



Amnesty International Report 2014/15 - Kuwait

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State of Kuwait

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

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

Peaceful criticism of the Amir, other state authorities or Islam remained criminalized. Those targeted for arrest, detention and prosecution included human rights and political reform activists. Authorities used a telecommunications law to prosecute and imprison critics who expressed dissent using social media, and curtailed the right to public assembly. The government continued to withhold nationality and citizenship rights from tens of thousands of Bidun people, and arbitrarily stripped several critics and members of their families of their Kuwaiti citizenship. Women faced discrimination in law and practice. Foreign migrant workers, who comprised over half of the population, lacked adequate protection under the law and were subject to discrimination, exploitation and abuse. The death penalty remained in force for a range of crimes; no executions were reported.

Freedom of expression

In April, the Public Prosecutor banned media discussion about a publicly available video recording that reportedly showed two former senior political figures discussing a plot to replace the Amir and take control of the government. The authorities stripped a media owner of his Kuwaiti nationality after his TV and radio station allegedly breached the media ban.

At least eight people were sentenced for comments they had made on social media, following prosecutions under Penal Code provisions that criminalized "insult" to the Amir and other state authorities and religion, and provisions of a 2001 law prohibiting the use of telecommunications facilities to disseminate criticism. Up to 10 others faced a cycle of prosecution, trial, conviction and appeal in connection with the expression of their views, mainly via the website Twitter. They included human rights activist and blogger Abdullah Fairouz, arrested in November 2013, who was sentenced in January to five years in prison for messages he posted on Twitter.^[1] In July, an appeal court upheld a 10-year prison sentence imposed on blogger Hamad al-Naqi in 2012 for allegedly defaming religion and foreign leaders.

In July, the authorities arrested former parliamentarian Musallam al-Barrak, a vocal government critic, after he reportedly accused senior officials of bribery and corruption in a speech to a large crowd in June. He was detained for 10 days and then released to stand trial on charges of "insulting" the judiciary. His arrest prompted widespread protests and accusations that the police had used excessive force against protesters, which the government denied. He continued to face a number of expression-related prosecutions at the end of the year.

Deprivation of nationality

The government resorted to the new tactic of arbitrarily stripping some of its critics and their dependents of their Kuwaiti citizenship rights under provisions of the 1959 nationality law.^[2] In July, the authorities stripped the nationality of Ahmed Jabr al-Shammari, owner of the *Al-Yawm* newspaper and TV channel, and four others, along with their dependents, rendering over 30 people stateless. The authorities revoked the citizenship of at least 10 others in August and a further 15 in September.

Torture and other ill-treatment

The authorities failed to independently investigate allegations of torture of detainees by security officials. In a letter to Amnesty International in September, the government denied that arbitrary arrests took place during demonstrations or that officials committed torture or ill-treatment.

Bidun human rights activist ' Abdulhakim al-Fadhli complained to an investigating prosecutor in February that police had beaten him in detention to force him to sign a "confession". The prosecutor failed to order a medical examination requested by 'Abdulhakim al-Fadhli or to take any other steps to investigate the alleged torture.

Discrimination – Bidun

The government continued to deny Kuwaiti nationality – and the rights and benefits associated with it, including free education, free health care and the right to vote – to tens of thousands of Bidun, although a small number were officially recognized as Kuwaiti citizens.

In October 2012, the Prime Minister had assured Amnesty International that the government would resolve the issue of citizenship for Kuwait's Bidun residents within five years; at the end of 2014 that appeared unlikely.

Members of the Bidun community demonstrated to demand an end to discrimination, despite the ban on public gatherings by "non-citizens". Some demonstrations were dispersed by police, but the government denied using excessive force. Scores of Bidun continued to face trial on charges of illegal gathering or public order offences. Many trials were repeatedly postponed, but in September 67 were acquitted. The authorities also detained at least 15 Bidun activists, mostly on charges relating to public order offences or "illegal gathering".

Women's rights

Kuwaiti women enjoyed greater rights than women in most other Gulf region states, including rights to stand as candidates and vote in elections, but they were not accorded equality under the

law with men. The law required that women have a male "guardian" in family matters, such as divorce, child custody and inheritance, and when receiving medical treatment.

Migrant workers' rights

Migrant workers, who made up the majority of Kuwait's workforce, continued to face exploitation and abuse linked partly to the official *kafala* sponsorship system. Migrant domestic workers, mostly women from Asian countries, were especially vulnerable as they were excluded from forms of protection afforded to other workers by Kuwait's labour laws.

Death penalty

The death penalty remained in force for murder and other crimes. At least five people were sentenced to death; no executions were reported.

[1. Urgent Action: Mother of activist at risk of deportation \(MDE 17/007/2014\)](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE17/007/2014/en/6e01aa07-e1d7-48aa-84a1-e81352d47889/mde170072014en.pdf)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE17/007/2014/en/6e01aa07-e1d7-48aa-84a1-e81352d47889/mde170072014en.pdf

[2. Kuwait: Halt the deplorable revocation of nationality of naturalized citizens \(MDE 17/004/2014\)](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE17/004/2014/en/a228d7d3-6b58-4be3-9aac-20f5bad79319/mde170042014en.pdf)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE17/004/2014/en/a228d7d3-6b58-4be3-9aac-20f5bad79319/mde170042014en.pdf

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