

CAMEROON 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cameroon is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. The country has a multiparty system of government, but the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) has remained in power since it was created in 1985. In practice the president retains the power to control legislation. In April 2013 the country conducted the first Senate elections in its history, which were peaceful and considered generally free and fair. In September 2013 simultaneous legislative and municipal elections occurred, and most observers considered them to be free and fair. In 2011 citizens re-elected CPDM leader Paul Biya president, a position he has held since 1982, in a flawed election marked by irregularities, but observers did not believe these had a significant impact on the outcome. Civilian authorities at times did not maintain effective control over the security forces.

During the year terrorist group Boko Haram's strategy in the country evolved to include using knives, sophisticated weapons, improvised explosive devices, and child soldiering. This had unprecedented consequences in affected regions as killings of civilians, abductions, looting, and destruction of property increased in frequency. In response the government increased security measures, but its efforts often failed to prevent excesses, which led to additional human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, and avoidable loss of life.

The most important human rights problems were Boko Haram killings and other abuses in the Far North Region, including child soldiering, abductions, beheadings, and immolations; security force (police and/or gendarmerie) torture and abuse, primarily of Boko Haram suspects; denial of fair and speedy public trial; and life-threatening prison conditions.

Other major human rights abuses included cases of arbitrary arrests and detention, prolonged and sometimes incommunicado pretrial detention, and infringement on privacy rights. The government in some cases harassed journalists, restricted freedoms of speech and press, and impeded freedom of movement. Security forces seized private property, including livestock and fishery products. The government conducted several secret trials of Boko Haram suspects. Corruption was pervasive at all levels of government. Gender-based violence occurred, including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Trafficking in persons was a problem, and human rights activists were repeatedly harassed. Members of the minority Mbororo community faced some discrimination. Harassment of and

discrimination against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community continued, although less than in recent years. Child labor remained a problem, especially in the informal sector, and there were reports of traditional leaders illegally detaining and torturing accused citizens.

Although the government took steps to punish and prosecute officials who committed abuses in the security forces and in the public service, these actors often continued to act with impunity.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were several reports that members of defense and security forces committed arbitrary and unlawful killings, either in the execution of their official duties or as part of their private affairs. Two units within the army--the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and the Motorized Infantry Battalion--the gendarmerie, and police were cited by civil society organizations and Amnesty International (AI) as being responsible for the violations.

Some abuses committed in late 2014 became public during the year. In December 2014, for example, members from BIR sealed off Magdeme and Double, two adjacent villages in the Mayo Sava division of the Far North Region, as part of a search operation. According to civil society organizations and AI's September report, at least nine individuals, including a young girl, were shot and killed during the operation. Government authorities investigated the incident; reportedly, all members of the BIR were found not culpable.

On January 29, in Dimako, East Region, Ngama Ndoke died as a result of heavy beating, reportedly by three gendarmes while in their custody. He was detained after being accused of stealing. The commander of the brigade attributed the death to an accident, but the result of the autopsy requested by the victim's relatives showed he died from severe internal bleeding caused by physical assault. When informed of the incident, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme (NDH) reportedly informed the military court in the East Region and the subdepartment for human rights and international cooperation at the Ministry of Justice and was told that an investigation would be opened. The NDH stated at year's end it had no further information on the outcome of any investigation.

Boko Haram killed hundreds of civilians and members of defense and security staff in the Far North Region during the year. On September 3, for example, a double suicide attack occurred in the locality of Kerawa, six miles from Kolofata district, killing at least 40 individuals and injuring more than 150 others.

As of October 31, there were no reported developments in the case of the three suspects arrested in connection with the 2014 killing of Christiane Soppo Mbango, a close aide of former government minister Marafa Hamidou Yaya, who was serving a 25-year prison term.

There were no reported developments in the 2014 trial of the three members of the BIR who were being prosecuted by the Kribi High Court for beating a man to death in 2013. In 2014 government sources stated the case was being handled by the ordinary law court and not by the military tribunal, due to the seriousness of the case.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances. Nevertheless, there were several reports of the arrest and disappearance of hundreds of individuals by security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) in the Far North Region, including in Magdeme, Double, and Maroua, since December 2014. In its September report on incidents in the Far North Region, AI indicated that at least 130 individuals arrested in Magdeme and Double since December 2014 remained unaccounted for. In a February 3 letter to the governor of the Far North Region, the Movement for the Defense of Human Rights and Liberties called on the government to take action to safeguard the rights of the detainees and expedite their trials.

Boko Haram insurgents kidnapped hundreds of civilians during their multiple attacks in the Far North Region, including Double, Waza, Amchide, Tchakamari, and Blame, among other districts. According to civil society organizations and local residents, most of the persons kidnapped remained unaccounted for as of the end of October.

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

Although the constitution and law prohibit such practices, there were reports that security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) tortured, beat, harassed, or otherwise abused citizens.

According to credible NGOs, police and/or gendarmerie reportedly detained and tortured persons at specific sites, including temporary holding cells within police or gendarme facilities and cells located at the Directorate General for External Intelligence (DGRE). Traditional rulers and religious instructors also reportedly detained and tortured persons at various locations, according to NGO reporting.

According to NGOs security and defense forces used a variety of methods to extract information, especially from Boko Haram suspects. For example, members of the security and defense forces beat those arrested during the December 2014 sweep operation in Magdeme and Double, including hitting them with truncheons. Security and defense forces loaded detainees into trucks and initially took them to the military camp in Mora and thereafter to the Gendarmerie Headquarters in Maroua, where they were locked in makeshift cells. The following day it was discovered that many of the detainees had died, probably by suffocation. In a press release on January 15, the Network of Human Rights Defenders in Central Africa (REDHAC) estimated the death toll at 50 and stated the dead were buried in a mass grave.

On March 23, Minister of Communications Issa Tchiroma Bakary convened a press conference to refute REDHAC's allegations of torture and summary execution by defense and security forces. Bakary acknowledged that 25 individuals arrested and detained at the Far North Legion of the Gendarmerie were found dead the next day. In a report dated September 15, AI cited witnesses and survivors who reported a gas filled at least one of the two rooms where detainees were kept, leading detainees to vomit and bleed from the nose as they struggled to breathe. On September 17, Bakary denied responsibility for the deaths, instead claiming that an autopsy showed the 25 had died as a result of "a collective chemical intoxication after ingesting unidentified chemical and traditional products." He did not make the autopsy report public, nor did he identify the deceased or the location of their burial. In response to this incident, the gendarmerie commander for the 4th Region was placed on administrative duty in Yaounde, and the government opened a military tribunal to investigate the incident.

On June 26, in Bagante, West Region, a military tribunal delivered its verdict in the prosecution case against Franklin Mowha, president of the human rights organization Frontline Fighters for Citizens Interests, who had been detained since 2013 on charges of destroying public property and contempt of government while he was inquiring about the situation of detained civil society members. The court

sentenced Mowha to an 18-month prison term and a fine of CFA francs 800,000 (\$1,355). REDHAC claimed Mowha was arrested for his human rights activities.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening due to gross overcrowding and inadequate food, poor sanitary conditions, and lack of medical care.

Physical Conditions: Overcrowding was pervasive in most prisons, especially in major urban centers. Officials held prisoners in dilapidated, colonial-era prisons, where the number of inmates was as much as four to five times the intended capacity. Sanitation, food, and medical care were wholly inadequate. Although authorities held that sick persons were detained separately from the general population, this was often not the case.

In August the country's prisons, which have an intended capacity of 17,000, had 26,702 inmates, according to the minister of justice speaking during a cabinet meeting on August 28. In an interview published in the *Cameroon Tribune* newspaper on September 2, the minister further indicated that the Yaounde Kondengui Central Prison, with an intended capacity of 1,500, had 4,234 inmates; the Douala New Bell prison with an initial capacity of 500 was upgraded to 960 through renovation and expansion over the years but held 3,150 prisoners as of August. The other prisons faced similar problems. The Maroua Central Prison, for instance, established in 1935 to accommodate up to 250 inmates, had 1,360, including approximately 50 women and 50 children. The Nkongsamba Prison, with an intended capacity of 200, had 432 inmates, while the Bertoua Central Prison, with an intended capacity of 120, held 680 inmates. As of March 3, the Garoua Central Prison, designed for 500, held 1,652 inmates.

There were two separate prisons and a few pretrial detention centers for women, but officials routinely held women in police and gendarmerie complexes with men. Occasionally, women were allowed to spend the night in an office or a corridor when there were men in the cells.

Deaths from illness, malnutrition, and lack of medical care occurred, and deficiencies in health care and sanitation remained significant problems. Physical abuse by prison guards, as well as prisoner-on-prisoner violence, was a problem, and "disciplinary cells" were often used to enforce discipline. Illustrative of overcrowded conditions, according to media outlets, on March 28, inmates of the Garoua Central Prison attempted a mass escape in protest against what they

referred to as inhuman detention conditions. The incident began when 22 prisoners were locked into a 40-square-foot disciplinary cell as a punitive measure. One of the prisoners, who reportedly had asthma, suffocated and died overnight after prison guards on duty refused to open the door when alerted by other detainees. The following morning when prison guards attempted to take away the corpse, the other occupants of the discipline cell revolted. The news quickly spread throughout the prison, leading to a general riot.

Disease and illness were widespread, and sick inmates were not systematically and promptly separated from the general population, for lack of facilities. For instance, as of March 23, Garoua Central Prison, with a population of more than 1,600 inmates, had one single-patient room for both contagious and noncontagious diseases. The room was equipped with two observation beds, and the prison had access to four additional beds at the Garoua Central Hospital. The prison had one doctor, three nurses, two nursing assistants, and one laboratory technician, who, in addition to servicing the Garoua Central Prison, had to provide for the health needs of four other principal prisons in the North Region.

Malnutrition, tuberculosis, bronchitis, and numerous other untreated conditions, including infections, parasites, dehydration, and diarrhea, were rampant. Overall, doctors and medicine were inadequate. Many convicts spent their sentences moving between the prison yard and the hospital ward as they were infected and reinfected with illnesses, according to the Ministry of Justice *Report on Human Rights in Cameroon for 2014* (released December 2015). The budget allocated for prisoner health in 2014 was CFA francs 157,740,000 (\$255,000), the same total as in 2013, representing an average of CFA francs 6,572 per inmate (\$10), according to the same report.

Potable water and food were inadequate, and officials expected prisoners' families to provide food for their family members. Prisoners generally had one meal a day. In 2014 the budget allocated for feeding prisoners throughout the country was CFA francs 2,313,799,000 (\$3.8 million), amounting to an average daily food allocation of CFA francs 263 (\$0.43).

Corruption among prison personnel was reportedly widespread. Prisoners bribed wardens for special favors or treatment, including temporary freedom, beds, and transfer to less crowded areas of the prisons. Due to their inability to pay fines, some prisoners remained imprisoned after completing their sentences or receiving court orders of release.

In temporary holding cells within police or gendarmerie facilities, officials held adult men, juveniles, and women together. Detainees usually received no food, water, or medical care. Detainees whose families knew of their incarceration relied on their relatives for food and medicine. Overcrowding was common. Detention center guards accepted bribes from detainees in return for access to better conditions, including permission to stay in an office instead of a cell.

Many citizens in the North and Far North regions turned to traditional chiefs for dispute resolution. The government claimed there were no private prisons in the country. There continued to be reports, however, of private detention facilities with reputations for serious abuse within the palaces of some traditional chiefdoms, including Tcheboa in the North Region. On August 26, the Garoua High Court sentenced Moussa Boubakari, the lamido of Tcheboa, to a two-year prison term plus a fine, following a lawsuit by a plaintiff, Gouma Damga, for “arbitrary arrest and detention.” According to media reports, Moussa Boubakari was sentenced in 2002 for a similar offense but never served the prison term.

Administration: Although the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) reported improvements in a few prisons in 2014, recordkeeping on prisoners was inadequate, especially in holding cells at police and gendarmerie premises, where detainees often were not registered. Independent authorities often investigated credible allegations of inhuman conditions.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted international humanitarian organizations access to prisoners. The NCHRF and other NGOs, including the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Archdiocese, made infrequent, unannounced prison visits during the year. The government continued to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit prisons, and the organization conducted visits during the year.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that human rights activists attempting to visit prisoners were required to pay bribes to prison officials. Some human rights activists, however, reported they were unable to obtain the necessary permits to visit prisoners. For example, NGOs reported they were denied access to Marafa Hamidou Yaya, including while he was at the Yaounde General Hospital receiving treatment. In response the government insisted that proper procedures requesting access were not followed.

Improvements: In May the National Program for Participatory Development donated 40 mattresses and 20 beds for inmates of the Douala New Bell Central Prison as a contribution to the improvement of detention conditions.

The registrar of Maroua Central Prison reported some improvements in prison conditions. Specifically, the prison constructed a separate wing for minors and women, and the number of doctors increased from one to two for the region.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. The law states that, except in the case of an individual discovered in the act of committing a felony or misdemeanor, the person making the arrest shall disclose his identity and inform the person arrested of the reason. The law also provides that any person arrested shall be given reasonable facilities to be in contact with his family, obtain legal advice, and arrange for his defense. The government occasionally did not respect these provisions.

There were several reports the government arbitrarily arrested and detained innocent citizens, especially as part of the fight against terrorism. In December 2014 security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) arrested 129 children following raids on Quranic schools in Guirvidig, Far North Region. A total of 84 children were transferred to a government-sponsored juvenile center in Maroua. Local authorities reportedly accused the schools of recruiting children for Boko Haram, although no formal charges were made against the children. According to a June 19 AI press release, all but three of the children were under age 15; 47 were under 10, and some were as young as five. By year's end the children in the juvenile center had been returned to their families.

In early December the investigating magistrate at the Yaounde Military Court submitted his report on the criminal case against Aboubakar Sidiki and Abdoulaye Harissou, and hearings were scheduled to open on December 22. Sidiki and Harissou were arrested, respectively, in Douala and Maroua in August 2014 without having been informed of the reason for their arrests. Later they were charged with contempt for the president, hostility against "the fatherland and encouraging revolution," aiding and abetting murder, and illegal possession of weapons of war.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police, DGRE, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Territorial Administration, and, to a lesser extent, Presidential Guard, are responsible for internal security. The Ministry of Defense--which includes the gendarmerie, the army, the army's military security unit, and the DGRE--reports to an office of the Presidency, resulting in strong presidential control of security forces. While the army is responsible for external security, the national police and the gendarmerie have primary responsibility for law enforcement. The gendarmerie alone has responsibility in rural areas. The national police--which includes the public security force, judicial police, territorial security forces, and frontier police--report to the General Delegation of National Security (DGSN), which is under the direct authority of the presidency.

The government took some steps to hold police accountable for abuses of power. Police remained ineffective, poorly trained, and corrupt. Impunity continued to be a problem.

Civilian authorities maintained some control over police and gendarmerie, and the government had somewhat effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. The DGSN and gendarmerie investigate reports of abuse and forward cases to the courts. Lesser sanctions are handled internally. The DGSN, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Justice claimed members of security and defense forces were sanctioned during the year for committing abuses but provided neither detail nor statistics on the cases. On April 6, however, the Mifi High Court in Bafoussam, West Region, sentenced Jean de Dieu Dimzon, a police officer working with the Bafoussam third district police station, to a three-year suspended sentence and a fine over charges stemming from excessive force. Also during the year, President Biya reportedly dismissed some security and defense officials for deliberately using the fight against Boko Haram to commit human rights abuses. This included the commander of the Darak gendarmerie brigade in the Logone and Chari division. Civil society organizations and some victims of human rights abuses reported that the president ordered an investigation into alleged abuses.

According to the Justice Ministry's 2014 human rights report, 29 police officers were sanctioned for misconduct relating to violation of the physical integrity of third parties and for offenses against their colleagues. Sanctions ranged from warnings to complete dismissal and included delay in promotion, drop in pay grade, demotion in rank, and suspension without pay. According to the same report, 15 gendarme officers were investigated for torture, violation of physical integrity or the right to life, and arbitrary arrest and detention. Military tribunals

prosecuted soldiers and gendarmes for offenses relating to capital murder, murder, and torture. Sentences ranged from fines to life imprisonment.

The National Gendarmerie and the army also have special offices to investigate abuse. The secretary of state for defense and the minister-delegate at the Presidency in charge of defense sanctioned abusers. The minister-delegate of defense refers cases involving aggravated theft, criminal complicity, murder, and other major offenses to the military courts for trial.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires that police obtain a warrant for an arrest, except when a person is caught in the act of committing a crime, but police often did not respect this requirement. The law provides that detainees be brought promptly before a magistrate, although this often did not occur. Police may legally detain a person in connection with a common crime for up to 48 hours, renewable once. This period may, with the written approval of the state counsel, be exceptionally extended twice before charges are brought. Nevertheless, police reportedly often exceeded these detention periods. The law permits detention without charge for renewable periods of 15 days by administrative authorities such as governors and civilian government officials serving in territorial command. The law also provides for access to legal counsel and family members, although police frequently denied detainees access to both. The law prohibits incommunicado detention, but it occurred, especially as part of the fight against Boko Haram. The law permits bail, allows citizens the right to appeal, and provides the right to sue for unlawful arrest, but these rights were seldom respected.

Arbitrary Arrest: “Friday arrests,” a practice whereby individuals arrested on a Friday typically remained in detention until at least Monday unless they paid a bribe to be released earlier, continued. Security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) and government authorities reportedly continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily, often holding them for prolonged periods without charge or trial and at times incommunicado.

There were several reports that security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) arbitrarily arrested persons during neighborhood sweeps for criminals and stolen goods or arrested persons without identification, as part of the fight against growing insecurity.

During the year the commander of the Mbouda gendarmerie brigade and the registrar of the Mbouda Principal Prison were called before an investigating judge, in connection with the 2014 incarceration of Theodore Wamba and his family, which included his wife, 10-month-old infant, nine-year-old son, and the pregnant widow of his brother. They were incarcerated for more than three months at the Mbouda Principal Prison, West Region, after Wamba requested information on the death of his elder brother, whom a private self-defense militia member shot and killed. A former local parliamentarian and members of the militia accused Wamba of highway robbery and drug trafficking. In 2014 the Bafoussam military tribunal released Wamba and his family for lack of evidence and ordered a new investigation into the case.

On October 7, the Tchollire Court of First Instance delivered its verdict on the prosecution case against 14 members of the Touboro Youth Association for Development, including Celestin Yandal, who were arrested and detained since November 2013 in connection with the September 2013 legislative and municipal elections. They were charged with making death threats and destroying property. After two years of pretrial detention, the court found the charges against eight of the 14 youths unsubstantiated. The remaining six were sentenced to time served and a fine.

As in the previous years, there continued to be reports that in the North and Far North regions, traditional chiefs temporarily detained persons outside the government penitentiary system.

Pretrial Detention: The law provides for a maximum of 18 months' detention before trial, but many detainees waited years for a date in court. Following visits to prisons and detention centers in January and May 2014, the NCHRF found the majority of inmates in Yaounde Central Prison were in pretrial detention. The NCHRF attributed the increase in prison population to administrative and judicial bottlenecks, including factors such as errors in drafting judicial documents, disappearance of documents from case files, and corruption.

As of September Aboubakar Sidiki and Abdoulaye Harissou, arrested August 9 and 26, 2014, respectively, remained in pretrial detention at Yaounde Kondengui Principal Prison. Hearings were scheduled to commence in January 2016.

During the year authorities released Donfack Yannick Romain, Noumbo Bertrand, Tsafack Eric, Kenfack Fomete William, and Tsafack Jean Pierre, who had been

detained in Bafoussam, West Region, since their arrest in the aftermath of the 2008 riots.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary. While the judiciary often demonstrated impartiality and independence, it remained generally corrupt, inefficient, and subject to political influence. Individuals reportedly accused innocent persons of crimes as retribution or to solve personal disputes. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reliable reports that authorities did not respect court orders.

On July 16, the Supreme Court issued a ruling on procedural grounds releasing Paul Eric Kingue, who had been detained since he was arrested in 2008. Kingue, at the time mayor of Njombe-Penja, was arrested in the context of a protest over a possible constitutional amendment to eliminate presidential term limits and charged with multiple offenses.

The court system is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice. The constitution designates the president as “first magistrate,” thus “chief” of the judiciary, making him the legal arbiter of any sanctions against the judiciary, although he has not played this role publicly. The constitution specifies that the president is the guarantor of the legal system’s independence. He appoints all judges, with the advice of the Higher Judicial Council. While judges hearing a case should be governed only by the law and their conscience as provided for by the constitution, in some matters they are subordinate to the minister of justice. For example, the Special Criminal Court must have approval from the minister of justice before it may drop charges against a defendant who offers to pay back the money he was accused of having embezzled. Despite the judiciary’s independence vis-a-vis the executive and legislative powers, the head of the executive branch appoints all members of the bench and legal department of the judicial branch, including the president of the Supreme Court, and may dismiss them at will. In December 2014, for instance, President Biya replaced important members of the judiciary, including Supreme Court President Alexis Dipanda Mouelle.

The legal system includes national and customary law, and many criminal and civil cases may be tried using either one. Criminal cases generally were tried in statutory courts.

Customary courts served as a primary means for settling domestic cases, such as succession, inheritance, and child custody. Customary courts may exercise jurisdiction in a civil case only with the consent of both parties. Either party has the right to have a case heard by a statutory court and to appeal an adverse decision by a customary court to the statutory courts.

Customary court convictions involving alleged witchcraft are automatically transferred to the statutory courts, which act as the courts of first instance. The law provides for sentences of between two and 10 years' imprisonment and fines of between CFA francs 5,000 (\$9) and CFA francs 100,000 (\$173). There were no arrests or trials for alleged witchcraft reported during the year.

Customary law is deemed valid only when it is not "repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience," but many citizens in rural areas remained unaware of their rights under civil law and were taught they must abide by customary laws. Customary law ostensibly provides for equal rights and status, although men may limit women's rights regarding inheritance and employment. Customary law practiced in rural areas is based on the traditions of the predominant ethnic group and is adjudicated by traditional authorities of that group. Some traditional legal systems regard wives as the legal property of their husbands.

Military tribunals may exercise jurisdiction over civilians when the president declares martial law and in cases involving civil unrest or organized armed violence. Military tribunals also have jurisdiction over gang crimes, banditry, and highway robbery if such crimes are committed with firearms.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair public hearing, without undue delay, in which the defendant is presumed innocent, but authorities did not always respect the law. For instance, trials of Boko Haram suspects were not made public. Defendants have the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges, with free interpretation as necessary. They have the right to a presumption of innocence, but the government often did not respect that right, resulting in many pretrial suspects being treated as if they were convicted. Trial by jury system is effective, especially in criminal matters. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and the government generally respected this right. Authorities generally allowed defendants to question witnesses and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a

defense and not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases, although in some cases the government did not make the evidence available in timely fashion. Defendants may appeal a conviction. The law extends these rights to all citizens.

Because appointed attorneys received little compensation, the quality of legal representation for indigent clients was often poor. Despite a law providing for attorneys for indigent defendants at public expense, lawyers often refused to defend such clients, claiming the government's compensation was inadequate. Human rights organizations such as REDHAC and voluntary organizations such as the Cameroonian Association of Female Jurists and Lawyers without Borders helped provide legal assistance in some cases, but defendants in courts of first instance and high courts were often prosecuted without being offered legal counsel. Generally, only defendants who run the risk of a life sentence or death penalty were systematically provided legal assistance. The law extends these rights to all citizens.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

No statistics were available on the number of political prisoners. Political prisoners were detained under heightened security, often within the Secretariat of State for Defense. Some detainees were held within the General Delegation of External Research under high security, and the government did not permit access to such persons on a regular basis, or at all, depending on the case.

Former minister of state for territorial administration Marafa Hamidou Yaya, convicted in 2012 on corruption charges and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment, remained in detention. During the year the government reportedly refused regular access to him. On July 3, barrister Saskia Ditisheim, Marafa's Swiss lawyer, and her local colleague, barrister Alice Nkom, were expelled from the Yaounde General Hospital during a visit to their client, who had been receiving treatment in the hospital over the preceding few weeks. A police officer arrived at the hospital room with an order to usher the two visitors to the hospital director, who told them they could not continue their visit because they did not have a permit to communicate with Marafa.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens have the right to seek redress for alleged wrongs through administrative procedures or through the legal system, although both options involved lengthy

delays. There were problems enforcing civil court orders due to bureaucratic inefficiency.

Property Restitution: Over the past few years, the government reportedly evicted thousands of squatters from their places of residence, including in the Douala neighborhood of Mebanda, but failed to resettle or compensate promptly those displaced. Many victims remained homeless during the year. No particular group was reported to have been intentionally targeted by officials for discriminatory treatment.

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

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, these rights were subject to restriction for the “higher interests of the state,” and there were credible reports that police and gendarmes harassed citizens, conducted searches without warrants, monitored private communications, and opened or seized mail with impunity. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reliable reports police detained family members and neighbors of criminal suspects.

The law permits a police officer to enter a private home during daylight hours without a warrant if he is pursuing a criminal suspect. A police officer may enter a private home at any time in pursuit of a person observed committing a crime. An administrative authority, including a governor or senior divisional officer, may authorize police to conduct neighborhood sweeps without warrants, and this occurred during the year.

Security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) sometimes sealed off a neighborhood, systematically searched homes, arrested persons, sometimes arbitrarily, and seized suspicious or illegal articles. Police detained citizens without identification cards until identity could be established. There were several complaints that police arbitrarily confiscated electronic devices, including cell phones.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and press but also criminalizes media offenses, and the government restricted speech and press.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: Government officials constrained individuals or organizations that criticized government policies or expressed views at odds with government policy. Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately sometimes faced reprisals. The government occasionally used the law requiring permits or government notification of public protests to stifle discourse. Such controls intensified after the December 2014 antiterrorism law, and many civil society and political organizations reported increased difficulty in obtaining approval to organize public gatherings. The government attempted to impede criticism by monitoring political meetings.

Press and Media Freedoms: The media was largely free, but there were sporadic instances of restrictions and self-censorship on matters of criticism against the state.

Approximately 650 newspapers published at least once during the year, according to government sources, but only an estimated 25 had sufficient funds to publish regularly. Among the publications that appeared regularly, some had not paid their journalists for up to 10 months at a time, deepening the vulnerability of “pay for coverage” activities and thus undermining the credibility of private media. Also, the unreliable road infrastructure and the monopoly of Messa Press in the printing and distribution of newspapers contributed to delayed newspaper circulation, placing the print media in a disadvantageous position when competing against electronic media. The government continued to disburse official funds to support private press outlets, although, unlike in previous years, there were no reports of disbursing funds selectively to outlets less critical of the government and with instructions to provide reporting favorable to the government. During the year some media professionals criticized the selecting and granting of public aid to private media. The amount disbursed to the media was not significant and barely covered a week’s printing costs.

Government officials sometimes used expansive libel laws to arraign journalists who criticized them and to suspend some media outlets. Some criticism of government officials appeared in both private and public media outlets. The government claimed that all media had access to the presidency and were invited to take part in the head of state’s official trips. Nevertheless, authorities did not accredit privately owned media with the president’s or prime minister’s offices and did not permit private media to accompany the president on official trips. During the official reception for presidents Hollande of France and Buhari of Nigeria, the private media complained they did not enjoy the same access privileges as the foreign media, although during these visits some private media outlets were

invited. The Prime Minister's Office revived the "Credentialing Committee," a government mechanism meant to systematize, and potentially control, the issuance of press credentials. The decision was met with criticism as well as enthusiasm from the media. While the committee failed to meet its intent several years ago, it was finally implemented in 2011. Journalists complained that it was corrupt and handed out credentials to undeserving individuals while ignoring journalists with experience and credibility in the industry.

Approximately 200 radio stations officially operated, including 50 community radio stations and 150 commercial radio stations, three-fourths of them in Yaounde and Douala. Three private television and one radio stations were officially licensed to operate, in addition to the state-owned public television and radio. Overall, the government issued four licenses since 2007. All unlicensed private radio and television broadcasts operate under the government's policy of "administrative tolerance." A cable distributor also had an official license to transmit, and many others transmitted programs through cable networks without official authorization. The government required nonprofit rural radio stations to submit applications to broadcast, but they were exempt from licensing fees.

Commercial radio and television broadcasters must submit a licensing application and pay an application fee and thereafter pay a renewable five-year annual licensing fee. The high license cost as well as the slow process kept private radio and television from applying. It is the responsibility of the government to scrutinize and call on proprietors to pay. Some were prepared to pay for a license, but the government preferred to keep them operating under "administrative tolerance," which meant that media outlets were allowed to function but could face closure by local officials at any time due to lack of a license. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports the government prohibited rural community radio stations from discussing politics. Some managers of community radios, however, reported they avoided politics as a general rule.

The state-owned Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) broadcast on both television and radio. The government levied taxes to finance CRTV programming, which gave the station an advantage over independent broadcasters.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) arrested, detained, and abused journalists during the year. On July 30, in Maroua, Far North Region, authorities arrested Ahmed Abba, a Nigerian national and correspondent for Radio France International's Hausa service. He was reportedly arrested while in a meeting at the governor's office, taken to Yaounde, where he was held for

questioning, and denied access to his lawyer for several weeks. In a statement issued on September 8, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) expressed concern over the detention and called on authorities to explain the reason for it and to allow Abba immediate access to his lawyer. Based on a report by Radio France International citing Charles Tchoungang, the journalist's lawyer, the CPJ suggested that Abba was being interrogated in connection with the activities of Boko Haram. On November 2, in an interview with the newspaper *Cameroon Tribune*, Minister of Communication Bakary denied that Abba had been arrested for exercising his profession as a journalist, claiming instead that Abba had been detained under the antiterrorism law and remained under investigation. Bakary stated Abba was presumed innocent but admitted Abba had not yet been granted access to a lawyer, citing the supposed sensitivity of the investigation under the antiterrorism law.

On August 28, a local journalist reporting in Nigeria, Simona Ateba, was detained and interrogated while he was allegedly accused of affiliation with Boko Haram and espionage. The journalist was arrested in the Minawao refugee camp in the Far North Region as he attempted to document the situation of the refugee situation. Ateba, who had been living and working as an independent reporter in Lagos (Nigeria) for more than 10 years, was reportedly given a grant by the Abuja-based International Center for Investigative Journalism to report on living conditions of refugees in Cameroon and Chad. Two major journalist unions, the National Syndicate of Cameroonian Journalists and the Cameroon Journalists' Union, promptly called for his immediate release because there is no law in the country prohibiting reporting from a refugee camp. Ateba was released after spending three nights in jail and credited the power of social media and public campaign for his release, after gendarmes gave him access to his smart phone and allowed posting of cell photographs on his social media account. Ateba admitted he entered the refugee camp without permission after unsuccessful attempts to obtain authorization from the Far North governor and the minister of communication.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The National Communication Council (NCC) is empowered to ensure that all printed media comply with the legal requirement that editors in chief deposit two signed copies of each newspaper edition with the Prosecutor's Office for scrutiny within two hours after publication. Journalists and media outlets also practiced self-censorship, especially after NCC served them suspensions.

The NCC issued sanctions ranging from warnings to temporary suspensions for up to six months. In February the NCC permanently banned the periodical *La*

Depeche du Cameroun and its publisher, Gilbert Avang, for “serious violation of professional ethics.” The weekly *La Nouvelle* received a six-month suspension, while daily *Le Soir* and the weekly *Le Courrier* each received a one-month suspension. Martinez Zogo, anchor of the program *Embouteillage* broadcast over Amplitude FM radio also received a one-month suspension.

Libel/Slander Laws: Press freedom is constrained by strict libel laws that may suppress criticism. Any citizen may file lawsuits against media organs for defamation of character. These laws authorize the government, at its discretion and the request of the plaintiff, to criminalize a civil libel suit or to initiate a criminal libel suit in cases of alleged libel against the president and other high government officials. Such crimes are punishable by prison terms and heavy fines. The libel law places the burden of proof on the defendant. The government contended maintaining libel laws in the penal code is aimed at safeguarding the rights of other citizens, whose reputations can be permanently damaged by defamation. The government and individual public figures reportedly used laws against libel or slander to restrict public discussion. The NCC, however, took significant steps to improve the impartiality of its adjudications.

Government officials filed libel complaints against media outlets with the NCC, but the NCC declared some of the complaints baseless. This was the case with Paul Atanga Nji, minister in charge of special duties at the Presidency, who filed a complaint against *L’Oeil du Sahel*, *The Post Guardian*, *Le Jour*, and *The Post*; however, the NCC resolved that his case was baseless, noting the newspaper outlets showed proof of professionalism in their work, notably, that they used an investigative approach that verified and crosschecked information. Complaints filed by Emmanuel Djoumessi Nganou, minister of the economy, planning, and regional development, against the newspaper *Integration* and radio Amplitude FM, were similarly disqualified on procedural grounds.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. According to the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 11 percent of the population used the internet in 2014.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Although there were no legal restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events, state security informants reportedly operated on university campuses. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports from professors that participation in opposition political parties or public criticism of the government could affect their professional opportunities. In October, Thierry Batoum and Barthelemy Tchaleu, president and secretary of the Association for the Defense of Cameroon University Students' Rights, respectively, were allowed to resume classes after two years of exclusion. Their initial exclusion occurred because they signed a petition calling on Yaounde I University authorities to issue biometric identification cards to all students who paid their regular university fee so that they could access the full gamut of academic and other services provided by the university. On November 16, police arrested Batoum while he was distributing leaflets calling on university students to participate in a silent and peaceful march against the illegal sale of student identity cards. After five days of detention, the police referred him to the prosecutor for organizing an illegal demonstration with the purpose of encouraging students to revolt. A trial opened on November 24 and continued at year's end.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

Although the law provides for freedom of assembly, the government restricted this right. The law requires organizers of public meetings, demonstrations, and processions to notify officials in advance but does not require prior government approval of public assemblies and does not authorize the government to suppress public assemblies that it has not approved in advance. Nevertheless, officials routinely asserted the law implicitly authorizes the government to grant or deny permission for public assembly. Consequently, the government often refused to grant permits for assemblies and used force to suppress public assemblies for which it had not issued permits. The government also prevented civil society organizations and political parties from holding press conferences.

Security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) forcibly disrupted meetings and demonstrations of citizens, trade unions, and political activists throughout the year.

In August, according to *La Nouvelle Expression*, the speaker of the National Assembly, Cavaye Yeguie Djibril, increased security measures at the chamber, notably implementing a ban on staff member gatherings. In a security note, he reportedly warned that "staff members who gather within the institution and for any reason whatsoever will be considered as potential terrorists." The independent

daily claimed that this specific measure had no direct connection with the Boko Haram crisis but rather targeted sympathizers of Bouba Simala, Cavaye's bodyguard, whose employment had been terminated and was under investigation.

On September 15, the divisional officer for Yaounde II used security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) to disrupt a civil society workshop on electoral governance and democratic transition to mark World Democracy Day. Police arrested some organizers of the workshop, including Jean Marc Bikoko, Agnes Adelaide Metougou, Jessie Bikoko, and Yves Ndjalla Epangue. The activists arrested spent nine days in detention. Although they were released on September 23, they remained under investigation for alleged disobedience and resistance.

There were a few reports of security forces disrupting student activities during the year.

Freedom of Association

The constitution and law provide for freedom of association, but the law also places limits on this right. The minister of territorial administration may, on the proposal of the senior divisional officer, suspend the activities of an association for three months, on the grounds that the association is disrupting public order. The minister may also dissolve an association if its activities are deemed to constitute a threat to the security of the state. In January the divisional officer for Nguti in the Southwest Region restored the charter of the NGO Nature Cameroon that was revoked in 2013 for the repetitive holding of public meetings. The restoration followed a December 2014 decision by the senior divisional office for Koupe-Manengouba. According to local groups, the NGO's activities were initially suspended as a result of pressure from Herakles Farms, a firm with a planned palm oil project in the region.

While national associations may acquire legal status by declaring themselves in writing to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, the ministry must explicitly register foreign associations and religious groups, and the law imposes heavy fines for individuals who form and operate any such association without prior authorization. The law prohibits organizations that advocate a goal contrary to the constitution, laws, and morality, as well as those that aim to challenge the security, territorial integrity, national unity, national integration, or the republican form of the state.

The conditions for government recognition of political parties, NGOs, or associations were complicated, involved long delays, and were unevenly enforced. The process resulted in associations operating in legal uncertainty, their activities tolerated but not formally approved.

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

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, these rights sometimes were impeded. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and asylum seekers.

In-country Movement: Security forces (police and/or gendarmerie) at roadblocks and checkpoints in cities and on most highways often extorted bribes and harassed travelers. Police frequently stopped travelers to check identification documents, vehicle registrations, and tax receipts as security and immigration control measures. There were credible reports that police arrested and harassed individuals who failed to carry their identification cards as required by law.

Exile: The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not use it. Some human rights monitors and political opponents remained in self-imposed exile because they believed they were threatened by the government.

Internally Displaced Persons

Several thousand persons abandoned their homes in some villages on the Nigeria border and fled to cities in the Far North Region as a result of frequent attacks from Boko Haram. Most of them left from the Far North Region localities of Kerewa, Greya, and Kolofata and found refuge in classrooms or churches, or camped outdoors in the Mayo-Sava, Logone, and Chari divisions. According to reports released by UNHCR in August and September, there were approximately 81,700 IDPs in the Far North Region. According to government sources, the

country had an estimated 100,000 IDPs as of September 10. The government generally provided protection and assistance to IDPs.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system of providing protection to refugees. UNHCR continued to play an important role in providing documentation and assistance to the refugee population.

The country hosted more than 319,000 refugees. More than 253,000 refugees fled the Central African Republic (CAR), including more than 150,000 who had been registered since December 2013. Refugees from the CAR lived in large refugee sites and approximately 300 villages in the Adamaoua and East regions, where they received humanitarian assistance from local communities and humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR. UNHCR registered more than 58,000 Nigerian refugees since May 2013, of whom more than 46,000 lived in Minawao Camp.

Refoulement: Following security measures taken by authorities in the Far North Region to counter Boko Haram, in July and August UNHCR noted cases of forced returns, including a convoy of more than 2,150 Nigerians who were escorted by the Cameroonian military. The convoy left Kousseri on July 29 for Nigeria. On August 3, a joint team of police and military officials also entered the Gourounguel transit center and reportedly expelled 50 of the 512 individuals who were undergoing the registration process to claim asylum. On August 14, UNHCR expressed concern over the method of recent government deportations of Nigerians without proper screening or due process for asylum application as required by international agreements. The statement praised Cameroon and neighboring countries for their “generosity and humanitarian spirit” but also expressed “fears that such deportations lead to shrinking of the protection and humanitarian space.” Shortly thereafter UNHCR and the government arrived at an agreement to satisfy both the government’s security concerns and obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Despite this apparent agreement, media reports indicated that refoulements continued to occur.

Durable Solutions: Between January and September, six refugee families with a total of 15 members voluntarily returned to their respective countries with the facilitation of UNHCR. Countries of origin included Chad, Rwanda, South Sudan, Liberia, and the CAR.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees, extending this protection to approximately 100,000 individuals during the year.

Cameroon also temporarily hosted third-country nationals who fled violence in the CAR. Although these individuals did not meet the definition of “refugee” as they did not flee their country of origin, they received assistance from the International Organization for Migration.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage. President Biya and CPDM members, however, controlled key aspects of the political process, including the judiciary.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In April 2013 the country held its first Senate elections. The ruling CPDM won 54 of the 70 elected seats; an additional 30 senators were appointed by the president, in accordance with the constitution. The elections were peaceful and generally free and fair. In June 2013 the Senate elected a president, Marcel Niat Njifenji, who is the designated successor to the president of the country in case of a vacancy.

In September 2013 the country held simultaneous legislative and municipal elections, with 29 parties participating in the legislative election and 35 in the municipal election. The CPDM won 148 of 180 parliamentary seats and 305 of 360 municipal council positions, representing gains for opposition parties compared with the parliament elected in 2007. In preparation Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), whose members were appointed by the president, recompiled voter rolls using biometric technology and issued biometric voter identification cards that were required at polling booths. Despite irregularities such as the inconsistent use of identification cards due to lack of expertise of local polling officials, opposition parties generally accepted the results. The high voter turnout (70 percent) and ELECAM’s administration of the election were viewed as major improvements over previous elections.

In October 2011 President Biya was re-elected in a poll marked by irregularities, but one which most observers believed reflected popular sentiment.

On July 21, the president appointed Abdoulaye Babale to replace Sani Taminou as ELECAM's director general of elections. Observers considered the appointment an attempt to resolve a leadership crisis between the chairman of ELECAM's Electoral Board and its director general of elections. The crisis could have ultimately impaired ELECAM's capacity to implement its mandate and organize credible elections, and the replacement was seen as a positive step.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The country had 298 registered political parties. Membership in the ruling political party conferred significant advantages, including in the allocation of key jobs in state-owned entities and the civil service. The president appoints all ministers, including the prime minister, and also directly appoints the governors of each of the 10 regions, who generally represent CPDM interests in the regions. The president has the power to appoint important lower-level members of the 58 regional administrative structures as well. The government pays the salaries of (primarily nonelected) traditional leaders, which creates a system of patronage.

In the three elections held in 2013, the CPDM was the most popular party in most regions except in the Northwest, where it faced strong competition from the Social Democratic Front. Many residents of the Anglophone regions sought greater freedom, equality of opportunity, and better government by demanding regional autonomy rather than national political reform, and they formed several quasi-political organizations in pursuit of their goals.

Authorities sometimes refused to grant opposition parties permission to hold rallies and meetings.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There were cultural constraints on women's political participation and they were underrepresented at all levels of government.

The minority Baka people took part as candidates in the municipal and legislative elections but were not represented in the Senate, National Assembly, or the higher offices of government.

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 or uniformly, and corruption was pervasive at all

levels of government. Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The World Bank's most recent Worldwide Governance Indicators reflected that corruption was a severe problem. Although there was some improvement in efforts to combat it, institutionalized, endemic, and publicly accepted corruption was a major challenge facing the government. In the context of the fight against Boko Haram, corruption-related inefficiencies and diversion of resources from their intended purposes represented a fundamental national security vulnerability.

Corruption: During the year the government sanctioned government employees for corruption, embezzlement, and mismanagement. The *Cameroon Tribune* reported that as of June 12, 42 cases had been filed and 11 court decisions issued at the Special Criminal Court (in French, Tribunal Criminal Special, or TCS) since the beginning of the year. Operation Sparrow Hawk, which was launched in previous years to fight corruption, including embezzlement of public funds, continued.

On June 9, the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on the September 2014 ruling by the TCS to sentence Cameroon-born French lawyer Annette Lydienne Yen Eyoum and her coaccused to a 25-year prison term. Eyoum and Honore Ngwen, former heads of the legal affairs division at the Ministry of Finance, were further required jointly to pay CFA francs 1.153 billion (\$2 million). Eyoum represented the government in litigation against Societe General des Banques au Cameroun (SGBC) in connection with the complicated 10-year liquidation of the government's National Commodity Marketing Authority. In the process of the liquidation, she and her codefendants diverted CFA francs 1.153 billion (\$2 million) into their private accounts. Eyoum claimed the money represented damages brought against SGBC (the defendant) by court decision, while the government considered it embezzlement. In a September 2014 ruling, TCS sentenced Eyoum to 25 years in prison. Her lawyers challenged the decision before the Supreme Court in October 2014, and a decision was pending.

On June 18, TCS delivered its verdict in the prosecution case against Dieudonne Telesphore Ambassa Zang and his coaccused. Ambassa Zang, former minister of public works, and Felix Debeauplan Mekongo Abega, a senior official at the same ministry, were given life sentences. They had been prosecuted since 2009 for embezzlement of public funds totaling more than CFA francs six billion (\$10.4 million), following an inspection mission by the Supreme State Audit Office. Because they were absent from the court from the opening of the case, the court issued an arrest warrant against them as part of the verdict. Ambassa Zang was

also required to pay the ministry damages, including CFA francs 5.126 billion (\$8.9 million), and also CFA francs 694.465 million (\$1.2 million) jointly with his coaccused.

Although police were reportedly sanctioned for corruption, some officers convicted of corruption were relieved of their duties but retained their jobs due to weak accountability and enforcement mechanisms for internal disciplining. Individuals reportedly paid bribes to police and the judiciary to secure their freedom. Police demanded bribes at checkpoints, and influential citizens reportedly paid police to make arrests or abuse individuals with whom they had personal disputes. There were reports that some police associated with the issuance of emigration and identification documents collected additional fees from applicants.

Judicial corruption was a problem. According to press reports, judicial authorities accepted illegal payments from detainees' families in exchange for a reduced sentence or the outright release of their relatives. Judges were susceptible to executive influence and often delayed judicial proceedings in response to governmental pressure. Many powerful political or business interests had virtual immunity from prosecution, and politically sensitive cases occasionally were settled through bribery.

Corruption in the education sector was reported to be a major problem. Anecdotal reports suggested that in reviewing the files of applicants for most scholarships, including those offered by foreign partners, members of the relevant committees within government ministries rarely based their decisions on merit. They often selected their relatives or offered aid to some applicants in return for bribes. Officials of major national training schools providing direct access to the public service were also often cited for corruption. According to reports, some officials had established networks of intermediaries charged with seeking out prospects and collecting fees at the time of nationwide competitive examinations. Such networks reportedly were organized in a manner that had no direct contact between the school official and the candidate. The amounts collected reportedly ranged from CFA francs 500,000 (\$867) to several million CFA francs, depending on the type of institution solicited.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) receives and investigates allegations of corruption, but it has no prosecutorial authority and must refer credible claims of corruption to the relevant ministry for administrative action or to the Ministry of Justice for judicial action. The vast majority of corruption

allegations received and transmitted by CONAC resulted in administrative penalties including reprimand, suspension from 10 to 90 days, delays in promotions, removal from office, and outright dismissal. As of year's end, CONAC had not released its 2014 annual report.

The National Financial Investigations Unit is a separate financial intelligence unit that tracks money laundering and terrorist finance. Like CONAC it can carry out its own investigations but has no prosecutorial authority.

The Supreme State Audit Office audits public services, regional and local entities, public and semipublic enterprises and organizations, and associations that receive financial assistance from the state. The office also monitors the execution of the state budget and externally funded projects, and it contributes to sanctions against officers and managers of public funds in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. By direction of the president, the office may also perform audits on any companies or organizations deemed strategically important.

Financial Disclosure: The constitution and law require senior government officials, including members of the cabinet, to declare their assets, although the president had not issued the requisite decree to implement the law by year's end.

Public Access to Information: There are no laws providing citizens with access to government information, and such access was difficult to obtain. The National Institute of Statistics developed a website where some statistical data may be accessed. Most government documents, however, such as statistics, letters exchanged between administrations, draft legislation, and investigation reports, remained unavailable to the public and the media.

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

Although a number of domestic and international human rights groups investigated and published findings on human rights cases, government officials impeded the effectiveness of many local human rights NGOs by harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening violence against NGO personnel. Human rights defenders and activists received anonymous threats by telephone, text message, and e-mail. The government took no action to investigate or prevent such occurrences.

Despite these restrictions, numerous independent domestic human rights NGOs continued operations.

On September 29 in Yaounde, the minister of justice invited state and nonstate actors for a discussion on human rights issues involving a dozen civil society organizations. Observers considered the initiative a significant development in the relationship between the government and nonstate human rights organizations.

There were several reports of government arrests of human rights activists.

Government intimidation of Maximilienne Ngo Mbe, leader of the REDHAC, continued. REDHAC issued several statements informing the public of threats and harassment against Ngo Mbe and Mey Ali, the president of partner organization OS Civile Droits de l'Homme, including tapped telephones and anonymous telephone threats. In February and March, human rights organizations, including REDHAC, Un Monde Avenir, Alternatives Cameroon, and the Cameroonian Foundation against AIDS (CAMFAIDS), were the subject of denigration campaigns through the media.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The NCHRF released its 2014 report on December 3. It was considered a dedicated and effective organization, albeit inadequately resourced. The National Assembly's Constitutional Laws, Human Rights and Freedoms, Justice, Legislation, Regulations, and Administration Committee was adequately resourced and effective in reviewing the constitutionality of proposed legislation, although it approved most ruling party legislation and was not an effective check on ruling party initiatives.

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

The constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination. It states that a human being, without distinction as to race, religion, sex, or belief, possesses inalienable rights. Although the government made some efforts to enforce these principles, violence and discrimination against women and girls and vulnerable populations persisted.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape and provides penalties of between five and 10 years' imprisonment for convicted rapists, but police and courts rarely investigated or prosecuted rape cases. The law does not address spousal rape. As in the previous year, NGOs reported cases of rape and sexual

violence, some associated with Boko Haram insurgents. NGOs reported that law enforcement generally was not effective.

The Ministries of Social Affairs and of Women's Empowerment and the Family, in conjunction with local NGOs, continued their campaign to raise awareness of rape and educate citizens on penal provisions against rape.

The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, although assault is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment and fines.

In the National Gender Policy Document for the period 2011-20 adopted in 2014 and released during the year, the Ministries of Social Affairs and of Women's Empowerment and the Family asserted that 52 percent of women experienced domestic violence at least once, and that 53 percent of women experienced violence by the age of 15. The ministries further indicated, based on a 2008 study on rape and incest, that 5.2 percent of women were victims of sexual violence. Of those, 33 percent became pregnant while 16 percent contracted sexually transmitted infections. Furthermore, the report indicated that more than one million girls and women were reported to have suffered an attempted rape and that rape was becoming widespread in all regions of the country. Included in this figure was incest, which affected 18 percent of raped women.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: The law protects physical and bodily integrity of persons but does not specifically address FGM/C for women and girls. Children under 18 years were reportedly subjected to FGM/C in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest regions, within the Choa and Ejagham tribes. The Ministries of Social Affairs and Women's Empowerment and the Family estimated the prevalence of FGM/C at 1.4 percent nationwide and 20 percent in the most affected communities. Excision was the most common type of FGM/C, and the age at which FGM/C was practiced varied depending on region and from a few days after birth up to age 15 or older. In general the procedure was performed before puberty, with one half of the girls five to nine years old, and one fifth 10 to 14 years old. The government took steps to combat the practice and reported it succeeded in reducing FGM/C prevalence. In 2011 the government adopted a national action plan, and the Ministries of Social Affairs and of Women's Empowerment and the Family established local FGM/C committees in areas where FGM/C was most prevalent, particularly in the Far North Region. The committees networked with former excision practitioners and traditional and religious leaders to reduce the practice. During the year the ministries and some civil society

organizations, including the Cameroon Young Jurists Legal Resource Center, also conducted education programs against FGM/C.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The practice of widow rites remained a problem in some areas, especially in the southern region of the country. The practices varied from area to area but generally entailed families forcing new widows to remove all hair using a razor blade, spend the night sleeping on the floor, and forgo bathing and other hygiene practices for extended periods of time. Widows were also sometimes forcibly married to one of the deceased husband's relatives. In addition to efforts by government authorities, civil society organizations including the Martin Luther King Memorial Foundation (LUKEMEF), an organization based in Limbe, Southwest Region, implemented programs to address violence against women during the year. LUKEMEF engaged with traditional authorities and the department of women and gender studies at the University of Buea to train peer educators in targeted communities, as well as sponsor lawyers to work with communities.

Unlike in previous years, there were no credible reports of breast ironing, a procedure to flatten a girl's growing breasts with hot stones, cast-iron pans, or bricks. The procedure was considered a way to delay a girl's physical development, thus limiting the risk of sexual assault and teenage pregnancy. The procedure has harmful physical and psychological consequences, which include pain, cysts, abscesses, and physical and psychological scarring.

Sexual Harassment: The law does not prohibit sexual harassment, and observers believed it was widespread.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals generally have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence, but societal pressures continued to reinforce taboos on discussing contraception and all other sex-related issues, particularly in northern rural areas. Women's dependence on their husbands' consent was also a barrier to contraceptive decisions.

In a 2013 Statistical Yearbook, the Ministries of Social Affairs and of Women's Empowerment and the Family reported that in 2011, 84.7 percent of girls and women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) received prenatal care from a qualified health worker and 65.8 percent delivered with assistance from qualified birth attendants. Prenatal care, skilled attendance during childbirth, and postpartum care

remained unavailable to many women, particularly to those living in rural areas. According to UN Population Fund (UNFPA) data, the maternal mortality rate was estimated to be 590 per 100,000 in 2013, with a modern contraception rate of 17 percent. The Ministries of Social Affairs and of Women's Empowerment and the Family noted that contraceptive prevalence was higher in urban centers than in rural areas, with a rate of 4 percent of uneducated women living with a partner, as opposed to 25 percent of those with primary education and 48 percent of those with secondary or higher education. Furthermore, the contraceptive rate was 7 percent of women from very poor households as opposed to 46 percent of those from higher income households. UNFPA reported the adolescent birth rate as 128 per 1,000 girls and women ages 15 to 19 between 1999 and 2012.

Maternal mortality remained high due to lack of access to medical care, the lack of trained medical personnel, and the high cost of prenatal care, hospital deliveries, and postpartum care. The low rate of contraception use was largely due to the lack of available products. The Ministry of Public Health provided counseling services to women during prenatal visits, promoting the concept of responsible parenthood and encouraging couples to use contraception to space the timing of their children. The Ministry of Social Affairs also had an educational program on responsible parenthood, which was broadcast twice weekly. Additionally, couples were encouraged to get HIV/AIDS testing prior to conception, and efforts continued to increase HIV/AIDS testing for pregnant women at health clinics. Emergency health care was available in most health facilities, although patients' access to health care remained a problem for those who could not afford treatment. During the year a better-equipped urgent care center was opened in Yaounde to handle health emergencies, including services for complications arising from abortion.

Discrimination: The law provides for the same legal status and rights for women as for men, including in terms of family, labor, property, nationality, and inheritance. Despite constitutional and legal provisions recognizing women's rights, however, women in practice did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men, and some provisions of civil law were prejudicial to women (see section 7.d.). For example, the law allows a husband to deny his wife the ability to work outside the home, and a husband may also forbid his wife to engage in commercial activity by notifying the clerk of the commerce tribunal. Also, while polygamy is authorized, polyandry is illegal. Customary law imposes further strictures on women, since in many regions a woman is regarded as the property of her husband. Because of custom and tradition, civil laws protecting women often were not respected. For example, in some ethnic groups women were precluded from inheriting from their husbands. Although local government officials including

mayors claimed that women had access to land in their constituencies, the overall sociocultural practice of depriving women of land ownership, especially through inheritance, was prevalent in most regions of the country.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from parents, and it is the parents' responsibility to register births. Parents must obtain a birth declaration from the hospital or health facility in which the child was born and complete the application. The mayor's office issues the birth certificate once the file is completed and approved. Because many children were not born in formal health facilities and many parents were unable to reach local government offices, many births were unregistered.

Education: The law provides that primary education is compulsory but does not set an age limit. Children were generally expected to complete primary education at age 12, or at ages 13-14 if they had to repeat classes. Although parents did not pay tuition for primary school, they had to pay uniform, book, and sometimes fees for primary school students, and then tuition and other fees for secondary school students. This rendered education unaffordable for many children.

During the year Boko Haram destroyed classrooms and entire schools in the Far North Region, rendering the 2015-16 academic year largely lost for hundreds of children. The government set aside CFA francs five billion (\$8.665 million) for construction of schools in the areas affected by the war against Boko Haram, but many building contractors were unwilling to work in the affected areas.

Child Abuse: Child abuse remained a problem. Children continued to suffer corporal punishment, both within families and in the school environment. According to a 2011 survey, 76 percent of children reported being hit frequently at home, and 10 percent of those between ages six and 15 reported sexual abuse. Newspaper reports often cited cases of children abandoned, thrown in the trash, or as victims of kidnapping and mutilation. Also, Boko Haram abducted children and, in some instances, used them as suicide bombers.

During the year local security officials uncovered two illegal and informal prisons at unregistered Quranic schools in the North and Adamawa regions. A total of 80 children and adults were found in the detention centers. Girls as young as 14 reported being raped in detention, while boys and men were chained in iron cuffs, starved, and tortured. Many of the detainees reportedly were left at the schools by

parents or local religious leaders who wanted to rid themselves of children with behavioral problems or mental disabilities. On July 29, for example, media reported that in the home of Modibo Sani, a Quranic teacher in Garoua, 10 children were found chained by their feet, piled on top of each other, and locked in a 43-square-foot cell. Authorities released the detainees and arrested their captors. An investigation continued at year's end.

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for men, although many families reportedly tried to marry off their girls before the age of 12. According to the UN Children's Fund, 38 percent of women and girls age 20 to 24 were married or in union by the age of 18, and 13 percent by age 15. Early marriage was prevalent in the regions of Adamaoua, North, and particularly Far North, where many girls as young as nine faced severe health risks as a result of pregnancies. The government conducted education campaigns as a means to combat early marriages. With support from UNFPA and the Norwegian Hospital in Ngaoundere, the government also provided medical support and reintegration services to victims.

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

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Penalties for the sexual exploitation of children include imprisonment of 10 to 20 years and a fine of CFA francs 100,000 to CFA francs 10 million (\$173 to \$17,320). Penalties are increased to 15 to 20 years' imprisonment if the victim is 15 years of age or younger, if a weapon is used, or if the victim sustains serious injuries as a result of trafficking. The law does not specifically provide a minimum age for consensual sex. The law prohibits the use of children for the production of pornography and provides for prison terms from five to 10 years and fines of CFA francs five million to 10 million (\$8,665 to \$17,320) for perpetrators who use any electronic system to forward child pornography or any document that could harm the dignity of a child. Children under age 18 were exploited in prostitution, and the problem was believed to be pervasive, although no statistics were available.

Child Soldiers: The government did not recruit or use child soldiers, but Boko Haram utilized child soldiers, including girls, in their attacks on civilian and military targets. Human rights organizations and some residents of the Far North Region reported that during attacks on their communities, children were often put in the first row of the fighting and killed before more experienced fighters came from behind. AI confirmed this practice in its September report. Also, between

July 12 and October 12, at least 10 suicide attacks occurred in the Far North, including Fotokol, Maroua, Kedrawa, and Kangaleri. In some cases the suicide bombers were under age 15.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: There were credible reports of mothers (usually young, unemployed, and unmarried) abandoning their newborns in streets, latrines, or garbage cans. The law criminalizes infanticide and provides penalties ranging from five years' imprisonment to the death sentence. There were a few reports of infanticide committed during the year. For instance, *La Nouvelle Expression* reported on August 18 that two days previously in Manjo, Mungo Division of the Littoral Region, a 20-year-old woman deliberately killed her newborn baby by smothering him in a small bucket. During the year the government organized education campaigns on responsible parenthood, including through media campaigns by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Displaced Children: As in previous years, many children lived on the streets of major urban centers, although their number apparently declined as a result of stringent preventive measures against Boko Haram. The Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children, a governmental project in partnership with NGOs, continued to gather information on street children and offer health care, education, and psychological care. The country also hosted a large population of refugee children from the CAR and Nigeria and internally displaced children, the result of Boko Haram activity in the Far North.

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

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community was very small, and there were no known reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The law does not specifically address discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, although the constitution explicitly forbids all forms of discrimination, providing that “everyone has equal rights and obligations.” The government made efforts to enforce this effectively with regard to persons with disabilities. The law requires that new government and private buildings be designed to facilitate access by persons with disabilities and that existing buildings be modified to do so. Secondary public education is tuition free for persons with disabilities and children born of parents with disabilities, and initial vocational training, medical treatment, and employment must be provided “when possible,” and public assistance “when needed.”

The majority of children with disabilities attended schools, although most of these children attended mainstream schools, rather than specialized schools for children with disabilities. Some specialized schools existed for children with vision, hearing, or physical disabilities. During the year as many as 82 children with disabilities were reportedly granted free tuition to attend government secondary schools in the Fako Division of the Southwest Region, including three students with vision disabilities in the government bilingual high school, Molyko. At the government bilingual high school Nkol-Eton in Yaounde, two students with visual disabilities, three with hearing disabilities, and more than 30 students with physical disabilities started school in September.

A private training institution, SHILO Special Education and Inclusive Bilingual Teacher Training Institute, opened in September 2014. The school accepted students with vision and other disabilities. The students were trained as teachers for schools that catered to children with disabilities. The first group included approximately 30 trainees, of whom five had visual disabilities and two had hearing disabilities.

Societal discrimination continued against persons with disabilities. A study conducted in 2014 by the Groupe d’Action pour la Promotion des Personnes Handicapees in the Center Region revealed that 93.4 percent of respondents had experienced some form of violence. There was a report of a teacher in the Southwest Region who asked a student with albinism to leave the class whenever the teacher would deliver his lesson. The regional delegation of the Ministry of Social Affairs stopped the harassment. Societal discrimination against persons with disabilities occurred less frequently than in previous years (see section 7.d.).

There is no separate legal framework for the protection of persons with albinism. Due to the discrimination experienced by such persons, the government includes albinism under the legislative framework protecting persons with disabilities. The government stated persons with albinism benefitted from free medical consultations in dermatology, oncology, and ophthalmology.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The population consists of an estimated 286 ethnic groups, among which there were frequent and credible allegations of discrimination. Ethnic groups commonly gave preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices (see section 7.d.). Members of the president's Beti/Bulu ethnic group from the south held key positions and were disproportionately represented in the government, state-owned businesses, security forces, and the CPDM.

Northern areas continued to suffer from ethnic tensions between the Fulani (or Peuhl) and the Kirdi, who remained socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged relative to the Fulani. Traditional Fulani rulers continued to wield great power over their subjects, who often included Kirdi, and sometimes subjected them to tithing and forced labor. Isolated cases of hereditary servitude were alleged, largely Fulani enslavement of Kirdi (see section 7.b.).

Indigenous People

An estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Baka, including Bakola and Bagyeli, resided primarily in (and were the earliest known inhabitants of) the forested areas of the South and East regions. While no legal discrimination existed, other groups often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitative labor practices (see section 7.d.). There were credible reports that the Mbororos, itinerant pastoralists mostly present in the North, East, Adamaoua, and Northwest regions, were subject to various forms of harassment, sometimes with the complicity of administrative or judicial authorities, and were involved in conflicts over ownership of land and access to water.

On September 1, Mbororo pastoralists in the Momo division of the Northwest Region addressed a petition to the Procurator General of the Northwest Court of Appeal, complaining that Mbarga Awounou, a state counsel for Momo division, extorted money through illegal detentions from late July to early August.

While the government did not effectively protect the civil or political rights of either group, it implemented a number of initiatives to promote the rights of the Baka people under the National Plan for the Empowerment of the Baka. Programs during the year included training Baka and Mbororo in agricultural and animal husbandry techniques, including follow-on support for projects initiated after training, and recruiting Baka and Mbororo to attend teacher-training colleges. Baka and Mbororo communities complained about being marginalized, forcibly removed from their ancestral lands, and denied access to water.

The Ministry of Social Affairs continued efforts begun in 2005 to provide birth certificates and national identity cards to Baka. Most Baka did not have these documents, and efforts to reach Baka were impeded by the difficulty in accessing their homes deep in the forest.

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

Consensual same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by a prison sentence of six months to five years and a fine ranging from CFA francs 20,000 to 200,000 (\$35 to \$347). Most human rights organizations that advocate for decriminalization of sexual relations between consenting adults of the same sex consider the penal code invalid for procedural reasons and because it violates the principal of equality. Government officials defended the law by claiming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights state that countries may limit freedoms in the interest of preserving public order and that individuals have the duty to preserve African values and morals.

Although reports of arrests dropped dramatically, homophobia remained a major concern. LGBTI individuals continued to face social stigmatization, harassment, and discrimination. There were increasing reports that both police and civilians extorted money from presumed LGBTI individuals by threatening to expose them.

CAMFAIDS reported that on January 19, in Yaounde a mob attacked and severely beat a transvestite individual named "Dolores" (legal name, Singa Kimie Jonas). According to the victim, she was heckled by a young man about her appearance and he demanded to see her genitals. He attacked her physically and was joined by approximately 10 others, who used sticks and stones to beat her. A passing law enforcement officer rescued her.

Suspected members of the LGBTI community continued to receive anonymous threats by telephone, text message, and e-mail. Unlike in previous years, there were few reports that LGBTI individuals who sought protection from authorities were extorted or arrested.

Despite the cultural environment, various human rights and health organizations continued to advocate for the LGBTI community by defending LGBTI individuals being prosecuted, promoting HIV/AIDS initiatives, and working to change laws prohibiting consensual same-sex activity.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Persons afflicted with HIV or AIDS often suffered social discrimination and were isolated from their families and society due to social stigma and lack of education about the disease. In the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey for Cameroon, 88 percent of women and 81.3 percent of men reported having discriminatory attitudes towards those living with HIV. There were no specific reports of discrimination in employment, housing, or access to education or health care.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

On October 21, elements of the navy clashed with residents in Maga, Mayo-Danay division, after the marines stationed in Maga to counter Boko Haram's incursion into the country reportedly solicited bribes that angered the local population. In response there was a small riot in which one civilian was killed and several others were injured. A larger crowd later that night responded by burning all army vehicles present.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that security forces failed to prevent or immediately respond to societal violence. A few cases of vigilante action were recorded. For example, local media and an NGO, Maison des Droits de l'Homme, reported that on October 1, an alleged thief was tortured to death by civilians in the Bonamoussadi neighborhood of Douala. The suspect was part of a gang of four who looted shops in the Zone A area. After committing their crime, the alleged criminals fled, abandoning a member of their group, who was attacked by neighborhood watch committee members. They beat him and burned him to death. Committee members claimed they decided to resort to vigilantism because on several previous occasions, other individuals suspected of theft who had been brought to the police were released without any apparent action by the police.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Statutory limitations substantially restricted these rights. The law does not permit the creation of a union that includes both public and private sector workers or the creation of a union that includes different or closely related sectors. The law requires that unions register with the government, permitting groups of no fewer than 20 workers to organize a union by submitting a constitution and bylaws, as well as nonconviction certifications for each founding member. The law provides for heavy fines for workers who form a union and carry out union activities without registration. Trade unions or associations of public servants may not join a foreign occupational or labor organization without prior authorization from the minister responsible for “supervising public freedoms.”

During the year the minister of labor and social security suspended the activities of the Cameroon Musical Union (SYcamu) for six months. He accused the union of violating its internal regulations. Members of the union disputed this allegation and claimed the suspension was illegal.

The constitution and law provide for collective bargaining between workers and management as well as between labor federations and business associations in each sector of the economy. The law does not apply to the agricultural or other informal sectors, which included the majority of the workforce.

Legal strikes or lockouts may be called only after conciliation and arbitration procedures have been exhausted. Workers who ignore procedures to conduct a legal strike may be dismissed or fined. Before striking, workers must seek mediation from the Ministry of Labor and Social Security at the local, regional, and ministerial levels. Only if mediation fails at all three levels can workers formally issue a strike notice and subsequently strike. The provision of law allowing persons to strike does not apply to civil servants, employees of the penitentiary system, or workers responsible for national security, including police, gendarmerie, and army personnel. Instead of strikes, civil servants are required to negotiate grievances directly with the minister of the appropriate department in addition to the minister of labor and social security.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security reported more than 4,343 individual disputes in 2014. Sectors most affected by social conflicts included transportation, construction and public works, agriculture, private education, and health. The ministry managed to address 2,212 of the conflicts during the same period.

The constitution and law prohibit antiunion discrimination, and employers guilty of such discrimination are subject to fines of up to approximately CFA francs one million (\$1,733). Nevertheless, employers found guilty are not required to compensate workers for discrimination or reinstate dismissed workers.

Industrial free zones are subject to labor law, except for the following provisions: the employers' right to determine salaries according to productivity, the free negotiation of work contracts, and the automatic issuance of work permits for foreign workers.

The government did not effectively enforce the applicable law. Although there were ministries tasked with upholding the labor laws, there were inadequate resources to support their mission. Penalties for violations were so rarely enforced that they were useless as a deterrent. Administrative judicial procedures were infrequent and subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Although the government made some efforts to respect workers' rights, state-owned enterprises often violated these rights and interfered with union activities. Some sections of the law had no force or effect because the presidency had not issued implementing decrees.

More than 100 trade unions and 12 trade union confederations operated in the country, including one public sector confederation. On March 9, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security published the classification of trade union confederations by order of importance, following staff representatives' elections organized nationwide in 2014.

Collective bargaining was effective in many sectors, resulting in the signing of a few collective agreements, including in the agriculture sector. The agreements covered dockworkers, oil and gas workers, shippers and retailers of petroleum products, and insurance sector workers.

A number of strikes were announced, including by workers of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. Some of the strikes were called off after successful negotiation, while others were carried out. Workers' grievances generally included poor working conditions, improper implementation of collective agreements, nonpayment of salaries arrears, a lack of salary increases, and failure of employers

to properly register employees and pay the employer's contribution to the National Social Insurance Fund, which provides health and social security benefits. Union representatives claimed the surge in strikes was the result of the government's strategy of defusing tension through last-minute fixes instead of finding concrete and lasting solutions to genuine problems. Addressing the public on May 1 on the occasion of International Labor Day, trade union representatives called for an amendment to article 2 of the 2014 law on terrorism, stating that it was likely to frustrate demonstrations by workers who request better working conditions.

Arbitration decisions are legally binding but were often unenforceable when parties refused to cooperate. Antiunion discrimination occurred. The blacklisting of union members, unfair dismissal, creation of employer-controlled unions, and threats against workers trying to unionize were common practices.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution and law prohibit all forms of forced and compulsory labor. The law prohibits slavery, exploitation, and debt bondage and voids any agreement in which violence was used to obtain consent. A 2011 law extends antitrafficking provisions to all persons regardless of age or gender. Violations of the law are punishable by prison terms of five to 20 years and fines ranging from CFA francs 10,000 to 10 million (\$17 to \$17,331). In cases of debt bondage, penalties are doubled if the offender is also the guardian or custodian of the victim. The law also extends culpability for all crimes to accomplices and corporate entities. The government continued to make efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor and collaborated with the regional office of the International Labor Organization (ILO) to draft a national plan of action. Although the national plan of action was officially adopted in 2014, it was not yet operational since the associated budget had not been approved by the executive power. The government did not enforce the law effectively, due to lack of resources limiting labor inspection and remediation.

The government placed renewed emphasis on street children, considered most vulnerable to child labor, including forced labor.

There were credible reports of hereditary servitude imposed on former slaves in some chiefdoms in the North Region. Many Kirdi, whose tribe had been enslaved by Fulani in the 1800s, continued to work for traditional Fulani rulers for compensation, while their children were free to pursue schooling and work of their choosing. Kirdi were also required to pay local chiefdom taxes to Fulani, as were

all other subjects. The combination of low wages and high taxes, although legal, effectively constituted forced labor. While technically free to leave, many Kirdi remained in the hierarchical and authoritarian system because of a lack of viable options.

Prison labor is permitted by prison regulation. Prison authorities continued to arrange for prison inmates to be contracted out to private employers or used as communal labor for municipal public works without the informed or formal consent of the prisoner. Prison administrators usually kept money generated from these activities.

In the South and East regions, some Baka, including children, continued to be subjected to unfair labor practices by Bantu farmers, who hired the Baka at exploitive wages to work on their farms during the harvest seasons.

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 law generally protects children from exploitation in the workplace and specifies penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for infringement. The law sets a minimum age of 14 for child employment, prohibits children from working at night or longer than eight hours a day, and enumerates tasks that children under 18 cannot legally perform, including moving heavy objects, undertaking dangerous and unhealthy tasks, working in confined areas, and prostitution. Employers were required to train children between ages 14 and 18, and work contracts must contain a training provision for minors. The government, however, did not effectively enforce these provisions of law, due to lack of resources limiting labor inspection and remediation. There was not sufficient information to determine whether penalties for violations were sufficient to deter violations. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security were responsible for enforcing child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses. Although inspections occurred sporadically during the year, the government did not allocate sufficient resources to support an effective inspection program. The government employed 79 general labor inspectors, whose responsibilities included investigating child labor.

The use of child labor, particularly in informal sectors, remained rampant. According to ILO's 2012 survey, 40 percent of children between the ages of six

and 14 were engaged in economic activity; 89 percent of working children were employed in the agricultural sector, 5 percent in commercial activities, and 6 percent in either industry or domestic work. Children working in agriculture frequently were involved in clearing and tilling the soil and harvesting crops, such as banana and cocoa. In the service sector, children worked as domestic servants and street vendors. Children worked at artisanal mining sites under dangerous conditions. Children were also used as beggars.

Parents viewed child labor as both a tradition and a rite of passage. Relatives often employed rural youth, especially girls, as domestic helpers, and these jobs seldom allowed time for school. In rural areas many children began work at an early age on family farms. The cocoa industry and cattle-rearing sector also employed child laborers. These children originated, for the most part, from the three northern and the Northwest regions.

Also see 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 and Occupation

The constitution and labor laws do not explicitly prohibit discrimination in employment or occupation based on race, religion, gender, disability, or belief. The constitution does not protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, having other communicable diseases, or social status. The constitution, however, states that all individuals have the right and the obligation to work.

The government generally attempted to enforce these legal requirements, but the large percentage of the population employed in the informal sector made effective enforcement difficult. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual orientation, especially in the private sector.

Ethnic groups commonly gave preferential treatment to fellow ethnic group members in business and social practices. Traditional Fulani rulers continued to have great power over their subjects and sometimes subjected them to tithing and forced labor. Isolated cases of hereditary servitude were alleged, largely by Fulani of the Kirdi ethnic group. Elsewhere in the country, especially in the South and East regions, other ethnic group members often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitive labor practices. There were

reports that persons with disabilities, including albinism, found it difficult to secure employment, especially in the private sector.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage in all sectors was raised to CFA francs 36,270 (\$63) per month, up from CFA francs 28,246 (\$49). The law establishes a standard workweek of 40 hours in public and private nonagricultural firms and a total of 2,400 hours per year, with the maximum limit of 48 hours per week in agricultural and related activities. There are exceptions for guards and firefighters (56 hours a week), service sector staff (45 hours), and household and restaurant staff (54 hours). The law mandates at least 24 consecutive hours of weekly rest. Premium pay for overtime ranges from 120 to 150 percent of the hourly pay depending on the amount of overtime and whether it is weekend or late-night overtime. There is a prohibition on excessive compulsory service.

The law mandates paid leave at the employer's expense at the rate of one and one-half working days for each month of actual service. A maximum of 10 days per year of paid special leave, not deductible from annual leave, is granted to workers on the occasion of family events directly concerning their own home. For persons under age 18, the leave accrues at the rate of two and one-half days per month of service. For mothers the leave is increased by either two working days for each child under six years of age on the date of departure on leave, where the child is officially registered and lives in the household, or one day only if the mother's accrued leave does not exceed six days. The leave is increased depending on the worker's length of service with the employer by two working days for each full period whether continuous or not of five years of service. For mothers, this increase is in addition to the one described above.

The government sets health and safety standards in the workplace. The minister in charge of labor establishes the list of occupational diseases in consultation with the National Commission on Industrial Hygiene and Safety. These laws were not enforced in the informal sector. The labor code also mandates that every enterprise and establishment of any kind, whether public or private, lay or religious, civilian or military, including those belonging to trade unions or professional associations, provide medical and health services for their employees. This stipulation was not enforced. On International Labor Day, celebrated on May 1, the National Commission on Human Rights and freedoms issued a statement in which it deplored the fact that the preventive health and safety measures recommended to protect the health of workers were not implemented. The Ministry of Labor and

Social Security is responsible for national enforcement of the minimum wage and work-hour standards. Ministry inspectors and occupational health physicians are responsible for monitoring health and safety standards, but the ministry lacked the resources for a comprehensive inspection program.

Despite the minimum wage law, employers often negotiated with workers for lower salaries, in part due to the high rate of unemployment in the country. Salaries lower than the minimum wage were prevalent in the public works sector, where many positions required unskilled labor, as well as in the domestic work sector.

By law workers can remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities did not effectively protect employees in these situations.