

TAJIKISTAN 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tajikistan is an authoritarian state dominated politically by President Emomali Rahmon and his supporters. The constitution provides for a multiparty political system, but the government has historically obstructed political pluralism and continued to do so during the year. The March parliamentary elections lacked pluralism and genuine choice, according to international observers, many of whom called the process deeply flawed. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

The most significant human rights problems included citizens' inability to change their government through free and fair elections; torture and abuse of detainees and other persons by security forces; and repression of political activists and opposition groups.

Other human rights problems included restrictions on freedoms of expression, press, and the free flow of information, including the repeated blockage of several independent news and social networking websites; poor religious freedom conditions; violence and discrimination against women; torture in the military; arbitrary arrest; denial of the right to a fair trial; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; prohibition of international monitors' access to prisons; limitations on worker rights; and trafficking in persons, including sex and labor trafficking.

Officials in the security services and elsewhere in the government acted with impunity. There were very few prosecutions of government officials for human rights abuses, and no officials have been convicted of torture.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

While the law prohibits extrajudicial killings by government security forces, there were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

As an illustrative example, according to an August 28 article from Radio Free Europe, police detained 23-year-old Umar Bobojonov and a group of his friends while they were walking in Vahdat Park. At the police station, Bobojonov's

friends witnessed police beat Bobojonov until he lost consciousness. Bobojonov died in the hospital on September 4 after a weeklong coma. Family and friends of Bobojonov insisted that police targeted him because of the perceived religious connotations of his beard. The Ministry of Interior announced on September 1 that it was setting up a special investigation, but the government had not reported the results of the investigation by year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances during the year.

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

The constitution prohibits the use of torture. Although the government amended the criminal code in 2012 to add a separate article that defines torture in accordance with international law, there were reports of beatings, torture, sexual assault, and other forms of coercion to extract confessions during interrogations. Officials did not grant sufficient access to information to allow human rights organizations to investigate claims of torture.

In March local police detained Ravshan Rakhmatov, an 18-year-old resident of Khujand, after an argument between two groups of teenagers turned violent. Despite the teenagers' testimonies, which insisted that Rakhmatov was not the perpetrator, Rakhmatov was charged with hooliganism and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Rakhmatov's lawyer stated that police officers tortured Rakhmatov both in the police car on the way to the police station and during his detention. Allegedly, Rakhmatov, no longer able to withstand the torture, grabbed a knife and stabbed himself in the stomach. In the court appeal process, the Prosecutor's Office recognized Rakhmatov's self-mutilation but denied the allegations of torture.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Physical Conditions: The government operated 10 prisons, including one for women, and 12 pretrial detention facilities. Exact conditions in the prisons remained unknown, but detainees and inmates described harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, including extreme overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. Disease and hunger were serious problems. UN agencies reported that infection

rates of tuberculosis and HIV in prisons were significant and the quality of medical treatment was poor. Juvenile boys were often held with men.

Administration: A governmental Office of the Ombudsman exists, and its ombudsman visited prisons but resolved fewer than 2 percent of complaints filed. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported mistrust of the ombudsman mechanism due to its loyalty to President Rahmon and frequent dismissal of public human rights concerns. A special monitoring group with ombudsmen and NGO representatives conducted announced monitoring visits of prison conditions. No known complaints were filed regarding conditions specifically.

Independent Monitoring: The Ministry of Justice continued to restrict access to prisons or detention facilities for representatives of the international community. In 2013 an association of local NGOs, the Coalition against Torture, concluded a closed institution monitoring agreement with the ombudsman and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Throughout the year the Coalition against Torture and the ombudsman conducted planned visits of closed institutions, although officials denied Coalition against Torture monitors access when they attempted unannounced monitoring visits, private interviews with detainees, or access to internal correctional institution documents. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continued to lack access due to the absence of a prison access agreement with the government. Negotiations stalled following the government's refusal to accept the ICRC's standard conditions for prison visits.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law does not explicitly prohibit arbitrary arrests, which were common. The law states that police must inform the Prosecutor's Office of an arrest within 12 hours and file charges within 10 days. Few citizens were aware of their right to appeal an arrest, and there were few checks on the power of police and military officers to detain individuals.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Drug Control Agency (DCA), Agency on State Financial Control and the Fight against Corruption (Anticorruption Agency), State Committee for National Security (GKNB), State Tax Committee, and Customs Service share civilian law enforcement responsibilities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is primarily responsible for public order and manages the police. The DCA, Anticorruption Agency, and State Tax Committee have mandates to

investigate specific crimes and report to the president. The GKNB is responsible for intelligence gathering, controls the Border Service, and investigates cases linked to alleged extremist political or religious activity, trafficking in persons, and politically sensitive cases. The Customs Service reports directly to the president. The Prosecutor General's Office oversees the criminal investigations that these agencies conduct.

Agency responsibilities overlap significantly, and law enforcement organizations defer to the GKNB. Law enforcement agencies were not effective in investigating organized criminal gangs, because the gangs maintained high-level connections with government officials and security agencies. A tacit understanding among law enforcement that certain individuals were untouchable prevented investigations.

Official impunity continued to be a serious problem. While authorities took limited steps to hold perpetrators accountable, reports of torture and mistreatment of prisoners continued, and the culture of impunity and corruption weakened investigations and prosecutions. In some cases during pretrial detention hearings or trials, judges dismissed defendants' allegations of abuse and torture during detention. Victims of police abuse may submit a formal complaint in writing to the officer's superior or the Office of the Ombudsman. Most victims reportedly chose to remain silent rather than risk official retaliation. The Office of the Ombudsman made few efforts to respond to complaints about human rights violations and rarely intervened, claiming that the office did not have the power to make statements or recommendations regarding criminal cases.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

According to the law, police may detain an individual up to 12 hours before authorities must file criminal charges. If authorities do not file charges after 12 hours, the individual must be released, but police often did not inform detainees of the arrest charges. If police file criminal charges, they may detain an individual 72 hours before they must present their charges to a judge for an indictment hearing. The judge is empowered to order detention, house arrest, or bail pending trial.

According to the law, family members are allowed access to prisoners after indictment, but officials often denied access to attorneys and family members. The law states that a lawyer is entitled to be present at interrogations at the request of the detainee or lawyer, but in many cases, authorities did not permit lawyers timely access to their clients, and initial interrogations occurred without them. Detainees

suspected of crimes related to national security or extremism were held for extended periods without being formally charged.

Arbitrary Arrest: The government generally provided a rationale for arrests, but detainees and civil society groups frequently reported that authorities falsified charges or inflated minor incidents to make politically motivated arrests.

On September 29, authorities arrested Buzurgmehr Yorov, a defense lawyer representing several Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) members detained in alleged connection to the September 4 violence, in which former deputy defense minister Nazarzoda and people loyal to him attacked and killed nine law enforcement officials. Authorities accused Yorov of committing large-scale fraud and forgery in business dealings from 2010. Colleagues and international observers claimed the authorities fabricated these accusations to block his defense of the IRPT and discourage other lawyers from taking the case. On October 15, the General Prosecutor's Office announced it was reclassifying Yorov's case as "secret," officially shutting off public information about the proceedings and raising further due process concerns. Numerous NGOs, including Amnesty International and the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, urged the immediate release of Yorov and access to a lawyer and his family. He remained in detention at year's end.

Some police and judicial officials regularly accepted bribes in exchange for lenient sentencing or release. Law enforcement officials must request an extension from a judge to detain an individual in pretrial detention after two, six, and 12 months.

Pretrial Detention: Defense advocates alleged that prosecutors often held suspects for lengthy periods and registered the initial arrest only when the suspect was ready to confess. In most cases pretrial detention lasted from one to three months, but it could extend as long as 15 months.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the law provides for an independent judiciary, the executive branch exerted pressure on prosecutors and judges. Corruption and inefficiency were significant problems.

Trial Procedures

Defendants legally are afforded a presumption of innocence, but the presumption did not exist in practice. The courts found nearly all defendants guilty. During the first six months of the year, there were four acquittals in 5,981 cases, of which two were full acquittals, and the remaining two were partial acquittals with convictions on lesser charges. Authorities imposed one life sentence during the first half of the year.

There is no trial by jury. Courts generally allowed defendants to consult with an attorney in a timely manner during trials but often denied defendants the right to an attorney during the pretrial and investigatory periods, particularly in politically sensitive cases. For example, Manonov Qurbon, IRPT leader in Norak District, was denied visitation rights and legal representation both in pre-detention and during his 10-day imprisonment. Authorities leveled politically motivated criminal charges against some defense lawyers to obstruct detained political opposition figures' access to legal counsel.

The government provided attorneys at public expense when requested, but defendants and civil society complained that the government sometimes appointed attorneys as a means to deny defendants' access to the legal counsel of their choice. Defendants and private attorneys said government-appointed attorneys often provided a poor and counterproductive defense. A number of local and international NGOs provided free legal counsel to defendants.

Defendants may present witnesses and evidence at trial with the consent of the judge. Defendants and attorneys have the right to review all government evidence, confront and question witnesses, and present evidence and testimony, although some defense lawyers claimed the government denied them access to evidential materials collected against their clients. No groups are barred from testifying, and in principle all testimony receives equal consideration. Courts, however, generally gave prosecutorial testimony far greater consideration than defense testimony. The law extends the rights of defendants in trial procedures to all citizens, and it provides for the right to appeal.

Low wages for judges and prosecutors left them vulnerable to bribery, a common practice. Government officials subjected judges to political influence.

Although trials are public, the law provides also for secret trials when there is a national security concern. Civil society members faced difficulties in gaining access to high-profile public cases, which the government often declared secret.

During the year the government conducted politically motivated court cases behind closed doors.

On February 9, Zaid Saidov, imprisoned former minister of industry, businessman, and leader of the unregistered political party New Tajikistan, asked that his trial on new charges be open to the public but the court refused his request. In 2013 authorities charged and convicted Saidov for fraud, bribery, rape, and polygamy in a trial human rights organizations claimed was politically motivated and rife with due process concerns. In July 2014 while Saidov was in prison serving a 26-year sentence, the anticorruption agency brought new charges against him, including embezzlement and forgery of documents. Anticipating an unfair trial, Saidov asked that journalists be present during the proceedings. The court approved Saidov's request and permitted an open trial; however, the court denied access to journalists, representatives of international organizations, and local NGOs, claiming that the courtroom was too small. On August 11, the court sentenced Saidov to an additional three years of imprisonment on the new charges. Human rights organizations continued to assess Saidov's case as politically motivated.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

While authorities claimed there were no political prisoners or politically motivated arrests, opposition parties and local and international observers reported the government selectively arrested and prosecuted political opponents. There was no reliable estimate of the number of political prisoners.

On July 20, a court in Hisor District sentenced Jaloliddin Mahmudov, a member of the political council of the IRPT and member of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda, to five years in prison. The GKNB detained Mahmudov on suspicion of illegal possession of weapons. Authorities detained Mahmudov on February 10, less than three weeks before parliamentary elections, leading observers to believe his detention was politically motivated.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Civil cases are heard in general civil courts, economic courts, and military courts. Judges may order monetary compensation for victims in criminal cases. No separate juvenile justice system exists, although there were some courts that provide a separate room for children linked to the courtroom by video camera.

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

The constitution states that the home is inviolable. With certain exceptions, it is illegal to enter the home by force or deprive a person of a home. The law states that police may not enter and search a private home without the approval of a judge. Authorities may carry out searches without a prosecutor's authorization in exceptional cases, "where there is an actual risk that the object searched for and subject to seizure may cause a possible delay in discovering it, be lost, damaged, or used for criminal purposes, or a fugitive may escape." The law states that courts must be notified of such searches within 24 hours. Police frequently ignored these laws and infringed on citizens' right to privacy, including personal searches without a warrant.

On September 16, GKNB officers arrested Mahmadali Hayit, deputy head of the IRPT. Following that, six GKNB and prosecutor general officers visited his home and conducted a search of his house. Hayit's relatives said that the law enforcement officers conducting the search did not have a search warrant. The officers confiscated documents belonging to Hayit, including his passport, phone, military card, a computer, tablet, and party documentation.

According to the law, "when sufficient grounds exist to believe that information, documents, or objects that are relevant to the criminal case may be contained in letters, telegrams, radiograms, packages, parcels, or other mail and telegraph correspondence, they may be intercepted" with a warrant issued by a judge. The law states that only a judge may authorize monitoring of telephone or other communication. Security offices often monitored communications, such as social media and phone calls, without judicial authorization

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and press, but the government restricted these rights.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The authorities continued to curb freedom of speech through detentions, prosecutions, and the threat of heavy fines. By law a person may be imprisoned for as long as five years for insulting the president.

Press and Media Freedoms: Independent media faced significant and repeated government threats on media outlets. Although some print media published

political commentary and investigatory material critical of the government, journalists observed that authorities considered certain topics off limits, including derogatory information about the president or his family or questions about financial improprieties of those close to the president.

Several independent television and radio stations were available in a small portion of the country, but the government controlled most broadcasting transmission facilities. The government allowed some international media to operate and permitted rebroadcasts of Russian television and radio programs.

On June 30, President Rahmon signed a protocol requiring all government bodies to provide official state news and statements to Khovar, the state news agency. The protocol required all other media outlets to reference or contact Khovar before publishing material regarding government sessions, presidential travel inside and outside the country, official meetings, and international events and statements. Independent media outlets reported they had difficulty accessing government officials and rarely received invitations to participate in government-sponsored events. Journalists reported there was a decrease in press conferences and interviews of government officials, who cited the protocol as an excuse. For example, in July, when independent news outlet Radio Ozodi asked a reliable source from within a government structure to answer questions about an upcoming presidential trip, the source referred the journalist to Khovar, citing the protocol for not answering the questions directly.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to face harassment and intimidation by government officials. Although the government decriminalized libel in 2012, state officials regularly filed defamation complaints against news outlets in retaliation for publishing stories critical of the government.

In August authorities convicted independent journalist and former Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty reporter Amindzhon Gulmurodzoda of forging his own birth certificate in the year 1989, when he was six years old. He received a two-year prison sentence. Observers viewed the verdict as part of the government's broader efforts to neutralize independent and opposition voices from the media sphere.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Journalists regularly practiced self-censorship to avoid retribution from officials. Opposition politicians had limited or no access to state-run television. The government gave opposition parties minimal broadcast time to express their political views, while the president's party had numerous

opportunities to broadcast its messages. Access to information was particularly difficult for journalists during the parliamentary elections on March 1. Despite guarantees in legislation regarding election coverage, authorities denied journalists without state media badges entry to polling stations in several locations. Officials denied to other journalists on the pretext that the journalist had to have special permission for entry to the polling station.

Newspaper publishers reported that the government exercised restrictions on the distribution of materials, requiring all newspapers and magazines with circulations exceeding 99 recipients to register with the Ministry of Culture. The government continued to control all major printing presses and the supply of newsprint.

Independent community radio stations continued to experience registration and licensing delays that prevented them from broadcasting. The government restricted issuance of licenses to new stations, in part through an excessively complex application process. The National Committee on Television and Radio, a government organization that directly manages television and radio stations in the country, must approve and then provide licenses to new stations. The government continued to deny the BBC a renewal of its license to broadcast on FM radio.

Libel/Slander Laws: In 2012 the government repealed the law criminalizing libel and defamation and downgraded the offenses to civil violations, although the law retains controversial provisions that make publicly insulting the president an offense punishable by a fine or up to five years in jail. Nevertheless, libel judgments were common, particularly against newspapers critical of the government.

Internet Freedom

Individuals and groups faced extensive government surveillance of internet activity, including e-mails, and often self-censored their views while posting on the internet. According to a 2014 Open Society Institute report, internet penetration was approximately 3.8 million persons (approximately 40 percent).

There were new and continuing government restrictions on access to internet websites, such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, and Google services. The State Communications Service (SCS) routinely denied involvement in blocking these sites, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted to foreign officials in June to periodically implementing a law that allows interruption of internet content and telecommunications “in the interest of national security.”

On May 28, the SCS ordered the blockage of several news websites including Asia Plus, and both the Tajik and Russian versions of Radio Ozodi, and a number of social networks such as Russian owned Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki. SCS officials denied any involvement. The timing of the blockages suggested that the websites were blocked in connection with reports and coverage of Tajik police commander Gulmurod Halimov's defection to the Islamic State in Syria.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The Ministry of Education maintained a dress code that bans wearing the hijab in schools and government institutions. Authorities allowed women to wear a traditional version of the head covering--a scarf that covers hair but not the neck--to schools and universities. Many female students wore the hijab to and from school but removed it upon entering the school building. Parents and school officials appeared to accept this arrangement. The ministry also maintained its ban on beards for all teachers. Students with beards reported being removed from class, questioned, and asked to shave.

A Ministry of Education directive requires school administrators to inform students of the Law on Parental Responsibility, which bans all persons under age 18 from participating in public religious activities, with the exception of funerals. The law provides that, with written parental consent, minors between the ages of seven and 18 may obtain a religious education during their free time from school and outside the state education curriculum and may worship as part of educational activities at religious institutions.

The government requires all persons studying religion abroad to register with the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The law provides criminal penalties for violating restrictions on sending citizens abroad for religious education, preaching and teaching religious doctrines, and establishing ties with religious groups abroad without CRA consent.

The Ministry of Education banned students from attending events sponsored by or conducted for foreign organizations during school hours.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution provides the right to freedom of assembly, but the government required that individuals obtain permission from the government to stage public demonstrations. Individuals considering staging peaceful protests reportedly chose not to do so for fear of government reprisal.

Freedom of Association

The constitution protects freedom of association, but the government restricted this right. Civil society organizations reported a noticeable increase in the number and intensity of registration and tax inspections by authorities.

In June the State Tax Committee, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Department of Labor, and the Ministry of Justice, allegedly according to GKNB instructions, initiated inspections against key human rights NGOs and their donors. For example, the NGO Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law (BHR), a leading human rights organization in the country, received an official request by the Tax Inspection office of Dushanbe that required BHR to turn over all its financial documents from 2010 to 2015. Authorities fined the NGO 42,639 Tajikistani somoni (TJS) (approximately \$6,000) to be paid in a 10-day period along with a notification stating the NGO violated undefined tax regulations.

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

In-country Movement: The law provides for freedom of movement, but the government imposed some restrictions. The government prohibits foreigners, except diplomats and international aid workers, from traveling within a 15-mile zone along the borders with Afghanistan and China in the Khatlon Region and the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) unless they obtain permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Officials did not always enforce the restrictions along the western border with Afghanistan, although the government continued to require travelers (including international workers and diplomats) to obtain special permits to visit the GBAO. During periods of unrest in the GBAO, authorities denied foreigners, including those holding permits, access to the region.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Nevertheless, the process for making asylum status determinations remained uncertain, lacking transparency, and administrative and judicial procedures did not comply with international standards. Although not required by law, government officials required refugees and asylum seekers to obtain a visa and a valid travel document before entering the country. Government officials without due process detained and deported individuals not in possession of a visa.

The government processed asylum applications through the National Refugee Status Determination Commission and granted applicants documents to regularize their stay and prevent deportation. Formal notifications of administrative and legal decisions provide little insight into the rationale for adjudications. In some instances, when denying claimants refugee status, officials cited, in broad terms, a lack of evidence of persecution in the refugee's home country or "malpractice" on the part of refugees applying to renew their status, such as violation of the prohibition of living in Dushanbe. Unofficially, some refugees claimed authorities could deny cases if sufficiently high bribes were not paid.

The government continued to place significant restrictions on claimants, and officials continued to enforce a law decreed in 2000 prohibiting asylum seekers and refugees from residing in the capital and all major cities in the country. Security officials regularly monitored refugee populations. Asylum seekers and refugees regularly reported to UNHCR that security officials harassed them, often for allegedly lacking personal identification, and attempted to extort money. Police subjected them to raids if police believed they were residing in prohibited areas.

During the year the government deported 32 asylum seekers and refugees to Afghanistan. The deportees included rejected asylum seekers and refugees with revoked status based on violation of the law prohibiting such persons from residing in urban areas as well as cumbersome preconditions that preclude a claimant from registering as a refugee. Most of the cases of revoked status were under appeal in court with the support of UNHCR. The deportations took place despite the incomplete appeal processes. In some of these cases, there was risk of refoulement.

Although the law stipulates that refugee status be granted for as long as three years, the transfer of refugee processing to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2009 resulted in much shorter periods of status being granted.

Employment: An increasing percentage of refugees entering the country did not possess professional backgrounds or job skills, and many faced discrimination by the local population. The requirement to live outside urban areas created additional problems for finding adequate work. While UNHCR assisted some female refugees by providing vocational job training in skills such as sewing, cooking, and hairdressing, most female refugees remained in the home in accordance with traditional cultures. Most male refugees worked for small enterprises.

Access to Basic Services: Refugees and asylum seekers are legally entitled to education and health services alongside local citizens. The Ministry of Education allowed Afghan parents to send their children to local schools without paying fees. UNHCR partners provided books, school uniforms, and some language classes to these children and assisted with their medical expenses. The law provides registered refugees with equal access to law enforcement, health care, and the judicial system, although refugees did not always have equal access. In practice refugees were subject to harassment, discrimination, and extortion.

Durable Solutions: Following the amended Law on Nationality adopted in August, refugees hold equal standing to nonrefugee foreigners when applying for citizenship. Although the government and UNHCR agreed on local integration of refugees into the general population as a more durable solution to the refugee situation, there was little progress in processing pending cases to completion.

Stateless Persons

As of February a reported 637 persons registered as stateless by the government. As of June UNHCR and its partners identified and registered as many as 10,000 individuals at risk of statelessness in three pilot cities, Shahritus, Tursunzade, and Istaravshan, highlighting the potential extent of statelessness as well as the challenges and opportunities of facilitating solutions. Holders of former Soviet Union passports constituted the bulk of those at risk of statelessness, although a number of people, predominantly women, holding expired foreign passports came forward and sought counselling.

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, but the government restricted this right. The president and his supporters continued to dominate the government. The president's political party, the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), dominated both houses of parliament. PDPT members held most government positions. The president had broad authority, which he exercised throughout the year, to appoint and dismiss officials.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: March parliamentary elections resulted in the ruling party winning 51 out of 63 seats in the lower house of parliament. Progovernment parties shared the remaining seats. The IRPT lost two seats, despite widespread public support, and was subsequently banned and designated a terrorist organization by the Supreme Court. Authorities arrested IRPT leaders along with their defense lawyer (see section 1.d.). Political opposition parties and international NGOs declared the elections unfair.

According to the monitoring report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the elections "took place in a restricted political space and failed to provide a level playing field for candidates." The report noted that, while there were some improvements made to the electoral law, authorities did not administer elections in a fair manner, with undue restrictions on freedoms of expression and assembly during the election campaign and significant irregularities, including ballot box stuffing, on voting day.

In January media reported that local authorities in three cities refused the IRPT's applications to hold campaign conferences, and the Dushanbe Mayor's Office denied an IRPT application to post campaign materials throughout the city. Citing vague licensing reasons, authorities also blocked some IRPT candidates from campaigning via television or radio despite electoral law providing for that right.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Eight political parties, including the PDPT, were legally registered, but the Supreme Court banned IRPT on September 5. Following claims of its alleged connection to violent attacks against Ministry of Internal Affairs forces in Dushanbe and Vahdat in early September, the Supreme Court designated the IRPT as a terrorist organization. Observers considered only three of these parties to be independent of the government. Opposition political

parties had moderate popular support and faced scrutiny by the government. All senior members of President Rahmon's government were PDPT members. Most members of the country's 97-seat parliament were members of the PDPT, belonging to progovernment parties, or PDPT-affiliates.

The government interfered in the attempts of political parties to organize and conduct their activities.

On July 6, Dushanbe authorities reportedly forced Qiyomiddin Avaz, the head of the IRPT in Dushanbe, to resign from the party. In a statement posted on the IRPT's website, Avaz said he withdrew from the party after Dushanbe authorities pressured his family and elderly parents. He said he was forced to sign a resignation form affirming his withdrawal from IRPT membership. Consequently, the IRPT board made a decision in mid-May to consider resignation applications, signed under pressure, invalid. In late June dozens of members and IRPT regional office heads announced their resignations from the IRPT in coordinated online videos. The IRPT claimed all those who withdrew their membership in such a manner did so under pressure from security offices in the regions. The IRPT reported 52 party members rescinded their membership after pressure from security officials.

On August 24, the Prosecutor General's Office closed the IRPT's headquarters. The Prosecutor General's Office claimed that the IRPT's central office in Dushanbe had been sealed because the building in which the office is located was illegally purchased. A source in the IRPT told the media that the party believed the closing of its offices was a deliberate action by the government to disrupt the party congress on September 15. On August 28, citing the notion that IRPT no longer had sufficient registered field offices to continue as a legitimate party, authorities announced the IRPT had 10 days to cease all activities.

On September 29, the Supreme Court declared the IRPT a terrorist group based on charges brought against them by the Prosecutor General's Office. The Supreme Court's ruling officially banned the party from any activities in the country, forced the closure of the IRPT's official newspaper, *Najot*, and prohibited the distribution of any video, audio, or printed materials related to the party's activities. In September and October, law enforcement officers arrested 27 high-ranking members of the IRPT. In an official statement, despite lack of evidence, the Office of the Prosecutor General accused them of involvement in "criminal groups" responsible for organizing attacks on September 4 that killed nine law enforcement officers.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Women were underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels of political institutions. Female representation in all branches of government was less than 30 percent. There was one female minister but no ministers from minority groups. A deputy prime minister; the minister of labor, migration, and employment; and several deputy ministers were women. In the 63-member lower chamber of parliament, there were 12 female members and no minority group members. In the 33-member upper chamber of parliament, there were six women and two members of a minority group. Cultural practices discouraged participation by women in politics, although the government and political parties made efforts to promote their involvement, such as the 1999 presidential decree that mandated every ministry or government institution have a female deputy. Civil society criticized this decree as a barrier to women holding top government positions.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively. Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Corruption, nepotism, and regional hiring bias were pervasive at all levels of government.

Corruption: Corruption in the Education Ministry was systemic. Prospective students were required to pay thousands of somoni (hundreds of dollars) in bribes to enter the country's most prestigious universities, and provincial colleges required several hundred somoni. Students often paid additional bribes to receive good examination grades.

Many traffic police retained fines they collected for violations. Traffic police posted at regular intervals along roads arbitrarily stopped drivers to ask for bribes. The problem was systemic in part due to the low official wages paid to traffic police. Many traffic police reportedly paid for their jobs, an expense they tried to recoup by extracting bribes from motorists.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Anticorruption Agency, and Prosecutor General's Office are responsible for investigating, arresting, and prosecuting suspected corrupt officials. The government acknowledged a problem with corruption and took some steps to combat it, including putting lower-level officials on trial for taking bribes.

Both the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Anticorruption Agency submit cases to the Prosecutor General's Office at the conclusion of their investigations. In some instances, the agency collaborated with the Prosecutor General's Office throughout the entire process.

The prosecutor general investigated some cases of suspected corruption by government employees, but the bulk of the cases involved mid- or lower-level officials, and none involved large-scale abuses. There were instances of the Prosecutor General's Office suddenly dropping cases submitted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the Anticorruption Agency.

Financial Disclosure: Public officials are not subject to financial disclosure laws.

Public Access to Information: Public budgets, particularly those involving major state-owned enterprises, lacked transparency. Although parliament has oversight of the state budget, it passed annual budgets almost without comment despite large, unexplained, and undefined expenses. Each year the government releases a report on budget performance for the previous year that contains numerous details about education, health, and other social sector spending. A considerable amount of government spending, including that for major buildings, parks, and other special projects such as summer residences for the president, occurred off budget.

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

Domestic human rights groups encountered increased difficulty monitoring and reporting on the general human rights situation in the country, although international human rights groups encountered fewer difficulties. Domestic NGOs and journalists were careful to avoid public criticism of the president or other high-ranking officials. Human rights and civil society NGOs faced increasing pressure from the government. Authorities investigated a number of NGOs for alleged registration problems and administrative irregularities.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government generally cooperated with international NGOs. It facilitated visits by high-ranking officials from the UN, the OSCE, and other international organizations but continued to deny the ICRC access to prison facilities.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman made little effort to respond to complaints from the public during the year, and its

limited staff and budget further constrained its capacity to do so. The ombudsman's office met with NGOs to discuss specific human rights cases and general human rights problems in the country, but no government action resulted. In December 2014 the Ministry of Justice gave NGOs the opportunity to discuss amendments to the Law on Public Associations and incorporated some of their recommendations into the final draft, but human rights NGOs report continuing politically motivated government interference in their activities under the auspices of the law.

The government's Office for Constitutional Guarantees of Citizens' Rights continued to investigate and answer citizens' complaints, but staffing inadequacies and inconsistent cooperation from other governmental institutions hampered the office's effectiveness. The procedural code on administrative offenses provided procedural protections to those persons accused of minor offenses.

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

The law provides for the rights and freedoms of every person regardless of race, gender, disability, language, or social status, but there was discrimination against women and persons with disabilities. Trafficking in persons for sexual and labor exploitation remained a problem.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law prohibits rape, which is punishable by up to 20 years' imprisonment. There was no separate statute for spousal rape. The government did not provide statistics on the number of cases or convictions. Law enforcement officials usually advised women not to file charges but registered cases at the victim's insistence. Most observers believed the majority of cases were unreported because victims wished to avoid humiliation.

Violence against women, including spousal abuse, remained a widespread problem. According to a survey conducted by the National Statistic Committee during the year, 19 percent of women between ages 15 and 49 reported they experienced physical violence since age 15. The highest incidence of domestic violence was reported in Sughd, where 22 percent of women reported suffering domestic violence. The lowest reported level of domestic violence was in the Districts of Republican Subordination around Dushanbe, where 13 percent of women reported suffering domestic violence. Women underreported violence against them due to fear of reprisal or inadequate response by police and the

judiciary, resulting in virtual impunity for the perpetrators. Authorities wishing to promote traditional gender roles widely dismissed domestic violence as a “family matter.” Women and girls were more vulnerable to domestic violence because of early and unregistered marriages.

Five police stations were fully equipped and staffed with police officers trained, with OSCE support, to respond to family violence cases and address the needs of victims in a gender-sensitive manner. In rural areas the government and NGOs operated additional crisis centers and hotlines where women could seek guidance on domestic violence problems and legal assistance, but many centers lacked funding and resources. Local governments donated the premises of three of the shelters. The Committee for Women’s Affairs (within the government) had limited resources to assist domestic violence victims, but local committee representatives referred women to the crisis shelters for assistance.

In 2012 the government adopted a law on domestic violence that is in line with internationally accepted standards; however, the implementing mechanism was inadequate. The Ministry of Internal Affairs lacked the capacity and training to implement the law, although it worked with the international community to increase capacity. In May 2014 the government adopted an action plan to implement domestic violence law. The plan calls for law enforcement, court officials, the prosecutor’s office, and representatives of relevant government bodies to receive training on their responsibility to combat domestic violence. The plan also calls for greater cooperation between law enforcement officials and local leaders to change societal attitudes towards domestic violence. The government took some steps to collect information on domestic violence, but many cases of domestic abuse went unreported.

Authorities seldom investigated reported cases of domestic violence, and they prosecuted few alleged perpetrators. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is authorized to issue administrative restraining orders, but by law police cannot act without a written complaint from the victim, even if there were other witnesses. Consequently, police often gave only warnings, short-term detentions, or fines for committing “administrative offenses” in cases of domestic violence.

Physical and psychological abuse of wives by mothers-in-law was widespread. In some rural areas, officials observed a continued trend of female suicide in which independent observers considered such abuse to be a contributing cause.

Sexual Harassment: No specific statute banned sexual harassment in the workplace. Victims often did not report incidents because of fear of social stigma. Authorities often perceived sexual harassment as female fabrications. Women reporting sexual harassment faced retaliation from their employers as well as scrutiny from their families and communities.

Reproductive Rights: The government did not interfere with the rights of individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children; to manage their reproductive health; and to have the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Traditional stereotypes prevented women and girls from obtaining information on reproductive health.

Discrimination: Although the law provides for women and men to receive equal pay for equal work, cultural barriers restricted women's professional opportunities (see section 7.d.). According to the World Bank report, *Women, Business, and the Law 2014*, women and men have equal ownership rights to property, although women owned significantly less property than men. The extensive number of male migrant workers to Russia and other parts of Central Asia, many of whom failed to send remittances or return home, exacerbated economic pressures on women, who had to provide for themselves and their children, and resulted in a significant gender imbalance in the population.

Due to family pressure, young women, especially adolescent girls, often dropped out of school to marry. The law protects women's rights in marriage and family matters, but families often pressured female minors to marry against their will. Religious marriages were common substitutes for civil marriages, due to the high marriage registration fees associated with civil marriages and the power afforded men under religious law. In cases of religious marriages not registered with the government, husbands simply repeated a phrase in front of two witnesses to divorce their wives. Husbands also used these officially unregistered religious marriages to prevent wives from accessing family assets and other rights in the event of divorce. The practice of men divorcing their wives by sending text messages declined after the 2011 Council of Ulema fatwa (religious edict) declared the practice unacceptable.

The 2004 Council of Ulema fatwa prohibiting Hanafi Sunni women--constituting the vast majority of the female population--from praying in mosques remained in effect. Religious ceremonies also made polygyny possible, despite the illegality of the practice. NGOs estimated that up to 10 percent of men practiced polygyny.

Many of these polygynous marriages involved underage brides. Unofficial second and third marriages were increasingly common, with neither the wives nor their children having legal standing or rights.

Inheritance laws do not discriminate against women, although some inheritances passed disproportionately to sons. In addition, many men hid their assets with their parents or other family members, so that if divorce occurred, they could claim no wealth and become exempt from paying child support or other restitution to the former wife.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs supported programs to increase the representation of female officers in law enforcement.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship by birth within the country's territory and from their parents. The government is required to register all births. Many parents waited to register a birth until a child was ready to enter school, since birth registration is required to receive public services such as education.

Education: Free and universal public education is compulsory until age 16 or completion of the ninth grade. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that school attendance generally was good through the primary grades, but girls faced disadvantages, especially in rural school systems where families elected to keep them home after primary grades to take care of siblings or work in agriculture. Families often invested money in their sons' education rather than that of their daughters so that the boys, with a better education, could provide for them and take care of their parents in old age.

A 2014 study revealed that dropout rates were higher among women. The analysis found that at the end of compulsory education, girls averaged 24 percent drop-out rates, while their male counterparts averaged 21 percent. Girls continued to drop out at rates higher in 10th and 11th grade at rates of 14 percent, compared with 5 percent for boys.

Child Abuse: The Committee on Women and Family Affairs and regional child rights protection departments are responsible for addressing problems of violence against children. Girls subjected to violence could receive support from several centers throughout the country. The Women of Science of Tajikistan Association, supported by UNICEF and the Dushanbe mayor's office, organized a hotline for

free legal and psychological consultations for girls who were victims of violence. Funding for and the capacity of such programs were limited. A five-year program for a Girls Support Center ended in its second year due to lack of funding.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage of men and women is 18 years. Under exceptional circumstances, which a judge must determine, such as in the case of pregnancy, a couple may also apply to a court to lower the marriageable age to 17. Underage religious marriage was more widespread in rural areas. Many parents told their daughters to quit school after ninth grade, at which point parents considered their daughters to have obtained sufficient professional skills, such as sewing or cooking, to have a source of income in the future.

The law expressly prohibits forced marriages of girls under age 18 or entering into a marriage contract with a girl under 18. Early marriage carries a prison sentence of up to six months, while forced marriage is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. In most cases the law punishes underage marriage with a fine. Because couples may not register a marriage where one of the would-be spouses is under age 18, many simply have a local religious leader perform the wedding ceremony. Without a civil registration certificate, the bride has few legal rights.

NGOs claimed that during the year regional ministries of education and schoolteachers were very actively involved in persuading parents not to take their daughters out of school. The NGOs claimed the situation in some rural areas had improved, and the government partially addressed the problem by requiring mullahs to demand a certificate of civil marriage registration to conduct the religious ceremony; however, this regulation was not effectively enforced, and mullahs conducted religious marriages at unmonitored private ceremonies.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. Law enforcement bodies investigated cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children, but no statistics were available on the number of prosecutions or convictions. The minimum age of consensual sex is 16 years. According to an NGO working with victims of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and sex trafficking, there were several cases in which family members or third parties forced children into sex work in nightclubs and in private homes.

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

Anti-Semitism

There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts. The small Jewish community had a place of worship and faced no overt pressure from the government or other societal pressures. Emigration to other countries continued.

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 on social protection of persons with disabilities applies to individuals having physical or mental disabilities, including sensory and developmental disabilities. The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, and provision of other state services, but public and private institutions generally did not commit resources to implement the law. The law requires government buildings, schools, hospitals, and transportation, including air travel, to be accessible to persons with disabilities, but the government did not enforce these provisions.

Many children with disabilities were not able to attend school because doctors did not deem them "medically fit." Children deemed medically unfit could attend special state-run schools specifically for persons with physical and mental disabilities. Observers noted that the capacity of these institutions probably did not meet demand. Mainstream schools and state-run schools for persons with physical and mental disabilities used the same curriculum. Doctors decided which subjects students were capable of studying, and directors of state-run schools could change the requirements for students to pass to the next grade at their discretion. Some children with Down syndrome and autism were allowed to attend mainstream schools. Up to 10 percent of families kept children with disabilities at home and provided home education or tutors.

The government charges the Commission on Fulfillment of International Human Rights, the Society of Invalids, and local and regional governmental structures with protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Although the government maintained group living and medical facilities for persons with disabilities, funding was limited, and facilities were in poor condition.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There were occasional reports that some law enforcement officials harassed ethnic Afghans and Uzbeks.

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

While same-sex sexual conduct is legal in the country, and the age of consent is the same as for heterosexual relationships, the law does not provide legal protection against discrimination. Homophobic attitudes and little societal tolerance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons made it rare for individuals to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Throughout the country there were reports that LGBTI individuals faced physical and psychological abuse, including from police.

There is no law against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and LGBTI persons were victims of police harassment and faced threats of public beatings by community members. Public activism on behalf of LGBTI persons was limited. LGBTI representatives claimed law enforcement officials extorted money from LGBTI persons by threatening to tell their employers or families of their activities and in some cases subjected LGBTI persons to sex trafficking. Hate crimes against members of the LGBTI community reportedly went unaddressed. LGBTI representatives claimed health-care providers discriminated against and harassed LGBTI persons. LGBTI advocacy and health groups reported harassment from government officials and clergy, to include violent threats.

In May the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria released a report stating that there were 30,000 LGBTI individuals in the country. The Ministry of Health refuted the data, saying that in reality the number was much lower but provided no statistic.

On April 30, a 55-year-old LGBTI resident of Dushanbe was killed in Shohmansur District. The Ministry of Interior reported that authorities detained two suspects in connection with the killing. The ministry did not make any other official statement about the investigation.

It was difficult for transgender persons to obtain new official documents from the government. The law allows for changing gender in identity papers if a medical organization provides an authorized document. Because a document of this form does not exist, it was difficult for transgender persons to change their legal identity to match their gender. This created internal problems involving any activity requiring government identification, including the acquisition of a passport for international travel.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

There was societal discrimination against individuals with HIV/AIDS. According to a 2014 demographic and health survey, 73 percent of individuals reported discriminatory attitudes towards those with HIV. In March 2014 President Rahmon signed amendments to the law on entry, stay, and residence for persons with HIV. The amendments remove mandatory HIV testing for foreigners, thereby eliminating all HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay, and residence.

The government offered HIV testing free of charge at 140 facilities, and partner notification was mandatory and anonymous. The World Health Organization noted officials systematically offered HIV testing to prisoners, military recruits, street children, refugees, and persons seeking visas, residence, or citizenship.

Women were increasingly vulnerable to HIV infection because of social taboos on discussion of sex education topics and popular sentiment against the use of condoms. Women remained a minority of those infected with HIV, although their incidence of infection was increasing. The government's National Center on HIV, under the Ministry of Health, detected 580 cases of HIV infection during the first half of the year, of which 370 were male and 214 were female. There were 7,142 officially registered cases of HIV in the country, 4,953 of which involved men and 2,189 involved women.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right to form and join independent unions but requires registration for all NGOs, including trade unions. The law also provides that union activities, such as collective bargaining, be free from interference except "in cases specified by law," but the law does not define such cases. Workers have the right to strike, but the law requires that meetings and other mass actions have prior

official authorization, limiting trade unions' ability to organize meetings or demonstrations. The law provides for the right to organize and bargain collectively, but it does not specifically prohibit antiunion discrimination.

Workers joined unions, but the government used informal means to exercise considerable influence over organized labor, including influencing the selection of labor union leaders. The government-controlled umbrella Federation of Trade Unions of Tajikistan did not effectively represent worker interests. There were reports that the government compelled some citizens to join state-endorsed trade unions and impeded formation of independent unions. According to International Labor Organization figures, 1.3 million persons belonged to unions. There were no reports of antiunion discrimination during the year.

Citizens were reluctant to strike due to fear of government retaliation. Collective bargaining contracts covered 90 percent of workers. In some cases foreign, specifically Chinese, workers received preferable treatment to local workers in labor disputes.

The government fully controlled trade unions and other labor unions. There were no reports of threats or violence by government entities towards trade unions; however, fearing government retaliation, unions made only limited demands regarding workers' rights. Most workers' grievances were resolved with union mediation between employee and employer.

Labor NGOs not designated as labor organizations played a minimal role in worker rights, as they were restricted from operating fully and freely.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, including that of children, except in cases defined in law. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate. The law prohibits both forced sexual exploitation and forced labor; it prescribes penalties of five to 15 years' imprisonment. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with other serious crimes, such as rape, and sufficient to deter violations.

The government continued to make progress in reducing the use of forced labor in the annual cotton harvest. NGO representatives did not monitor the cotton harvest for forced labor in 2014 due to lack of funding; however, the Ministry of Labor conducted its own monitoring mission, and during the year NGOs again conducted

a monitoring mission. The government appointed a Ministry of Labor official to accompany the International Organization for Migration (IOM) representatives during the fall cotton harvest to meet local officials in cotton-growing districts and to reinforce the prohibition on forced child labor.

In April the Khujand City Court convicted two local women of human trafficking, sentencing one to eight years' imprisonment and the other to 12 years' imprisonment. The two women transported four young women from Khujand to Dubai for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The women were subjected to trafficking in 2008 and returned to the country in 2014. Upon return, two of the four women turned to law enforcement authorities for assistance. The case remained pending at year's end.

See also 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 minimum age for children to work is 16 years, although children may work at age 15 with permission from the local trade union. By law children younger than age 18 may work no more than six hours a day and 36 hours per week. Children as young as age seven may participate in household labor and agricultural work, which is separately classified as family assistance. Many children younger than age 10 worked in bazaars or sold goods on the street. The highest incidences of child labor were in the domestic and agricultural sectors.

Enforcement of child labor laws is the responsibility of the Prosecutor General's Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and appropriate local and regional governmental offices. Unions also are responsible for reporting any violations in the employment of minors. Citizens can bring unresolved cases involving child labor between unions and employers before the prosecutor general for investigation. There were few reports of violations because most children worked under the family assistance exception. There were reports that military recruitment authorities kidnapped children under the age of 18 from public places and subjected them to compulsory military service to fulfill local recruitment quotas.

The government enforced labor laws and worked with the IOM to prevent the use of forced child labor in the autumn cotton harvest. Nevertheless, there were isolated reports that some children were exploited in agriculture. The overall

instances of forced child labor in the cotton harvest decreased dramatically since 2013; the 2013 IOM annual assessment showed local or national government authorities responded to most cases. The government levied nine fines against employers using child labor and collected a total of TJS 7,200 (\$1,470) from violators.

The Interministerial Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons disseminated a directive to local officials reiterating existing prohibitions. The government accredited NGOs working through the IOM to monitor the cotton harvest. On September 1, NGOs working with the IOM started monitoring the 2015 cotton harvest for child labor. In total, 13 NGOs monitored the country's 25 cotton-growing districts. Additionally, government officials accompanying IOM representatives met with local officials to reiterate the law's prohibition against forced child labor. Site visits by foreign diplomats confirmed the monitors' observations that government efforts resulted in a significant reduction in the use of forced child labor.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment or Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation on the basis of race, sex, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV-positive status, other communicable diseases, or social status. The law does not expressly prohibit worker discrimination on the basis of color, religion, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, or age. There were no official complaints of such discrimination with respect to employment and occupation. Nevertheless, employers discriminated against individuals based on sexual orientation and HIV-positive status, and police generally did not enforce these laws. LGBTI persons and HIV-positive individuals opted not to file complaints due to fear of harassment from law enforcement and the belief that police would not take action.

The law provides that women receive equal pay as men for equal work, but cultural barriers continued to restrict the professional opportunities available to women. Employers forced women to work overtime without additional pay.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum monthly wage was TJS 250 (\$50), and the minimum monthly pension was TJS 130 (\$26).

Some establishments compensated their employees with food commodities or enterprise-produced products, which employees either sold or bartered in local markets. As of August 2014, the government defined the minimum standard of living as a basket of goods equal to TJS 153.5 (\$31) per month. The government did not have a formal poverty line.

There is no legal prohibition on excessive compulsory overtime. The law mandates overtime payment, with the first two hours paid at a time-and-a-half rate and the remainder at double the rate. Resources, inspections, and remediation to enforce the law were inadequate. Penalties for violations, including fines of TJS 800 to TJS 1,200 (\$163 to \$245) were adequate, but the regulation was not enforced, and the government did not pay its employees for overtime work. Overtime payment was inconsistent in all sectors of the labor force. The Ministry of Finance enforces financial aspects of the labor law, and the Agency of Financial Control of the presidential administration oversees other aspects of the law.

The law establishes occupational health and safety standards. It permits workers to remove themselves from hazardous conditions without risking loss of employment. The State Technical Supervision Committee under the Council of Ministers is responsible for enforcing health and safety standards. The government did not fully comply with these standards, partly because of corruption and the low salaries paid to inspectors. Few workers removed themselves from hazardous conditions.

Farmers and agricultural workers, accounting for more than 75 percent of employment in the country, continued to work under difficult circumstances. There was no system to monitor or regulate working conditions in the agricultural sector. Wages were low, and many workers received payment in kind. The government's failure to ensure and protect land tenure rights continued to limit its ability to protect agricultural workers' rights.