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State of Kuwait

Head of state: **Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah**

Head of government: **Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Hamad al-Sabah**

The authorities tightened restrictions on freedom of expression, including by adopting a new cybercrime law, and prosecuting opposition and online critics. The government also adopted a law requiring all citizens and residents to provide DNA samples on anti-terrorism grounds. Members of the Bidun minority faced discrimination and were denied citizenship rights. Migrant workers faced inadequate protection against exploitation and abuse. Courts continued to hand down death sentences; no executions were reported.

BACKGROUND

On 26 June a suicide bomber attacked the Imam Sadiq Mosque, a Shi'a mosque in Kuwait City, killing 27 people and wounding more than 220 others. It was Kuwait's most devastating suicide attack to date.

In March, Kuwait joined the Saudi Arabia-led international coalition that engaged in the armed conflict in Yemen (see Yemen entry).

In June, the government accepted 179 recommendations made during the UPR of Kuwait, including nine relating to freedom of expression. It rejected 71 others, including recommendations on the rights of Bidun and advocating abolition of the death penalty.

FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY

The authorities continued to restrict the right to freedom of expression, prosecuting and imprisoning government critics and online activists under penal code provisions that criminalize comments deemed offensive to the Emir, the judiciary and foreign leaders. In June, Parliament adopted a new cybercrime law criminalizing and further restricting online expression, due to come into force in

January 2016, and extended prohibitions in existing legislation to include online expression, including social media and blogs.

There were prosecutions for insulting Arab leaders on social media, including the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

In January, a court sentenced Bidun rights activist Abdulhakim al-Fadhli to one year's imprisonment followed by deportation on charges arising from his participation in a February 2014 gathering that marked the third anniversary of a demonstration calling for Bidun people to be granted Kuwaiti citizenship. His sentence was upheld on appeal in December. He also received a separate five-year prison term and a deportation order after a court convicted him on charges of insulting the Emir, damaging a police vehicle and taking part in an illegal demonstration.

In March, police arrested and beat human rights activist Nawaf al-Hendal as he monitored a peaceful opposition demonstration. He was detained for two days before being charged with "illegal gathering".

Musallam al-Barrak, a prominent government critic and former MP, began serving a two-year prison term in June. He had been sentenced in April 2013 to five years' imprisonment for a speech criticizing the government; the sentence was reduced on appeal. More than 60 others who protested against his arrest by publicizing or reciting extracts from his speech also faced prosecution; two people were sentenced to prison terms and 21 others received suspended sentences.

In July, prosecutors questioned 13 people over discussions on the social media site WhatsApp about video footage taken in 2014 that appeared to show leading members of the government advocating the Emir's removal from power. The 13, who included members of the ruling family, were freed on bail and banned from leaving Kuwait; their trial was ongoing.

COUNTER-TERROR AND SECURITY

The authorities increased security measures following the June suicide bombing at the Imam Sadiq Mosque. They tried 29 Kuwaitis and foreign nationals, five in their absence, on charges linked to the attack. Fifteen were convicted and, of these, seven were sentenced to death. In December, the Appeal Court confirmed one of the death sentences and commuted another to 15 years' imprisonment; it had not ruled on the other defendants' appeals by the end of the year.

The authorities also prosecuted people accused of supporting extreme jihadist armed groups in Iraq and Syria. In July, the Criminal Court sentenced six men to prison terms ranging from five to 20 years, followed by deportation, after convicting them of "hostile acts" against Iraq and Syria, endangering Kuwait's relations with those countries, and joining the banned organization Daesh (another name for the armed group Islamic State, or IS). Another two defendants were acquitted. All eight defendants alleged in court that security officials had beaten them in pre-trial detention to coerce them to confess. The court failed to investigate their allegations.

In July, Parliament approved a new law requiring all citizens and residents in Kuwait to provide samples of their DNA, citing anti-terrorism as the justification. Refusal to comply with the law became punishable by up to one year's imprisonment and a fine. Press reports in July indicated that the government planned to implement an emergency decree to extend the length of time that a

suspect can be held in detention without charge; however, no such provision had been enacted by the end of the year.

In September, further torture allegations emerged after 25 Kuwaitis and an Iranian went on trial before the Criminal Court accused of espionage and terrorism-related charges. The defendants said officials had tortured them with electric shocks, hanging by the legs and beatings to force them to "confess". The Court was due to deliver its verdict in January 2016.

DEPRIVATION OF NATIONALITY

In April, the authorities arrested Sa'ad al-'Ajmi, a political activist and adviser to former MP Musallam al-Barrak (see above), and deported him to Saudi Arabia, claiming that he held Saudi citizenship, which he denied.

In May, the Administrative Appeal Court ordered the government to restore the Kuwaiti citizenship of Abdullah Hashr al-Barghash, a former MP whose nationality the authorities revoked in July 2014. The government appealed against the ruling. In November the Administrative Appeal Court ruled that the case fell outside its jurisdiction.

DISCRIMINATION – BIDUN

The government continued to withhold Kuwaiti citizenship from over 100,000 Bidun, or stateless residents of Kuwait, whom they considered to be illegal residents. Bidun rights activists faced arrest and prosecution. Two days after the June mosque bombing, for which 13 Bidun were among those arrested, the authorities stopped issuing Bidun with travel documents except for those seeking medical treatment abroad.

In an August memorandum to Parliament, the government's Central System to Resolve Illegal Residents' Status, which administers Bidun affairs in Kuwait, said that it was not mandatory that 31,189 Bidun listed in the 1965 census, used by the government as the basis for determining citizenship, should be naturalized. The Central System said that other considerations, such as security, should be taken into account when considering their right to Kuwaiti nationality. This determination adds a further obstacle for Bidun to be granted Kuwaiti nationality.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Kuwaiti women had the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections, but continued to face discrimination in law and in practice. In particular, the law accorded women fewer rights than men in family matters, such as divorce, child custody and inheritance.

MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS

Migrant workers, including those in the domestic, construction and other sectors, faced exploitation and abuse. Parliament passed a law in June that for the first time gave migrant domestic workers, predominantly women, labour rights including one day of rest per week, 30 days' annual paid leave and an end-of-service payment equivalent to one month's salary for each year worked.

DEATH PENALTY

At least 15 people were sentenced to death, including five in their absence. No executions were reported.

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