Bhutan

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

2004

February 28, 2005

Bhutan is a hereditary monarchy. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck governs with the support of a National Assembly, a Cabinet, a Council of Ministers, and the Monastic Body, a 3,500-member institution headed by 4 representatives selected with the consent of the King. The King is the head of state and is responsible for matters relating to the country's security and sovereignty. There is no written constitution to protect fundamental political and human rights. A committee consisting of elected representatives, religious leaders, judicial and government officials continued to draft a constitution. Citizens voted for 105 of the 150 representatives in the National Assembly in 2003, with the remainder appointed by the King, the Buddhist clergy, and the Council of Ministers. The National Judicial Commission, a government-appointed body, oversees the judiciary.

The Royal Bhutan Police, under full control of the Government, has sole responsibility for the maintenance of internal security. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. Some members of the security forces committed human rights abuses.

The economy was centrally directed. It was based primarily on agriculture, which provided the main livelihood for 80 percent of the population and accounted for approximately half of the gross domestic product (GDP); the population was approximately 800,000. Hydroelectric power production and tourism were key sources of revenue. The GDP growth rate was 6.5 percent, and wages generally kept up with inflation.

The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, problems remained. The King exercised strong and direct power over security and sovereignty, though day-to-day governance was the responsibility of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. The Government placed limitations on civil, political, and workers' rights. The Government prohibited political parties, and none operated legally. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of arbitrary arrest or detention. The King, using recommendations from the National Judicial Commission, made judicial appointments to the High Court and District. The National Judicial Commission reviewed judicial reform and processed appointments to the bench. The authorities infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government restricted freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and association. A significant refugee problem persisted. The Government restricted worker rights.

**RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The laws proscribe torture and abuse. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Prison conditions reportedly were Spartan. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) conducted two visits to the Lodrai Sub-district Jail and Chamgang Central Jail during the year. Prisoners incarcerated for political reasons were kept in areas separate from common criminals and men and women were kept in separate cells.

The Government and the ICRC signed a 5-year Memorandum of Understanding in 1998, and in September, the Government extended the ICRC prison visits program for another year, as it has done annually. The ICRC was allowed generally unhindered access to prisons. An exception was the country's denial of an ICRC request to visit Indian prisoners of war and assist in the evacuation of women and children stranded by fighting following the December 2003 military offensive against guerillas from the United Liberation Front of Asom (Assam) (ULFA), which had been using the country as a base of operations against India. All of the ULFA prisoners reportedly were turned over to Indian authorities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions'.

Under the law, police may not arrest a person without a warrant and must bring an arrested person before a court within 24 hours, exclusive of travel time from place of arrest. Human rights activists alleged that legal protections were incomplete, due to deficiencies in police training and practice. The initiation of ICRC prison visits and the establishment of an ICRC mail service between detainees and family members helped to alleviate reports in previous years of incommunicado detention of prisoners.

According to the ICRC, of those persons detained in connection with political dissidence and violence in 1991-92, 70 continued to serve sentences after conviction by the High Court. Reports indicated that six of those detained in 1991-92 were released in 2003. There were no developments and none expected in the case of Damber Singh Pulami, a member of the banned Bhutan People's Party, arrested in 2001. Some Nepal-based refugees who reportedly returned to the country without authorization were subsequently arrested.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The judiciary is overseen by the National Judicial Commission, which was established in 2003. The King appointed a 39-member committee to draft a constitution in 2001, intended to establish a constitutional monarchy (see Section 3). The judicial system consists of three branches, the Sub-Divisional Court, the District Court, and a High Court. Only the King can pardon or commute a sentence. Judges to the High Court and twenty District Courts were appointed by the King on the recommendation of the National Judicial Commission and may be removed, suspended or censured by him, but only after the National Judicial Commission requests such action. The Chief Justice, using recommendations of the Judicial Service Council, made judicial appointments to the sub-divisional courts.

The Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) is the judicial support department of the Government and conducted state prosecutions, drafted and reviewed legislation, and rendered legal counsel. The OLA is composed of a Legal Services Division with domestic, international, and human rights sections, and a Prosecution Division, with a criminal section and a civil section.

Citizens generally had the right to a fair trial. Criminal cases and a variety of civil matters were adjudicated under both customary law and legal code established in the 17th century, revised in 1958 and 1965, and codified in 2001 as the Bhutan Civil and Criminal Procedure Code. State-appointed prosecutors filed charges and prosecuted cases for offenses against the State. In other cases, the relevant organizations and departments of government filed charges and conducted the prosecution. Defendants had the right to be presented with written charges in their own language, and to be given time to prepare their own defense. According to some political dissidents, this practice was not always respected.

There were reports that defendants received legal representation at trial, and could choose from a list of 165 government-licensed advocates to assist with their defense; however, it was not known how many defendants actually received such assistance. Defendants were also able to present their own cases. Village headmen, who had the power to arbitrate disputes, constituted the bottom rung of the judicial system. Magistrates, each with responsibility for a block of villages, could review the decisions of village headmen. Magistrates' decisions could be appealed to district judges, of which there was one for each of the country's 20 districts. The High Court in Thimphu is the country's Supreme Court.

Defendants have the right to appeal to the High Court and may make a final appeal to the King, who traditionally delegated the decision to the Royal Advisory Council. Trials were supposed to be conducted in open hearings, except for family law and cases involving juveniles. There was a legal requirement that citizens pay for their legal counsel; however, many citizens were unable to afford representation and thus, in practice, did not receive legal assistance in court.

Questions on family law such as marriage, divorce, adoption and child custody were addressed under the Marriage Act of 1980, amended in 1996.

Approximately 70 prisoners were serving sentences for offenses related to political dissidence or violence. Most were ethnic Nepalese who committed the alleged offenses during 1991-92, and may be political prisoners (see Section 1.d.).

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

The laws do not provide for these rights, and according to human rights groups, police regularly conducted house-to-house searches for suspected dissidents without explanation or legal justification. The Government requires all citizens, including minorities, to wear the traditional dress of the ethnic majority in all public places, and strictly enforced this law for visits to Buddhist religious buildings, monasteries, government offices, in schools, and when attending official functions and public ceremonies; however, some citizens commented that enforcement of this law was arbitrary and sporadic (see Section 5).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Government restricted freedom of speech, and to a lesser extent, freedom of the press. The country's only regular publication was Kuensel, a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 15,000. It also reported stories on a daily basis through its on-line edition (kuenselonline.com). Kuensel was formerly government-run, and human rights groups stated that government ministries reviewed editorial material and suppressed or changed content. According to the Government, Kuensel was independent and funded entirely through advertising and subscription revenue. Its board consisted of senior civil servants and private individuals. Kuensel was published in the English, Dzongkha, and Nepali languages, although the Nepali edition had a minimal circulation. It supported the Government but occasionally reported criticism of the King and of government policies in the National Assembly. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that journalists working for Kuensel were subjected to government threats and harassment. The Government maintained that there were no restrictions on individuals starting new publications; it argued instead that the market was too small to support any. Foreign newspapers and magazines were available, but readership was in the hundreds and primarily limited to government officials. There were no reports of government restrictions on academic freedom.

The Government allowed television broadcasts of locally produced and foreign programs. There were 50 cable providers in the country with more than 15,000 subscribers. A large variety of programming was available, including CNN and BBC. The Government did not censor cable content. The radio station was government owned.

The Government did not restrict use of the Internet; however, the Government did regulate all material it considered pornographic. In May 2003, the Royal Bhutan University, comprised of 10 colleges, opened in Thimphu.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law does not provide for freedom of assembly and association and the Government restricted these rights in practice by not permitting the creation of political parties and organizations; however, the Government allowed civic and business organizations to function freely. The Government regarded political parties organized by ethnic Nepalese exiles--the Bhutan People's Party, the Bhutan National Democratic Party, and the Druk National Congress as "terrorist and antinational" organizations and declared them illegal. These parties, which sought the repatriation of refugees and democratic reforms, did not conduct activities inside the country.

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted this right in practice and Buddhism was the state religion. Approximately two-thirds of the population practiced either Drukpa Kagyupa or Ningmapa Buddhism.

The Government subsidized monasteries and shrines of the Drukpa sect and provided aid to approximately one-third of the Kingdom's 12,000 monks. The Government also provided financial assistance for the construction of Drukpa Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist temples and shrines. Societal pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms was prevalent.

The King declared that major Hindu festivals were national holidays, and the royal family participated in them. However, there were no Hindu temples in Thimphu, despite the migration of many ethnic Nepalese to the city. NGOs reported that permission from the Government to build a Hindu temple was required but rarely granted. Followers of religions other than Buddhism and Hinduism generally were free to worship in private homes but could not erect religious buildings or congregate in public. International Christian relief organizations and Jesuit priests were active in education and humanitarian activities. Proselytization through financial and material inducement was illegal, and dissidents living outside the country claimed that the Government prohibited conversions. The Government denied the dissidents' claims, and asserted that any citizen was free to practice any religion openly.

According to dissidents living outside of the country, only Buddhist religious teaching was permitted in the schools. Some dissidents claimed that Buddhist prayer is compulsory in all government-run schools. Applicants for government services sometimes were asked their religion before services were rendered. All government civil servants were required to take an oath of allegiance to the King, the country, and the people. The oath did not have religious content, but was administered by a Buddhist lama (see Section 5).

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law does not provide for these rights, and the Government placed some limits on them in practice. Citizens traveling in border regions were required to show their citizenship identity cards at immigration check points, which in some cases were located a considerable distance from what is in effect an open border with India. By treaty, citizens may reside and work in India. In addition, ethnic Nepalese claimed that they were frequently denied security clearances, which is a prerequisite for obtaining a passport form. The ethnic Nepalese said that since the clearances were based on the security clearance of their parents, the clearances frequently excluded children of ethnic Nepalese. All citizens must have a security clearance from the Government.

The law neither provides for nor prohibits forced exile. Although the Government officially does not use formal exile, many political dissidents freed under government amnesties stated that they were released on the condition that they depart the country. The Government denied this. Many of those released subsequently registered at refugee camps in Nepal, and some relocated to India.

The law does not provide for the granting of asylum in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol (see Section 5); however, the Government recognizes the right to asylum in accordance with international refugee law. The Government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. There were no reports that the Government did not provide protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

During the mid- and late-1980s, citizenship became a highly contentious matter. Requirements for citizenship resulted in the denaturalization of many ethnic Nepalese residents of the country; however, residents who lost citizenship under the 1985 citizenship law were permitted to apply for naturalization if they were able to prove residence during the 15 years prior to that time. The Government declared all residents who could not meet the new citizenship requirements to be illegal immigrants. In addition, citizens who voluntarily emigrated lost their citizenship. Beginning in 1988, the Government expelled large numbers of ethnic Nepalese to enforce the new citizenship law.

Many of the ethnic Nepalese went to camps in Nepal where they remained. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 100,000 ethnic Nepalese from the country have been living in 7 camps in southeastern Nepal since the early 1990s. Also, approximately 15,000 additional persons fled the country and now reside in the Indian states of West Bengal and Assam, but UNHCR has not accorded them refugee status. Since 1994, there have been an ongoing series of negotiations between Nepal and the country to resolve the Bhutanese refugee problem.

In June 2003, the Joint Verification Team (JVT), composed of representatives of both the country and Nepal, released verification results for one of the refugee camps, the Khudunabari camp. It identified 2.4 percent of the total camp population as eligible Bhutanese citizens, with the absolute right of return, 70.6 percent were "voluntary migrants," and would have to apply for citizenship in Bhutan if they chose to return, 24.2 percent were found to be "non-nationals" and could not return, and 2 percent were found to be criminals and would have to face charges if they returned to the country. The 2.4 percent categorized as Bhutanese citizens remained in Nepal at year's end. During the year, the Government did not restart the JVT process, citing concerns over the security situation in Nepal following an attack on its verification team members by refugees in Khudunabari camp in December 2003.

The Citizenship Act provided for the revocation of the citizenship of any naturalized citizen who "has shown by act or speech to be disloyal in any manner whatsoever to the King, country, and people of Bhutan." The Home Ministry later declared in a circular that any nationals leaving the country to assist "antinationals," and the families of such persons, would forfeit their citizenship. Human rights groups alleged that these provisions were used widely to revoke the citizenship of ethnic Nepalese who subsequently were expelled from or otherwise departed the country.

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

Citizens do not have the right to change their government. The country is a monarchy with sovereign power vested in the King. However, during the year, the 39-member Drafting Commission continued its consultations with international constitutional law experts. The Chief Justice of the High Court chaired the drafting committee, which was composed of representatives of the Monastic body, the people, the judiciary, and the Royal Government.

In 2003, citizens elected 105 members of the 150-member National Assembly. Of the remaining 45 seats, the Buddhist clergy selected 10, and the King appointed the remaining 35 members. The National Assembly has the power to remove ministers whom the King appoints, but it never has done so. Political authority has been devolved to the National Assembly, which can pass legislation; however, ultimate control still resided in the King and the Cabinet, which is composed of the Royal Advisory Council and the Council of Ministers.

The National Assembly, which convenes once a year, elects the Council of Ministers and the Royal Advisory Council. A special session, if necessary can be called at any time.

Each National Assembly constituency consists of a number of villages. Each village is permitted to nominate one candidate, and the vote is conducted by secret ballot, according to national election law. There is no provision for self-nomination, and the law states that no person may campaign for the candidacy or canvass through other means. Political parties were not allowed. Parties established abroad by ethnic Nepalese and Eastern Bhutanese were banned (see Section 2.b.).

In 2003, human rights activists claimed that the only time individual citizens have any involvement in choosing a National Assembly representative is when they were asked by the village headman for consensus approval of a village candidate. The activists claimed that district officials suggested candidates, who in turn take their direction from the central Government, and that consensus approval takes place at a public gathering. Human rights activists stated that there was no secret ballot; however, the Government refuted these allegations. According to the Government, a secret ballot was now mandatory, even if there was only one candidate.

All cabinet ministers are nominated by the King and elected by the National Assembly. A minister's term is limited to 5 years, after which he or she must pass a vote of confidence in the National Assembly to remain in office. The National Assembly, by a two-thirds vote of no confidence, can require the King to abdicate and to be replaced by the next person in the line of succession. The position of chairman rotates on a yearly basis, beginning with the minister who receives the most votes. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers also serves as Prime Minster and head of government. At year's end, Finance Minister Yeshey Zimba served as chairman and prime minister.

Corruption was a growing concern during the year; however, the Government took some steps to combat the problem. In December, the Government created the Public Accounts Committee in the National Assembly, an anti-corruption agency charged with monitoring how government funds were spent. The Government also instituted an anti-corruption fraud alert system where citizens could post information on corrupt practices on the Royal Audit Authority website.

There is no law providing for public access to government information.

There were 15 women in the 150-member National Assembly. There were 2 women in the High Court, 23 percent of civil service employees were women, and women held more than 30 percent of positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There was no provision for allocating a set number or percentage of parliamentary seats for women or members of minority groups.

All major ethnic groups were represented in the National Assembly, including 14 ethnic Nepalese. However, NGOs reported that ethnic Nepalese were underrepresented in the Assembly.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

There were no legal human rights organizations in the country. The Government regarded human rights groups established by ethnic Nepalese exiles--the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan, the People's Forum for Human Rights in Bhutan, and the Association of Human Rights Activists-Bhutan--as political organizations and did not permit them to operate in the country.

ICRC representatives conducted a biannual prison visit, and the Government allowed them unhindered access to detention facilities, including those in southern districts inhabited by ethnic Nepalese.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability, language, or social status. In the past, the Government committed many abuses against ethnic Nepalese, which led to the departure of 100,000 of them. At the time, the Government claimed that it was concerned about the rapid population growth of and political agitation by the ethnic Nepalese. The Government claimed that ethnic and gender discrimination in employment was not a problem. It claimed that ethnic Nepalese filled 16 percent of the civil service or government employment, which was less than their proportion of the total population. Bhutanese human rights groups active outside the country claimed that ethnic Nepalese actually make up approximately one-third of the country's population, and that the Government underreported their numbers. The Government stated that 25 percent of the population was ethnic Nepalese. Ethnic Nepalese claimed they were subject to discrimination and prejudice.

Women

The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence against women; however, the provisions of criminal law generally cover such crimes. There was no evidence that rape or spousal abuse were extensive problems. However, NGOs reported that many women did not report rape because of cultural taboos or because they were unaware of their legal options.

The Rape Act contains a clear definition of criminal sexual assault and specified penalties. In cases of rape involving minors, sentences range from 5 to 17 years in prison. In extreme cases, a rapist may be imprisoned for life. There were few reported instances of sexual harassment.

Women were accorded respect in the traditions of most ethnic groups and participated freely in the social and economic life of the country. Inheritance law provides for equal inheritance among all sons and daughters, but traditional inheritance practices, which vary among ethnic groups, may be observed if the heirs choose to forego legal challenges. Dowries were not customary, even among ethnic Nepalese Hindus. Among some groups, inheritance practices favoring daughters reportedly accounted for the large numbers of women who owned shops and businesses and for an accompanying tendency of women to drop out of higher education to go into business. However, female school enrollment has been growing in response to government policies and it was 47 percent. Women in unskilled jobs generally were paid slightly less than men in the same positions. Women constituted approximately 30 percent of the formal work force.

Questions related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance were adjudicated by the Marriage Act of 1996. The minimum age of marriage for women was 18 years. The law provides for equal treatment for both men and women; however, the application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group often resulted in discrimination against women. Polygamy is allowed, provided the first wife gives her permission. Polyandry is permitted but rare. Marriages may be arranged by the marriage partners themselves as well as by their parents. Divorce was common. The law requires that all marriages be registered.

The National Women's Association of Bhutan has been active since 1981 and has tried to encourage women to improve their living standards and socio-economic status. A National Commission on Women and Children was established during the year to promote the rights of women and children.

Children

The Government demonstrated its commitment to child welfare by rapidly expanding the number of primary schools, healthcare facilities, and immunization programs. For example, the King established the Youth Development Fund in 1998 to provide assistance for ongoing and new youth activities and programs. The Government provided free and compulsory primary school education, and primary school enrollment increased 9 percent per year since 1991, with enrollment of girls increasing at an even higher rate. During the year, the participation rate for children in primary schools was estimated at 85 percent, with the rate of completion of 7 years of schooling at 86 percent for girls and at 73 percent for boys. There is no law barring ethnic Nepalese children from attending school. However, many primary schools in southern areas heavily populated by ethnic Nepalese were closed in 1990 and remained closed. The closure of the schools effectively barred ethnic Nepalese in southern areas from obtaining primary and secondary education. Dissidents claimed that the few schools operating in the south gave preference to the children of government officials and members of the security forces. The shortage of places in these schools often forced local inhabitants to send their children to other areas of the country for schooling.

The Government denied security clearance forms to children of ethnic Nepalese who the Government claimed were "anti-nationals." Exile groups claimed that Nepalese secondary-level students scoring highly on national exams were not always given the same advantages as other students (such as the chance to study abroad at government expense), particularly if they were related to prominent dissidents or refugees. This allegation was based on the fact that they were denied the security clearance necessary to obtain a passport for travel abroad. The Government refuted this claim, stating that all scholarships were merit based.

Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons; however, there were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, or within the country. In September 2003, Bhutan ratified the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) convention on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children for prostitution.

Persons with Disabilities

The law does not specifically protect the rights of citizens with disabilities, nor does it mandate access to buildings; however, there was no evidence of official discrimination against persons with disabilities with regard to employment, education, access to health care, or in the provision of other state services.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

After the expulsion of many ethnic Nepalese in the early 1990s, discriminatory measures with regard to ethnic minority communities continued. The law requires that the national dress be worn for official occasions and as a school uniform, and that Dzongkha be taught as a second language in all schools. No instruction in Nepali as a second language was required or offered.

Drukpa Bhutanese have been resettled in the southern part of the country on land vacated by the ethnic Nepalese living in refugee camps in Nepal (see Section 2.d.). Human rights groups maintained that this prejudiced any eventual outcome of negotiations over the return of the refugees to the country. The Government maintained that citizens who are ethnic Nepalese from the south sometimes were resettled on more fertile land in other parts of the country. The failure of the Government to facilitate the return of ethnic Nepalese refugees has tended to reinforce societal prejudices against this group, as has the Government's one-time only policy on the forced retirement of refugee family members in government service and the resettlement of Drukpa on land vacated by expelled ethnic Nepalese in the south. The Government claimed the resettlement scheme was part of a nationwide program to discourage migration to urban centers and reduce landless people's dependence on migrant farming.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law does not allow workers to form or join unions and there were no labor unions. The Government maintained that, with very little industrialization, there was little labor to be organized. The total labor force numbered approximately 412,000 persons, of whom 279,000 worked in rural areas. In 2003, a Ministry of Labor was established to analyze the country's labor situation and provide vocational training.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law does not authorize collective bargaining or the right to strike, and the Government was not a member of the International Labor Organization. Industry accounted for approximately 25 percent of the GDP but employed only a minute fraction of the total work force. The country lacked a large pool of ready labor; for major projects, such as road works, the Government brought in hired laborers from India.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Government prohibits forced or compulsory labor and there were no reports that such practices occurred. However, voluntary community service was often practiced, which included building local roads, schools and hospitals. The system of mandatory national work service was abolished in 1996; however, NGOs stated that this practice was still administered selectively. For instance, NGOs believed the practice often selected poor agricultural workers at the height of the harvesting season. There was no evidence to suggest that domestic workers were subjected to coerced or bonded labor.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

There is no minimum age for employment; however, the minimum age of 18 was established "in all matters of the state." Children often performed agricultural work and chores on family farms. The law does not specifically prohibit forced or compulsory labor by children, but there were no reports that such practices occurred. As a state party to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government supported the provisions contained therein.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

A 1994 circular established wage rates, rules and regulations for labor recruiting agencies. It also established the regulations for payment of worker's compensation. Wage rates were revised periodically, and range upward from a minimum of roughly $2.50 (100 ngultrums) per day plus various allowances paid in cash or kind. This minimum wage provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The workday was defined as 8 hours with a 1-hour lunch break, and employers must grant regular days of leisure. Work in excess of this must be paid at one and one-half times normal rates.

The largest salaried work force was the government service, which had an administered wage structure last revised in 1988 but supplemented by special allowances and increases. The last such increase was in 1999. Civil Service regulations require equal pay for equal work for men and women. According to the latest Census of Manufacturing Industries, only 38 industrial establishments employed more than 50 workers. The Government favored family-owned farms. Land laws prohibit a farmer from selling his or her last 5 acres and require the sale of holdings in excess of 25 acres. This, along with the country's rugged geography, resulted in a predominantly self-employed agricultural workforce. Workers are entitled to free medical care. Persons who could not receive adequate care within the country were flown to other countries (usually India) for treatment. Workers are eligible for compensation for partial or total disability, and, in the event of death, their families are entitled to compensation. Existing labor regulations do not grant workers the right to remove themselves from work situations that endanger health and safety without jeopardizing their continued employment.