

The State Security Court consisted of a panel of three judges, two military officers and one civilian. Approximately 20 cases were tried or were ongoing in the State Security Court during the year. As with the civilian courts, proceedings of the court were open to the public. Defendants tried in this court were often held in lengthy pretrial detention and were refused access to legal counsel until just before the trial. State Security Court judges inquired into allegations that defendants were tortured and allowed the testimony of physicians regarding such allegations. The Court of Cassation previously ruled that the State Security Court may not issue a death sentence on the basis of a confession obtained as a result of torture. Defendants who claimed to have given testimony under torture were permitted to give new testimony. Defendants in the State Security Court have the right to appeal their sentences to the Court of Cassation, which is authorized to review issues of both fact and law, although defendants convicted of misdemeanors in the State Security Court had no right of appeal. Appeals were automatic for cases involving the death penalty.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

During the year, there were reports of political detainees.

On June 6, the opposition Islamic Action Front (IAF) claimed that the government arrested seven activist members in Zarqa while preparing for the upcoming municipal elections. The men were charged with belonging to Hamas, an organization deemed illegal in the country. In September authorities released four of the men.

On September 24, according to IAF press statements, police arrested and detained two IAF members in Aqaba. The IAF claimed that this was an effort to pressure the Islamic movement before the November elections.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent judiciary in civil matters. The Supreme Court of Justice hears administrative complaints. The courts are open to all residents. Courts also have jurisdiction over any person in a civil or criminal matter, including in lawsuits where the government is a plaintiff or a defendant.

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

The law prohibits arbitrary interference; however, in practice the government did not respect this prohibition. The law requires that security forces obtain a warrant from the prosecutor general or a judge before conducting searches or otherwise interfering with these rights; however, in security cases, authorities obtained pre-approved warrants. Security officers reportedly sometimes monitored telephone conversations and Internet communication, read private correspondence, and engaged in surveillance of persons considered to pose a threat to the government or national security without a court order. During the year human rights activists reported that security personnel stormed into the houses of suspects in the middle of the night, arrested them, and placed them in GID facilities without pressing charges.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press; however, the government imposed significant restrictions on these rights in practice. Citizens generally were able to criticize the government openly, although journalists exercised caution in regard to the king, the royal family, the GID, and sensitive topics such as religion. Government intimidation and the threat of fines and detention led to self-censorship of journalists during the year.

On March 21, the parliament revised the Press and Publications Law to remove provisions that explicitly called for imprisonment of

journalists, while substantially increasing fines that the government may levy on journalists from \$14,000 (10,000 dinars) to \$40,000 (28,000 dinars). The law limits significantly the government's power to order shutdowns of printing presses, allows journalists to cover court proceedings unless the court ruled otherwise, and requires publications to be licensed. It also gives the courts the right to withhold publication of any printed material and imposes strict limits on publications, which allows the government broad leeway to impose sanctions. The law maintains restrictions on the operation of newspapers, and the power to withdraw licenses remains with the judiciary.

The penal code imposes restrictions on insulting the king and stirring sectarian strife and sedition. Any journalist can be punished for such actions. According to the penal code, the punishment for defamation of the king or royal family is three years in prison and a fine not exceeding \$700 (500 dinars). Additionally, citizens may be prosecuted for slandering the government or foreign leaders and for offending religious beliefs.

For example, on October 9, the State Security Court convicted and sentenced former member of parliament (MP) Ahmad Abbadi to two years' imprisonment on charges of undermining the country's reputation, membership in an illegitimate organization, and distributing illegal pamphlets. On April 30, Abbadi published an open letter to a foreign official on a foreign Web site accusing senior Jordanian officials of corruption, challenging the government's commitment to reform, and criticizing the government's respect for human rights. Abbadi named the minister of interior personally in the letter. On May 3, the minister of interior filed a personal complaint alleging slander. At year's end, Abbadi also faced charges of slander, libel, and misuse of electronic media in the Amman Court of Conciliation.

Journalists, like all citizens, may be prosecuted before the State Security Court for criminal and security violations. There were no such cases during the year. Although historically some cases have been dismissed before trial, other cases have lingered in the courts for years. According to the National Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ), the government used detention and prosecution or the threat of prosecution to intimidate journalists into practicing self-censorship during the year.

Some human rights groups continued to criticize the 2006 Prevention of Terrorism Act for limiting free speech, alleging that the act's broad definition of terrorist speech and opinion could lead to arrest and detention of government critics. However, the government has not to date used the act.

During the year there were several reported instances of arrest and government harassment of journalists.

On January 10, *Al-Ghad* and CDFJ reported that security forces detained three journalists while covering reports of Al-Qaeda activities in Irbid. They were released after several hours.

On February 6, according to the Jordanian Press Association, the PSD arrested *Al-Rai* reporter Khalid Khawaja after criminal prosecutors charged him with assaulting a police officer. Khawaja previously filed a complaint against three police officers who he claimed beat him while he was covering a story the preceding week. Results of the investigation were not made public at year's end.

On May 11, ammonnews.net reported that authorities prevented Al-Jazeera journalists from covering a rally in Amman supporting former MP Abbadi, and that they were instructed to stop posting comments related to Abbadi's detention on ammonnews.net.

On November 1, the Amman Court of First Instance dropped all charges against editors Jihad Momani and Hashem al-Khalidi. In May 2006 Amman's conciliation court sentenced the two editors to two months imprisonment for "attacking religious sentiment" over their publication of the controversial Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

During the year the government used informants and de facto censors at printing presses to supply the government with articles for preapproval and inform it if particularly objectionable material was slated for print. Media contacts also reported that the government appoints editors-in-chief at major publications, whether directly by virtue of officials' positions on the boards of directors of publications, in which the government has an ownership stake, or indirectly through nondisclosed contacts by government employees, further contributing to censorship. On at least one occasion during the year, government officials delayed publication at the printer.

On April 21, authorities confiscated the videotapes of an Al-Jazeera interview with Prince Hassan, during which the prince allegedly criticized a foreign country's policies.

In the April 29 edition of the weekly *Al-Majd*, the government halted publication of an article discussing Jordanian training of Palestinian security forces, claiming that it would harm the country's relations with its neighbors. The government permitted the story to be published the following week after publishers made several edits and relocated it from the front page to the inside pages.

According to a 2006 Committee to Protect Journalists report, authorities pressured printers to delay publication of several newspapers until editors agreed to remove critical articles. According to the report, editors reportedly received telephone calls from security officials instructing them how to cover events.

High taxes on media and tariffs on paper caused journalists to reduce the size of their publications. Publishers of weekly editions criticized the Sales and Income Tax Department's July 9 decision to require them to pay sales tax on advertising revenue as an attempt to "marginalize their role in the community." Journalists also criticized the government for advertising predominantly in newspapers in which the government owned shares.

The law provides foreign media operations freedom of expression, which was generally respected in practice.

Radio and television news broadcasts remained more restricted than the print media. Jordan Television reported only the government's position on controversial matters. International satellite television and Israeli and Syrian television broadcasts were available and unrestricted. Some foreign films were edited prior to release.

The Press and Publications Department continued to enforce bans on the publication of selected books for religious, moral, and political reasons.

Internet Freedom

During the year there were no reports of government restrictions on access to the Internet, although citizens and activists widely assumed that the government monitored electronic correspondence. Al-Jazeera estimated internet usage rates of 30 percent during the year. The government permitted Internet news sites to operate in the country, including some that presented news critical of the government.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government limited academic freedom. Some academics claimed that they received threats of dismissal or were dismissed for their political views. During the year members of the academic community claimed that there was an ongoing intelligence presence in academic institutions. The University of Jordan continued to grant its president authority to appoint half of its 80-member student council, including the chair. This measure was viewed widely as an effort to curb the influence of campus Islamists. Many students, including non-Islamists, continued to object to the university's policy.

On March 21, *Al-Ghad* reported that security officials interrogated two Islamist students at the University of Jordan for distributing leaflets on campus without a license.

On May 10, Zarqa Private University dismissed 14 Islamist professors. The Chronicle of Higher Education and local media reported IAF claims that the government pressured the university to dismiss the professors. Both the government and the university denied the allegations.

On June 6, while collecting student signatures on a petition on a university campus, the Follow-up Committee for the National Campaign for Student Rights announced that security forces detained two members for 12 hours.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly; however, the government restricted this right. Citizens must obtain permits for public gatherings including demonstrations, workshops, seminars, and some meetings. The government generally granted permits for protests it found objectionable only after extensive negotiations with the organizers. The law requires that the organizers of rallies and demonstrations request permission from provincial governors at least two days prior to any event. Under the law no protest may be held without the governor's consent, and violators face imprisonment from one to six months and a fine not to exceed \$4,230 (3,000 dinars). In some cases the government granted approval at the last moment, making it difficult for organizers to plan the demonstrations.

Other requests were denied outright. In their annual reports, AI, HRW, and the Arab Organization for Human Rights accused the government of denying permission and being stringent in issuing permits for peaceful demonstrations.

The IAF claimed that on July 8 the Governorate of Amman refused its request to hold a protest across from the Prime Ministry. Police broke up the subsequent unlicensed but peaceful protest held at IAF offices in Amman.

On December 14, the IAF claimed that 20 supporters were incarcerated for trampling the country's flag during a licensed protest. The State Security Court placed a university student in custody for 14 days pending further investigation, charging him with "fuelling national discord, inciting sectarianism, and dishonoring the national flag."

The Prevention of Terrorism Act provides for punishment of those involved in peaceful demonstrations which could be interpreted as "disrupting of public order," or "endangering public safety," which fall under the definition of "terrorist acts" in the law.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right of association; however, the government limited this freedom in practice. The law prohibits the use of associations for the benefit of any partisan organization. The government required organizations to receive approval for all conferences, workshops, seminars, and some meetings, by the governor at least 48 hours before the event. Several civil society groups complained that the governor denied them permission to host workshops, conferences, or other public gatherings with limited notice and often without reason.

On May 1, the Council of Ministers issued new regulations for nonprofit organizations registered with the Ministry of Industry and

Trade requiring organizations to seek prior approval from the council before receiving foreign funds. Affected civil society organizations claimed that they were not consulted by the government prior to enactment. During the year, according to charitable societies and civil society organizations registered with the Ministry of Social Development, the ministry regularly issued regulations and instructions that restricted their efforts.

On October 26, the governor of Amman denied the NGO Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Center permission to hold a workshop regarding the role of civil society in monitoring elections less than 48 hours before the workshop. The governor subsequently granted approval for the workshop, but the organization had too little time to reorganize the event.

On December 17, HRW released a report criticizing the government's restrictions on freedom of association. HRW alleged that the government ousted the leadership of two large NGOs, the General Union of Voluntary Societies and the Islamic Center Society, both of which were accused by the government of financial impropriety. HRW alleged that the government violated the law by not subsequently holding new elections to replace the leadership and by changing Islamic Center Society's membership criteria.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution provides for freedom to practice the rites of one's religion, provided that religious practices are consistent with "public order and morality;" however, the government continued to impose some restrictions on freedom of religion.

The state religion is Islam. The government does not officially recognize all religious groups. Groups must obtain recognition with the approval of the prime minister. In order to be recognized, the group must have citizens among its constituency, and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) must also conduct a background investigation. Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are the religions formally recognized by the government. Recognition allows a religious group to purchase land with a tax exemption. The government did not accord the Druze or Baha'i faiths the status of officially recognized religions but did not prohibit the practice of these faiths. The government did not record the bearer's religion on national identity cards issued to Baha'is and categorized Druze as Muslims on these documents.

Iraqi Christians and Sunni Muslims freely practiced their faiths at existing churches and mosques. However, the government reportedly refused Iraqi Sabean-Mandaeans permission to congregate in public places to perform their baptismal rites.

The government did not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but each of these denominations conducted religious services and activities without interference. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, complained of societal and official discrimination. The government has not accorded legal status to all Christian denominations.

Unlike other faiths, the government did not permit Baha'is to hold religious councils, did not recognize marriages by the Baha'i Assembly, and did not permit Baha'is to register properties or endowments in the name of the Baha'i community.

In November 2006 the parliament approved a law requiring preachers and teachers in mosques to have licenses issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims, and government policy requires that foreign missionary groups refrain from public proselytizing. The government deported, detained, or refused residency renewal to approximately one dozen Christian pastors, priests, and other religious activists of varying nationalities after questioning them about their religious activities and work with Muslims or converts. As in previous years, the government took action against Christian proselytizers in response to the complaints of recognized Jordanian Christian groups, which charged that the activities of these missionaries are disruptive to society.

The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a training school for Christian pastors and missionaries, had not been accredited as an educational institution by year's end, although the government granted it "registration," allowing it to operate as a cultural center. The government did not allow JETS to accept Muslim students.

Conversion to Islam was allowed; however, a Muslim may not convert to another religion. Muslims who convert to other faiths documented and experienced social and official discrimination, including death threats from family members. Under Shari'a converts are regarded as apostates and legally may be denied their property and other rights. Converts from Islam to another faith faced possible loss of civil rights, loss of child custody, and economic hardship.

Converts from Islam are still considered Muslims under Shari'a in matters of personal status. The constitution provides that religious community trusts, or "awqaf," and matters of personal status fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Shari'a courts for Muslims, and separate non-Muslim tribunals exist for each religious community recognized by the government. Civil marriage is not recognized by the government. The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and representatives for its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the prime minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as "societies" come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals assigned for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions. These persons must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

Men may divorce their spouses more easily than women; however, since 2005 Shari'a courts have granted more divorces sought by women. Some Christians are unable to divorce under the legal system because they are subject to their denomination's religious court system, which does not allow divorce. Such individuals sometimes convert to another Christian denomination or to Islam to

divorce legally.

The legal system regards minor children of a male Muslim who converts to another religion to remain Muslims. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not themselves convert to Islam. Muslim converts to Christianity and minor children of male converts to Christianity are not recognized legally as Christians and continue to be treated as Muslims in matters of family and property law.

Apart from unrecognized religious groups, the government noted individuals' religions (except for Druze, Baha'is, and other unrecognized religious groups) on the national identity card and "family book" (a national registration record issued to the head of every family that serves as proof of citizenship) for all citizens. Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for official identification purposes.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Relations between Muslims and Christians, including those of Iraqi origin, generally were amicable. However, Iraqi Mandaeans residing in the country complained that individuals who did not understand their faith sometimes interfered in their baptismal rituals.

Anti-Semitism in the media was present and editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces sometimes depicted negative images of Jews in the newspapers *Al-Rai*, *Al-Dustur*, and *Al-Ghad* during the year. There was no government response to these pieces.

On March 9, *Al-Dustur*, a privately owned paper with partial government sponsorship, published an article by Rakan Al-Majali that stated, "The war of annihilation and ruin in Palestine and Lebanon opened the eyes of the Arabs and of the entire world to the racism of Zionism and to the traits of the Jewish personality based on resentment, desire for revenge, and non-recognition of anyone who is not Jewish..." The same article compared Zionism to Nazism.

Aside from expatriates, there was no resident Jewish community in the country.

Muslims who convert to other religions often faced social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. Families usually strongly discouraged interfaith romantic relationships. Such relationships may lead to ostracism and, in some cases, violence against the couple or feuds between members of the couple's families. Baha'is faced some societal and official discrimination. Unlike other faiths, the government does not permit Baha'is to have religious councils, does not recognize marriages by the Baha'i Assembly, and does not permit Baha'is to register properties or endowments in the name of the Baha'i community.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2007 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, there were some restrictions. The law requires that all minors obtain written permission from their father to apply for a passport. Consular officers and activists encountered cases of mothers who reported that they were prevented from departing with their children because authorities enforced requests from fathers to prevent their children from leaving the country. The GID sometimes withheld passports from citizens for security reasons.

Local governors may use the Preventing Crimes Law to place citizens under house arrest for up to one year without formally charging them. House arrest may involve requiring persons to report daily to a local police station while under curfew. Persons who violate the terms of house arrest may be imprisoned for up to 14 days.

Citizens receive passports that are valid for five years. Some persons of Palestinian origin living in the country were citizens and received passports; however, the government reported that there were approximately 130,000 Palestinian refugees, mostly of Gazan origin, who did not qualify for citizenship. Approximately half received two-year passports valid for travel but which do not connote citizenship. West Bank residents without other travel documentation are eligible to receive five-year passports which do not connote citizenship.

Human rights activists continued to charge that the government did not consistently apply citizenship laws, especially in cases in which passports were taken from citizens of Palestinian origin. The government maintained this policy was in line with its efforts to implement the government's disengagement from its former claims to the West Bank. However, activists complained that the process was not transparent and the appeal process was virtually nonexistent. Claimants or families filed appeals with the MOI, which were not resolved to their satisfaction. The government asserted that all cases it closed involved persons without valid claims to citizenship or travel documents.

Human rights activists claimed that approximately 10,000 to 12,000 former residents of Palestinian origin remained outside the country, and that the government refused to renew their passports at embassies overseas.

The law prohibits internal and external forced exile, and the government did not use forced exile in practice.

Protection of Refugees

The government is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 protocol and does not have any national legislation pertaining to the status and treatment of refugees. It generally cooperated with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. The government respected the UNHCR's eligibility determinations regarding asylum seekers, including those who entered the country clandestinely. A 1998 memorandum of understanding between the government and the UNHCR contains the definition of a refugee, confirms the principle of non-refoulement, and allows recognized refugees a maximum stay of six months during which period a durable solution must be found. In practice the government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they feared persecution. However, during the year some Iraqis detained for alleged criminal offenses were returned to Iraq or Syria before UNHCR could determine their refugee status. UNHCR reported several instances in which it successfully intervened to prevent the deportation of persons issued UNHCR asylum seeker cards.

The UNRWA and the government continued to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees during the year. At year's end approximately 1.9 million Palestinian refugees were registered with the UNRWA. The government granted nationality to approximately 700,000 persons displaced from former Jordanian territories during the 1967 war. An additional 120,000 persons displaced during the 1967 war held temporary residency permits. An additional 200,000 Palestinian refugees were also estimated to be living in the country without any direct assistance.

Since 1991 many Iraqis have applied for refugee status and received legal and material assistance from the UNHCR. According to a Jordanian government technical team cited in a survey conducted by the Norwegian research institute Fafo in May, an estimated 450,000 to 500,000 Iraqis were living in the country. By the end of the year, approximately 52,000 had registered with UNHCR as refugees or asylum seekers. The government tolerated the prolonged stay of many Iraqis beyond the expiration of the visit permits under which they entered the country.

The government generally recognized UNHCR's requests that states continue to grant temporary protection for all Iraqi asylum seekers, including new arrivals, rejected cases, and recognized refugees whose cases had been suspended by resettlement countries. However, during the year the government began to restrict admission of many Iraqis at its ports of entry. According to UNHCR figures, at year's end, approximately 52,000 persons, primarily Iraqis, were seeking asylum. During the year 6,467 persons, primarily from Iraq, Russia, Somalia, Syria, and Sudan were recognized as refugees awaiting resettlement. The government allowed an additional 90 Chechens to remain indefinitely pending repatriation.

The government continued to provide temporary protection to recognized refugees formerly resident in a UNHCR camp in Ramadi, Iraq, who fled Iraq in 2003 and relocated to Ruweished following the government's closure of a UNHCR reception camp in the area between Jordanian and Iraqi frontier posts at the Trebil-Karama border. In September all 108 Palestinian-Iraqi refugees departed the UNHCR-managed camp in Ruweished for resettlement in Brazil. By year's end the camp remained vacant, awaiting final closure by the government.

On July 26, the government announced that Iraqi students, regardless of residency status, could attend public schools. Some schools ran second shifts to accommodate Iraqis and the government worked closely with the UN Children's Fund, UNHCR, and NGOs to develop a program to waive textbook costs and mandatory school fees for Iraqis who could not afford them.

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

The law does not provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully. Citizens may participate in the political system through their elected representatives in parliament; however, the king may use his discretion to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, cabinet, and upper house of parliament; dissolve or extend parliament; and establish public policy. The prime minister appoints the mayors of the capital Amman, Wadi Musa (Petra) and Aqaba, a special economic zone. The mayors of the other 93 municipalities are elected.

Elections and Political Participation

After appointment by the king, a prime minister is required to submit his cabinet to a parliamentary vote of confidence, if there is a seated parliament. Executive power is vested in the king (or, in his absence, the regent), who exercises his power through his ministers in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

The king proposes and dismisses extraordinary sessions of parliament and may postpone regular sessions for up to 60 days. If the government amends or enacts a law when parliament is not in session, it must submit the law to parliament for consideration during the next session; however, such "provisional" laws do not expire and, while technically subject to action by parliament when it returns to session, in practice remain in force without legislative approval.

On July 31, nationwide multiparty municipal elections were held. Several domestic activists and the opposition IAF alleged a number of election irregularities. The NCHR's September 12 municipal election report charged serious violations, including exploiting armed forces personnel to vote en masse for pro-government candidates. There were no local or international observers present.

On November 20, multiparty parliamentary elections were held. The government permitted 150 local observers under the umbrella of NCHR to monitor the elections and granted them full access inside the polling stations. Other coalitions of civil society organizations organized thousands of volunteers to monitor the election process outside the polling stations. Local observers alleged a number of irregularities, including vote buying, multiple voting, and transfer of votes. An international NGO partnered with

a local research center to conduct the first ever election day exit polling of approximately 4,000 voters in six electoral districts.

The government routinely licensed political parties and other associations but prohibited membership in unlicensed political parties. During the year there were 35 licensed political parties. On March 31, parliament passed the Political Parties Law, which, in an effort to consolidate political parties, stipulated a minimum of 500 founding members from five governorates. Existing parties have until April 2008 to meet these criteria or lose their licenses. The government may deny licenses to parties that it decides do not meet the political and other criteria contained in the law. The High Court of Justice may dissolve a party if it violates the constitution or the law.

The election law significantly underrepresented urban areas. For instance, Amman's second district has more than 200,000 constituents and was granted four representatives, while Karak's sixth district has approximately 7,000 constituents and was granted three representatives. Analysts considered electoral districting unfair, claiming that it was intended to reduce the representation of areas heavily populated by citizens of Palestinian origin and because of a lack of balance between the population and the number of seats per district. The law allows voters to choose one candidate in multiple-seat districts. In the largely tribal society, citizens tended to cast their vote for extended family members.

Citizens of Palestinian origin, estimated to be more than half of the total population, comprised five of the 28 ministers in the Nader Dahabi government sworn in on November 25. In parliament, 10 of 55 senators and 16 of 110 lower house deputies were of Palestinian origin. There were no Palestinian-origin leaders in any of the country's 12 governorships, nor any Palestinian-origin secretaries general in any of the ministries.

The election law requires judiciary verification of polling results, and establishes the number of lower house seats at 110, with six reserved for women, nine for Christians, and three for either the Circassian or Chechen ethnic minorities. The voting age is set at 18 years for all citizens. Citizens may freely nominate themselves and register as candidates if they have a "certificate of good conduct" issued by the GID. Persons who have been sentenced to more than one year in prison are ineligible for election.

Women have the right to vote. Seven women serve in the senate, seven in the Chamber of Deputies (six elected through a quota system), and four in the cabinet. On March 21, parliament approved the Municipalities Law, which provides a 20 percent quota for women in municipal council seats. During the November 20 parliamentary elections, a woman was elected to a parliamentary seat for the first time, and during the July 31 municipal elections, a woman was elected to a mayoral term for the first time. On January 9, the cabinet appointed the country's first female governor, Rabeha Dabbas.

During the year there were 36 female judges, an increase of 11 from 2006. On May 28, the Judicial Council appointed Ihsan Barakat to the post of chief of the West Amman Court of the First Instance, the first woman to hold this position. During the year, the MOJ set a minimum membership quota of 15 percent for women in the Judicial Institute of Jordan; such membership is a prerequisite to becoming a judge.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption. The Worldwide Governance Indicators of the World Bank reflect that corruption was a problem. Influence peddling and a lack of transparency have been alleged in government procurement and dispute settlement. The use of family, business, and other personal connections to advance personal business interests was widespread.

The law requires certain government officials to declare their assets in a sealed envelope to the Financial Disclosure Department of the MOJ to be opened by the chief justice in the event of a complaint. During the year the press reported the status of public officials' submissions to the MOJ. At year's end 1,300 of the 3,300 required officials complied.

On March 24, a special committee of parliament found former minister of municipalities Abdul Razzaq Thbeshat innocent on charges of corruption. In November 2006 the parliament brought charges against the former minister due to a 2002 purchase of waste-management vehicles from Germany, which an audit bureau later found to be faulty. In March the Amman Court of First Instance subsequently acquitted four other men charged in the case.

In December 2006 the parliament created the Anti-Corruption Commission. At year's end the commission had not heard any cases. The committee enjoys a free mandate to pursue current and former officials suspected of involvement in corrupt activities. The law provides that this body is autonomous and its officials are immune from prosecution, although some commentators questioned its actual independence and efficacy. Individuals who submit baseless claims to the commission are subject to civil and criminal prosecution. Two members of the commission resigned, one due to an ongoing corruption investigation.

The law provides for public access to government information once it becomes a matter of legal record, and the government enforced this law in practice. On June 17, the parliament endorsed the Access to Information Law, outlining the procedures for journalists, researchers, and citizens to obtain information from the government and its ministries. A number of journalists and civil society organizations criticized the law, claiming it would impede their access to information by creating a process that would delay the government's required time to respond and permit the government to deny requests without justification.

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

Several domestic and international human rights groups generally operated with restricted permission from the government and publicly reported allegations of human rights abuses in the country throughout the year. Major local human rights observers included the government-funded NCHR and several independent organizations: the Amman Centre for Human Rights Studies, the

Arab Organization for Human Rights, the CDFJ, and the Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies. The government sometimes met and often responded publicly to charges and reports issued by these organizations. These observers often claimed that the government did not rectify the problems they identified.

On April 11, the Arab Organization for Human Rights charged in a press release that the government responded to only four of its 111 inquiries and claimed that the government does not take NGOs seriously.

On four separate occasions in August, the government permitted the Adaleh Center and the Human and Environment Observatory to accompany an HRW researcher on prison visits, including the GID detention center, to investigate allegations of torture. This marked the first time local or international NGOs were granted access to these facilities together.

The government generally cooperated with international NGOs, but some human rights observers claimed that they were unable to meet with some security detainees because they were held incommunicado.

The government also generally cooperated with international governmental organizations.

The government cooperated with and funded the NCHR, which some human rights activists complained was influenced by the government. On April 10, the NCHR issued its third annual report on the state of human rights in the country, covering 2006. The report addressed the government's actions to improve the legal human rights framework and its implementation, as well as NCHR investigations into alleged violations, criticisms of the legal framework, and suggestions for improvement. Although the government formed a ministerial committee following the release of the 2005 report, at year's end it had not produced a formal response as planned.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution does not distinguish between citizens on the basis of race, disability, language, or social status; however, the law treats women unequally, and minorities faced discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas.

Women

Women experienced legal discrimination in pension and social security benefits, inheritance, divorce, ability to travel, child custody, citizenship, and in certain limited circumstances, the value of their Shari'a court testimony. On August 1, the government published its ratification of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW in the official gazette, thereby giving it the status of law.

Widespread violence and abuse against women continued, including honor crimes and spousal rape. In rural areas violence against women was reported more frequently than in major cities; however, women's rights activists speculated that many incidents in cities went unreported.

Although in recent years the government has taken steps to increase the resources available to help abused women, including opening a safe house for women, cultural norms continued to discourage victims from seeking medical or legal assistance. On January 17, Dar al-Wafaq, a government-run shelter for victims of domestic violence, opened with a capacity to support between 35 and 50 women. During the year this shelter assisted 290 women.

Women may file a complaint in court against their spouses for physical abuse; however, in practice familial and societal pressures discouraged them from seeking legal remedies. Spousal rape is not illegal. The NGO Jordanian Women's Union maintained a telephone hotline for victims of domestic violence, but the extent of the problem remained widespread. During the year the PSD Family Protection Unit reported and investigated cases of sexual assault and domestic violence. Spousal abuse is technically grounds for divorce, but husbands may seek to claim religious authority to strike their wives.

During the year authorities prosecuted all 17 reported instances of honor crimes that resulted in death of the victim, although activists reported that additional unreported cases likely occurred. A November UN Development Fund for Women study stated that 25 percent of honor crime victims in the country were killed merely because they were suspected of involvement in an illicit relationship, while 15 percent were killed after such a relationship was allegedly proven. In ordinary cases the maximum penalty for first-degree murder is death, and the maximum penalty for second-degree murder is 15 years in prison; however, the law is lenient for perpetrators of honor crimes. While the defendants are almost universally found guilty, defendants often received token sentences, with the charges often reduced from premeditated murder to manslaughter. Many men convicted of an honor crime received minimal prison sentences, usually no more than six months.

On October 2, a 27-year-old man was sentenced to 10 years in prison after being convicted of the 2006 murder of his four sisters, one of whom was six months' pregnant, in Salt. Authorities sentenced him to life imprisonment, but the tribunal reduced his sentence because the victims' family dropped the charges. The tribunal acquitted four other male family members, including the victims' father, from complicity in murder charges and instigating murder.

On April 10, the *Jordan Times* reported that a Jordanian man murdered his daughter after forcing her to undergo an abortion for a pregnancy out of wedlock. The criminal prosecutor charged the 68-year-old suspect with premeditated murder after he shot and killed his 26-year-old daughter reportedly for reasons related to family honor.

The police regularly placed potential victims of honor crimes in involuntary protective custody in Jweideh Correctional and

Rehabilitation Center, a detention facility where some have remained for up to 20 years. Activists estimated that at year's end more than 15 women were in protective custody.

One NGO continued to work with the government to provide a temporary but unofficial shelter where the women could live in relative anonymity as an alternate to protective custody.

Prostitution is illegal, although it occurred in limited circumstances.

According to the law, sexual harassment is strictly prohibited and subject to criminal penalties including fines and imprisonment.

The government provided men with more generous social security benefits than women. The government continued pension payments of deceased male civil servants but discontinued payments of deceased female civil servants to their heirs. Laws and regulations governing health insurance for civil servants do not permit women to extend their health insurance coverage to dependents or spouses. However, divorced and widowed women may extend coverage to their children.

Under Shari'a as applied in the country, female heirs receive half the amount that male heirs receive, and non-Muslim widows of Muslim spouses have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half of her parents' estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits both of his parents' property. Male Muslim heirs have the duty to provide for all family members who need assistance. The existing permanent divorce law allows women to seek divorces and retain their financial rights only under specific circumstances, such as spousal abuse. In these cases the woman has the burden of proof. Special courts for each denomination adjudicate marriage and divorce matters for Christians.

The law states that women have the right to obtain passports without the written permission of their husbands, although in practice the husband's permission is often required. Married women do not have the legal right to transmit citizenship to their children; however, female citizens married to noncitizen men can pass citizenship to their children upon the permission of the council of ministers. In practice this permission was usually granted, except in cases where the father was of Palestinian origin. Women may not petition for citizenship for their noncitizen husbands. The husbands themselves must apply for citizenship after fulfilling a requirement of 15 years of continuous residency. Once the husbands have obtained citizenship, they may apply to transmit the citizenship to their children. However, in practice such an application may take years, and in many cases citizenship may be denied to the husband and children. Such children become stateless and, if they do not hold legal residency, lose the right to attend public school or seek other government services.

Civil law grants women equal pay for equal work; however, in practice this was not consistently enforced. Traditional social pressures discouraged many women from pursuing professional careers, especially after marriage. At year's end the unemployment rate for women was 31 percent, compared to 14.3 for the country as a whole.

Children

The government was committed to children's rights and welfare in the areas of education and health; however, government efforts in these areas were constrained by limited financial resources.

Education is compulsory from ages six through 16 and free until age 18; however, no legislation exists to enforce the law or punish guardians for violating it. Absence from school goes without penalty, especially for girls. The overall school attendance and total secondary school attendance rates was 92 percent. Several domestic and foreign religious groups operated private schools throughout the country. Unlike previous years, on July 26, the government announced that all Iraqi children may be admitted to public schools regardless of their residency status. At year's end approximately 24,000 Iraqi children attended school, with thousands of others enrolled in informal education programs. Some remained out of the system.

The government granted food and transportation supplements to families with many children and to very poor families. Students must obtain a good behavior certificate from the GID to be admitted under the university quota system. Activists reported that the GID sometimes withheld these certificates from deserving students due to a family member's allegedly problematic record.

The government provided free inoculation programs typically administered through the school system for children. In addition, both boys and girls had equal access to government-subsidized public clinics, which offered reduced fees for most services.

The National Council for Family Affairs coordinated all issues concerning family safety. Since 2005 the government-funded "Dar al Amman," the country's first child protection center, has provided temporary shelter, medical care, and rehabilitation for abused children age six to 12.

During the year authorities received and investigated complaints of physical abuse and sexual abuse of children. The law specifies punishment for abuses against children. Conviction for rape or sodomy of a child less than 15 years of age potentially carries the death penalty.

The current minimum age for marriage is 18 years. However, with the consent of a judge and a guardian, children as young as 15, in most cases girls, may be married. In most cases the guardian made the decision that the child should be married, and it was not the child's choice. One partner, almost exclusively the man, is often significantly older than the 15-year-old.

Although the law prohibits most children under the age of 16 from working, children worked as street vendors and as carpenters, blacksmiths, and painters in Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid. Economic conditions and social disruption caused the number of these

children to increase in the last 10 years. However, NCHR's annual report stated that police arrested 710 children for begging in 2006, a decrease of 30 percent from the 1,011 children that were arrested in 2005.

Trafficking in Persons

The law does not specifically prohibit all forms of trafficking in persons, but the government prohibits trafficking in children. Other statutes governing kidnapping, assault, rape, and fraud could also be used to prosecute trafficking offenses.

There were reports that persons were trafficked to Jordan primarily from Bangladesh, China, India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan to work in the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs), according to the May 2006 report released by the National Labor Committee.

During the year the NCHR received an increased number of complaints from migrant workers regarding potential violations, including nonpayment of wages, long working hours and forced overtime, withholding of passports, threats, and physical abuse. Some domestic workers experienced conditions that amounted to involuntary servitude, including restrictions on movement, nonpayment of wages, excessive hours, and withholding of passports. There were reports that workers who complained of these conditions were repatriated to their home countries or otherwise intimidated into not making official complaints.

The government did not offer protection services for victims of trafficking. Some foreign workers who fled from abusive employers or who have faced sexual assault were falsely charged with crimes by their employer or put into "protective custody." Many others sought refuge in their countries' embassies.

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides persons with disabilities equal rights. NCHR received some complaints from disabled persons regarding employers who discriminated against them on the grounds of disability. While there were no explicit reports of official discrimination against persons with disabilities, access to education in rural areas for persons with disabilities remained a problem.

During the year the government passed a new disabilities law, which mandates that companies reserve four percent of their positions for persons with disabilities. According to education officials, there are 4,000 blind teachers currently employed. The government generally enforced accessibility provisions, although many private and public office buildings still have limited or no access for persons with disabilities.

High unemployment restricted job opportunities for persons with disabilities, who officially numbered 150,000, although UN estimates placed the number closer to 500,000. The government provided monetary assistance to citizens with severe mental and multiple physical disabilities whose families earned less than \$352 (250 dinars) per month. The Special Building Code Department oversees the retrofitting of existing buildings to make them accessible to disabled persons as required by the 2006 Special Buildings Code.

National/Ethnic/Racial Minorities

There were three groups of Palestinians residing in the country. Those that migrated to the country and the Jordan-controlled West Bank after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war were given full citizenship. Those still residing in the West Bank after 1967 were no longer eligible to claim citizenship but were allowed to obtain temporary passports without national numbers, provided they did not also carry a Palestinian Authority travel document. In 1995 King Hussein announced that West Bank residents without other travel documentation would be eligible to receive full-validity passports, although still without national numbers. Refugees who fled Gaza after 1967 were not entitled to citizenship and were issued temporary passports without national numbers.

Human rights activists maintained that despite the codified passport issuance procedures, interior ministry employees revoked national numbers of many citizens of Palestinian origin. Others claimed that their temporary passports were confiscated after spending time in the West Bank. Human rights activists claimed Palestinians were underrepresented in parliament and appointments to many senior positions in the government and the military, as well as admittance to public universities, and limited access to university scholarships.

During the year there were reports of societal discrimination against Iraqis living in the country. Some employers reportedly refused to pay or underpaid Iraqis working illegally, and some landlords reportedly would not rent or sell to Iraqis.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Societal discrimination against homosexuals existed. There were reports of individuals leaving the country out of fear they would be harmed by their family for being homosexual.

HIV/AIDS was a taboo subject in society, and public awareness was limited. Many citizens assumed the disease was a problem exclusively of foreigners due to government requirements that only foreigners be tested for HIV annually.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides workers in the private sector, in some state-owned companies, and in certain professions in the public sector the right to form and join unions, and in practice the government allowed them to form unions in these sectors. Unions must be registered to be legal. The labor law limits membership to citizens, effectively excluding the country's 313,495 registered foreign workers. However, some unions represented the interests of foreign workers informally.

According to official figures, more than 30 percent of the workforce was organized into 17 unions. Although an international NGO put the actual number closer to between 10 and 15 percent, the number approaches 30 percent including professional associations. Unions are required by the government to be members of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), the sole trade union federation. The government subsidized and audited the GFJTU's salaries and activities. Union officials are elected by secret ballot to five-year terms, when elections actually take place. Members have three days to file a nomination application, which is reviewed by the union. Elections are only held if there are more candidates than seats, and more often than not, the number of candidates equals the number of seats. In recent election cycles, when the number of candidates exceeded the number of seats, the government persuaded some candidates to withdraw. The government monitors the elections in the event of a complaint to ensure compliance with the law.

The constitution prohibits antiunion discrimination, but the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, now called the International Trade Union Confederation, claimed in 2005 that the government did not protect adequately employees from antiunion discrimination. Workers may lodge complaints of antiunion discrimination with the Ministry of Labor (MOL), which is authorized to order the reinstatement of employees discharged for union activities. There were no complaints of antiunion discrimination lodged with the MOL during the year.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Unions have the right to bargain collectively, and in practice the government respected this right.

Labor laws mandate that workers must give the employer 14-day prior notice before striking. If a strike violates other provisions of the law, the workers would be fined. Unions generally did not seek approval for a strike, but workers used the threat of a strike as a negotiating tactic. Strikes are prohibited if a labor dispute is under mediation or arbitration.

In a labor dispute, if a settlement is not reached through mediation, the MOL may refer the dispute to an industrial tribunal with agreement of both parties. The tribunal is an independent arbitration panel of judges appointed by the MOL. The decisions of the panel are legally binding. If only one party agrees, the MOL refers the dispute to the council of ministers and then to parliament. Labor law prohibits employers from dismissing a worker during a labor dispute.

At year's end nearly 70 percent of the workers in the QIZs were noncitizens. By law they were not permitted to form or participate in unions, although some unions advocated on their behalf. Some foreign workers have reportedly suffered from unfair labor practices in some factories. MOL inspections have identified problems at certain factories regarding delayed payment of wages, length of overtime, and physical abuse of workers. In such cases, MOL issued warnings and fines, and placed the factories on intensive surveillance.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor, except in a state of emergency such as war or natural disaster; however, there were reports throughout the year that such practices occurred.

Foreign domestic servants, almost exclusively women, were subject to coercion and abuse and, in some cases, worked under conditions that amounted to forced labor.

Some factories in the QIZs allegedly delayed payment of wages, held passports, and forced overtime, amounting to indentured servitude. However, during the year the allegations decreased substantially due to more rigorous MOL inspections. During the year the MOL regularly investigated allegations of forced labor, required violators to pay fines when appropriate, and publicized the outcomes of their findings.

In August the MOL began to regularize the process of worker registration through the issuance of temporary identification cards to more than 6,000 foreign workers in the QIZs. Workers cannot receive annual employment or residency permits without payment of accrued overstay fines of \$2.12 (1.50 dinars) per worker for each day out of legal status. A worker can fall out of legal status for reasons such as incomplete paperwork presented by factory management or failure by the government to process the paperwork in a timely manner after transferring workers from closed factories. Government ministries worked together and with the NCHR to repatriate foreign workers who could not afford to pay overstay fines related to their status, although in some cases waited three to four months for waivers to be processed.

The law does not prohibit specifically forced or compulsory labor by children; however, such practices were not known to occur.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The labor law forbids employment for children under the age of 16, except as apprentices; however, there were reports of child labor throughout the country, mostly in urban areas. Children under the age of 18 may not work for more than six hours continuously between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., or during weekends, religious celebrations, or national holidays. Children under 18 may not work in hazardous occupations. Provisions in the labor laws do not extend to children in the informal sector, which consists of agriculture, domestic labor, and small family businesses.

The law provides that employers who hire a child under the age of 16 must pay a fine ranging from \$140 to \$710 (100 to 500 dinars), which is doubled if the offense is repeated. The government, however, provided little training on child labor to the 85 MOL inspectors responsible for enforcing the relevant laws. At year's end, no fines had been issued, as the government continued to work to put in place a database to monitor violations.

The MOL's Child Labor Unit received, investigated, and addressed child labor complaints (although it has no formal mechanism for doing so) and coordinated government action regarding child labor. According to a December 2006 International Labor Organization-funded Center for Strategic and International Studies study of 387 working children aged nine to 17, 55 percent of those surveyed were employed in the fields of carpentry, blacksmiths, or painting and 13.4 percent were employed as street vendors. Survey respondents indicated that 60 percent worked longer than 10-hour days and 63 percent replied that they were paid below the minimum wage. Of the sample, 12.7 percent claimed their guardian compelled them to work.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

On January 1, the government's 5.7 percent national minimum wage increase raised wages from \$127 to \$154 (95 to 110 dinars) per month. The minimum wage applies to all workers except domestic servants, those working in small family businesses, and those in the agricultural sector. MOL inspectors largely enforced the minimum wage, but due to limited resources were unable to ensure full compliance. The national minimum wage did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The government estimated that the poverty level was at a monthly wage of approximately \$47 (33 dinars) per month, per capita.

In some cases, the law requires overtime pay for hours worked in excess of the 48-hour standard work week, provided that overtime does not account for more than 30 days per year. Employees were entitled to one day off per week. In previous years, some workers in the QIZs reportedly were forced to work seven days a week and in excess of 48 hours per week without overtime pay, though NCHR and MOL inspectors reported that these practices had ceased.

On February 10, the National Labor Committee (NLC) informed the government of allegations of worker rights violations, including nonpayment of wages, seven-day work weeks, withholding of passports, and not sponsoring residence permits, at the Concord Garment Factory. MOL inspectors confirmed the allegations; visited the factory in February, April, and June; placed the factory on the intensive inspection surveillance list; and threatened closure. Subsequent MOL inspections determined that management corrected previous violations.

The labor law does not apply to small family businesses, domestic servants, and nonprofessional and nontechnical workers in the agriculture sector. However, it does apply to citizen and noncitizen workers in other sectors. There is a separate civil service law. The law specifies a number of health and safety requirements for workers, which the MOL is authorized to enforce.

On January 15, the MOL closed five factories in four industrial estates for violating safety and occupational health laws.

The law requires employers to report industrial accidents to the ministry within 48 hours. Although employers are not required to report occupational diseases to the ministry, the law stipulates that if the medical authority determines that a worker suffers an occupational accident or disease as a result of his work, the employer is liable for compensation. The ministry mediates disputed amounts of compensation in cases of occupational disease. Workers do not have a statutory right to remove themselves from hazardous conditions without risking the loss of their jobs.

According to the MOL, there were 313,495 registered noncitizen workers in the country, the majority of whom were engaged in low-wage, low-skill activities in the textile, agriculture, construction, and industrial sectors. According to government and independent surveys, more than 36,000 of these workers were employed in the QIZs. Foreign workers in the QIZs were recruited through a vetted process involving registered recruitment agencies. However, sending countries typically recruited sub-agents who are unregistered and who feed workers into registered recruitment agencies, collecting illegal fees.

During the year the MOI and MOL instituted a system to regularize Egyptian laborers, many of whom were living in the country under expired residence or work permits. In collaboration with the Egyptian government, the MOL granted more than 12,400 permits to Egyptians through this process. In mid-July, after a one-month grace period, the police arrested more than 3,800 illegal workers (mostly Egyptian), of whom the government repatriated more than 1,000. The government released some on humanitarian grounds.

A May 2006 report by the NLC brought the QIZs under international scrutiny, as the NLC claimed that foreign workers were subject to conditions that amounted to human trafficking. During the year the NLC issued several follow-up reports alleging new violations in individual factories. MOL and NCHR inspectors investigated the allegations and published their findings and reports on their Web sites. More often than not, the allegations were not substantiated by government labor inspectors and monitors from NCHR. In response the government conducted immediate inspections of all factories, addressed concerns raised, referred cases to local authorities or the NCHR, and fined or threatened closure.

On April 23, the MOL assisted six workers in filing a legal case against three supervisors who slapped them. On May 24, a court found the supervisors guilty and fined them, marking the first time the judicial system found employers guilty in a case of physical abuse. On June 11, police arrested the previous owner of Cotton Craft factory for unpaid fines due to labor violations that occurred in 2006.

Abuse of domestic servants, most of whom were foreign, reportedly continued, although it was not thoroughly documented. Employers routinely limited their domestic employees' freedom of movement, did not allow them a day off, and often illegally confiscated travel documents. Victims feared losing their employment and being returned to their home country.



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