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2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Jordan

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
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The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Abdullah II bin Hussein, with a population of six million. The constitution concentrates executive and legislative authority in the king. The multiparty parliament consists of the 55-member House of Notables (Majlis al-Ayan), appointed by the king, and a 120-member elected lower house, the Chamber of Deputies (Majlis al-Nuwwab). Parliamentary elections, which international observers deemed credible, were held on November 9 after the king dissolved parliament in November 2009. Security forces reported to civilian authorities.

There were limitations on the right of citizens to change their government peacefully, and a newly drafted electoral law perpetuated the significant underrepresentation of urban areas and citizens of Palestinian origin in leadership positions. Domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported cases of arbitrary deprivation of life, torture, poor prison conditions, impunity, arbitrary arrest and denial of due process through administrative detention, prolonged detention, and external interference in judicial decisions. Citizens continued to describe infringements on their privacy rights. Restrictive legislation and regulations limited freedoms of speech and press, and government interference in the media and threats of fines and detention further encouraged self-censorship, according to journalists and human rights organizations. The government also continued to restrict freedoms of assembly and association. Legal and societal discrimination and harassment remained a problem for women, religious minorities, converts from Islam, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, and some persons of Palestinian origin. Local human rights organizations reported widespread violence against women and children. The government restricted labor rights, and local and international human rights organizations reported high levels of abuse of foreign domestic workers.

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 during the year that the government or its agents committed unlawful killings.

In November 2009 Saddam al-Saoud died of injuries allegedly sustained in police custody at the Al Hussein Police Station. Saoud's family said Public Security Directorate (PSD)

officers caused Saoud's injuries when they hit him on the head with a gun. At year's end, felony cases against six PSD officers remained pending.

Also in November 2009 Fakhri Kreishan died of injuries sustained during an altercation with police two days earlier in the southern city of Ma'an. A police officer reportedly hit him on the head with a baton. At year's end, the felony case against the officer was pending.

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; however, international NGOs continued to report incidences of torture and widespread mistreatment in police and security detention centers. Article 208 of the penal code prohibits torture by public officials, including psychological harm, and provides penalties of as long as three years' imprisonment for the use of torture, with an increased penalty of up to 15 years if serious injury occurs. Human rights lawyers found the law ambiguous and supported amendments to better define "torture" and strengthen sentencing guidelines. The government has not charged an individual under article 208.

Local and international NGOs criticized the use of special police prosecutors and courts to try PSD personnel accused of torture and police misconduct as ineffective and not transparent. As part of the 2009 reform process, the government gave civilian prosecutors authority to assist in the investigation of torture allegations, even though such cases were tried in a police court.

International and domestic organizations stated that security forces continued to practice torture, particularly in police stations; however, observers commented that allegations of torture in prisons decreased during the year. On May 14, as part of its periodic review process, the UN Committee against Torture expressed "deep concern" at "the numerous, consistent, and credible allegations of a widespread and routine practice of torture and ill-treatment of detainees in detention facilities and that such allegations were seldom investigated or prosecuted." A August 30 National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) report on prisons and police detention centers cited 33 complaints of mistreatment in detention centers and three complaints from prison inmates between January 1 and June 30. The NCHR report also commented on individual violations perpetrated by law enforcement staff in some police stations and observed that several forms of torture were practiced against the defendants and detainees. A report issued in January by the international NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) also noted that torture continued to be practiced in the country's prisons and police stations. HRW claimed that the reform program does not address accountability for abuses and that initiatives by the NCHR and other groups were "far from sufficient considering the lack of both political will and effective mechanisms to bring perpetrators to justice."

On March 1, members of the Criminal Investigation Unit with the Public Security Directorate in Irbid reportedly arrested Sayed Mahmoud Hamed Talafha on allegations of attempted robbery and beat him severely in custody. Officers reportedly struck him on the right leg where he had metal pins from a previous operation, hung him by the wrists to the back of a door, and pierced one wrist with a drill. The PSD spokesperson claimed that Talafha inflicted the wounds himself. According to his lawyer, on March 2, he had emergency surgery to repair his hand. The general prosecutor dropped the charges against Talafha on November 13, but he remained in administrative detention on the Mafraq governor's order. Talafha was released from administrative detention on December 2.

In 2008 the director of the Sahab Police Station, a police officer of the Criminal Investigations Department, and the director of public security allegedly tortured and mistreated an individual known only as Raad. On March 22, Raad reportedly filed a civil

case in the amount of 7,000 dinars (\$10,000) for psychological, physical, and moral damages resulting from torture, beatings, and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment at Sahab prison facility. Additionally he claimed the defendants forced him to remove his clothes, leaving him naked, and used an electric baton on him. Also in 2008 an individual known only as Wasfi, together with the directors of North Marka Security Center and the director of public security, allegedly beat and insulted an individual known only as Dawood. On March 10, Dawood filed a civil case for psychological, physical and moral damages resulting from torture and cruel and degrading treatment. Both cases were pending at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Significant problems remained in prisons, including poor legal services, understaffing, inadequate food and health care, poor sanitation standards, poor ventilation, extreme temperatures, inadequate access to potable water, ineffective prerelease and postrelease programs, and insufficient basic and emergency medical care. Some detainees reported abuse and mistreatment by guards during the year. Hunger strikes remained common, but prison riots and allegations of mistreatment reportedly decreased. Prisoners filed complaints of poor prison conditions with the PSD and the NCHR. The construction of four prisons during the year alleviated overcrowding to some extent.

On July 19, a Web site published a report detailing stories of government authorities physically and verbally abusing children in government-run juvenile detention centers. In response to the allegations, the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) investigated these claims and concluded that there was no evidence to support the children's claims; however, some local children's rights activists noted that abuse occurred in some government-run juvenile detention centers. In 2009 former and current residents and parents of children in several ministry-operated juvenile rehabilitation centers and orphanages reported verbal and physical abuse of children by supervisors. For example, parents of children in an Irbid juvenile center and former residents of an orphanage in Madaba reported physical abuse of children. At year's end, the government investigation remained pending.

In November 2009 the Council of Ministers passed amendments placing stiffer disciplinary measures, including salary deductions and termination, on civil servants who used corporal punishment on children, including those in schools and juvenile centers. However, authorities rarely used this punishment in practice.

The PSD reported that some prisoners went on hunger strikes during the year to protest mistreatment, poor prison conditions, and a prisoner classification system under which some prisoners had been moved to different wards or prisons based on the type of crime, number of offenses, and other factors. The NCHR reported 205 prison strikes from January 1 to August 1.

In February 2009 the Institute of Forensic Medicine, a part of the Ministry of Health, issued a report stating that prison clinic conditions were unsuitable and deteriorating and that inmates did not have access to basic health services. The report also criticized the lack of psychiatric treatment and follow-up care.

According to government statistics, there were approximately 18,449 inmates in 14 correctional and rehabilitation center (CRC) facilities. The government generally held men, women, and juveniles in separate prisons and detention facilities; however, pretrial detainees were often held in the same detention facilities as convicted prisoners. The General Intelligence Directorate (GID) held some persons detained on national security charges in separate detention facilities. According to the NCHR, GID detainees are generally held in solitary confinement and are not allowed to meet unsupervised with visitors, including their lawyers. Islamist prisoners in Jweidah were held in a separate wing and kept in small-group isolation. International and domestic NGOs also reported that in some instances Islamist prisoners faced harsher prison conditions than other inmates.

Prisoners and detainees had restricted access to visitors and were permitted religious observance. Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhumane conditions. Authorities did not investigate credible allegations of inhumane conditions. The government investigated and monitored prison and detention center conditions.

The government permitted local and international human rights observers to visit prisons and conduct private interviews. During the year the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited prisoners and detainees in all prisons, including those controlled by the GID and the military intelligence directorate, according to standard ICRC modalities. The Ombudsman's Bureau, a national institution that receives complaints about federal agencies, is unable to serve on behalf of prisoners to consider matters such as alternatives to incarceration, although it is permitted to look into cases of inhumane treatment. The NCHR conducted routine and unannounced prison inspections during the year, including visits to GID facilities.

The government continued its large-scale, long-term prison reform to transfer CRC management from the PSD to the Ministry of Justice. At year's end the government had finished constructing four new CRCs with cells that meet international standards, raising the number of prisons from 14 to 18.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. According to local and international human rights groups, the government did not always observe these prohibitions in practice. In particular, the governors of the country's 12 governorates continued to use the Crime Prevention Law to administratively detain individuals without due process.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The PSD controls general police functions. The PSD, GID, gendarmerie, Civil Defense Directorate, and military share responsibility for maintaining internal security. Members of the gendarmerie assist police in emergencies, provide diplomatic security, and respond to riots, protests, and demonstrations. The Civil Defense Directorate is responsible for public safety during natural disasters and civil disturbances. The PSD and gendarmerie report to the minister of interior with direct access to the king when necessary, and the GID in practice reports directly to the king.

Civilian authorities maintained control over security forces. According to local and international NGOs, the government did not thoroughly investigate and punish all credible reports of corruption or abuse by security forces. The government used mechanisms to investigate abuse and corruption, but there were wide-scale allegations of impunity. Citizens may file complaints of police abuse or corruption with the PSD's human rights office or with one of 50 police prosecutors stationed throughout the country. Complaints of abuse and corruption by the gendarmerie may be filed directly with the gendarmerie. A GID liaison officer receives complaints against the GID and refers them to GID personnel for investigation. Complaints against the PSD, gendarmerie, and GID may also be filed with the NCHR or several other NGOs, such as the Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR). The PSD's preventive security office is tasked with investigating allegations of police corruption. The PSD and gendarmerie try their personnel internally with their own courts, judges, and prosecutors, in a manner not transparent to the public.

Allegations of torture and mistreatment continued, according to numerous credible observers. During the year citizens filed 46 complaints, including allegations of mistreatment against PSD personnel. NGOs noted that victims may be reluctant to file formal complaints due to impunity within the police and security apparatus.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

The law allows suspects to be detained for up to 24 hours without a warrant in all cases. The criminal code requires that police notify authorities within 24 hours of an arrest and that authorities file formal charges within 15 days of an arrest. Human rights observers claimed that police continued to make arrests before obtaining warrants and prosecutors did not file charges or seek extensions in a timely manner. The period to file formal charges can be extended for as long as six months for a felony and two months for a misdemeanor. Local NGOs stated that prosecutors routinely requested extensions and judges granted them. This practice generally lengthened pretrial detention for protracted periods. As of year's end, approximately 800 persons were reportedly being held in prison without formal charge. Bail is allowed under the penal code and used in some cases. Some detainees reported not being allowed timely access to a lawyer, but authorities generally permitted family member visits. Authorities appointed lawyers to represent indigent defendants charged with felonies, although legal aid services remained minimal. There were allegations of long periods of incommunicado detention in GID facilities, and the UN Committee against Torture's May 14 report expressed serious concern about the government's failure in practice to afford all detainees, including detainees held in GID and PSD facilities, with "all fundamental legal safeguards from the very outset of their detention," including the right to notify a relative and to be informed of their rights and charges against them at the time of detention.

The State Security Court gives judicial police, charged with conducting criminal investigations, authority to arrest and keep persons in custody for 10 days. This authority includes arrests for alleged misdemeanors. In cases purportedly involving state security, the security forces arrested and detained citizens without warrants or judicial review, held defendants in lengthy pretrial detention without informing them of the charges against them, and did not allow defendants to meet with their lawyers or permitted meetings only shortly before trial. Defendants before the State Security Court usually met with their attorneys at the start of a trial or only one or two days before. A case may be postponed for more than 48 hours only under exceptional circumstances determined by the court. In practice, cases routinely involved postponements of more than 10 days between sessions with proceedings lasting for several months. In most cases the accused remained in detention without bail during the proceedings. Several inmates were in detention without charge at year's end.

Under the Crime Prevention Law, provincial governors may detain individuals suspected of planning to commit a crime or those who allegedly shelter thieves, habitually steal, or constitute a danger to the public, and in practice they used this provision widely. Those accused are subject to imprisonment or house arrest as "administrative detention" without formal charges. A detention order may be for as long as one year, but governors can impose new orders to prolong detentions. During the year governors administratively detained 12,345 individuals. Several international and national NGOs noted that governors routinely abused the law, imprisoning individuals when there was not enough evidence to convict them and prolonging detentions of prisoners whose sentences had expired. The law was also widely used to incarcerate women at risk of being honor crime victims. The NCHR and other human rights organizations called for the abolishment of the Crime Prevention Law.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary's independence in practice was compromised by allegations of nepotism and the influence of special interests. Unlike the previous year, there were no reports of interference by senior judges in junior judges' cases. The Judicial Council, a committee led by the president of the Court of Cassation, is composed of other high-ranking judges from various courts and the Ministry of Justice. The council approves judicial appointments after initial nominations by the ministry, and it assigns and evaluates judges. The executive branch, through the ministry, controls most judicial functions, giving the government the ability to influence judicial decisions. The Judicial Council continued to lack the internal capacity to effectively manage judicial administrative and financial matters and therefore lacked independence. Unlike the previous year, there were no allegations that the former council's head reassigned judges or forced them to retire early for personal instead of policy reasons.

Trial Procedures

The law presumes that defendants are innocent. All civilian court trials, including state security court trials, are open to the public unless the court determines otherwise. Juries are not used. Defendants are entitled to legal counsel, provided at public expense for the indigent in cases involving the death penalty or potential life imprisonment. In many cases defendants have no legal representation. In July 2009 the government passed an amendment that made court rulings legally binding without the presence of the defendant if an attorney for the defendant is present. Defendants could present witnesses on their behalf and question witnesses presented against them. Defense attorneys were generally granted access to government-held evidence relevant to their clients' cases. Defendants can appeal verdicts; appeals are automatic for cases involving the death penalty. In the State Security Court, defendants convicted of felonies have the right to appeal their sentences to the Court of Cassation, which is authorized to review issues of both fact and law. All citizens were accorded these rights. Civil, criminal, and commercial courts accord equal weight to the testimony of men and women; however, in Sharia courts, which have jurisdiction over Muslim marriage, divorce, and inheritance cases, the testimony of two women was equal to that of a man in most circumstances.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Citizens and NGOs alleged that the government continued to detain individuals, including political opposition members, for political reasons during the year, and that governors continued to use administrative detentions for what appeared to be political reasons. In a few cases, the media and human rights organizations reported that authorities kept detainees in solitary confinement and denied them access to lawyers.

A 2008 HRW report stated that political prisoners, including Islamists convicted of crimes against national security, reportedly received greater abuse than other prisoners.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent judiciary in civil matters. Individuals may bring lawsuits related to human rights violations and did so during the year. The High Court of Justice hears administrative complaints. The courts are open to all residents. Courts also have jurisdiction over any person in civil matters, including lawsuits in which the government is a plaintiff or a defendant.

During the year at least two individuals who alleged being tortured in 2008 filed civil cases for damages (see section 1.c.).

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

The law prohibits arbitrary interference in private matters, but the government did not respect this prohibition in practice. Citizens widely believed that security officers monitored telephone conversations and Internet communication, read private correspondence, and engaged in surveillance without court orders.

The law requires that security forces obtain a warrant from the prosecutor general or a judge before conducting searches; however, during the year foreign migrant workers with valid work and residency permits reported that police forcibly entered their homes without warrants as part of a joint police and labor inspection campaign to verify the legal status of workers.

A few religious activists reported that the GID withheld their certificates of good behavior required for job applications or to open a business, or threatened not to allow their children to enter or graduate from university. The GID usually withholds a certificate of good behavior if there is a criminal record; however, there is no public information outlining the GID's policies for issuing the certificates.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the government did not respect these rights in practice. A 2009 Freedom House report on media freedom called the country "not free." On May 8, the Amman-based National Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) issued its 2009 annual report, which concluded that media freedoms deteriorated in 2009. Journalists reported that the threat of detention and imprisonment under the penal code for a variety of offenses, and stringent fines of as much as 20,000 dinars (\$28,000) under the press and publications law for defamation led to self-censorship. There were several incidents during the year in which the government prohibited journalists from reporting on high-profile court cases. The government's use of "soft containment" of journalists, such as financial support, scholarships for relatives, and special invitations, led to significant control of media content. In March the government amended the Press and Publication Law to remove administrative detention as a punishment for journalists and created a court to deal specifically with matters of freedom of expression and speech. The amended law prohibits journalists from being referred to State Security Courts for freedom of expression or speech issues, and none were referred there during the year.

The law provides punishment up to three years' imprisonment for insulting the king, slandering the government or foreign leaders, offending religious beliefs, or stirring sectarian strife and sedition. In practice citizens were generally able to criticize the government, although they reportedly exercised caution in regard to the king, the royal family, the GID, and other sensitive topics such as religion.

On February 13, in response to a lawsuit brought by private citizens, state security forces detained journalist Muwaffaq Mahadin and environmentalist Sufian al-Tal for two weeks for having given separate public interviews criticizing the army's security role in Afghanistan. State security charged them with "harming relations with a foreign country," "stirring sectarianism," "harming the stature of the state and the army," instigation, and slander. The case was sent to the State Security Court, which did not have jurisdiction, then to the prosecutor general. At year's end, the court case was pending.

In late February the GID arrested university student Imad al-Ash for allegedly sending an instant message that "insulted the monarchy" and participating in online forums expressing "controversial religious opinions." Ash denied the charges. On July 13, the security court sentenced him to two years in prison. Ash appealed the ruling, and the court upheld his two-year prison sentence on October 2.

On July 25, PSD officers arrested university student Hatim al-Shuili on charges of "causing national strife" and "insulting the monarchy" over a poem he denied writing that reportedly criticized the king. Shuili was detained until September 8, when the king pardoned him along with 17 others accused of insulting the monarchy.

As of year's end, the PSD had not yet released any findings in its alleged investigation of the October 2009 beating of opposition figure Layth Shbeilat in an Amman bakery. Shbeilat and many local observers connected the assault to a lecture he presented at the Socialist Thought Forum two days earlier in which he called for increased efforts to fight government corruption and the need to question and hold officials accountable.

Independent print media existed, including several major daily newspapers; however, such publications must obtain licenses from the state to operate. The independent print and broadcast media largely operated without restriction, but media observers reported governmental pressure to avoid sensitive topics such as the royal family, the GID, and religion. Media organizations and journalists reported that the government influenced the appointment of editors in chief at some major publications, whether by virtue of officials' positions on the boards of directors of government-affiliated publications or through undisclosed contacts. The government has a majority share on the board of

directors for one major daily newspaper and a minority share in another. The governmental Audiovisual Commission, whose mandate is to license private broadcast agencies, has authority to recommend rejection of a broadcast license without a stated reason. Media observers note that when covering controversial subjects, government-owned Jordan Television, Jordan News Agency, and Radio Jordan reported only the government's position.

Apart from the arrest of Muwaffaq Mahadin, there were no reports of physical violence or harassment of journalists during the year. As of year's end, the government had not released any findings of its alleged investigation into the January 2009 gendarmerie attack on an Al Jazeera television crew. There were no updates in the June 2009 case of poet and reporter Islam Samhan, sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 10,000 dinars (\$14,200) on charges of slandering Islam and insulting "religious sentiment" for his use of Qur'an verses and prophets in his poetry, or the 2008 arrest of *El-Ekhbariya* editor in chief Fayez Al-Ajrashi on charges of "inflaming sectarian strife" and "sowing national discord." Both men remained free on bail at year's end.

The government directly and indirectly censored the media. Authorities monitored and censored printing presses and edited articles deemed offensive before they could be printed. Journalists claimed the government used informants in newsrooms and that GID officials monitored reporting. Editors reportedly received telephone calls from security officials instructing them how to cover events or to refrain from covering certain topics or events. Government officials also reportedly bribed journalists to influence their reporting. According to a 2009 Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists survey, 95 percent of journalists polled exercised self-censorship. The survey also reported that 70 percent of journalists thought the government used "soft containment" to control the media at a medium to high degree. Ninety-four percent said they avoid writing about or broadcasting military matters, and 83 percent said they avoid discussing religious topics.

On March 10, a State Security Court attorney general prohibited the press from reporting or commenting on the case of the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company expansion project without his personal approval, purportedly to allow the judicial authorities to work "calmly" on the case.

The government continued to enforce bans on the publication of selected books for religious, moral, and political reasons. Some foreign films were edited prior to release.

Internet Freedom

There were government restrictions on access to the Internet. Citizens and activists widely believed that the government monitored electronic correspondence and Internet chat sites; therefore, they practiced self-censorship over such media. Individuals and groups were unable to express their views via the Internet, including by e-mail. According to the 2010 International Research and Exchange Board Jordan Media Strengthening Program, Internet usage was 30 percent. Internet speech is regulated by the Press and Publication Law.

On August 3, the government issued the Information Systems Crime Law, a "temporary" law (see section 3) that would require law enforcement officials to have probable cause and a warrant before entering and searching any place suspected of being used to commit a cybercrime or to seize property and make arrests based on suspicion of illegal cybercrime activity.

On August 5, authorities blocked 50 domestic news Web sites in government institutions and offices purportedly to "end confusion about topics related to the government."

During the year the Ministry of Interior continued to monitor Internet cafes for "security reasons" via video cameras. The ministry also required cafe owners to register users' personal data, submit records of visited Web sites, and prevent access to questionable Web sites, as defined by the ministry.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government placed some limits on academic freedom. Some members of the academic community claimed there was an ongoing intelligence presence in academic institutions, including monitoring of academic conferences and lectures.

On April 29, the administration of Hashemite University introduced an amendment requiring that candidates running for student elections must have participated in religious and national occasions and cultural, scientific, social, artistic, and voluntary activities at the university. Local organizations and the media criticized the amendment, calling it a government attempt to control student elections by ensuring that the candidate is familiar to the administration.

In September 2009 the National Campaign for Defending Students' Rights criticized the interference of security services in student activities, especially in university student council elections. Security personnel reportedly told students to vote for specific candidates. The group also noted that universities had punished or expelled students for distributing literature expressing solidarity with Palestinians.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but the government restricted this right. The Public Gatherings Law stipulates that organizations do not need approval to hold routine internal meetings and activities but that routine public meetings – including workshops and training sessions – require approval. Governors are not required to provide a legal reason for denial of permission to hold an event, and there is no standard in the law for what constitutes an impermissible public gathering. If an organization fails to apply for permission for an event, its members face imprisonment from one to six months and a fine of as much as 3,000 dinars (\$4,300). If a governor does not issue a response within 48 hours, applicants are entitled to hold the event without legal liability.

Throughout the year several civil society organizations and political parties accused the government of being stringent in issuing permits for public gatherings based on political factors rather than security concerns. Governors sometimes denied requests for peaceful demonstrations and civil society gatherings. In some cases the government granted approval at the last moment, making it difficult for organizers to plan events.

On May 10, Muhammad al-Sunaid and Ahmad al-Luwansa, leaders of the Committee of Day Laborers, gathered with 30 other day laborers to hold a peaceful protest outside an office where the minister of agriculture was scheduled to speak. After the protest they attended the minister's speech, where they questioned the firing of day laborers working at the ministry and called for the minister's removal. The governor ordered the PSD to arrest Sunaid and al-Luwansa and charged them with holding an unlawful gathering. Luwansa was detained at the Security Directorate in Madaba for one day and was released without charges. Sunaid was detained for 10 days and was charged with "unlawful gathering," which carries a sentence of up to one year. On July 27, the Security Court sentenced Sunaid to three months in prison, and he was appealing the sentence at year's end.

In late October the Islamic Action Front requested permission to hold a protest. On November 3, the government denied their request; however, on November 6, the group staged a sit-in to protest the rejection of their permit request. There was no response from the government.

On November 6, the governor of Amman rejected a sit-in request by the Popular Unity Party's "boycotters for change" campaign.

Government investigation committees cleared the gendarmerie of excessive use of force

in the January 2009 case when the gendarmerie allegedly used batons, tear gas, and water cannons to disperse demonstrators throwing rocks and protesting outside the Israeli embassy. The gendarmerie were also cleared in the July 2009 incident in which they were accused of using batons to disperse a sit-in at the Ministry of Agriculture protesting importation of Israeli fruit and vegetables.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right of association, but the government limited this freedom in practice. The law gives the MOSD the right to reject applications to register an organization or to receive foreign funding for any reason, and it prohibits the use of associations for the benefit of any political organization. The law also gives the ministry significant control over the internal management of associations, including the ability to dissolve associations, appoint new boards of directors, send government representatives to any board meeting, prevent associations from merging their operations, and appoint an auditor to examine an association's finances for any reason. The law requires associations to inform the ministry of board meetings, submit all board decisions for approval, disclose members' names, and obtain the Ministry of Interior's security clearances for board members. The law includes severe penalties, including fines up to 10,000 dinars (\$14,200).

The MOSD advisory board overseeing NGOs is chaired by the minister of social development and includes representatives from seven other government bodies and four civil society representatives. As of year's end, the prime minister had not appointed the civil society representatives. Local and international NGOs claimed that the law severely restricted the work of independent organizations. During the year the government did not deny any organizations permission to register or to receive foreign funding; however, a local NGO reported that prolonged bureaucratic procedures to secure government approval of foreign funding led to the organization losing the proposed funding.

c. Freedom of Religion

For a complete description of religious freedom, please see the Department of State's [*2010 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 UN reported that the government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Some mothers claimed that they were prevented from departing the country with their children because authorities enforced requests from fathers to prevent their children from leaving. However, authorities did not stop fathers from exiting the country with their children when the mother objected. There were reports some women were required to obtain the permission of either their husband or father in order to acquire or renew a passport, despite the 2003 Passport Law, which stipulates that women do not need a custodian to renew passports. The GID sometimes withheld passports from citizens for alleged security reasons. Employers or authorities sometimes held the passports of foreign workers.

Some persons of Palestinian origin living in the country were citizens and received passports; however, the government reported that there were approximately 165,000 Palestinian refugees, mostly of Gazan origin, who did not qualify for citizenship. Approximately half of these persons received two-year travel documents that do not

connote citizenship and do not contain a national number. West Bank residents without other travel documentation were eligible to receive five-year travel documents that do not connote citizenship. Local and international human rights organizations 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 or in which national identification numbers were revoked, thereby revoking citizenship.

A HRW report issued in February claimed that more than 2,700 Jordanians of Palestinian origin had their citizenship revoked between 2004 and 2007. The government maintained this policy was in line with its efforts to implement its disengagement from its former claims to the West Bank. For example, government officials stated that a national number may be revoked if an individual obtains Palestinian travel documents, works for any part of the Palestinian Authority, or does not renew a family reunification permit. Activists complained that the disengagement regulations did not outline such procedures, that the process was not transparent, and that the Ministry of Interior's appeal process was virtually nonexistent. Claimants reported that appeals were not resolved to their satisfaction. Human rights activists also claimed the government refused to renew the passports of former residents of Palestinian origin at overseas embassies.

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

Protection of Refugees

The country is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Its laws do not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a formal system of providing protection to refugees and does not have any national legislation pertaining to the status and treatment of refugees. 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 nonrefoulement, and allows recognized refugees a maximum stay of six months, during which period the UNHCR must find a durable solution. In practice the government provided protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. However, according to observers, the government did not accept refugees for resettlement from third countries or facilitate local integration, particularly of refugees in protracted situations.

The UNRWA and the government continued to provide services, such as health care, education, the right to work, and social services, to Palestinian refugees during the year. At year's end, approximately two million Palestinian refugees were registered with the UNRWA in the country.

The government granted nationality to approximately 700,000 persons displaced from former territories during the 1967 war with Israel. An additional 120,000 persons displaced during the 1967 war held temporary residency permits, and an additional 200,000 Palestinian refugees were also estimated to be living in the country without any direct assistance.

The government generally recognized the UNHCR's requests to grant temporary protection for all Iraqi asylum seekers, including new arrivals, rejected asylum or resettlement cases, and recognized refugees whose cases had been suspended by resettlement countries. The government estimated there were 450,000 to 500,000 Iraqi refugees in the country; NGO estimates varied from 100,000 to 200,000. As of year's end, a total of 30,800 Iraqi refugees in the country were registered with the UNHCR. Most registered refugees received legal and material assistance from the UNHCR and other international and nongovernmental humanitarian organizations. The government provided education and health care to Iraqis and tolerated the prolonged stay of many

Iraqis beyond the expiration of the visit permits under which they entered the country. During the year the government waived any overstay fines and exit fees for those returning to Iraq. Few Iraqi refugees received work permits due to bureaucratic hurdles and significant overstay fines they would have to pay when applying for such permits.

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 monarch or government. The king appoints and dismisses the prime minister, cabinet, and the House of Notables, dissolves parliament, and directs major public policy initiatives. Citizens may participate in the political system through their elected representatives in the Chamber of Deputies. The cabinet, based on the prime minister's recommendation, appoints the mayors of Amman, Wadi Musa (Petra), and Aqaba, a special economic zone. The mayors of the other 93 municipalities are elected.

The king proposes and dismisses extraordinary sessions of parliament and may postpone regular sessions for as long as 60 days. In November 2009 the king dissolved parliament and called for parliamentary elections in the final quarter of 2010. Although the constitution states that elections must be held within four months of parliament's dismissal or the previous parliament is reinstated, the king exercised his constitutional authority to extend this period. 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 "temporary" laws do not expire. Although they are technically subject to action by parliament when it returns to session, in practice they typically remain in force in the absence of legislative action.

Elections and Political Participation

On November 9, the country held parliamentary elections, which international observers stated in their preliminary reports were "credible" and "a clear improvement over the nation's 2007 polls," while recommending future reforms such as establishing an independent electoral management body, preprinting ballots to mitigate concerns over voting procedures for the illiterate, strengthening representation for all citizens, and introducing regulations to allow for systematic appeals of the election results.

The country was without an elected parliament for the majority of the year, during which time the cabinet issued a number of temporary laws. On May 19, the cabinet issued a "temporary" elections law that increased the women's quota in the parliament to 12, added four parliamentary seats to underrepresented urban districts, and divided the existing electoral districts into nongeographic subdistricts based on the number of seats within each district. The new subdistricting system served to change the rules for candidate registration by requiring candidates to run for a specific subdistrict, while still allowing voters to cast their single ballots for any candidate within the electoral district as a whole. Civil society groups and media commentators criticized the law for not going far enough in its reforms to address concerns about fairness and transparency, especially for persons of Palestinian origin. Many analysts commented that government did not adequately explain to citizens the new law's system of nongeographic subdistricts.

The government licensed political parties and other associations but prohibited membership in unlicensed political parties. The High Court of Justice may dissolve a party if it concludes that the party violated the constitution or the law. The law stipulates that a political party must have a minimum of 500 founding members from five governorates. Opposition parties complained that the law was unconstitutional and obstructed political dynamism. Political parties, NGOs, and independent candidates found the registration process onerous and costly and criticized the GID's annual screening process of founding party members. Political parties also complained that the mandated public funding of 50,000 dinars (\$71,100) was insufficient to operate effective campaigns. Political analysts and opposition parties called on the government to take active measures to promote party development, including amendments to the electoral system that would place greater emphasis on parties.

Women have the right to vote. On November 9, 13 women were elected to parliament, exceeding the quota by one. There was one female governor, and three women served in the appointed 30-member cabinet. The law provides a 20 percent quota for women in municipal council seats and a 10 percent quota for women in the lower house of parliament.

Citizens of Palestinian origin were underrepresented at all levels of government and the military. Many observers believed the electoral system was intended to reduce the representation of areas heavily populated by citizens of Palestinian origin in favor of tribal interests. The law allows voters to choose one candidate in multiple-seat districts, which in the largely tribal society meant citizens tended to cast their vote for members of their own tribe. The law reserves nine seats in the lower house of parliament for Christians and three seats for the Circassian and Chechen ethnic minorities together, constituting an overrepresentation for these minorities. No seats were reserved for the relatively small Druze population, but they were permitted to hold office under their government classification as Muslims. The law also stipulates that Muslims must hold all seats not reserved for specified minority religions. Christians served as cabinet ministers and ambassadors. The government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians (4 percent); however, Muslims held all senior command positions.

Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, it remained a problem. Domestic and international NGOs noted the government did not implement the law effectively and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. During the year the government investigated allegations of corruption; however, there were few convictions. Many observers noted that investigations into official corruption typically focused on small-scale corruption. The use of family, business, and other personal connections to advance personal business interests was widespread. There were allegations of lack of transparency in government procurement, government appointments, and dispute settlement.

During the year the Anticorruption Commission investigated 890 cases of corruption. The cases dealt with fraud, misuse of public office, forgery, bribery, and embezzlement, as well as cases related to food and drug laws. Despite increased investigations, some local observers questioned the commission's effectiveness due to the limited amount of investigations involving senior officials or large government projects despite allegations against them.

On July 7, the State Security Court sentenced three former officials – a former finance minister, a former Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (JPRC) chairperson, and a former economic advisor to the prime minister – and a businessman to three years in prison after convicting them of bribery in connection with the JPRC expansion project. The defendants were acquitted on the charges of abuse of public office. The defendants appealed the conviction and were free on bail at year's end.

In a 2009 high-profile case, the government formed an ad hoc committee to investigate the embezzlement of 1.2 million dinars (\$1.7 million) from the Ministry of Agriculture. On August 31, the court found two men guilty of embezzlement and sentenced them to 22 years in prison.

During the year citizens filed more than 2,776 complaints against public agencies with the governmental Ombudsman Bureau. The bureau rejected 1,537 of the complaints because they did not fall under its mandate, but it amicably resolved 80 percent of the accepted cases and issued recommendations in 19 percent of the accepted cases. The bureau is charged with investigating complaints regarding any decision or action by public offices or their employees.

The law requires certain government officials to declare their assets privately; in the event of a complaint, the chief justice may review the disclosures. Under the law failure

to disclose assets could result in prison sentences from one week to three years or fines from five to 200 dinars (\$7 to \$280). As of year's end, no officials had been punished for failing to submit a disclosure.

The law provides for public access to government information that is a matter of legal record but allows requests to be denied for reasons of "national security, public health, and personal freedoms." Journalists criticized the law, claiming it permits the government to deny requests without justification. A 2008 study by the Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center showed that 58 percent of journalists were unaware of the law and nearly 85 percent did not know they had the right to request information. Fifty percent of journalists who had attempted to obtain government information characterized the government's response as inadequate, and 13.8 percent said their requests triggered verbal abuse. In a 2008 Higher Media Council survey, nearly half of the journalists surveyed reported difficulty accessing information or said their requests had been denied outright.

Section 5 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Domestic and international human rights groups operated in the country with some restrictions. The law gives the government the ability to control NGOs' internal affairs, including acceptance of foreign funding. NGOs were generally able to investigate and report publicly on human rights abuses throughout the year, although government officials were not always cooperative. Senior government officials accused local human rights organizations of having "Western" or foreign agendas and focusing only on the negative aspects of an issue. Major local human rights organizations included the NCHR and several independent organizations, such as the MIZAN Law Group for Human Rights, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, the AOHR, the CDFJ, and the Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies. Government entities met with members of these organizations and participated in many projects the organizations undertook.

The government generally cooperated with international NGOs, the UN, and other international governmental organizations. On May 14, as part of its periodic review process, the UN Committee against Torture expressed "deep concern" at continuing allegations of torture and mistreatment of detainees in the country (see section 1.c.).

The government-funded NCHR's reporting was largely regarded as objective and critical, although some local human rights groups and activists complained that the NCHR did not speak out sufficiently during the year on some controversial issues, such as freedom of expression, students' rights, citizenship, and religious freedom. The prime minister appoints the NCHR board chair and commissioner general. In April the NCHR issued its sixth annual report on the state of human rights in the country, which highlighted a range of continuing human rights problems in 2009, including excessive use of administrative detention, new restrictions on the right to establish civil society and professional associations, limitations on protests and demonstrations, restrictions on the right to access information, and physical attacks by students against their professors and vice versa.

Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution states that all citizens are equal under the law and prohibits discrimination based on race, language, and religion; however, discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, and social status is not specifically prohibited. The penal code does not address discrimination, thereby severely limiting judicial remedies.

Women

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

The law stipulates a sentence of at least 10 years' imprisonment with hard labor for rape of a girl or woman age 15 years or older. Spousal rape is not illegal. During the year the PSD Family Protection Department (FPD) treated and investigated 395 cases of sexual assault, 131 cases of rape against women, and 223 rape cases against children. There was no information available regarding prosecutions or convictions for rape during the year.

In a survey of women in rural southern areas that the Higher Population Council and the Ministry of Health released in January 2009, 30 percent of women 15 to 49 years old reported psychological abuse and 20 percent reported physical abuse. Spousal abuse is technically grounds for divorce, but husbands can claim religious authority to strike their wives. A woman may file a complaint against her spouse for physical abuse with the FPD, certain NGOs, or directly with judicial authorities. During the year the FPD forwarded 2,021 complaints of domestic violence for prosecution. Violators of protection orders may face as long as six months in prison. Observers noted that judges generally supported a woman's claim of domestic abuse in court; however, due to societal and familial pressure, few women sought legal remedies. A 2007 survey by an international organization showed that only 22 percent of domestic violence victims sought any form of assistance. In 2008 the Jordan Center for Social Research conducted a survey indicating that women often did not admit they were subjected to violence and did not seek help because they were afraid of breaking up or damaging the reputation of their families. The results also showed some degree of acceptance of abuse, particularly among less-educated women. Of the respondents who reported a case of violence, 83 percent identified their husband, father, or brother as the perpetrator. There were few services available to victims of domestic violence, and most women were not aware of them.

The government-run shelter Dar al-Wafaq assisted approximately 730 women and 160 children who were victims of domestic violence. It provided reconciliation services to victims and their families and worked with NGOs to provide services, such as legal and medical assistance. However, observers noted a lack of a comprehensive approach for victims and the absence of psychosocial counseling. The FPD continued to operate a domestic violence hotline during the year and received inquiries and complaints via the Internet and e-mail. The Jordanian Women's Union, a domestic NGO, maintained a hotline for victims of domestic violence and provided shelter to abuse victims. The Jordan River Foundation operated a child and family center in East Amman that provided shelter and assistance to domestic violence victims. During the year the quasi-governmental Jordanian National Commission for Women received 583 gender-related complaints ranging from domestic violence to discrimination.

Authorities prosecuted 16 officially reported instances of homicides related to "honor" crimes that occurred over the past three years. Activists reported that many such crimes went unreported. An Information and Research Center study released in October 2009 on the causes of "honor" crimes in the country showed a high correlation between poverty and education with "honor" crimes. The study found that 73 percent of victims since 2000 were classified as poor, a group that constituted only 30 percent of the country's population. The brother of the victim was the perpetrator in 76 percent of the cases and the father in 13 percent.

In July 2009 the government established a specialized section within the criminal courts to hear all cases of "honor" crimes. During the year the court sentenced 15 perpetrators to 10 years in prison and one perpetrator to five years in prison. In most cases during the year, the family dropped the criminal charges, and the court issued a sentence of 10 years' imprisonment. Judges have the discretionary right, but not an obligation, to reduce sentences by as much as half if the victim's family does not press charges, even if the perpetrator and victim are from the same family.

Prior to the creation of the specialized unit within the criminal court, some lower courts handed down 15-year sentences for second-degree murder, but in every case the court immediately cut the sentence in half. In previous years the courts usually found perpetrators of honor killings guilty of a "crime of passion," which merited a maximum sentence of three years. Although defendants were almost always found guilty, they

often received token sentences of no more than six months. The maximum sentence for first-degree murder is death.

On June 1 in East Amman, a man stabbed his sister 30 times on a busy street with the assistance of his 19-year-old cousin. The brother suspected that his sister was pregnant. The victim was rushed to the hospital where she was declared dead on arrival. The prosecutor general charged the brother and cousin with premeditated murder, and at year's end the case was pending.

On July 23 in Deir Alla, a man shot and killed his 16-year-old niece with a machine gun at her wedding, confessing he did it to "cleanse his family's honor" over suspicions the girl had lost her virginity a month earlier. The father and husband pressed criminal charges against the perpetrator; the case was pending at year's end.

At year's end the March 2009 case of a man in Zarqa who beat to death his 19-year-old daughter with the assistance of two of her brothers remained pending at the criminal court.

On April 23, the criminal court convicted and sentenced a man to 15 years in prison for publicly stabbing his 24-year-old daughter 16 times on a main street in October 2009. The court reduced his sentence to 10 years because the family dropped the charges.

Through the administrative detention authority granted to governors under the Crime Prevention Act, authorities continued to place potential victims of honor crimes in involuntary protective custody in the Women's Correctional and Rehabilitation Center in Jweideh, a detention facility where some women had remained for more than four years. A woman detained in protective custody can be released only after her family signs a statement guaranteeing her safety and both the local governor and the woman agree to the release. During the year the government released a number of women who had been detained for more than 10 years. Unlike in previous years, there were no cases of women being killed after release from protective custody. A human rights organization estimated that approximately 12 women were in protective custody. One NGO continued to work for the release of these women through mediation with their families. The NGO also provided a temporary but unofficial shelter for such women as an alternative to protective custody.

According to the law, sexual harassment in the workplace is strictly prohibited. The law does not make a distinction between sexual assault and sexual harassment; both carry a minimum prison sentence of four years with hard labor. Women's groups stated that harassment was common, but many victims were hesitant to file a complaint and rarely did so because they often were blamed for inciting it, they feared losing their job, or they faced pressure to keep silent.

Couples have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children. Contraceptives were generally accessible to all men and women, both married and single, and provided free of charge in public clinics. Almost 99 percent of births in the country take place in hospitals with trained professionals. Comprehensive essential obstetric, prenatal, and postnatal care is provided throughout the country in the public and private sectors. According to data compiled by international organizations, in 2008 there were approximately 59 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. There was no discrimination against women in the diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

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 Sharia court testimony.

Under Sharia law 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; however, a Muslim spouse can designate some of his property to his non-Muslim spouse through a will. 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 temporary divorce law allows women to seek divorces in return for waiving financial rights or alimony. The law allows retention of financial rights under specific circumstances, such as spousal abuse. Special courts for each denomination adjudicate marriage and divorce for Christians.

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

Women's rights activists complained that the law granting women equal pay for equal work was not enforced. Many women said traditional social pressures discouraged them from pursuing professional careers, especially after marriage. The official unemployment rate for women was 20 percent, compared with 11.9 percent for the country as a whole. A Jordanian National Council for Family Affairs study released in April 2009 found that women were often denied basic labor rights, such as pay equality and the working hours and conditions outlined in the labor law. The study called for legislative changes and awareness campaigns to inform women of their rights.

The law states that a woman has the right to obtain or renew a passport without the written permission of her husband; however, some women reported that authorities required a male custodian's permission.

Married women do not have the legal right to transmit citizenship to their children. In practical terms this affects thousands of families whose father is of Palestinian origin. Female citizens married to noncitizen men may pass citizenship to their children only with the permission of the cabinet; however, the cabinet rarely took such action, the public was widely unaware of this mechanism, and permission was usually not granted in cases in which the father was of Palestinian origin. Women may not petition for citizenship for their noncitizen husbands, who must apply for citizenship after fulfilling a requirement of 15 years' continuous residency. Once a husband has obtained citizenship, he may apply to transmit citizenship to his children. However, in practice such an application may take years, and the government may deny the application, resulting in the children becoming stateless.

During the year a female citizen married to a Palestinian man from Gaza was not allowed to enroll her son in preschool because her son was not considered Jordanian. Furthermore, her husband was unable to work legally because the family could not afford to renew his residency permit on a yearly basis.

In 2009 a female citizen whose Egyptian husband died after falling at a construction site had to reapply annually for a residency permit for her three Egyptian-citizen children to continue to enable them to live legally in the country and have access to education and health services. The cost of applying for residency every year was a significant burden, and the government's approval was not guaranteed.

Children

Citizenship is derived only through the father. Children of female citizens and noncitizen husbands receive the nationality of the father and lose the right to attend public school or to seek other government services if they do not hold legal residency, which must be applied for every year and is not guaranteed. The government did not issue birth certificates to all children born inside the country during the year. The government deemed some children – including children of unmarried women, certain interfaith marriages, and converts from Islam to another religion – illegitimate and denied them proper registration, making it difficult or impossible for them to attend school, access health services, or receive other documentation. In one such case in 2009, a single

mother had to illegally bury her baby who died during childbirth because she was unable to obtain a birth or death certificate.

Education is compulsory from ages six through 16 years and free until age 18. However, no legislation exists to enforce the law or to punish guardians for violating it.

During the year authorities received and investigated 128 complaints of child abuse and 223 complaints of child rape. A February 2009 UN Children's Fund report stated that 71 percent of children were subjected to verbal abuse and 57 percent had experienced some form of physical abuse in school. Statistics on child abuse within households were not available. The law specifies punishment for abuses against children. For example, conviction for rape of a child younger than 15 years potentially carries the death penalty. However, local organizations working with abused children pointed to gaps in the legal system that regularly resulted in lenient sentencing, particularly for family members. For example, the penal code gives judges the ability to reduce a sentence when the victim's family does not press charges. In child abuse cases, judges routinely accorded leniency per the wishes of the family. The National Council for Family Affairs and other local organizations stated that legislation does not provide children sufficient protection from abuse, specifically citing the legal authorization for parents to discipline their children using force.

Some local children's rights activists noted that abuse occurs in some government-run juvenile detention centers (see section 1.c.). The defendants in a February 2009 shaken baby syndrome case and April 2009 torture and killing of a five-year-old boy remained in jail at year's end, pending the outcome of their court cases.

The government continued to fund a child protection center that provided temporary shelter and medical care for abused children between the ages of six and 12. During the year the shelter housed 158 abused children. Observers noted that the shelter lacked qualified staff, psychosocial counselors, and a comprehensive approach to deal with victims of abuse.

The minimum age for marriage is 18. With the consent of both a judge and a guardian, a child as young as 15, in most cases a girl, may be married. Judicial statistics indicated that in 2008-09 judges granted consent in 14,000 cases in which at least one person was between 15 and 18 years old. According to the May 2010 Jordan Population and Family Health Survey conducted in 2009, 6 percent of persons between ages 15 and 19 were married, the majority of those having been married between the ages of 17 and 19. Instances of forced marriage as an alternative to a potential honor killing were reported in rural areas during the year. Observers note that, if a woman marries her rapist, according to customary belief, her family members would not need to kill her to "preserve the family's honor."

The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information on international parental child abduction, please see the Department of State's annual report on compliance at http://travel.state.gov/abduction/resources/congressreport/congressreport_4308.html, as well as country-specific information at http://travel.state.gov/abduction/country/country_3781.html.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was present in the media, and editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces sometimes depicted negative images of Jews without government response. Aside from expatriates, there was no resident Jewish community in the country.

Trafficking in Persons

For information on trafficking in persons, please see the Department of State's annual [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

Persons with Disabilities

The law provides equal rights to persons with disabilities, who numbered around 200,000, according to government and NGO estimates. The Higher Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities works with government ministries, the private sector, and NGOs to formulate and implement strategies to assist persons with disabilities. In July 2009 the council issued national accreditation standards for rehabilitation centers for persons with disabilities. According to the council there were more than 15,000 students with disabilities attending 255 specialized centers and schools.

Citizens and NGOs universally reported that persons with disabilities faced problems accessing education, transportation, and other services, particularly in rural areas. The Special Buildings Code Department is tasked to enforce accessibility provisions and oversees retrofitting of existing buildings to comply with building codes. Many private and public office buildings continued to have limited or no access for persons with disabilities.

The law mandates that public and private sector establishments with between 25 and 50 workers employ at least one person with disabilities, and establishments with more than 50 workers must reserve 2 percent of their positions for persons with disabilities. However, these requirements were rarely enforced. Local organizations received complaints from persons with disabilities regarding employers who discriminated against them.

In 2009 the government provided monetary assistance to citizens with severe mental and multiple physical disabilities whose families earned less than 250 dinars (\$360) per month, and the higher council and local NGOs operated assistance programs. During the year the higher council discontinued financial assistance previously provided to cover a portion of education, training, or rehabilitation expenses for persons with disabilities due to budget cuts.

In September the government announced that it would allow persons with disabilities to vote with the aid of personal assistants rather than verbally, ensuring them greater ballot secrecy and electoral access. Takafo, an NGO aiming to increase voter participation for persons with disabilities, confirmed that the government made the necessary changes for the November 9 parliamentary elections to allow voters with disabilities greater accessibility and greater ballot secrecy.

National/Ethnic/Racial Minorities

There were three groups of Palestinians residing in the country, many of whom faced some discrimination. Those who migrated to the country and the Jordan-controlled West Bank after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war received full citizenship, as did those who migrated to the country after the 1967 war and hold no residency entitlement in the West Bank. Those still residing in the West Bank after 1967 were no longer eligible to claim full citizenship but were allowed to obtain temporary travel documents without national identification numbers, provided they did not also carry a Palestinian Authority travel document. These individuals had access to some government services but paid noncitizen rates at hospitals, educational institutions, and training centers. Refugees who fled Gaza after 1967 were not entitled to citizenship and were issued temporary travel documents without national numbers. These persons had no access to government services and were almost completely dependent on UNRWA services.

Several human rights organizations stated that the Ministry of Interior revoked national numbers of many longtime citizens of Palestinian origin during the year, despite codified passport issuance procedures (see section 2.d.).

Palestinians were underrepresented in parliament and senior positions in the government and the military, as well as in admission to public universities. They had 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.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Homosexuality is not illegal in Jordan; however, societal discrimination against LGBT persons existed. A number of citizens reported sporadic police mistreatment of suspected LGBT persons. There were reports of individuals who left the country due to fear their families would punish them for their sexual orientation.

In March 2009 the municipality of Amman reportedly denied an application to establish a gay rights organization.

In 2008 security forces arrested four gays in a park in West Amman for "lewd acts" following a targeted operation by the police. The individuals were placed in solitary confinement in Jweidah Prison until they promised that they would not carry out any such acts in the future.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

HIV/AIDS was a largely taboo subject. Lack of public awareness remained a problem; many citizens believed the disease exclusively affected foreigners and gays. There was a social stigma against HIV-positive individuals in general. The government continued efforts to inform the public about the disease and to eliminate negative attitudes against persons with HIV/AIDS, including a media strategy launched in September 2009. The government continued to test all foreigners annually for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, syphilis, malaria, and tuberculosis, and it deported foreigners who tested HIV positive.

Section 7 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides citizens working in the private sector, in some government-owned companies, and in certain professions in the public sector the right to form and join unions, but in practice this right was restricted. According to official figures, more than 10 percent of the workforce was organized into 17 unions which fall under a government-subsidized centralized federation, the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU). On August 15, the Ministry of Labor issued a temporary law that allows foreign workers to join unions; however, foreign workers are not permitted to create unions or hold key positions.

Government influence in union policies and activities reportedly continued. The government required unions to be members of the GFJTU, the sole trade union federation, and new unions must be directly linked to 17 professions and sectors in which unions already exist before being approved by the Ministry of Labor. The government subsidized and audited the GFJTU's salaries and activities, and it monitored union elections. Observers noted that the minister of labor may dissolve unions without judicial due process.

Teachers employed in public schools held several sit-ins during the year to demand their own professional association and better work conditions. The government did not agree to establish an association but approved the creation of a teachers' union, which would have broader legal restrictions and less autonomy than associations. As of year's end, the teachers had not agreed to this proposal and were in negotiations with the government. In June the government forced approximately 40 teachers, many of whom were actively calling on the government to create an independent association, into early retirement but reinstated them just before school started on September 14.

On July 15, the government issued an amendment to the labor law allowing companies with more than 25 employees to form workers' committees to look into labor conditions. The amendment also allowed up to 28 days of sick leave per year and the recalculation of annual leave to exclude weekends.

The law permits workers to strike only under certain conditions, including a minimum 14 days' notice to both the employer and the government. Strikes are prohibited if a labor dispute is under mediation or arbitration. In practice workers generally went on strike without notifying the government in advance, and the union or workers requested penalty waivers for the illegal strike as part of subsequent labor negotiations. During the year the gendarmerie broke up one strike deemed illegal due to lack of prior notice and briefly detained some strikers.

As of year's end, a joint PSD-gendarmerie investigation continued into the alleged July 2009 case of gendarmerie forces using excessive force to break up a sit-in by workers at the general cargo port in Aqaba. Workers held the two-day sit-in to protest job losses and a housing compensation agreement connected to the sale of the port. The government transferred the strike leader from the port of Aqaba to another position in Amman. Labor activists and NGOs noted no significant improvements at the Aqaba port; however, the workers received some of their demands, such as monetary support of between 3,000 and 5,000 dinars (\$4,200-\$7,000) for moving expenses.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Unions have the right to bargain collectively, and in practice the government respected this right, although observers stated that the legal procedures are cumbersome and discourage collective bargaining.

The constitution prohibits antiunion discrimination, and the Ministry of Labor received no complaints of antiunion discrimination during the year; however, some nonunionized workers alleged retaliation from the government based on strike activity and attempts to organize. This was particularly the case for foreign workers and contracted domestic employees, such as day laborers.

Nearly 76 percent of the workers in the qualified industrial zones (QIZs) were noncitizens and for most of the year were not permitted to participate in unions or to engage in collective bargaining. As of year's end, foreign workers were not permitted to form unions but could join existing unions.

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 of forced labor, particularly of domestic workers and garment sector factory workers. With the August 2009 passage of new domestic worker regulations, labor inspectors have the authority to inspect a labor complaint in a private home but only after receiving the employer's permission or with a court order. According to local NGOs, as of year's end, labor inspectors had not investigated reports of labor abuse in private homes. Domestic workers can file in-person complaints with the Ministry of Labor's Domestic Workers Directorate or the PSD; however, many domestic workers complained that there was no follow up to their cases either from the Ministry of Labor or the PSD. Domestic workers are covered by the labor laws, although not fully or effectively.

Women, including some minors with forged documents, from countries including Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines migrated to work as domestic servants, but some were subjected to conditions of forced labor, including withholding of passports, restrictions on movement, nonpayment of wages, threats, excessively long working hours, and physical or sexual abuse. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka prohibited the emigration of migrant workers for domestic work because of a high rate of employer abuse of domestic workers and administrative problems with overstay fines when employers filed to renew the employees' work permits. However, the prohibition did not

reduce the flow of migrant workers.

During the year an estimated 300 domestic workers from the Philippines, 275 Indonesian workers, and 400 Sri Lankan workers were sheltered at their respective embassies in Amman. Most had reportedly fled some form of forced labor, including unpaid wages and to a lesser extent sexual or physical abuse. By law employers are responsible for renewing residency permits but often fail to do this for their domestic helper employees. As a result most of the embassy-sheltered domestic workers were considered illegal residents, and many were stranded in the country because they were unable to pay the daily overstay fees of 1.5 dinars (\$3) to depart the country. Due to the large number of domestic workers sheltered at their respective embassies, the government created a working group in August to examine the cases individually. In some cases this resulted in overstay fines being waived.

Chinese, Bangladeshi, Indian, Sri Lankan, and Filipino men and women encountered conditions indicative of forced labor in some garment sector factories, including unlawful withholding of passports, late or nonpayment of wages, and excessive overtime. The government actively inspected factories and investigated allegations of forced labor in garment factories, and reports of withholding of passports declined during the year. The Ministry of Labor required violators to conform to the requirements of the labor law and other governing legislation and imposed fines when appropriate. The ministry also publicized the outcomes of its findings.

Also see the Department of State's annual [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The labor law forbids employment for children younger than 16 years of age, except as apprentices in nonhazardous positions. The law provides that employers who hire a child younger than 16 must pay a fine of as much as 500 dinars (\$710), which is doubled for repeat offenses. The law bans those between the ages of 16 and 18 from working in potentially hazardous jobs, limits working hours for such children to six hours per day, mandates one-hour breaks for every four consecutive working hours, and prohibits these children from working after 8 p.m., on national or religious holidays, and on weekends.

Children worked in mechanical repair, agriculture, fishing, construction, and the hotel and restaurant industry, as well as in the informal sector as street vendors, carpenters, blacksmiths, domestic workers, and painters, and in small family businesses. Child labor was reportedly concentrated in larger cities, such as Amman, Zarqa, and Irbid. A 2008 Department of Statistics study estimated that more than 32,000 children between the ages of five and 17 were working in the country. Activists estimated the number to be higher, as many businesses and families tended to hide the practice.

During the year the Ministry of Labor conducted 53,825 labor inspections including 19,165 child labor visits. In June officials inspected 412 institutions, issuing warnings to 75 employers and fining another 19 for recruiting children under the age of 16, mostly in mechanic shops, bakeries, blacksmith shops, carpentries, restaurants, and gas stations.

On September 20, the Ministry of Labor reported that 32.4 percent of working children were in Amman, with the remainder distributed across the country, mainly in impoverished areas. Eighty-nine percent of the working children were boys employed in the car repair (approximately 36 percent), agricultural (27 percent), or hotel and restaurant (4 percent) sectors.

The government's capacity to implement and enforce child labor laws was not sufficient to deter the practice. The Ministry of Labor's Child Labor Unit coordinates government action regarding child labor and receives, investigates, and addresses child labor complaints. The unit, with three employees, coordinated child labor inspections for the 129 labor inspectors.

In 2009 the government reinstated the National Committee to Combat Child Labor and initiated development of a new national strategy; however, as of year's end, the government had not implemented the new national strategy. During the year international organizations trained 78 general labor inspectors on techniques of combating child labor. Sixty-two inspectors participated in several labor training courses during the year.

Labor inspectors issue fines for child labor violations but reportedly attempt alternative approaches first, such as ensuring safe work conditions and cooperating with employers to permit working children to attend school concurrently.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The national minimum wage was 150 dinars (\$213) per month, which did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Ministry of Labor inspectors enforced the minimum wage but were unable to ensure full compliance due to limited resources.

The law requires overtime pay for hours worked in excess of the 48-hour standard workweek. The law prohibits compulsory overtime but allows the employer to require the employee to work more than 48 hours a week for specific purposes, such as conducting an annual inventory, closing accounts, preparing to sell goods at discounted prices, avoiding loss to goods that would otherwise be exposed to damage, and receiving special deliveries. In such cases actual working hours may not exceed 10 hours per day, the employee must be paid overtime, and the period may not last more than 30 days. Employees can lodge a complaint directly with the Ministry of Labor or through organizations such as their union or the NCHR. Employees are entitled to one day off per week. Provisions for domestic workers were similar.

The law specifies a number of health and safety requirements that the Ministry of Labor is authorized to enforce; however, workers do not have a statutory right to remove themselves from hazardous conditions without risking the loss of their jobs and may be fired if they attempt to do so. Foreign workers were more susceptible to dangerous or unfair conditions.

Foreign workers, who make up the vast majority of workers in the QIZs and Export Processing Zones, were vulnerable to poor work conditions such as mandatory overtime, withholding of passports, and unacceptable living conditions in dorms. On August 18, the Phoenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies issued a report claiming that approximately 10,000 attendants and cafeteria staff in the health support services sector were denied basic rights such as annual leave, health and safety conditions, and minimum wage as guaranteed under the labor law. The report indicated that a majority of the 23,000 day laborers were being denied their rights to job security and safety. Throughout the year day laborers held several strikes and sit-ins to demand job security, payment of overdue wages, and wage increases.

On December 1, the government issued a directive making the International Labor Organization project, Better Work Jordan, mandatory in all garment factories in the country. The project aimed to improve labor standards compliance through monitoring of factories and reporting on conditions as well as providing technical assistance.
