

IRAQ 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Iraq is a constitutional parliamentary republic. The outcome of the April 2014 parliamentary elections generally met international standards of free and fair elections and led to the peaceful transition of power from former prime minister Maliki to Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. In October 2014 parliament approved the new prime minister's final cabinet nominations, successfully completing the government formation process. Civilian authorities did not always maintain effective control of the security forces: the regular armed forces and domestic law enforcement bodies; the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a state-sponsored umbrella military organization composed of approximately 40 militia groups, which were predominantly Shia; and the Peshmerga--the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) principal military force. On April 7, the Council of Ministers announced that the PMF was an official body reporting to the prime minister, but the prime minister's ability to command the PMF remained a source of disagreement and debate.

Sectarian violence fueled by the actions of Da'esh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) continued to divide the country. Destabilizing violence occurred throughout the year as government forces fought to liberate territory lost to Da'esh, principally in Arab Sunni and some mixed ethnosectarian areas. Armed clashes between Da'esh and government forces caused civilian hardship. By year's end the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) had surpassed 3.2 million. The country also hosted 245,000 Syrian refugees, most of whom have settled in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR). Although donor funding increased, government response fell short of rapidly rising humanitarian demands, and displaced populations became destitute, leading some citizens to seek refuge abroad.

Severe human rights problems were widespread. Da'esh committed the overwhelming number of serious human rights abuses, including attacks against civilians, especially Shia but also Sunnis who opposed Da'esh; members of other religious and ethnic minorities; women; and children. Some Shia PMF reportedly committed human rights violations. Numerous reports continued during the year of Shia PMF killing, torturing, kidnapping, and extorting civilians. Simultaneously, to a much lesser extent, government forces reportedly engaged in abuses against civilians in liberated areas, such as arbitrary detentions and limits on freedom of movement. Sectarian hostility, widespread corruption, and lack of

transparency at all levels of government and society weakened the government's authority and worsened effective human rights protections.

Observers reported other significant human rights-related problems: disappearances; torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; harsh and life-threatening conditions in detention and prison facilities; arbitrary arrest and lengthy pretrial detention, sometimes incommunicado; denial of fair public trial; insufficient judicial institutional capacity; ineffective implementation of civil judicial procedures and remedies; delays in resolving property restitution claims; arbitrary interference with privacy and homes; child soldiers; limit on freedom of expression, including press freedoms; violence against and harassment of journalists; undue censorship; social, religious, and political restrictions in academic and cultural matters; limits on freedoms of peaceful assembly and association; limits on religious freedom due to violence by extremist groups; restrictions on freedom of movement; refugee and IDP abuse; discrimination against, including exclusion from decision-making roles, and societal abuse of women and ethnic, religious, and racial minorities; trafficking in persons; societal discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons; and limitations on worker rights.

Information about investigations or prosecutions of abuses by government officials and members of the security forces was not publicly available. Impunity effectively existed for government officials and security forces personnel.

Terrorists committed the overwhelming number of serious human rights abuses. Da'esh members committed acts of violence on a mass scale, including killing by suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices, execution-style shootings, public beheadings, and other forms of executions. They also engaged in kidnapping, rape, enslavement, forced marriage, sexual violence, committing such acts against civilians from a wide variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, including Shia, Sunni, Kurds, Christians, and members of other religious and ethnic groups, as well as religious pilgrims. Reports of Da'esh perpetrating gender-based violence, recruiting child soldiers, and destroying civilian infrastructure and cultural heritage sites were credible and common. The government initiated investigations of Da'esh's human rights abuses, such as the reported June 2014 massacre of as many as 1,700 largely Shia Air Force recruits at Camp Speicher. Official conclusions were not publicly available.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

During the year the security situation remained unstable due to widespread fighting between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Da'esh (see section 1.g.) and, to a lesser extent, Shia PMF. There were numerous reports that government forces, independent militias, and terrorist groups committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

While civilian fatalities, including civilian police that the government used in military operations, decreased from 2014, terrorist groups continued to target civilians, police, and security forces. From January 1, 2014, to October 31, 2015, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) recorded at least 55,047 civilian casualties resulting from the conflict, with 18,802 killed and 36,245 wounded. Baghdad was most affected with almost half of the total fatalities.

During the year the conflict with Da'esh caused an increase in violations against children, especially in Anbar, Diyala, and Ninewa Governorates. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), violations against children included killing and maiming, recruitment or use as soldiers, sexual violence, attacks against schools or hospitals, denial of humanitarian access for children, and abduction.

Security forces reportedly committed extrajudicial killings, although identification of specific killers was rare. Ministry of Interior personnel reportedly tortured detainees to death, according to unverified accounts from human rights organizations (see section 1.c.). Amnesty International (AI) reported that Peshmerga also carried out destruction of Arab homes in areas recaptured from Da'esh.

In many cases Shia PMF operated independently and without oversight or direction from the government. According to AI, on January 26 Shia PMF and government security forces singled out and killed at least 56 and possibly more than 70 Sunni men in Barwana, a village west of Muqdadiya in Diyala Governorate. Witnesses told AI that Badr Brigades members, wearing green and red bandanas and armbands, went house to house and asked the men to come outside with their identification documents. Witnesses also said that among the perpetrators were members of the Ministry of Interior's Special Weapons and Tactics force, as well as the Muqdadiya police force. Witnesses heard gunfire and then found the bodies of the men shot and some of their fingers amputated. Witnesses said they found their family members shot and blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. On January 28, the prime minister ordered an investigation into these killings. On March 20, the Commission of Inquiry submitted its report to the parliament. AI

reported that as of April, the authorities had not contacted any of the victims' families or informed them of any steps investigators took.

Terrorist activities throughout the country increased significantly during the year, particularly with Da'esh assaults on cities across the west and north. Da'esh frequently employed suicide attacks and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). Some attacks targeted government buildings or checkpoints staffed by security forces, while others targeted civilians. For example, local and international media reported that on July 17, Da'esh claimed responsibility for a truck bombing that killed at least 115 persons at a crowded marketplace in Khan Bani Saad in Diyala Governorate. The victims, the majority of whom were Shia, had gathered to mark the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Attacks continued on playgrounds, mosques, government sites, civilian homes, and markets, as well as attacks directed at members of the security forces, public officials, journalists, ethnic and religious minorities, and local leaders opposed to Da'esh. Da'esh claimed responsibility for many such attacks via its social media platforms.

Da'esh reportedly carried out attacks against civilians in Baghdad's Shia-majority neighborhoods. UNAMI reported that improvised explosive devices, suicide vests, and VBIEDs caused at least half of all verified casualties in the first half of the year. For example, on January 30, an attack in al-Bab al-Sharji, Baghdad, killed 62 civilians, injured 109, and damaged or destroyed local shops. On July 5, local media reported that a bomb exploded near al-Obeidi District, killing four and injuring 14. A second blast killed four and injured 11 at a restaurant in Jisr Diyala, and two other bombs detonated at bus stops in Shulla and in a northeastern suburb of Baghdad, killing seven persons and injuring nine. On August 13, Da'esh detonated a VBIED at Jameela market in Sadr City in Baghdad, killing at least 45 and injuring 72.

Da'esh forces murdered Sunni tribal leaders; Sunnis who cooperated with the government, including previous Sons of Iraq members; and Sunni clerics who refused to recognize Da'esh and its caliphate. Da'esh also targeted Sunni civilians who cooperated with the ISF. UNAMI reported that on January 1, Da'esh executed 15 members of the Jumaili tribe in al-Shihabi area of Anbar Governorate. On February 6, Da'esh burned alive three civilians in front of residents of Hit District in Anbar Governorate. In both cases Da'esh targeted civilians for purportedly cooperating with the ISF by providing information on Da'esh members, offering food to the ISF, or for being related to ISF members.

Numerous reports of Da'esh abductions, public executions, and massacres of Sunni tribes emerged as members of these Sunni tribes increasingly turned against the terrorist group. On October 4, Da'esh executed 70 members of the Albu Nimr tribe in Ramadi in Anbar Governorate, according to international media. The victims were reportedly male relatives of members of ISF, police, and tribal fighters.

Spillover across the porous border from the conflict in Syria continued to destabilize the security situation in the country. The government did not control the border with Syria, and Da'esh was able to facilitate movement of fighters and materiel into Iraq.

AI reported that a prominent Sunni tribal leader who had called for sectarian reconciliation, Sheikh Qassem Sweidan al-Janabi, was kidnapped on February 13 in Dura in Baghdad. Authorities found the bodies of the sheikh, his son, and his bodyguards a few hours later in Baghdad. Janabi had pressed for the return of 70,000 displaced Sunni residents of Jurf as Sakhr in Babil Governorate.

International human rights organizations criticized the increasingly sectarian nature of Shia PMF activity and the lack of sufficient government oversight. The prime minister repeatedly called for the elimination of independent militias and ordered all such groups to fall under ISF authority. Shia religious leaders also called for Shia volunteers to fight under the command of the security forces and condemned violence against civilians, including destruction of personal property. On April 7, the Council of Ministers announced that the PMF were an official body reporting to Prime Minister al-Abadi, although the prime minister's ability to command the PMF remained a source of disagreement and debate.

Ethnic-based fighting escalated in ethnically mixed governorates in post-Da'esh clearing operations. Following an October 22 car bombing and an exchange of fire on November 12 in Tuz Khurmatu, in Salah ad Din Governorate, Peshmerga forces and Asayish (Kurdistan internal security) clashed with Popular Mobilization Forces reportedly composed of Shia Turkmen, Badr Brigades, the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Kita'ib Hizballah. The two sides supported by armed local residents from their respective communities reportedly committed punitive actions including razing homes, burning villages, looting, and engaging in mass arrests. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Shia Turkmen fighters from the PMF detained and tortured between 150 and 175 Sunni Arabs from Tuz Khurmatu, killed between eight and 34 of those abducted, kept approximately 50 in captivity at year's end, and released the rest (see section 1.d.).

There were significantly fewer reports of killings or other sectarian violence in the IKR than in the rest of the country. Minority groups reported threats and attacks targeting their communities in non-IKR areas that the KRG effectively controlled.

There were no known developments in other cases of arbitrary or unlawful killings reported in 2014.

b. Disappearance

Disappearances and kidnappings were regular occurrences, and some kidnapers who did not receive a ransom killed their victims. There were also cases reported in which the abductor killed the kidnapped individual despite receiving ransom payments. Most kidnappings appeared to be financially motivated. Da'esh forces and illegal armed groups engaged in widespread kidnapping of members of Iraq's various ethnic and religious communities. The Ministry of Human Rights reported that the numbers of missing persons from June 2014 to June 2015 had reached 2,935. According to UNAMI estimates, there were numerous "execution style" killings of victims kidnapped for ransom to intimidate members of their communities.

Criminal groups were most often associated with abductions outside of Da'esh-controlled areas. Kidnapping cases increased throughout the year, with criminals and some militias exploiting the security situation to carry out kidnappings, either for personal gain or for sectarian reasons. In March according to HRW, members of Shia PMF, including Kita'ib Hizballah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, apprehended and detained up to 200 residents from Jalam areas of ad-Dawr, Salah ad Din Governorate. A local member of parliament called for a government investigation; however, at year's end the whereabouts of at least 160 abductees were unknown. In September gunmen kidnapped 18 Turkish construction workers in Sadr City, according to international media. Two were released in Basrah two weeks later, and the remaining 16 were released on September 30. In December unknown gunmen kidnapped 26 Qatari members of a hunting party in the Muthanna desert. At year's end the Qatari citizens were still missing.

In areas it controlled, Da'esh engaged in frequent abductions of members of the security or police forces, ethnic and religious minorities, and other non-Sunni communities. In September local and international media reported that Da'esh kidnapped 127 children in Mosul, allegedly to force them to attend extremist camps, where they would learn how to use weapons and participate in suicide

attacks. Widely published photographs and videos depicted minors wearing Da'esh uniforms and using semiautomatic weapons. According to Yezidi activists and political leaders, 2,000 of the estimated 5,000 Yezidi men, women, and children kidnapped by Da'esh had been rescued due to assistance from the Office of the KRG Prime Minister and others.

Da'esh kidnapers also targeted ethnic and religious minorities. According to officials from the Turkmen Women's Association, Da'esh militants kidnapped 500 Turkmen women and children from Tall Afar and Mosul since June 2014. The association claimed that Da'esh militants brutalized the captives and tied at least 25 of the women to electricity poles and raped them in front of their family members.

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), an intergovernmental organization, estimated the number of missing persons from the Saddam Hussein era ranged from 250,000 to more than one million and included persons missing due to human rights violations and other atrocities committed during the Saddam regime, as well as persons missing due to the Iran-Iraq War and more recent conflicts. There was no central database for missing persons, and organizations documenting the abuses held the files in warehouses of several governmental ministries. The IKR Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs calculated the number of missing persons based on the number of families seeking assistance, but it was unclear how other ministries calculated their numbers. According to the ICMP, the decentralization and inaccessibility of records were obstacles to progress on missing persons cases.

In May media outlets reported the discovery of a mass grave in western Mosul containing the remains of 80 Yezidis. A representative from the Yezidi Affairs Council in the IKR reported these individuals were likely victims of Da'esh, and the remains showed signs of brutal treatment in captivity. Throughout the year authorities discovered several other mass graves with Yezidi victims of Da'esh. Authorities and returning civilians discovered several other mass graves with Yezidi victims of Da'esh; by year-end approximately 35 mass graves had been reported. In June the Ministry of Human Rights announced that the government exhumed more than 600 bodies from mass graves in Tikrit; it said that the bodies were mainly those whom Da'esh executed at the former Camp Speicher in June 2014.

There were no known developments in other cases of disappearances from prior years.

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

Although the constitution expressly prohibits torture in all its forms under all circumstances, including cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, government officials as well as local and international human rights organizations documented instances of government agents committing torture and other abuses. Police throughout the country continued to use abusive and coerced confessions as methods of investigation, and courts continued to accept forced confessions as evidence. Da'esh, however, committed the overwhelming majority of such abuses.

The Human Rights Ministry confirmed that allegations of torture and systematic abuses were pervasive within prisons and detention centers. International human rights organizations documented credible cases of torture and abuse in facilities of the Ministry of Interior and to a lesser extent in detention facilities of the Ministries of Justice and Defense, as well as in facilities of the KRG. The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR) noted that torture cases were underreported because many detainees did not file complaints due to fear. HRW contended that widespread torture and systematic abuses continued in detention facilities and reported several instances of torture and rape of detainees.

As in previous years, abuse and torture, particularly by police and security forces, during arrest and investigation were common in pretrial detention and after conviction. Former prisoners, detainees, and human rights groups reported that methods of torture and abuse included: putting victims in stress positions, beating them, breaking their fingers, suffocating them, burning them, removing their fingernails, suspending them from the ceiling, overextending their spines, beating the soles of their feet with plastic and metal rods, forcing them to drink large quantities of water while preventing urination, sexually assaulting them, denying them medical treatment, and threatening to kill them. A number of inmates reported that prison guards mistreated their families during visits.

On April 28, the Baghdad Center for Human Rights issued a statement detailing abuse of nine prisoners from al-Rasafa Prison in Baghdad. The statement said authorities beat detainees on the head, abdomen, face, hands, legs, and back with sticks, iron and plastic batons, and rifle butts. The statement included an account from an unnamed employee within the Iraqi Corrections Service, who said the prison director, on-duty officer, internal affairs administrator, and a group of prison employees abused the detainees.

The KRG's antiterrorist law allows abusive interrogation under certain conditions, and such practices reportedly occurred in some detention facilities of the KRG's internal security unit, the Asayish, and the intelligence services of the major political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) Parastin and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) Zanyari.

Abuses by terrorist groups were widespread. Da'esh reportedly brutalized Christians in churches in Qaraqush, Ninewa Governorate. According to international media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), in December 2014 Da'esh vandalized and occupied two churches, then committed brutal treatment against Christian prisoners unless they converted to Islam.

There were indications that government authorities initiated some investigations of security forces accused of committing human rights abuses, although authorities did not make public any findings of investigations. In February UNAMI reported results of its study of government responses to torture allegations. In 17 trials UNAMI monitored from January to June 2014, 28 defendants alleged that police tortured them, and in each case the judge failed to order an investigation. For nine cases the judge asked defendants if they had a medical report; none did because authorities did not permit them access to a doctor while in police custody. In response to the February report, the Ministry of Human Rights reported that it received and investigated numerous complaints of torture inside prisons and detention centers throughout the country and continued to visit prisons and detention facilities, although officials stated they could not visit prisons without permission from Baghdad Operations Command. The ministry demonstrated its capacity to document credible allegations of systematic torture, deaths, forced confessions, and arbitrary detention, but there was no publicly available information at year's end indicating that the government took judicial action against officials in the Justice, Interior, or Defense Ministries in response to allegations of torture.

There were no known developments in cases of torture and abusive treatment or punishment reported in 2014.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions at some prison and detention facilities remained harsh and life threatening due to food shortages, overcrowding, and inadequate access to

sanitation facilities and medical care, as well as cases of abuse and torture in some facilities.

The head of the KRG's Human Rights Committee and international observers alleged that both the central government and the KRG operated secret detention facilities during the year. There was no information available to verify whether--or the extent to which--they remained in use. During an August 27 media event, the deputy head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations denied the existence of secret facilities in the IKR and reiterated that the IKR prohibited torture of prisoners.

Physical Conditions: The Iraqi Corrections Service (ICS)--the only government entity with legal authority to hold persons after conviction--managed 24 correctional facilities; three were not operational due to the security situation. NGO contacts reported that due to the closure of prisons after Da'esh's advances in June 2014, remaining prisons were overcrowded, some holding more than twice their designed inmate capacity. No information was available on prisoners or detainees in undeclared facilities of Asayish and the KRG intelligence service. Authorities separated detainees from convicts in most cases. Prisoners facing terrorism charges were isolated from general prisoners and were more likely to remain in Interior Ministry facilities in harsher conditions.

Although the government held most juvenile pretrial detainees and convicts in facilities operated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as the law requires, international and local NGOs reported that authorities held some juveniles in Justice Ministry prisons, Interior Ministry police stations, and other Interior Ministry detention facilities. In some KRG Asayish detention centers and police-run jails, KRG authorities occasionally held juveniles in the same cells as adults.

Some Justice, Interior, and Defense Ministry authorities reported that conditions and treatment of detainees were generally poor. Overcrowding was a persistent problem in most facilities. Many inmates lacked adequate food, water, exercise facilities, vocational training, and family visitation. Access to medical care was inconsistent. Some detention facilities did not have an onsite pharmacy or infirmary, and authorities reported that existing pharmacies were undersupplied. Moreover, NGO contacts reported a significant shortage of social workers at prisons. Women's prisons often lacked adequate child-care facilities for inmates' children, whom the law permits to remain with their mothers until the age of four. Limited infrastructure or aging physical plants in some facilities worsened marginal sanitation, limited access to potable water, and poor quality food.

Da'esh reportedly continued to operate three facilities in areas under its control, including the Justice Ministry's Badoush Prison in Mosul, and two Interior Ministry prisons in Ninewa Governorate. The condition of individuals detained in these facilities was unknown.

UNAMI reported cramped and inadequate common facilities for detainees in Al-Ma'qal Prison for women in Basrah, although the prison administration was working to improve conditions and provide vocational training and other educational opportunities to prisoners. Medical facilities in Basrah's prisons were not adequate to treat some prisoners' serious conditions. According to local officials in Muthanna Governorate, the Central Prison was overcrowded, with a capacity of 220 prisoners but a population of 450, and food and medication provided to prisoners were inadequate. The Muthanna branch of the Iraqi Human Rights Commission received reports of blackmail and torture of prisoners.

Administration: Recordkeeping on prisoners was inadequate. According to officials at the Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Defense, and at the Counterterrorism Service, each entity maintained its own records of detainees, although some facilities held individuals detained by several entities, making it difficult to account for all of a facility's detainees. Additionally, human rights organizations reported that prison guards or arresting officers released detainees after the detainees paid a bribe, a practice that further contributed to inaccurate detainee recordkeeping.

The government took steps to develop enhanced systems for maintaining prison records, but progress remained stalled. The Ministry of Justice reported the government was developing a unified database to track prisoners in Justice, Interior, and Defense Ministry prisons. In the meantime the ICS relied on a single central computer to track prisoner statistics, which each ICS prison facility provided to the ministry on a regular basis. By year's end human rights and NGO contacts reported the Justice Ministry's database did not include records from other ministries.

There were no known examples of penal or judicial authorities using alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders.

ICS prisons maintained visitation programs that allowed regular visits by family members, legal counsel, and independent nongovernmental observers. International and local human rights groups nevertheless reported that authorities

in numerous cases denied family visits to detainees and convicts. In many cases guards allegedly demanded bribes when detainees asked to call their relatives or legal counsel. Following escalation of the conflict with Da'esh in June 2014, the Ministry of Justice temporarily prohibited visits by family members due to security concerns. Authorities lifted restrictions in February, according to human rights NGOs.

The Ministry of Human Rights reported that prisoners and detainees in Justice Ministry facilities were able to submit complaints without censorship; the human rights ministry publicly reported complaints, but there was no information available whether authorities responded to complaints or investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions. The Ministry of Justice operated human rights offices in 20 prisons to collect reports on prison conditions for the ministry's human rights division. The ministry also supported two citizen complaints offices to handle public inquiries or complaints. Within prisons, the Ministry of Justice established complaint boxes for inmates to provide anonymous feedback to the ICS; the prison director, a social worker, and a legal officer reviewed the complaints. There was no information available about censorship or action on the complaints.

Independent Monitoring: ICS prisons allowed regular visits by independent nongovernmental observers. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continued to have its customary access to Justice, Interior, Defense, and Labor and Social Affairs Ministry prisons and detention facilities. Authorities also granted prison and detention facility access to UNAMI. There were reports of institutional interference in prison visits and in some cases required advance notification to wardens and prison officials of visits by outside monitors.

From January to December, the ICRC conducted more than 156 visits to 71 prisons and transitory places of detention under the administration of the Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Defense and verified living conditions and treatment of 37,000 detainees. Apart from the temporary suspension of visits to some facilities located in areas of active conflict, or areas under Da'esh control, the ICRC continued to conduct visits to detention facilities located throughout the country. UNAMI continued inspections of Justice Ministry prison and detention facilities in Baghdad and Basrah.

The KRG generally allowed international human rights NGOs and intergovernmental organizations to visit convicted prisoners and pretrial detainees but occasionally delayed or denied access to some individuals, usually in cases

involving terrorism. The UNAMI Human Rights Office and ICRC inspected prisons and detention facilities in the IKR. From January through October, UNAMI conducted 11 visits to prisons and other detention facilities in the IKR.

Among independent organizations, local NGOs, the ICRC, and UNAMI had regular, but sometimes delayed, access to KRG internal security and intelligence service facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution provides some basic legal safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, although emergency laws give security forces broad discretion over arrest and detention when the government has declared a national emergency. During the year there continued to be many reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

In August the human rights staff of an international organization reported concerns about arrests of IDPs by authorities in Baghdad and by the PMF elsewhere. With the cooperation of the Ministries of Interior and Justice, the international organization representative visited IDP detainees, but authorities prevented the international organization representative from conducting confidential interviews. Reports of arrests and temporary detention of predominantly Sunni IDPs continued throughout the year.

Prison authorities sometimes delayed the release of exonerated inmates unless they received bribes. According to NGO contacts, inmates whom the judiciary ordered to be released continued to face delays from the Interior Ministry or other ministries to clear their record of other pending charges.

According to local NGOs and the head of the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament's Human Rights Committee, prisoners held in KRG-administered Asayish prisons sometimes remained in detention for more than six months without trial. On August 6, according to local media, authorities arrested civil society activist Qanie Rafiq Haji, who claimed that PUK Security intelligence forces (Zanyari) abused him after he participated in a protest on July 27 in response to a lack of public services in the city of Rania, in Sulaimaniyah Governorate. Haji's family reported to media outlets that officials did not allow them to visit their son in prison.

There were reports of Shia PMF detaining Sunnis following the liberation of Da'esh-dominated areas. For example, in December 2014 local media reported

that Shia PMF members allegedly had detained 200 women and children for an undefined period in Hilla, capital of Babil Governorate, after government forces, the Badr Brigade, and Kata'ib Hizballah liberated Jurf as Sakhr. The women and children had fled from Jurf as Sakhr during clashes between Shia PMF and Da'esh. The women told international media that PMF members separated an unknown number of male relatives from their group. At year's end there was no further information on the fate of the men.

Da'esh seized persons to silence those who criticized it in the areas under its control. In July Da'esh captured 350 Mosul residents, the majority of whom were military, police, former army personnel, and clerics. According to media statements from the governor of Ninewa, Da'esh captured those who expressed opposition to the organization's abuses of Mosul residents. There was no further information available about those taken/captured, but on July 27, local media reported that researchers found more than 120 bodies shot and killed, allegedly by Da'esh.

In December 2014 the prime minister issued an executive order to enforce the existing rights of detainees--a principal concern of Sunnis, who often criticized the previous government, claiming it had targeted them for detention on the basis of religion. The executive order prohibits the arrest or remand of individuals except by an order issued by a competent judge or court or in the conditions warranted by the code of criminal procedures. The authority that enforced the arrest warrant or detention is required within 24 hours of the detention to register in the government's central electronic and manual registers the detainee's name, place of detention, reason for detention, and legal article. The Ministry of Justice is then responsible for updating and managing these registers. The order requires the Ministries of Defense and Interior and the National Security Service to establish guidelines and mechanisms for commanders to register detainees' details in this central register. The executive order also prohibits any entity, other than legally competent authorities, to detain any person. At year's end progress implementing justice reforms was minimal.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The ISF consists of security forces administratively organized within the Ministries of Interior and Defense and the Counterterrorism Service. Interior Ministry responsibilities include domestic law enforcement and maintenance of order relying on the Federal Police, Provincial Police, Facilities Protection Service, and Department of Border Enforcement. Conventional military forces under the

Defense Ministry are responsible for the defense of the country, but working with elements of the Interior Ministry, they often also carried out counterterrorism and internal security operations. The Counterterrorism Service reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office and oversees the Counterterrorism Command, an organization that includes the three brigades of special operations forces. The PMF is a state-sponsored umbrella military organization composed of approximately 40 militia groups, predominantly Shia.

The government rarely investigated reported human rights violations committed by ISF personnel or members of the PMF. As in the previous year, the minister of defense publicly called for holding perpetrators of human rights abuses within the security forces accountable, but there was no information available on the outcome of any investigations or of official punishment for human rights violations.

There were reports of torture and abuse throughout the country in Interior Ministry and Defense Ministry facilities. According to international human rights organizations, abuse took place primarily during detainee interrogations while in pretrial detention. The Interior Ministry did not release the number of officers punished during the year, and there were no known court convictions for abuse.

Problems persisted within the country's provincial police forces, including corruption. The army and federal police recruited and deployed soldiers and police officers on a nationwide basis. This practice led to complaints from local communities that members of the army and police were abusive because of ethnosectarian differences.

Security forces made limited efforts to prevent or respond to societal violence. Although 16 family protection units operated through police stations around the country to respond to claims of domestic violence by women and children, they lacked sufficient capacity.

The two main Kurdish political parties, the KDP and PUK, maintained their own security apparatuses. Under the federal constitution, the Kurdistan Regional Government has the right to maintain regional guard brigades, supported financially by the central government but under the regional government's control. Accordingly, the KRG established a Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. There are 12 infantry brigades under the authority of the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, but the PUK and KDP controlled tens of thousands of additional military personnel.

The KDP maintained its own internal security unit, the Asayish, and its own intelligence service, the Parastin. The PUK maintained its own internal security unit, also known as the Asayish, and its own intelligence service, the Zanyari. While the PUK and KDP took some nominal steps to unify their internal and external security organizations, they remained separate, since political party leaders effectively controlled these organizations through party channels.

KRG security forces detained suspects in areas the regional government controlled. The poorly defined administrative boundaries between the IKR and the rest of the country resulted in continuing confusion about the jurisdiction of security forces and the courts. Da'esh's control of parts of these areas exacerbated this situation.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The constitution prohibits “unlawful detention” and mandates that authorities submit preliminary documents to a competent judge within 24 hours of arrest, a period that may extend in most cases to a maximum of 72 hours. For offenses punishable by death, authorities may legally detain the defendant as long as necessary to complete the judicial process. According to local media and rights groups, authorities arrested suspects in security sweeps without a warrant, particularly under the antiterrorism law, and held some detainees for prolonged periods without charge.

The government arbitrarily detained individuals and often did not inform detainees promptly of charges against them. The government periodically released detainees, usually after concluding that it had insufficient evidence for the courts to convict them. Many others remained in detention pending review of other outstanding charges. The law allows release on bond for criminal (but not security) detainees. Authorities rarely released detainees on bail. KRG internal security units held some suspects incommunicado without an arrest warrant and transported detainees to undisclosed detention facilities.

The law provides for judges to appoint paid counsel for the indigent. Attorneys appointed to represent detainees frequently complained that insufficient access to their clients hampered adequate attorney-client consultation. In many cases detainees were not able to meet their attorneys until their scheduled trial date. There were reports that defendants did not have access to legal representation during the investigation phase, appointed lawyers lacked sufficient time to prepare a defense, and courts failed to investigate claims of torture while in detention. The

Human Rights Ministry acknowledged the need for public defenders and judges far exceeded supply, resulting in delayed trials.

Arbitrary Arrest: Police and army personnel arrested and detained individuals without judicial approval, although there were no reliable statistics available regarding the number of such acts. Authorities often failed to notify family members of the arrest or location of detention, resulting in incommunicado detention. The UN, HRW, and local media reported on October 22 that members of the PMF abducted between 150 and 175 Sunni Arabs civilians from Tuz Khurmatu District in Salah ad Din Governorate. UNAMI reported PMF forces went house to house and took civilians to facilities in Sulaiman Beg and Yengija village for two days of questioning. Precise numbers were unknown, but approximately 130 were released; the whereabouts of others remained unknown at year's end. Bodies of abductees were found in the area. According to UNAMI, the abductions were conducted without arrest warrants or coordination with local law enforcement (see section 1.a.). No investigations or prosecutions were underway at year's end.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detainees represented approximately 20 percent of those incarcerated in Justice Ministry's ICS facilities, according to ICS data. By law other ministries, including Defense, Interior, and Labor and Social Affairs, may hold pretrial detainees.

Although there were no independently verified statistics concerning the number of pretrial detainees in government facilities, most individuals in Interior and Defense Ministry facilities were reportedly pretrial detainees. According to AI, in February the parliamentary human rights committee stated that approximately 40,000 detainees remained in prison, pending investigations. As of June the Ministry of Justice stated that there were approximately 28,000 detainees in the ministry's correction centers, including 200 foreign detainees. NGOs noted actual detainee figures could be as high as 50,000. In the IKR there were an estimated 3,000 pretrial detainees, including 82 women, at various Kurdistan regional government facilities as of October 5.

Lengthy detentions without due process and without judicial action were a systemic problem. The lack of judicial review resulted from several factors, including a large number of detainees, undocumented detentions, slow processing of criminal investigations, an insufficient number of judges and trained judicial personnel, authorities' inability or reluctance to utilize bail or other conditions of release, lack of information sharing, bribery, and corruption. Overcrowding of

pretrial detainees remained a problem in many detention facilities. There were allegations of detention beyond judicial release dates as well as unlawful releases.

Authorities held many detainees for months or years after initial arrest and detention, particularly those detained under the antiterrorism law. Authorities sometimes held detainees incommunicado, without access to defense counsel or without formal charge before a judge within the legally mandated period. Authorities at times detained spouses and other family members of fugitives, mostly Sunnis wanted on terrorism charges, as proxies to pressure the fugitives to surrender.

KRG authorities reportedly held detainees for extensive periods in pretrial detention. According to local NGOs and the head of the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament's Human Rights Committee, prisoners held in regional government-administered Asayish prisons sometimes remained in detention for more than six months without trial.

Amnesty: In January the Ministry of Justice submitted more than 2,000 amnesty requests to the Council of Ministers' legal department for adjudication. In March the minister of justice announced 250 prisoners had been granted amnesty following approval from the presidency. There were no reported cases of amnesty in the IKR.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, although certain articles restricted judicial independence. The country's security situation and political history left the judiciary weak and dependent on other parts of the government. Additionally, in 2013 the Supreme Court overturned a court order mandating the separation of the Federal Supreme Court and the Higher Judicial Council, thus allowing one individual to head both the court, which rules on issues related to federalism and constitutionality, and the council, which manages and supervises the court system, including disciplinary matters. Local and international media claimed the decision was politically motivated and undermined judicial independence.

There were reports that corruption influenced authorities' willingness to respect court orders. For example, the Integrity Committee of the Council of Representatives reported that Interior Ministry and Justice Ministry employees demanded payment from detainees to release them.

Threats and killings by sectarian, tribal, extremist, and criminal elements impaired judicial independence. Judges, lawyers, and their family members frequently faced death threats and attacks. Lawyers participated in protests demanding better protection from the government against threats and violence. Judges were also vulnerable to intimidation and violence. Corruption or intimidation reportedly influenced some judges presiding over criminal cases at the trial level and on appeal to the Court of Cassation. The Commission of Integrity routinely investigated judges on corruption charges, but there were numerous reports that such investigations were often politically motivated.

By law the Kurdish Judicial Council was financially and administratively independent from the KRG Ministry of Justice, but the KRG executive continued to influence politically sensitive cases.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides all citizens the right to a fair trial. Observers, including some government officials, the UN, and NGOs, reported that trial proceedings fell short of international standards. Although investigative, trial, and appellate judges generally sought to enforce the right to a fair trial, defendants' insufficient access to defense attorneys was a serious defect in proceedings. Many defendants met their lawyers for the first time during the initial hearing and had limited access to legal counsel during pretrial detention. Trials were public, except in some national security cases, but some faced undue delays.

The law considers an accused person innocent until proven guilty and gives detainees the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges as well as the right to a privately retained or court-appointed counsel, at public expense if needed. Officials routinely did not inform defendants promptly or in detail of charges against them. Judges assemble evidence and adjudicate guilt or innocence. There is no right to a trial by jury. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases before trial and have the right to confront witnesses against them and present witnesses and evidence. In many cases forced confessions served as the only source of evidence without the corroboration of forensic evidence or independent witness testimony, according to AI. The law provides the right to appeal, although there is a statute of limitations for referral; the Court of Cassation reviews criminal cases on appeal.

On July 7, Baghdad's Central Criminal Court tried 28 men charged under the antiterrorism law and accused of participating in the June 2014 Camp Speicher

massacre of as many as 1,700 Shia cadets. According to international media, local lawyers who attended the trial, and HRW, the trial lasted between two to four hours. One lawyer represented all 28 defendants, did not meet with the defendants before the trial, and made one statement for the court on behalf of all of them. The judge asked each defendant for a statement of confession, although all defendants declined to confess and stated that they were innocent. Defendants told the judge that during the investigation authorities blindfolded them and told them to sign papers, which they believed were confessions. They also said authorities tortured them during the investigation. No witnesses presented evidence. The judges left the room for a brief discussion and returned with a verdict, sentencing 24 of the defendants to death and exonerating four others for lack of evidence.

KRG officials noted that prosecutors and defense lawyers encountered obstacles in carrying out their work and that prisoners' trials were unnecessarily delayed for administrative reasons.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

The government did not consider any incarcerated persons to be political prisoners or detainees and stated that all individuals in prison had been either convicted or charged under criminal law or were detained and awaiting trial while under investigation.

It was difficult to assess claims that there were no political prisoners or detainees due to the lack of government transparency, prevalence of corruption in arrest procedures, slow case processing, and inaccessibility of detainees, especially those held by counterterrorism, intelligence, and military authorities. Political opponents of the government asserted the government imprisoned or sought to imprison persons for political activities or beliefs under the pretense of criminal charges ranging from corruption to terrorism and murder.

Similar factors in the IKR obscured a reliable assessment concerning political prisoners and detainees. HRW reported on August 4 that KDP intelligence detained Esa Barzani after he posted pictures supporting Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdulla Ocalan, and PUK leader and former president of Iraq Jalal Talabani. A member of Esa Barzani's family told HRW that authorities detained Esa Barzani due to his criticism of KDP President Barzani's family.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for or cessation of human rights violations. Administrative remedies also exist, although due to the overwhelming security focus of the executive branch, coupled with an understaffed judiciary dependent on the executive, the government did not effectively implement civil or administrative remedies for human rights violations. In January 2014 in collaboration with the IHCHR, the Higher Judicial Council established special courts to investigate human rights violations and reports of abuse wherever there is a court of appeal. IHCHR members stated they referred a few thousand cases of human rights violations; however, the prosecutor dismissed hundreds of cases for lack of evidence or failure to complete required documents. By year's end the courts had not issued any convictions for human rights violations.

KRG law provides for compensation to persons subject to unlawful arrest or detention. The KRG's Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs handles compensation for unlawful arrests or detentions, and its Human Rights Commission reported that while approximately 8,000 cases (including many historical cases) received approval for compensation, the government was not able to pay compensation due to budget constraints.

Property Restitution

The Property Claims Commission, an independent governmental commission, resolved claims for property unjustly seized between 1968 and 2003 by the Saddam Hussein regime. Authorities intended the process to benefit those whose land was confiscated for ethnic or political reasons as part of that regime's Arabization program and other sectarian displacement policies. By October 31, the commission had resolved all outstanding claims.

According to a 2015 International Organization for Migration (IOM) report, Da'esh engaged in widespread destruction, looting, and confiscation of property and the illegal rental and sale of civilian property to Da'esh affiliates. IDPs interviewed by IOM from January to March stated that Da'esh created a property directorate in Mosul to sell IDP properties and distribute property documents to Da'esh members.

In July the parliamentary integrity committee stated it received dozens of complaints from Christians over illegal seizure of their real estate in Baghdad. According to Masarat, an Iraqi religious freedom NGO, most Christians refused to file complaints due to fear that armed groups might abduct their families. Those who filed complaints reported police did not conduct thorough investigations. In

July religious leaders, members of parliament, and Baghdad-based judges said some political parties sanctioned criminal networks seizing Christian property. The parliamentary integrity committee launched an investigation into allegations of fraud in real estate registration departments, and the Ministry of Justice called for digitization of real estate records to reduce fraud; however, at year's end property seizure continued.

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

The constitution mandates that authorities may not enter or search homes except with a judicial order. The constitution also prohibits arbitrary interference with privacy, but security forces often entered homes without search warrants.

During the year Da'esh fighters entered homes, destroyed or looted private property, and converted houses into operational bases. In particular, Da'esh forced members of ethnic and religious communities from their homes and confiscated their belongings, including valuables, at checkpoints. In February a Christian media outlet reported that Da'esh opened markets called "Spoils of the Nazarenes" to sell electronics, furniture, and other items looted from Christian homes.

g. Use of Excessive Force and Other Abuses in Internal Conflicts

The conflict with Da'esh led to a significant deterioration in the human rights situation during the year. Armed clashes continued and further escalated in May when Da'esh took control of Ramadi in Anbar Governorate. By year's end the number of displaced Iraqis surpassed 3.2 million, according to UN figures. Human rights abuses included mass executions, abductions, and repression of ethnic and religious minorities. Government security forces also made gains, liberating Tikrit in April, Sinjar in November, and Ramadi at year's end. More than 150,000 IDPs returned to Tikrit.

Killings: The UN reported that the minimum number of civilian fatalities between December 2014 and October 31, 2015, was 7,200. In attempts to drive out Da'esh from northern and western areas, the government targeted Da'esh bases, many of which were located in populated civilian areas. Throughout the year the government escalated its use of bombing and shelling, and the collateral damage reportedly killed civilians, including children, in attacks on suspected Da'esh locations and infrastructure in civilian neighborhoods, particularly in Anbar Governorate. UNAMI reported that some military operations directly targeted

civilian infrastructure, and authorities carried out other operations without taking all appropriate precautions to protect the civilian population.

Throughout the year ISF attacks on Da'esh locations in civilian areas increased. According to a report of the UN secretary-general on children and armed conflict in Iraq, on January 2, airstrikes targeting villages of al-Farhaniya and al-Subaihat in Salah ad Din Governorate reportedly killed 12 civilians. On March 5, airstrikes targeting Bartilla subdistrict east of Mosul in Ninewa Governorate allegedly killed 11 civilians, including three children. On June 26, international media reported that six civilians were killed and 12 others injured by ISF air strikes on residential neighborhoods in Fallujah in Anbar Governorate. Medical sources told media that airstrikes hit a central city market as well as areas near Fallujah Hospital.

Human rights groups and the media reported high levels of sectarian violence. Much of the violence was due to Shia militias--some of which participated as part of the PMF, nominally under government control--killing and abusing Sunni civilians. Successful airstrikes and ISF ground operations to liberate Da'esh-controlled areas created civilian security vacuums into which these units moved. The situation worsened during the year, and Sunni civilians faced revenge attacks for Da'esh crimes as well as forced displacement from their homes.

In instances when Sunni tribes turned against Da'esh and fought with the ISF, Da'esh conducted mass executions of tribesmen. According to UNAMI, in December 2014 in Madain, southern Baghdad, a Da'esh suicide bomber killed a group of at least 21 Sunni tribesmen collecting their salaries at a military base. The attack injured at least 48 others.

According to the UN and international human rights organizations, some Shia PMF operating outside government control committed abuses against civilians, including killings, abductions, and destruction of property. AI reported that members of Shia PMF--with participation or noninterference from the military and police--allegedly carried out extrajudicial killings of at least 56 and possibly more than 70 civilians from Barwana, Diyala Governorate, on January 26 (see section 1.a.). On January 23, after reclaiming Diyala from Da'esh control, Shia PMF allegedly looted and destroyed eight houses in Saadian and destroyed four mosques in Muqdadiya, Diyala Governorate. A February 15 HRW report, *Iraq: Militias Escalate Abuses, Possibly War Crimes*, claimed that since June 2014, at least 3,000 persons had fled their homes in Muqdadiya and that some were kidnapped and summarily executed. According to HRW the attacks appeared to be part of a

campaign involving the Badr Brigade to displace residents from Sunni and mixed-sect areas and prevent them from returning.

There were cases of killings of Sunni clerics in Basrah. On January 1, unknown assailants killed four Sunni clerics in a drive-by shooting in Basrah's Zubayr District. Religious leaders on both sides called for restraint, and the prime minister ordered an investigation that produced no results by year's end.

According to AI on January 25, Yezidi fighters looted and burned homes in two Sunni Arab villages, Jiri and Sibaya, in Sinjar. They reportedly executed 21 civilians, including elderly men and women and children, and they injured several others, including three children. They also allegedly abducted 40 residents; at year's end the whereabouts of 17 were unknown. Residents told AI that Peshmerga and Asayish security forces present during the attack did not act to stop it.

International media and the IHCHR reported that Da'esh increasingly used civilians as human shields in combat. In March the Institute for the Study of War reported that Da'esh fighters held an unspecified number of civilians as human shields in Tikrit. In Fallujah an Anbar provincial council member told media in July that Da'esh militants were using civilians as human shields to prevent ISF's advance into the city.

The UN, international human rights groups, and the media reported that Da'esh executed hundreds of noncombatants, primarily captured soldiers or those who surrendered, military conscripts, police, and others associated with the government. The majority of those killed were Shia. For example, on June 22, Da'esh released a video showing its execution of 16 men by drowning them in a cage. In April local media displayed photographs alleging Da'esh executed 300 persons in Shriqat, northeast of Tikrit.

Da'esh also reportedly killed and abducted religious leaders who failed to support the terrorist group. According to UNAMI, on September 13, Da'esh executed three imams in Hammam Ali District of Mosul because they reportedly did not praise Da'esh in their sermons. On June 22, Da'esh abducted six Sunni clerics in Mosul for failing to follow Da'esh instructions forbidding evening Ramadan prayers; the whereabouts of the clerics remained unknown at year's end.

Da'esh's attacks against civilians had decreasing effect because the terrorist organization was forced on the defensive during the year, and because many

potential victims had been killed, abducted, or fled since Da'esh's onslaught began in 2014.

Throughout the year Da'esh detonated VBIEDs and suicide bombs in public markets, security checkpoints, and predominantly Shia neighborhoods. Armed Da'esh fighters also deployed in or near populated areas and used civilians as human shields.

Abductions: Militias, illegal armed groups, and other unknown actors kidnapped many persons. In some cases individuals were kidnapped due to their ethnic or sectarian identity; in other cases individuals to destabilize the political process or for financial motives. A June UN General Assembly report on the protection of the rights of children reported that at least 1,297 children (685 girls and 612 boys) were abducted in 322 incidents between January and December of 2014 and that Da'esh perpetrated almost all the incidents against the Yezidi community in Sinjar. Da'esh reportedly detained children in schools, prisons, and airports and separated girls above the age of 12 from their families to sell them in Da'esh-controlled areas for sexual slavery. Da'esh also punished minors in areas under its control. According to UNAMI, on September 2, Da'esh cut off the hand of a 13-year-old boy in Bab al-Tob market in Mosul after accusing him of theft.

UNAMI reported that by year's end Da'esh held approximately 3,500 persons in slavery, predominantly women and children from the Yezidi community, as well as other ethnic and religious minorities from the Sinjar District of Ninewa Governorate. On June 25, according to UNAMI, Da'esh moved 42 Yezidi women to Mayadeen, Deir ez Zor Governorate in eastern Syria, and sold them to Da'esh fighters for amounts ranging from 553,180 dinars to 2.2 million dinars (\$500 to \$2,000) each.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: Reports from international human rights groups alleged that government forces and Shia PMF abused prisoners and detainees, particularly Sunnis (see section 1.a.).

Da'esh reportedly used brutal tactics to abuse and punish individuals connected to the security services and government, as well as those they considered apostates, such as Yezidis, according to international human rights organizations. The Human Rights Ministry and the UN reported numerous cases of rape and sexual assault carried out by Da'esh and its affiliates. In August according to international media, Da'esh executed 19 women in Mosul for refusing sex with Da'esh members.

Child Soldiers: There were no reports that ISF conscripted or recruited children to serve in the security services. According to the report of the UN secretary-general on children and armed conflict in Iraq, released in November, while there was no instruction for children to join fighting, children continued to be associated with PMF and militias in all conflict areas. UN observers reported children wearing military uniforms and carrying weapons, as well as parading alongside adult members of armed groups. The report stated that on June 7, the Ministry of Youth and Sports sent a letter to its directorates in all governorates encouraging the use of youth clubs for military training of youth.

On July 28, the Associated Press reported its staff witnessed dozens of camps around the country with hundreds of students training to join the PMF and fight Da'esh. A spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office responded that there were isolated incidents of underage fighters joining combat on their own but that the government did not condone children going to war. Observers noted there was no official encouragement for children to join militias, which occurred infrequently and generally due to family or peer encouragement.

According to UNAMI, Da'esh forcibly recruited children to serve as informants, checkpoint staff, and suicide bombers. According to the UN report on children and armed conflict, from August 2014 to June 2015, Da'esh forcibly recruited hundreds of boys as young as eight years old from Ninewa Governorate, including Yezidis and Turkmen, and sent them to centers to train on weapons and learn combat. On January 14, a video widely circulated on social media showed a Da'esh training camp for children in Tall Afar District in Ninewa Governorate. The video, titled "Farouq Institute for Cubs," showed children under the age of 15 training to use weapons. On February 6, Da'esh imposed compulsory recruitment of children in Rutba, Anbar Governorate. The Ministry of Human Rights and local media reported that on June 21, Da'esh abducted more than 800 children and held them at al-Salamiya Camp in Mosul. Children ages five to 10 were placed in religious education camps, and children ages 10 to 15 were forced to attend military training. According to UNAMI, Da'esh allegedly stopped allowing families to pay 500,000 dinars (\$455) in lieu of service.

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

Other Conflict-related Abuses: Active areas of conflict continued to disrupt the lives of hundreds of thousands of persons throughout the country, particularly in

Baghdad and the IKR, but also in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, and Diyala Governorates. Roadblocks established by the government, PMF, and Da'esh impeded the flow of humanitarian assistance to communities in need.

According to AI, Peshmerga and Yezidi armed groups razed villages and towns under their control, with no military necessity to do so. AI reported widespread burning of homes and property in villages and towns in Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates that Peshmerga forces captured from Da'esh fighters between September 2014 and March 2015 and that remained under KRG administration. The report stated that in one nearly destroyed village, members of the Peshmerga told AI they had blown up houses so that the residents would never return. In another village a member of the Peshmerga told AI that an area had been bulldozed following its recapture in order to create an empty area. Erbil-based NGOs and human rights activists corroborated some of AI's claims.

According to local media, in August residents of the Assyrian town Telsqof in Ninewa Governorate said they witnessed members of the Peshmerga entering homes in search of valuables. Residents described the looting as "systematic," with Peshmerga units going house to house and emerging with products such as appliances, gas cylinders, oil drums, and furniture.

Reports of Da'esh's targeted destruction of civilian infrastructure were common, including attacks on roads, religious sites, and hospitals. Da'esh laid siege to Haditha District in Anbar Governorate and cut off supply routes to prevent humanitarian aid access. By March the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated that thousands of families in Haditha faced critical shortages of food, medicine, fuel, and basic supplies. On March 18, local media reported that at least 10 persons, including women and children, had died from hunger in Haditha because no aid could reach the district.

Da'esh attacked cultural and religious heritage sites in areas under its control. According to Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, on March 2, Da'esh using bulldozers destroyed an Assyrian Christian cemetery in the town of Tall Kayf. On March 19, Da'esh destroyed three Shabak holy sites in Hamdaniya, south of Mosul and one in Bashbita village. On March 19, Da'esh destroyed an ancient monastery and archeological site of Al-Jib, in Nimrud District. Over a six-month period, Da'esh destroyed several Yezidi pilgrimage sites, including Nasir Din and Al-Saeed shrines in Bashiqa in February. UNAMI stated in an April report that Da'esh violations against Christians, Faili (Shia) Kurds, Kaka'i, Sabean-Mandeans, Shabak, Shia Arabs, Turkmen, Yezidi and others appeared to be part of

a policy to suppress, permanently expel, or destroy these communities in areas under Da'esh control.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution broadly provides for the right of free expression that does not violate public order and morality or express support for the banned Baath party or for altering the country's borders by violent means. The main limitation on individual and media exercise of these rights was self-censorship due to credible fear of reprisals by the government, political parties, ethnic and sectarian forces, terrorist and extremist groups, or criminal gangs.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Despite the constitutional protection for freedom of expression, government oversight of media operations tightened, at times resulting in closures of media outlets, restrictions on reporting, and interference with internet service. Individuals were able to criticize the government publicly or privately, but not without fear of reprisal.

On June 24, police in Erbil arrested Payam TV journalist Dilshad Hartali because of an article posted on the website Islam Paik criticizing the KRG minister of education. Hartali had previously worked for Islam Paik, but he reportedly did not write the critical article. On June 25, authorities released Hartali.

Press and Media Freedoms: An active media expressed a variety of views largely reflecting the owners' political viewpoints. The media also self-censored to comply with government restrictions against violating public order and because of fear of reprisal, particularly by nongovernmental forces. Media outlets, unable to cover operating costs through advertising revenue, overwhelmingly relied on political funding, which affected their ability to report unbiased news. Political parties strongly influenced, or controlled outright, most of the several hundred daily and weekly print media publications, as well as dozens of radio and television stations.

International and local organizations reported arrests and harassment of journalists as well as closure of media outlets covering politically sensitive topics, including poor security, corruption, and weak governmental capacity. The deterioration in the security situation exacerbated harassment of journalists. Government security authorities sometimes prevented journalists from reporting due to security pretexts.

For example, according to the Press Freedom Advocacy Association of Iraq, on September 13, naval security forces prevented five media organizations from covering a demonstration near the Umm Qasr port.

During the year media freedom organization Journalistic Freedoms Observatory (JFO) reported that the Communications Media Commission--a nominally independent but government-run media regulator--allowed al-Jazeera Media Network and al-Arabiya news offices to reopen in the country, on direction of the prime minister.

In the IKR government authorities continued to try, convict, and imprison journalists, despite a 2008 law that decriminalizes publication-related offenses. According to syndicate officials, the 2008 law is the sole basis for prosecution of journalists for publication offenses, but authorities allowed prosecution for offense to public morals and other crimes.

On February 2, according to HRW, authorities in the IKR city of Duhok charged and detained freelance journalist and former head of the independent Kurdish NRT TV Sabah Atrushi for violating the counterterrorism law by comments he made in a January 29 talk show. Atrushi told HRW he called for the resignation of a Peshmerga commander who was also the son of a high-ranking official. On the show Atrushi accused the Peshmerga of releasing captured Da'esh fighters and then shooting them as they were running from the detention center. According to Atrushi, the Peshmerga invited KTV to film the shootings as propaganda to show that the Peshmerga were winning frontline battles against Da'esh.

On February 16, NRT TV channel suspended operations for a week by order of the KRG's Ministry of Culture and Publishing. The ministry's order followed NRT TV's interview with Mullah Krekar, the founder of Ansar al-Islam, soon after his release from a prison in Norway. According to media reports, a senior Ministry of Culture official warned NRT not to broadcast the segment, since doing so would violate broadcasting rules.

Violence and Harassment: In its 2015 annual report, JFO reported 235 cases of harassment and violence against journalists, resulting in at least 30 journalists killed and at least 10 others who disappeared, their whereabouts unknown at year's end.

Reporting from Da'esh-controlled areas was increasingly difficult. Journalists covering armed clashes involving government, militia, and Da'esh forces faced

threats to safety, with several instances of journalists being killed or injured. Military officials, citing safety considerations, sometimes restricted access of journalists particularly to areas with active fighting; however, by year's end ISF allowed international journalists to report from the front lines, for example, throughout its operations to retake Ramadi.

Media workers often reported they were under pressure from persons and institutions, including politicians, government officials, security services, tribal elements, and business leaders, not to publish critical articles about them. Media workers offered accounts of violence, intimidation, death threats, and harassment by government or partisan officials. In August journalists reporting on anticorruption protests in Basrah stated they had received death threats. Journalists said that a vigilante group calling itself "Heroes of Iraq," believed to be affiliated with one of Basrah's ruling political parties, dropped leaflets containing death threats into the courtyard of the Basrah branch of the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate after the syndicate declared its support for the journalists covering and participating in the protests. The Iraqi Observatory for Press Freedoms issued a statement complaining that local security forces did not protect journalists from armed gangs that threatened their lives.

Media workers reported they could not cover stories on Shia PMF without receiving threats. On October 21, the pan-Arab television outlet al-Jazeera broadcast a report highly critical of former prime minister Maliki, as well as senior PMF leaders, on its regular *Black Box* investigative news program. This report implicated Maliki and PMF leaders in human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and disappearances. After the broadcast of the report, al-Jazeera staff said credible sources had advised them to either leave the country or go into hiding.

Throughout the IKR there were numerous shootings, beatings, detentions, and death threats against media workers. In some cases the aggressors wore military or police uniforms. Many attacks targeted independent and former opposition media, mainly the independent Nalia Radio and Television; Payama Television, affiliated with the Kurdistan Islamic Group; and the Kurdish News Network Television, affiliated with the Gorran Movement.

On September 9, media reported that the Sulaimaniyah Criminal Court reportedly ordered the detention of a senior Kurdish intelligence official, Lahur Sheikh Jangi (aka Lahur Talabani), in connection with the 2013 shooting of the owner of the independent Kurdish Nalia TV satellite channel, Shaswar Abdulwahid. Although

Lahur Sheikh Jangi appeared in court on September 12, there was no progress on the case by year's end.

In August 2014 a trial began for two of three suspects in the 2013 killing of journalist Kawa Garmiani in Sulaimaniyah Governorate. In January a court in Kalar exonerated PUK Politburo member Mahmood Sangawi, stating that it found no evidence linking him to the killing, despite the fact that in 2012 he threatened Garmiani's life in a video that was widely circulated on social media. The verdict awaited Supreme Court review at year's end.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The law prohibits producing, importing, publishing, or possessing written material, drawings, photographs, or films that violate public integrity or decency. The penalties include fines and imprisonment. Fear of violent retaliation for publishing facts or opinions displeasing to political factions inhibited free expression. Public officials reportedly influenced content by rewarding positive reporting with bribes, providing money, land, access to venues, and other benefits to journalists, particularly to members of the progovernment Journalists' Syndicate. These restrictions extended to privately owned Iraqi television stations operating outside of the country.

The Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament passed the Access to Information Law in 2013, which provides for access to information for journalists, media outlets, and ordinary citizens. By year's end, however, the KRG had not made efforts to implement the law. Moreover, local government, political parties, and officials, regularly discriminated between media outlets regarding access to information based on party affiliation. For example, in KDP stronghold areas Duhok and Erbil, KDP-affiliated outlets Rudaw and KTV had access to all KRG departments, while in the PUK and Gorran stronghold of Sulaimaniyah Governorate, PUK-affiliated outlets such as GK TV and Kurdsat TV received more access to government and party information than other outlets.

All books published in the country as well as imported books required the Ministry of Culture's approval and were therefore subject to censorship

Libel/Slander Laws: The law prohibits defamation and provides penalties of up to one month in prison or a fine of 50,000 to 250,000 dinars (\$45 to \$225). Many in the media complained this provision prevented them from freely practicing their profession by creating a strong fear of prosecution, although widespread self-censorship impeded journalistic performance as well. Public officials occasionally resorted to libel charges under criminal and civil law, which in some cases resulted

in punitive fines on individual media outlets and editors, often for publishing articles containing allegations of corruption. When cases went to court, the courts usually sided with the journalist, according to local media freedom organizations.

Libel is a criminal offense under KRG law as well, and judges may issue arrest warrants for journalists on this basis.

Nongovernmental Impact: Journalists and family members were targets of terrorists, religious groups that rejected media independence, criminals, corrupt officials, and unknown persons or groups wishing to limit the flow of news. Journalists were harassed, kidnapped for ransom, or killed in deliberate attacks for reporting information critical of Da'esh. The NGO Committee to Protect Journalists called Da'esh "one of the most dangerous forces for the press." Local NGOs reported Da'esh militants took control of media organizations inside Mosul and kidnapped, injured, and executed journalists there. On April 26, Da'esh militants abducted Thaeer al-Ali, editor of a Mosul newspaper, from a cafe in Al-Dawasa, according to the international NGO Reporters Without Borders. Da'esh members confiscated his cell phone and, upon finding contacts for provincial government officials, accused him of collaborating with entities hostile to Da'esh. After interrogating him for two weeks, Da'esh militants shot and killed him. Most journalists from Mosul left for Baghdad or the IKR, or left the country.

On September 30, according to media reports, the chair of the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament Human Rights Committee stated that Hazhar Musa Adam, the leader of a Dohuk-based human rights NGO, was missing since September 5 and that his disappearance was likely connected to one of his Facebook posts. There was no further information available at year's end.

Internet Freedom

There were overt government restrictions on access to the internet, and there were credible reports, but no official acknowledgement, that the government monitored e-mail and internet communications without appropriate legal authority. Despite restrictions, political figures and activists used the internet to criticize corrupt and ineffective politicians, mobilize protesters for demonstrations, and campaign for candidates through social media channels. According to the World Bank, approximately 11.3 percent of the population used the internet in 2014, compared with 5.0 percent in 2011.

The government acknowledged that it interfered with internet access in some areas of the country due to the deterioration in the security situation and Da'esh's disruptive use of social media platforms. During the year there were reports that government officials attempted to have pages critical of the government removed from Facebook and Twitter for communications that the government considered "hate speech," although they did not succeed in doing so. Unlike last year there were no reports the Ministry of Communications imposed social media blackouts.

On July 25, according local media reports, four unknown gunmen wearing military uniforms and driving an unmarked car kidnapped activist Abbas Brifki, beat him, and then left him outside Duhok city. Opponents reportedly beat Brifki due to his political views and his posts on Facebook. The IKR Human Rights Commission spokesperson condemned the attack and called on security forces to find the perpetrators. At year's end authorities had not prosecuted anyone for the attack.

Da'esh also restricted access to the internet and telephone service in Mosul.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Social, religious, and political pressures significantly restricted the exercise of freedom of choice in academic and cultural matters. In all regions various groups reportedly sought to control the pursuit of formal education and granting of academic positions. The country's universities did not pursue gender-segregation policies. Da'esh continued to limit female education beyond the primary level in areas that it controlled.

On August 5, authorities in Basrah announced measures to block local youth from holding a "Festival of Colors" event in the city's Khoura Park. Provincial Council members condemned the planned event for "mixing the sexes" and disturbing families in Basrah mourning relatives killed by Da'esh.

Academic freedoms were increasingly restricted in areas of active conflict and in Da'esh-controlled territory. Following Da'esh's seizure of Mosul in June 2014, the group began reshaping education at the elementary, high school, and university levels, including printing textbooks that glorify violence and Da'esh history for elementary school children. For example, local and international media reported that at Mosul University, Da'esh altered the programs of study to comply with Da'esh ideology in the colleges of law, fine arts, physical education, languages, social sciences, and archeology.

Da'esh militants also targeted libraries, museums, and academic institutions in violent attacks and abducted students and faculty. Da'esh fighters ransacked libraries in Mosul, including the Ninewa Provincial Central Library and Mosul University's library in January. On February 23, according to an Iraqi satellite channel broadcasting from Mosul, Da'esh looted and burned the central library of Mosul, resulting in the destruction of 10,000 books and manuscripts. UNESCO described this incident as an example of Da'esh's systematic destruction of cultural diversity in the country.

Extremists and armed groups limited cultural expression by targeting artists, poets, writers, and musicians. For example, the local media continued to report that Da'esh issued a directive banning all stores in Mosul from selling movies or music CDs and instructed businesses to stock only CDs containing Quranic verses or religious programs.

In February international media reported that Da'esh ransacked Mosul's central museum and destroyed statues and artifacts that dated from the Assyrian and Akkadian Empires. In a video released from Ninewa Governorate, Da'esh fighters condemned the artifacts as idols and then destroyed the statues with drills and hammers.

Members of the Afro-Arab community in southern Iraq reported in February and September they could not conduct their traditional musical performances in public due to intimidation by armed groups throughout the year.

In the IKR, according to local NGOs, senior professorships continued to be easier to obtain for those with links to the traditional KDP and PUK ruling parties.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration "regulated by law." Regulations require protest organizers to seek permission seven days in advance of a demonstration and submit detailed information about the applicants, the reason for the protest, and participants. The regulations prohibit all "slogans, signs, printed materials, or drawings" involving "sectarianism, racism, or segregation" of citizens. The regulations also prohibit anything that would violate the constitution or law; encourage violence, hatred, or killing; or prove insulting to Islam, "honor, morals, religion, holy groups, or Iraqi entities in

general.” Provincial councils traditionally maintained authority to issue permits. Authorities generally issued permits in accordance with the regulations. The majority of protests were peaceful; the government provided appropriate security. Additionally, a limited number of peaceful protests occurred without permits.

In July demonstrations increased in several major cities, with protesters demanding better government services and an end to corruption. The prime minister ordered security forces not to interfere. Social media reports included photographs of security forces providing water to protesters and protecting protesters from agitators. One report depicted protesters protecting security forces from agitators trying to start a riot. There were limited reports of violence against protesters. Media reported that in July security forces shot and killed a protester in Basrah. The Basrah Provincial Council announced it was investigating the incident. By year’s end there were no updates on investigation. Local contacts stated tribal leaders negotiated compensation for the killing but there would be no formal charges launched against the perpetrators.

In some cases the government dismissed unauthorized protests or restricted protests for security reasons. On September 7, Basrah police prevented anticorruption demonstrators from staging a demonstration outside the Provincial Council building. On September 13, a few hundred protesters in Babil attempted to enter the Provincial Council building, but security forces stopped them. Protesters reportedly began throwing stones at the building and burning tires. According to social media reports, security forces fired into the air to disperse demonstrators but otherwise showed restraint.

There were reports of beatings and interrogations of some protesters in Baghdad. According to HRW, on September 18, in plain sight of uniformed Iraqi soldiers at nearby checkpoints, men claiming to be intelligence officers beat three activists attending a demonstration in Tahrir Square in Baghdad. The activists told HRW they were forced into a Ford pick-up, blindfolded, handcuffed with their hands behind their back, and taken to a nearby building, where they were interrogated, kicked, and beaten with plastic cables. Interrogators asked if the activists were affiliated with Da’esh and asked who was funding demonstrations in Baghdad. After signing a pledge not to demonstrate, activists were released. One activist obtained a medical report confirming his injuries and filed a complaint; however, the outcome of the complaint was unclear at year’s end.

The investigation into the killing of 44 demonstrators in 2013 during demonstrations in Hawija was continued at year’s end, according to the IHCHR.

There were limited reports of violence or official interference in protests in the IKR. On March 25, a group of Yezidi IDPs residing in Khanke Camp demonstrated to demand that the international community recognize the crimes committed by Da'esh against Yezidis as genocide. According to unconfirmed claims by some Yezidi activists, KRG security forces arrested 60 demonstrators and transferred them to an unknown location. In the weeks following the arrests, authorities released many, but observers claimed that several detainees remained missing.

In October security forces killed five demonstrators and, according to media reports, wounded another 130 persons during economic and political protests in Kalar, Qaladze, and to a lesser extent in other towns in Sulaimaniyah Governorate. Attacks on government buildings by protesters prompted government security forces to limit media freedoms and freedom of movement in the region--limitations that continued at year's end. For example, government security forces temporarily closed the NRT and KNN media networks, and on October 12, security forces denied entry into Erbil to individuals and parliamentarians believed to be affiliated with the Gorran Party. While NRT was allowed to reopen in December, KNN remained closed, allegedly for its affiliation with the Gorran Party, according to media and NGOs.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right to form and join associations and political parties. The government generally respected this right, except for the legal prohibitions on groups expressing support for the Baath Party or Zionist principles. The law stipulates that any person who promotes Zionist principles, associates with Zionist organizations, assists such organizations by giving material or moral support, or works in any way towards the realization of Zionist objectives is subject to punishment by death. There were no applications of this law after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime.

Many Sunni Muslims alleged that the country's Shia majority waged a continuing campaign of revenge identifying Sunnis with the Baath Party's abuses of Shia under Saddam Hussein's rule. Complaints included allegations of discrimination in public sector employment due to the continuing campaign of de-Baathification. The government claimed that it intended the de-Baathification process to target loyalists of the former regime, but some NGOs and Sunnis believed the

government implemented the Accountability and Justice Law (de-Baathification law) selectively to render many Sunnis ineligible for government employment.

Bureaucratic delays continued in the NGO registration process. The slow process impeded development and legal protection of NGOs. A law designed to facilitate NGO registration and operations and provide extra protection from onerous and arbitrary government actions provided limited assistance. The NGO Directorate in the Council of Ministers Secretariat issued registration certificates to 326 NGOs, including two foreign NGOs, from January to October, compared with 217 in all of 2014.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement and foreign travel, but the government did not consistently respect these rights. IDPs had limited access to Baghdad, Kirkuk, Najaf Governorates, and areas controlled by the KRG throughout the year. KRG authorities hosted approximately 1.5 million IDPs in the IKR and areas under KRG security control. Some IDPs, particularly Sunni Arabs, reported they faced delays and restrictions on entering the region as well as pressure to leave the region.

The government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the IOM, and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to IDPs, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern. The government did not have effective systems to assist all of these individuals, largely due to funding shortfalls and lack of capacity. The deterioration in the security situation and armed clashes between the ISF and Da'esh throughout the year caused significant movement of civilians, further complicating the government's coordination of relief efforts. The UN estimated that, since January 2014, the conflict with Da'esh had caused more than 3.2 million Iraqis to become displaced. Security considerations in active combat areas, destruction of roads, and official and unofficial restrictions in some cases limited humanitarian access to IDP communities.

In-country Movement: The law permits security forces to restrict in-country movement pursuant to a warrant, impose a curfew, cordon off and search an area, and take other necessary security and military measures in response to security threats and attacks. There were numerous reports that security forces, including the ISF and Peshmerga, as well as the PMF selectively enforced regulations requiring residency permits in order to limit entry of persons into liberated areas under their control. UNAMI and the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received multiple reports that authorities denied Sunni Arab IDPs from Salah ad Din and Ninewa governorates access to Kirkuk Governorate.

The KRG, imposing what it stated were necessary security procedures, restricted movement across the areas it administered. Authorities required nonresidents of the IKR to obtain permits that authorized limited stays in the IKR. These permits were generally renewable. Iraqi citizens from outside the IKR who sought to obtain residency permits for areas controlled by the KRG required sponsorship from a resident in the region. Citizens (of all ethnosectarian backgrounds, including Kurds) crossing into the region from the south were obligated to enter at checkpoints and undergo personal and vehicle inspection.

KRG authorities applied restrictions more stringently in some areas than in others. The UN and international humanitarian organizations alleged that practices regarding the entry of IDPs were more or less restrictive depending upon the location of the checkpoint and the ethnosectarian background of the displaced individuals. There were also reports that checkpoints into the IKR were sometimes closed for extended periods, forcing IDPs to wait to enter the region. Officials prevented individuals whom they deemed security threats from entering the region. IKR officials generally admitted minority IDPs into the IKR, although the security checks were occasionally lengthy. Entry often was more difficult for men, particularly Arab men traveling without family.

Due to increased violence, central government security forces increased the number of checkpoints and erected makeshift roadblocks in many parts of the country (see section 1.g.). From May to July, following Da'esh's seizure of Ramadi, thousands of residents fled the city for surrounding areas. During this period international media reported government authorities sporadically closed the Bzebiz Bridge, the most direct route to Baghdad, due to fighting between ISF and Da'esh forces. Multiple times during the year, aid agencies and Anbar

Governorate officials told international media that the fighting stranded families on the Anbar side of the bridge and prevented IDP families from receiving aid.

Da'esh restricted freedom of movement, particularly in the west and north (see section 1.g.). Da'esh prevented citizens from leaving the cities of Fallujah, Ramadi, and Mosul unless those citizens paid bribes to exit, left family members behind as collateral for their return, or agreed to relinquish property they owned in those cities. Da'esh severely restricted women's freedom of movement in areas under its control. Patrols checked to make sure that women wore suitable attire and male relatives or guardians accompanied them outside the home.

Foreign Travel: The government required exit permits for citizens leaving the country, but the requirement was not routinely enforced.

Exile: The constitution permits forced exile only of naturalized citizens and only if a judicial decision establishes that the individual obtained citizenship based on material falsifications. There were no reported cases of forced exile.

Internally Displaced Persons

The constitution and the national policy on displacement address IDP rights, but few laws specifically do so. The central government, the IKR, and international organizations attempted to provide protection and assistance to IDPs. In August the UN renewed the designation of the humanitarian crisis as a level three emergency, its highest level, citing the scale and complexity of the situation. Host communities, particularly in the IKR, faced acute pressure on their ability to provide public services to increasing numbers of IDPs.

Since January 2014 the armed conflict displaced more than 3.2 million persons, predominantly in Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din governorates. An additional one million IDPs from the 2006-08 sectarian conflict remained displaced.

Sectarian violence and the advance of Da'esh displaced Sunni, Christian, Shia, Yezidi, Turkmen, Shabak, and Sabeen-Mandean families (see section 1.g.). The majority of the displaced fled to areas outside their districts of origin.

The government's focus on improving the security situation and addressing IDPs' immediate humanitarian needs strained official efforts to promote their safe, voluntary return or local integration. This challenge required the government to balance attempts to assist IDPs while maintaining good relations with host

communities. UNHCR and other international organizations noted there was no national policy on IDP returns to homes of origin. The Ministry of Migration and Displacement's strategy recognized local integration as a legal option for IDPs; although in practice, IDPs (the large majority of whom were Sunni Arabs) faced difficulties being accepted in KRG-controlled areas or areas held by Shia PMF units. The government attempted to integrate IDPs into local populations but also encouraged families to return to their original homes, and in some cases before the families were willing to return. In December the OHCHR stated Iraqi security forces, KRG security forces, and affiliated militias were responsible for looting and destruction of property belonging to Sunni Arab communities, forced evictions, abductions, illegal detention and some cases of extrajudicial killings.

Government assistance focused on the provision of financial grants, but it made neither the initial nor the successive payments consistently. Faced with the large movements of IDPs across the country, the government provided food, water, and financial assistance to many but not all IDPs, including in the IKR. Many IDPs lived in informal settlements where they did not receive adequate water, sanitation, or other essential services. According to the IOM, as of October one in five IDPs lived in shelter arrangements that did not meet minimal safety or security standards. The Iraqi government and KRG worked with the UN to establish new camps and expand existing infrastructure. The government provided many of the IDPs in the camps with basic household goods

IDPs generally received services such as food rations allocated through the government's public distribution system. Persons who did not register as IDPs in their current places of residence sometimes faced limited access to services. Local authorities often determined whether IDPs would have access to local services. Through the provision of legal aid, UNHCR and other humanitarian actors assisted IDPs in obtaining documentation and registering with authorities to improve their access to services and entitlements. The IOM reported that some IDPs faced difficulty with registration due to lack of required documentation and administrative delays.

While humanitarian assistance generally reached displaced persons in the IKR and most of the governorates in the southern part of the country, access to those remaining in Da'esh-controlled areas, particularly in Ninewa, Anbar, Kirkuk, and Salah ad Din governorates remained constrained. Humanitarian personnel continued to attempt to provide assistance in these areas, but security and movement limitations constrained aid delivery.

There were also reports of local councils forcing displaced persons to volunteer for the PMF. According to religious freedom NGO Masarat, on April 21, the Wasit Provincial Council issued a statement forcing displaced persons between the ages of 18 and 50 to enlist. Shabak IDPs living in Wasit told Masarat that local police confiscated their identity documents and told them they had to enlist in security forces or leave the province. Ultimately, after intervention from human rights activists, a member of parliament, religious authorities, and members of the Wasit provincial council, the decision to forcibly enlist Shabak IDPs was revoked, and local police returned their identity documents.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government established a system, albeit flawed, for providing protection to refugees. According to UNHCR, there were nearly 250,000 refugees in the country, with most asylum seekers arriving from Syria and smaller numbers from Iran and Turkey. The government generally cooperated with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to refugees and IDPs in the country.

Refoulement: The government cooperated with UNHCR to prevent the deportation of refugees. UNHCR relocated refugees at risk of deportation to refugee camps or attempted to resettle them.

Refugee Abuse: There were reports that sectarian groups, extremists, criminals, and, in some alleged but unverified cases, government forces attacked and arrested refugees, including Palestinians, Ahwazis, and Syrian Arabs. During the year UNHCR reported cases of abuse of Palestinian refugees in Baghdad, including intimidation at checkpoints, arbitrary arrests, abductions, and disappearances. There were also reports of threats against Palestinians who reported abuses to local police.

Local NGOs reported that abuse of Syrian refugees--often by other refugees--was common, including violence against women and children, child marriage, forced prostitution, and sexual harassment.

A 2011 memorandum of understanding between the government and the UN provided for the closure of Camp Ashraf in Diyala Governorate and transfer to Camp Hurriya (in Baghdad) of members of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, an Iranian dissident group. By year's end the UN reported a population of 1,957 persons in

Camp Hurriya. Authorities relocated 1,119 residents of Camp Hurriya to foreign countries, either independently (63 individuals) or through the UNHCR relocation program (1,056 individuals). The majority of relocations were to Albania.

According to AI, a Shia militia, the al-Mukhtar Army, claimed responsibility for an October 29 rocket attack on Camp Hurriya that killed at least 24 residents. Government authorities responded to the attack by providing emergency services and doctors to the camp. On September 21, a militia group also attacked residents of the camp and killed three Iraqi security personnel. There continued to be no information on the whereabouts of seven Mujahedin-e-Khalq members abducted from Camp Ashraf in 2013.

Employment: By law refugees and asylum seekers have the right to work in the private sector. Palestinian refugees, however, faced job insecurity when working in the public sector due to their ambiguous legal status; the government did not recognize their refugee status and did not allow them to obtain citizenship. Syrian refugees were able to obtain and renew residency and work permits both in refugee camps and in Erbil. Authorities, however, did not allow some Syrian refugees to continue their employment in refugee camps.

Durable Solutions: Ethnic Kurdish refugees from Syria, Turkey, and Iran in the IKR generally integrated well. Local integration remained the best and most likely option for the majority of Iranian Kurds. The Kurdistan regional government classified an estimated 40,000 Syrian Kurd refugees as “noncamp refugees.” Many noncamp refugees worked in Erbil or found shelter with relatives in the IKR.

Stateless Persons

UNHCR estimated that approximately 120,000 stateless persons, an increase of 10,000 from the previous year, lived in the country, many of them Syrian refugees. Many nonrefugee stateless individuals were previously Iraqi citizens and had already begun the process of reacquiring nationality.

As of 2006, the latest year for which data were available, an estimated 54,500 Bidoun individuals living as nomads in the desert near or in the southern governorates of Basrah, Dhi Qar, and Qadisiyah remained undocumented and stateless. Prolonged drought in the southern section of the country forced many individuals from these communities to migrate to city centers, where most obtained identification documents and gained access to food rations and other social benefits. Other communities similarly at risk of statelessness included the

country's Romani population, the Ahwazi community of Shia Arabs of Iranian decent, the Bahai religious minority community, inhabitants of the southern Marshlands, members of the Goyan and Omariya Turkish Kurdish tribes near Mosul, and nationals of South Sudan, which had not established a diplomatic presence in the country.

Stateless persons faced discrimination in employment and access to education. Many stateless persons, particularly Bahai, were not able to register for identity cards, which prevented them from enrolling in public school, registering marriages, and gaining access to some government services. Stateless persons also faced difficulty obtaining public sector employment and lacked job security.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, and, despite violence and other irregularities in the conduct of elections, citizens generally exercised this right.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In April 2014 the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) conducted elections for both the Iraqi Council of Representatives and the provincial councils of Erbil, Dahuk, and Sulaymaniyah governorates. International and local observers monitored the elections. Despite security concerns, monitors declared the elections credible and free from widespread or systemic fraud. There were limited reports of abuse or electoral irregularities. IHEC announced preliminary election results in May 2014, and the Federal Supreme Court certified the results in June 2014.

The loss of civil documentation related to a growing number of IDPs presented a challenge for future elections. In February, according to a survey by Minority Rights Group International, a UK-based human rights organization, in 44 percent of all IDP families, one or more members lacked national identity cards. In many cases IDPs needed to return to their areas of origin to obtain identity documents. According to UNCHR, in February the government attempted to mitigate this difficulty by opening more branch offices to issue IDPs new identity cards, but IDPs faced problems accessing these offices.

In March the IKR established the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission, which has authority to supervise all elections and referenda within the IKR, previously under IHEC supervision. Discussions between Iraqi government and Kurdistan regional electoral commissions to determine the coordination mechanism for federal elections continued at year's end.

In August IHEC announced initial approval for a petition by Basrah Governorate residents to hold a referendum to make the governorate an autonomous region. IHEC noted that a lack of funding from the central government could impede efforts to carry out a referendum in Basrah.

Da'esh intensified attacks against election workers this year. In August international media reported that Da'esh executed 300 IHEC civil servants, including 50 women, by firing squad in Mosul after sentencing them to death for promoting democracy in the country.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Political parties and coalition blocs tended to organize along either religious or ethnic lines. Membership in some political parties conferred special privileges and advantages in employment and education.

On August 27, the Council of Representatives passed the Political Parties Law, which bans parties from receiving revenue from any foreign entity, including citizens living outside the country, and mandates that parties receive funds only from membership fees, donations from within the country, returns on the party's investments, and subsidies from the state. It prohibits, moreover, political parties from having direct ties with militias or security forces. Finally, the law establishes an IHEC oversight committee responsible for approving and regulating all political parties, as well as investigating complaints against parties and disbanding parties in violation of the law.

Participation of Women and Minorities: The constitution mandates that women constitute at least 25 percent of parliamentary and provincial council membership. In the 2014 national parliamentary elections, 22 women received sufficient votes to win seats in the 328-seat Council of Representatives without having to rely on the constitutional quota, compared with five in 2010. More than 60 additional women, who received fewer votes, were awarded seats based on the quota, bringing the total number of seats held by women to 86. Despite an increase in the number of female parliamentarians, political discussions often marginalized female members of parliament. There was one female minister in the Council of Ministers.

Of the 328 seats in parliament, the law reserves eight seats for minorities: five for Christian candidates from Baghdad, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Dahuk; one Yezidi; one Sabean-Mandean; and one Shabak.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year. Officials in all parts of the government often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, and investigation of corruption was not free from political influence. Family, tribal, and religious considerations significantly influenced government decisions at all levels. Bribery, money laundering, nepotism, and misappropriation of public funds were common.

The Commission of Integrity generally refrained from releasing the names of government officials in its annual reports. By year's end the COI had not released its 2015 annual report.

Corruption: There were reports alleging that senior officials involved in bribery schemes held illicit funds in overseas accounts, making bribery more difficult to detect. In August international media reported that the government launched a corruption investigation against the former deputy prime minister for energy affairs Baha al-Araji, accusing him of nine crimes, including property racketeering and financial corruption. Araji publicly admitted to owning as many as seven houses, a hotel, and other properties. He also had 300 guards paid by the state. There were no results publicly available by year's end. In August the COI announced it would investigate the Ministry of Trade for corruption, due to complaints about irregularities in the ministry's public distribution system. In October the judiciary announced it had issued an arrest warrant for Minister of Trade Milas Muhammad Abdul Karim on corruption charges. The minister had since left his post, but the corruption investigation continued at year's end.

During the first half of the year, the COI investigated 13,398 cases and referred 2,171 cases to relevant courts, including 13 officials at the ministerial level and 80 at the director general level. The COI reportedly recovered 36 billion dinars (\$32.7 million) in stolen assets and issued a court order to recover an additional 12 billion dinars (\$10.9 million) during the year.

The Central Bank's Money Laundering Reporting Office leads the government's efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The office is responsible for monitoring financial transactions and compiling information on money laundering and disseminating it to law enforcement agencies. The office was largely ineffective due to its lack of qualified staff at all levels of the organization as well as the lack of effective enforcement capabilities against banks and exchange houses in the country. In September the Council of Representatives approved a law to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The effectiveness of the law's implementation was not determinable by year's end.

The Council of Ministers Secretariat also has an anticorruption advisor, and the Council of Representatives has an Integrity Committee. The Joint Anticorruption Council reporting to the Council of Ministers oversees and monitors compliance with the government's 2010-14 anticorruption strategy. The secretary general for the Council of Ministers led the anticorruption council, which also included the chairperson of the Federal Board of Supreme Audit, the commissioner of the COI, and representatives of the Inspector Generals' (IG) offices. When the agenda of the anticorruption council calls for high-level participation by the government, the Ministry of Interior's head of economic crimes may attend. Despite the council's mandate, the public generally regarded it as having little effect due to the scale of official corruption. The COI's National Strategy to Combat Corruption (2015-19) aimed to increase training and development of staff of the IG's office and COI staff. On April 14, the Council of Ministers established an anticorruption academy to conduct trainings and workshops for COI staff, offer postgraduate studies in anticorruption, and publish anticorruption research.

Lack of agreement about institutional roles, insufficient political will, political influence, poor transparency, and unclear governing legislation and regulatory processes hampered joint efforts to combat corruption. Although anticorruption institutions increasingly collaborated with civil society groups, organizing workshops, surveys, and training courses, the impact of expanded cooperation was limited. The media and NGOs continued to attempt to expose corruption independently, although their capacity to do so was limited. Anticorruption, law enforcement, and judicial officials, as well as members of civil society and the media, faced threats and intimidation in their efforts to combat corrupt practices (see section 2.a.).

Government officials and the IGs frequently contended that corruption investigations were highly politicized. For example, in August the head of parliament's integrity committee told international media that the body

recommended 500 cases for investigation during the year but that the COI addressed only a few cases because judges in the commission were not independent. Human rights NGOs alleged that government officials sought to influence the outcome of corruption investigations or to stifle anticorruption efforts altogether.

As in previous years, ministries effectively stalled investigations by failing to comply with requests for information or for officials to appear in court. The IGs claimed some ministers stifled their oversight efforts or openly threatened IG staff with dismissal for performing basic oversight functions. Some government officials stated politically motivated corruption investigations hindered public administration because officials reportedly feared corruption allegations from political opponents.

The law requires the prime minister's approval before a corruption case may proceed against members of the presidency or the Council of Ministers; there was no information regarding specific instances of the prime minister or other ministers withholding approval during the year. The constitution provides members of the Council of Representatives immunity from prosecution, which the council may lift by a majority vote.

The IGs and other anticorruption officials lacked sufficient resources, especially adequate personal security. High turnover among the IGs left positions unfilled for long periods. The IGs reported these deficiencies were key factors in determining whether to report instances of corruption. The executive branch's failure to seek legislative confirmation of the appointment of key anticorruption officials further weakened the independence of the Federal Board of Supreme Audit, COI, Central Bank, and IGs by leaving many officials in an "acting" capacity, subject to removal by the prime minister at any time.

On August 9, the prime minister announced, and the Council of Representatives approved, a series of reforms designed to eliminate official corruption and to improve public services. Reforms went into effect August, but implementation was inconsistent. His plan called for the end of sectarian quotas in determining senior positions, as well as the establishment of an executive committee to select ministers, advisors, and director generals based on merit and competence. The reforms reduced the number of government ministries from 33 to 22. Although the canceled ministries lost their official mandate, in reality working-level employees continued at their posts and continued to be paid while the Council of Ministers engaged in protracted negotiations to merge ministries and reassign employees

from canceled ministries. Finally, the reform package authorized a high commission to reopen and investigate old corruption cases. The government subsequently referred 2,000 corruption cases to the courts for prosecution; however, the vast majority of these cases dated from 2003 to 2005.

The prime minister also called on the judiciary to appoint expert judges known for their integrity to investigate and prosecute corruption cases. In September authorities appointed 34 new judges to courts across the country and 19 integrity judges to Baghdad courts. Baghdad Integrity Court--an investigation court that specializes in integrity cases--announced it was investigating dozens of corruption cases involving many government ministries. In September two new integrity courts opened in Basrah and Najaf to evaluate corruption cases in their districts.

Widespread and pervasive corruption and lack of government transparency, including with regard to oil revenue, were major problems in the IKR. According to the Kurdistan Commission on Public Integrity, corruption in the IKR was extensive. Weak budgetary oversight and lack of training for personnel further hindered the commission from fighting corruption effectively. Allegations and rumors of missing oil revenue were rampant, but there had been no audits or unbiased investigations as of year's end.

Financial Disclosure: The law authorizes the COI to obtain annual financial disclosures from senior public officials, including ministers, governors, and parliamentarians, and to take legal action for nondisclosure. Penalties range from fines to imprisonment. A unified system for enforcing annual financial disclosures did not exist. The COI has no jurisdiction over the IKR, but Kurdish members of the central government were required to conform to the law. The law obligates the COI to provide public annual reports on prosecutions, transparency, accountability, and ethics of public service.

The Kurdistan Commission on Public Integrity is responsible for distributing and collecting financial disclosure forms in the IKR. The commission reported that by August the Kurdistan region's president, all members of its parliament, and 20 of its 23 ministers had submitted financial disclosure reports. There was no information available indicating that public officials faced penalty for financial nondisclosure.

Public Access to Information: The law does not provide public access to government information. The IKR Information Law expands citizens' rights to request information from the regional government, parliament, and court system,

except in cases of national security or classified information. According to the Kurdistan region's Human Rights Commission, the government did not implement this law.

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

Domestic and international NGOs operated in most cases with little government interference. Due to the humanitarian crisis in western and northern areas of the country, the majority of local NGOs shifted their focus to providing assistance to IDPs and other communities affected by the conflict. In some instances these local NGOs worked in coordination with central government and Kurdistan regional government authorities. A number of NGOs also investigated and published findings on human rights cases. When NGOs alleged human rights abuses that concerned government actions or actions of ethnic or religious groups allied with the government, there were some reports of government interference.

NGOs faced capacity-related challenges, did not have regular access to government officials, and did not systematically serve as bulwarks against failures in governance and human rights abuses. Sustainability of domestic NGOs remained a key factor hindering the long-term development of the sector. The government rarely awarded NGOs contracts for services. While the law forbids NGOs from engaging in political activity, political parties or sects originated, funded, or substantially influenced many, although not all, domestic NGOs.

The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) was the primary coordinating body for NGOs. The NCCI included both international and local NGOs. The NCCI primarily supported humanitarian response efforts and coordinated with UN humanitarian agencies. For example, on September 30, during a side meeting at the 70th UN General Assembly, the NCCI briefed the assembly on humanitarian and protection issues in Iraq and stressed the importance of neutrality and impartiality when implementing humanitarian assistance programs.

The IKR had an active community of mostly Kurdish NGOs, many of them closely linked to and funded by the PUK and KDP parties. By law government funding of NGOs is contingent upon whether an NGO's programming goals conform to already identified areas of priority. The region's NGO Directorate established formal procedures for awarding funds to NGOs, which included a public description of the annual budget for NGO funding, priority areas for consideration, deadlines for proposal submission, establishment of a grant committee, and the

criteria for ranking proposals. Local and international NGOs reported difficulties registering with the regional government and obtaining permits for their operations in areas administered by the KRG.

Several NGOs in the IKR reported security forces harassed their staffs. For example, NGOs in Kirkuk reported intrusive inspections, delays in registration, and arrests in May, according to the IHCHR.

Following the intensification of the conflict with Da'esh and seizure of several cities in the north, there were reports of Da'esh threats to NGOs and civil society activists in those areas.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government sometimes restricted the access of the UN and other international bodies to sensitive locations, including Interior Ministry detention facilities.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Until August the Ministry of Human Rights was responsible for monitoring human rights abuses and for assisting and advocating for victims. The ministry received and investigated complaints from citizens and published public reports addressing violations, including reports on prisons and detention centers; women's civil, economic, and political rights; minorities; and victims of terrorism. Lack of political independence, poor cooperation from other ministries, and limited resources hindered the ministry's effectiveness. In August the prime minister abolished the ministry as part of his reform program to reduce the number of governmental ministries. By year's end ministry staff were in the process of transferring to other ministries and to the IHCHR.

The constitution mandates the creation of an independent IHCHR. The law governing its operation provides for commissioners with four-year nonrenewable terms. No less than one-third of the 11 full-time and three reserve commissioners must be women, and at least one full-time member and one reserve member must be from a minority community. The law provides that the IHCHR be financially and administratively independent and have broad authority, including the right to receive and investigate human rights complaints, conduct unannounced visits to correctional facilities, and review legislation. As of October the commission had not elected a president or selected an adequate number of female commissioners in accordance with the law.

In January the Council of Representatives, in collaboration with the UN Development Program, launched an NGO Human Rights Advisory Board to assist the parliament's Human Rights Committee in engaging with civil society organizations that promoted human rights. The board included 19 representatives from civil society organizations, including three that represented minorities' issues. The main functions of the board were to strengthen civil society oversight of government performance and to contribute to the legislative process, particularly on human rights related issues.

On January 21, the Council of Ministers established a National Commission for International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The commission included members from ministries, the IHCHR, as well as an international NGO with observer status. The commission advised the government on progress implementing treaties related to IHL and strengthened cooperation and information exchange between the government and organizations that specialized in IHL.

The Kurdistan regional government has a Human Rights Commission, but its personnel lacked human rights experience, and employees often owed their positions to party affiliation.

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

The constitution provides that all citizens are equal before the law without regard to gender, sect, opinion, belief, nationality, or origin. The law prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, language, religion, social origin, political opinion, age, or social status. The government was ineffective in enforcing these provisions. The law does not address sexual orientation or gender identity, disability, HIV-positive status, or other communicable diseases.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Domestic violence remained a pervasive problem, and there was no law prohibiting domestic violence. The law did not always adequately protect rape victims. The law criminalizes rape (but not spousal rape) and permits a maximum sentence of life imprisonment if the victim dies. The law allows authorities to drop a rape case if the perpetrator marries the victim. There were no reliable estimates of the incidence of rape or information on the effectiveness of government enforcement of the law. Due to social stigma and societal and often familial retribution against both the victim and perpetrator, victims of sexual crimes did not usually report it to authorities or pursue legal

remedies. International organizations reported that family-imposed movement restrictions, cultural norms, or stigmatization prohibited or discouraged female victims of sexual crimes from accessing psychosocial support services. Local NGOs in IDP camps in the IKR reported that some Ministry of Health professionals were unwilling to treat sexual assault survivors due to cultural norms, and if they did give care, it was inadequate due to capacity limitations in the health-care sector.

Due to continuing Da'esh-perpetuated violence, women's status suffered severe setbacks (see also sections 1.g. and 6). During the year Da'esh continued to kidnap women and girls, sell, rent, or gift them as forced "brides" (a euphemism for forced marriage or sexual slavery) to Da'esh fighters and commanders, and exploit the promise of sexual access in propaganda materials as part of its recruitment strategy. In March the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OFWI) reported that Da'esh initially sold women for prices ranging from 110,000 dinars to 1.1 million dinars (\$100 to \$1,000), and as a woman was sold, resold, and rented to Da'esh fighters, the price decreased to 16,600 dinars (\$15). According to an OHCHR fact-finding mission, some women discovered to be pregnant in Da'esh captivity were forced to have abortions.

In March a UN *Women in Iraq Factsheet* reported that during the year sexual violence against women and children increased in Ninewa, Najaf, and Karbala governorates, where there were also increased reports of abductions, trafficking, and forced recruitment.

On May 27, the Council of Ministers approved an emergency plan to implement UN Resolution 1325 in response to the conflict with Da'esh and its effects on the humanitarian and security situation of women. The plan was unfunded at year's end. The plan called for a partnership between the IHCHR, the High Commission for Human Rights in Kurdistan, NGOs, and international partners to prevent human rights violations against women and to protect and assist women affected by the conflict. Goals included designing IDP camps to provide for women's needs, including support for survivors of sexual violence and abduction. The plan also called for the government to investigate promptly claims of human rights abuses against women and include women in postconflict reconstruction efforts.

There is no law against domestic violence in Iraq. Local and international NGOs and media reported that domestic violence often went unreported and unpunished, with abuses customarily addressed within the family and tribal structure. Harassment of legal personnel who sought to pursue domestic violence cases under

laws criminalizing assault, as well as a lack of trained police and judicial personnel, further hampered efforts to bring perpetrators to justice. According to UNAMI's 2013 *Women in Iraq Factsheet*, 46 percent of married women reported spousal violence, and 38 percent of women reported experiencing sexual violence by their husband at least once monthly.

Private shelters run by NGOs were against public policy. The lack of NGO-run shelters prevented victims of gender-based crimes from accessing health care and psychosocial support.

The Ministry of Interior maintained 16 family protection units around the country, which aimed to resolve domestic disputes and establish safe refuges for victims of sexual or gender-based violence. These units tended to prioritize family reconciliation over victim protection and lacked the capacity to support victims. Hotlines went to the male commanders of the units, which did not follow a regular referral system to provide victims with services, such as legal aid or safe shelter. The family protection units in Basrah and Kirkuk, for example, were located in police stations and staffed primarily by male officers, making it potentially difficult and unsafe for women to access them. Victims of domestic violence in Basrah told UNAMI that they feared approaching the family protection units, because they suspected that police would immediately inform their families of their testimonies. Shelters for victims of domestic abuse were limited; the family protection units in most locations did not operate shelters. Safe houses, both those run by the government and NGOs, were often targets for violence. Minority Rights Group International, an EU-funded human rights organization, noted that the Ministry of Interior Family Protection Units, responsible for receiving complaints about domestic violence, recorded a total of 22,442 cases of family violence across the country between 2010 and November 2014, the latest statistics available.

The law in the IKR makes domestic violence, including physical and psychological abuse, threats of violence, and spousal rape, a crime. The government implemented the provisions of the law, creating a special police force to investigate cases of gender-based violence and establish a family reconciliation committee within the judicial system, but local NGOs reported that these programs were not effective at combating gender-based violence.

In December 2014 the Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs and the UN Development Program, established the first national database for tracking domestic violence cases. In April the Interior

Ministry's Directorate for Protecting Families and Children from Domestic Violence established a hotline to offer legal guidance on domestic violence.

In the IKR, three labor ministry-operated women's shelters provided some protection and assistance for victims of gender-based violence and human trafficking. Space was limited, and service delivery was poor. NGOs played a key role in providing services, including legal aid, to victims of domestic violence, who often received no assistance from the central government. Instead of using legal remedies, authorities frequently attempted to mediate between women and their families so that the women returned to their homes. Other than marrying or returning to their families, which often resulted in further victimization by the family or community, there were few options for women accommodated at shelters.

In the IKR during the year, there were 6,949 cases of violence against women, 61 cases of self-immolation, 115 suicides, 54 femicides, and 119 cases of rape and sexual abuse, according to the KRG High Council of Women's Affairs.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The Family Violence Law, which went into effect in 2011 in the IKR, bans FGM/C. Many NGOs reported that the government was not enforcing the law and the practice persisted, particularly in rural areas. During the year interviews conducted by the international human rights organization WADI and local women's rights organization PANA indicated that 25 percent of women in the central and southern parts of the country had been subjected to FGM/C. While the practice occurred throughout the country, it was most prevalent in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah governorates. According to the results of a study in Erbil released in January 2014, 70.3 percent of women surveyed acknowledged having undergone some form of FGM/C. Several NGOs stated the Erbil study confirmed anecdotal evidence that FGM/C remained a serious problem.

On February 6, in recognition of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM/C, the Women's High Council of the KRG, in collaboration with local NGO WADI and UNICEF, hosted a conference to raise awareness about the issue. Also in February WADI, with support from UNICEF, sponsored four television announcements to combat FGM/C.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Honor killings remained a serious problem throughout the country. Some families arranged honor killings to appear as suicides. In the IKR some women resorted to self-immolation to kill themselves; authorities refused to investigate certain cases. The law permits honor

considerations to mitigate sentences; for example, a provision limits a sentence for murder to a maximum of three years in prison if a man is on trial for killing his wife or a female dependent due to suspicion that the victim was committing adultery.

Women and girls were at times sexually exploited through so-called temporary marriages, a practice more common in Shia than in Sunni traditions, under which a man gives the family of the girl or woman dowry money in exchange for permission to “marry” her for a specified, limited period. Government officials and international and local NGOs also reported that the traditional practice of “fasliya”--whereby family members, including women and children, are traded to settle tribal disputes--remained a problem, particularly in southern governorates. In May an agreement to resolve a dispute between the al-Shawi and al-Garamsha tribes in the Qurna area north of Basrah included the exchange of up to 50 women over a one-year period. Local authorities, however, intervened and compelled the sheikhs of the tribes to forswear fasliya, and by year’s end the women had not been exchanged.

Extremist groups and militias targeted women in violent attacks throughout the country. In January the OHCHR stated the office received reports of women whom Da’esh executed, particularly educated and professional women. The OHCHR received reports that Da’esh executed three female lawyers in January.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual relations outside marriage, including rape or sexual solicitation that may occur during sexual harassment. The penalties include fines and imprisonment. The law provides relief from penalties if unmarried participants marry. No information was available regarding the effectiveness of government enforcement. Due to social conventions and retribution against both the victim and perpetrator of sexual harassment, victims of sexual harassment usually did not pursue legal remedies. In September the Iraqi Media Women Forum revealed results of its national survey on sexual harassment, noting that 77 percent of women surveyed reported harassment, and 91 percent of harassed women said that local traditions and customs prevented them from pursuing legal remedies. Because of the unequal social status of women, their fear of telling close relatives, and their distrust of the criminal justice process, victims rarely filed police complaints against their offenders. In most areas there were few or no publicly provided women’s shelters, information, support hotlines, and little or no sensitivity training for police.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, timing, and spacing of their children, manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Due to general insecurity in the country and attendant economic difficulties, many women nonetheless received inadequate medical care. The UN reported that sexual and reproductive health services, trauma counselling centers, and reintegration support were severely limited, including in the IKR, where the majority of returned captives lived, often having suffered severe trauma at the hands of Da'esh. There were no reports of women denied access to contraception or maternal health services because of a spouse or other family member withholding permission. A March 23 UN report on conflict-related sexual violence documented cases where Da'esh forced Yezidi captive women to have abortions because of their ethnicity.

Discrimination: Although the constitution forbids discrimination based on gender, conservative societal standards impeded women's ability to enjoy the same legal status and rights as men in all aspects of the judicial system. Throughout the country women reported increasing social pressure to adhere to conservative social norms. Da'esh continued to impose severe restrictions on women's movement and dress, and enforcement patrols by Da'esh forces were reportedly routine occurrences. The IHCHR reported cases of Da'esh executing women for not wearing the veil.

Women experienced economic discrimination in access to similar work as men and generally did not receive equal pay for equal work (see section 7.d.). Deteriorating security throughout the year limited women's ability to work outside their homes. According to a March UN *Women in Iraq Factsheet*, there were 1.6 million widows in the country and even more female-headed households. The UN reported that displaced women, widows, and female-headed households were particularly vulnerable to abuse. In May the Ministry of Planning reported that women constituted approximately 60 percent of total IDPs.

Law and custom generally do not respect freedom of movement for women. For example, the law prevents a woman from applying for a passport without the consent of her male guardian or a legal representative. Women could not obtain the Civil Status Identification Document--required for access to public services, food assistance, health care, employment, education, and housing--without consent of a male relative. This restriction affected women in conflict, according to local NGOs. OWFI and local media reported authorities told a female minor, whose entire family was killed, that she could not obtain identity documents without a

male relative until she turned 18 years old. As a result she could not attend school or access social and public services. In Da'esh-controlled areas, Da'esh forces reportedly forbade women from leaving their homes unless male relatives escorted them. Da'esh also prevented professional women from returning to work, with the exception of medical workers and teachers.

In August as part of the prime minister's reform package, authorities dissolved the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs, which had functioned primarily as an advisory office without an independent budget. The former ministry was largely ineffective at solving problems facing women, according to civil society and international women's rights groups. The NGO community called for the government to replace the ministry with another institution. By year's end the government had not indicated how another ministry or institution would cover women's issues or how the institution would be resourced.

Children

Birth Registration: The constitution states that anyone born to at least one citizen parent is a citizen. Failure to register births resulted in the denial of public services such as education, food, and health care. Single women and widows often had problems registering their children. Although in most cases authorities provided birth certificates after registration of the birth through the Ministries of Health and Interior, this was reportedly a lengthy and at times complicated process. The government was generally committed to children's rights and welfare, although it denied benefits to noncitizen children. Families of noncitizen children had to pay for services, such as public schools and health services that were otherwise free.

Education: Primary education is compulsory for citizen children for the first six years of schooling but is neither free nor compulsory for noncitizen children. Equal access to education for girls remained a challenge, particularly in rural and insecure areas. UNICEF estimated that net primary school enrollment was 93 percent for boys and 87 percent for girls. The net overall completion rate for primary school was 50 percent as of 2013, the latest year data available. Children in rural areas faced greater education challenges. The IKR primary school completion rate was among the highest in the country, with 65 percent of children completing primary school on time. A lack of identification documents, limited income with which to purchase required supplies, and a lack of transportation often prevented IDP children from attending schools.

The continuing conflict delayed the academic school year as IDPs throughout the country sheltered in schools. According to a September UNICEF report, the displacement of more than three million Iraqis strained education infrastructure and had affected at least 950,000 children since 2014. UNICEF reported that authorities appropriated approximately 1,200 schools in host communities as collective shelters.

Child Abuse: Violence against children remained a significant problem. According to a UN-supported study in 2011 (the latest year for available comprehensive figures), 46 percent of girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were exposed to family violence. In 2013 the Council of Representatives amended the social care law to increase protection for children who were victims of domestic violence. The amendment also called for protection and care of children in shelters, state houses, and orphanages. Implementation of the law continued at year's end.

The KRG's Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs, Education, and Culture and Youth established a toll-free hotline to report violations against, or seek advice regarding, children's rights. The hotline received more than 4,135 calls between January and September, according to government data.

Early and Forced Marriage: By law the minimum age of marriage is 15 with parental permission and 18 without. The government made few efforts to enforce the law. Traditional forced marriages of girls as young as age 11 continued, particularly in rural areas. According to UNICEF, 6 percent of girls were married by 15, and 24 percent were married by 18. Girls between the ages of 11 and 18 told UNICEF that early marriage was the primary obstacle to completing their education. Early and forced marriages, as well as abusive temporary marriages, were more prevalent in Da'esh-controlled areas. In February HRW interviewed 20 Yezidi women and girls who escaped from Da'esh captivity; nearly all said that they had been forced into marriage, sold (in some cases a number of times), or given as gifts.

Local and international NGOs reported that forced divorce--the practice of husbands or their families threatening to divorce wives they married when the girls were very young (ages 12 to 16) to pressure the girl's family to provide additional money to the girl's husband and his family--also occurred, particularly in the south. Victims of forced divorce were compelled to leave their husbands and their husbands' families, and social customs regarding family honor often prevented victims from returning to their families, leaving some adolescent girls abandoned.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: See information for girls under 18 in Women's section above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits sexual relations outside of marriage for any reason. Because sex outside marriage is always illegal, the age of consensual sex is effectively the minimum marriage age. The law does not specifically address the commercial exploitation of children but prohibits pornography of any kind, including child pornography. During the year there were multiple reports of Da'esh forces abducting girls and forcing them into marriage with Da'esh fighters (see section 1.g.). Child prostitution was a problem, and anecdotal evidence suggested the problem was particularly serious among Syrian refugees in the IKR. Because the age of legal responsibility was nine years old in the central region and 11 in the IKR, authorities often treated sexually exploited children as criminals instead of as victims. Penalties for the commercial exploitation of children range from fines and imprisonment to the death penalty. No information was available regarding the effectiveness of government enforcement.

Child Soldiers: The UN reported that cases of forced recruitment of child soldiers and children engaging in armed violence on behalf of Da'esh and other illegal armed groups increased during the year (see section 1.g.). International media reported in November that Da'esh executed 12 Iraqi children for fleeing a Da'esh training camp. According to the IHCHR, during the year authorities detained 857 juveniles, including 804 on charges of terrorism, murder, theft, and kidnapping. An international organization reported that an estimated 30 percent of juveniles in pretrial or posttrial detention were held on security related charges.

Displaced Children: Insecurity and active conflict between government forces and Da'esh caused the displacement of large numbers of children. Due to the conflict in Syria, many children and single mothers from Syria also took refuge in the IKR (see section 2.d.).

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For country-specific information see the Department of State's report at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/iraq.html.

Anti-Semitism

A small number of Jewish citizens lived in Baghdad, and there were unconfirmed reports that small Jewish communities existed in other parts of the country. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts. On October 11, the KRG Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs opened a representative office for Kurdish Jews. According to unofficial statistics, there were 430 Jewish families living in the IKR.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

Although the constitution states the government, through law and regulations, should care for and rehabilitate persons with disabilities in order to reintegrate them into society, there are no laws prohibiting discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, or the provision of other state services. There were reports that persons with disabilities continued to experience discrimination due to social stigma. Although the Council of Ministers issued a decree ordering access for persons with disabilities to buildings and to educational and work settings, incomplete implementation limited access. Local NGOs reported many children with disabilities dropped out of public school due to insufficient physical access to school buildings, a lack of appropriate learning materials in schools, and a shortage of teachers qualified to work with children with developmental or intellectual disabilities. NGOs also reported that authorities denied some children with physical disabilities access to schools.

A 2013 law authorized the establishment of a commission for persons with disabilities led by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs but designed to remain independent of the government. The KRG has a similar law. In January the government launched the Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs with 19 members, including representatives from government ministries, disability rights groups, and other civil society organizations. The commission had a working budget of 18 billion dinars (\$16.3 million). The deputy minister of labor and social affairs leads the commission.

In 2013 the Council of Ministers approved a 5 percent public sector employment quota for persons with disabilities, but employment discrimination persisted, and

observers projected that the quota was not likely to be met by year's end (see also section 7.d.). Central government and KRG officials reported they had few resources to accommodate persons with disabilities in prisons, detention centers, and temporary holding facilities. Mental health support for prisoners with mental disabilities did not exist.

The Ministry of Health provided medical care, benefits, and rehabilitation, when available, for persons with disabilities, who could also receive benefits from other agencies, including the Prime Minister's Office. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs operated several institutions for children and young adults with disabilities. The ministry maintained loans programs for persons with disabilities for vocational training.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The country's population included Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Shabak as well as religious minorities, including Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenian Orthodox, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandean, Bahai, Kaka'i, and a very small number of Jews. The country also had a small Romani community, as well as an estimated one million citizens of African descent, referred to as "Black Iraqis," who resided primarily in Basrah and the south. On April 20, the Ministry of Religion in the IKR officially registered a variant of Zoroastrianism, locally known as Zaradashti, as a religion.

In areas under its control, Da'esh committed numerous abuses against Yezidis, Shabaks, Christians, and other minority communities, including execution, kidnapping, rape, enslavement, forced marriage, forced abortions, expulsion, theft, and destruction of property. Activists from religious and ethnic minority communities faced the greatest risk. Other illegal armed groups also targeted ethnic minority communities (see section 1.g.).

Black Iraqis continued to face systemic societal discrimination. Many of the estimated one million persons of African descent lived in extreme poverty with high rates of illiteracy and unemployment. The Institute for International Law and Human Rights, an international NGO, reported that although the government directly or indirectly employed as many as 70 percent of the country's citizens working in the formal economy, no Black Iraqi held a high-level position in government or served in an elected body.

There were reports of KRG authorities discriminating against minorities, including Turkmen, Arabs, Yezidis, Shabaks, and Christians, both in the disputed territories and in the Kurdistan region.

Although Arabs are the majority in most of the country, they are a minority in Kirkuk, and Arab residents of the city frequently charged that KRG security forces targeted Arab communities. Arab residents of Kirkuk alleged that local authorities used the pretext of terrorist attacks to impose curfews on them and arrest Arabs who lacked legal resident permits.

IDPs in Kirkuk, particularly members of the Sunni Arab community, faced pressure to return to their areas of origin. UNAMI received reports of evictions, confiscation of identity documents, or notifications to leave Kirkuk throughout the year. For example, on January 11, authorities evicted 24 IDP families from Diyala from their homes in east Kirkuk. According to UNAMI, the Asayish took their identification documents and marked them to prevent reentry. On August 23, the Kirkuk Provincial Council announced its decision that IDPs from Diyala Governorate, currently residing in Kirkuk, must leave within one month. The governor of Kirkuk subsequently told the UN he would not deport IDPs from his province. International organizations and NGOs continued to assert that the government was indirectly pressuring IDPs to leave.

A 2006 law prevents Palestinians from obtaining citizenship. According to media reports, authorities continued to detain, harass, and abuse Palestinians for their stateless status (see section 2.d.). UNHCR also reported that Palestinians who were compelled to leave the country for Syria without proper exit documentation during past periods of sectarian violence faced prosecution upon their forced return from Syria.

Local and international NGOs reported that the Romani population of approximately 120,000 experienced poor access to state services as well as economic and social discrimination.

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

Neither hate crime nor antidiscrimination laws exist, nor do other criminal justice mechanisms exist to aid in the prosecution of crimes motivated by bias against members of the LGBTI community. Despite repeated threats and violence

targeting LGBTI individuals, the government failed to identify, arrest, or prosecute attackers or to protect targeted individuals.

No law specifically prohibits consensual same-sex sexual activity, although the law prohibits sodomy, irrespective of gender. There was no data on prosecutions for sodomy.

Authorities relied on public indecency charges or confessions of monetary exchange (that is for prostitution, which is illegal) to prosecute same-sex sexual activity. Authorities used the same charges to arrest heterosexual persons involved in sexual relations with persons other than their spouses.

The law does not address discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Societal discrimination in employment, occupation, and housing based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and unconventional appearance was common. Information was not available regarding discrimination in access to education or health care.

Due to stigma, intimidation, and potential harm, including violent attacks, LGBTI organizations did not operate openly, nor were there gay pride marches or gay rights advocacy events. LGBTI persons often faced abuse and violence from family and nongovernmental actors. In addition to targeted violence, members of the LGBTI community remained at risk for honor crimes, since their conduct did not conform to traditional gender norms. LGBTI rights groups attributed the lack of publicized cases of attacks to the low profile of members of the LGBTI community, who altered their public dress and lifestyle to conform to societal norms. NGOs established shelters for individuals who feared attacks and continued to accommodate victims. They periodically received threats and relocated shelters for security reasons. Community activists reported that violence and intimidation continued.

According to international media reports and human rights organizations, throughout the year Da'esh published videos depicting alleged executions of persons accused of homosexuality. For example, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, an international human rights organization, cited widely published January 16 photographs of Da'esh members throwing LGBTI men from tall buildings in central Mosul in Ninewa Governorate. On March 8, Da'esh beheaded two individuals accused of homosexuality and a third for blasphemy in the Bab al-Toob area of Mosul. Between June and August,

UNAMI cited several other cases of Da'esh executing civilians by throwing them off tall buildings, all accused of sodomy or homosexuality.

Following a series of 2012 attacks on LGBTI persons, the Council of Ministers established an interministerial committee to investigate the attacks and provide recommendations on LGBTI rights. According to human rights organizations, the committee was not operational and had not completed any reports at year's end.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution states that citizens have the right to form and join unions and professional associations. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination or provide reinstatement for workers fired for union activity. On August 17, the Council of Representatives approved a new labor law (No. 37 of 2015) that allows workers to select representatives for collective bargaining, even if they are not members of a union, and affords workers the right to have more than one union in a workplace.

A Saddam Hussein-era law bans all public sector trade union activity. The law also considers individuals employed by state-owned enterprises, who made up approximately 10 percent of the workforce, as public sector employees. Civil society organizations lobbied for a new trade union law to expand union rights.

Private sector employees in worksites employing more than 50 workers may form workers committees--subdivisions of unions with limited rights--but most private sector businesses employed fewer than 50 workers.

Labor courts have the authority to consider alleged labor law violations and disputes, but no information was available concerning enforcement of the applicable law, including whether procedures were prompt or efficient.

Strikers and union leaders reported threats and harassment by government officials during the year. They also asserted that ministries and state-owned enterprises used fines, demotions, suspension from work, and forced transfers to punish labor activists and discourage union activity. Unions reported authorities arrested labor leaders and activists for their activities. Union leaders also cited corruption within the government as a continuous problem, with government officials imposing

arbitrary fines on workers for such activities as calling for demonstrations and traveling outside the country on union business without prior approval.

The law allows for collective bargaining in the private sector, although government authorities sometimes violated private sector employees' collective bargaining rights. Some unions were able to play a supportive role in labor disputes, and they had the right to demand government arbitration.

Antiunion discrimination occurred in the private sector. Employers interfered in union functions and threatened or punished workers for union activity. For example, according to the Iraqi Trade Union, on June 17, police dispersed by force a cleaning workers' demonstration in Kut in Wasit province and arrested some of the workers. Local press reported that workers were protesting because they had not received their salaries for more than 50 days.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor--including slavery, indebtedness, and trafficking in persons--but the government did not effectively monitor or enforce the law.

Foreign migrant workers, particularly construction workers, security guards, cleaners, handymen, and domestic workers, were subjected to forced labor, confiscation of travel and identity documents, restrictions on movement and communications, physical abuse, sexual harassment and rape, withholding of wages, and forced overtime. There were cases of employers withholding travel documents, stopping payment on contracts, and preventing foreign employees from leaving the work site.

Women were subjected to involuntary domestic service through forced marriages and the threat of divorce, and women who fled such marriages or whose husbands divorced them were vulnerable to further forced labor. Due to the deterioration in the security situation, female IDPs were increasingly vulnerable to economic exploitation and discriminatory employment conditions. According to local sources, Da'esh exploited as many as several thousand Yezidi and other minority women and girls sexually and economically (see also sections 1.g. and 6).

In August international media reported that Da'esh had developed a detailed bureaucracy for sex slavery, including sales contracts notarized by Da'esh-run

courts. According to the Yezidi Affairs Directory, Da'esh had captured and enslaved as many as 5,838 Yezidis, including 3,192 women, since August 2014.

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 and law prohibit child labor. The minimum age for employment is 15. The law limits working hours for persons younger than 18 to seven hours a day and prohibits employment in work detrimental to health, safety, or morals of anyone younger than 18. The labor code does not apply to juveniles (ages 15 to 18) who work in family-owned businesses producing goods exclusively for domestic use. Since children employed in family enterprises are exempt from some protections in the labor code with regard to employment conditions, anecdotal reports of children performing hazardous work in family-owned businesses, such as in brick manufacturing and auto repair shops, continued. The new labor law introduced improvements to child labor regulations, such as increased fines and penalties for violators of the labor law. The new law abolished a Saddam-era decree that allowed children as young as 12 to work. The law also mandates employers--not workers or families--to bear the cost of annual medical checks for working juveniles (ages 15-18). Children between the ages of 12 and 14 were not required to attend school but were not permitted to work and thus were vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. By law violators are subject to imprisonment for a period of 30 days to six months or to a fine ranging from 100,000 dinars to 500,000 dinars (\$91 to \$455). Qualitative data on child labor practices was limited, particularly with regard to the worst forms of child labor, a factor that further limited enforcement of existing legal protections.

Child labor, including in its worst forms, occurred throughout the country. The inspection service of the labor ministry sought to comply with the law prohibiting child labor in the private and public sectors. Inspections continued, but due to capacity constraints as well as the focus on maintaining security and fighting terrorism, efforts by law enforcement personnel and labor inspectors to monitor these practices were not effective, and penalties for violations did not serve as a deterrent.

There was no recent survey of the child labor situation in the IKR, but local NGOs reported that child labor increased due to the influx of Syrian refugees. The IKR's

labor ministry operated a 24-hour hotline for reporting labor abuses, including child labor, and the hotline received approximately 200 calls per month.

There were reports that Da'esh and other armed groups recruited children to gather intelligence, staff checkpoints, patrol the streets, and serve as couriers (see section 1.g. and section 6, Children). There was no evidence that the government purposely recruited children into the armed forces. There were local press reports of families sending their children to beg in the streets. Local NGOs reported that organized gangs also recruited children to beg. In September the labor ministry launched a grants program to encourage low-income families to send their children to school rather than to beg in the streets.

See also the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment or Occupation

The constitution provides that all citizens are equal before the law without regard to gender, sect, opinion, belief, nationality, or origin. The law prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, religion, social origin, political opinion, language, or social status. The government was ineffective in enforcing these provisions. The law does not prohibit discrimination on disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, HIV-positive status, or other communicable diseases.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, foreign workers, and minorities (see section 6). The law gives migrant Arab workers the same status as citizens but does not provide the same rights for non-Arab migrant workers, who faced stricter residency and work visa requirements. The labor law passed in August provides for new protections against discrimination, including prohibition of sexual harassment in the workplace.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

In October the prime minister announced salary cuts for senior civil servants due to budget constraints. The new pay scale reduced salaries of senior civil servants and increased salaries of civil servants at the low end of the pay scale. The new pay scale offered nonskilled workers a monthly salary of 170,000 dinars (\$155) and 300,000 dinars (\$273) for jobs that required a bachelor's degree. The salary also included bonuses for employees with families and higher education degrees.

The law limits the standard workday to eight hours, with one or more rest periods totaling 30 minutes to one hour, and the standard workweek to 48 hours. The law permits up to four hours of overtime work per day and requires premium pay for overtime work. For industrial work, overtime should not exceed one hour per day. The government sets occupational health and safety standards. The law states that for hazardous or exhausting work, employers should reduce daily working hours. The law provides workers the right to remove themselves from a situation endangering health and safety without prejudice to their employment but does not extend this right to civil servants or migrant workers, who made up the majority of the country's workforce.

The labor ministry's Labor Directorate has jurisdiction over labor law, child labor, wages, occupational safety and health topics, and labor relations. The government did not enforce regulations governing working conditions. The ministry's occupational safety and health staff worked throughout the country, but the lack of a law governing these inspections hindered compliance and enforcement efforts.

The legal and regulatory framework, combined with the country's high level of violence and insecurity, high unemployment, large informal sector, and lack of meaningful work standards, resulted in unacceptable conditions for many workers. Workplace injuries occurred frequently, especially among manual laborers. For example, in August media reported that a pipeline explosion at an electricity station in Najibia in Basrah killed three workers and injured several others due to maintenance defects and old equipment.

A lack of oversight and monitoring of employment contracts left foreign and migrant workers vulnerable to exploitative working conditions and abusive treatment. Little information was available on the total number of foreign workers in the country, although some observers reported that large groups of migrant workers, many of them in the country illegally, lived in work camps, sometimes in substandard conditions. In May the labor ministry reported that approximately 140,000 foreign workers lacked formal work permits. Due to the deterioration in security and conflict throughout western and northern Iraq, many foreign workers departed the country, or their companies or home governments evacuated them.

In July the labor ministry launched an income-generating loan program, with a budget of 10 billion dinars (\$9.1 million), to assist unemployed persons, including recent college graduates, shopkeepers affected by terrorism, and IDPs. In

September the ministry launched a microloan program in Kirkuk, Basrah, Salah ad Din, and Dhi Qar governorates benefiting 21,167 persons by the end of the year.