

VIETNAM 2018 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is an authoritarian state ruled by a single party, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), and led by General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, and Chairwoman of the National Assembly Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan. The most recent National Assembly elections, held in 2016, were neither free nor fair, despite limited competition among CPV-vetted candidates.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

Human rights issues included unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government; torture by government agents; arbitrary arrests and detentions by the government; political prisoners; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; arbitrary arrest and prosecution of individuals critical of the government, including online, and of journalists and bloggers, monitoring communications of journalists, activists, and individuals who question the state's authority, censorship, unjustified internet restrictions such as site and account blocking, and criminal libel; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association including detention, arrest and prosecution of individuals seeking to assemble freely and form associations; significant restrictions on freedom of movement, including exit bans on activists; restrictions on political participation; corruption; and outlawing of independent trade unions.

The government sometimes took corrective action, including prosecutions, against officials who violated the law, but police officers sometimes acted with impunity.

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

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were multiple reports indicating officials or other agents under the command of the Ministry of Public Security or provincial public security departments committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including reports of at least 11 deaths implicating police officers on duty. In most cases authorities either provided little information on investigations into the deaths or stated the deaths were the result of

suicide or medical problems. Authorities sometimes harassed and intimidated families who questioned the police determination of cause of death. In a small number of cases, the government held police officials responsible, typically several years after the death. Despite guidance from the Supreme People's Court to charge police officers responsible for causing deaths in custody with murder, such officers typically faced lesser charges. Family members of individuals who died in police custody reported harassment and abuse by local authorities.

On August 2, Hua Hoang Anh died after local police officers in Chau Thanh district, Kien Giang Province, interrogated him concerning his participation in mass demonstrations in June against a draft law on Special Administrative Economic Zones (SAEZ) and a new cybersecurity law. Social media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that there were many injuries to his body, including to his head, neck, and belly, possibly indicating torture. State-run media only stated that he died.

In some cases the government held security officers responsible for arbitrary deprivation of life. On September 13, a court in Ninh Thuan Province sentenced five former police officers to between three and seven years in prison on charges of "use of corporal punishment" for beating a drug user to death in the police station in 2017. The court also banned these police officers from holding any law enforcement positions for one to three years after finishing their jail terms.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

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

The law prohibits physical abuse of detainees, but suspects commonly reported mistreatment and torture by police, plainclothes security officials, and compulsory drug-detention center personnel during arrest, interrogation, and detention. Police, prosecutors, and government oversight agencies seldom conducted investigations of specific reports of mistreatment. Some activists reported receiving death threats from plainclothes individuals they said were associated with the government.

On August 12, over 200 individuals receiving treatment at a drug treatment center in Tien Giang Province broke out of the center, according to state-run media. The individuals said they were forced to work eight hours per day without

compensation and were subject to punishment, including beatings, if they “misbehaved.”

Police and plainclothes authorities routinely mistreated, harassed, and assaulted activists and those involved in demonstrating against the government; for example in June Ho Chi Minh City police beat and detained some 180 individuals at a stadium related to anti-SEAZ and cybersecurity law demonstrations. There were also numerous reports of police mistreatment and assaults against individuals who were not activists or involved in politics. On March 1, Nguyen Cong Chi was hospitalized with a brain injury after going to the local police station in Chu Puh district, Gia Lai Province, the day before for a traffic violation. Chi’s family accused local police of beating him; they denied the accusation and said they were looking into the case.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions varied substantially by prison and province. In most cases they were austere but generally not life threatening. Insufficient diet and unclean food, overcrowding, lack of access to potable water, and poor sanitation remained serious problems. Prison officials singled out political prisoners for harsher treatment and often held them in small groups separate from the general inmate population, and subjected them to extreme harassment from both prison authorities and other inmates.

Physical Conditions: Authorities generally held men and women separately, with some reported exceptions in local detention centers. Although authorities generally held juveniles in prison separately from adults, on rare occasions authorities reportedly held juveniles in detention with adults for short periods. Authorities sometimes kept children in prison with their mothers until age three, according to a former political prisoner.

In March 2017 the Ministry of Public Security released a five-year review of its execution of criminal judgements covering 2011-16, the most recent period for which such information was available. The report acknowledged lack of quality infrastructure and overcrowded detention centers were ongoing challenges. The report stated the average floor space was 5.44 square feet per prisoner compared with the standard requirement of 6.6 square feet per prisoner.

As of November at least 11 deaths of persons in custody were reported; many were presumed to have been the result of abuse. On August 24, Hoang Tuan Long died

in Ha Dong hospital approximately a week after local police in Tho Quan ward, Dong Da district, Hanoi held him in custody for drug-related allegations. Authorities conducted an autopsy and found that he suffered multiple injuries, including a hole in the head and four broken ribs. Local police said he committed suicide by chewing his own tongue; the family said they believed police beat him.

Former political prisoners reported that police beat individuals in custody with books to prevent visible bruising. Prison officials failed to prevent prisoner-on-prisoner violence and in some cases encouraged prisoners to physically assault and harass political prisoners. In late July political prisoner Tran Thi Nga reported that a fellow inmate at Gia Trung detention facility, Gia Lai Province, had severely beat her. On November 18 prison officials allowed her partner to visit for the first time in two years, but they denied visits by her two minor children.

Activist Le Dinh Luong's family said he was held for one year in solitary confinement at the Nghe An Provincial Detention Center in Nghe An province with no access to sunlight prior to his August conviction and sentencing to 20 years in prison for "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration."

Some former and existing political prisoners and their families reported prisoners received insufficient, poor quality food. Former prisoners reported they received only two small bowls of rice and vegetables daily, often mixed with foreign matter such as insects or stones. Family members continued to make credible claims prisoners received extra food or other preferential treatment by paying bribes to prison officials. Prisoners had access to basic health care, although there were instances of officials preventing family members from providing medication and of prison clinics not reviewing predetention health records of prisoners. Family members of many imprisoned activists who were or became ill claimed medical treatment was inadequate and resulted in long-term health complications. Tran Thi Xuan's health deteriorated after her transfer in October to Thanh Hoa Detention Facility No. 5, according to her family, who said she suffered from edema related to a kidney disease.

Authorities placed prisoners in solitary confinement for standard periods of three months, although officials often subjected political prisoners to more extended periods of solitary confinement. An American citizen imprisoned for a nonpolitical charge reported he was only allowed out of his cell for five minutes per day during a continuous 39-month period except to meet with consular officials.

Prison authorities reportedly also placed some transgender individuals in solitary confinement due to confusion regarding whether to place them with men or women. Ministry of Public Security officials sometimes prohibited reading and writing materials. In January the Law on Temporary Detention and Custody came into effect, which transferred authority for approving such materials for those in temporary detention to the “agency handling the case” (i.e. the courts) rather than the prison authorities. Pham Van Troi said he was not able to receive reading materials at the B14 detention facility in Hanoi after the new law came into effect. Prison authorities said they were working to address implementation gaps and acknowledged that the law provides prisoners the right to receive gifts, books, newspapers, and documents.

Prison authorities often held political prisoners far from their homes, making family visits difficult and routinely did not inform family members of prison transfers. On July 5, Truong Minh Duc was transferred to Detention Facility No. 6 in Thanh Chuong district, Nghe An Province, 870 miles from his home in Ho Chi Minh City. On November 18, Nguyen Viet Dung’s father went to Nghi Kim prison in Nghe An Province to visit Dung who was serving a six-year prison term. Prison authorities informed him then that Dung had been transferred to Nam Ha prison in Ha Nam Province.

Administration: There was no active system of prison ombudsmen with whom prisoners could file complaints, but the law provides for oversight of the execution of criminal judgments by the National Assembly, people’s councils, and the CPV’s Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), an umbrella group that oversees the country’s government-sponsored social organizations. Tran Huynh Duy Thuc reported he was not permitted to send a petition to government officials asking that he be released because under the new penal code the crime he was convicted of is only punishable by five years’ imprisonment. Thuc had served nine years of his 16-year sentence for “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s administration.”

Authorities limited prisoners to one family visit of no longer than an hour per month and generally permitted family members to provide various items, including money, supplemental food, and bedding to prisoners. Political prisoners and their family members reported that prison authorities at times revoked, denied, or delayed visitation rights and did not allow them provide items to family members. Imprisoned Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton’s family said prison authorities at Gia Trung

detention center in Gia Lai routinely required additional procedures and paperwork to approve what should be routine prison visits with family as provided for by law.

In July and August respectively, political prisoners Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh and Tran Huynh Duy Thuc conducted lengthy hunger strikes to protest prison conditions. Thuc, whose hunger strike lasted 34 days, told family members that authorities at the Number 6 detention facility in Nghe An province also restricted the number of letters he could send after some of his letters from jail were publicized on Facebook.

While government-sanctioned Vietnam Buddhist Sangha monks were able to visit prisoners according to state-run media, Roman Catholic democracy activist Ho Duc Hoa said he was repeatedly denied a visit by a priest for confession. Prison authorities at the Nam Ha detention facility in Ha Nam Province said they did not have a chapel and therefore could not facilitate such a visit.

Family members of prisoners and former prisoners reported certain prison authorities did not permit prisoners to have religious texts in detention, despite provisions in the law for access to such materials. Ho Duc Hoa said he had access to a Bible and “Pure” Hoa Hao Buddhist Bui Van Trung Tham was allowed to have a censored version of the “Pure” Hoa Hao Buddhist scripture, according to an NGO.

Independent Monitoring: Local and regional International Committee of the Red Cross officials neither requested nor carried out prison visits during the year. Diplomatic representatives conducted supervised visits to several political prisoners at both temporary and long-term detention facilities. The visits were monitored and did not afford the opportunity for independent assessment of the prisoners or prison conditions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution states that a decision by a court or prosecutor is required for the arrest of any individual, except in the case of a “flagrant offense.” The law allows the government to arrest and detain persons “until the investigation finishes” for particularly serious crimes, including national security cases. Those detained may question the legality of their detention with the body responsible, but officials denied this right to political prisoners.

According to an NGO, between June and September authorities imprisoned 14 activists for social media posts and charged three for “abusing democratic freedom” and three with “making, storing, and spreading information, materials, and items for the purpose of opposing the state.” Authorities routinely subjected activists and suspected criminals to de facto house arrest without charge.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of Public Security is responsible for internal security and controls the national police, a special national security investigative agency, and other internal security units. The Bureau of Investigation of the Supreme People’s Procuracy (national-level public prosecutor’s office) examines allegations of abuse by security forces. The ministry had a substantial voice in national policymaking; three of the 17 members of the Politburo were actual or former Ministry of Public Security officials.

People’s committees (the executive branch of local governments) had substantial authority over police forces and prosecutors at the provincial, district, and local levels. Provincial and local police often had, consequently, significant independence in their activities.

Although the Supreme People’s Procuracy had authority to investigate security force abuse, police organizations operated with little legal restraint or transparency, and no public oversight. Police officers sometimes acted with impunity. At the commune level, guard forces composed of residents or members of government-affiliated social organizations commonly assisted police and sometimes committed human rights abuses.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In January a number of criminal laws including the 2015 Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), 2015 Penal Code, and 2015 Law on Custody and Detention went into effect.

The new CPC introduced adversarial elements into civil and criminal trial proceedings. The CPC also provides a full chapter on the roles and responsibilities of defense attorneys, which includes attorneys’ right of access to evidence and access to the accused at the time of arrest.

Activists reported Ministry of Public Security officials assaulted political prisoners to exact confessions or used other means to induce written confessions, including instructing fellow prisoners to assault them or making promises of better treatment. Some activists also reported routine police interrogations to obtain incriminating information concerning other human rights activists.

By law police usually need a warrant issued by the People's Procuracy to arrest a suspect, although in some cases a decision from a court (different from the procuracy) is required. There were numerous instances where activists were taken into custody by plainclothes individuals without an arrest warrant. The new CPC allows police to "hold an individual" without a warrant in "urgent circumstances," such as when evidence existed that a person was preparing to commit a crime or when police caught a person in the act of committing a crime. Police may hold a suspect for 72 hours without an arrest warrant. In such cases the People's Procuracy must approve or disapprove the arrest within 12 hours of receiving notice from police.

Police frequently used excessive force when making an arrest. There were cases where plainclothes individuals attempted to instigate an altercation in order to arrest an individual. On April 1, plainclothes officers arrested former political prisoner Vu Van Hung on the street near his house after he attended an unsanctioned meeting. Two plainclothes officers reportedly followed him from the meeting and beat Hung when he resisted their attempts to arrest him. Hung was ultimately charged and convicted of "deliberately inflicting injuries against others."

The People's Procuracy must issue a decision to initiate a formal criminal investigation of a detainee within three days of arrest; otherwise, police must release the suspect. The law allows the People's Procuracy to request two additional three-day extensions allowing for an extension of the custody time limit to a maximum of nine days.

The new criminal code reduces the time limit for detention while under investigation, including for "serious" and "particularly serious" crimes. For the latter an individual may be held for 20 months. The law, however, allows the Supreme People's Procuracy to detain an individual "until the investigation finishes" in cases of "particularly serious crimes," including national security cases. The government in some cases exceeded these limits for both activists and those accused of other crimes. On October 5, Luu Van Vinh, Phan Trung, and Nguyen Van Duc Do were convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms after

being held in pretrial detention for almost two years. Consistent with a pattern of increasingly lengthy sentences for human rights activists, Luu Van Vinh received a 15-year sentence for conviction of “conducting activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s administration”.

During the period of detention, authorities may deny family visits, which they routinely did for those arrested under national security and related articles such as “disrupting public order.”

The law allows for bail as a measure to replace temporary detention, but authorities seldom granted bail. Investigators, prosecutors, or courts may allow the depositing of money or valuable property in exchange for bail.

The law requires authorities to inform persons held in custody, accused of a crime, or charged with a crime, of their legal rights, including the right to an attorney. The law provides for legal aid services for persons younger than age 18, those with disabilities, or to those accused of a capital crime.

The law affords detainees access to counsel from the time of their detention, but authorities continued to use bureaucratic delays to deny timely access to legal counsel. In many cases authorities only permitted attorneys access to their clients or the evidence against them immediately before the case went to trial, denying them adequate time to prepare their cases.

In cases investigated under national security laws, the government has and routinely used authority to prohibit access by defense lawyers to clients until after officials complete an investigation and formally charge the suspect with a crime.

Authorities did not allow Le Dinh Luong to meet with his lawyer until July, approximately a year after his arrest. On August 18, a court in Nghe An Province sentenced Luong to 20 years in prison, consistent with a pattern of increasingly lengthy sentences for human rights activists.

Suspects routinely were not brought promptly before a judicial officer. Before a formal indictment, detainees have the right to notify family members. Although police generally informed families of detainees’ whereabouts, the Ministry of Public Security held a number of blogger and activist detainees suspected of national security violations incommunicado. On September 2, blogger Ngo Van Dung disappeared; his family did not receive informal confirmation of his whereabouts until mid-October. As of November the whereabouts of more than a

dozen other bloggers taken into custody across the country at the same time remained unknown.

Arbitrary Arrest: Arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly for political activists and individuals protesting land seizures or other injustices, remained a serious problem.

During the year security officers abducted activist Pham Doan Trang and questioned her for multiple times. On February 24, security officers took her from her house to the Security Investigation Agency of Ministry of Public Security, interrogating her for hours regarding her book titled “Politics for the Masses”. Authorities subjected many religious and political activists to varying degrees of arbitrary detention in their residences, in vehicles, at local police stations, at “social protection centers,” or at local government offices. Officials also frequently detained human rights activists upon their return from overseas trips.

The government arrested numerous individuals for expressing political views or protesting economic conditions, including dozens arrested in June in the aftermath of nationwide demonstrations against a draft special administrative economic zone and the new cybersecurity law. Authorities said three of those were arrested for “abusing freedoms and democratic rights to infringe upon the State’s interests or lawful rights and interests of organizations or individuals,” which carries a sentence of up to seven years’ imprisonment; two others were arrested for “producing, storing, spreading or disseminating information, documents or objects to oppose the State,” which carries a sentence of up to 20 years’ imprisonment; and one was arrested for “intentionally inflicting injury to or causing harm to the health of other persons.”

Taken into custody on September 2 for comments made on Facebook, activist Doan Thi Hong remained in detention without charge at year’s end; friends say she disappeared after dropping off her toddler with a friend. Her family had no information concerning her whereabouts for several weeks, but they eventually located her in Binh Thanh Ward, Ho Chi Minh City; they have not been allowed to meet with her.

Pretrial Detention: The allowable time for temporary detention during an investigation, equivalent to pretrial detention, varies depending on the offense: three months for less serious offenses, 16 months for the most serious cases, and 20 months for “especially serious” crimes. These limits were exceeded with impunity, including for cases not involving activists. Police and prosecutors used

these lengthy periods of pretrial detention to punish or to pressure human rights defenders to confess to crimes, activists said. By law authorities must provide justification for detention beyond the initial four months, but there were reports that court officials routinely ignored the legal requirement of providing such justification.

Lengthy pretrial detention was not limited to activists. The Ho Chi Minh City People's Procuracy reported that as of May 2017, 452 persons had been in custody for more than 12 months without trial and police had detained seven persons past the maximum period allowed by law. The Ho Chi Minh City's People's Procuracy attributed the delays to disagreements among the police investigation agency, the People's Court, and the People's Procuracy on whether to charge detainees under criminal or civil codes.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: Persons arrested or detained may request that the agency responsible review the decision. If a decision is deemed improper by that body, the individual may be eligible for appropriate compensation.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary and lay assessors, but the judiciary was effectively under the control of the CPV, exercised through the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). During the year there were credible reports that political influence, endemic corruption, bribery, and inefficiency strongly distorted the judicial system. Most if not all judges were members of the CPV and underwent screening by the CPV and local officials during their selection process to determine their suitability for the bench. Judges are reappointed every five years, following review by party officials. The party's authority was particularly notable in high-profile cases and other instances in which authorities charged a person with corruption, challenging or harming the party or state, or both. Defense lawyers routinely complained that, in many cases, it appeared judges made a determination of guilt prior to the trial.

There continued to be credible reports that authorities pressured defense lawyers not to take religious or democracy activists as clients and questioned their motivations for so doing. Authorities also restricted, harassed, and disbarred, human rights attorneys who represented political activists. While the new penal code maintained the requirement for attorneys to violate attorney client privilege in

cases relating to “national security,” or other “serious crimes,” it did away with such requirements for other, less “serious” offenses.

On March 12, the Ho Chi Minh City bar association disbarred lawyer Pham Cong Ut, who frequently defended human rights activists and “victims of injustice,” in many cases at no charge. The bar association said he had violated its code of ethics. State media accused him of failing to fully refund a legal consulting fee, while social media stated that such claims were spurious and the disbarment was instead related to his defense of “victims of injustice.”

By law authorities must request the local bar association, legal aid center, or the VFF appoint an attorney for criminal cases involving juveniles, individuals with mental or physical disabilities, and persons formally charged with capital crimes. In many such cases, however, authorities did not provide attorneys access to their clients until immediately before the case went to trial, depriving them of adequate time to prepare cases. In August authorities informed lawyer Nguyen Kha Thanh of the appeal trial of his client, Nguyen Viet Dung, only 24 hours in advance. Thanh said he did not have sufficient time to travel to attend the trial, and the court denied his request for a delay. Dung was not represented by an attorney. The court upheld his conviction for “conducting propaganda against the state” but reduced his seven-year sentence by one year.

Trial Procedures

While the constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, this right was not evenly enforced. The law states that defendants are innocent until proven guilty. Defendants have the right to prompt, detailed information of the charges levied against them, but defendants rarely experienced such treatment. Defendants have the right to a timely trial, and public trials generally were open to the public, but in sensitive cases, judges closed trials or strictly limited attendance.

Authorities generally upheld the rights of defendants to be present at their trial. The court sometimes denied the suspect the right to his/her own choice of attorney and assigned one. The new CPC modified the courtroom setting to have defendants seated adjacent their defense attorney. Defendants have the right to communicate with a lawyer at trial for a criminal charge that could result in a 15-year or longer sentence, although not necessarily with the lawyer of their choice.

Although the defense has the right to cross-examine witnesses, there were multiple instances in which neither defendants nor their lawyers knew which witnesses

would be called, nor were they allowed to cross-examine witnesses or challenge statements against them. In political trials neither defendants nor their attorneys were allowed to examine or review evidence relied upon by the prosecution. A defendant has the right to present a defense, but the law does not expressly state that the defendant has the right to call witnesses. Judges presiding over politically sensitive trials often did not permit defense lawyers and defendants to exercise their legal rights.

Police and prosecutors attempted to coerce confessions by offering lighter sentences in some sensitive cases. On January 31, Vu Quang Thuan stated at trial that investigators told him while he was in pretrial detention that he would receive only 16 months in prison if he cooperated with the investigation. He was charged with antistate propaganda, convicted, and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

The law stipulates that the spoken and written language of criminal proceedings is Vietnamese, but the state provides interpretation if participants in a criminal procedure use another spoken or written language. The law did not specify whether such services are free of charge.

The court uses an inquisitorial system, in which the judge plays the primary role of asking questions and ascertaining facts in a trial. Authorities permitted foreign diplomats to observe via closed circuit television four high-profile cases and one regular criminal trial during the year, including three involving individuals charged under national security articles. In most of those trials, defense attorneys were given time to address the court and question their clients, but they were not permitted to call official witnesses or examine evidence used to prosecute the defendants. The Hanoi appellate court permitted a defendant to answer only questions posed by his attorneys rather than the judges. In other cases involving individuals charged under national security articles, judges occasionally silenced defense lawyers who were making arguments on behalf of their clients in court. Convicted persons have the right to at least one appeal.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

According to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other NGOs, more than 100 persons were in prison in the country for political or religious reasons in 2018. One NGO stated that as of September 22, courts had convicted 36 "activists and bloggers" for exercising internationally recognized human rights, including freedom of expression and association.

Between April 4 and September 12, courts sentenced nine members of the Brotherhood for Democracy to lengthy prison terms for “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s administration.” Nguyen Trung Truc and Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton both received 12-year sentences, and land and religious freedom activist Nguyen Bac Truyen, was sentenced to 11 years’ imprisonment. Hoang Duc Binh, an environmental and labor activist, was sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment, and activist Le Dinh Luong received a 20-year sentence for “resisting persons in the performance of their official duties,” “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State” and “carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s administration.”

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The constitution provides that any person illegally arrested and detained, charged with a criminal offense, investigated, prosecuted, brought to trial, or subjected to judgment enforcement illegally has the right to compensation for material and mental damages and restoration of honor. The law provides a mechanism for pursuing a civil action to redress or remedy abuses committed by authorities. Administrative and civil courts heard civil suits, with legal procedures being similar to criminal cases and using members of the same body of judges and people’s assessors to adjudicate the cases. Administrative and civil courts continued to be vulnerable to corruption and outside influence, lack of independence, and inexperience. Very few victims of government abuse sought or successfully received redress or compensation through the court system.

The government continued to prohibit class action lawsuits against government ministries, thus rendering ineffective joint complaints from land rights petitioners.

Property Restitution

By law all land belongs to the government (“all the people of Vietnam”) which has granted considerable decision-making authority for land pricing, allocation, and reclamation to local people’s committees and people’s councils, which has contributed to unfair business practices and corruption.

There were numerous reports of clashes between local residents and authorities at land expropriation sites during the year. Disputes regarding land expropriation for development projects remained a significant source of public grievance. Many whose land the government forcibly seized protested at government offices for failure to address their complaints. Some coercive land seizures resulted in

violence and injury to state officials and residents. There were also reports of suspected plainclothes police officers and “thugs” hired by development companies to enforce government seizures by intimidating and threatening residents or breaking into their homes. Authorities arrested and convicted multiple land rights protesters on charges of “resisting persons on duty” or “causing public disorder.”

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

The law prohibits such actions, but the government did not consistently protect these rights and at times violated them.

By law, security forces need public prosecutorial orders for forced entry into homes, but Ministry of Public Security agents and local police officers regularly entered homes, particularly of activists, without legal authority. They often intimidated residents with threats of repercussions for failure to allow entry.

According to social media, on July 6, three plainclothes individuals broke into the home of Tran Van Chuc in Loc Thang town, Bao Lam district, Lam Dong province and beat him badly with wooden sticks, breaking his arm and causing multiple injuries. Activists reported that the assault was retaliation for attendance at a mass demonstration on June 10.

Without legal warrants, authorities regularly opened and censored targeted private mail; confiscated packages and letters; and monitored telephone conversations, email, text messages, blogs, and fax transmissions. The government cut telephone lines and interrupted cell phone and internet services of a number of political activists and their family members.

The Ministry of Public Security maintained a system of household registration and block wardens to monitor unlawful activity. While this system was less intrusive than in the past, the ministry closely monitored individuals engaged or suspected of engaging in unauthorized political activities. Local officials in several provinces in the Central Highlands, including Doan Ket village, Dak Ngo commune, Tuy Duc district, Dak Nong province, denied registration to 700 Hmong Christians who had migrated there in recent years, according to an NGO. As a result school officials did not allow their children to attend to school.

Family members of activists reported numerous incidents of physical harassment, intimidation, and questioning by Ministry of Public Security officials. Such harassment included harassment at the work place, and denying education and employment to family members of former or existing political prisoners or activists.

The constitution stipulates that society, families, and all citizens implement “the population and family planning program,” which allows couples or individuals the right to have one or two children, with exceptions based on government decree. There is no legal provision punishing citizens who have more children than the program allows; however, there were reported instances where local authorities imposed administrative fees on families in Nghe An province who had more than two children.

The CPV and certain ministries and localities issued their own regulations on family size for their staff. A decree issued by the Politburo, for example, subjects CPV members to reprimand if they have three children, removes them from a ranking position if they have four children, and expels them from the CPV if they have five children. Violating the decree also decreases the likelihood of promotion and may lead to job termination. The CPV did not enforce these provisions consistently.

CPV membership remained a prerequisite to career advancement for employees in nearly all government and government-linked organizations and businesses. Economic diversification, however, continued to make membership in the CPV and CPV-controlled mass organizations less essential for financial and social advancement.

Representatives from state-run organizations and progovernment groups visited activists’ residences and attempted to intimidate them into agreeing that the government’s policies were correct, according to social media and activists’ reports. For example on August 8, a group of injured veterans surrounded the private residence of activist Nguyen Lan Thang, calling him names and playing loud music for hours, according to social media. The group repeated the harassment for several days and authorities did not intervene despite repeated requests.

Family members of activists reported numerous and sometimes severe instances of harassment by Ministry of Public Security officials and agents, ranging from threatening telephone calls and insulting activists in local media and online to

attacks on activists' homes with rocks, shrimp paste, and gasoline bombs. There were reports that such abuses caused injury and trauma requiring hospitalization.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for the press; however, in practice the government did not respect these rights in practice, and several laws specifically encroach on freedom of expression. The government continued to use broad national security and antidefamation provisions to restrict these freedoms. The law defines the crimes of “sabotaging the infrastructure of socialism,” “sowing divisions between religious and nonreligious people,” and “propagandizing against the state” as serious offenses against national security. It also expressly forbids “taking advantage of democratic freedoms and rights to violate the interests of the state or lawful rights and interests of organizations or individuals.”

Freedom of Expression: The government continued to restrict speech that criticized individual government leaders, criticized the party, promoted political pluralism or multiparty democracy, or questioned policies on sensitive matters, such as human rights, religious freedom, or sovereignty disputes with China. The government also sought to impede criticism by monitoring meetings and communications of journalists and activists, including in academic institutions.

On June 12, the National Assembly adopted the Law on Cybersecurity which included vague national security provisions prohibiting “distortion of history, denial of revolutionary achievements, undermining national solidarity, taking advantage of cybersecurity protection activities to violate national security, national interests or sovereignty, or disrupt public order.” The law states any violation of its regulations would be subject to criminal prosecution.

Numerous groups and individuals criticized current and former local and national officials or members of government affiliates on social media, particularly Facebook.

On July 5, Hanoi authorities arrested blogger Le Anh Hung and charged him with “abusing democratic freedom” for online posts criticizing political leaders. Hung was a regular political writer for the Vietnamese programs of Voice of America,

Radio Free Asia, and the British Broadcasting Corporation, and also contributed to the Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam's blog.

Press and Media Freedom: The CPV, government, and party-controlled mass organizations exercised legal authority over all print, broadcast, online, and electronic media, primarily through the Ministry of Information and Communications under the overall guidance of the CPV Propaganda and Education Commission. The law authorizes the government to fine journalists and newspapers, with fines ranging from five million to 10 million Vietnamese dong (VND) (\$220 to \$440) for journalists who fail to cite their sources of information and for journalists and newspapers that “use documents and materials from organizations and personal letters and materials from individuals.” In July the Ministry of Information and Communications ordered a three-month suspension and 220 million VND (\$10,000) fine on *Tuoi Tre Online*, the online version of top daily *Tuoi Tre*, for attributing untrue remarks to the president and “disrupting national unity.” The suspension was one of the harshest punishments in years and had a chilling effect throughout the journalism sector.

Many nongovernmental entities produced and distributed publications in a variety of forms, e.g. by subcontracting, joint-publishing, or buying permits from government or public entities that were entitled to media activities and publishing. State-run media reported that private entities produced more than 90 percent of all publications in the country, although outright private ownership or operation of any media outlet or publishing house remained prohibited. Media independent of government authority operated on a limited basis online, primarily via blogs and social media, but independent journalists faced government harassment.

On March 11, the government consolidated several circulars implementing revised Decree 72 which governs on the management, supply, and use of internet services and online information. Decree 72 continues to require media to register and store user's personal information, facilitate the removal of information that violated laws, and allow the revocation of licenses of violators, among other provisions.

The law allows the government to punish publishers if they publish “untruthful information” in the fields of statistics; atomic energy; management of prices, charges, fees, and invoices; education; civil aviation; vocational training; hydrometeorology; cartography; and health.

The law limits satellite television access to senior officials, foreigners, luxury hotels, and the press, but persons throughout the country continued to be able to access foreign programming via home satellite equipment or cable.

The government permitted foreign-based media outlets although the law requires foreign television broadcasts to run on a 30- to 60-minute delay to enable content monitoring. Such channels ran on a 10-minute delay, however. Viewers reported obstruction of various commentaries, documentaries, and movies on human rights incidents in the country, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the Soviet era, or events in China and Venezuela.

Major foreign media outlets reported the government delayed or refused to issue visas for reporters who previously covered sensitive political topics, particularly reporters for the overseas Vietnamese-language press. In November consular officials did not issue a visa to a BBC journalist who intended to report on the anniversary of relations between the UK and Vietnam. His visa application remained pending in December.

Government regulations authorize the information ministry to revoke the licenses of foreign publishers, and each foreign publisher must reapply annually to maintain its license.

Violence and Harassment: There continued to be a significant number of reports of security officials attacking, threatening, or arresting journalists and independent bloggers because of their coverage of sensitive stories.

Plainclothes security officials detained and beat a prominent independent journalist and author Pham Doan Trang with their motorcycle helmets after she attended an unsanctioned concert in Ho Chi Minh City. She sustained a concussion.

Foreign journalists said they continued to be required to notify authorities about travel outside Hanoi when it was to an area considered sensitive, such as the Northwest or Central Highlands, or involved a story the government otherwise might consider sensitive.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The Ministry of Information and Communications and the CPV Propaganda and Education Commission frequently intervened directly to dictate or censor a story.

Propaganda officials forced editors of major press outlets to meet regularly to discuss what topics were off-limits for reporting. More often pervasive self-censorship, including among independent journalists and bloggers, due to the threat of dismissal and possible arrest, enabled the party and government to control media content. The government continued its practice of penalizing journalists for failing to self-censor, to include revoking journalists' press credentials.

In August a managing editor at a leading state-run daily said he was warned that he could be disciplined for what he wrote on Facebook. The newspaper said the contents he posted “undermined national unity” and provided fabricated and libelous information about organizations and individuals. He had written posts about state conglomerate Vinashin's losses, among other issues.

National Security: The law tightly restricts media freedom and stipulates fines of 20 million to 30 million VND (\$880 to \$1,330) for journalists, newspapers, and online media that publish or broadcast information deemed harmful to national interests and up to 50 million dong (\$2,200) for information considered as distorting history and the revolution's achievements. In some cases these “violations” may be subject to criminal proceedings.

Citing laws protecting national security, police arrested and charged journalists to restrict criticism of government policies or officials.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet, censored online content, and monitored private online communications without legal authority. The limited number of licensed internet service providers (ISPs) were fully or substantially state-controlled companies. The government monitored Facebook posts and punished those who used the internet to organize protests or publish content critical of the government. On September 22, in separate trials, the People's Court of Cai Rang district, Can Tho City, convicted Facebook users Nguyen Hong Nguyen and Truong Dinh Khang of “abusing democratic freedoms” and sentenced them to two years' and one year' imprisonment respectively. The government sometimes blocked websites it deemed politically or culturally inappropriate, including sites operated by overseas Vietnamese political groups in addition to the websites of Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, and the BBC Vietnamese news service. State-owned ISPs routinely blocked domestic Vietnamese-language websites that contained content criticizing the CPV or promoting political reform.

The law requires all companies and organizations operating websites providing content on “politics, economics, culture, and society” or social networks, including blogging platforms, to register with the government. The government also required such owners to submit detailed plans of their content and scope for approval. Such companies and organizations must locate at least one server in the country to facilitate requests for information from the government and store posted information for 90 days and certain metadata for up to two years.

The government forbids direct access to the internet through foreign ISPs, requires domestic ISPs to store information transmitted on the internet for at least 15 days, and requires ISPs to provide technical assistance and workspace to public security agents to allow them to monitor internet activities. The Ministry of Public Security has long required “internet agents,” including cyber cafes, to register the personal information of their customers, to store records of internet sites visited by customers, and to participate in government investigations of online activity. Internet cafes continued to install and use government-approved software to monitor customers’ online activities. The Ministry of Public Security enforced these and other requirements and monitored selectively.

On June 12, the National Assembly adopted a Law on Cybersecurity--scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2019--that requires foreign firms to store personal data locally and to open offices in the country. Members of the public protested the law and shared concerns that the law would make it easier for the state to pressure social media platforms to remove user-generated content or to hand over user information to security officials. Critics said it could undermine local businesses, which rely heavily on firms providing cross-border services online such as cloud-computing services.

The government continued to pressure firms such as Facebook and Google to eliminate “fake accounts” and content deemed “toxic,” including antistate materials. On July 9, the Ministry of Information and Communications announced that Google removed nearly 6,700 video clips, YouTube blocked six YouTube channels, and Facebook blocked nearly 1,000 links, 107 fake accounts, and 137 accounts that defamed the CPV and government.

Force 47, a special unit within the Ministry of National Defense monitored the internet for misinformation and antistate propaganda.

Authorities also suppressed online political expression by direct action against bloggers such as arrests, short-term detentions, surveillance, intimidation, and the illegal confiscation of computers and cell phones of activists and family members. The government continued to use national security and other vague provisions of the penal code against activists who peacefully expressed their political views online. Political dissidents and bloggers reported that the Ministry of Public Security routinely ordered disconnection of their home internet service. On September 17, the People's Court of Tu Son town convicted citizen journalist Do Cong Duong of "disrupting public order" for filming a forced eviction, according to an NGO. He was sentenced to four years in prison. Duong was subsequently convicted of "abusing democratic freedoms" and sentenced on October 12 to an additional five years in prison.

Social network and blog users are required to provide their full name, national identification number, and address before creating an account. In-country website and social network operators must allow authorities to inspect local servers upon request and must have a mechanism to remove prohibited content within three hours of detection or notification by authorities.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, 49.6 percent of the population used the internet in 2017.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom and cultural events. Foreign academic professionals temporarily working at universities in the country could discuss nonpolitical topics widely and freely in classes, but government observers regularly attended classes taught by both foreigners and nationals. The government continued to require international and domestic organizations to obtain advance approval for conferences involving international sponsorship or participation. The government allowed universities more autonomy over international exchanges and cooperation programs, but visa requirements for visiting scholars and students remained onerous.

The government continued to prohibit any public criticism of CPV and state policy, including by independent scientific and technical organizations, even when the criticism was for a purely academic audience.

The government exerted influence over art exhibits, music, and other cultural activities by requiring significant permission procedures.

Many activists reported Ministry of Public Security officials threatened university leaders if they did not expel activists from their respective universities and pressured them and their family members not to attend certain workshops, although their political activities were peaceful. Multiple activists also reported academic institutions refused to allow them or their children to graduate due to their advocacy of human rights. In March at Hanoi Noi Bai airport authorities denied exit permission to a student from Song Ngoc parish in Nghe An province who was traveling to study overseas due to his involvement in Formosa-related protests.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The government restricted freedom of peaceful assembly. Law and regulations require persons wishing to gather in a group to apply for a permit, which local authorities issued or denied without explanation. Only those arranging publicized gatherings to discuss sensitive matters appeared to require permits, however, and persons routinely gathered in informal groups without government interference. The government generally did not permit any demonstrations perceived to be political. The law permits security forces to detain individuals gathering or protesting outside of courthouses during trials.

The Ministry of Public Security and local police routinely prevented activists from peacefully assembling. There were numerous reports of police dispersing gatherings of environmental activists, anti-China activists, land rights advocates, human rights defenders, bloggers and independent journalists, women's rights, and former political prisoners.

Social media and multiple activists reported that on June 17, authorities took some 180 people, including those who were involved in protesting the draft SAEZ and cybersecurity laws and those observing the demonstrations, to Tao Dao stadium in Ho Chi Minh City. Some activists including Phan Tieu May said they were not protesting but were taken by authorities from their homes or cafes to the stadium. Authorities searched, and beat those detained. Many of those involved said they sustained injuries to the head, and some lost consciousness. One individual required long-term hospitalization for his injuries.

On August 15, Ho Chi Minh City police and plainclothes individuals beat musician Nguyen Tin and other activists at Casanova Cafe in District 3 in Ho Chi Minh City after Nguyen Tin held an unregistered concert. They tied him to a chair and beat him over the head with his guitar, according to other activists.

Freedom of Association

The constitution affords individuals the right of association, but the government restricted freedom of association severely. The country's legal and regulatory framework establishes mechanisms for restricting freedom of NGOs to act and organize, including by restricting freedom of association. The government generally prohibited the establishment of private, independent organizations, insisting that persons work within established, party-controlled mass organizations, usually under the aegis of the VFF. The government used complex and politicized registration systems for NGOs and religious organizations to suppress unwelcome political and religious participation.

Laws and regulations governing NGOs restrict their ability to engage in policy advocacy or conduct research outside of state-sanctioned topics and prohibit organizations focused on social science and technology from operating in fields such as economic policy, public policy, political issues, and a range of other areas considered sensitive. Authorities also do not permit them to engage in the public distribution of policy advocacy positions.

The Law on Belief and Religions, which came into effect January 1, still requires religious groups to register with authorities and to inform officials of activities. Authorities had the right to approve or refuse religious activities. Some unregistered religious groups reported an increase in government interference.

Some registered organizations, civil society organizations including governance and environment-focused NGOs, reported increased scrutiny of their activities.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government imposed some limits on the movement of certain individuals, especially those convicted under national security or related charges or outspoken critics of the government.

Religious and ethnic minority groups, including Hmong and Montagnards who fled the Central Highlands for Cambodia or Thailand, some reportedly due to abuse (see Section 6), asserted that authorities pressured them to return by threatening their families that remained in-country. Authorities then abused, detained, or questioned them upon their return.

In-country Movement: Several political activists, amnestied with probation or under house arrest, along with others not facing such legal restrictions were officially restricted in their movements, including Bui Thi Minh Hang and Dinh Nhat Uy. Authorities continued to monitor and selectively restrict the movement of many prominent activists and religious leaders including Nguyen Dan Que, Pham Chi Dung, Pham Ba Hai, Nguyen Hong Quang, Thich Khong Tanh, Le Cong Cau, and Duong Thi Tan. Several activists reported authorities had confiscated their national identification cards, preventing them from traveling domestically by air or conducting routine administrative matters.

Some activists reported authorities prevented them and their family members from leaving their homes during politically sensitive events, (see also section 1.d.).

A government restriction regarding travel to certain areas required citizens and resident foreigners to obtain a permit to visit border areas, defense facilities, industrial zones involved in national defense, areas of “national strategic storage,” and “works of extreme importance for political, economic, cultural, and social purposes.”

Local police required citizens to register when staying overnight in any location outside of their own homes; the government appeared to enforce these requirements more strictly in some Central and Northern Highlands districts. Foreign passport holders also needed to register to stay in private homes, although there were no known cases of local authorities refusing to allow foreign visitors to stay with friends or family. There were multiple reports of police using the excuse of “checking on residency registration” to intimidate and harass activists and prevent them from traveling outside of their place of registration (see sections 1.d. and 1.f.).

Authorities did not strictly enforce residency laws for the general population, and migration from rural areas to cities continued unabated. Moving without permission, however, hampered persons from obtaining legal residence permits, public education, and health-care benefits.

Foreign Travel: Prospective emigrants occasionally encountered difficulties obtaining a passport or exit permission, and authorities regularly confiscated passports of activists, at times indefinitely. There were multiple reports of individuals crossing the land borders with Laos or Cambodia illegally because they were unable to obtain passports or exit permission; in some cases this included persons sought for alleged crimes or wanted for political or other activism.

The Ministry of Public Security continued to use foreign travel prohibitions against certain activists and religious leaders, including Bui Minh Quoc, Dinh Huu Thoai, Do Thi Minh Hanh, Pham Doan Trang, Nguyen Hong Quang, and Le Cong Dinh. Authorities banned and prevented dozens of individuals from traveling overseas, withheld their passports on vague charges, or refused to issue passports to certain activists or religious leaders without clear explanation. Authorities also refused to issue passports to the family members of certain activists.

On September 17, authorities prevented Nguyen Quang A from traveling to Geneva to attend a hearing with members of civil society for Vietnam's Universal Periodic Review before the UN Human Rights Council. In October Nguyen Quang A was able to travel to Brussels to testify to the EU's International Trade Committee, but reported having been intimidated by security officials the day of his departure.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees.

Stateless Persons

According to the government, at the end of 2017 there were approximately 29,500 recognized stateless persons and persons of undetermined nationality living in the country. This was a substantial increase from the estimated 11,000 stateless persons acknowledged in 2016 and was due to increased government effort to identify such persons. The bulk of this population lived in border areas, but it also

included a number of women who lost their citizenship after marrying a foreigner but then lost their foreign citizenship, primarily because of divorce. In the past the government naturalized stateless ethnic Vietnamese who had lived in Cambodia, but there was no information on naturalization efforts or options for those identified as stateless persons during the year.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides the ability to elect representatives to the National Assembly, people's councils, and other state agencies directly. By law National Assembly elections take place once every five years by secret ballot. The constitution sets the voting age at 18 and allows candidates to run for election to the National Assembly or People's Council at 21. Nonetheless, the ability of citizens to change their government democratically was severely limited. Constitutional and legal provisions established a monopoly of political power for the CPV; the CPV was the only party allowed to put forward candidates for office and it oversaw all elections.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The most recent elections to select members of the National Assembly in 2016 allowed limited competition among CPV-vetted candidates but were neither free nor fair, and the government did not allow NGO monitoring. The CPV's Fatherland Front chose and vetted all candidates through an opaque, multistage process. CPV candidates won 475 of the 496 seats. The remaining 21 were non-CPV candidates unaffiliated with any party. There were no candidates from a party other than the CPV.

According to the government, 99 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2016 election, a figure activists and international observers considered improbably high. Voters may cast ballots by proxy, and officials charged local authorities with assuring that all eligible voters cast ballots by organizing group voting and verifying that all voters within their jurisdiction had voted. There were numerous reports throughout the country that election officials had stuffed ballot boxes and created the illusion of high turnout.

The law allows citizens to "self-nominate" as National Assembly candidates and submit applications for the VFF election vetting process. In the months leading up to the 2016 National Assembly elections, an informal coalition of legal reformers, academics, activists, and human rights defenders attempted to register as self-

nominated, non-CPV “activist independent” candidates. In contrast to the party’s candidates, these candidates actively used Facebook and social media to advertise their policy platforms. VFF officials refused, however, to qualify any activist independent candidates, and authorities instructed official media to criticize certain activist independent candidates. According to press reports, the VFF allowed two self-nominated candidates on final ballots, but both individuals were party members.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Political opposition movements and other political parties are illegal. The constitution asserts the CPV’s role as “vanguard of the working class and of the Vietnamese nation” and the “leading force in the state and society,” a broad role not given to any other constitutional entity. Although the constitution states that “all Party organizations and members of the CPV operate within the framework of the constitution and the laws,” the CPV Politburo in fact functioned as the supreme national decision-making body, although technically it reported to the CPV Central Committee.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit participation of woman or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. The law set a target of 35 percent of final candidates for the National Assembly and provincial people’s councils to be women and 18 percent of final candidates for the National Assembly to be from minority groups.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

Although the law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There was also a noticeable increase in the number of high-profile arrests and prosecutions of high-ranking officials for corruption. This included existing and retired officials from the Politburo, Central Party, military, public security services.

Corruption: The lack of public consultation on land use plans and government land compensation frameworks was the primary driver of corrupt land transfers and source of land conflicts. Corruption in financial, banking, natural resource mining and public investment sectors also remained significant political and social problems.

The MPS reported it processed 185 corruption cases in 2017, the most recent data available. In a June speech, Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu

Trong said the CPV had punished nearly 1,300 members in the prior two years for corruption. The great majority of these cases were handled within the Party and could not be independently confirmed.

According to a government report, in 2017 39 leaders were punished for allowing corruption to occur within their agencies compared with only 11 in 2016. The report stated the government prosecuted 136 corruption cases, up 177 percent from the previous year, and the police investigated 354 cases of which 345 were prosecuted. These resulted in the government recovering more than 1.52 trillion VND (\$65 million) and 7.7 hectares (19 acres) of land.

In August Tran Trung Chi Hieu, former chairman of PetroVietnam, was convicted of bribery and corruption and sentenced to 28 years' imprisonment, while Trinh Xuan Thanh, former chairman of PetroVietnam Construction, received a life sentence in January for embezzlement, and Dinh La Thang, a former politburo member and chairman of PetroVietnam, received in May an 18-year sentence for mismanagement and a separate 13-year sentence for embezzlement in January.

Corruption among police remained a significant problem at all levels as illustrated by the April 6 arrest of former MPS director general Phan Van Vinh on bribery charges, and police sometimes acted with impunity. Internal police oversight structures existed but were subject to political influence.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires senior government officials and National Assembly members to disclose to their agency their income and assets and explain changes from the previous year's disclosure. In some cases these declarations were publicly declared to be correct or not. In addition supervisors have the right to question an employee's disclosure. The law provides for reprimand, warning, suspension, or removal for noncompliant civil servants for corruption.

A 2017 government report stated that more than 1.1 million government workers disclosed their finances, but only 78 were verified, of which five were identified as incorrect. Media highlighted examples of civil servants driving luxury cars, using houses given to them by enterprises, or sending children to study overseas while ostensibly only earning small official salaries.

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

The government did not permit independent, local human rights organizations to form or operate, nor did it tolerate attempts by organizations or individuals to criticize its human rights practices publicly. The government used a wide variety of methods to suppress domestic criticism of its human rights policies, including surveillance, detention, prosecution, and imprisonment, interference with personal communications, and limits on the exercise of the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. The government occasionally allowed representatives of international human rights organizations to visit the country but usually strictly controlled their itineraries. The government denied access to the senior director of global operations at Amnesty International and the secretary general of the International Federation for Human Rights, precluding their participation in the September 9 World Economic Forum meetings in Hanoi.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law prohibits using or threatening violence against women or taking advantage of a person who cannot act in self-defense. It also criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, for men and women. The new penal code added to the section on rape “other sexual contacts” and “forced sex crimes” in addition to “sexual intercourse.” This expanded the range of prohibited acts to include vaginal, anal, and oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object.

Conviction for rape is punishable by imprisonment of up to 15 years, depending on the severity of the case. Authorities prosecuted rape cases but did not release arrest, prosecution, conviction, or punishment statistics.

Authorities treated domestic violence cases as civil cases unless the victim suffered injuries to more than 11 percent of the body. The law specifies acts constituting domestic violence and stipulates punishments for convicted perpetrators ranging from warnings through probation to imprisonment for up to three years.

Domestic violence against women was common. A 2015 NGO survey, the most recent available, reported 59 percent of married women had suffered physical or sexual abuse at least once in their lives, typically from a male partner or member of the family.

Officials acknowledged domestic violence as a significant social concern, and the media discussed it openly. Social stigma prevented many survivors from coming forward due to fear of harassment from their spouses or family.

While police and legal systems generally remained unequipped to deal with cases of domestic violence, the government with the help of international and domestic NGOs continued to train police, lawyers, community advocates, and legal system officials in the law and continued to support workshops and seminars that aimed to educate women and men about domestic violence and women's rights and highlight the problem through public awareness campaigns.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace. Publications and training on ethical regulations for government and other public servants did not mention the problem of sexual harassment. In serious cases victims may sue offenders under a provision that deals with "humiliating other persons" and specifies punishments for conviction that include a warning, noncustodial reform for up to two years, or a prison term ranging from three months to two years. As of November there were no reports of prosecutions or sexual harassment lawsuits. A study determined 83 percent of women and girls in Hanoi and 91 percent of those in Ho Chi Minh City had experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment during their lives.

Coercion in Population Control: The government continued to encourage couples to have no more than two children. While the law does not prohibit or provide penalties for those having more than two children, some CPV members and activists reported informally administered repercussions for doing so, including restrictions on job promotion (see section 1.f).

Discrimination: The law provides for gender equality, but women continued to face societal discrimination. Despite the large body of law and regulation devoted to protecting women's rights in marriage and the workplace, as well as provisions that call for preferential treatment, women did not always receive equal treatment in employment, education, or housing, particularly in rural areas.

Gender gaps in education declined, but certain gaps remained. There were substantial differences in the education profile of men and women at the postsecondary level. The number of female students enrolled in higher education applied technology programs was much smaller than the number of men enrolled.

Although the law provides for equal inheritance rights for men and women, women continued to face cultural discrimination. A son was more likely to inherit property than a daughter, unless otherwise specified by a legal document such as a will.

The Women's Union and the government's National Committee for the Advancement of Women continued to promote women's rights, including political, economic, and legal equality, and protection from spousal abuse.

Gender-biased Sex Selection: The national average male-female sex ratio at birth in 2018 was 115.1 boys to 100 girls, up three percentage points from 2017 and falling short of the target of 112.8 boys to 100 girls, according to the General Office for Population and Family Planning, under the Ministry of Health. The government acknowledged the problem, highlighted reduction of the ratio as a goal in the national program on gender equality, and continued to take steps to address it.

Children

Birth Registration: By law the government considers anyone born to a citizen parent to be a citizen. Persons born to non-Vietnamese parents may also acquire citizenship under certain circumstances. The law requires a birth certificate to access public services, such as education and health care. Nonetheless, some parents, especially from ethnic minorities, chose not to register their children and local authorities prevented some parents from registering children to discourage migration.

Education: Education is free, compulsory, and universal through age 14, although many families were required to pay a variety of school fees. Under a government subsidy program, ethnic-minority students were exempt from paying school fees. Nevertheless, authorities did not always enforce required attendance or enforce it equally for boys and girls, especially in rural areas, where government and family budgets for education were limited and children's labor in agriculture was valuable.

Child Abuse: The government did not effectively enforce existing laws on child abuse and physical and emotional mistreatment was common.

According to 2016 reports from UNICEF, violence against children occurs in many settings including schools and homes, and is usually inflicted by someone

known to the child. The most common types of school violence are bullying and corporal punishment by teachers. The number of reported cases of child abuse, especially child sexual abuse, was increasing. UNICEF stated there were no effective inter-disciplinary and child and gender sensitive procedures and processes for handling child abuse reports, and the responsibilities of the responsible agencies were unclear. The child protection workforce, especially at local levels, from social workers to relevant professionals such as police, judges, prosecutors, teachers, and medical experts, was poorly trained, uninformed, and generally insufficient to address the problem.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage is 18 for girls and 20 for boys, and the law criminalizes organizing marriage for, or entering into marriage with, an underage person.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Sexual exploitation of children younger than age 16 is illegal. The law criminalizes all acts of sale or deprivation of liberty of children as well as all acts related to child prostitution and forced child labor. Sentences of those convicted range from three years' to life imprisonment, and fines range from five million to 50 million VND (\$220 to \$2,200). The law also specifies prison sentences for conviction of acts related to child prostitution, including harboring prostitution (12 to 20 years), brokering prostitution (seven to 15 years), and buying sex with minors (three to 15 years). The production, distribution, dissemination, or sale of child pornography is illegal and conviction carries a sentence of three to 10 years' imprisonment. The country is a destination for child sex tourism.

The law prohibits all acts of cruel treatment, humiliation, abduction, sale, and coercion of children into any activities harmful to their healthy development and provides for the protection and care of disadvantaged children.

The minimum age of consensual sex is 18. Conviction of statutory rape may result in life imprisonment or capital punishment. Penalties for sex with minors between ages 16 and 18, depending upon the circumstances, vary from five to 10 years in prison. The penalty for rape of a child between ages 13 and 16 is seven to 15 years' imprisonment. If the victim becomes pregnant, the rape is incestuous, or the offender is in a guardianship position to the victim, the penalty increases to 12 to 20 years' imprisonment. The law considers all cases of sexual intercourse with children younger than age 13 child rape, with sentences ranging from 12 years' imprisonment to death. The government enforced the law, and convicted rapists received harsh sentences.

Displaced Children: Media reported that approximately 21,000 children lived on the streets and sometimes experienced police harassment or abuse.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://www.travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/forC-Afor-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html>.

Anti-Semitism

There were small communities of Jewish foreigners in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City; there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution provides for the protection of persons with mental and physical disabilities. The law prohibits discrimination against or mistreatment of persons with physical, mental disabilities, or both, and protects their right to access education and other state services, but the government struggled to enforce these provisions.

The law protects persons the rights of persons with disabilities including the right to access to education, employment, health services, information, communications, buildings, transport, judicial system, and other state services; however, the majority of persons with disabilities faced challenges in exercising their rights and could not access government services due to lack of policy implementation and social stigma.

In prior years, representatives from a broad range of ministries--construction, finance and planning, transport--have begun incorporating accommodations for persons with disabilities in joint planning. While the law requires that new construction or major renovations of government and large public buildings

include access for persons with disabilities, enforcement continued to be sporadic, particularly for projects outside of major cities.

Access to education for children with disabilities, particularly deaf children and children with intellectual disabilities, remained extremely limited.

There is no legal restriction on the right to vote for persons with disabilities, although many polling stations were not accessible, especially to persons with physical disabilities.

While the provision of social services to persons with disabilities remained limited, the government made some efforts to support the establishment of organizations of persons with disabilities and consulted them in the development or review of national programs, such as the National Poverty Reduction Program, vocational laws, and various education policies. The National Committee on Disabilities, the Vietnam Federation on Disability, and their members from various ministries worked with domestic and foreign organizations to provide protection, support, physical access, education, and employment. The government operated a small network of rehabilitation centers to provide long-term, in-patient physical therapy.

NGOs reported they continued to face challenges applying for funding and offering training for disability-related programs from certain provincial governments, which hampered access for international experts to conduct training.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination against ethnic minorities, but societal discrimination was longstanding and persistent. Local officials in some provinces, notably in the highlands, discriminated against members of ethnic and religious minority groups. Despite the country's significant economic growth, the economic gap between many ethnic minority communities and ethnic majority communities persisted, although ethnic minority group members constituted a sizable percentage of the population in certain areas, including the Northwest, Central Highlands, and portions of the Mekong Delta.

International human rights organizations and refugees continued to allege authorities monitored, harassed and intimidated members of certain ethnic minority groups, particularly ethno-religious minorities, including Christian Hmong and groups collectively referred to as Montagnards. Some members of these groups fled to Cambodia and Thailand, seeking refugee status as victims of oppression;

the government claimed these individuals were illegal migrants who left the country in pursuit of economic opportunities. Human rights groups stated the government pressured Cambodia and Thailand to deny these individuals refugee or temporary asylum seeker status and to return them to Vietnam.

Authorities used national security provisions of the law to impose lengthy prison sentences on members of ethnic minorities for connections to overseas organizations that the government claimed espoused separatist aims. In addition activists often reported an increased presence of Ministry of Public Security agents on historically significant days and holidays throughout the region.

The government continued to address the socioeconomic gap between ethnic minorities and the majority community through programs to subsidize education and health facilities and expand road access and electrification to rural communities and villages. The government also continued to allocate land to ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands.

The government operated 300 boarding schools in 50 provinces for ethnic minority children, mostly in the Northwest and Central Highlands and the Mekong Delta. The government also worked with local officials to develop local-language curricula. Implementation was more comprehensive in the Central Highlands and the Mekong Delta than in the Northwest Highlands. The government also subsidized several technical and vocational schools for ethnic minorities.

The government granted preferential treatment to domestic and foreign companies that invested in highland areas populated predominantly by ethnic minorities. The government also supported infrastructure development programs that targeted poor, largely ethnic-minority areas, and established agricultural extension programs for remote rural areas though land expropriation in these areas was also common.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuse Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law does not prohibit discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, or access to government service. The civil code gives individuals who have undergone a “sex change” the right to register their new status. Sexual orientation and gender identity were still a basis for stigma and discrimination.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

HIV and AIDS social stigma and discrimination hindered HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.

According to the 2015 *Stigma Index*, the latest available data, 11.2 percent of persons with HIV, 16.6 percent of female sex workers, 15.5 percent of persons who inject drugs, and 7.9 percent of men who have sex with men reported having experienced violations of their rights within the 12 months prior to the survey. Individuals with HIV continued to face barriers accessing and maintaining employment.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution affords the right to association and the right to demonstrate but limits the exercise of these rights, including preventing workers from organizing or joining independent unions of their choice. While workers may choose whether to join a union and at which level (local or “grassroots,” provincial, or national), the law requires every union to be under the legal purview and control of the country’s only trade union confederation, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL), a CPV-run organization. Only citizens may form or join labor unions.

The law gives the VGCL exclusive authority to recognize unions and confers on VGCL upper-level trade unions the responsibility to establish workplace unions. The VGCL’s charter establishes the VGCL as the head of the multilevel unitary trade union structure and carries the force of law. The law also stipulates that the VGCL answers directly to the CPV’s VFF, which does not protect trade unions from government interference in or control over union activity.

The law also limits freedom of association by not allowing trade unions full autonomy in administering their affairs. The law confers on the VGCL ownership of all trade-union property, and gives it the right to represent lower-level unions. By law trade union leaders and officials are not elected by union members but are appointed.

The law requires that if a workplace trade union does not exist, an “immediate upper-level trade union” must perform the tasks of a grassroots union, even where workers have not so requested or have voluntarily elected not to organize. For

nonunionized workers to organize a strike, they must request that the strike “be organized and led by the upper-level trade union,” and if non-unionized workers wish to bargain collectively, the upper-level VGCL union must represent them.

The law stipulates that trade unions have the right and responsibility to organize and lead strikes, and establishes certain substantive and procedural restrictions on strikes. Strikes that do not arise from a collective labor dispute or do not adhere to the process outlined by law are illegal. Contrary to international standards, the law forbids strikes regarding “rights-based” disputes. This includes strikes arising out of economic and social policy measures that are not a part of a collective negotiation process, as they are both outside the law’s definition of protected “interest-based” strikes.

The law prohibits strikes by workers in businesses that serve the public or that the government considers essential to the national economy, defense, public health, and public order. “Essential services” include electricity production; post and telecommunications; maritime and air transportation, navigation, public works, and oil and gas production. The law also grants the prime minister the right to suspend a strike considered detrimental to the national economy or public safety.

The law prohibits strikes among workers across different employers, resulting in a ban on sector- and industry-level protests and prohibits workers and unions from calling for strikes in support of multiemployer contracts.

The law states that the executive committee of a trade union may issue a decision to go on strike only when at least 50 percent of workers support it.

Laws stipulate an extensive and cumbersome process of mediation and arbitration before a lawful strike over an interest-based collective dispute may occur. Unions or workers’ representatives may either appeal decisions of provincial arbitration councils to provincial people’s courts or strike. The law stipulates strikers may not be paid wages while they are not at work. The law prohibits retribution against strikers. By law individuals participating in strikes declared illegal by a people’s court and found to have caused damage to their employer are liable for damages.

The laws include provisions that prohibit antiunion discrimination and interference in union activities while imposing administrative sanctions and fines for violations. The laws do not distinguish between workers and managers, however, and fail to prohibit employers’ agents, such as managers who represent the interests of the

employer, from participating or interfering in union activity. Penalties were not adequate to deter violations.

According to the VGCL, more than 73 percent of the 189 strikes that occurred in the first eight months of the year occurred in foreign direct-investment companies (mainly Korean, Taiwanese, Japanese, and Chinese companies), and nearly 40 percent occurred in the southern economic zone area in Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Ba Ria Vung Tau provinces and Ho Chi Minh City. None of the strikes followed the authorized conciliation and arbitration process, and thus authorities considered them illegal “wildcat” strikes. The government, however, took no action against the strikers and, on occasion, actively mediated agreements in the workers’ favor. In some cases the government imposed heavy fines on employers, especially of foreign-owned companies, that engaged in illegal practices that led to strikes.

Because it is illegal to establish or seek to establish independent labor unions, there were no government-sanctioned domestic labor NGOs involved in labor organizing. Local labor NGOs, however, supported efforts to raise awareness of worker rights and occupational safety and health issues and to support internal and external migrant workers. Multiple international labor NGOs collaborated with the VGCL to provide training to VGCL-affiliated union representatives on labor organizing, collective bargaining, and other trade union issues. The International Labor Organization (ILO)-International Finance Corporation (IFC) Better Work project reported management interference in the activities of the trade union was one of the most significant issues in garment factories in the country.

Labor activists and representatives of independent (non-VGCL) worker organizations faced antiunion discrimination. Independent labor activists seeking to form unions separate from the VGCL or inform workers of their labor rights sometimes faced government harassment. In February a court convicted and sentenced peaceful labor and environmental activist Hoang Duc Binh to 14 years’ imprisonment under vague articles of the penal code. Binh, who was arrested in 2017, advocated for compensation for fishermen affected by the 2016 Formosa spill, and posted online content about the government’s response to the spill that significantly affected workers (also see section 1.d.). In July a crowd attacked the house of Do Thi Minh Hanh, chairwoman of the independent Viet Labor Movement, pelting it with stones, fish sauce, and petrol bombs. In addition authorities continued to use foreign travel prohibitions against labor activists, including Do Thi Minh Hanh (also see section 2.d.).

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution and law prohibit forced or compulsory labor. The labor code's definition of forced labor, however, does not explicitly include debt bondage. In January penal code amendments entered into effect that criminalized all forms of labor trafficking of adults and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment and fines of 20 to 100 million VND. The amendments also criminalized labor trafficking of children younger than age 16 and prescribed penalties of seven to 12 years' imprisonment and fines of 50 to 200 million VND. The law does not provide any penalty for violation of the labor code provisions prohibiting forced labor. NGOs continued to report the occurrence of forced labor of men, women, and children within the country (see also section 7.c.).

Labor recruitment firms, most of which were affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly charged workers seeking international employment higher fees than the law allows, and they did so with impunity. Those workers incurred high debts and were thus more vulnerable to forced labor, including debt bondage.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The constitution prohibits "the employment of persons below the minimum working age." The law defines underage employees as anyone younger than age 18. The law prohibits children under 18 from working heavy, hazardous, and dangerous jobs. The law limits children between ages 15 and 18 to working a maximum of eight hours per day and 40 hours per week. Children between ages 13 and 15 may work only in light jobs, as defined by the Ministry of Labor, and considerations must be made for schooling, working conditions, labor safety, and hygiene. The law permits children to register at trade training centers, a form of vocational training, from age 14 without parental consent. While the law generally prohibits the employment of children under 13, it allows those under 13 to engage in sectors not deemed to be harmful as regulated by the ministry.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing child labor laws and policies. Government officials may fine and, in cases of criminal violations, prosecute employers who violate child labor laws. As part of the government's 2016-20 *National Plan of Action for Children and National Program for Child Protection*, the government continued efforts to prevent child labor and specifically targeted

children in rural areas, disadvantaged children, and children at risk of exposure to hazardous work conditions.

Per the *Vietnam National Child Labor Survey 2012*, the most recent data available, 1.75 million working children were categorized as “child laborers”, accounting for 9.6 percent of the national child population or 62 percent of children engaged in economic activities. Of child laborers, 40 percent were girls, nearly 85 percent of these children lived in the rural areas and 60 percent belonged to the 15-17 age group. Some children started work as young as age 12 and nearly 55 percent did not attend school (5 percent of whom would never attend school). Agriculture was the most common field for child laborers, with 67 percent of the total population, while 15.7 percent worked in construction/manufacturing and 16.7 percent in services.

There were reports of children between ages 10 and 18--and some as young as six--producing garments under conditions of forced labor. The most recently available information from government raids, NGOs, and media reports indicated that groups of children were laboring in small, privately owned garment factories and informal garment workshops. Reports indicated that these employers were beating or threatening the children with physical violence. In addition, there was evidence that children as young as 12 were working while confined in government-run rehabilitation centers. Employers forced these children to sew garments without pay under threat of physical or other punishments.

International and domestic NGOs noted successful partnerships with provincial governments to implement national-level policies combatting child labor.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment, labor relationships, and work but not explicitly in all aspects of employment and occupation. The law prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, disability, color, social class, marital status, belief, religion, HIV status, and membership in a trade union or participation in trade union activities. The law does not prohibit discrimination based on political opinion, age, language, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

No laws prohibit employers from asking about family or marital status during job interviews.

The government did not effectively enforce laws related to employment discrimination. The government took some action to address employment discrimination against persons with disabilities. Companies with a workforce composed of at least 51 percent employees with disabilities may qualify for special government-subsidized loans.

Discriminatory hiring practices existed, including discrimination related to gender, age, disability, and marital status. Women in the public sector were expected to retire at age 55, compared with age 60 for men, affecting women's ability to rise to managerial ranks and have higher incomes and pensions.

Women-led enterprises continued to have limited access to credit and international markets. A 2017 report by Oxfam estimated male workers earned on average 33 percent more than their female counterparts. Skilled female workers with university degrees earned 80 percent of male university graduates' wages. Many women older than age 35 found it difficult to find a job, and there were reports of women receiving termination letters at age 35. The VGCL's Institute of Workers and Trade Unions noted that women older than age 35 accounted for roughly half of all unemployed workers in the country.

Social and attitudinal barriers and limited access to the workplace remained problems in the employment of persons with disabilities.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage for enterprises ranged from 2.76 million VND (\$117) per month to 3.98 million VND (\$170) per month, depending on the region. In August the National Wages Council agreed to a 5.3 percent increase in the minimum wage, to take effect in 2019, raising the minimum wage range to 2.92 million VND (\$124) – 4.18 million VND (\$178). The minimum wage exceeds the General Statistics Office-World Bank official poverty income level.

The law limits overtime to 50 percent of normal working hours per day, 30 hours per month, and 200 hours per year, but it provides for an exception in special cases, with a maximum of 300 overtime hours annually, subject to stipulation by the government after consulting with the VGCL and employer representatives.

The law provides for occupational safety and health standards, describes procedures for persons who are victims of labor accidents and occupational diseases, and delineates the responsibilities of organizations and individuals in the

occupational safety and health fields. The law provides for the right of workers to remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The law protects “labor subleasing”, a pattern of employment, and thus extends protection to part-time and domestic workers.

The Ministry of Labor is the principal labor authority, and it oversees the enforcement of the labor law, administers labor relations policy, and promotes job creation. The Labor Inspections Department is responsible for workplace inspections to confirm compliance with labor laws and occupational safety and health standards. Inspectors may use sanctions, fines, withdrawal of operating licenses or registrations, closures of enterprises, and mandatory training. Inspectors may take immediate measures where they have reason to believe there is an imminent and serious danger to the health or safety of workers, including temporarily suspending operations, although such measures were rare. The ministry acknowledged shortcomings in its labor inspection system and emphasized the number of labor inspectors countrywide was insufficient.

Government enforcement of labor laws and standards, including in the informal economy, was irregular for many reasons, including low funding and a shortage of trained enforcement personnel.

Credible reports, including from the ILO-IFC Better Work 2017 Annual Report, indicated that factories exceeded legal overtime thresholds and did not meet legal requirements for rest days. The ILO-IFC report stated that, while a majority of factories in the program complied with the daily limit of four hours overtime, 77 percent still failed to meet monthly limits (30 hours) and 72 percent exceeded annual limits (300 hours). In addition and due to the high prevalence of Sunday work, 44 percent of factories failed to provide at least four days of rest per month to all workers.

Migrant workers, including internal economic migrants, were among the most vulnerable workers, and employers routinely subjected them to hazardous working conditions. Members of ethnic minority groups often worked in the informal economy and, according to the ILO, informal workers typically had low and irregular incomes, endured long working hours, and lacked protection by labor market institutions. On-the-job injuries due to poor health and safety conditions and inadequate employee training remained a problem. In 2017, the government reported 8,956 occupational accidents with 9,173 victims, including 898 fatal incidents with 928 deaths.