

QATAR 2012 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy in which Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani exercises full executive power. The 2005 constitution provides for hereditary rule by males in the emir's branch of the Al Thani family which has ruled since 1868. The most recent national elections were held May 2011 for the Central Municipal Council, an advisory and consultative body. Sharia law is the main source of legislation. Security forces reported to civilian authorities.

The principal human rights problems were the inability of citizens to change their government peacefully, restriction of fundamental civil liberties, and pervasive denial of expatriate workers' rights. The monarch-appointed government prohibited organized political parties and restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press, and assembly and access to a fair trial for persons held under the Protection of Society Law and Combating Terrorism Law.

Other continuing human rights concerns included restrictions on the freedoms of religion and movement, as foreign laborers could not freely travel abroad. Trafficking in persons, primarily in the labor and domestic worker sectors, was a problem. Legal, institutional, and cultural discrimination against women limited their participation in society. The noncitizen "Bidoon" (stateless persons) who resided in the country with an unresolved legal status experienced social discrimination.

The government took steps to prosecute those who committed abuses, and there were no cases of impunity reported.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices; there were limited reports of abuse carried out by government officials. There were reports that authorities kept some detainees in solitary confinement while in prison. Mohammed bin al-Dheeb al-Ajami was held in solitary confinement at Doha's Central Prison from November 2011 until his sentencing one year later. He remained in detention at year's end.

The government interprets Sharia as allowing corporal punishment for certain criminal offenses, including court-ordered flogging in cases of alcohol consumption and extramarital sex by Muslims. On appeal the courts have typically reduced this sentence to imprisonment or fine. While Amnesty International (AI) reported that government officials informed them the judicial floggings were ordered, the state-sponsored National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) reported that they found no evidence that floggings were carried out. The government conducted training for law enforcement personnel that focused on the prohibition of torture.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prisons and detention center conditions generally met international standards, and the government permitted some visitation rights by NHRC and international NGOs.

Physical Conditions: Prisons and detention centers generally provided clean sanitation facilities, potable water, and access to adequate medical care.

There were approximately 600 to 700 prisoners at the Central Prison, the principal facility for convicted criminals, and 500 detainees awaiting trial in detention centers throughout the country. The NHRC reported that the Deportation Detention Center (DDC) held an estimated 1,100 male and 300 female detainees. Separate facilities existed for men and women, pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners, and juveniles and adults. The Ministry of Social Affairs has authority over juvenile detainees. It held an average of five or six juveniles at any given time, separately and under the supervision of a government social worker. Conditions for female prisoners were the same as those for men. In certain cases fines, community service, and probation were used for nonviolent offenders in lieu of prison sentences.

Administration: Prisoners and detainees generally had access to visitors, although prison officials at the state security prison limited access to family and legal counsel. According to past reports of detainees at the state security prison and visits by the NHRC chair, “security” prisoners did not face significantly different conditions from those of the general prison population, and there were no reports that foreign detainees were treated differently than citizens. Authorities allowed prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial and administrative authorities without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhumane treatment. Authorities stated that they investigated allegations, but the results were not made public.

Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers and international bodies in accordance with their standard modalities to all facilities except the state security prison. The last reported visit by an international human rights organization to a detention center was by AI in October. The government occasionally provided foreign embassies access to state security prisoners at separate locations. The government-appointed NHRC conducted regular visits to all facilities. By law ombudsmen cannot serve on behalf of prisoners and detainees.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions. However, there were isolated reports that individuals were arbitrarily arrested and detained. Authorities may detain individuals in the state security prison for indefinite periods under the Protection of Society Law and the Combating Terrorism Law. In practice the government limited detention to two months for all DDC detainees except those facing additional criminal charges. However, the processing speed for deportations decreased for most DDC detainees during the year, with the period of detention ranging from two days to 10 months. There were reports that deportations were delayed up to 10 months in cases where detainees had to resolve financial delinquencies before being allowed to depart the country.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police under the Ministry of Interior and state security forces, and the government employed effective

mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

Criminal law requires that persons be apprehended openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by a duly authorized official, be charged within 24 hours, and be brought before a court without undue delay, although the law empowers the judge investigating the case to extend the total detention period to six months before it goes to court. The state security service can arrest and detain suspects for up to 30 days without referring them to the public prosecutor.

The Protection of Society Law and Combating Terrorism Law provide procedures that permit detention without charge for as long as 15 days, renewable for up to six months. The law permits an additional six months' detention without charge with approval of the prime minister, who can extend the detention indefinitely in cases of threats to national security. This law empowers the minister of interior to detain persons suspected of crimes related to national security, honor, or impudence. Decisions under this law are subject to appeal by the prime minister only. A provision of this law permits the prime minister to adjudicate complaints involving such detentions. The law permits a second six-month period of detention with approval from the Criminal Court, which can extend a detention indefinitely with review every six months.

In most cases a judge may order a suspect released, remanded to custody to await trial, held in pretrial detention pending investigation, or released on bail. Although suspects are entitled to bail (except in cases of violent crimes), it was used infrequently in practice. Authorities were more likely to grant citizens bail than noncitizens. Noncitizens charged with minor crimes may be released to their citizen sponsor, although they cannot leave the country until the case is resolved. There was no information available at year's end on the number of these unresolved cases.

By law in nonsecurity cases, the accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process and prompt access to family members. There are provisions for state-funded legal counsel for indigent prisoners in criminal cases, and this requirement was generally honored in practice. Authorities generally did not afford suspects detained under the Protection of Society Law and the Combating Terrorism Law access to counsel and delayed access to family

members. The NHRC reported it had evidence that some individuals arrested under the Protection of Society Law were not referred to the public prosecutor.

All suspects except those detained under the Protection of Society Law or the Combating Terrorism Law must be presented before the Public Prosecutor within 24 hours of arrest. If the Public Prosecutor finds sufficient evidence for further investigation, a suspect can be detained for up to 16 days before charges must be filed in the courts. Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one month, extendable by one month at a time for up to six months, to provide authorities additional time to conduct investigations.

AI reported that prisoners were held incommunicado in detention for weeks or months without charge or trial under the law. There were no reports of individuals being held under house arrest.

Arbitrary Arrest: The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and, with few exceptions, the government observed these prohibitions. There were reports of individuals detained without formal charges by security agencies on allegations of terrorist financing as stipulated by the law.

Pretrial Detention: With few exceptions nearly all suspected criminals go to trial within a month of arrest. AI reported that Mohammed al-Ajami was detained for six months during the investigation of his crimes prior to going to trial and was allegedly held incommunicado in solitary confinement for months before being allowed family visits.

Amnesty: During Ramadan and on National Day, the emir granted amnesty to 69 prisoners, including 10 citizens and 59 noncitizens.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the emir, based on recommended selections from the Supreme Judicial Council, appoints all judges, who hold their positions at his discretion. Approximately 75 percent of the judges were foreign nationals dependent on residency permits. Suspects held in pretrial detention under the law had limited access to the legal system.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial for all residents, and the judiciary generally enforced this right, except for suspects held under the Protection of Society Law and Combating Terrorism Law.

The law provides defendants the presumption of innocence, and defendants are informed promptly of the charges against them. Judges give verdicts, and trials are open to the public, but the presiding judge can close the courtroom to the public if the case is deemed to be sensitive.

The judge in Doha's Criminal Court presiding over the trial of Mohammed al-Ajami ruled to close the trial to the public. AI claimed that the trial had been "marred by irregularities," including reports that al-Ajami's lawyer was prevented from attending one trial hearing and claimed that the prosecution presented edited testimony.

Defendants are entitled to choose their legal representation or accept it at public expense throughout the pretrial and trial process. In matters involving family law, Shia and Sunni judges may apply their interpretations of Sharia for their religious groups.

Defense attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases once the case has been filed in the court. Defendants have the right to confront and question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants are also offered an opportunity to give a statement at the end of their trial. Defendants have the right to appeal a decision within 15 days, and use of the appellate process was common in practice.

The Court of Cassation requires a fee to initiate the appeals process. In some cases courts waived fees if an appellant demonstrated financial hardship.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

In rare cases authorities arrested or detained individuals for political activity. Mohammed al-Ajami was sentenced to life in prison on charges of "inciting to overthrow the regime." He was prosecuted for reciting a poem critical of the ruling family and other governments in the region.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There are civil remedies available for those seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations, but there were no cases reported during the year. The law specifies circumstances that necessitate a judge's removal from a case for conflict of interest, and these laws were observed in practice. However, there were cases where judges did not recuse themselves despite a conflict of interests.

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

The constitution and the criminal procedures code prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. However, police and security forces reportedly monitored telephone calls and e-mails. The government prohibits membership in political organizations.

Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners, which was generally granted. Male citizens may apply for residency permits and citizenship for their foreign wives, but female citizens can apply only for residency for their foreign husbands and children, not citizenship.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press in accordance with the law, but the government limited these rights in practice. On November 29, poet Mohammed al-Ajami was sentenced to life imprisonment for "criticizing the emir," "insulting the emir," and "incitement to overthrow the regime."

Freedom of Speech: Citizens individually discussed sensitive political and religious issues, but not in public forums or as part of political associations, which were not allowed. Members of the much larger foreign population also were not allowed to express themselves publicly on sensitive topics. The law prohibited residents from criticizing the emir or the heir apparent.

Al-Ajami's lawyer and international human rights groups, including AI, asserted that al-Ajami's sentence of life in prison went beyond sentencing guidelines prescribed by law. Al-Ajami submitted an appeal that remained under review at year's end.

Freedom of Press: The law provides for restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspapers, closure, and confiscation of assets of a publication. It also criminalizes libel and slander, including injury to dignity.

Members of the ruling family or proprietors who enjoyed close ties to government officials owned all print media. There were no independent broadcast media, and state-owned television and radio reflected government views. The government owned the Doha-based al-Jazeera satellite television network, which carried regional, international, and theme-based programming. Although al-Jazeera management and the government claimed that the channel was free of government influence, the government funded it, and some media reported that the government influenced content. Al-Jazeera usually did not broadcast reports critical of the government.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Journalists and publishers continued to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government policies or material deemed hostile to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states. The Qatar Radio and Television Corporation and customs officials censored material. There were no specific reports of political censorship of foreign broadcast news media or foreign programs. The government reviewed and censored foreign newspapers, magazines, and books for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content.

Publishing Restrictions: Laws restricted without advance permission the publication of information that incite the overthrow of the regime, its abuse, or that harm supreme state interests; slander the emir or heir apparent; report official secret agreements; ridicule or express contempt for one of the heavenly religions; prejudice heads of state or disturb relations; harm the national currency or the economic situation; violate the dignity of persons, proceedings of investigations, and prosecutions in relation to family status; or defame or endanger the state's safety.

Internet Freedom

The government-owned Internet service provider Qtel restricted the expression of views via the Internet and censored the Internet for political, religious, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which monitored and blocked Web sites, e-mail, and chat rooms. For example, the government continued to block access to Ali Khalifa al-Kuwari's blog *Ikhbareya*, which at times published articles critical of the government. A user who believed a site was mistakenly censored

could submit the Web site address to have the site reviewed for suitability; there were no reports that any Web sites were unblocked based on this procedure. Qtel is responsible for monitoring and censoring objectionable content on the Internet.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research. In practice instructors at Qatar University noted that they often exercised self-censorship. Instructors at foreign-based universities operating in the country reported they enjoyed academic freedom. There were no reported government restrictions on cultural events, although some groups organizing cultural events reported they exercised self-censorship. Films were censored for political, religious, and sexual content and for vulgar and obscene language.

The West-East Divan Orchestra cancelled a planned performance at the Katara music festival in May. The orchestra reported that Katara organizers had cancelled the engagement due to “sensitivity to developments in the Arab world.” Other editorials in newspapers commented, “it wasn’t the time or place to entertain Israelis and a Zionist conductor.”

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for, but strictly regulates, freedom of assembly. Organizers must meet a number of restrictions and conditions to acquire a permit for a public meeting. For example, the director general of public security at the Ministry of Interior must give permission for a meeting, subject to appeal to the minister of interior, who has the final decision. There were peaceful demonstrations in Doha in November by citizens and foreign citizens calling for increased action on climate change by world governments at the Doha Climate Change Conference, which was held November 26 to December 8. Protesters also gathered for permitted protests in February in front of the Russian Embassy and in March at the Syrian Embassy in connection with the crisis in Syria and in September in front of the U.S. Embassy against a film defaming Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. Authorities approved permits for these protests and did not intervene.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right to form groups, defined by the law as professional associations and private institutions, but the government significantly limited this right in practice. There were no reports of attempts to organize politically. There were no organized political parties, and politically oriented associations are not allowed. Twenty-six professional and private organizations existed: 11 were humanitarian, six cultural, five professional, one social, and three scientific. Professional associations and private institutions are prohibited from engaging in political matters or affiliating internationally and must obtain approval from the Ministry of Social Affairs, which can deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest.

Administrative obstacles, including the slow pace of procedures required to form professional associations and private institutions and strict conditions on their establishment, management, and function restricted their recognition. The minister of social affairs must approve applications, and the number of noncitizens cannot exceed 20 percent of the total membership without approval by the ministerial cabinet. Seven organizations applied to form a professional society during the year. During the year the government approved 10 new nongovernmental associations.

Professional societies must pay 50,000 riyals (approximately \$13,750) in licensing fees, 10,000 riyals (\$2,750) in annual fees and, since 2010, must have 10 million riyals (\$2.75 million) in capital funds. Private institutions must also have 10 million riyals in capital funds, but this requirement can be waived by the Council of Ministers. Registrations expire after three years; subsequently, an association must reregister.

Informal organizations, such as community support groups and activity clubs, operated without registration, but they may not engage in activities deemed political.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/rpt.

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

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government did not fully respect these rights in practice. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees generally did not ask the government to assist internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

In-country Movement: The only restrictions on in-country movement for citizens concerned sensitive military, oil, and industrial installations. Although there was less emphasis on setting and enforcing “family-only times” at entertainment areas in Doha, several local malls and souks continued to restrict access to certain areas to foreign workers on weekends. Police also limited foreign workers’ access to National Day celebrations on the main bayside road.

Foreign Travel: The government prevented the travel of its citizens only when they were involved in ongoing court cases. The government’s sponsorship system severely restricted foreign travel for noncitizens, which principally affected foreign workers. All noncitizens require an exit permit from their employer to leave the country. Although the law provides an administrative procedure for obtaining an exit permit without an employer’s approval, the process was burdensome. Foreign embassies and foreign citizen community leaders reported that the process was ineffective, and they continued to receive requests to mediate disputes concerning exit permits between foreign workers and their sponsors. The law prohibits the practice of employers withholding workers’ passports, but foreign citizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries confirmed it remained a common problem with insufficient enforcement. Courts could order travel bans for individuals in cases involving delinquent payments.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not explicitly provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, but in practice the government occasionally accepted such individuals as “guests” on a temporary basis. The small number of persons granted residence on humanitarian grounds were legally classified as visitors.

Refoulement: The constitution prohibits the extradition of political refugees. The government generally provided protection against the expulsion or forcible 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.

Stateless Persons

Citizenship derives solely from the father, and women cannot transmit citizenship to their spouse or children. A woman must obtain permission from authorities before marrying a foreign national but does not lose citizenship upon marriage.

According to the NHRC, there were approximately 300 to 400 Bidoon residents in the country. They suffered some social discrimination, but not legal discrimination. The Bidoon were able to register for public services such as education and health care.

The law allows long-term residents to apply for citizenship after having lived in the country for 25 consecutive years, but in practice citizenship applications were rarely approved. The government provides a legal means for long-term residents to acquire citizenship; in practice restrictions and uneven application of the law prevented stateless persons from acquiring citizenship.

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

The constitution provides for hereditary rule by the emir's branch of the Al Thani family and does not provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully through elections. The government did not permit political parties or opposition groups. The emir exercises full executive powers, including appointment of cabinet members. The Shura Council, whose members the emir appointed, plays an advisory role only. The constitutional provision for initiation of legislation by the Shura Council remained unimplemented. The influence of family and tribal traditions was strong, and the government did not permit political parties or opposition groups.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In May 2011 citizens elected the 29 members of the fourth Central Municipal Council to four-year terms. The council advises the minister of municipality and urban affairs on local public services. Foreign diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities or fraud in the elections, although voter turnout was lower than authorities expected. There were an estimated 100,000 to 120,000 eligible voters and 32,662 registered voters. Of the voters who registered, 13,606 (41.6 percent) went to the polls.

Voting is open to all citizens who are at least 18 years old and who have been naturalized for at least 15 years.

Political Parties: The government did not permit the organization of political parties, and there were no attempts to form them during the year.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Although traditional attitudes and roles continued to limit women's participation in politics, women served in public office as chair of the Qatar Foundation, vice president of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs (SCFA) with ministerial rank, head of the General Authority for Museums, ambassador to the UN mission in Geneva, and president of Qatar University. One woman served on the Central Municipal Council and there were two female judges on the Court of First Instance.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were no reported cases of government corruption during the year. Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws.

The National Committee for Accountability and Transparency has been responsible for combating corruption since its establishment in 2007. A second authority, the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority, headed by a former deputy prime minister, was inaugurated in 2011. Its mandate includes probing the misuse of public funds and investigating complaints against government officials. There was no publicly available information on the authority's investigations. The agency may also have access to banking details in cases that allege money laundering.

The law does not provide for public access to government information beyond the requirement that the government publish laws in the official gazette. Information on that government, such as the budget, expenditures, or draft laws, was generally not available.

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

The three NGOs operating in the country whose charters indicated an interest in human rights were all funded by the government and responsive to its influence. These included the NHRC, Qatar Foundation for Combating Human Trafficking (QFCHT), and Qatar Foundation for Protecting Women and Children (QFPWC). They cooperated with the government, rarely criticized it (with the exception of the NHRC), and did not engage in political activity.

UN and Other International Bodies: No international NGO that focused on human rights or humanitarian issues was registered in the country. The government fully cooperated with and sanctioned visits by Human Rights Watch in June and AI in October to assess migrant worker conditions. Since 2009 the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has operated in Doha through its Human Rights Training and Documentation Center for Southwest Asia and the Arab Region and has received government funding. In November the UN's Social, Humanitarian Cultural Affairs Committee (Third Committee) determined that it would fund the center from the regular UN budget. The center has no mandate to monitor human rights violations in the country.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The government-funded and appointed NHRC investigated local human rights conditions. The NHRC reported that it handled 295 petitions for assistance during the year, 96 of which were from citizens and 199 from noncitizens. The NHRC typically handled petitions by liaising with government institutions to ensure a timely resolution to disputes. During the year the NHRC published a report on the status of human rights in 2011 that was widely covered in local media and available online.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, language, religion, but not disability, sexual orientation, or social status. In practice custom outweighed government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws, and legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed against women, noncitizens, and foreign workers.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, but not spousal rape. The penalty for rape is life imprisonment, regardless of the age or gender of the victim. If the perpetrator is a relative, teacher, guardian, or caregiver of the victim, the penalty is death. The government enforced the law against rape, but victims

generally feared social stigma and underreported the crime. During the year the government convicted four individuals for rape and another 10 persons awaited trial.

There is no specific law criminalizing domestic violence. According to the NHRC, domestic violence may be prosecuted under the criminal law that provides a general prohibition against violence. According to the quasigovernmental QFPWC, domestic violence against women continued to be a problem. There were neither arrests nor convictions for family domestic violence among citizens publicized in the press, although there were reports of cases involving noncitizens. The police maintained a women-only division that was able to receive in-person complaints freely but had limited access to homes. During the year 550 cases of domestic abuse against women were reported to the foundation. No data on sexual abuse was available from foreign embassies. In the past police treated domestic violence as a social issue rather than a criminal matter; the government took steps to address the situation, including by increasing the hiring of female police officers.

The SCFA operated a shelter under the supervision of the QFPWC to accommodate abused women and children. During the year the shelter accommodated 29 women and 38 children. The shelter provided a variety of services, including financial assistance, legal aid, and psychological counseling. The QFPWC also opened an office in the attorney general's office to improve case coordination with the public prosecutor.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment or fines. In some cases sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic servants. Most domestic servants did not press charges for fear of losing their jobs. The QFPWC reported 34 cases of sexual harassment, nine of which were ultimately resolved outside of court, six that resulted in conviction of the perpetrators, and 19 that were pending before the courts. When the domestic employees brought harassment to the attention of authorities, the employees were occasionally deported and no charges were filed against the employer.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of government interference in the right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination or coercion. There was no direct government support for access to means of contraception, but contraceptives were freely available without a prescription at major retailers. Licensed medical professionals attended

mothers at birth, and maternal care was readily available. Men and women had equal access to treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.

Discrimination: The constitution asserts equality between citizens in rights and responsibilities, but legislation undermines the principle of equality with regard to women. For example, the law governing the generous government housing system was not applied fairly in practice and discriminated against women married to noncitizen men and against divorced women. The law requires the passage of five years of residency from the date of divorce before female citizens may obtain their housing entitlement. Women married to noncitizens or to Bidoons must reside in the country with their husbands for five consecutive years before applying for the housing benefit. Under the Nationality Law, female citizens faced legal discrimination in obtaining and transmitting citizenship to their noncitizen husbands and their children.

Traditions and interpretation of Sharia also significantly disadvantage women in family, property, and inheritance law and in the judicial system generally. For example, a non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. The proportion that women inherit depends upon their relationship to the deceased; in the cases of siblings, sisters inherit only one-half as much as their brothers. In cases of divorce, young children usually remain with the mother, regardless of her religion, unless she is found to be unfit. Women who are granted guardianship over their children by law receive their financial rights and associated right of residence.

Women may attend court proceedings and represent themselves, but a male relative generally represented them. In cases involving financial transactions, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but courts routinely evaluated evidence according to the overall credibility of the witness and the testimony being offered and not based on gender.

A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim, but many do so. Children born to a Muslim father are considered Muslims. Men may prevent adult female family members from leaving the country, but only by seeking and securing a court order. During the year there were no reports that women over the age of 18 were prevented from traveling abroad.

According to the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, women constituted approximately 13 percent of business owners, mainly operating design companies, fashion establishments, training centers, and beauty centers. Women constituted 36 percent of the overall workforce but only 7 percent of senior officials and managers. Women served in the workforce as university professors, public school teachers, medical professionals, and police. Illiteracy among women largely has been eliminated, and women made up 83 percent of higher education students. Women received equal pay for equal work but often lacked access to decision-making positions and did not receive equal allowances for transportation, housing, and subsistence.

There is no specialized government office devoted to women's equality.

Children

Birth registration: Citizenship is derived from one's father. The government generally registered all births immediately.

Education: The government provides more for the welfare of citizen than noncitizen children. Education was free and compulsory for all citizens through the age of 18 or nine years of education, whichever comes first. Education is compulsory for noncitizen children, but they pay a nominal fee.

Child Abuse: There were limited cases of child abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse. The QFPWC reported that, during the year, it received 242 cases involving abuse of children.

Child Marriage: By law the minimum age for marriage is 18 for boys and 16 for girls. Marriage of persons below these ages is not permitted except in conformity with religious and cultural norms. These norms include the need to obtain consent from the legal guardian to ensure that both prospective partners consent to the union and apply for permission from a competent court.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: There is no specific law establishing a minimum age for consensual sex. By law sex is prohibited outside of marriage (see Child Marriage). In the criminal law, the penalty for sexual relations with a person younger than 16 is life imprisonment. If the individual is the relative, guardian, caretaker, or servant of the victim, the penalty is death; there were no reports this sentence was ever implemented. There is no specific law prohibiting child pornography as all pornography is prohibited, but the antitrafficking law passed in

October 2011 specifically criminalizes the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The QFPWC conducted awareness campaigns on the rights of the child and maintained a special hotline that allowed both citizen and noncitizen children to call with questions and concerns ranging from school, health, and psychological problems to sexual harassment. The hotline operated in conjunction with the family abuse hotline; the QFPWC reported it received 5,631 calls during the reporting period, of which 3,874 were from individuals and 1,757 were from institutions such as hospitals.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

Anti-Semitism

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community; Jews in the country were foreigners with no restrictions on traveling or working. On occasion, in response to political events in the region, some of the country's privately owned Arabic-language newspapers carried cartoons with offensive caricatures of Jews and Jewish symbols. These occurred primarily in the daily newspapers *al-Watan*, *al-Sharq*, *al-Arab*, and *al-Raya* and drew no government response.

Anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism appeared during the year in the local press, including in one documented Friday sermon. On June 29, a televised Friday sermon stated that Jews were "always like parasites, living off others, rather than striving for self-improvement." There was no indication whether the author of the sermon was penalized under the law, which calls for a one-year prison term of 1,000 riyal (\$275) fine for those who produce or circulate material containing slogans, images, or symbols that defame Islam, Christianity, or Judaism.

On February 13, the daily *al-Sharq* published an article by Khaled al-Hindawi in which he claimed that the Syrian murders in Homs surpassed what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Holocaust.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against--and requires the allocation of resources for--persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, and other state services or other areas. There was no underlying pattern of abuse at education facilities, mental health facilities, or prisons. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals and the NHRC and enforcing compliance. The law requires that 2 percent of jobs in government agencies and public institutions be reserved for persons with disabilities, and most government entities appeared to carry out this law in practice. Private sector businesses employing a minimum of 25 persons are also required to hire persons with disabilities as 2 percent of their staff. Employers who violate these employment provisions are subject to fines of up to 20,000 riyals (\$5,500). There were no reports of violations during the year.

Private and independent schools generally provided most of the required services for students with disabilities, but government schools did not. Few public buildings met the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings generally did not comply with standards. The SCFA is charged with ensuring compliance with the rights and provisions mandated under the law, but compliance was not effectively enforced.

The right of persons with disabilities to vote and participate in civic affairs was not restricted, and there were designated schools for students with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Legal and social discrimination against noncitizen workers was a problem. The government discriminated against noncitizens in employment, education, housing, and health services. Noncitizens were required to pay for electricity, water, and some secondary and higher education (services provided without charge to citizens). Noncitizens were eligible for medical coverage at a nominal fee. Noncitizens generally could not own property, but the law provides for property ownership in three designated areas. Cultural, linguistic, and religious differences and divergent economic status accentuated social discrimination between citizens and migrant workers. Bidoons also experienced social discrimination.

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

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons faced discrimination under the law and in practice. The law prohibits same-sex sexual conduct between men but is silent on same-sex relations between women. Under the law a man convicted of having sexual relations with a boy younger than 16 is subject to a sentence of life in prison. A man convicted of having same-sex sexual relations with a man older than 16 is subject to a sentence of seven years in prison. The number of such cases before the courts during the year was unknown. There were no LGBT organizations in the country. During the year there were no public reports of violence against LGBT persons, but there was an underlying pattern of discrimination toward LGBT persons based on cultural and religious values prevalent in the society. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination

Due to social conventions and potential repression, LGBT organizations did not operate openly, nor were gay pride marches or gay rights advocacy events held. Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, victims of such discrimination were unlikely to come forth and complain because of the potential for further harassment or discrimination.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There was discrimination against HIV-infected patients. Foreigners with HIV/AIDS, whose conditions were diagnosed during their medical examinations upon arrival in the country, were deported. HIV-positive citizens were quarantined and received treatment.

A South African employee of al-Jazeera English online was detained, dismissed, and deported based on his HIV/AIDS status.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law does not adequately protect the right of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively, a situation that made the exercise of these rights difficult. The law provides workers in private sector enterprises that have 100 citizen workers who are 18 and older a limited right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively. For those few workers covered by the

law protecting the right to collective bargaining, the government circumscribed the right to bargain collectively through its control over the rules and procedures of the bargaining and agreement processes. The labor code allows for only one trade union, the General Union of Workers of Qatar (General Union), which was composed of general committees for workers in various trades or industries. Trade or industry committees were composed of worker committees at the individual firm level.

Noncitizens are not eligible to join worker committees or the national union, effectively banning foreign workers from organizing, striking, or bargaining collectively. The law explicitly prohibits public sector workers or the military from organizing.

Civil servants and domestic workers do not have the right to strike; the law also prohibits strikes at public utilities and health or security service facilities, which include the gas, petroleum, and transportation sectors. Although the law recognizes the right to strike for some workers, restrictive conditions made the likelihood of a legal strike extremely remote. The law requires approval for a strike by three-fourths of a company's workers committee. The Complaint Department of the Ministry of Labor in coordination with the Ministry of Interior must rule on all industrial disputes before workers can call a strike.

In organizations with more than 30 workers, the law permits the establishment of "joint committees" with an equal number of worker and management representatives to deal with a limited number of workplace issues. Foreign workers may be members of joint labor-management committees. The law offers a means to file collective disputes. If not settled internally between the employees and employer, the Ministry of Labor can be brought in to mediate a solution to such disputes.

The law requires Ministry of Labor approval for worker organizations to affiliate with groups outside the country. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination or provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not respected in practice. The General Union was not a functioning entity. Employees could not freely practice collective bargaining, and there were no workers under collective bargaining contracts. While rare, when labor unrest occurred, mostly involving the country's overwhelmingly foreign workforce, the government responded by dispatching large numbers of police to the work sites or labor camps involved; the

strikes generally ended peacefully after these shows of force. In most cases the government summarily deported the workers' leaders and organizers. For example, on January 24, 127 Nepali workers were detained after they went on strike to protest low pay; some were later deported.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, and the government generally enforced the law.

The government made efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor during the year. The government arrested and prosecuted individuals for labor law violations; two cases each of forced labor and bonded labor were before courts at year's end. In addition the government closed 15 recruitment firms during the year. The QFCHT and the NHRC conducted several training sessions during the year for migrant laborers to educate them on their rights in the country. The NHRC printed and distributed pamphlets that included pertinent articles of the labor and sponsorship laws in multiple languages to better educate migrant workers on their rights. In addition the Ministry of Labor opened a free legal clinic for low-income migrant workers in March.

There were continuing indications of forced labor, especially in the construction and domestic labor sectors, which disproportionately affected migrant workers. Exorbitant recruitment fees incurred abroad entrapped many workers in long-term debt, making them more vulnerable to being exploited for forced labor. Some foreign workers who voluntarily entered the country to work had their passports and pay withheld, were refused exit permits, and worked under conditions to which they had not agreed. In a critical June report, Human Rights Watch highlighted a number of these problems, including poor living conditions, employers who routinely confiscated worker passports, and a sponsorship system that gave employers inordinate control of workers.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 and stipulates that minors between the ages of 16 and 18 can work with parental or guardian permission. Minors may not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week.

Employers must provide the Labor Department with the names and occupations of their minor employees and obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to hire a minor. The Labor Department may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs judged dangerous to their health, safety, or morals. The government generally enforced relevant laws effectively, and child labor rarely occurred in practice.

d. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no minimum wage. The law requires equal pay for equal work in the private sector. The labor law prescribes a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period and paid annual leave days. Employees who work more than 48 hours per week or 36 hours per week during the holy month of Ramadan are entitled to an overtime pay supplement of at least a 25 percent. The law requires premium pay for overtime and prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. The government set occupational health and safety standards. The labor law and provisions for acceptable conditions of work do not apply to workers in the public sector, agriculture, or to domestic servants.

Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Labor as well as the Ministry of Energy and Industry and the Ministry of Health. The government did not effectively enforce standards in all sectors; working conditions for citizens were generally adequate, as government agencies and the major private sector companies employing them generally followed relevant laws. Enforcement problems were in part due to insufficient training and lack of personnel. There were approximately 150 inspectors in the Ministry of Labor. Fear of penalties such as blacklisting, which allows the Ministry of Labor to suspend specific operations, appeared to have had some effect as a deterrent to some labor law violations.

The government took action to prevent violations and improve working conditions during the year. According to foreign diplomats and some individual migrant workers, the Ministry of Labor's Department of Labor Affairs was perceived to be objective within its mandate when dealing with the nonpayment of wages, health and safety violations, and other labor law violations. The department claimed it resolved 80 percent of the 6,000 complaints filed by workers during the year. The ministry referred 292 cases to the labor courts for judgment. During the first half of the year, the labor courts heard 8,101 cases, of which 813 received final verdicts, 920 received preliminary verdicts, 5,236 were still under review, 1,111 were cancelled, and 21 were linked to existing cases. The courts ordered that companies provide both financial compensation and airline tickets to their country

of origin for plaintiffs in 49 cases, financial compensation only in six cases, and airline tickets only in five cases. A limited number of labor complaints were referred to the criminal courts, but statistics were not publicly available.

The Labor Inspection Department conducted monthly and random inspections of labor camps; when it found them below minimum standards, the operators received a warning, and authorities ordered them to remedy the violations within one month. If they did not remedy the violations, the Ministry of Labor blacklisted the company and on occasion referred the matter to the public prosecutor for action. Some cases went to trial. During the year inspectors conducted 46,624 observations of work and labor housing sites. Inspectors found 90 percent of companies were compliant with the administrative aspects of the law, such as timely payment of salaries and work regulations, while 70 percent were found to be compliant with safety standards. The Ministry of Labor issued 7,337 warning notices, 5,245 for health and safety reasons and 2,092 for administrative reasons. There were 377 companies that were issued reports of violations, 231 for health and safety reasons and 146 for administrative reasons. Violators faced penalties of up to 6,000 riyal (\$1,648) and 30 days' imprisonment in the most serious cases, but labor observers reported that most safety and health violations were handled through administrative fines or blacklisting. The Ministry of Labor maintained an office in Doha's industrial area, where most unskilled laborers resided, to receive complaints about worker safety or nonpayment of wages.

Violations of wage, overtime, and safety and health standards were relatively common, especially in sectors employing foreign workers, in which working conditions were often poor. Employers often ignored working hour restrictions and other laws with respect to domestic workers and unskilled laborers, the majority of whom were foreigners. A November survey by Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute found that 90 percent of unskilled laborers worked on average six days per week and 9.3 hours per day. Many unskilled foreign laborers were housed in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has repeatedly reported abusive conditions, including unexplained and work-related deaths, for migrant workers, especially in the construction sector. After an ITUC investigation of working conditions for Nepali workers, the organization alleged that work-related deaths due to problems such as heat exhaustion were wrongly attributed to heart attacks or natural causes.

Domestic workers, who are not protected by the labor law, often faced unacceptable working conditions. Many such workers frequently worked seven days a week and more than 12 hours a day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and no effective means to redress grievances.

According to the ITUC and other organizations, foreign workers faced legal obstacles and lengthy legal processes that prevented them from seeking redress for violations and exploitative conditions. The sponsorship law was widely considered the root of these violations. Under the country's sponsorship system, most employees cannot leave the country without permission and are prevented from switching jobs without a "no objection letter" from their employer. Employees leaving the country without a no objection letter are barred from reemployment in the country for two years.