

Human Rights Report: Suriname

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

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Suriname is a constitutional democracy, with a president elected by the unicameral legislature or by the larger United People's Assembly. The population is approximately 524,000. After generally free and fair elections in 2005, the New Front Plus government, consisting of a coalition of eight political parties, was formed. In 2005 the United People's Assembly reelected Ronald Venetiaan as president. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens. However, there were problems in some areas, including overcrowded detention facilities; an overwhelmed judiciary with a large case backlog; lengthy pretrial detention; self-censorship by some media; governmental corruption; societal discrimination against women, minorities, and indigenous people; violence against women; trafficking in women, girls, and boys; and child labor in the informal sector.

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 that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

During the year authorities completed an internal affairs investigation into the August 2008 police shooting and killing of Charles Burlison, a detainee who escaped a pretrial detention cell in May 2008 while awaiting trial on charges of murder and armed robbery. The Attorney General's Office reviewed the case and did not prosecute.

There were no known developments, and none were expected, in the October 2008 police shooting and killing of an armed robbery suspect.

During the year authorities completed the investigation into the 2007 killing of Andy Aroma and forwarded the results to the Attorney General's Office. The Attorney General's Office reviewed the case and did not prosecute.

As mandated by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' ruling on the 1986 killings of 39 Moiwana residents, the government provided a settlement payment to the Moiwana Foundation and entered its second phase of housing construction in Moiwana village.

The trial of former military head of state Desi Bouterse and his codefendants for the 1982 extrajudicial killing of 15 political opponents continued at year's end.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

While the law prohibits such practices, human rights groups and the media continued to express concern about mistreatment by police and prison officials and reported isolated incidents of abuse of prisoners by prison officials.

On December 24, mob violence in Albina occurred after a Brazilian man stabbed to death a Maroon man during a dispute. The violence, primarily directed towards Brazilian and Chinese migrants, resulted in at least three rapes. At year's end 20 persons, including a local official, were in custody on charges including rape, theft, and arson.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions were poor. There were three prisons, which held female and male prisoners separately. There were also 19 smaller jails, or temporary detention centers, in police stations throughout the country. Most of these facilities, particularly the older jails, were unsanitary and seriously overcrowded. As of October 17, the 19 jails and three prisons held 584 men and 30 women. At year's end the three main prisons and the main pretrial detention center that opened in December 2008 held 915 persons.

Violence among prisoners was common. In a letter addressed to an attorney's office in November, prisoners from the Santo Boma prison complained of inadequate food provisions, mistreatment by prison guards, limited ventilation, and a lack of rehabilitation programs.

Human rights organizations expressed concern about conditions in pretrial detention facilities, which remained overcrowded. Growing numbers of convicted prisoners were held in pretrial detention cells due to prison overcrowding. Due to staff shortages, police officers rarely permitted detainees to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also alleged that meals were inadequate.

Conditions in the women's jail and prison facilities were generally better than those in the men's facilities. Following conviction, girls under age 18 were held in the women's detention center and in the women's section of one of the prison complexes.

There was one juvenile detention facility, Opa Doeli, for boys and girls under the age of 18. This facility, located in Paramaribo, was considered adequate, provided educational and recreational facilities, and was occupied to less than its maximum capacity. A separate wing of the detention facility held boys under age 18 convicted of serious crimes.

The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers, and such visits occurred during the year.

The Welzijns Institute Nickerie, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) operating in the western district of Nickerie, visited and provided counseling for detainees in the youth detention center in that district. The institute continued a program to train prison officers to counsel detainees.

The government continued construction on the main pretrial detention center to improve conditions and reduce overcrowding. During the year the detention center absorbed pretrial detainees that were previously imprisoned in the 19 smaller jails around the country.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions. Due to a shortage of judges, prisoners who appealed their cases often served their full sentences before the lengthy appeals process could be completed.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The armed forces are responsible for national security and border control, with the military police having direct responsibility for immigration control at the country's ports of entry. All elements of the military are under the control of the Ministry of Defense. Civilian police bear primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and report to the Ministry of Justice and Police.

Corruption remained a problem. The Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ), an office within the Police Department, investigates complaints against members of the police force. The OPZ received 189 complaints and launched 57 investigations into cases involving narcotics, bribery, and other types of police misconduct. In contrast to 2008, the OPZ received no reports of police abuse. Impunity was not a problem; during the year authorities relieved 23 police officers of duty for various offenses, six of whom were jailed.

Police effectiveness was hampered by a lack of equipment and training, low salaries, and poor coordination with military forces.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

Individuals were apprehended openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and brought before an independent judiciary. The law provides detainees with the right to a prompt judicial determination of the legality of the detention, and authorities respected this right in practice. Detainees were promptly informed of the charges against them. Police may detain for up to 14 days a person suspected of committing a crime if the sentence for that crime is longer than four years, and an assistant district attorney or a police inspector may authorize incommunicado detention. The police must bring the accused before a prosecutor to be charged formally within that period, but if additional time is needed to investigate the charge, a prosecutor and, later, a judge of instruction may extend the detention period an additional 150 days. There is no bail system. Detainees were allowed prompt access to counsel of their choosing, but the prosecutor may prohibit access if the prosecutor thinks that this could harm the investigation. Detainees were allowed weekly visits from family members.

The average length of pretrial detention was 30 to 45 days for lesser crimes. Detainees were held in 19 overcrowded detention cells at police stations throughout the country. In accordance with the law, the courts freed most detainees who were not tried within the 164-day period. According to human rights monitors, factors such as a shortage of judges, large case loads, and large numbers of detainees caused trial delays.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the law provides for an independent judiciary, disputes over the appointment of judges undermined the independence of the judiciary. The attorney general and the president of the Court of Justice are appointed for life.

The judicial system consists of three lower courts, two specialized courts, and the Court of Justice as an appeals court. A military court system operates in cooperation with the civilian judicial system.

The Ministry of Justice and Police improved the functioning of the court system by addressing the long-standing shortage of judges. In July five new judges took their positions after completing the ministry's 5-year "Rechterlijke Ambtenaar in Opleiding" (Judicial Government Employee in Training) program in 2008. The former president of the Court of Justice was also sworn in as a judge, bringing the number of judges in the country to 20.

Other problems the judiciary faced included financial dependence on the Ministry of Justice and Police (and hence the executive branch), lack of professional court managers and case management systems to oversee the courts' administrative functions, and lack of physical space. These contributed to a significant case backlog. The courts required a minimum of six months to process criminal cases.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair, public trial in which defendants have the right to counsel, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. All trials are public except for indecency offenses. There is no jury system. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to appeal. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult an attorney in a timely manner. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence. Defendants' attorneys can question witnesses and can present witnesses and evidence on the defendant's behalf. The courts assign private sector lawyers to defend indigent detainees. There were 138 court-assigned attorneys for both the civil and the penal system. The law extends the above rights to all citizens.

Military personnel generally are not subject to civilian criminal law. A member of the armed forces accused of a crime immediately comes under military jurisdiction, and military police are responsible for all such investigations. Military prosecutions are directed by an officer on the public prosecutor's staff and take place in separate courts before two military judges and one civilian judge. Due to the shortage of judges, military and civilian judges are selected from the same pool by the Court of Justice, which makes assignments to specific cases. A mechanism exists to prevent conflicts of interest. The military courts follow the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There is no appeal from the military to the civil system.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Although there are separate procedures for civil processes, the same pool of judges is responsible for presiding over these procedures. There is access to a court to bring lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation. Despite the installation of new judges during the year, the backlog in cases continued. Most civil cases were resolved approximately three to four years after being heard by the courts.

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

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law requires search warrants, which are issued by quasijudicial officers who supervise criminal investigations.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. Individuals could criticize the government publicly or privately without reprisal. There was one case reported to the Attorney General's Office of a newspaper journalist receiving anonymous threats after reporting on government investigations into police corruption.

Some media members continued to practice occasional self-censorship. This was due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership or a response to pressure applied by senior government officials and important community leaders on journalists who published negative stories about the administration. In addition many news outlets were affiliated with particular political parties, which discouraged journalists from reporting on some news items. In July a newscaster from the program *Suriname Vandaag* alleged that the management had engaged in self-censorship on some of its political content. In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of government officials threatening libel actions against the media.

In October and November, the Bureau of Human Rights, under the authority of the Ministry of Justice and Police, conducted training for the media on recognizing human rights violations.

In October the government announced it would pay compensation to two broadcasting companies for the national army's destruction of their radio stations under the military dictatorship of Desire Bouterse in 1982.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail. The International Telecommunication Union reported that there were approximately 10 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2008. The population in the interior did not have equal access to the Internet due to limited infrastructure.

In August the Ministry of Justice and Police held a meeting with the Attorney General's Office; the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Tourism; TeleSur; the police commissioner; and Telecom Authority Suriname to discuss a government approach to gossip Web sites, which some officials saw as an invasion of individual privacy. The media expressed concerns that the government was attempting to limit political criticism.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination against members of religious groups, including anti-Semitic acts. There was a declared Jewish community of approximately 150 persons.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2009 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/.

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

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The occasion did not arise during the year for government cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Although the law does not address forced exile, the government did not use it.

Protection of Refugees

The country is a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Its laws do not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. Under special circumstances, persons may be granted refugee status, and in practice the government provided protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

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

The law provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

The constitution provides for direct election by secret ballot of the 51-member National Assembly no later than five years after the prior election date. The National Assembly in turn elects the president by a two-thirds majority vote. If the legislature is unable to do so, the constitution provides that the United People's Assembly, composed of members of parliament and elected regional and local officials, shall elect the president. After generally free and fair elections in May 2005, the United People's Assembly reelected incumbent Ronald Venetiaan as president in August 2005. Political parties could operate without restriction or outside interference.

Historical and cultural factors as well as societal pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, particularly with respect to marriage and inheritance, inhibited equal participation by women in leadership positions in government and political parties. While women made limited gains in attaining political power, men continued to dominate political life. There were 13 women among the 51 members of the National Assembly and three women among the 17 ministers in the cabinet. During the year four women were sworn in as judges, increasing to five the number of women among the 20 sitting judges. The head clerk of the Court of Justice, that body's highest administrative position, was a woman.

Several factors traditionally limited the participation of Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior to avoid recapture) and indigenous Amerindians in the political process, particularly the fact that their populations were concentrated in remote areas in the interior, removed from the country's centers of political activity. There was one Amerindian and three Maroon political parties during the 2005 election, and voters elected eight Maroons and one Amerindian to the National Assembly. The opportunity for Maroons to participate in the political process increased when the three Maroon parties formed a coalition (A-Combinatie) for the 2005 election and became part of the governing coalition. The A-Combinatie remained active during the year, with three Maroons in the cabinet and several others in decision-making positions.

Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Long delays often occurred before corruption cases came to trial. The World Bank's worldwide governance indicators reflected that government corruption was a problem. The media frequently reported alleged corrupt practices with regard to the acquisition of land by one of the political parties in the governing coalition. In contrast to prior years, a shortage of police personnel did not hamper police investigations of fraud cases.

In September the police announced that 200 pounds of cocaine went missing from a storage vault at the arrest team's headquarters. The minister of justice and police terminated the command of the arrest team due to the incident. The OPZ suspended several arrest team officers and initiated an investigation.

On May 4, former minister of trade and industry Siegfried Gilds was sentenced to one year's imprisonment for his involvement in a money-laundering case and for bribing witnesses. Gilds allegedly laundered SR\$3.56 million (\$1.27 million) between 2003 and 2005. At year's end Gilds was serving his prison sentence pending the outcome of his appeal.

Public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws. Various sections of the Ministry of Justice and Police, including the Fraud Police and the Attorney General's Office, were responsible for combating government corruption.

Although the law provides for public access to government information, such access was limited in practice for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media. While almost every ministry has an information service, onerous bureaucratic hurdles made obtaining information difficult.

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

A number of independent domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. NGOs reported generally positive relationships with government officials, although occasionally officials were not responsive to their views. No international human rights groups operated in the country during the year.

A parliamentary commission on human rights continued operating throughout the year, but resource constraints hampered its effectiveness. Parliament also has a commission dealing with women's and children's rights.

Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on race and ethnicity but does not address discrimination based on disability, language, or social status. Although the law does not specifically prohibit gender discrimination, it provides for protection of women's rights to equal access to education, employment, and property. In practice various sectors of the population, such as women, Maroons, Amerindians, persons with HIV/AIDS, and gay and lesbian persons, suffered forms of discrimination.

Women

In August the law criminalizing rape was amended to include spousal rape. The prescribed penalty for rape or forcible sexual assault ranges between 12 and 15 years' imprisonment. The government enforced the law effectively. Through November the Ministry of Justice and Police registered 27 cases of attempted rape and 68 cases of rape.

Violence against women was a common problem. The Ministry of Justice and Police registered 1,769 cases of domestic violence, an increase from 2008. The media attributed the increase in registered domestic violence cases to a greater awareness of domestic violence issues. On June 20, the National Assembly adopted the Law Combating Domestic Violence, which allowed for more severe punishments for offenders than had been available when prosecuting domestic violence cases under the assault law. Penalties range from four to eight years' imprisonment. The Bureau of Women and Children Policy, under the Ministry of Justice and Police, conducted an awareness campaign on domestic violence in cooperation with the Foundation Ilse Henar Hewith. In August the Bureau of Women and Child Policy trained government officials, social workers, and NGO staff on domestic violence issues. The Victim Assistance Bureau that opened in Paramaribo in December 2008 provided resources for victims of domestic violence and other crimes. It operated a satellite office in Nickerie, the country's second-largest city. There were four victims' rooms in police stations in Paramaribo and Nickerie, and police units were trained to deal with victims and perpetrators of sexual crimes and domestic violence. An NGO operated a shelter for victims of domestic violence.

Although the law prohibits sexual exploitation, including prostitution, in practice prostitution was tolerated and common (see section 6, Trafficking). Poverty continued to put young women at risk of being exploited for commercial sex. The presence of large groups of illegal workers in the gold mining sector in the interior drew young Maroon women and girls into commercial sexual exploitation. Police allowed many brothels to operate but made bimonthly checks on these establishments to monitor if women were being abused, held against their will, or having their passports retained by brothel owners to ensure fulfillment of work contract obligations.

While there was no specific legislation on sexual harassment, prosecutors could cite various penal code articles in filing sexual harassment cases. There were no reported court cases involving sexual harassment in the workplace during the year.

Access to information on contraception and skilled attendance during childbirth and in postpartum care were widely available. Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of children, and have the information and means to do so free from discrimination. Women and men were given equal access to diagnostic services and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Women have the legal right to equal access to education, employment, and property; nevertheless, societal pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, inhibited their full exercise of these rights, particularly with respect to marriage and inheritance. Societal pressures on families to have their daughters married at or near the legal age of marital consent frequently interfered with these girls' education and resulted in the direct passage of all property the women would have inherited from their parents to their husbands and parents-in-law in accordance with these customs.

Men and women generally enjoyed the same rights under property law and under the judicial system. The Bureau for Women and Children, under the Ministry of Justice and Police, worked to ensure the legal rights of women and children.

Women experienced discrimination in access to employment and in rates of pay for the same or substantially similar work. The government did not make specific efforts to combat economic discrimination.

The National Women's Movement, the most active women's rights NGO, continued assisting women in launching small home-based businesses, such as sewing and vegetable growing, and provided general legal help. The Women's Business Group advocated for business opportunities for women, while the Women's Parliament Forum advocated for opportunities in the public sector. Stop Violence against Women provided assistance to victims of domestic violence, including legal help with dissolving an abusive marriage. The Maxi Linder Foundation worked with prostitutes, including women and children who were victims of trafficking, and conducted outreach and informational sessions to inform victims about their rights. Resource constraints continued to limit the effectiveness of these groups.

Children

Citizenship is derived by birth within the country's territory and from one's parents.

Physical and sexual abuse of children continued to be a problem.

During the year police received reports of 265 cases of sexual abuse of children, compared with 338 reported in 2008. The police Youth Affairs Office conducted three visits per week to different schools in the capital and the surrounding areas on a rotating schedule to provide outreach and raise awareness about child abuse and to solicit and investigate complaints. The Youth Affairs Office also raised awareness about sexual abuse, drugs, and alcohol through a weekly television program.

According to one study, more than 80 percent of children in Paramaribo, and an even greater percentage elsewhere, were exposed to violence. An estimated 10 percent of the victims developed post-traumatic stress syndrome as a result of serious mental and physical damage; in most cases victims lacked professional assistance from the government, according to research conducted in 2006 on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Various laws were used to prosecute perpetrators of sexual abuse, and several cases of sexual abuse against minors came to trial. Sentences averaged three years in prison. In the capital there were several orphanages and one privately funded shelter for sexually abused children. In contrast to the previous year, there were no reports of sexual abuse of children in public institutions.

Although the legal age of sexual consent is 14, it was not enforced effectively. The marriage law sets the age of marital consent at 15 for girls and 17 for boys, provided parents of the parties agree to the marriage. Parental permission to marry is required up to age 21. The law also mandates the presence of a civil registry official to register all marriages.

Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of minors remained problems. On July 29, the criminal law was revised to include penalties against child prostitution. The maximum penalty is six years' imprisonment, and the maximum fine is SR\$100,000 (\$35,714). The law also prohibits child pornography, which has a maximum penalty of six years' imprisonment and maximum fine of SR\$50,000 (\$17,857).

UNICEF continued cooperating with the government in providing training to officials from various ministries dealing with children and children's rights. The government-operated "1-2-3" telephone hotline for children provided confidential advice and aid to children in need.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons; however, the country was a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation. No reliable numbers were available indicating the magnitude of the problem.

There were reports that Chinese and Haitian men and women were trafficked to and through the country. Some Chinese men and women were forced to work in supermarkets, construction sites, and in the sex industry. Some Haitian migrants transiting the country were forced to work in the agricultural sector. NGOs expressed concern that local boys and girls, particularly Maroon children, were trafficked to the interior of the country for exploitative work, including sex work at gold mining sites. However, there were no reliable estimates as to the extent of the problem. At least one organized ring trafficked Brazilian women to gold mining sites in the country. There were allegations that other foreign women were trafficked to these sites for sex work and forced labor.

Trafficking was largely under the control of local criminal organizations, many of which were active in the sex industry. The most common victims of sex trafficking were women aged 18 to 23. Many victims were from Brazil and Guyana. Some traffickers lured victims to the country with promises of employment or job training. There were reports that minors from underprivileged areas were trafficked within the country for prostitution.

The penal code specifically prohibits trafficking in persons for both sexual and other purposes. The law covers both internal and external forms of trafficking. Penalties for trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation and labor exploitation, such as forced or bonded labor and involuntary servitude, range from five to 20 years' imprisonment. The Attorney General's Office may press dual charges against a trafficker for both the act of trafficking and for the rape of a victim. The penalty for rape or forcible assault ranges between 12 and 15 years in prison. The government provided free legal services to trafficking victims.

During the year authorities prosecuted six individuals for trafficking in persons; the trial of four other individuals was pending at year's end.

There were reports that government officials, including consular affairs, customs, and immigration officers, fostered an environment conducive to trafficking in persons by allowing individuals who were not bona fide visitors to enter the country.

On June 9, a judge sentenced a Dutch man and two Guyanese women who were arrested in September 2008 for trafficking an underage Guyanese girl and forcing her to work as a prostitute. The Dutch man received two years' imprisonment, one woman received 9 months' imprisonment and a SR\$3,000 fine (\$1,071), and the second woman received 18 months' imprisonment and a SR\$10,000 (\$3,571) fine. The two women appealed the decision. On December 22, they were released from prison after having served two-thirds of their sentences. The outcome of their appeal was pending at year's end.

The government's Antitrafficking Working Group, which has primary responsibility for interagency coordination of antitrafficking efforts, assessed progress and coordinated new actions. Police cooperated with counterparts in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic, and justice officials sought improved mechanisms for cooperation with Colombia and French Guiana. The government requested the cooperation of Trinidad and Tobago and Curacao in investigating the case of 23 individuals trafficked to Trinidad and Tobago for forced labor. The government of Curacao cooperated in extraditing four individuals arrested in connection with the crime (see section 7.c.).

The Public Prosecutor's Office and the police continued a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality. Although prostitution is illegal, the police had informal agreements with many brothel owners allowing them to operate. The Special Antitrafficking Police Unit conducted bimonthly checks to ensure that women were not mistreated, that no minors were present, and that owners did not keep the women's airline tickets or passports.

While there was no shelter designated solely for trafficking victims, the Foundation against Trafficking in Persons, a private organization mandated by the government to provide victim protection, arranged shelter and provided other services to both foreign and domestic victims.

Women arrested in brothel raids as immigration violators and who did not indicate they were trafficked were deported, but authorities sought to treat identified victims as material witnesses needing protection rather than as criminals. An NGO receiving government funding, the Maxi Linder Foundation, continued working with trafficking victims, providing counseling and rehabilitative training.

The government continued operating a trafficking-in-persons awareness campaign funded by the International Organization for Migration and focusing on the Chamber of Commerce, Youth Parliament, and the various districts.

The State Department's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* can be found at www.state.gov/g/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

There are no laws prohibiting discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of state services. In general persons with disabilities suffered from discrimination when applying for jobs and services. Some training programs were provided for the blind and others with disabilities.

There are no laws or programs to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to buildings. A judge may rule that a person with a cognitive disability be denied the right to vote, take part in business transactions, or sign legal agreements. A Ministry of Social Affairs working group remained responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities but made limited progress during the year.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, and no such discrimination complaints were filed during the year. Nonetheless, Maroons, who represent approximately 15 percent of the population, generally continued to be

disadvantaged in the areas of education, employment, and government services. Most Maroons lived in the interior where limited infrastructure reduced their access to educational and professional opportunities and health and social services. Some forms of discrimination that affected indigenous Amerindians also extended to Maroons.

During the year some progress was made on the execution of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' ruling on a 2006 case involving 12 Saramaccan clans who claimed authority over 60 villages in the Upper Suriname River area. In 2007 the court ruled that the government must recognize the collective land rights of the Saramaccan clans, draft legislation that complies with international treaties, establish a development fund of SR\$1,680,000 (\$600,000), and begin demarcation by February 2008. During the year the Saramacca Commission met with the Association of Saramaccan Leaders and prepared a draft report on implementation of the ruling. The Saramacca Commission established a private foundation to manage the development fund and reimbursed the clans for court costs. However, constitutional issues prevented demarcation of land claimed by ethnic groups. It was reported that the Inter-American Court of Human Rights did not take into account the presence of non-Saramaccan groups in the area, including indigenous and Maroon tribes, which complicated the demarcation process. The deadline for implementation is December 19, 2010.

Indigenous People

The law affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous people. Most Amerindians (approximately 3 percent of the population) suffered disadvantages and had only limited ability to participate in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources. The country's political life, educational opportunities, and jobs were concentrated in the capital and its environs, while the majority of Amerindians (as well as Maroons) lived in the interior, where government services were largely unavailable.

Because Amerindian and Maroon lands were not effectively demarcated, populations continued to face problems with illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining. Organizations representing Maroon and Amerindian communities complained that small-scale mining operations, mainly by illegal gold miners, dug trenches that cut residents off from their agricultural land and threatened to drive them away from their traditional settlements. Mercury runoff from these operations also contaminated and threatened traditional food source areas. Many Maroon and Amerindian groups also complained about the government granting land within their traditional territories to third parties, who sometimes prevented the villages from engaging in their traditional activities on those lands. There are no laws granting indigenous people rights to share in the revenues from the exploitation of resources on their traditional lands.

Indigenous groups, with the assistance of the Amazon Conservation Team, mapped their lands and presented proposed demarcation charts to the government in 2000 and to the Ministry of Physical Planning, Land, and Forestry Management in both 2006 and November 2009. At year's end, however, the government had not accepted the proposed demarcations, and the indigenous groups did not have official rights to the lands.

Maroon and Amerindian groups continued to cooperate with each other to exercise their rights more effectively. Moiwana and other NGOs continued to promote the rights of indigenous people.

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

Although the law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, there were reports of employment discrimination against gay and lesbian persons. There were no reports of official discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, access to education, or health care. Police neither perpetrated nor condoned violence against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgender (LGBT) persons. LGBT organizations operated in the country independently and without restriction.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons with HIV/AIDS continued to experience societal discrimination in employment and medical services. An NGO working with HIV-infected persons reported that law enforcement agencies and the fire department conducted HIV testing as part of their hiring procedures. Catering establishments, casinos, and some private companies also reportedly demanded HIV tests prior to employment. The Mamio Foundation noted that individuals, mostly women, reported physical violence or discrimination after their HIV-positive status became known. Insurance companies allegedly denied services to HIV-positive clients, having identified their status via their medication histories.

The Ministry of Health continued its efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS through a comprehensive outreach program involving local health care providers. The program achieved its goal of voluntary testing of 90 percent of expectant mothers. The military continued its ongoing HIV/AIDS awareness program among troops. In October the Ministry of Defense unveiled a two-year plan to develop a workplace policy on HIV/AIDS awareness that included the development of a policy and protocols manual, free condom distribution, and training of peer educators, with the goal of reducing the risk of HIV/AIDS to military personnel and their families.

Section 7 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers did so in practice. Nearly 60 percent of the workforce was organized into unions, and most unions belonged to one of the country's seven major labor federations. Unions were independent of the government but played an active role in politics.

The law provides for the right to strike, and workers in both the public and private sectors exercised this right in practice.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Collective bargaining is protected by law, and the government generally enforced this right in practice. Collective bargaining agreements covered approximately 50 percent of the labor force. The law prohibits employer interference in union activities, and in practice it did not occur.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see section 6, Trafficking).

On April 2, the International Organization for Migration repatriated eight of 11 individuals to Indonesia after it was reported in December 2008 that they were brought to the county under false pretenses and made to work in poor conditions without pay. The remaining three decided to stay in the country and return to work for the employer.

The trial of two individuals arrested after allegedly recruiting 23 men for a cooking course in Trinidad and Tobago and then providing them as forced labor upon arrival in that country continued at year's end. During the year an additional four persons were arrested in Curacao and extradited to Suriname, where they were awaiting trial at year's end.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for most types of employment at 14 years and restricts working hours for minors to day shifts but does not limit the number of hours minors can work. Children younger than 14 are allowed to work only in a family-owned business, small-scale agriculture, and special vocational work. The law does not define the worst forms of child labor. Children younger than 18 are prohibited from doing hazardous work, defined as work dangerous to their life, health, and decency. Children under the age of 15 are not permitted to work on boats. However, the Ministry of Labor and the police enforced the law sporadically, and child labor remained a problem in the informal sector, especially in the western districts of Nickerie and Saramacca, as children faced increasing economic pressure to discontinue their education to seek employment.

Children under 14 worked in gold mines, in informal urban sectors, and reportedly in the commercial sex industry. Employers in these sectors did not guarantee work safety, and children often worked barefoot and without protective gloves or access to medical care. There was a lack of statistical data on the labor environment and child labor situation in the country. In contrast to 2008, there were no reports of commercial sexual exploitation of children and teenagers by caretakers and older recruiters.

The Ministry of Labor's Department of Labor Inspection, with 75 inspectors, has responsibility to implement and enforce labor laws; however, enforcement was inadequate. Inspectors visited private sector companies throughout the country, but no data was available regarding the number of inspections performed during the year. Employers were required to maintain a Register of Young Persons that includes each employee's information. Employing a child less than 14 years of age is punishable by fines and up to 12 months in prison. Parents who permit their children to work in violation of labor laws may also be prosecuted. The government did not investigate exploitive child labor cases outside urban areas. Labor inspectors were not authorized to conduct inspections in the informal sector as responsibility for controlling the informal sector lies with the police.

Although the government provided no programs to remove children from the worst forms of child labor, it supported vocational programs for dropouts and older children to serve as an alternative to underage labor.

On November 20, the National Commission for the Eradication of Child Labor became active. Members included officials from the ministries of labor, social affairs, and education, as well as representatives from labor unions, the private sector, and NGOs. The commission's mandate includes formulating national policy regarding the eradication of child labor, initiating specific programs for indigenous children, developing a list of occupations involving the worst forms of child labor, and monitoring the country's compliance with international child labor standards.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislation providing for a minimum wage. The lowest wage for civil servants was approximately SR\$600 (\$214) per month, including a cost of living allowance, which did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Government employees, who constituted approximately 50 percent of the 100,000-member workforce, frequently supplemented their salaries with second or third jobs, often in the informal sector. The president and the Council of Ministers set and approved civil service wage increases. During the year the government implemented the first phase of a new civil servant wage system, which increased wages for many civil servants.

Work in excess of 45 hours per week on a regular basis requires special government permission, which was granted routinely. Such overtime work earned premium pay. The law prohibits excessive overtime and requires a 24-hour rest period per week.

The government sets occupational health and safety standards, and a 10- to 12-member inspectorate in the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing occupational safety and health regulations, but it did not make regular inspections. There is no law authorizing workers to refuse to work in circumstances they deem unsafe; they must appeal to the inspectorate to declare the workplace situation unsafe.