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Introduction

Freedom House has prepared this overview report as a companion to our annual survey on the state of global political rights and civil liberties, *Freedom in the World*. We are publishing this report to assist policymakers, human rights organizations, democracy advocates, and others who are working to advance freedom around the world. We also hope that the report will be useful to the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The reports are excerpted from *Freedom in the World 2007*, which surveys the state of freedom in 193 countries and 15 select territories. The ratings and accompanying essays are based on events from December 1, 2005 through December 31, 2006. The 17 countries and 3 territories profiled in this report are drawn from the total of 45 countries and 7 territories that are considered to be Not Free and whose citizens endure systematic and pervasive human rights violations.

Included in this report are eight countries judged to have the worst records: Burma, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Also included are two territories, Chechnya and Tibet, whose inhabitants suffer intense repression. These states and regions received the Freedom House survey's lowest rating: 7 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties. Within these entities, state control over daily life is pervasive and wide-ranging, independent organizations and political opposition are banned or suppressed, and fear of retribution for independent thought and action is part of daily life. In the case of Chechnya, the rating in large measure reflects the fallout of a vicious conflict that in the last 12 years has disrupted normal life and resulted in some 200,000 deaths.

The report also includes nine further countries near the bottom of Freedom House's list of the most repressive: Belarus, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Laos, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Zimbabwe. The territory of Western Sahara is also included in this group. While these states scored slightly better than the "worst of the worst," they offer very limited scope for private discussion while severely suppressing opposition political activity, impeding independent organizing, and censoring or punishing criticism of the state.

Massive human rights violations take place in nearly every part of the world. This year's roster of the "most repressive" includes countries from the Americas, the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and East Asia; they represent a wide array of cultures and levels of economic development. This report from Freedom House to the United Nations focuses on states and regions that have seen some of the world's most severe repression and most systematic and brutal violations

of human dignity. Our report seeks to focus the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Council on states and territories that deserve investigation and condemnation for their widespread violations.

The fundamental violations of rights presented in this report are all the more alarming because they stand in sharp contrast to the significant expansion of human liberty over the last three decades. In that period, dozens of states have shed tyranny and embraced democratic rule and respect for basic civil liberties. There has also been growing public support around the world for the values of liberal democracy including multiparty competition, the rule of law, freedom of association, freedom of speech, the rights of minorities, and other fundamental, universally valid human rights. According to our global survey *Freedom in the World*, (whose findings can be accessed online at www.freedomhouse.org) at the beginning of 2007, of the 193 countries in the world, 90 (47 percent) are Free and can be said to respect a broad array of basic human rights and political freedoms. An additional 58 (30 percent) are Partly Free, with some abridgments of basic rights and weak enforcement of the rule of law. In all, some 3 billion people—46 percent of the world's population—live in Free states in which a broad array of political rights are protected.

There is also growing evidence that most countries that have made measured and sustainable progress in long-term economic development are also states that respect democratic practices. This should hardly be surprising as competitive, multiparty democracy provides for the rotation of power, government transparency, independent civic monitoring, and free media. These in turn promote improved governance and impede massive corruption and cronyism, conditions that are prevalent in settings where political power is not subject to civic and political checks and balances.

The expansion of democratic governance over the last several decades has important implications for the United Nations and other international organizations. Today, states that respect basic freedoms and the rule of law have greater potential than ever before to positively influence global and regional institutions. But they can only achieve that potential within international bodies by working cooperatively and cohesively on issues of democracy and human rights. Nowhere is the need for international democratic cooperation more essential than at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Although democracy has scored impressive gains in recent times, we have also begun to experience a new drive to prevent the further spread of democracy and, where possible, roll back some of the achievements that have already been registered. A number of the countries featured in this report are prominent in this effort. The strategy of those involved in this campaign to roll back democracy

has many facets: dismantling independent media, marginalizing the political opposition, and preventing independent think tanks and NGOs from obtaining necessary resources. In addition, many of the world's worst violators of human rights and democratic standards have joined in loose coalitions at the United Nations to deflect attention from their records of repression. The failure of the United Nations to effectively address human rights problems played an important role in the decision to replace the old Commission on Human Rights with the new Human Rights Council. The Council is functioning under a set of procedures that will hopefully enable that body to deal with the core human rights problems in the world. We offer this report in the hope that it will assist the democratic world in pressing the case for freedom at the United Nations and in other forums.

Jennifer Windsor
Executive Director, Freedom House
April 2007

Belarus

Population: 9,700,000

Capital: Minsk

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Belarus's 2006 presidential elections handed President Alyaksandr Lukashenka his third term in the country's most controversial elections yet, which outside observers declared neither free nor fair. The authorities' attacks against the opposition and suspected voting fraud provoked the largest public protests to occur on the streets of Minsk since Lukashenka came to power more than a decade ago. Belarus's president responded by intensifying repression of all forms of opposition, and several key opposition leaders received prison sentences. Since then, the opposition has dwindled, with the government exerting growing pressure on opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), independent media outlets, and educational establishments.

Belarus declared independence in 1991, ending centuries of foreign control by Poland, Russia, and, ultimately, the Soviet Union. Stanislau Shushkevich, a reform-minded leader, served as head of state from 1991 to 1994. That year, voters made Alyaksandr Lukashenka, a member of parliament with close links to the country's security services, Belarus's first post-Soviet president. Lukashenka pursued efforts at reunification with Russia and subordinated the government, legislature, and courts to his political whims while denying citizens basic rights and liberties. A controversial 1996 referendum, highly criticized by domestic monitors and the international community, adopted constitutional amendments that extended Lukashenka's term through 2001, broadened presidential powers, and created a new bicameral parliament (the National Assembly).

In October 2000, Belarus held deeply flawed elections to the House of Representatives, parliament's lower house. State media coverage of the campaign was limited and biased, and approximately half of all opposition candidates were denied registration. Following a boycott by seven opposition parties, only three opposition candidates were elected.

Lukashenka won a controversial reelection in September 2001 amid accusations from former security service officials that the president was directing a government-sponsored death squad aimed at silencing his opponents. Four politicians and journalists critical of the regime disappeared during 1999 and 2000. Western observers judged the election to be neither free nor fair. On election day, Lukashenka declared himself the victor with 75 percent of the vote over opposition candidate Uladzimir Hancharyk (15 percent). However, independent nongovernmental exit polls showed that Lukashenka had received 47 percent of the vote and Hancharyk 41 percent—an outcome that by law should have forced a second round. By 2002, Lukashenka had launched a campaign of political retribution against those who had opposed him during the presidential campaign.

Legislative elections and a parallel referendum on the presidency were held in October 2004. The Central Election Commission claimed that 90 percent of voters took part in the plebiscite, and some 79 percent of them voted in favor of the government's proposal that would allow Lukashenka to run for a third term in 2006. According to the official election results, not a single candidate fielded by opposition parties entered the National Assembly. A monitoring effort by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) declared on October 17, 2004, that the parliamentary elections fell "significantly short" of Belarus's OSCE commitments. An exit poll conducted by The Gallup Organization/Baltic Surveys, which collected data during the weeklong voting process, found that just 48.4 percent of all eligible voters in the country said yes to the referendum, far short of the official 79 percent. Thus, according to independent poll data, the referendum actually failed to amend the Belarusian constitution or to give Lukashenka the right to run for reelection, as claimed by Belarus authorities.

Ukraine's Orange Revolution, unfolding only five weeks after the constitutional referendum in Belarus, frightened the regime into thinking that a similar series of protests could take place in Belarus. Lukashenka boosted the law enforcement agencies in 2005 and purged their ranks of potential dissenters. The amendments to the Law on Interior Troops introduced in February 2005 allowed for the discretionary use of firearms against protesters on orders from the president, suggesting that the police were preparing for street protests.

More opposition figures were effectively barred from politics throughout the year. Mikhail Marynich, a former government minister and a potential contender for the presidency, was sentenced to five years in jail in December 2004 on charges of stealing computers from his own nongovernmental organization (NGO). Siarhiej Skrabets, leader of the opposition in the previous parliament, was arrested in May 2005 on corruption charges.

The March 19, 2006, presidential elections, in which Lukashenka won a third term, were neither free nor fair, and the OSCE declared that the voting

did not meet democratic standards. Although four candidates competed, Lukashenka's victory was clear from the start. On March 2, just a few weeks before the election, police detained and beat Alexander Kozulin, one of the opposition candidates.

Lukashenka's government took harsh, repressive measures against the opposition, harassing and arresting opposition campaign workers. In the weeks before the election, the state security agency KGB created a climate of intimidation by accusing the opposition of preparing a violent overthrow of the government and warning that peaceful protesters could face charges of terrorism, with sentences ranging from eight years to the death penalty. None of the major polling companies could conduct exit polls during the election, which made it difficult to detect voting fraud. The opposition asserted that Lukashenka could not have won the 83 percent of the vote that he claimed.

The elections provoked the largest public protest of Lukashenka's tenure; protestors who erected a five-day tent camp on October Square in Minsk were ultimately dispersed by the authorities. Initially, 10,000 to 15,000 activists gathered on March 19, but their numbers quickly dwindled to 2,000 to 5,000, with only a few hundred spending the night. Between 500 and 1,000 individuals were arrested on March 25, including former candidate Kozulin. In July, a Minsk court sentenced him to five and one-half years in prison for his role in the protest; his sentence was much longer than those for other protesters, who typically received 10 to 15 days. In prison, Kozulin staged a 53-day hunger strike, ending on December 11, that brought attention to the plight of the opposition. As many as 26 journalists from Canada, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Russia, Poland, Ukraine, and the United States were assaulted and detained during the protests, and some had to serve 15-day prison terms.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Despite a constitutional guarantee of universal, equal, and direct suffrage, Belarus is not an electoral democracy. Serious and widespread irregularities have marred all recent elections.

The National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus is composed of two houses. The 110 members of the House of Representatives are popularly elected for four years on the basis of single-mandate constituencies. The Council of the Republic consists of 64 members, of whom 56 are elected by regional councils and 8 are appointed by the president. The constitution vests most power with the president, giving him control over the government, courts, and even the legislative process by stating that presidential decrees have a higher legal force than the laws. The National Assembly serves largely as a rubber-stamp body.

As a result of the concentration of power in the hands of the president, political parties play a negligible role in the political process. Opposition parties have no representation in the National Assembly, while pro-presidential parties

serve only formal functions. In late September 2006, the Ministry of Justice filed suit with the Supreme Court to suspend the activities of the opposition Belarusian Party of Communists, claiming that it had violated the law on parties because membership had dropped below 1,000.

The authorities constantly harass opposition leaders: former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich was sentenced to 15 days in prison for organizing an unsanctioned anti-government protest on the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident (April 26, 2006), and United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka was imprisoned on July 17 for 10 days on charges of swearing in a public place; Lyabedzka had also served 10 days in March. On November 1, the regime sentenced opposition Youth Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich to 18 months in prison, provoking protest from the EU. Such harassment continued throughout the year. In September, UN special rapporteur Adrian Severin called for an investigation into the role of high government officials in the disappearance of four politicians and journalists critical of the Belarusian government in 1999 and 2000.

Belarus was ranked 151 out of 161 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index because of the increasing bureaucratization of the economy and the overall lack of transparency in the government.

The Lukashenka regime systematically curtails press freedom. The Committee to Protect Journalists listed Belarus as one of the 10 most censored countries in the world in May 2006. Libel is both a civil and a criminal offense. State media are subordinated to the president, and harassment and censorship of independent media are routine. Belarusian national television is completely under the control and influence of the state and does not provide coverage of alternative and opposition views. The State Press Committee issues warnings to publishers for unauthorized activities such as distributing copies abroad or reporting on unregistered organizations; it also can arbitrarily shut down publications without a court order. The news bulletins and daily playlists of all FM radio stations are censored. The state-run press distribution monopoly refused in November 2005 to continue distribution of most of the country's independent newspapers.

Harassment and legal attacks against independent newspapers and broadcast media were widespread in 2006. The newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii* faces criminal and potential libel charges of 1 billion rubles (\$467,000) for a July 11 article about the personal finances of Hryhory Kisel, the head of the government's ONT television station.

Internet sites within the country are under the control of the government's State Center on Information Security, which is part of the Security Council of Belarus, and their impact is limited. An OpenNet Initiative analysis of the internet during the 2006 presidential campaign found that generally opposition websites were available during the campaign period. However, many

of the key opposition sites were not accessible on election day or on some days following the elections, when major demonstrations took place.

Despite constitutional guarantees that “all religions and faiths shall be equal before the law,” government decrees and registration requirements have increasingly restricted the life and work of religious groups. Amendments in 2002 to the Law on Religions provide for government censorship of religious publications and prevent foreign citizens from leading religious groups. The amendments also place strict limitations on religious groups that have been active in Belarus for fewer than 20 years. The government signed a concordant with the Belarusian Orthodox Church in 2003, and the Church enjoys a privileged position. The authorities forced a Pentecostal pastor to resign from her teaching job when she complained about an Orthodox priest’s lecture to students denouncing “sects” such as Baptists and Pentecostals. In December 2005, the authorities refused to renew the visas of two Polish Catholic priests, including one who had worked in the country for 10 years. For the first time, the authorities imprisoned someone for holding an illegal religious service: on March 3, 2006, a Minsk judge sentenced the pastor of Christ’s Covenant Reformed Baptist Church, Gregory Vyazorsky, to 10 days in jail for holding unsanctioned services on February 5. In a positive development, on December 1, 2005, Lukashenka freed all registered religious organizations from paying land taxes.

Academic freedom is subject to intense state ideological pressures, with institutions that use a Western-style curriculum, promote national consciousness, or are suspected of disloyalty being subject to harassment and liquidation. The most highly regarded secondary school, the National State Humanities Lyceum, was shut down in 2003. In 2004, the leading private institution of higher learning, the European Humanities University, was closed; it subsequently relocated to Lithuania. Official regulations stipulate the immediate dismissal and revocation of degrees to students and professors who join opposition protests. Lukashenka has detained several scientists who disagree with his conclusion that the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear accident have largely been overcome in the country. In September, middle school staff and students protested a government ban on teachers from Poland; the government accuses them of working in Warsaw’s interests to undermine the Belarus government.

The Lukashenka government limits freedom of assembly by groups independent of and critical of the president’s regime. Protests and rallies require authorization from local authorities, who can arbitrarily withhold or revoke permission. When public demonstrations do occur, police typically break them up and arrest participants.

Freedom of association is severely restricted. More than a hundred of the most active NGOs critical of the authorities were liquidated or forced to close down from 2003 through 2005. Housing rules, which make it impossible for opposition parties and NGOs to rent inexpensive office space, became a

pretext for liquidating hundreds of local chapters of opposition parties in June 2005. As a follow-up move, in December 2005, Lukashenka signed into law amendments to the Criminal Code that criminalize participation in an unregistered or liquidated political party or organization, allowing for further punitive measures against groups that refused to shut down. The amendment provided for jail terms ranging from six months to two years for serious cases.

New regulations introduced in August 2005 ban foreign assistance to NGOs, parties, and individuals who promote “meddling into the internal affairs” of Belarus from abroad. In the 2006 election year, the government arrested four activists from the U.S.-funded unregistered civic initiative Partnerstva, which tried to monitor elections and conduct an exit poll, several weeks before the elections in February; they remained in jail until their trial began in July. Two were sentenced to six months and shortly released, while the others must serve terms of one and two years. Independent trade unions are subject to harassment, and their leaders are frequently arrested and prosecuted for peaceful protests and dismissed from employment.

Although the country's constitution calls for judicial independence, courts are subject to significant government influence. The right to a fair trial is often not respected in cases with political overtones. Human rights groups continue to document instances of beatings, torture, and inadequate protection during detention in cases involving leaders of the democratic opposition. In 2006, numerous independent civic leaders, opposition political activists, independent journalists, and others who oppose government policies experienced arbitrary persecution, arrest, and imprisonment.

An internal passport system, in which a passport is required for domestic travel and to secure permanent housing, limits freedom of movement and choice of residence. Citizens traveling abroad have to reapply for a permission stamp in their passport every five years. In September 2005, the Constitutional Court bowed to government pressure and renounced an earlier decision to outlaw the stamp system. Wiretapping by state security agencies limits the right to privacy. The country's command economy severely limits economic freedom.

Women are not specifically targeted for discrimination, but there are significant discrepancies in income between men and women, and women are poorly represented in leading government positions. As a result of extreme poverty, many women have become victims of the international sex-trafficking trade.

↓ Burma (Myanmar)

Population: 51,000,000

Capital: Rangoon

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Trend Arrow: Burma received a downward trend arrow due to the largest offensive against the ethnic Karen population in a decade and the displacement of thousands of Karen as a result of the attacks.

Overview:

Although the National Convention, tasked with drafting a new constitution as an ostensible first step toward democracy, was reconvened by the military regime in October 2006, it was boycotted by the main opposition parties and met amid a renewed crackdown on opposition groups. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party, remained under house arrest in 2006, and the activities of the NLD were severely curtailed. Meanwhile, a wide range of human rights violations against political activists, journalists, civil society actors, and members of ethnic and religious minority groups continued unabated throughout the year. The military pressed ahead with its offensive against ethnic Karen rebels, displacing thousands of villagers and prompting numerous reports of human rights abuses. The campaign, the largest against the Karen since 1997, had been launched in November 2005.

After occupation by the Japanese during World War II, Burma achieved independence from Great Britain in 1948. The military has ruled since 1962, when the army overthrew an elected government that had been buffeted by an economic crisis and a raft of ethnic insurgencies. During the next 26 years, General Ne Win's military rule helped impoverish what had been one of Southeast Asia's wealthiest countries.

The present junta, led by General Than Shwe, dramatically asserted its power in 1988, when the army opened fire on peaceful, student-led, prodemocracy protesters, killing an estimated 3,000 people. In the aftermath, a younger generation of army commanders created the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to rule the country. However, the SLORC refused to cede power after it was defeated in a landslide election by the National

League for Democracy (NLD) in 1990. The junta jailed dozens of members of the NLD, which had won 392 of the 485 parliamentary seats in Burma's first free elections in three decades.

Than Shwe and several other generals who headed the junta refashioned the SLORC into the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. The generals appeared to be trying to improve the junta's international image, attract foreign investment, and encourage an end to U.S.-led sanctions linked to the regime's grim human rights record. In late 2000, encouraged by the efforts of UN special envoy Razali Ismail, the government began holding talks with NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which led to an easing of restrictions on the party by mid-2002. Suu Kyi was released from house arrest and allowed to make several political trips outside the capital, and the NLD was permitted to reopen a number of its branch offices.

Suu Kyi's growing popularity and her revitalization of the NLD during the first half of 2003 apparently rattled hard-liners within the regime. On May 30, a deadly ambush on an NLD convoy by SPDC supporters left an unknown number of people killed or injured. Suu Kyi and dozens of other NLD officials and supporters were detained following the attack, NLD offices were again shut down, and universities and schools were temporarily closed in a bid to suppress wider unrest. Since then, authorities have maintained their focus on containing the popularity of the NLD. Suu Kyi was released from prison in September 2003 but remains under house arrest, as do other senior party leaders. Periodic arrests and detentions of political activists and other perceived threats to the regime, including journalists and students, remain the norm.

In August 2003, the junta announced that the National Convention, which had the responsibility of drafting principles for a new constitution but had not met since 1996, would be reconvened in May 2004 as part of a new "road map to democracy." However, the convention was boycotted by the main political parties, including the NLD and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), which did not want to take part under conditions of extreme political repression. The proceedings themselves were heavily restricted in terms of format and operations, as authorities had handpicked most of the delegates and limited the scope of permissible debate from the outset. The convention was adjourned in July 2004. Although it was reconvened in February 2005 for a six-week session, it was again boycotted by the NLD and SNLD. In a similarly restricted atmosphere, delegates agreed to draft principles that enshrined the military's role in government, reserving 25 percent of seats in any future parliament for the military. The convention met again in October 2006, with the opposition parties maintaining their boycott. The body met as the government renewed efforts to repress its critics; in the week leading up to the gathering, six prodemocracy activists were detained.

Relations between the SPDC and numerous ethnic rebel groups significantly worsened during 2006. The government had verbally agreed to an

informal ceasefire with the Karen National Union (KNU) in late 2003, but skirmishes between the two sides continued, and in November 2005 the army launched its largest offensive in Karen State since 1997, sending approximately 5,000 troops into KNU-controlled areas. Thousands of villagers were displaced as a result of the offensive, and Burmese military personnel have been accused of numerous abuses, such as looting and burning homes, using villagers as slave laborers, and planting antipersonnel mines in civilian areas. Karen leaders met with government officials in October 2006 to attempt to negotiate a cease-fire, but attacks continued through the end of the year. Meanwhile, there have been numerous reports of abuses against the Chin minority group, and in September, the army stepped up its offensive against ethnic Shan rebel groups in eastern Burma.

This increased violence may be the result of an October 2004 government purge in which Khin Nyunt, the prime minister and head of military intelligence, was removed from office and placed under house arrest. A relative moderate, he had advocated limited dialogue with both the NLD and Burma's armed ethnic factions, and had spearheaded several recent cease-fire agreements. His replacement by hard-liner Lieutenant General Soe Win, who has been accused of masterminding the May 2003 attack on Suu Kyi as she rode in her motorcade, suggests that the junta will continue to resist all pressure to reform.

Since the 2004 purge, there have been persistent rumors of tension within the junta's senior leadership, and several reshuffles of both administrative and military personnel were conducted in 2006. Also that year, authorities officially shifted the country's capital 600 km (370 miles) inland, to a new site called Nay Pyi Taw, near the town of Pyinmana. However, foreign embassies remained in Rangoon. The junta continued to accuse opposition groups of involvement in May 2005 bombings in Rangoon, and in April 2006 the government designated four exiled political groups as terrorist organizations. Among the groups listed was the National League for Democracy-Liberated Area, which was loosely affiliated with the NLD. The junta also adopted an increasingly threatening stance towards the NLD itself, stating in April 2006 that it had enough evidence tying the NLD to terrorist groups to justify dissolving the party. The continued crackdown on opposition groups, coupled with the new offensive in Karen State, led to increased international focus on Burma in 2006. In September, the UN Security Council added Burma to its permanent agenda, with many members arguing that internal repression and the flourishing drug trade made the country a threat to international security. The United States has stated its intention to submit a draft resolution on Burma, calling for the release of political prisoners and an end to human rights abuses perpetrated by the army. The resolution was pending at the end of 2006.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Burma is not an electoral democracy, and continues to be governed by one of the world's most repressive regimes. The SPDC rules by decree; controls all executive, legislative, and judicial powers; suppresses nearly all basic rights; and commits human rights abuses with impunity. Military officers hold most cabinet positions, and active or retired officers hold most top posts in all ministries, as well as key positions in the private sector.

Since rejecting the results of the 1990 elections and preventing the elected parliament from convening, the junta has all but paralyzed the victorious NLD party. Authorities have jailed many NLD leaders, pressured thousands of party members and officials to resign, closed party offices, harassed members' families, and periodically detained hundreds of NLD supporters at a time to block planned party meetings. After being allowed somewhat greater freedom in 2002, the NLD was subjected to another crackdown in 2003 that has for the most part continued to date. Although the party's main office was allowed to reopen in April 2004, its branch offices remain closed and several key party leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, remain under house arrest. In the run-up to the National Convention session held in October 2006, opposition party leaders and members of prodemocracy youth groups faced heightened surveillance, intimidation, and arrest as they attempted to engage in peaceful political activities.

Besides the NLD, there are more than 20 ethnic political parties that remain suppressed by the junta. Of the 28 ethnic parties that participated in the 2004 session of the National Convention, 13 called for greater local autonomy, according to Amnesty International. In February 2005, at least 10 ethnic Shan politicians were arrested, including the senior leaders of the SNLD party, and in November that year, nine were sentenced to lengthy prison terms and transferred to undisclosed locations. At least three NLD party leaders were arrested in 2006, and several student and youth members were also imprisoned.

In a system that lacks both transparency and accountability, official corruption is rampant at both the national and local levels. Burma was ranked 160 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The junta sharply restricts press freedom, and either owns or tightly controls all daily newspapers and broadcast media. It subjects private periodicals to prepublication censorship and also restricts the importation of foreign news periodicals. Under new censorship rules that came into effect in July 2005, media are ostensibly allowed to offer criticism of government projects as long as the criticism is deemed "constructive," and are allowed to report on natural disasters and poverty as long as the reports do not adversely affect the national interest. In February 2006, four individuals involved in the publication of a book

of poems critical of the government were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 7 to 19 years. Two photojournalists who photographed buildings in the new capital were imprisoned in March. The Burma Media Association reported in February that the government had launched a campaign to track down and imprison people who gave information to the international media. Several journalists, businessmen, and civil servants have reportedly been interrogated in relation to the program. While some people have access to international shortwave radio or satellite television, the Committee to Protect Journalists notes that those caught accessing foreign broadcasts can face jail time. The internet, which operates in a limited fashion in the cities, is tightly regulated and censored.

Ordinary Burmese can worship with some freedom. However, the junta shows a preference for Theravada Buddhism, discriminating against non-Buddhists in the upper levels of the public sector and coercively promoting Buddhism in some ethnic-minority areas. The regime has also tried to control the Buddhist clergy by placing monastic orders under a state-run committee, monitoring monasteries, and subjecting clergy to special restrictions on speech and association. A number of monks remain imprisoned for their prodemocracy and human rights work. Violence and discrimination against the Muslim minority continues to be a problem; recent incidents include a deadly flare-up in Arakan State in January 2005, in which two Muslims were killed in violence between Muslims and Buddhist monks. Ethnic Chin, who are predominantly Christian, continue to be persecuted for their beliefs. A report released by three human rights groups in March 2006 documented several instances of forced labor and sexual violence against the minority. There were also several reported cases of intimidation and harassment of Christians in Rangoon, where they are barred from attending church and forced to register with local authorities.

Academic freedom is severely limited. Teachers are subject to restrictions on freedom of expression and publication, and are held accountable for the political activities of their students. Since the 1988 student prodemocracy demonstrations, the junta has sporadically closed universities, limiting higher education opportunities for a generation of young Burmese. Most campuses have been relocated to relatively isolated areas as a way to disperse the student population. According to Amnesty International, teachers have recently been imprisoned for talking about or possessing books on historical political figures, and the licenses of private tutors have been withdrawn on political grounds.

Freedom of association and assembly is restricted. An ordinance prohibits unauthorized outdoor gatherings of more than five people, and authorities regularly use force to break up peaceful demonstrations and prevent prodemocracy activists from organizing events or meetings. Since the May 2003 crackdown, an increasing number of people have been detained for attempting to exercise their rights to freedom of association and expression. However, some public sector employees, as well as other ordinary citizens, are induced to join

the junta's mass mobilization organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association. Domestic human rights organizations are unable to function independently, and the regime generally dismisses critical scrutiny of its human rights record by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In February 2006, the government released new guidelines that further restricted NGOs, leading Medecins Sans Frontieres and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue to cease activities in Burma. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) has also recently been barred from carrying out prison visits.

Independent trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes are illegal, and several labor activists are serving long prison terms for their political and labor activities. The regime continues to use forced labor despite formally banning the practice in October 2000. The International Labor Organization and other sources report that soldiers routinely force civilians, including women and children, to work without pay under harsh conditions. Laborers are commandeered to construct roads, clear minefields, porter for the army, or work on military-backed commercial ventures. The practice appears to be most widespread in states populated by ethnic minorities. In the past year, the government reportedly began using prisoners as forced laborers for government projects.

The judiciary is not independent. Judges are appointed or approved by the junta and adjudicate cases according to the junta's decrees. Administrative detention laws allow people to be held without charge, trial, or access to legal counsel for up to five years if the SPDC feels that they have threatened the state's security or sovereignty. Some basic due process rights are reportedly observed in ordinary criminal cases, but not in political cases, according to the U.S. State Department's 2006 human rights report. Pervasive corruption, the misuse of overly broad laws, and the manipulation of the courts for political ends continue to deprive citizens of their legal rights.

Detailed reports issued by Amnesty International have raised a number of concerns about the administration of justice, highlighting laws and practices regarding detention, torture, trial, and conditions of imprisonment. Political prisoners are frequently held incommunicado in pretrial detention, facilitating the use of torture and other forms of coercion, and are denied access to family members, legal counsel, and medical care. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported that six political prisoners died in custody in 2006. Prisons are often overcrowded, and in 2006 the ICRC was barred from conducting visits to prison facilities.

The junta has periodically released some of those arrested in the aftermath of the May 2003 violence. In the month after General Khin Nyunt's October 2004 removal, thousands of prisoners were released, including several dozen who were being held on political charges. However, according to AAPP more than 1,000 political prisoners remain incarcerated at the end of 2006,

including 78 people detained in the past year. Most prisoners are held under broadly drawn laws that criminalize a range of peaceful activities, such as distributing prodemocracy pamphlets or reporting on human rights violations. The frequently used Decree 5/96, issued in 1996, authorizes prison terms of up to 20 years for aiding activities “which adversely affect the national interest.” After the October 2004 purge, jails were also filled with suspected allies of Khin Nyunt; several thousand were arrested, and beginning in November of that year, a number were sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

The UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva condemns the regime each year for committing grave human rights abuses. Annual resolutions commonly highlight a systematic pattern of extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions; arrests, incommunicado detention, and “disappearances”; rape, torture, inhumane treatment, and forced labor, including the use of children; forced relocation; and the denial of freedom of assembly, association, expression, religion, and movement. Police and security forces that commit such abuses operate in a climate of impunity, as such incidents are not commonly investigated and prosecutions are rare.

Some of the worst human rights abuses take place in the seven states populated by ethnic minorities, who comprise approximately 35 percent of Burma’s overall population. In these border states, the *tatmadaw*, or Burmese armed forces, kill, beat, rape, and arbitrarily detain civilians. According to a July 2006 report released by the Women’s League of Chinland, Burmese soldiers are promised 100,000 kyat (US\$16,000) for marrying Chin women as part of a strategy of “Burmanization.” As described in an Amnesty International report released in September 2005, soldiers also routinely destroy property and seize livestock, cash, property, food, and other goods from villagers. The junta has committed particularly serious abuses against the Muslim Rohingya minority in northern Rakhine State. A 2006 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news report noted that the vast majority of Rohingya are denied citizenship and face severe restrictions on their freedom of movement, their right to own land, and their ability to marry. In addition, they are regularly subjected to arbitrary taxation and other forms of extortion, as well as forced eviction and land confiscation, at the hands of Burmese security forces. More than 250,000 Rohingya remain in neighboring Bangladesh, where they fled in the 1990s to escape extrajudicial execution, rape, forced labor, and other abuses.

The junta continues to face low-grade insurgencies waged by the KNU and at least five other ethnic rebel armies. In November 2005, the army stepped up its attacks in Karen State, leading to a prolonged offensive that lasted throughout 2006. Several reports have accused the Burmese military of targeting civilians and destroying fields and food supplies. Approximately 16,000 Karen have been displaced as a result of the attacks. Seventeen rebel groups, however, have reached cease-fire deals with the junta since 1989, under which they have been granted effective administrative authority in the areas under their control

and are able to retain their own militias. While army abuses are the most widespread, some rebel groups forcibly conscript civilians, commit extrajudicial killing and rape, and use women and children as porters, according to the U.S. State Department's 2006 human rights report. Child soldiers are used frequently in the army, and the practice of recruiting them has increased in recent years, according to a 2006 report by the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma.

Tens of thousands of ethnic minorities in Shan, Karenni, Karen, and Mon states remain in squalid and ill-equipped relocation centers set up by the military. The army has forcibly moved the villagers to the sites since the mid-1990s as part of its counterinsurgency operations. Press reports indicate that at least one million people have been internally displaced by these and other tactics.

In addition, according to Refugees International, several million Burmese have fled to neighboring countries, including Thailand, India, and Bangladesh. Thailand continues to host at least 145,000 Karen, Mon, and Karenni in refugee camps near the Burmese border, as well as hundreds of thousands more who have not been granted refugee status. In March 2005, a renewed offensive by the regime, aided by the United Wa State Army, an ethnic force allied with the government, that targeted the rebel Shan State Army led to intensified abuses against and the displacement of thousands of civilians in Shan State.

Authorities in 2006 continued to infringe on citizens' privacy rights by arbitrarily searching homes, intercepting mail, and monitoring telephone conversations. Laws criminalize the possession and use of unregistered electronic devices, including telephones, fax machines, computers, modems, and software.

Burmese women have traditionally enjoyed high social and economic status, but domestic violence is a growing concern, and women remain underrepresented in the government and civil service. A September 2004 report by the Women's League of Burma detailed an ongoing nationwide pattern of sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage, against women by SPDC military personnel and other authorities. Criminal gangs have in recent years trafficked thousands of women and girls, many from ethnic minority groups, to Thailand and other destinations for prostitution, according to reports by Human Rights Watch and other organizations.

China

Population: 1,311,400,000

Capital: Beijing

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Overview:

In response to China's pressing socioeconomic problems, the leadership team of President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in 2006 continued to promote policies aimed at building a "harmonious society," balancing economic growth with the provision of public goods such as social welfare and environmental protection. However, concerns over social stability also led to a strengthening of restrictions on the country's media and the detention of human rights activists, civil rights lawyers, and others the authorities viewed as posing a challenge to the regime.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in mainland China in 1949 after defeating the nationalist Kuomintang forces in the Chinese Civil War. Aiming to strengthen his own position and hasten China's socialist transformation, Communist leader Mao Zedong oversaw devastating mass-mobilization campaigns, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), which resulted in millions of deaths and politicized nearly every aspect of daily life. Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping emerged as China's paramount leader. Over the next two decades, Deng maintained the CCP's absolute rule in the political sphere while guiding China's transition from a largely agrarian economy to a rapidly urbanizing, export-driven market economy.

The CCP signaled its intent to maintain political stability at all costs with the 1989 massacre of prodemocracy protesters who had gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Following the crackdown, the party tapped Jiang Zemin to replace the relatively moderate Zhao Ziyang as general secretary of the party. Jiang was named state president in 1993 and became widely recognized as China's top leader following Deng's death in 1997.

Jiang continued the Dengist policies of rapid economic growth, recognizing that regime legitimacy now rested largely on the CCP's ability to boost living standards. However, concerned that devolution of power to the

provinces and market liberalization had gone too far, creating local protectionism, corruption, and growing inequalities, the party began to reassert control in the 1990s. The recentralization of the tax system as well as the reorganization of China's vast bureaucracy improved Beijing's macroeconomic steering capacity.

At the CCP's sixteenth party congress in November 2002, Hu Jintao was named to replace Jiang as party general secretary. He was widely recognized as China's supreme leader after Jiang stood down as head of the military in September 2004. Wen Jiabao replaced Zhu Rongji as prime minister in March 2003, taking over the day-to-day management of the economy.

Pressing socioeconomic problems have emerged in the course of China's modernization, including a rising income gap, unemployment, the lack of a social safety net, environmental degradation, and corruption. The problems are seen by the CCP as the sources of a recent rise in social unrest and as a threat to its ruling status. In response, Hu and Wen have promoted policies aimed at building a "harmonious society." The Eleventh Five-Year Program (2006–10), issued in March 2006, signaled a shift in China's economic development model from the pursuit of gross domestic product (GDP) growth to a balancing of growth with the provision of public goods such as healthcare, pensions, unemployment benefits, and education as well as environmental protection.

Under the new program, one of the government's top priorities is to establish a "new socialist countryside," boosting central government spending on rural areas and abolishing the centuries-old agricultural tax on farmers in an effort to stem the widening income gap. In addition, new regulations call for the protection of internal-migrant workers' rights, including timely wage payments, education for migrants' children, and access to social-welfare services.

The Hu-Wen leadership team has also made fighting corruption a key priority. The latest anticorruption campaign featured the downfall of a number of high-ranking officials, most notably politburo member and mayor of Shanghai Chen Liangyu, who was removed from his post in September 2006 and is under investigation for his role in the misappropriation of monies from the Shanghai social security pension fund.

As part of the effort to improve governance, the government in October 2005 had issued a White Paper on "building political democracy in China." The document outlined plans to build a so-called participatory democracy that combined authoritarian CCP leadership with an expansion of popular participation in the political process and administration of the state through the rule of law, while rejecting political reforms that would challenge the CCP's monopoly on power.

Preoccupation with political stability, however, also prompted the Chinese government to further restrict political rights and repress critics of the regime in 2006, with a number of high-profile detentions and arrests of dissidents, journalists, and lawyers. Restrictions on communication were

tightened that year, new rules aimed at limiting media coverage of judicial proceedings were issued in September and a draft emergency management law is under review that if enacted would prevent Chinese and foreign journalists from reporting on “emergencies” without government approval. Regulations authorizing China’s official news agency, Xinhua, to censor and regulate the content of foreign news agencies’ reports were widely criticized by the international community. The utility of village elections for reducing local corruption continues to be compromised by alleged violence initiated by local party leaders, including attacks on foreign journalists attempting to cover news stories. Violence broke out in Shunde, Guangdong province, in November 2006, after corrupt local officials who refused to relinquish their power even after being defeated in a village election hired thugs to attack the newly elected officials and their supporters.

China continues to be active on the international stage, improving relations with countries that can help satisfy its growing need for energy and natural resources. Trade agreements were signed during Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to China in March 2006, as well as on Hu’s trips to Saudi Arabia and several African nations in April. Hu also visited the United States in April, and U.S. officials urged China to act as a “responsible stakeholder” in world affairs; as a permanent, veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council and a major regional and global economic power, China could play a pivotal role in the resolution of such U.S. priorities as the Iranian and North Korean nuclear disputes. There was a slight warming in Sino-Japanese relations, with Shinzo Abe in October 2006 paying the first visit to China by a Japanese prime minister in five years.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

China is not an electoral democracy. Although economic activity is increasingly independent of state control, Chinese citizens cannot democratically change top leaders or publicly express opposition to government policy. As stipulated in the Chinese constitution, the CCP possesses a monopoly on political power. Party members hold almost all top national and local governmental, internal security, and military posts. A 3,000-member National People’s Congress (NPC) is, in principle, the Chinese parliament, empowered to elect the president for a five-year term and confirm the president’s nominee for prime minister. Its members are elected to five-year terms by provincial legislatures. While it has shown signs of independence, no longer automatically approving legislation put before it, in practice the NPC remains subordinate to the CCP Politburo and its nine-person standing committee. Opposition groups, such as the China Democracy Party, are actively suppressed. The only competitive elections are at the village level and for urban residency councils.

Citizens can also vote for local people's congress representatives at the county level and below. However, these elections are largely dominated by the CCP.

The Chinese state closely monitors political activity and uses opaque national security regulations to justify detainment of those who are politically active without party approval. Groups considered to pose a threat to the regime are suppressed and persecuted.

Corruption remains a severe problem in China. In 2006, 40,041 government employees were investigated for corruption and dereliction of duty, with a total of 825 officials above the county level sentenced by the courts, of which nine were at provincial or ministerial level. 9,582 investigations into commercial bribery involving government employees were initiated. Beijing vice mayor Liu Zhihua, Anhui vice governor He Minxu, and Shanghai mayor Chen Liangyu were all dismissed from office in 2006. The crackdown has had limited impact at the local level, however, where personal connections among party, government, and business leaders perpetuates the problem. China was ranked 70 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Under the constitution, Chinese citizens enjoy freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and demonstration. Although freedom of expression continues to expand in the private realm, freedom of speech on topics deemed politically sensitive by the CCP remains severely limited. The tightly controlled media are barred from criticizing senior leaders or their policies. Journalists who do not adhere to party dictates on news content are harassed, fired, or jailed. In 2006, Singapore *Straits Times* reporter Ching Cheong, *New York Times* researcher Zhao Yan, and *Bijie Daily* reporter Li Yuanlong were imprisoned. In addition, a number of 2005 regulations—requiring publishers to refrain from reprinting books of questionable political correctness and allowing the confiscation of banned books; restricting popular access to foreign films and television programs; and encouraging the media to engage in self-censorship—were put into effect in 2006. A draft Emergency Management Law issued in July 2006 contained provisions for imposing heavy fines on Chinese and foreign journalists who report on natural disasters, accidents, health hazards, and social disturbances without government approval. New regulations in September 2006 gave Xinhua, China's official news agency, the authority to censor and regulate the content produced by foreign news agencies serving mainland subscribers, and the power to revoke agencies' licenses to operate, drawing widespread criticism from press freedom advocates and foreign governments.

The government continues to crack down on the internet and monitor personal communications. China regularly blocks websites it deems politically threatening and detains those responsible for posting objectionable content; cyber-dissident Zhan Aizong was arrested in August 2006. Foreign internet companies continue to cooperate with the Chinese government on censorship enforcement. In 2005, the U.S.-based firm Yahoo! provided information leading

to the conviction of Hunan journalist Shi Tao, who was accused of leaking state secrets. Following the closure of over a quarter of China's 573,755 websites in July 2005, after their operators failed to register at the Ministry of Information Industry, 7 more popular web sites were shut down in July 2006, including "Century China" and the online chat forum of "Life Week" magazine. The government continues to strengthen regulations aimed at enhancing control over the internet and restricting internet news sites, web logs, and cellular telephone text-messaging, which is also subject to monitoring by the government. International radio and television broadcasts, including Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), are still jammed.

Though constitutionally recognized, religious freedom is accorded little respect in China. All religious groups are required to register with the government, and while officially sanctioned groups are tolerated, members of unauthorized religious groups, such as Falun Gong, are harassed, detained, and imprisoned. Some 50 members of an "underground" Christian church in the Zhejiang province were arrested in July 2006 and their church building was demolished. In areas like the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, home to the predominantly Muslim Uighur ethnic group, the government has used the pretext of counterterrorism to crack down on Islamic organizations, labeling them religious extremists. Restrictions on Muslims' religious activity, teaching, and places of worship in Xinjiang are "implemented forcefully," according to the U.S. State Department's 2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices.

Academic freedom is restricted on sensitive political issues. Universities and research institutions must support official CCP ideology, and many scholars practice self-censorship in the interest of personal safety. Academics risk losing their positions if they publicly criticize the party or state policy.

Freedom of assembly is severely restricted in China. Nongovernmental organizations are required to register with the government and follow strict regulatory guidelines, with the constitution specifically prohibiting activities that undermine "party leadership" or go against the "interests of the state."

Chinese workers are not allowed to form independent labor unions. The only union permitted is the government-controlled All China Federation of Trade Unions. Independent labor leaders are harassed, detained, and jailed for their efforts. Collective bargaining is legal in all industries but seldom occurs in practice. Despite the fact that workers lack the legal right to strike, there has been a growing wave of strikes over layoffs, dangerous working conditions, unpaid wages, and benefits. The reaction of local officials varies, with most offering partial concessions to workers while detaining strike leaders.

Although labor laws exist, they are poorly enforced. Employers frequently ignore minimum wage requirements and fail to implement required health and safety measures. Highly publicized mining accidents, which claimed

5,286 lives in the first 11 months of 2006, prompted the government to publicize its concerns with improving worker safety.

The party controls the judiciary. The CCP directs verdicts and sentences, particularly in politically sensitive cases. Despite advances in criminal procedure reforms, trials—which are often mere sentencing hearings—are frequently closed; in practice few criminal defendants have access to counsel. Although regulations issued in July 2006 were aimed at addressing the problem, the authorities continue to use torture to coerce confessions that are frequently admitted as evidence. Police conduct searches without warrants and at times monitor telephone conversations and other personal communications to use as evidence against suspected dissidents. Many political prisoners and ordinary criminal defendants are deprived of trials altogether, detained instead by bureaucratic fiat in “re-education through labor” camps. Endemic corruption further exacerbates the lack of due process in the judicial system. Judicial conditions are worst in capital punishment cases; 65 crimes carry the death penalty, and perpetrators are often executed immediately upon conviction or failure of appeal. In October 2006, new legislation was announced requiring all death penalties handed down by lower courts be reviewed by the Supreme People’s Court.

Though in most cases security forces are under direct civilian control, misuse of authority remains frequent, and human rights violations are widespread. Cases of extrajudicial and politically motivated murder, torture, beating, and arbitrary arrest continue to be reported. In August 2006, human rights activist Chen Guangcheng was jailed for four years and his conviction upheld in a rare retrial in December 2006; AIDS activist Hu Jia was detained in September and has been held under house arrest since November; and anticorruption crusader Guo Feixiong was arrested in October. Lawyers who are overly vocal in defending the rights of their clients are frequently harassed or detained. Civil rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was arrested in October 2006, although in December 2006, he received a lighter sentence than was expected: three years with a five-year suspension.

The Ministry of Public Security reported that the number of “mass incidents” fell by a fifth in the first 10 months of 2006 to 17,900; however, “mass incidents” are more narrowly defined than “public order disturbances” of which 87,000 were reported in 2005, up from 74,000 in 2004. One of the major sources of discontent in both rural and urban areas is the confiscation of land without adequate compensation, often involving collusion between local government and developers eager to profit from China’s rapid urbanization. The authorities continue to frequently employ excessive force to quell such disturbances. Numerous people were injured and a teenage girl was killed in clashes between villagers and police in Panlong, Guangdong Province, in January 2006.

Although antidiscrimination laws exist, religious groups, minorities, the disabled, and people with HIV/AIDS face severe discrimination in mainstream society. Concerns over social stability, and the need to control China's "floating population" of some 140 million internal-migrant workers, have prompted the government to experiment with reform of the household registration, or *hukou*, system, to allow for greater mobility. However, restrictions remain on changing one's employer or residence, and with quotas on the number of temporary residence permits issued in urban areas, many migrants remain outside the system, unable to gain full access to social services like health care and education, and subject to exploitation.

China's population control policy remains in place. Couples may have no more than one child, although there are a number of exceptions, and the policy is less stringently enforced in rural areas. The Population and Family Planning Law requires couples who have unapproved children to pay extra fees, and gives preferential treatment to couples who abide by birth limits. Compulsory abortion or sterilization by local officials enforcing family-planning regulations still occurs, but is illegal and far less common than in the past.

Serious human rights violations against women and girls continue. The one-child policy and cultural preference for boys over girls, including sex-selective abortion, has led to a shortage of females, creating a market for human trafficking. A Chinese survey conducted by the All-China Women's Federation found that violence against women remains a significant problem, with 30 percent of families reporting incidents of domestic abuse in 2004.

Cote d'Ivoire

Population: 19,700,000

Capital: Yamoussoukro (official), Abidjan (de facto)

Political Rights: 7 ↓

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Ratings Change: Cote d'Ivoire's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7 because the legislature continued to function without a mandate as a result of President Gbagbo's further postponement of presidential elections.

Overview:

Cote d'Ivoire remained split between the government-controlled south and the rebel-held north in 2006. Persistent deadlock between the two sides over disarmament and voter registration issues caused the further postponement of the presidential election, which had already been delayed from October 2005. Legislative elections, initially set for December 2005, were also postponed, leaving the legislature without a mandate. Separately, a Dutch-based company in August 2006 dumped toxic waste in Abidjan, leading to the resignation President Laurent Gbagbo's cabinet.

Cote d'Ivoire gained independence from France in 1960, and President Felix Houphouet-Boigny ruled until his death in 1993. Henri Konan Bedie, then the speaker of the National Assembly, assumed power and won a fraudulent election in 1995 with 95 percent of the vote. Alassane Ouattara, the opposition's most formidable candidate, was barred from the contest, demonstrations were banned, and the media were intimidated.

General Robert Guei seized power in December 1999 and stood for a presidential election in October 2000. When initial results showed he was losing to Laurent Gbagbo, Guei sacked the electoral commission, detained its officers, and declared himself the winner. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in a popular uprising that toppled Guei from power. Clashes followed between supporters of Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), who claimed electoral victory, and Ouattara's Rally of Republicans (RDR), who called for new elections. Supported by security forces, Gbagbo refused to call new polls. The political violence, in which hundreds of civilians died, led to a deepening division between the largely Muslim north and mainly Christian south, although the conflict was not strictly rooted in a north-south, Muslim-Christian divide.

Gbagbo was eventually declared the winner of the election, with 59 percent of the ballots, compared with 33 percent for Guei.

The FPI won 96 seats in the December 2000 legislative elections, while 4 went to the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire and 5 to the RDR. Smaller parties and independents took 24 seats, and 2 seats in Ouattara's district went unfilled.

Civil war erupted in September 2002 when some 700 soldiers attempted to stage a coup by simultaneously attacking a number of cities throughout the country. Under unknown circumstances, government forces killed Guei in Abidjan on the first day of fighting. Clashes intensified between forces loyal to the government and the disgruntled soldiers who formed an insurgency group called the Patriotic Movement of Cote d'Ivoire (MPCI). MPCI quickly seized the northern part of the country and called for Gbagbo to step down. Other groups in the west, angered by the killing of Guei, echoed the calls for Gbagbo's resignation. By December 2002, these groups had united to form the New Forces led by Guillaume Soro.

Gbagbo's government and the New Forces in January 2003 signed a cease-fire brokered by France that called for a broad-based coalition government to rule until elections were held. However, that accord broke down. Following the deaths of nine French peacekeepers in a government bombing campaign against the New Forces movement in November 2004, France destroyed the Ivorian air force and—with the backing of the African Union (AU)—persuaded the UN Security Council to impose a strict arms embargo on the country. Some 4,000 French and 6,000 UN peacekeepers are monitoring the cease-fire line across the middle of the country.

South African President Thabo Mbeki in April 2005 brokered a new peace accord that set presidential and legislative elections for October and December of that year, respectively, but disarmament and preparations for the polls were not completed in time. As a result, the AU extended Gbagbo's term in office for another year and called for a new prime minister with a mandate to disarm the warring parties and prepare for the upcoming elections. Mbeki and other AU mediators appointed economist Charles Konan Banny to the post. An International Working Group (IWG) was established under the auspices of the African Union to oversee the peace process.

In response to a UN statement that the National Assembly's mandate did not extend beyond 2005, angry members of pro-government militia groups, including the Young Patriots, began targeting UN forces and outposts near the Liberian border in January 2006, driving UN troops to relocate. Violence swelled over the next few days when Young Patriot members took over the state-run media outlets and mobilized thousands of Ivoirians who burned tires, blocked roads, and intensified attacks against UN representatives throughout the country.

Despite moderate political improvements early in the year, when leading members of the major coalitions met numerous times to discuss prospects for peace, the likelihood of a presidential election being held by October 2006—the end of Gbagbo's extended mandate—became increasingly dim as the year progressed. As a prerequisite for the election, both sides initially agreed to disarm and accepted a timetable for registering voters. In July, public hearings for the identification of voters who had formerly been disenfranchised began in both the north and the south. However, in Abidjan much of the progress was blocked by Young Patriot forces that erected street barricades and intimidated potential registrants. Such tactics resulted in the killing of six potential applicants in the southern city of Divo. By August, Gbagbo effectively terminated the voter registration process when he announced that the mobile courts handing out identity papers did not have the authority to do so and that any voter with such papers would be refused the right to vote on election day. In the same month, disarmament was also suspended indefinitely after nearly 1,000 pro-government soldiers registered but failed to hand in enough weapons.

By September, it was apparent that the election would not take place in October; the African Union and the IWG proposed that the voting be further deferred and that control of the armed forces be transferred to the prime minister. In early November, the UN Security Council passed a resolution supporting this proposal giving Banny all necessary authority to implement the peace plan. Gbagbo has since refused to relinquish power calling the resolution's requirement for strengthening the prime minister's mandate "an attack on the sovereignty of my country." Gbagbo has also called for the removal of French and UN troops from the country and the dissolution of the IWG, arguing that the UN-led peace process had failed completely. No formal compromise has yet been reached, and the future of the peace process remains uncertain. This impasse between the Prime Minister and the President has led to a number of anti-government protests and demonstrations throughout the country, a few of which have turned violent.

Separately, in late August 2006, the Netherlands-based company Trafigura Beheer B.V. dumped some 400 tons of petrochemical waste containing hydrogen sulphide, a toxic substance, in and around Abidjan after other, safer means of disposal were deemed too expensive. The action contravened the 1989 Basel Convention, which, among other things, was designed to protect poorer countries from hazardous waste disposal. The toxic dump in Cote d'Ivoire resulted in seven confirmed deaths, over 80,000 people seeking medical treatment, and the arrest of a number of officials, including two French employees of the Dutch company. In addition, the cabinet of the Prime Minister resigned in protest immediately following the incident; although, in practice this move was purely symbolic as Prime Minister Banny reappointed most of his cabinet members a few weeks later with the exception of the ministers of transport and the environment. In the course of the government's

investigation into the affair, a number of high-ranking officials were also suspended, including the general manager of the Abidjan port and the head of customs, both of whom had been victims of mob attacks in Abidjan following the dumping. In late November, in an apparent demonstration of his continued power over Banny, Gbagbo ordered the reinstatement of these, and other, civil servants in connection with the toxic waste scandal; the general manager of the Abidjan port, one of the men reinstated, allegedly has close ties to Gbagbo himself and is a primary financier of the militant Young Patriot group.

Cote d'Ivoire is by far the world's leading producer of cocoa, and the country was once a beacon of stability and economic progress in West Africa. However, the civil war has ravaged the economy. The country retains strong political, economic, and military ties to France, which has maintained a military garrison near Abidjan for years, mainly to protect French nationals who live in Cote d'Ivoire. Many French, however, fled after the war erupted.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Cote d'Ivoire is not an electoral democracy. The 1995 presidential election was neither free nor fair and was boycotted by all the major opposition parties. Voting in the October 2000 presidential election appeared to be carried out fairly, but only 5 of 19 potential candidates were allowed to contest the vote. President Laurent Gbagbo's FPI won an overwhelming number of seats in the December 2000 legislative elections.

The constitution provides for the election of a president by popular vote every five years. However, a date for the next presidential election—already postponed by more than a year—has not been set. The president traditionally appoints the prime minister; however, Charles Konan Banny, the current prime minister, was appointed by African Union mediators during the course of peace negotiations at the end of 2005. The 225 members of the unicameral National Assembly are elected in single- and multi-district elections by direct popular vote to serve five-year terms. The legislature's latest electoral mandate expired at the end of 2005.

Major political parties include the ruling FPI, the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire–African Democratic Rally, and the RDR.

Corruption is a serious problem in Cote d'Ivoire. Profits from cocoa, cotton, and weapons, as well as informal taxes, have made resolving the Ivorian conflict a less attractive option for many in power, including members of the military and rebel forces. Corruption did not noticeably improve in 2006. Cote d'Ivoire was ranked 151 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Despite constitutional protections for press freedom, it is generally not respected in practice and deteriorated slightly in 2006. State-owned newspapers and the state-run broadcasting system are for the most part unreservedly

progovernment. Several private radio stations and a cable television service operate, but only the state broadcasting system reaches a national audience. In the north, the circulation of newspapers printed in Abidjan is heavily restricted and local radio and television stations remain under the tight control of the rebel authorities. Despite the reconciliation process, most Ivorian media remain partisan and provocative.

Journalists in 2006 continued to face harassment and threats. In January, to bolster support for attacks on the United Nations, progovernment Young Patriot forces took control of the state-owned radio and television stations and broadcast messages that drew thousands of demonstrators onto the streets. During the occupation of the media outlets, which was aided by security personnel and a number of senior broadcast officials, demonstrators threatened to kill or rape journalists who were unwilling to cooperate. Many other journalists were harassed, attacked, and threatened amid the wider violence that month, particularly in Abidjan. In November, Gbagbo moved the state-run media closer toward complete government control when he fired the director general of the national state-run television station, Ivorian Radio Television (RTI), and replaced him with Brou Amessan, who had served as the government's news anchor during the Young Patriot's takeover of the station. This move came during a period of heightened tension between Gbagbo and his prime minister after RTI aired one of the prime minister's press releases which condemned Gbagbo's order to reinstate the previously dismissed civil servants accused of involvement in the toxic waste dump scandal.

In December 2004, the National Assembly passed a new law removing criminal penalties for press offenses, such as defamation and publishing false information, and replaced them with stiff fines. This legislative change was applied in September 2006 when a private daily, *Le Jour Plus*, was fined \$29,000 by an Abidjan court for publishing an article accusing the president's wife of involvement in the toxic waste incident. In an otherwise disappointing environment for the media, international press coverage in Cote d'Ivoire improved in May 2006 when the National Council for Broadcast Communication allowed Radio France Internationale (RFI) to resume FM transmission after suspending it in July 2005 for being "unbalanced." Internet access, though used infrequently is unrestricted by the government.

Religious freedom is guaranteed but is not respected in practice. The government openly favors Christianity, and Muslims, who predominate in the rebel-held north, have been targeted as a result of the civil war. However, direct attacks on Muslims have decreased in recent years. Efforts by religious and civil society groups have helped ease tensions between Christians and Muslims.

The government, which owns most of the educational facilities in the country, inhibits academic freedom by requiring authorization for all political meetings held on college campuses. According to the UN news organization IRIN, the pro-government Student Federation of Cote d'Ivoire (FESCI)

operating on the University of Abidjan campus regularly intimidates students through the use of strong-arm tactics including physical violence, sexual harassment, and occasionally even rape in its efforts to control political thought, student and staff activities, and campus commerce. In July 2005 when a rival student union attempted to hold a meeting on campus the FESCI attacked their members and temporarily closed the campus.

The constitution protects the right to freely assemble and demonstrate; however, this right is often denied in practice. In recent years, a number of opposition demonstrations have been violently dispersed by pro-government forces leaving many dead. However, in 2006, while pro-government law enforcers actively continued to suppress opposition activity, a number of peaceful anti-government demonstrations were successfully staged, notably in response to Gbagbo's decision to reappoint the civil servants accused of involvement in the toxic waste dump scandal. Human rights groups generally operate freely in Cote d'Ivoire, although rights defenders sometimes face death threats and harassment. Labor union formation and membership are legally protected, although only a small percentage of the workforce is organized. Workers have the right to bargain collectively.

Cote d'Ivoire does not have an independent judiciary. Judges are political appointees without tenure and are highly susceptible to external interference. In many rural areas, traditional courts still prevail, especially in the handling of minor matters and family law. In the rebel-held north, no functioning judiciary exists, a situation which leads to frequent arbitrary arrests and the imposition of prison sentences with no legal foundation. Security forces generally operate with impunity, and prison conditions are harsh.

Human rights groups have accused officials of deliberately encouraging a culture of violent xenophobia in Cote d'Ivoire, whose economy has long attracted workers from neighboring countries. Conflict between newer immigrants and longer term residents has contributed significantly to deepening and complicating the country's current political crisis. More than one-quarter of the country's population is estimated to consist of expatriates from other African countries. For decades, immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Guinea have provided cheap labor for local landowners, which helped turn Cote d'Ivoire into the world's leading cocoa producer. However, competition over land rights, economic decline, and the civil war have inflamed ethnic tensions, particularly in the western region.

Freedom of movement is curtailed throughout the country, but especially between the south and the rebel-held north. In response to the attacks on UN forces in January 2006, the UN Security Council imposed financial and travel sanctions for 12 months on two prominent members of the Young Patriots responsible for the attacks, including the group's leader Charles Ble Goude. In the same resolution, the Security Council imposed identical sanctions on Martin Kouakou Fofie, a commander of the New Forces in the north, for the

perpetration of human rights violations, including the recruitment of child soldiers and sexual abuse, by forces under his command.

Child labor and child trafficking are problems, although Cote d'Ivoire has made efforts to stem both practices. Tens of thousands of West African children are believed to be working on Ivorian plantations in hazardous conditions.

Women suffer widespread discrimination, despite official encouragement for respect for their constitutional rights. Equal pay for equal work is offered in the small formal business sector, but women have few chances to obtain, or advance in, wage employment. In rural areas that rely on subsistence agriculture, education and job opportunities for women are even more scarce. Female genital mutilation is still practiced, although it has been a crime since 1998. Violence against women is reportedly common. Human Rights Watch has reported that both the government and rebels have been responsible for sexual violence against women and girls that is rooted in ethnic discrimination and a climate of impunity.

Cuba

Population: 11,300,000

Capital: Havana

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

In 2006, President Fidel Castro passed power, on a provisional basis, to his brother Raul, who is head of the armed forces. This decision was made when serious internal bleeding forced the Cuban leader to undergo emergency surgery, which was followed by a slow convalescence. The transfer of authority, which occurred shortly before Fidel Castro's 80th birthday on August 13, marked the first time that the elder Castro has relinquished control since the 1959 Cuban revolution. The 75-year old Raul Castro initially kept a low profile, but gradually began to assume a more prominent role. Although most Cubans were initially stunned by the news, routine life continued without disruption. Levels of government repression remained constant throughout this transition period. Tensions between Cuba and the United States remained high, while Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez met frequently with the ailing Castro and vowed his support for the Cuban Revolution.

Cuba achieved independence from Spain in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War. The Republic of Cuba was established in 1902, but remained under U.S. tutelage as a result of the Platt Amendment until 1934. In 1959, the U.S.-supported dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who had ruled Cuba for 18 of the previous 25 years, was ousted by Fidel Castro's July 26th Movement. Castro declared his affiliation with communism shortly thereafter, and the island has been a one-party state ever since.

Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of some \$5 billion in annual Soviet subsidies, Castro opened some sectors of the island's economy to direct foreign investment. The legalization of the U.S. dollar in Cuba in 1993 created a new source of inequality, as access to dollars from remittances or through the tourist industry engendered a new moneyed class, while the majority continued to live on peso wages averaging less than \$10 a month.

The Castro government remains highly repressive of political dissent. Although Cuba's cycle of repression has ebbed and flowed over the past decade, the desire to neutralize organized political dissent remains a regime priority. In February 1999, the government introduced tough legislation against sedition, with a maximum prison sentence of 20 years. It stipulated penalties for unauthorized contacts with the United States and the import or supply of "subversive" materials, including texts on democracy and documents from news agencies and journalists. The Cuban government has recently undertaken a series of campaigns to undermine the reputations of leading opposition figures by portraying them as agents of the United States.

In 2002, the Varela Project, a referendum initiative seeking broad changes in the four-decades-old socialist system, won significant international recognition. Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter praised the project on Cuban television during his visit to the island, and its leader, Oswaldo Paya of the Christian Liberation Movement, later received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In May, project organizers submitted more than 11,000 signatures to the National Assembly demanding that a referendum be held in which Cubans could vote for fundamental reforms such as freedom of expression, the right to own private businesses, and electoral reform. However, the proposal was rejected by the constitutional committee of the National Assembly, and the Cuban government instead held a counter-referendum in which 8.2 million people supposedly declared the socialist system to be "untouchable."

In March 2003, the government initiated a crackdown against the pro-democracy opposition. Seventy-five people, including 27 independent journalists, 14 independent librarians, and more than 40 signature collectors for the Varela Project, were sentenced to an average of 20 years in prison following one-day trials held in April. (At the end of 2004, 61 of the activists who were arrested remained in prison; 14 won conditional release for health-related reasons, and two subsequently left Cuba.) In 2005, Cuba's "Ladies in White," a group of wives who hold weekly public demonstrations for the release of their husbands imprisoned in 2003, won the Sakharov Prize, following in the footsteps of Paya.

In May 2004, U.S. president George W. Bush announced that the United States would intensify pressure on the Cuban regime by increasing broadcasts designed to break through the island's information blockade, by aiding dissidents, and by limiting the amount of money Cuban-Americans could take with them on family visits or send through remittances. In 2005, the U.S. State Department appointed a "transition coordinator" to oversee efforts to destabilize the Castro government and usher in democratic change. In February 2006, the U.S. diplomatic mission in Cuba set up a billboard to broadcast messages to the Cuban people, but the Cuban government responded by erecting 138 black flags in front of the building that commemorated "victims of

imperialism.” In July, the U.S. government released an updated version of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, chaired by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez. The commission set aside \$80 million for the Cuba Fund for a Democratic Future to fund assistance to opposition groups within Cuba, but many dissidents complained that the program was counterproductive.

On July 31, Fidel Castro, president since 1959, passed power to his younger brother, Raul, the head of the armed forces, on a provisional basis. Serious internal bleeding, which forced Fidel to undergo emergency surgery, prompted the decision, and his surgery was followed by a slow convalescence. The transfer of authority, which occurred shortly before Fidel’s 80th birthday on August 13, marked the first time that the elder Castro had relinquished control since the 1959 Cuban revolution. In addition to Raul Castro, six Cuban ministers were named to manage the responsibilities for health, education, energy, and finance. The 75-year old Raul subsequently kept a low profile, while other top officials, including Vice President Carlos Lage, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque, and National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon took on more prominent roles. Cuban authorities declared the state of Fidel’s health to be a state secret, but later released several videotapes of him meeting with foreign dignitaries while dressed in pajamas in his hospital bed. Although most Cubans were initially stunned by the news, routine life continued without disruption. Increased security measures were evident in the streets of Havana and other major cities in the days following the announcement of the transfer of power, including the deployment of military personnel to prevent possible public disruptions.

Castro’s illness sparked spontaneous celebrations in Miami, Florida, where the Cuban exile community in the United States believed that Castro’s long-awaited demise was close at hand. The U.S. government took a cautious approach and reaffirmed that the long-standing U.S. embargo would remain in place until Cuba undertook free and fair elections. U.S.-Cuban relations remained tense and were characterized by periodic skirmishes. In September, the United States called for Cuba to hold a referendum to allow the Cuban people to vote on Raul’s ascension, but the island’s government rejected this proposal.

Cuba continued to strengthen its alliance with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez during the year. Trade between the two countries neared \$3 billion, with Venezuela exporting nearly 100,000 barrels of oil per day on preferential financing terms. Cuba and Venezuela continued to deepen several joint programs, including Operation Miracle, which provided eye surgeries for poor Latin Americans; the state-sponsored news channel Telesur; and a regional oil pact known as PetroCaribe. The December 2005 election of President Evo Morales in Bolivia had allowed Cuba to expand its international partnerships, including the economic and social pact known as the Bolivarian Alternative for

the Americas (ALBA). Both Venezuela and Bolivia pledged to help defend Cuba against potential U.S. intervention.

In September, Cuba hosted the 14th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, a 118-member grouping of developing countries. Fifty-six heads of state attended, including the leaders of Pakistan, India, Iran, and Malaysia. However, the presidents of several major Latin American countries—including Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Peru—chose not to attend. Cuba continued to diversify its international partnerships. China emerged as Cuba's second largest trading partner with nearly \$1 billion in trade in 2005. Major Chinese investments were made in the island's nickel industry, as well as in tourism, transportation, and telecommunications. The Cuban government defended Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. European countries like the Czech Republic criticized Cuba for suppression of civil liberties, but European investment in Cuba remained strong.

Although the Cuban economy remained troubled, it appeared to be rebounding from the severe economic crisis of the 1990s. Fidel Castro claimed a growth rate of 12.5 percent in 2006, while outside analysts estimated a more modest 5 percent increase. During the year, foreign companies continued exploring Cuba's offshore energy reserves, which the U.S. Geological Survey estimated could hold 4.6 billion barrels of oil and 9.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Cuba parceled its offshore territory into 59 exploration blocks, 16 of which were claimed by companies from Canada, Spain, Norway, India, and China. The Cuban government also expressed interest in revitalizing its sugar industry, which underwent a major downsizing in 2002 and yielded a record-low harvest of 1.3 million tons in 2006. Fidel Castro announced an "energy revolution" in January to end the problem of blackouts, and later raised the monthly minimum wage to 225 pesos (about \$10) a month.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Cuba is not an electoral democracy. President Fidel Castro and, more recently, his brother Raul Castro dominate the political system. The country is a one-party state with the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) controlling all governmental entities from the national to the local level. Communist structures were institutionalized by the 1976 constitution installed at the first congress of the PCC. The constitution provides for the National Assembly, which designates the Council of State. It is that body which in turn appoints the Council of Ministers in consultation with its president, who serves as head of state and chief of government. However, Castro is responsible for every appointment and controls every lever of power in Cuba in his various roles as president of the Council of Ministers, chairman of the Council of State, commander in chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), and first secretary of the PCC. The

most recent PCC congress took place in 1997, and no date has been set for the next meeting.

In October 2002, some 8 million Cubans voted in tightly controlled municipal elections. On January 19, 2003, an election was held for the Cuban National Assembly, with just 609 candidates—all supported by the regime—vying for 609 seats.

All political organizing outside the PCC is illegal. Political dissent, spoken or written, is a punishable offense, and those so punished frequently receive years of imprisonment for seemingly minor infractions. Continuing a trend from 2003, in 2006 the Cuban government harassed dissidents, including using arbitrary sweeps and temporary detentions of suspected dissidents. The regime also called on its neighbor-watch groups, known as “Committees in Defense of the Revolution,” to strengthen vigilance against “anti-social behavior,” a government euphemism for opposition activity. Several dissident leaders claimed to suffer “acts of repudiation” by state-sponsored groups that attempt to intimidate and harass government opponents.

Official corruption remains a serious problem, with a “culture of illegality” shrouding the mixture of private and state-controlled economic activities allowed on the island. In late 2003, Juan Jose Vega, the president of Cubanacan, a state-run enterprise controlling more than \$600 million in foreign investment in Cuba’s tourism industry, was dismissed on charges of corruption. In 2006, a leading government official, Juan Carlos Robinson, was dismissed from the Politburo and sentenced to 12 years in prison for corruption charges. Cuba was ranked 66 out of 163 countries surveyed in the Transparency International’s 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of the press remains tightly curtailed, and the media in Cuba remain controlled by the state and the Communist Party. The independent press is considered illegal by the state and is the object of a targeted campaign of intimidation by the government, which uses Ministry of Interior agents to infiltrate and report on the independent media. Independent journalists, particularly those associated with a dozen small news agencies established outside state control, have been subjected to continued repression, including jail terms of hard labor and assaults by state security agents. Foreign news agencies may only hire local reporters through government offices, limiting employment opportunities for independent journalists.

In 2004, 22 independent journalists arrested in March 2003 remained imprisoned in degrading conditions, which included physical and psychological abuse; acts of harassment and intimidation were also directed against their families. In April, two journalists held without trial since March 2002 were finally tried by a court in Ciego de Avila on charges of insulting Castro and the police and creating public disorder; one received a three-year prison sentence and the other a sentence of three and a half years.

Access to the internet remained tightly controlled. It is illegal for Cubans to connect to the internet in their homes. State-owned internet cafes exist in major cities, but web sites are closely monitored, and access costs are inaccessible for most Cubans. Only select state employees are permitted access to email at their workplaces as well as to an intranet system that limits access to web sites that the government deems inappropriate.

In 1991, Roman Catholics and other believers were granted permission to join the Communist Party, and the constitutional reference to official atheism was dropped the following year. In 1998, Pope John Paul II visited Cuba and called for greater religious freedom; his visit was followed by a temporary lessening of restrictions on religious worship. However, according to the Cuban Conference on Catholic Bishops, official obstacles to religious freedom remain as restrictive as before the Pope's visit. According to the U.S. State Department's 2006 International Religious Freedom Report, Cuba remains one of four countries that continues to employ authoritarian actions to control religious belief and expression. Security agents frequently spy on worshippers, the government continues to block construction of new churches, the number of new foreign priests is limited, and most new denominations are refused recognition. Churches are not allowed to conduct educational initiatives and church-based publications are subject to the control and censorship of the governmental Office of Religious Affairs. An estimated 70 percent of all Cubans on the island practice some form of Afro-Cuban religion.

The government restricts academic freedom. Teaching materials for courses such as mathematics or literature must contain ideological content. Affiliation with official Communist Party structures is generally needed to gain access to educational institutions, and students' report cards carry information regarding their parents' involvement with the Communist Party. In 2003, state security forces raided 22 independent libraries and sent 14 librarians to jail with terms of up to 26 years. Many of the targeted individuals were charged with working with the United States to subvert the Cuban government, thereby committing national security violations and aiding a foreign power. Several political prisoners have subsequently been released for health reasons, but they are subject to re-arrest at any time.

Limited rights of assembly and association are permitted under the constitution; however, as is the case with all other constitutional rights, these are subject to the stipulation that they may not be "exercised against the existence and objectives of the Socialist State." The unauthorized assembly of more than three persons, including those for private religious services in private homes, is punishable by law with up to three months in prison and a fine. This prohibition is selectively enforced and is often used as a legal pretext to imprison human rights advocates.

Workers do not have the right to bargain collectively or to strike. Members of independent labor unions, which the government considers illegal,

are often harassed or dismissed from their jobs and subsequently barred from future employment. The government has also been reducing opportunities for private economic activity; a trend towards revoking self-employment licenses continued, and privately run farmers' markets also came under increased scrutiny, a further intensification of the movement toward increased state control of the economy.

The executive branch controls the judiciary. In practice, the Council of State, of which Castro is chairman, serves as a de facto judiciary and controls both the courts and the judicial process as a whole.

According to a domestic monitoring group, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, there are more than 300 prisoners of conscience in Cuba, most held in cells with common criminals and many convicted on vague charges such as "disseminating enemy propaganda" or "dangerousness." Members of groups that exist apart from the state are labeled "counterrevolutionary criminals" and are subject to systematic repression, including arrest; beatings while in custody; loss of work, educational opportunities, and health care; and intimidation by uniformed or plainclothes state security agents. Dissidents reported being subject to even tighter surveillance following Fidel Castro's illness, as the government mobilized to thwart any potential public disruptions.

Since 1991, the United Nations has voted annually to assign a special investigator on human rights to Cuba, but the Cuban government has refused to cooperate. Cuba also does not allow the International Red Cross or other humanitarian organizations access to its prisons. Cuba's prison population is disproportionately black.

Many Afro-Cubans have only limited access to the dollar-earning sectors of the economy, such as tourism and employment by joint-ventures.

Freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence and place of employment are severely restricted. Attempting to leave the island without permission is a punishable offense. Intercity migration or relocation is also restricted and requires permission from the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution and other local authorities. In the post-Soviet era, only state enterprises can enter into economic agreements with foreigners as minority partners; regular citizens cannot participate. However, PCC membership is still required to obtain good jobs, serviceable housing, and real access to social services, including medical care and educational opportunities. In 2004, a Ministry of Labor decree halted the issuance of all new licenses for 40 categories of self-employment that were legalized in 1993. Roughly 150,000 Cubans are self-employed, representing approximately 2 percent of the workforce. The government systematically violates international salary standards, terms of contract, and other labor codes for workers employed on the island by foreign-owned firms.

About 40 percent of all women work, and they are well represented in most professions. However, violence against women is a problem, as is child prostitution.

Equatorial Guinea

Population: 500,000

Capital: Malabo

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Equatorial Guinea signed an oil production agreement with China in February 2006, continuing to reap huge profits from its natural resources even as the majority of its citizens remained mired in poverty. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo maintained his broad powers over the country's political institutions as well as the national oil industry.

Equatorial Guinea achieved independence from Spain in 1968. It has since been one of the world's most tightly closed and repressive societies. Current President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo seized power in 1979 by deposing and murdering his uncle, Francisco Macias Nguema. Demands from donor countries for democratic reforms forced Obiang to legalize a multiparty system in 1992, though he and his clique continued to control political power. The 1996 presidential election, won by Obiang, was marred by official intimidation, a near total boycott by the political opposition, and very low voter turnout. The ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) won 75 of 80 seats in similarly flawed parliamentary elections in 1999. Many opposition candidates were arrested or confined to their villages prior to the polls.

Four opposition challengers withdrew from the December 2002 presidential election, citing irregularities. Obiang won a third seven-year term with 99.5 percent of the vote. Following the election, the government announced the formation of a "government of national unity" that brought members of eight small parties into the cabinet. Despite reshuffles in 2004 and 2006, key cabinet positions continue to be held by presidential relatives and loyalists.

The PDGE won 68 of 100 seats in the April 2004 parliamentary elections, with allied parties taking 30. The opposition Convergence Party for Social Democracy (CPDS), which complained of numerous irregularities and voter intimidation, won the remaining two seats.

In June 2005, Obiang granted amnesty to six Armenian pilots who had been among 22 people convicted in November 2004 for alleged involvement in a coup plot discovered in March 2004. Under intense international pressure,

Obiang in June 2006 freed several of the South African citizens in the group as part of a larger release of 41 political prisoners. Amnesty International had expressed concern over the likely use of torture in extracting confessions from the coup plot defendants, particularly in the case of a German suspect who died in custody. Many of the alleged plotters, some of whom were tried in Zimbabwe, had ties to the defunct mercenary firm Executive Outcomes, founded by apartheid-era South African military officers.

The Equatorial Guinean government accused Severo Moto, an opposition figure living in exile in Spain; South African financier and oil broker Eli Calil; and Sir Mark Thatcher, son of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, of being behind the scheme to oust Obiang in 2004. Tried in a South African court, Thatcher testified as part of a plea bargain that he had unwittingly helped to bankroll the coup attempt. Moto and eight members of his “government in exile” were tried in absentia and convicted of treason. A separate group of Equatorial Guineans accused of trying to topple Obiang in October 2004 received sentences of up to 30 years in prison in September 2005. According to Amnesty International, all but two of the defendants who appeared in court said they had been tortured. Of the six defendants tried in absentia, three were allegedly held incommunicado in Equatorial Guinea after being abducted from Nigeria and Benin.

Equatorial Guinea is Africa’s third-largest oil producer, and per capita gross domestic product is among the highest in the world. U.S. direct investment in Equatorial Guinea stands at more than \$10 billion, nearly all of it energy-related, and represents the fourth-highest level of U.S. direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa. The United States closed its embassy in the country in 1995, but reopened it in 2003. In 2006, the United States named its first resident ambassador to Equatorial Guinea in more than a decade. Other countries vie for Equatorial Guinea’s oil, including China, which signed an oil production agreement there in February 2006 and is providing training to the local military forces.

Despite the country’s oil wealth, there have been few improvements in the standard of living. Equatorial Guinea’s economy is now 20 times larger than it was in the mid 1990s, but school enrollment and literacy rates continue to be very low. Over 50 percent of the population lacks access to clean water. According to the World Bank, life expectancy decreased between 2000 and 2004. The majority of the country’s impoverished citizens depend on subsistence agriculture. Equatorial Guinea ranked 120 out of 177 countries on the UN Development Program’s 2006 Human Development Index.

World Bank programs were cut off in 1993 because of corruption and mismanagement. The government has since attempted to negotiate a “shadow” fiscal management program with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Equatorial Guinea declared its intent to implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in September 2004, but has made

slow progress to date. According to the IMF, the government still holds offshore treasury accounts worth \$718 million.

Equatorial Guinea maintains a security agreement with Sao Tome and Principe aimed at guaranteeing the safety of offshore oil rigs, as well as controlling clandestine immigration and drug trafficking, and guaranteeing the security of maritime and air traffic.

The United Nations since 2004 has served as mediator in a dispute between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon over exploration rights in the potentially oil-rich Corisco Bay Islands. The Equatorial Guinean government briefly accused Gabon of providing assistance to the October 2004 coup plotters.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Equatorial Guinea is not an electoral democracy, and the country has never held a credible election. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, whose current seven-year term will end in 2009, holds broad powers and limits public participation in the policy-making process. The 100 members of the unicameral House of People's Representatives are elected to five-year terms but wield little power, and 98 of these seats are held by the ruling PDGE and allied parties. There are 13 registered political parties in Equatorial Guinea, 6 of which are aligned with the PDGE. The activities of the remaining parties, in particular the CPDS, are closely monitored by the government. Despite Obiang's iron grip on the country, members of his Mongomo clan compete with each other for political influence and financial gain.

Equatorial Guinea is considered one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Obiang and members of his inner circle and ethnic group have reaped huge personal profits from the growing oil industry. Equatorial Guinea ranked 151 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Press freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, but the government restricts this right in practice. The 1992 press law authorizes government censorship of all publications, and nearly all print and broadcast media are state run and tightly controlled. A few private newspapers and underground pamphlets are published irregularly. Criticism of the country's leadership is not tolerated, and self-censorship is widespread. Publications that irk the government are banned from the newsstands without explanation. In June 2005, authorities seized 200 copies of the country's sole opposition newspaper, *La Verdad*. Equatorial Guinea has one internet provider affiliated with the government telephone monopoly, and there have been unconfirmed reports that the government monitors citizens using the internet.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, and government respect for freedom of individual religious practice has generally improved. The

government does not restrict academic freedom, though faculty practice self-censorship.

Freedom of association and assembly is restricted. Authorization must be obtained for any gathering of 10 or more people for purposes deemed political. There are no effective domestic human rights organizations, and the few international nongovernmental organizations operating in Equatorial Guinea are prohibited from promoting or defending human rights. Dozens of opposition activists remain in prison.

Though the constitution provides for the right to organize unions, only the Small Farmers Syndicate has legal recognition. The government has refused to register the Equatorial Guinea Trade Union, whose members carry out their activities in secret. Foreign oil firms have attempted unsuccessfully to reduce government control over the local industry's hiring process.

The judiciary is not independent, and laws on search and seizure—as well as detention—are routinely ignored. Amnesty International and the International Bar Association allege that the trials for the two separate groups of alleged 2004 coup plotters were marked by flagrant human rights abuses, including torture and forced confessions. Civil cases rarely go to trial, and a military tribunal handles cases tied to national security. Prison conditions, especially in the notorious Black Beach prison, are often life-threatening for inmates.

Obiang's Mongomo clan of the majority Fang ethnic group monopolizes political and economic power to the exclusion of other groups. Differences between the Fang and the Bubi are a major source of political tension and often erupt into violence. Fang vigilante groups abuse Bubi citizens with impunity.

All citizens are required to obtain permission to travel abroad from the local police commissioner, and some members of opposition parties have been denied this permission. Those who do travel abroad are sometimes subjected to interrogation upon their return.

Constitutional and legal guarantees of equality for women are largely ignored, and violence against women is widespread. Traditional practices including primogeniture and polygamy discriminate against women. Most women lack educational opportunities and the ability to participate in the formal economy or government. Abortion is permitted to preserve the physical health of the mother, but only with spousal or parental authorization.

↓ Eritrea

Population: 4,600,000

Capital: Asmara

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Trend Arrow: Eritrea received a downward trend arrow due to heightened legal restrictions on religious minorities.

Overview:

The repressive government of President Isaias Afwerki clamped down further on civil society and grew more isolated internationally in 2006. Leading journalists and democracy activists remained jailed for a fifth year, and Christians who belonged to unrecognized churches were increasingly persecuted. Meanwhile, the government continued its policy of refusing to permit competitive elections. The authorities also expelled a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and UN peacekeepers, and were accused of supporting Islamist militants in Somalia.

In 1950, after years of Italian occupation, Eritrea was incorporated into Ethiopia. Its independence struggle began in 1962 as a nationalist and Marxist guerrilla war against the Ethiopian government of Emperor Haile Selassie. The seizure of power by a Marxist junta in Ethiopia in 1974 removed the ideological basis of the conflict, and by the time Eritrea finally defeated Ethiopia's northern armies in 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had discarded Marxism. Internationally recognized independence was achieved in May 1993 after a referendum supervised by the United Nations produced a landslide vote for statehood.

War with Ethiopia broke out in 1998. In May 2000, an Ethiopian military offensive made significant territorial gains. Eritrea signed a truce with Ethiopia in June 2000, and a peace treaty was signed in December 2000. The agreement provided for a UN-led buffer force to be installed along the Eritrean side of the contested border and stipulated that further negotiations should determine the final boundary line. The war had dominated the country's political and economic agenda, reflecting the government's habitual use of real or perceived national security threats to generate popular support and political unity.

In May 2001, 15 senior ruling-party members known as the Group of 15 publicly criticized President Isaias Afwerki and called for “the rule of law and for justice, through peaceful and legal ways and means.” Eleven members of the dissident group were arrested for treason in September 2001. Three members who were out of the country at the time escaped arrest, and one withdrew his support for the group. The small independent media sector was also shut down, and 18 journalists were imprisoned.

In 2005, the Eritrean government clamped down on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) by withdrawing tax exemptions and increasing registration requirements. The government ordered the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to end its operations in the country. Separately, tensions remained high with Ethiopia, as Eritrea objected to the inconclusive results of an internationally mediated solution to its long-standing border dispute. It claimed that the Ethiopians were not respecting the 2000 agreement, and the authorities banned UN helicopter flights in Eritrean airspace, restricted UN ground patrols, and expelled some of the peacekeepers.

Isaias’s government added to its restrictions on civil society and isolated itself internationally in 2006. The journalists and democracy activists detained in 2001 remained jailed for a fifth year despite widespread international calls for their release, and competitive elections continued to be blocked. Reports appeared in 2006 of hundreds of followers of various unregistered churches (mostly Protestant) being detained, harassed, and abused. Approximately 2,000 individuals remained in detention at year’s end because of their religious affiliation, according to the NGO Compass Direct.

The government also expelled several development NGOs, including Concern Worldwide, Mercy Corps and Acord. Five UN peacekeepers were expelled without cause, and the government was accused of supporting Islamist militants in Somalia. The UN-backed transitional government there, which the militants opposed, was receiving Ethiopian military aid.

The 2006 UN Human Poverty Index ranked Eritrea at 70 out of 102 countries measured. Per capita GDP was \$977. The government is estimated to have the highest level of per capita military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), at 36.4 percent, in the world.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Eritrea is not an electoral democracy. Created in February 1994 as a successor to the EPLF, the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) maintains complete dominance over the country’s political life. Instead of moving toward creating a framework for a democratic political system, the PFDJ has taken significant steps backward since the end of the war with Ethiopia. The 2001 crackdown on those calling for greater political pluralism,

and subsequent repressive steps, clearly demonstrate the Eritrean government's authoritarian policies.

In 1994, a 50-member Constitutional Commission was established. A new constitution was adopted in 1997, authorizing "conditional" political pluralism with provisions for a multiparty system. The constitution calls for the 150-seat legislature, the National Assembly, to elect the president from among its members by a majority vote. In 2000, the National Assembly determined that the first general elections would be held in December 2001 and appointed a committee that issued draft regulations governing political parties. The regulations have never been enacted, and independent political parties authorized by the constitution do not exist. National elections have been postponed indefinitely. In 2004, regional assembly elections were conducted, but they were carefully orchestrated by the PFDJ and offered no real choice.

Eritrea has long maintained a reputation for a relatively low level of corruption. In recent years, however, graft appears to have increased somewhat. Eritrea was ranked 93 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Government control over all broadcasting outlets and the repression of independent print media have eliminated the vehicles for dissemination of opposing or alternative views. In its September 2001 crackdown, the government banned all privately owned newspapers while claiming that a parliamentary committee would examine conditions under which they would be permitted to reopen. Journalists arrested in 2001 remain imprisoned, and other journalists have subsequently been arrested. In 2006 the Committee to Protect Journalists listed Eritrea as one of the ten worst countries limiting press freedom in the world. Internet use remains limited, with an estimated 50,000 users in 2005 out of a population of more than four million.

The government places significant limitations on the exercise of religion. It officially recognizes only four faiths—Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism as practiced by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Persecution of minority Christian sects has escalated in recent years, particularly against Jehovah's Witnesses, who were stripped of their basic civic rights in 1994, and evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Members of other minority churches have been jailed and tortured or ill-treated to make them abandon their faith. Some Muslims have also been targeted. The U.S. Department of State's 2006 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom cited Eritrea as one of eight top abusers of religious freedom in the world.

Academic freedom is constrained. High school students are required to participate in a highly unpopular policy of obligatory military service, often at a station far from their homes, such as the training camp in Sawa, in the far western part of the country, near the Ethiopian border. The conscription periods are open-ended, and no conscientious objector clause exists. Critics have alleged that such activities constitute forced labor.

The government continues to maintain a hostile attitude toward civil society. Independent NGOs are not allowed, and the legitimate role of human rights defenders is not recognized. In 2005, Eritrea enacted legislation to regulate the operations of all NGOs, requiring them to pay taxes on imported materials, submit project reports every three months, renew their licenses annually, and meet government-established target levels of financial resources. International human rights NGOs are barred from the country, and in 2006 the government expelled three remaining development NGOs.

The civil service, the military, the police, and other essential services have some restrictions on their freedom to form unions. In addition, groups of 20 or more persons seeking to form a union require special approval from the Ministry of Labor. The military conscription of men aged 18 to 45 has also created a scarcity of skilled labor.

A judiciary was formed by decree in 1993. It has never issued rulings significantly at variance with government positions, and constitutional guarantees are often ignored in cases related to state security. The provision of speedy trials is limited by a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure.

According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, torture, arbitrary detentions, and political arrests are widespread. Religious persecution and ill-treatment of those trying to avoid military service are increasing, and torture is systematically practiced by the army. Prison conditions are poor, and outside monitors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross have been denied access to detainees.

There have been reports of government and societal discrimination against the Kunama, one of the country's nine ethnic groups. Historically, the Kunama, who reside primarily in the west, have resisted attempts to integrate them into the national society.

Official government policy is supportive of free enterprise, and citizens generally have the freedom to choose their employment, establish private businesses, and operate them without government harassment.

Women played important roles in the guerilla movement, and the government has worked in favor of improving the status of women. In an effort to encourage broader participation by women in politics, the PFDJ in 1997 named three women to its executive council and 12 women to its central committee. Women participated in the Constitutional Commission, filling almost half of the positions on the 50-member panel, and hold senior government positions, including minister of justice and minister of labor. Approximately 40 percent of all households are headed by women. Equal educational opportunity, equal pay for equal work, and penalties for domestic violence have been codified. However, traditional societal discrimination persists against women in the largely rural and agricultural country.

Laos

Population: 6,100,000

Capital: Vientiane

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Choummaly Sayasone took over leadership of the ruling party in March and was appointed president in June after his party won nearly all seats in April parliamentary elections. Choummaly is seen as a staunch ally of his predecessor and is not expected to introduce significant policy changes.

Laos, a landlocked and mountainous country, won independence in 1953 after six decades of French rule and Japanese occupation during World War II. The new constitutional monarchy soon entered into a civil war with Communist Pathet Lao (Land of Lao) guerrillas, who were backed by the Vietnamese Communist Party. As the civil war raged on, Laos was drawn into the Vietnam War in 1964, when the United States began bombing North Vietnamese forces operating inside Laos. The Pathet Lao seized power in 1975 and set up a one-party Communist state under Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane's Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP).

By the 1980s, the Laotian economy was in tatters after years of civil war and the inept economic policies of the LPRP. Seeing the success of China's economic opening, the LPRP began to relax controls on prices, encouraged foreign investment, and privatized farms and some state-owned firms. These actions spurred much needed economic growth, but the government has rejected deeper economic reform for fear of losing its power.

General Khamtay Siphandone took over leadership of the LPRP in 1992 and the presidency in 1998. He stepped down in March 2006, leaving the party in the hands of Choummaly Sayasone, age 70. In April 30 elections, LPRP candidates won 113 of the 115 National Assembly seats, while the remaining two seats went to independent candidates. The Assembly endorsed Choummaly as the new president in June. A former vice president and defense minister, he was expected to follow the policies set by Khamtay.

Poverty is widespread, and the economy remains dependent on subsistence agriculture. The country rates poorly on the UN Human Development Index as a result of both the civil war and the inept economic policies of the LPRP. Trade, tourism, and sales of hydroelectric power to neighboring Thailand are the key sources of foreign revenue for the government. Expansion of the Nam Theun hydroelectric dam in southern Laos will produce more electricity for export. Thailand has committed to buying 95 percent of the 1,070 megawatts of power the dam will generate beginning in 2010. The government expects to collect \$2 billion in revenue in the first 25 years of operation. The World Bank has agreed to provide \$270 million in funding and risk guarantees for the project, which critics say will threaten wildlife and displace thousands of subsistence farmers and hill-tribe populations. These two groups—who rely heavily on the illegal growth and sale of opium poppy for their economic livelihood—have also suffered recently from the government’s antidrug campaign, which has been conducted with rigor in order to secure aid from Europe and the United States. Pushed into extreme poverty, some are forced to leave their land to find legitimate work elsewhere or to go deeper into the mountains to continue their illegal trade.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Laos is not an electoral democracy. The 1991 constitution makes the LPRP the sole legal political party and grants it a leading role at all levels of government. The LPRP vets all candidates for election to the rubber-stamp National Assembly, whose 115 members elect the president. Elections are held every five years. General Khamtay Siphandone succeeded Kaysone Phomvihane as head of the LPRP in 1992 and assumed the presidency from Nouhak Phoumsavanh in 1998. The National Assembly reelected Khamtay as president in March 2001. Choummaly Sayasone took over as head of LPRP in March 2006 and assumed the presidency in June.

Corruption and abuses by government officials are widespread. Official announcements and new laws aimed at curbing corruption are rarely enforced. Government regulation of virtually every facet of life provides corrupt officials with many opportunities to demand bribes. High-level personnel in government and the military are also frequently involved in commercial logging, mining, and other enterprises aimed at exploiting Laotian natural resources. The country ranks 111 out of 163 nations surveyed in Transparency International’s 2006 Corruption Perception Index.

Freedom of the press is severely restricted. Any journalist who criticizes the government or discusses controversial political topics faces legal punishment. The state owns all media, including three newspapers that have extremely low circulations, Lao National TV (wholly government owned), Laos Television 3 (a joint venture with a Thai company), and the country’s only radio

station. Residents within frequency range of Radio Free Asia and other foreign broadcasts from Thailand can access these alternative media sources. Internet access is heavily restricted and content is censored.

Religious freedom is tightly restricted. Dozens of Christians have been detained on religious grounds, and several have been jailed for proselytizing or conducting other religious activities. The government forces Christians to renounce their faith, deprives them of their property, and bars them from celebrating Christian holidays. The majority Buddhist population is restricted through LPRP control of clergy training and oversight of temples and other religious sites.

Academic freedom is not respected. University professors cannot teach or write about democracy, human rights, and other politically sensitive topics. A small number of young people have been allowed to travel overseas, including to the United States, for university and graduate-level training. However, they are carefully screened by the government and are generally children of officials and military leaders.

Government surveillance of the population has been scaled back in recent years, but searches without warrants still occur.

The government severely restricts freedom of assembly. Laws prohibit participation in organizations that use demonstrations or public protests to send their message or in any other way cause "turmoil or social stability." Persons found guilty of violating these laws could be sentenced from one to five years in jail. Laos has some nongovernmental welfare and professional groups, but they are prohibited from pursuing political agendas and are subject to strict state control. All unions must belong to the official Federation of Lao Trade Unions. Strikes are not expressly prohibited, but workers rarely stage walkouts, and they do not have the right to bargain collectively.

The courts are corrupt and controlled by the LPRP. Long delays in court hearings are common, particularly for cases dealing with public grievances and complaints against government abuses. Security forces often illegally detain suspects, and some Laotians have allegedly spent more than a decade in jail without trial. Hundreds of political activists have also been held for months or years without trial. Prisoners are often tortured and must bribe prison officials to obtain better food, medicine, visits from family, and more humane treatment.

Discrimination against members of minority tribes is common at many levels. In June 2005, four U.S. nationals were detained and three were deported by the government for "illegally liaising" with members of the Hmong ethnic minority, which allied with U.S. forces during the Vietnam War. All seven were members of the Fact Finding Commission, a U.S.-based non-profit organization, ascertaining the safety of 170 relatives of Hmong rebels who were surrendering to the government. Thousands of Hmong refugees in Thailand were forced by the Thai government to return to Laos in 2005, despite international warnings that they could face political persecution. Laotian government actions to destroy

the remnant Hmong guerilla army and alleged rebel elements have created significant hardships for these mountain people, and thousands have been forced off their land to allow for the exploitation of timber and other natural resources. In December, a group of more than 400 Hmong, mostly children, surrendered to government forces, marking the latest of several bands to do so, according to the Fact Finding Commission.

Many subsistence farmers and fishermen work for themselves and some Laotians run small private businesses.

Although women are guaranteed many of the same rights as men under Laotian laws, gender-based discrimination and abuse are widespread. Tradition and religious practices have contributed to women's inferior position with respect to access to education, equal employment opportunities, and worker benefits. Poverty exacerbates these hardships and puts many women at greater risk of exploitation and abuse by the state and society at large. Domestic violence is a major cause of divorce, and abortion is allowed only to save the life of the mother. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Laotian women and girls, many lowland Laotians and an increasing number of highland ethnic minorities, are trafficked each year for prostitution.

Libya

Population: 5,900,000

Capital: Tripoli

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Despite Libya's poor human rights record, the United States and the European Union continued to develop relations with the oil-rich state in 2006. Libyan leader Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi had changed his country's foreign policies in recent years and remained focused on ending its international isolation. While Libya has taken positive steps, such as releasing some political prisoners, it remains a country where the citizens have few civil rights or political liberties.

Libya was ruled by the Ottoman Empire until the early twentieth century, when it was conquered by Italy. After a period of UN trusteeship in the wake of World War II, the country gained independence in 1951. For the next 18 years, a relatively pro-Western monarch, King Idris, ruled Libya. But in 1969, a group of military officers led by a young captain, Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, overthrew the king while he was out of the country.

Al-Qadhafi soon seized control of the country's vast oil reserves from foreign companies, and evicted U.S. and British forces from military bases on Libyan territory. In establishing the new regime, he claimed that Libya would be ruled directly by the people. His three-volume political treatise, the *Green Book*, is supposedly the guide to leadership and governance in Libya, and explains his ideology, which is a fusion of Arab nationalism, socialism, and Islam. Al-Qadhafi currently holds no official title, and is referred to in Libyan state media as Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution.

In 1981, the United States imposed sanctions on the country, which had become a leading state sponsor of terrorism. After a further deterioration in relations, the United States in 1986 bombed several targets in Libya, including al-Qadhafi's home. In 1988, a Pan Am flight exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 people aboard as well as 11 residents of the town. After an exhaustive investigation, Scottish police issued arrest warrants for two Libyan men, including a Libyan intelligence agent. The UN Security Council

then imposed trade sanctions on the country. For the next several years, Libya was economically and diplomatically isolated.

In 1999, al-Qadhafi set out to make amends internationally and handed over the two Lockerbie bombing suspects for trial. He accepted responsibility for past acts of terrorism and offered compensation packages to the families of victims. The United Nations suspended its sanctions and the European Union began reestablishing diplomatic and trade relations with the country. In 2001, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, found one of the Lockerbie suspects guilty of masterminding the attack. Libya agreed to pay a \$10 million compensation package to the families of each of the 270 victims in 2003. The following year, al-Qadhafi made his first trip to Europe in more than 15 years, and European leaders in turn traveled to Libya. The EU subsequently lifted its arms embargo and normalized diplomatic relations.

Libya also improved its relations with the United States. In 2004, a year after al-Qadhafi's government announced that it had scrapped its nonconventional weapons programs, the United States established a liaison office in Tripoli and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs William Burns visited the country, making him the first U.S. official to do so in nearly three decades. The United States removed Libya from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and established a full embassy in Tripoli in May 2006.

Libya's relations with some fellow Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, have remained poor. Media reports in 2003 suggested the existence of a Libyan plot to assassinate then-Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz al Saud. Libya has denied the claim.

One of al-Qadhafi's seven children, Saif al-Islam, is believed to be one of the driving forces behind Libya's shift in policies. He runs a charitable organization called the Gaddafi International Foundation for Charity Associations, and has facilitated visits by foreign human rights activists. According to press reports, his foundation has made it possible for Libyan citizens to report abuses they may have faced at the hands of authorities. Saif al-Islam has also publicly criticized current conditions in Libya and advocated changes in the leadership.

Libya's people have yet to benefit from the recent policy changes. Political rights and civil liberties are still severely restricted, and the unpredictable al-Qadhafi is still the undisputed leader of the country. In September 2006, he made worrying statements about the need to kill Libya's enemies and reasserted the overall success of the revolution.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Libya is not an electoral democracy. Although it is effectively a dictatorship that has been dominated by the same leaders for over 35 years, Libya is in theory a country ruled by the masses, a "jamahiriya" in Arabic. It is

illegal for any political group to oppose the principles of the 1969 revolution, which are laid out in supreme leader Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi's multivolume political treatise, the *Green Book*. Power theoretically lies with a system of people's committees and the General People's Congress, but those structures are manipulated in practice to ensure al-Qadhafi's rule.

There are no legal opposition parties in Libya. The government monitors political activity, and people who do try to form parties can end up in jail. Many Libyan opposition leaders are active in Europe.

Libya ranked 105 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index. The poor showing is consistent with the country's pervasive corruption in both government and business.

The local press is state controlled and is characterized by its praise of the leadership. Libyan journalists operate in a climate of fear and censorship, leading some to publish their critical reporting on websites based in foreign countries. The June 2005 murder of Dayf al-Ghazal al-Shuhaibi, a former journalist for the government-owned daily *Azahf al-Akhdar* and a contributor to critical Libya-focused websites based in London, had a chilling effect on independent voices in the country. In another such case, Abd al-Raziq al-Mansuri, a journalist who wrote for a London-based website, was arrested in January 2005 by security agents. He received a pardon and was released in March 2006, though the details of the pardon were not disclosed. Al-Mansuri was originally convicted of illegal possession of a weapon, which was found following his arrest, but human rights activists maintain that the real reason behind his detention was his writing critical of the government.

Libya is overwhelmingly Muslim, and the government closely monitors mosques for any Islamist political activity. The few religious minorities, comprised mostly of foreigners living in Libya, are permitted to practice their faiths with relative freedom. Academic freedom is restricted, and like journalists, Libyan academics avoid controversial or politically sensitive topics.

Free assembly, demonstrations, and public events are discouraged and limited by the government. Civil society groups are largely powerless, and those that do have any clout, like the al-Qadhafi Foundation for Development, have connections to the government. Independent labor unions are virtually non-existent.

The People's Court, which had been used to jail political dissidents, has been closed, but Libya's judiciary remains beholden to the government. The courts do not make decisions that run counter to the opinions of al-Qadhafi and his close associates, and arbitrary detentions and imprisonment are fairly routine. However, Libya's desire to rejoin the international community has driven it to make some concessions. Over the last three years, the government has allowed teams from respected international human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International into the country to conduct

research missions. In January 2006, Human Rights Watch released a report based primarily on the findings of its June 2005 trip. While the organization praised the leadership's steps toward ending its international isolation, it was pointedly critical of Libya's judiciary, its restriction of free speech and assembly, and its treatment of political opponents. In a positive note, Libya in March 2006 pardoned over 130 political prisoners, many of whom had spent more than seven years in prison. The government still faced scrutiny for the case of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian physician who were arrested in 1999 after being accused of deliberately injecting 400 hospitalized Libyan children with HIV. The defendants were eventually convicted and sentenced to death. Nevertheless, they maintain their innocence and have blamed the HIV outbreak on the poor conditions at the hospital. They also allege that they have been tortured, and two of the nurses claim they were raped. A retrial is currently being conducted, with a verdict expected on December 19. The retrial confirmed the sentence in December 2006. The nurses and the Palestinian physician are appealing the verdict.

Libya has an enormous force of migrant workers, largely illegal laborers from Africa, many of whom hope to end up in Europe. Human Rights Watch has criticized Libya for arbitrary detention of migrants in poor facilities. As Libya cracks down on undocumented migrant workers, the likelihood of abuse by authorities has increased.

Libyan women enjoy more legal protections than women in many other Arab countries, and Libyan girls enjoy greater access to public education. However, women still face many social and legal hurdles to equality, particularly in areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

North Korea

Population: 23,100,000

Capital: Pyongyang

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

After the short-lived “Joint Agreement” at the September 2005 session of the Six Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, the country withdrew late that year from the Beijing-based talks in order to protest banking sanctions instigated by the U.S. Treasury Department in response to North Korea’s currency counterfeiting transgressions. North Korea in 2006 proceeded to test ballistic missiles and a nuclear device, both of which resulted in condemnatory resolutions from the UN Security Council. Also in 2006, the UN General Assembly joined the UN Commission on Human Rights (now the Human Rights Council) in recognizing and condemning North Korea’s severe human rights violations. Food shortages within North Korea and the problems faced by North Korean refugees in China continued to fester during the year.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) was established in the northern part of the Korea Peninsula in 1948 following three years of post–World War II Soviet occupation. The Soviet Union installed Kim Il-sung, a Korean resistance fighter who had waged guerrilla war against Japan, as the new country’s leader. In 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea in an attempt to reunify the peninsula under Communist rule. Drawing in the United States and then China, the ensuing three-year conflict killed at least 2.5 million people and ended with a cease-fire rather than a full peace treaty. Since then, the two Koreas have been on a continuous war footing, and the border remains one of the most heavily militarized places in the world.

Kim Il-sung solidified his control following the Korean War, purging rivals, throwing thousands of political prisoners into labor camps, and fostering an extreme personality cult that promoted him as North Korea’s messianic, superhuman “Great Leader.” Following the 1953 death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, “revisionist” Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe eased some of the worst excesses of Stalinism, but East Asian Communist governments took a different course. Kim Il-sung attempted to “Koreanize”

Stalinism by reviving the essentially feudalistic social and political institutions of the Choson dynasty, which had ruled Korea for 500 years before the advent of Japanese colonial rule in 1910. These included self-isolation, a hereditary class structure, extensive slave-labor, metaphysical Neo-Confucianism, emperor worship, monolithic ideological orthodoxy, guilt by association, collective punishment for political dissent, and dynastic succession. The DPRK's "Juche ideology" (often literally translated as self-reliance but better understood as "to do for oneself on one's own terms") as elaborated by Kim Il-sung's son, Kim Jong-il, replaced Marxism while seeking to raise collectivism to new levels. Rule passed to "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-il upon the death of the "Great Leader" in 1994; Kim Il-sung was proclaimed "Eternal President" even though physically deceased.

The end of the Cold War and its associated Soviet and Chinese subsidies, however, led to the collapse of North Korea's command economy. While the regime maintained rigid control over all aspects of its citizens' lives, severe economic mismanagement resulted in a famine in the 1990s that killed at least a million people. In addition, as many as 300,000 North Koreans fled to China in search of food or wages to assist their families at home, despite a legal ban on leaving the DPRK. In 1995 North Korea ended its self-imposed isolation and allowed the United Nations and private humanitarian aid organizations from Europe, North America, and South Korea to undertake what was, at that point, one of the world's largest famine relief operations.

During the height of the famine crisis, when the Public Distribution System had collapsed, the DPRK reluctantly permitted food to be sold in public markets, which previously were regarded as illegal. The regime also instituted economic reforms in 2002, which included easing price controls, raising wages, devaluing the currency, and giving factory managers more autonomy. Despite continuing food shortages, the DPRK in 2005 instructed the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to either switch from humanitarian relief to development assistance or leave North Korea. However, the WFP remained in North Korea on a reduced basis. In 2006, the DPRK ordered Europe-based private humanitarian agencies to leave after the European Union sponsored UN resolutions condemning North Korea's human rights violations. Also in 2006, the regime attempted to revive the Public Distribution System and again prohibited grain sales in markets. There is little expectation of additional far-reaching market reforms, as the government seems opposed to any measures that would grant North Koreans greater personal autonomy and potentially undermine the dictatorship's tight grip on power. Human rights and humanitarian aid organizations warn of ongoing malnutrition and the threat of renewed famine.

Kim Jong-il's regime is kept afloat by Chinese and South Korean aid, as both neighbors fear the possible consequences of state collapse in North Korea, including a humanitarian disaster, massive refugee outflows, the release

of more than a million armed men from any military command structure, the emergence of criminal gangs and regional warlords, and a loss of state control over nuclear weapons.

Tensions relating to North Korea's nuclear weapons program have continued to define its foreign relations. Following disputes between the United States and the DPRK over the interpretation of the September 19, 2005 "joint statement," North Korea withdrew from the Beijing-based "Six Party Talks" on the issue in order to protest banking sanctions instigated by the U.S. Treasury Department, which was seeking to thwart North Korean counterfeiting activities. In July 2006 North Korea tested seven multistage ballistic missiles, which led to a unanimous UN Security Council resolution of condemnation. In October, the DPRK tested an atomic device, prompting another Security Council condemnation and an extension of previously imposed arms embargoes. Efforts continued at year's end to persuade North Korea to return to the Six Party Talks.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

North Korea is not an electoral democracy. Every aspect of social, political, and economic life is tightly controlled by the state. The regime denies North Koreans all basic rights and subjects many thousands of political prisoners to brutal conditions. Collective punishment—the imprisonment of an entire family if one member of the family is suspected of dissent—is also a common practice. The government operates a highly developed, semihereditary system of social discrimination. All citizens are classified into 53 subgroups organized under overall security ratings—"core," "wavering," and "hostile"—based on their family's perceived loyalty to the regime. This rating essentially determines every facet of a person's life, including employment and educational opportunities, place of residence, access to medical facilities, and even access to stores.

Kim Jong-il has led North Korea since the 1994 death of his father, founding leader Kim Il-sung. He is formally the general secretary of the Korean Workers' Party, supreme commander of North Korea's military, and chairman of the National Defense Commission. This last post has been the "highest office of state" since the office of president was permanently dedicated to Kim Il-sung in a 1998 constitutional revision.

North Korea's parliament, the Supreme People's Assembly, is a rubber-stamp institution and meets for only a few days each year. Parliamentary and local assembly elections were held in 1990, 1998, and, most recently, in August 2004. The elections were not free. The government maintains two minority parties for the sake of appearances, but they do not fulfill any real electoral role, and are not known to exist below the "central committee" level.

North Korea was not ranked by Transparency International in its 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, but in practice these rights are nonexistent. All media outlets—print, television, and radio—are either run or controlled by the state. Televisions and radios are permanently fixed to state channels, and all publications are subject to strict supervision and censorship. Internet access in North Korea is restricted to a few thousand people who have received state approval; foreign-based websites are blocked by the state.

Although freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, it does not exist in practice. A report issued in late 2005 by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom details the severe violation of freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, and belief in the DPRK, and the intense political and ideological indoctrination to which North Koreans are subjected under Kimilsungism, a virtual state religion.

There are no known associations or organizations other than those created by the government. Strikes, collective bargaining, and other basic organized-labor activities are illegal.

In 2004 the UN Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in North Korea to prepare studies for the commission (now the Human Rights Council) and the General Assembly. The DPRK refuses to cooperate with the special rapporteur. Nonetheless, his reports highlight problems in six areas: (1) the right to food and the right to life; (2) the right to the security of the person, humane treatment, nondiscrimination and access to justice; (3) the right to freedom of movement and the protection of persons linked with displacement (primarily in China and upon return to North Korea); (4) the right to the highest attainable standards of health and the right to education; (5) the right to self-determination and political participation, access to information, and freedom of expression, belief, opinion, association, and religion; and (6) the rights of vulnerable groups and persons, particularly women and children.

North Korea does not have an independent judiciary and “socialist norms of life” and a “collective spirit” are emphasized over individual rights. The UN Commission on Human Rights since 2003 and the General Assembly since 2005 have recognized and condemned, by overwhelming margins, severe violations in North Korea including the use of torture, public executions, extrajudicial and arbitrary detention; the absence of due process and the rule of law; imposition of the death penalty for political offenses; and the large number of prison camps and use of forced labor. The authorities are assisted by a huge network of informers that monitors nearly all correspondence and communication and can subject entire communities to security checks. North Korea has two police forces: one to address “ordinary crimes” called the People’s Safety Agency and another political police force called the State Security Agency.

Freedom of movement does not exist. Forced internal resettlement is routine. Access to Pyongyang, where the availability of food, housing, and health care is somewhat better, is tightly restricted. Emigration is illegal, although exit visas are sometimes issued to trusted businessmen, athletes, scholars, and religious figures. Defection is a capital crime punishable by death. Controversy has developed over the Chinese government's willingness to return defectors to North Korea, where they are subject to torture, harsh imprisonment, or death.

Despite recent market reforms, North Korea's economy remains both centrally planned and grossly mismanaged. The government assigns all jobs, prohibits private property, and spends nearly one-third of its gross domestic product on its military. The economy is also hobbled by a lack of infrastructure, a scarcity of energy and raw materials, and an inability to borrow on world markets or from multilateral banks because of sanctions, lingering foreign debt, and ideological isolationism.

Little is known about how problems such as domestic violence or workplace discrimination may affect North Korean women. There have been widespread reports of trafficked women and girls among the tens of thousands of North Koreans who have recently crossed into China. The UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly have noted the use of forced abortions and infanticide against pregnant women forcibly repatriated from China. During the height of the famine crisis, the regime allowed private markets to arise. The fact that most of the market sellers are women has accounted for a real if unplanned increase in the status and wealth of women in North Korea.

Saudi Arabia

Population: 24,100,000

Capital: Riyadh

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Saudi Arabia continued incremental reforms in 2006. King Abdullah resolved succession questions by establishing a committee known as the Allegiance Institution, composed of the male descendents of King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, to elect future kings through majority vote. Following the previous year's judicial reform, the government created security, family, traffic, and commercial courts. It also established a supreme court in Riyadh and an appeals court in each of the 13 provinces. Faced with increased international pressure over its educational system, the kingdom also worked to revise school curriculums. Separately, the composition of the country's partially elected municipal councils was finalized in December 2005, after eight months of delays.

Since its unification in 1932 by King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, Saudi Arabia has been controlled by the al-Saud family, and the current king, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, is the sixth in the ruling dynasty. The Saudi monarchy rules in accordance with a conservative school of Sunni Islam. In the early 1990s, Saudi Arabia embarked on a limited program of political reform, introducing an appointed Consultative Council, or Majlis al-Shura. However, this step did not lead to any substantial shift in political power. In 1995, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud suffered a stroke, and in 1997, Abdullah, then crown prince, took control of most decision making.

Saudi Arabia has been under intense scrutiny from the international community since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States—15 of the 19 airline hijackers in the attacks were Saudi citizens, and Osama bin Laden, leader of the terrorist group al-Qaeda, is from a wealthy Saudi family of Yemeni descent. The Saudi government has taken steps to stem the flow of financial support to terrorist groups, implementing new rules against money laundering and more closely monitoring charitable contributions and organizations suspected of financing terrorist operations in Saudi Arabia and abroad.

Terrorist groups that had posed a threat to Saudi Arabia for a decade escalated their attacks in 2003 in an effort to destabilize the autocratic monarchy. These assaults continued through 2004, culminating in an attack, on residential compounds in Khobar where mostly foreign oil workers lived, that killed 22 people. The government subsequently increased its counterterrorism efforts, killing dozens of suspects, detaining hundreds of others, and claiming to have destroyed five of six major terrorist networks operating in the kingdom. Though peaceful compared with 2003 and 2004, Saudi Arabia experienced some unrest in 2005, with clashes between security forces and terrorist suspects breaking out in the spring.

The formal transition of power from King Fahd, who died in August 2005, to King Abdullah led to increased discussions of political reform. Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz, a former finance minister and a half-brother of Abdullah's, called for political reform and a constitution in Saudi Arabia. Talal also said that the current Majlis al-Shura should be given additional powers and be turned into a "quasi-legislative" council. These comments reflected growing support for similar proposals within the royal family and more broadly in Saudi society.

Saudi Arabia organized elections for municipal councils in the first half of 2005, giving Saudi men a limited opportunity to select some of their leaders at the local level. Women were completely excluded from the political process. The eligible electorate consisted of less than 20 percent of the population: male citizens who were at least 21 years old, not serving in the military, and resident in their electoral district for at least 12 months. Half of the council seats were open for election, and the other half were appointed by the monarchy. Officials in the Municipal and Rural Affairs Ministry and the Interior Ministry screened candidates, and all results were subject to final approval by the government. Candidates supported by conservative Muslim scholars triumphed in the large cities of Riyadh and Jeddah, and minority Shiite Muslim voters participated in large numbers, seizing the opportunity to voice their opinion. In December 2005, the final composition of the 178 municipal councils was announced.

In a major step forward for the kingdom, King Abdullah in October 2006 announced a formal protocol to be used for determining future succession. Under the plan, a committee known as the Allegiance Institution, composed of the sons (or grandsons in the event of their deaths) of the founding King Abdul Aziz, would be established. It would be chaired by the eldest member. The committee would make decisions on the succession by a majority vote using secret ballots and would require a quorum of two-thirds of the members. The arrangement would be added to the Basic Law but would not apply until after the current crown prince, Sultan bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, became king. The new committee would also have the right and the responsibility, on the advice of a medical committee, to declare a king incapable of ruling or a crown prince unfit to succeed.

Saudi Arabia has the largest proven oil reserves in the world. The country's oil resources and importance to the global economy are key factors affecting its external relations, and the al-Saud dynasty uses its unmatched wealth to shape and control internal politics. However, the government's dominance of the economy, endemic corruption, and financial mismanagement have led to mounting economic problems, including a decline in real gross domestic product (GDP) per person over the last decade. Unemployment is estimated at about 25 percent, and a growing youth population is making economic conditions even more difficult by adding to pressure on the Saudi government to create new jobs. The most recent census found that 59.4 percent of the Saudi population is between the ages of 15 and 64, and 38.2 percent is under the age of 15. The Saudi economy, buoyed by high oil prices, is expected to maintain a 5.4 percent growth for 2006. Saudi Arabia joined the World Trade Organization in December 2005.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Saudi Arabia is not an electoral democracy. The country's 1992 basic law declares that the Koran and the Sunna (the guidance set by the deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad) are the country's constitution. A 120-member Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) is appointed by the monarch for four-year terms. This council has limited powers and does not affect decision making or power structures in a meaningful way. The Council of Ministers, an executive body appointed by the king, passes legislation that becomes law once ratified by royal decree. The monarchy has a tradition of consulting with select members of Saudi society, but this process is not equally open to all citizens.

Saudi Arabia does not have political parties, and the only semblance of organized political opposition exists outside of the country, with many Saudi opposition activists based in London. The al-Saud dynasty dominates and controls political life in the kingdom.

Corruption is a significant problem, with foreign companies reporting that they often pay bribes to middlemen and government officials to secure business deals. Saudi Arabia was ranked 70 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The government tightly controls content in domestic media outlets but is unable to do much about satellite television coverage, with Arab regional satellite channels growing in popularity. Government authorities have banned journalists and editors who publish articles deemed offensive to the country's powerful religious establishment or the ruling authorities. The regime has taken steps to limit the impact of new media. The government has blocked access to some internet websites deemed too offensive or sensitive.

Religious freedom does not exist in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and home to the faith's two holiest cities—Mecca and Medina. Islam is

Saudi Arabia's official religion, and all Saudis are required by law to be Muslims. The government prohibits the public practice of any religions other than Islam and restricts the religious practices of both the Shiite and Sufi Muslim minority sects. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, it does not always respect this right in practice.

Academic freedom is restricted in Saudi Arabia, and informers monitor classrooms for compliance with limits on curriculums, such as a ban on teaching Western philosophy and religions other than Islam. In 2004, the government began efforts to reform school curriculums by deleting disparaging religious references in textbooks. In February 2005, Abdullah bin Saleh al-Obaid, a hardcore Wahhabi, was appointed to the prestigious post of education minister, replacing a secularist reformer. In January 2006, he announced the formation of a committee of experts to make revisions in the school curriculums, including syllabus reform and changes to rote learning. A Saudi foundation proceeded with plans to launch King Faisal University in 2007, to help reform the kingdom's much-criticized higher education system. In March 2006, the Riyadh International Book Fair included a Bible for the first time.

Saudis do not enjoy freedom of association and assembly. The government frequently arrests and detains political activists who stage demonstrations or engage in other civic advocacy. In 2003, the government approved the establishment of the National Human Rights Association (NHRA), a semi-official organization charged with reviewing allegations of human rights violations and monitoring the country's compliance with international human rights agreements. Although the NHRA reported in June 2005 that it had received about 2,000 human rights complaints, there has been little or no initiative taken by the organization.

In 2005, the government approved a new labor law aimed at bringing Saudi law into line with international standards as the country prepared to join the World Trade Organization. The law extended protections to previously unregulated categories of workers, set end-of-service benefits, established clear terms for terminating employment, and required large companies to provide nurseries to help working mothers. It also banned child labor and set provisions aimed at resolving labor disputes. In addition, the new law sought to advance the goal of the "Saudization" of the country's workforce by stipulating that Saudis must make up at least 75 percent of a company's employees. Finally, the law stated that women are permitted to work in "all sectors compatible with their nature."

The judiciary lacks independence from the monarchy. In May 2006, the Justice Ministry announced the establishment of specialized courts. State security courts, as well as family, traffic, and commercial courts are to be set up in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam. These new courts stem from judicial reforms implemented in 2005. As part of the plan, a supreme court will be created in Riyadh, with appeals courts in each of the kingdom's 13 regions. In 2001, the

Council of Ministers approved a 225-article penal code that bans torture. However, allegations of torture by police and prison officials are frequent, and access to prisoners by independent human rights and legal organizations is strictly limited. In July 2006, King Abdullah declared amnesty for any militants who surrendered to security forces after participating in radical groups.

Although racial discrimination is illegal, substantial prejudice against ethnic, religious, and national minorities prevails. Roughly two million Shiites live in Saudi Arabia, representing 10 to 15 percent of the population. Shiites are underrepresented in major government positions—no Shiite has served as a minister or member of the royal cabinet. The country's estimated six million foreign workers from Asia and Africa are subject to formal and informal discrimination and have difficulty using the justice system.

Saudis have the right to own property and establish private businesses, but much private-enterprise activity is connected with members of the ruling family, the government, or other elite families. Although Saudi Arabia first joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1993, its slow process of privatization and economic reform prevented it from becoming a member of the subsequent World Trade Organization (WTO) for several years. However, at the end of 2005, Saudi Arabia was admitted to the WTO.

Women are not treated as equal members of society, and many laws discriminate against them. They may not legally drive cars and their use of public facilities is restricted when men are present. By law and custom, women cannot travel within or outside of the country without a male relative. According to interpretations of law in Saudi Arabia, daughters receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers. The testimony of one man is equal to that of two women in Islamic law courts. Unlike Saudi men, Saudi women who marry non-Saudis are not permitted to pass their nationality on to their children, and their spouses cannot receive Saudi nationality. Saudi women are not permitted to serve as lawyers, and women seeking access to the courts must work with a male. The Committee to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue, a semiautonomous religious police force commonly known as the *mutawa'een*, enforces a strict policy of segregation between men and women and often uses physical punishment to ensure that women meet conservative standards of dress in public.

The government did not allow women to participate in the municipal elections that took place in early 2005. Prince Mansour bin Miteb bin Abdul Aziz, head of the elections committee, announced in advance of the elections that the country did not have sufficient time to prepare for both women and men to vote, indicating that Saudi Arabia would require separate polling stations run by female election judges before it allowed women to participate politically.

Education and economic rights for Saudi women have improved. Girls were not permitted to attend school until 1964, but now more than half of the country's university students are female. In May 2004, women won the right to

hold commercial licenses, which opened the door for greater economic participation. In addition, women have generally become more visible in society. In 2005, Saudi state television began using women as newscasters, and two women became the first females elected to Jeddah's chamber of commerce, a small step forward for women's leadership in business.

Somalia

Population: 8,900,000

Capital: Mogadishu

Political Rights: 7 ↓

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Ratings Change: Somalia's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7 due to the consolidation of power—especially in Mogadishu—by the Islamic Courts Union, which was not a freely elected government accountable to the people and which worked to limit political participation.

Overview:

For much of 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an Islamist movement, expanded its control over southern Somalia and largely routed the forces of the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government, which was based in the town of Baidoa. After months of speculation about the extent of Ethiopia's military involvement in Somalia, Ethiopian leaders in late December declared that their goal was to crush the Islamists and support the transitional government. By year's end, Ethiopian and government troops had captured Mogadishu, the capital, and driven the ICU to the southernmost portion of the country.

Somalia gained independence in 1960 as an amalgam of former British and Italian colonies populated largely by ethnic Somalis. A 1969 coup by an army general, Siad Barre, led to two decades of instability, brutal civil strife, and the manipulation of clan loyalties for political purposes. Somalia was also plagued by natural disasters including floods, drought, and famine. When Barre's government was toppled in 1991, the clan-based militias began fighting each other, and Somalia has lacked an effective central government ever since.

Extensive television coverage of famine and civil strife that took some 300,000 lives in 1991 and 1992 prompted a UN humanitarian mission led by U.S. forces. The intervention soon deteriorated into urban guerrilla warfare with the Somali militias, and over 100 UN peacekeepers, including 18 U.S. soldiers, were killed. The \$4 billion operation was eventually terminated, and international forces had departed by March 1995. Civil conflict continued over the subsequent decade with varying degrees of intensity.

In 2000, many of the faction leaders agreed to participate in a Transitional National Government (TNG) established at the Conference for

National Peace and Reconciliation, hosted by neighboring Djibouti. The conference charter called for a three-year transitional government with a 245-seat Transitional National Assembly (TNA). In August, the TNA elected Abdiqassim Salad Hassan as transitional president. The TNG and more than 20 rival factions signed a ceasefire in Kenya in October 2002, an initial step toward establishing a lasting federal system. Serious fissures in the process developed over the next year, as some factions launched their own power-sharing negotiations in Mogadishu.

The political process was revitalized in 2004 at another conference in Kenya, which resulted in the establishment of a 275-seat parliament, the Transitional Federal Assembly, and a new Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The country's four largest clans were each given 61 TFA seats, and an alliance of minor clans took the remaining 31. The members in October elected controversial Ethiopian-backed warlord Abdullahi Yusuf to serve a five-year term as the first transitional president. Yusuf had previously been the leader of the breakaway region of Puntland. A month later, he appointed Ali Muhammad Gedi as his prime minister.

Despite the political process, clashes between rival factions continued and hundreds of civilians were killed. The TFG moved from its base in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2005 and established itself by early 2006 in Baidoa, a town about 155 miles north of Mogadishu.

In 2006, a fierce battle for control of Mogadishu broke out between an alliance of warlords and the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a local Islamist group. Critics of the ICU, including Ethiopia and the United States, accused it of links to the terrorist network al-Qaeda. The ICU alleged that the United States was violating a UN weapons embargo by supplying arms to the anti-ICU warlords. By June 2006, the ICU had taken control of Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia, gaining a popular following for its promise to deliver law and order. The TFG in Baidoa feared it would lose any claims on control of the country and called for the intervention of East African peacekeeping troops, a move bitterly opposed by the ICU. Some Somalis warned that the involvement of regional troops would lead to a prolonged conflict, since neighboring states had supported different factions in Somalia, undermining their neutrality. There are credible allegations that Ethiopia's enemy Eritrea supported the ICU by providing arms to the movement. The UN Security Council passed a resolution on December 6 calling for a force of regional troops to support the TFG, but the measure had not been implemented by year's end.

Meanwhile, the ICU had taken control of the southern city of Kismayo in September and appeared poised to move on the small territory left to the TFG. By November, peace talks between the TFG and ICU had broken down. Ethiopia said it was obliged to repel the ICU threat, and in December Ethiopian troops were openly deployed in Somalia. A major Ethiopian and TFG offensive

ensued late that month, and by year's end the ICU had been driven from Mogadishu and forced to retreat to the extreme south of the country.

Somalia is a poor country, and the economic problems Somalis face are compounded by both civil strife and natural disasters. The majority of Somalis are pastoralists or subsistence farmers. In the cities, because of the lack of government regulation, businesses and telecommunications industry have continued to function with some success. The absence of central authority since 1991 left a void that allowed businesspeople to enter the market without bureaucratic hurdles.

Since May 1991, the northwestern region of Somaliland, roughly comprising the territory of the former British colony, has functioned with considerable stability as a de facto independent state, though it has not received international recognition. The region of Puntland, in the northeastern corner of the country, has also been relatively autonomous since 1998. However, unlike Somaliland, it has not sought full independence, declaring only a temporary secession until Somalia is stabilized.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Somalia is not an electoral democracy. The ICU, which controlled large swaths of the country for much of 2006, had not publicly committed to creating democratic institutions. Nationwide elections have not been held since the 1969 military coup, but 3,000 representatives of various clans and civic and religious groups chose an internationally recognized transitional parliament in 2000. A new, 275-member Transitional Federal Assembly was convened in 2004, which elected Abdullahi Yusuf to a five-year term as president. The transitional government controlled only a small portion of southern and central Somalia for most of the year. The country has no effective political parties, and the political process is driven largely by clan loyalty.

As in most countries experiencing long-term civil strife, corruption is rampant in Somalia. Transparency International did not rank Somalia in its 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Somalia's charter provides for press freedom, but journalists face threats and harassment. In the second half of 2006, there was an increase in the frequency of attacks on journalists, both by the ICU and the TFG. After the ICU took control of southern and central Somalia, the relative freedom that journalists enjoyed when the situation was more lawless was replaced by an atmosphere of fear. In one case, award-winning Swedish freelance journalist and photographer Martin Adler was murdered in June while filming a demonstration in Mogadishu. Also that month, the TFG shut down local radio station Radio Shabelle after it reported that a few hundred Ethiopian troops had entered Somalia. In November, Abdulahi Yasin Jama, a journalist who worked for two private radio stations, was detained for three days after he also reported that

there were Ethiopian troops in Somalia. The ICU in September began closing critical radio stations and detaining journalists. The private Radio HornAfrik and Radio Simba were both temporarily shuttered for their critical reporting. Radio HornAfrik was told it could resume broadcasting if it agreed to stop playing romantic music and refrained from critical reporting about the ICU.

In December 2006, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) expressed its concern over the rising attacks on journalists as the conflict intensified. CPJ criticized the ICU for not permitting the head of the independent National Union of Somali Journalists to leave the country. At the same time, the organization also chided the TFG for shuttering Radio Warsan, which at the time was the only remaining private station in Baidoa, for its critical reporting.

Somalia is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, but there is a small Christian community and some followers of traditional African religions. Even before the ICU's rise to prominence, religious freedom was limited, and it dwindled further after the Islamists took power in most of the country. While some of the ICU leaders stressed that their aim was to restore law and order in Somalia and not to impose a strict interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law), the courts acted with varying degrees of conservatism, and the overall effect on personal freedoms—particularly those of non-Muslims and secular Muslims—was negative.

Academic freedom faces some restrictions similar to those imposed on the media, and there is no organized higher education system in most of the country.

Xenophobic sentiment escalated after the ICU took power, increasing the operating risks faced by foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other agencies. In September 2006, an Italian nun who had lived in Somalia for decades was murdered in a hospital along with her bodyguard by unidentified gunmen. Even though the situation is dangerous and chaotic, there are still several local and international relief groups and NGOs operating in the country. The state of civil conflict has made broad economic and labor policies impossible to establish, but Somalia's informal economy still functions and the country has an extensive telecommunications sector.

The ICU had dominated the judiciary in Somalia before it seized political control. Much of the popular support it built up was due to its ability to establish a semblance of law and order in the war-torn country. The courts of the ICU interpreted Sharia with varying degrees of severity, but some judges have been accused of supporting an al-Qaeda or Taliban style of leadership.

Prior to Ethiopia's attack on the ICU, human rights abuses occurred on a regular basis in Somalia. However, the outbreak of more intense warfare raised the possibility of abuses on a larger scale. Extrajudicial killing, torture, and arbitrary detention are common. Under the ICU, residents faced imprisonment or more severe forms of punishment for ordinary activities that were considered

un-Islamic. During the first few days of war with Ethiopia, there were media reports of high civilian casualty rates and the threat of a humanitarian crisis as residents fled the violence.

Discrimination in Somalia is generally clan-based, rather than ethnic or religious, since most Somalis share the same ethnicity and faith. Clan loyalty means that the larger, more established clans are able to dominate political and social life and harass those from smaller clans.

Travel throughout Somalia is restricted by poor security, and the situation worsened as fighting involving the ICU, government forces, and Ethiopian troops intensified.

Women's groups were instrumental in galvanizing support for Somalia's peace process. The country's new charter prohibits sexual discrimination, but women experience intense discrimination under customary practices and variants of Sharia. The ICU's advances in 2006 threatened to amplify the influence of the latter. UN agencies and NGOs are working to raise awareness about the health dangers of female genital mutilation. Various armed factions have recruited children into their militias.

Sudan

Population: 41,200,000

Capital: Khartoum

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Although additional peace agreements with rebel groups were signed in 2006, the killing, rape, and displacement of civilians continued in Darfur, a vast area in western Sudan. For much of the year, the Sudanese government was locked in a bitter war of words with the United Nations, refusing to accept a proposed UN force that would replace the underfunded, 7,000-person African Union force already operating in Darfur.

Sudan, Africa's largest country, achieved independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, and it has been embroiled in civil wars for most of its subsequent history. The Anyanya movement, representing mainly Christian and animist black Africans in southern Sudan, battled Arab Muslim-dominated government forces from 1956 to 1972. In 1969, General Jafar Numeiri toppled an elected government and established a military dictatorship. The south gained extensive autonomy under a 1972 accord, and an uneasy peace prevailed for the next decade. In 1983, Numeiri restricted southern autonomy and imposed Sharia (Islamic law). Civil war between the north and the south resumed and would continue until 2004, causing the deaths of some two million people and the displacement of millions more. Meanwhile, Numeiri was overthrown in 1985. Civilian rule was restored in 1986 with the election of a government led by Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi of the moderate Islamic Ummah Party. Lieutenant General Omar al-Bashir ousted al-Mahdi in a 1989 coup, and the deposed leader spent seven years in prison or under house arrest before fleeing to Eritrea. Until 1999, al-Bashir ruled through a military-civilian regime backed by senior Muslim clerics including Hassan al-Turabi, who wielded considerable power as the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) leader and speaker of the National Assembly.

Tensions between al-Bashir and al-Turabi climaxed in December 1999. On the eve of a parliamentary vote on a plan by al-Turabi to curb presidential powers, al-Bashir dissolved parliament and declared a state of emergency. He

fired al-Turabi as NCP head, replaced the cabinet with his own supporters, and held deeply flawed presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2000, which the NCP won overwhelmingly. In June 2000, al-Turabi formed his own party, the Popular National Congress (PNC), but he was prohibited from participating in politics. In January 2001, the Ummah Party refused to join al-Bashir's new government despite the president's invitation, declaring that it refused to support totalitarianism.

Al-Turabi and some 20 of his supporters were arrested in February 2001 after he called for a national uprising against the government and signed a memorandum of understanding in Geneva with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the main southern rebel group. In May 2001, al-Turabi and four aides were charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government; al-Turabi was placed under house arrest. He was moved to a high-security prison in September 2002 and then released in October 2003.

By sidelining al-Turabi, who was considered a leading force behind Sudan's efforts to export Islamic extremism, al-Bashir began to lift Sudan out of international isolation. Although Vice President Ali Osman Mohammed Taha—who replaced al-Turabi as Islamic ideologue—remained committed to Sudan's status as an Islamic state and to the government's self-proclaimed jihad against non-Muslims, al-Bashir managed to repair relations with several countries. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States, al-Bashir offered his country's cooperation in combating terrorism. Sudan had previously provided a safe haven for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the international terrorist network. In March 2004, al-Turabi was again placed under house arrest, this time on suspicion of plotting a coup with sympathizers of rebel groups in the western region of Darfur; al-Turabi had been outspokenly critical of the government's tactics in the region.

In addition to repairing its international image, the Sudanese government focused on ending its long-running conflict with the SPLA in the south. After intense negotiations, the two sides signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005. The pact marked the first time in decades that the Arab-dominated government compromised and decentralized some authority. The CPA included power-sharing provisions, with the NCP still retaining a slight majority in parliament, as well as measures to share state revenues. The civil war had been fueled in part by competition for control of southern oil resources. However, the new agreement failed to address the massive and systematic human rights abuses committed by both sides during the conflict. The government had bombed and destroyed civilian targets, denied humanitarian relief to rebel-held areas and internally displaced people, and forced conversions to Islam. For its part, the SPLA had also regularly attacked civilian targets and recruited child soldiers.

A key provision of the CPA allowed a referendum on southern independence to be held after a six-year transitional period, during which the

government was obliged to withdraw 80 percent of its troops stationed in the south. While the CPA has generally held, there have been serious disruptions. Just 20 days after he was sworn in as vice president of Sudan under an interim constitution, the SPLA's longtime leader, John Garang, died in an August 2005 helicopter crash, sparking riots by supporters who suspected that the crash was not an accident. At least 130 people were killed in the rioting, and some 2,000 were arrested. Garang's deputy, Salva Kiir, replaced him as SPLA leader and national vice president. A number of the CPA's provisions have yet to be implemented, and many Sudanese have questioned the government's commitment to the deal. Meanwhile, the government of southern Sudan has moved to assert its international position, hosting peace talks between the Ugandan government and a rebel group in 2006.

As Sudan's lengthy north-south conflict was coming to an end, another brutal internal conflict was escalating. In 2003, rebel groups in Darfur, a historically marginalized region in western Sudan, began attacking Sudanese military positions, although some observers have dated the first attacks to 2001 and 2002. The residents of Darfur, mostly black Muslim farmers or herders, had long clashed with some of the region's nomadic Arab tribes, and with one another, over land use. The rebels also complained of discrimination by the Arab-dominated government. There had been periods of violence in Darfur since Sudanese independence, but the new conflict was on a different scale. By early 2004, government-supported Arab militias known as the Janjaweed had begun torching villages, massacring the inhabitants, slaughtering and stealing livestock, and raping women and girls. The military also employed some of the same scorched-earth tactics it had used in the south, bombing and strafing settlements from the air. Those who were not killed fled the violence, and one of the world's most acute refugee crises was born. Many arrived in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps within Darfur, while others gathered in refugee camps in neighboring Chad.

The African Union deployed a force to monitor a cease-fire signed by Sudan and two of the major rebel groups in April 2004 and increased the size of the force to 7,000 troops in 2005. However, it remained underfunded and was not authorized to intervene directly in the fighting, leading to calls for a 17,000-strong UN force.

The scale of the killing and displacement led to charges of genocide by international human rights groups, and the UN Security Council in September 2004 passed a resolution calling for a Commission of Inquiry. The commission's report, delivered to the Security Council in January 2005, stated that although the panel could not designate the killing as genocide, there was mass killing and rape. The commission also requested that the case be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Despite the ceasefire and UN negotiation efforts, the killing continued. As of 2006, credible estimates of the dead ranged from 70,000 to over 400,000,

with more than two million displaced. Many in the IDP and refugee camps suffered from disease and starvation.

In May 2006, the Sudanese government signed the Darfur Peace Agreement with a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), one of the western region's rebel groups, led by Minni Minnawi. All the other major rebel groups refused to sign the agreement, saying it did not address their concerns. After the signing of the pact, there were demonstrations and riots in the camps by those who opposed the agreement. The fighting in Darfur intensified, and the UN Security Council repeatedly reiterated its position that a UN force should be deployed in the region, but the Sudanese government refused, saying it would not compromise its sovereignty. However, on December 26, al-Bashir sent a letter to outgoing UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, saying that he accepted a compromise plan to strengthen the African Union presence in Darfur and eventually create a hybrid UN-AU force.

Another marginalized area, in eastern Sudan, has also been the scene of conflict in recent years. Local groups had clashed with the government's large military presence around Port Sudan on the Red Sea, an important oil-export terminal. The Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions, an allied pair of rebel groups known as the Eastern Front, signed a peace agreement with the Sudanese government in October 2006. The Eastern Front gained some political power under the agreement.

Sudan's economy, while weak, has been improving thanks to high oil prices. The oil wealth and the involvement of Chinese firms in the country make economic sanctions over the Darfur issue unlikely.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Sudan is not an electoral democracy. The last national elections took place in 2000, but major opposition parties boycotted the process and the European Union refused an invitation to monitor the balloting. President al-Bashir and his NCP won easily, and the NCP remained the dominant party until the peace agreement with the SPLA was implemented in 2005. The SPLM—the SPLA's postconflict political incarnation—and the existing Sudanese government formed a joint transitional administration, with the SPLM leader as first vice president. The joint presidency appointed members of the 450-seat lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, with the NCP holding 52 percent, the SPLA controlling 28 percent and the rest of the seats divided among other northern and southern parties. The parliament's upper house is the 50-member Council of States. Although the current members of parliament were appointed, members of both chambers would serve five-year terms after the first elections, scheduled for 2008–09. Part of the Sudanese government's reluctance to give Darfur rebel groups more power in Khartoum stems from its desire to maintain its majority in parliament. Nine of Sudan's 30 cabinet ministries are

now headed by members of the SPLM, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education.

Sudan is one of the world's most corrupt states. It is ranked 156 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The interim constitution guarantees free speech. Khartoum's private press can be extremely critical of government policies. Sudanese journalists can write articles that would have been impossible in previous years, and they have been particularly emboldened following the signing of the CPA. However, reporters still practice self-censorship and face harassment by the government for critical reporting. In September 2006, the decapitated body of Mohamed Taha Mohamed Ahmed, editor of *Al-Wifaq* newspaper, was found a day after he was abducted from his home by unidentified assailants. He had been charged with blasphemy in 2005 after he published an article that questioned the prophet Muhammad's parental lineage; editors were warned not to write about the case. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 15 local and foreign journalists were detained over the course of 2006, although some of these detentions were very short. Human Rights Watch also charged that the practice of prepublication censorship, which the Sudanese government had ended in 2005, was restarted in September 2006. The same month, the authorities also warned journalists not to cover violent demonstrations that took place after price increases for basic goods were announced.

According to human rights groups, foreign journalists have difficulty obtaining visas to enter Sudan to cover the Darfur crisis, and even those who have visas face restrictions on movement and the ability to conduct interviews freely. Most broadcast media outlets are controlled by the government. Under the CPA, the United Nations was granted a license to establish a radio station in Sudan, and although the station has begun broadcasting, the government has restricted the reach of the broadcast to a very limited area. The news media enjoy more freedom in southern Sudan. The Sudanese government does not actively restrict the internet, but its penetration in the country is very limited.

The 2005 interim constitution stemming from the CPA guarantees freedom of worship. Before the peace agreement, Islam was the state religion, and Sharia (Islamic law) was described as the source of legislation. The majority of the population in the north is Sunni Muslim, while the majority in the south is animist and Christian. There is also a sizeable Christian population in Khartoum. Sudan's northern states are subject to Sharia, but those in the south are not. In the north, Sudanese Christians face discrimination. Permits to build churches are sometimes denied, and Christians are harassed. Under the 1994 Societies Registration Act, religious groups must register in order to legally gather, and registration is reportedly difficult to obtain. Sudan's north-south civil conflict was characterized as jihad by the government, and in some cases non-Muslims were forced to convert to Islam.

The SPLM controls the Ministry of Higher Education, and there are some critical voices in Sudan's private universities. Universities have also held forums for the discussion of critical topics. Overall, however, university professors practice self-censorship. The administration of public universities is controlled by the government.

While international nongovernmental organizations operate in Sudan, the government at times restricts their movement and activities, which often include providing essential humanitarian assistance. In May 2005, Sudanese police arrested a member of Doctors Without Borders after the group published a report describing systematic rape of women in Darfur by government and militia forces. The Sudanese army and police have also at times surrounded IDP camps in Darfur and barred outside access to camp inhabitants. Humanitarian workers have also been targeted, and in some cases kidnapped and killed, by rebel groups. There are several international NGOs operating throughout Sudan, particularly in Darfur and south Sudan. During the year, government authorities harassed NGO employees, sometimes detaining them. In July Tomo Kriznar, a Slovenian human rights activist, was arrested and charged with espionage. President Bashir pardoned him after Slovenia's President Janez Drnovsek, who had sent Kriznar to Darfur, intervened. NGO employees have also been harassed by rebel groups and as the overall security situation deteriorated, the threat to NGO workers increased.

Al-Bashir's government quickly destroyed Sudan's powerful independent trade unions after coming to power in the 1989 coup. Currently, the only functioning union organization is the Sudan Workers Trade Unions Federation, with some 800,000 members. Its elections are rigged to ensure the victory of government-approved candidates.

The judiciary is not independent. The head of the judiciary, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, is a government appointee. Lower civilian courts provide some due process safeguards, but higher courts are subject to political control, and special security and military courts do not apply accepted legal standards. In response to the International Criminal Court investigation into crimes related to Darfur, the Sudanese government created the Special Courts for Darfur. The credibility of the courts has been challenged by legal experts. Sudanese criminal law is based on Sharia and provides for punishments such as flogging and amputation. Non-Muslim southern states are not subject to Sharia. Police and security forces practice arbitrary arrest and torture with impunity, and prison conditions do not meet international standards.

The Sudanese government has been accused of genocide by respected international human rights groups, and serious abuses occur in Sudan on a nearly daily basis. During the war between the north and south, both sides committed serious crimes, although the government was the more frequent perpetrator. According to local sources, both the SPLA and the government of Sudan avoided including accountability for wartime abuses in the CPA. With

regard to Darfur, human rights groups have also accused all sides of engaging in serious abuses. Most of the violations, however, have been perpetrated by the government and government-supported militias. The government and the Janjaweed have been accused of mass killings, rape, and looting of property. There have also been confirmed cases of slavery in Sudan.

Sudanese women face discrimination on many levels. Women in northern Sudan who are subject to Sharia face discrimination in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. As in many other East African states, female genital mutilation is widely practiced despite being illegal. There have been credible reports of rape committed by Janjaweed and security forces on a large scale against women in Darfur. For a man to be found guilty of rape in Sudan, there must be four male eyewitnesses to the act, and accusers whose cases fail face prosecution. Adultery is a capital crime. Sudan has not ratified the international Convention on the Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, arguing that it contradicts Sudanese values and traditions. Of the 450 members of the National Assembly, 66 are women.

Syria

Population: 19,500,000

Capital: Damascus

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6 ↑

Status: Not Free

Ratings Change: Syria's political rights rating improved from 7 to 6 because of small improvements in personal autonomy.

Overview:

The Syrian government continued its repression of political rights and civil liberties in 2006 and renewed its crackdown on dissidents. In May, Syrian political and human rights activists formulated and signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, which called for a change in Syrian-Lebanese relations and the recognition of Lebanese sovereignty; many of the signatories were arrested and in some cases jailed. Syria that year continued its public support for the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and its close alliance with Iran's hard-line government. There were small improvements in personal autonomy in areas such as travel, residence, and employment.

The modern state of Syria was established by the French after World War I and formally granted independence in 1946. The country's new democratic institutions functioned intermittently until the Arab Socialist Baath Party seized power in a 1963 coup and transformed Syria into a one-party state governed perpetually by emergency law. During the 1960s, power shifted within the party from civilian ideologues to an ambitious group of army officers hailing mostly from Syria's Alawite minority (adherents of an offshoot Islamic sect comprising 12 percent of the population), culminating in General Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1970.

Although the regime cultivated a base of support among public-sector employees, peasants, and select private-sector beneficiaries that transcended sectarian and ethnic divisions, its grip on power rested squarely on Alawite domination of the military-security establishment and the suppression of dissent. In 1982, government forces stormed the northern town of Hama to crush a rebellion by the Muslim Brotherhood and killed as many as 20,000 insurgents

and civilians. By the time of al-Assad's death in 2000, nearly four decades of stifling Baathist rule had made Syria one of the Arab world's poorest countries.

Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his late father as leader of the country, pledged in his inaugural speech to introduce sweeping political and economic liberalization. The first six months of his tenure featured the release of several hundred political prisoners, the return of many exiled dissidents, and a substantial expansion of civil liberties as informal reformist networks met openly to discuss the country's social, economic, and political problems. In February 2001, however, the regime abruptly halted the so-called Damascus Spring. Most of the country's leading reformists were arrested and sentenced to lengthy prison terms, while others grew accustomed to constant surveillance and frequent intimidation by the *mukhabarat* (secret police). Economic reform fell by the wayside, as dozens of reform laws remained unimplemented, were put into effect half-heartedly, or lacked supporting regulatory changes. Syria under Bashar al-Assad proved to be less free than under his father and equally resistant to political change.

The toppling of Iraq's Baathist regime by the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 reinvigorated the Syrian opposition. For the first time, secular and Islamist dissidents began cooperating and pushing for a common set of demands, including the release of all political prisoners, the cancellation of the state of emergency, and legalization of political parties. Apparently inspired by the political empowerment of Iraqi Kurds, Syria's Kurdish minority erupted into eight days of rioting in March 2004. At least 30 people were killed as security forces suppressed the riots and arrested some 2,000 people.

Internal opposition to the regime was strengthened by growing international outrage over Syria's failure to combat terrorist infiltration into Iraq and its continuing occupation of Lebanon. Syrian troops had entered Lebanon in 1976, during the latter country's civil war, but they had stayed on after peace was restored in 1990. In September 2004, UN Security Council Resolution 1559 explicitly called on Damascus to immediately end the occupation. As a result of widespread suspicions of Syrian involvement in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, international pressure for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, including mass anti-Syrian demonstrations in Beirut, quickly intensified.

Although al-Assad pulled Syrian troops out of Lebanon in April 2005, Syrian relations with countries in the region and abroad remained strained by his refusal to fully cooperate with the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC) probing the killing of Hariri. In October 2005, the UNIIC issued an interim report containing circumstantial evidence and anonymous witness testimonies implicating al-Assad's brother-in-law and military intelligence chief, General Assef Shawkat, as well as other senior Syrian officials. Shortly afterward, the UN Security Council passed Resolution

1636, calling on Syria to cooperate unconditionally with the investigation under threat of “further action.”

In the face of growing internal opposition, the regime released hundreds of political prisoners in 2005. Syrian officials repeatedly hinted that sweeping political reforms would be drafted at a major Baath Party conference. According to state media reports, party leaders issued a set of vague recommendations to legalize political parties, reform the electoral system, permit greater press freedom, and relax emergency law, but no substantial measures were undertaken to implement the recommendations. Al-Assad openly stated that there would be no major constitutional reforms or loosening of Baath Party control of the state. In October of that year, representatives of all three opposition currents—the Islamists, the Kurds, and secular liberals—signed the Damascus Declaration for Democratic and National Change, which explicitly called for the country’s leaders to step down and endorsed a broad set of liberal democratic principles. Secular and Kurdish figures who openly communicated with the Muslim Brotherhood faced harsh retribution by the state.

In 2006, the government reversed its partial leniency on personal freedom with a renewed crackdown on dissidents. A number of political and human rights activists were arrested or detained over the year. In May, exiled Syrian opposition leaders announced the creation of the National Salvation Front (NSF) to bring about regime change. A Syrian military court charged former vice president Abdel Halim Khaddam, a leader of the NSF, in absentia with inciting foreign attack against Syria.

Progovernment forces, trying to control the pace of reform so that it did not lead to their removal, enacted slow, mostly economic reforms. However, there was a major cabinet reshuffle in February 2006 that introduced 14 new ministers and replaced the foreign, interior, and information ministers. In May, the parliament announced that it would begin drafting a new electoral law to implement a system of proportional representation before scheduled balloting in 2007.

A number of Syrian political and human rights activists formulated and signed in May 2006 the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, which called for a change in Syrian-Lebanese relations and the recognition of Lebanese sovereignty. Many of the signatories, including prominent political activists Anwar al-Bunni and Michel Kilo, have been imprisoned or briefly arrested as a result.

Syria deepened its international isolation in 2006 by failing to stem attacks on the Danish and Norwegian embassies by Muslims upset over the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. Syria continued its public support for the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and maintained its close alliance with Iran’s hard-line government.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Syria is not an electoral democracy. Under the 1973 constitution, the president is nominated by the ruling Baath Party and approved by popular referendum for seven-year terms. In practice, these referendums are orchestrated by the regime, as are elections for the 250-member, unicameral People's Council, which serves for four-year terms and holds little independent legislative power.

The only legal political parties are the Baath Party and its six small coalition partners in the ruling National Progressive Front (NPF). Independent candidates are heavily vetted. The ruling party pledged to legalize political parties not based on religious or ethnic identity (a condition that would exclude the Muslim Brotherhood and Kurdish opposition groups) at its June 2005 conference, but no legislation implementing this pledge was forthcoming at year's end.

Key regime officials and their offspring monopolize many lucrative import markets and benefit from a range of illicit economic activities. Corruption is widespread, and bribery is often necessary in order to navigate the government bureaucracy. Equality of opportunity has been compromised by rampant graft. Syria was ranked 93 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is heavily restricted. Vaguely worded articles of the penal code, the Emergency Law, and a 2001 press statute criminalize the publication of material that harms national unity, tarnishes the image of the state, or threatens the "goals of the revolution." Syrian writer and activist Habib Saleh was sentenced in August 2006 to three years in prison for "disseminating false news" after he published an article that was critical of the president and his family. Many other journalists, writers, and intellectuals have been arrested or harassed for similar reasons.

Apart from a handful of non-news radio stations, all broadcast media are state-owned. However, satellite dishes are common, giving many Syrians access to foreign news broadcasts. While more than a dozen privately owned newspapers and magazines have sprouted up in recent years, only one (owned by the son of Syria's defense minister) is allowed to publish serious criticism of the government. The 2001 press law permits the authorities to arbitrarily deny or revoke publishing licenses and compels privately owned print media outlets to submit all material to government censors. It also imposes punishment on reporters who do not reveal their sources in response to government requests. Since the Kurdish protests in 2004, the government has cracked down on journalists calling for the expansion of Kurdish rights. In June 2006, a military court sentenced Ali al-Abdullah and his son Mohamed for publishing an article calling on the Baath Party to end its repression of Kurds. Syrians are permitted to access the internet only through state-run servers, which block access to a

wide range of websites. E-mail correspondence is reportedly monitored by the intelligence agencies.

Although the constitution requires that the president be a Muslim, there is no state religion in Syria and freedom of worship is generally respected. The Alawite minority dominates the officer corps of the military and security forces. The government tightly monitors mosques and controls the appointment of Muslim clergy.

Academic freedom is heavily restricted. University professors have frequently been dismissed from state universities for expressing dissent, and some have been imprisoned. Between January and March 2006, eight Syrian university students were arrested on unknown charges, but the detentions were apparently related to the students' attempts to develop a youth movement on campus and their publication of articles calling for political reform.

Freedom of assembly is heavily circumscribed. Public demonstrations are illegal without explicit permission from the Interior Ministry, and permission is typically granted only to progovernment organizations. Increasingly, the authorities have relied on plainclothes agents to intimidate activists. Freedom of association is severely restricted. All nongovernmental organizations must register with the government, which generally denies registration to reformist groups. Although a handful of unlicensed human rights groups have been allowed to organize, they are prevented from publishing material inside Syria and are placed under such heavy (and often visible) surveillance that most citizens who suffer abuses at the hands of the authorities are reluctant to communicate with them. Leaders of these organizations have frequently been jailed for publicizing government human rights abuses.

The security services intensified their ban on public and private gatherings in 2006, forbidding any group of five or more people from discussing political and economic topics. This rule has been enforced through surveillance, wiretapping, and informant reports. Syrian security forces broke up private meetings of activists belonging to the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria conducted in private homes. The attendees were searched, their documents were seized, and they were forcibly removed from the gatherings. Syrian security services even arrested a 70-year-old man for voicing his views on the current situation in Syria with his friends in a cafe.

All labor unions must belong to the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU). Although nominally independent, the GFTU is used by the government to control all aspects of union activity in Syria. Strikes in nonagricultural sectors are legal, but they rarely occur.

While regular criminal and civil courts operate with some independence and generally safeguard defendants' rights, politically sensitive cases are usually tried by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), an exceptional tribunal established under emergency law that denies the right to

appeal, limits access to legal counsel, tries many cases behind closed doors, and routinely admits as evidence confessions obtained through torture. Only the president and interior minister may alter the verdicts.

The state of emergency in force since 1963 gives the security agencies virtually unlimited authority to arrest suspects and hold them incommunicado for prolonged periods without charge. Many of the estimated 2,500 to 3,000 remaining political prisoners in Syria have never been tried for any offense. The security agencies, which operate independently of the judiciary, routinely extract confessions by torturing suspects and detaining members of their families. There were scores of credible reports of torture by the security services in 2006. After serving prison time, political activists are routinely monitored and harassed by Syrian security services upon their release. The Syrian Human Rights Committee has reported that hundreds of government informants are rewarded for or coerced into writing reports on relatives, friends, and associates who are suspected of being involved in “anti-regime” activities.

The Kurdish minority in Syria faces severe restrictions on cultural and linguistic expression. The 2001 press law requires that owners and top editors of publications be Arabs. Some 200,000 Syrian Kurds are deprived of citizenship and unable to obtain passports, identity cards, or birth certificates, which in turn prevents them from owning land, obtaining government employment, and voting. Suspected Kurdish activists are routinely dismissed from schools and public sector jobs.

In 2005, the government released 312 Kurds who had been detained since the 2004 riots. However, it has continued to detain dozens of members of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), arrested hundreds of other Kurdish activists over the past few years, and prevented many from traveling to Iraqi Kurdistan.

Although most Syrians do not face travel restrictions, prominent opposition figures and relatives of exiled dissidents are routinely prevented from traveling abroad, and stateless Kurds lack the requisite documents to leave the country. In July 2006, the government issued a new list of activists under travel ban that included signers of the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, former Damascus Spring detainees, human rights lawyers, and their family members. Aside from travel bans on political dissidents, Syrians were generally allowed freedom of movement, residence, and employment.

The government has promoted gender equality by appointing women to senior positions in government and providing equal access to education, but many discriminatory laws remain in force. A husband may request that the Interior Ministry block his wife from traveling abroad, and women are generally barred from leaving the country with their children unless they can prove that the father has granted permission. Violence against women is common, particularly in rural areas. Syrian law stipulates that an accused rapist can be acquitted if he marries his victim, and the law provides for reduced sentences in cases of “honor crimes” committed by men against female relatives for alleged

sexual misconduct. Personal status law for Muslim women is governed by Sharia (Islamic law) and is discriminatory in marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters.

Turkmenistan

Population: 5,300,000

Capital: Ashgabat

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Before his sudden death in December 2006, President Saparmurat Niyazov continued past practices, ruling single-handedly behind a facade of vitiated formal institutions, frequently reshuffling high-level officials, fomenting a cult of personality, maintaining iron control over the media environment, and crushing all real and imagined hints of political opposition. The emergence of a successor, Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, raised hopes of improvement, although no substantive reforms took place through the end of 2006. Meanwhile, the country's natural gas reserves underpinned its place in the international arena; Turkmenistan secured price increases from Iran, Russia, and Ukraine, even as it established closer ties with China amid plans to build a new gas pipeline across Central Asia to China by 2009.

The southernmost republic of the former Soviet Union, Turkmenistan was conquered by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, seized by Russia in the late 1800s, and incorporated into the USSR in 1924. Turkmenistan gained formal independence in 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Saparmurat Niyazov, the former head of the Turkmenistan Communist Party, was the sole candidate in elections to the newly created post of president in October 1990. After the adoption of a new constitution in 1992, he ran unopposed again and was reelected for a five-year term with a reported 99.5 percent of the vote. The main opposition group, Agzybirlik, which was formed in 1989 by leading intellectuals, was banned. In a 1994 referendum, Niyazov's tenure as president was extended for an additional five years, until 2002, which exempted him from having to run again in 1997 as originally scheduled. In the December 1994 elections to the National Assembly (Mejlis), only Niyazov's Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), the former Communist Party, was permitted to field candidates.

In the December 1999 Mejlis elections, every candidate was selected by the government and virtually all were members of the DPT. The Central

Election Commission (CEC) claimed that voter turnout was 98.9 percent. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), citing the lack of provision for nongovernmental parties to participate and the executive branch's control of the nomination of candidates, refused to send even a limited assessment mission. In a further consolidation of Niyazov's extensive powers, parliament unanimously voted in late December to make Niyazov president for life. With this decision, Turkmenistan became the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States to formally abandon presidential elections.

Although Niyazov continued to exercise widespread power throughout the country, cracks in his regime emerged during 2002. Several high-level government defections, along with a purge by Niyazov of Turkmenistan's intelligence service, highlighted growing political tensions and challenges to the government. On November 25, Niyazov survived an alleged assassination attempt in Ashgabat when gunmen fired at the president's motorcade. The incident sparked a widespread crackdown against the opposition and perceived critics of the regime, drawing condemnation from foreign governments and international organizations, including the OSCE and the United Nations.

While some observers speculated that Niyazov himself had planned the shooting as an excuse to increase repression of his political enemies, others maintained that it was a failed attempt by certain members of the opposition to oust the president from power. According to the government, former foreign minister and prominent opposition leader Boris Shikhmuradov, along with three other former high-ranking officials living in exile, had organized the attack. Shikhmuradov was alleged to have returned to Turkmenistan from exile in Russia with the help of the Uzbek authorities, an accusation which soured already strained relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Shikhmuradov was arrested on December 25, 2002 and made a televised confession four days later that critics maintain had been coerced. On December 30, he was sentenced to life in prison following what human rights groups condemned as a Soviet-style show trial. Two of the alleged co-conspirators received life sentences in absentia, while many other suspects were given lengthy prison sentences.

The president subsequently announced early elections for the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council) in April 2003. Observers noted that the decision to hold the poll two years ahead of schedule was most likely intended to eliminate any remaining opposition to Niyazov's government through a redistribution of legislative posts. There was no election campaign, and the state media did not provide information about the candidates, all of whom were nominated by the presidential administration. The CEC announced voter turnout of 99.8 percent, although the true figure is believed to have been much lower.

In the run-up to the December 19, 2004, Mejlis polls, the list of candidates was reportedly personally approved by Niyazov. The government refused to invite any international observers to monitor the election, which most

analysts described as little more than a staged vote. As in previous elections, only the DPT was allowed to field candidates. Voter turnout was officially listed as 77 percent.

High-level government reshuffles, a prominent feature in Turkmen political life in 2005, continued in 2006, pointing to the irrelevance of formal institutions under Niyazov's rule and the president's deepening political paranoia. Long-serving prosecutor-general Gurbanbibi Atajanova, who had presided over a far-reaching purge of the country's energy sector leadership, was herself purged amid traditional accusations of corruption. As in past years, Niyazov also dismissed several governors and district heads for failing to meet projected cotton harvest targets.

Niyazov's death on December 21 from an apparent heart attack was followed by the rapid and seemingly well-orchestrated ascent of Deputy Prime Minister Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov to the position of acting president. The succession was orderly but appeared to circumvent constitutional norms, as criminal charges were brought against parliament speaker Ovezgeldy Ataev, who would have been next in line to succeed Niyazov according to the constitution, within hours of Niyazov's death. This removed Ataev from contention and cleared the way for Berdymukhammedov to assume the presidency. The Security Council, which brings together the country's top military and security officials, played a key role in the succession process, suggesting that the country's powerful security and intelligence services continue to play a crucial role in the absence of independent institutions and oversight.

Turkmenistan's importance as a supplier of natural gas dominated the country's relations with the outside world. When Russia cut off gas deliveries to Ukraine in January 2006 in the course of a pricing dispute, cheap Turkmen gas made possible a compromise solution in which Ukraine agreed to pay \$95 per 1,000 cubic meters for a combination of expensive Russian natural gas and cheaper gas from Turkmenistan. Later in the year, Turkmenistan threatened to cut off gas to Russia and successfully secured a higher price in the fall.

In April, Turkmenistan signed an agreement to build a gas pipeline to China by 2009. However, skeptics cast doubt on the project's feasibility and suggested it could be a bargaining ploy to secure future price increases from Russia, Ukraine, and Iran, the main buyers of Turkmen gas. Meanwhile, an April report by Global Witness pointed to massive corruption in the Turkmen-Ukraine gas trade.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Turkmenistan is not an electoral democracy. President Saparmurat Niyazov enjoyed virtually absolute power over all branches and levels of government. While the extent to which Niyazov's successor, Gurbanguly

Berdymukhammedov, would be able to consolidate his own power remained unclear by the end of 2006, the legacy of absolute presidential power is likely to prove difficult to overcome. In recent years, the government underwent a rapid turnover of personnel as Niyazov dismissed many officials whom he suspected could challenge his authority.

The country has two parliamentary bodies, neither of which enjoys genuine independence from the executive branch: the unicameral Mejlis (National Assembly), composed of 50 members elected by popular vote for five-year terms, and the approximately 2,500-member Halk Maslahaty (People's Council), composed of various elected and appointed members, which was officially made the country's supreme legislative body in 2003.

None of the country's legislative elections have been free or fair. Only one political party, the DPT, has been officially registered. Opposition parties have been banned, and their leading members face harassment and detention or have fled abroad.

Niyazov established an extensive cult of personality, including erecting monuments to his leadership throughout the country. In 1994, he renamed himself Turkmenbashi, or "leader of the Turkmen." He enacted bizarre decrees, including ordering the renaming of the days of the week and months of the year after himself and his mother. As part of a stated attempt to fend off foreign influences in the country, he banned opera and ballet performances. In 2006, he gave ministers six months to learn English and continued the practice of sponsoring vast construction projects of little evident value to the populace.

In one of his first statements, acting President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov pledged to "continue the policy of Samarurat Niyazov," although he also promised on December 26 to hold a planned presidential election "on a democratic basis" in February 2007. No resolution to the evident contradiction emerged by year's end. On December 28, 2006, the Central Election Commission announced the registration of six candidates for the presidency, but all were members of the DPT and part of the power structure Niyazov established. Of the six, five were little-known figures, suggesting that their participation was intended to lend a democratic veneer to Berdymukhammedov's eventual ascent from acting to actual president.

Corruption is widespread, with public officials often forced to bribe their way into their positions. The authorities have used anticorruption campaigns as a way to remove potential rivals. Turkmenistan was ranked 142 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of speech and the press is severely restricted by the government, which controls all radio and television broadcasts and print media. Reports of dissenting political views are banned, as are even mild forms of criticism of the president. Subscriptions to foreign newspapers and magazines are forbidden, and foreign journalists have few opportunities to visit

Turkmenistan. In 2004, the government shut down broadcasts of Russia's Radio Mayak, the last foreign media outlet to reach Turkmenistan. The state-owned Turkmen Telekom is the only authorized internet service provider in the country.

Few international correspondents work in Turkmenistan, and many have been expelled from the country. In 2005, journalist Viktor Panov of the Russian news agency RIA-Novosti was deported from Turkmenistan to Russia on espionage charges. In 2006, Radio Liberty correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova, who had been arrested in the course of a dubious spy scandal, died in custody under suspicious circumstances, prompting international condemnation and protests. Two human rights activists who had been arrested along with Muradova received six- and seven-year prison terms in a 10-minute trial.

The government restricts freedom of religion, and independent religious groups continue to face persecution. A 2003 law on religion criminalized the practice of religious groups not officially registered and prescribed up to one year of corrective labor against violators. In May 2004, Niyazov decreed that practicing an unregistered religion would no longer be a criminal offense, although it remains illegal, with violators subject to fines. Seventh-day Adventist, Baha'i, Hare Krishna, Baptist, and several Protestant communities have subsequently achieved formal registration, but other groups have experienced difficulties in attempting to register. Furthermore, members of independent religious congregations—including those legally registered by the government—continue to face pressure from the authorities.

The government controls access to Islamic education and restricts the number of mosques throughout the country. The authorities coerce Christian and Muslim houses of worship to display a copy of the *Rukhnama*, a quasi-spiritual guide allegedly authored by Niyazov.

The government places significant restrictions on academic freedom, with schools increasingly being used to indoctrinate, rather than educate, students. The *Rukhnama* is required reading throughout the school system and has largely replaced many other traditional school subjects. Textbooks must meet the government's strict ideological requirements. In 2004, Niyazov issued an order invalidating most higher education degrees received outside the country since 1993, dismissing holders of such degrees from state jobs. Analysts viewed this decree as part of a broader effort to eliminate foreign influences from Turkmen society. Bribes are commonly required for admission to various schools and institutes. In early 2005, Niyazov announced a decision to close most libraries in the country on the grounds that most books that Turkmen citizens need—many allegedly written by the president himself—should already be present in homes, schools, and workplaces.

The state security services regularly monitor the activities of citizens and foreign nationals, limiting open and free private discussion. Security officers use such surveillance techniques as wiretapping, the interception of mail, and

the recruitment of informers. After the November 2002 assassination attempt, Niyazov reportedly directed law enforcement bodies to carefully monitor people's conversations in public places and called on people to assist the police by informing on their fellow citizens. In February 2004, Niyazov ordered the government to intensify video surveillance, including at all strategic economic facilities, public buildings, and government offices.

While the constitution guarantees peaceful assembly and association, these rights are severely restricted in practice. Public demonstrations against state policies are extremely rare. After changes in pension law in January 2006 reportedly stripped 100,000 retirees of their pensions and reduced payments to another 200,000, opposition sources provided scattered reports of protests, but these could not be confirmed.

A 2003 law on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) effectively criminalized the activities of unregistered organizations and imposed penalties that included heavy fines, the confiscation of property, and imprisonment. In an apparent reversal, a new law was adopted the following year abolishing criminal penalties for unregistered NGOs. However, most observers suspected that the law was designed primarily to counter international criticism of the country's poor human rights record, rather than to genuinely improve the environment for Turkmenistan's civil society sector.

The government-controlled Colleagues Union is the only central trade union permitted. There are no legal guarantees for workers to form or join unions or to strike, although the constitution does not specifically prohibit these rights. Strikes in Turkmenistan are extremely rare.

The judicial system is subservient to the president, who appoints and removes judges without legislative review. The authorities frequently deny rights of due process, including public trials and access to defense attorneys. Police abuse and torture of suspects and prisoners, often to obtain confessions, is reportedly widespread. Those arrested and sentenced for complicity in the assassination attempt against Niyazov suffered ill-treatment or torture, had no access to legal counsel of their own choosing, and were convicted in closed trials; many of their friends and relatives were targeted for harassment and intimidation. The trial of Radio Liberty correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova, who subsequently died in custody, and two human rights activists in 2006 highlighted a variety of abuses and flaws in the judicial system.

In early 2003, the government broadened the definition of treason to cover a wide range of activities, including attempting to undermine the public's faith in the president's policies and failing to inform the authorities of a wide range of crimes. Prisons suffer from overcrowding and inadequate nutrition and medical care, and international organizations are not permitted to visit prisons.

Turkmenistan remains a smuggling corridor for drugs from neighboring Afghanistan, with numerous reports suggesting the involvement of high-level

officials in the narcotics trade and a growing problem of drug addiction within Turkmenistan.

Employment and educational opportunities for ethnic minorities are limited by the government's policy of promoting Turkmen national identity and its discrimination against those who are not ethnic Turkmen. Following the 2002 assassination attempt against Niyazov, which Turkmenistan openly accused Uzbekistan of supporting, the Turkmen authorities took a harder line against ethnic Uzbeks in Turkmenistan. The government reportedly ordered the forced relocation of part of the Uzbek population living along the Uzbekistan border and their replacement with ethnic Turkmen. In March 2004, the country's former chief mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, an ethnic Uzbek, was sentenced to 22 years in prison on charges of treason; he had been removed from his post in January 2003 and was succeeded by an ethnic Turkmen. The authorities have ordered the closure of a variety of Russian-language institutions, including schools, throughout the country.

Freedom of movement, particularly overseas, is severely restricted. In 2004, Niyazov formally abolished the country's exit-visa requirement—which had been eliminated in January 2002 but reintroduced the following year—to stave off trade restrictions by the United States. However, travel abroad remains extremely difficult for most Turkmen citizens and often requires the payment of bribes to government officials. In addition, the government is believed to maintain a lengthy blacklist of people—possibly thousands—who are not permitted to travel outside the country, including those suspected of opposition to the authorities. The State Service for the Registration of Foreign Citizens monitors foreign visitors, whose activities are strictly regulated.

A continuing Soviet-style command economy and widespread corruption diminish equality of opportunity. The government sets extremely high production targets for farmers, who must then sell their crops at very low prices set by the state monopoly grain purchaser. Profits from the country's extensive energy exports rarely reach the general population, most of whom live in poverty. Employees working in the dominant public sector are tested on their knowledge of the *Rukhnama* as a condition of their employment. In January 2005, Niyazov announced a ban on the practice of child labor. However, there are concerns that the practice is so widespread and central to the country's economy, particularly during the annual fall cotton harvest, that the ban will not be enforced.

According to the Vienna-based International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the Turkmen government has engaged in "widespread violations of property rights" as part of a dramatic urban reconstruction project in Ashgabat that was launched in 2001. Hundreds of residents have reportedly been forced to vacate their homes on extremely short notice and have received little or no financial compensation or equivalent accommodation from the authorities.

The government restricts various personal social freedoms, including the wearing of long hair or beards by men. Traditional social and religious norms and a lack of employment prospects limit professional opportunities for women, and anecdotal reports suggest that domestic violence is common.

Uzbekistan

Population: 26,200,000

Capital: Tashkent

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Uzbekistan's human rights conditions, which deteriorated in the wake of the authorities' violent suppression of unrest in Andijon in 2005, remained extremely poor in 2006. The government of President Islam Karimov continued to imprison members of the country's fledgling political opposition, harass independent media, and expel foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations.

Located along the ancient trade route of the famous Silk Road, Uzbekistan was incorporated into the Russian empire by the late nineteenth century. The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was established in 1924, and its southeastern portion was detached and organized as the separate Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic five years later.

On December 29, 1991, more than 98 percent of the country's electorate approved a popular referendum on Uzbekistan's independence. In a parallel vote, Islam Karimov, former Communist Party leader and chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the successor to the Communist Party, was elected president with a reported 88 percent of the ballots. The only independent candidate to challenge him, Erk (Freedom) Party leader Mohammed Solih, claimed election fraud. Solih fled the country two years later, and his party was forced underground. The opposition group Birlik (Unity) had been barred from contesting the election and was later refused legal registration as a political party. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and other religious-based groups were banned entirely. Only progovernment parties were allowed to compete in elections to the first post-Soviet legislature in December 1994 and January 1995. A February 1995 national referendum to extend Karimov's first five-year term in office until 2000 was allegedly approved by 99 percent of the country's voters.

The government's repression of the political opposition and of Muslims not affiliated with state-sanctioned religious institutions intensified after a series of deadly bombings in Tashkent in February 1999. The authorities blamed the

attacks, which they described as an assassination attempt against Karimov, on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an armed group seeking the overthrow of Uzbekistan's secular government and its replacement with an Islamic state.

All of the five parties that competed in the December 1999 parliamentary elections, which were strongly criticized by international monitors, supported the president and differed little in their political platforms. In the January 2000 presidential poll, Karimov defeated his only opponent, Marxist history professor Abdulhasiz Jalolov, with 92 percent of the vote. The government refused to register genuinely independent opposition parties or permit their members to stand as candidates.

In August 2000, the IMU engaged in armed clashes with government troops. As part of its declared effort to prevent renewed invasions by the IMU, Uzbekistan placed land mines along portions of its borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, leading to protests by both governments and reports of accidental civilian deaths in the region.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., Uzbekistan became a key strategic ally of the United States in its military operations in Afghanistan. Tashkent's decision to permit the deployment of U.S. troops on its territory for search-and-rescue and humanitarian operations was widely seen as an effort to obtain various concessions from the United States and its allies, including economic assistance, security guarantees, and reduced criticism of its poor human rights record. In March 2002, the United States and Uzbekistan signed the Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework, in which both countries agreed to cooperate on economic, legal, humanitarian, and nuclear-proliferation matters. Uzbekistan's continued collaboration with the U.S.-led antiterrorism campaign led to U.S. commitments of financial assistance in exchange for promises from Karimov of political reforms.

The fragile state of Uzbekistan's political order was highlighted by a series of suicide bomb attacks and related violent clashes in late March and early April 2004 in Bukhara and Tashkent, in which some 50 people lost their lives. Official media coverage was limited, prompting widespread rumors about the identities and motives of the attackers. The fact that police appeared to be the main targets of the violence prompted speculation that the bombings were acts of revenge carried out by relatives of those imprisoned for alleged religious extremism. The authorities blamed radical international Islamist groups—particularly the IMU, which had links to al-Qaeda, and the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation)—and denied any connection between the violence and the government's repressive political and economic policies.

In the days following the attacks, law enforcement agencies swept up hundreds of alleged suspects and increased security measures in the capital and other large cities. Dozens of defendants were convicted in the second half of the

year for their alleged roles in the attacks, and all received lengthy prison sentences in trials that did not meet basic standards of due process. On July 30, several people were killed when suicide bombers struck again, in coordinated attacks on the U.S. and Israeli embassies and the office of Uzbekistan's prosecutor-general. Several groups claimed responsibility, although the claims could not be independently verified.

Elections for the lower house of a new bicameral parliament were held on December 26, 2004. Only the country's five legal parties, all of which are considered to be propresidential, were granted registration to participate. Several opposition groups, including Erk and Birlik, announced in November that they would boycott the vote after being unable to register candidates. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which sent only a limited observer mission due to concerns about the poor electoral framework and lack of registered opposition parties, criticized the vote as falling "significantly short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections."

The city of Andijon in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, an area that has suffered both from the government's continued repression of Islamic groups and from high poverty and unemployment, was the scene of a violent crackdown by armed forces against a popular uprising in May 2005. On May 10 and 11, family members and supporters of 23 local businessmen charged with involvement in a banned Islamic extremist group staged a peaceful demonstration in anticipation of the trial verdict. The situation turned violent when armed supporters of the businessmen attacked a police station and army barracks. They stormed the prison, freeing inmates—including the 23 businessmen—and captured the local government administration building. Thousands of local residents, among them women and children, subsequently gathered in the center of Andijon, where people spoke out on political and economic issues, often making antigovernment statements.

Security forces responded by opening fire on the demonstrators and storming the occupied building. Although the authorities maintained that the protesters were the first to open fire, eyewitnesses reported that the security forces began shooting indiscriminately, including at people who were fleeing from the scene or were already injured. Official figures put the death toll at 187, but unofficial sources estimated the dead at nearly 800, most of them unarmed civilians. The government accused Islamic extremists of orchestrating the demonstrations, though most of the protesters appeared to have been motivated by economic and social grievances.

Karimov repeatedly rejected calls from the United Nations, the European Union, the OSCE, and the United States for an independent international inquiry into the violence. In July 2005, Uzbekistan gave the United States six months to leave its military base at Karshi-Khanabad. Russia and China supported the official account of the violence and the U.S. base eviction.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's relations with Kyrgyzstan soured when 439 Uzbek refugees who had fled to Kyrgyzstan after the unrest in Andijon were airlifted to Romania rather than repatriated for possible trial. Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations warmed in 2006, however, as Kyrgyz authorities repatriated five refugees to Uzbekistan and the two countries conducted joint security operations in southern Kyrgyzstan against alleged Islamic extremists.

The crackdown unleashed by the Uzbek authorities after Andijon continued in 2006, targeting potential political opposition figures, human rights defenders, and even former officials. In December 2005, the husband of Nigora Hidoyatova, head of the unregistered opposition party Ozod Dehqonlar (Free Farmers), was shot to death in Kazakhstan. Nodira Hidoyatova, Nigora's sister and coordinator of the opposition Sunshine Coalition, was sentenced to a 10-year prison term on tax evasion charges in March; she was subsequently released after agreeing to cede over \$100,000 in currency and property to the state. Sunshine Coalition leader Sanjar Umarov received a 10-year prison sentence and \$8 million fine in March.

Saidjahon Zainabitdinov, an Andijon-based rights defender who provided key accounts to foreign media about Uzbek government actions there, was sentenced to a seven-year prison term in January 2006 for supplying "false information." Rights activist Motabar Tojiboeva was sentenced to an eight-year prison term on defamation and corruption charges in March after a trial that Human Rights Watch described as "unsound." And the well-known dissident poet and songwriter Dodokhon Hasan, who wrote a song describing government actions in Andijon as a "massacre," received a three-year suspended sentence for insulting the "dignity and honor" of Karimov after a closed trial in September.

Former defense minister Qodir Ghulomov, who was removed in November 2005, reportedly received a five-year conditional sentence after a closed trial in 2006, a possible reprisal for his role in strengthening U.S.-Uzbek ties. Reports in October indicated that Qobiljon Obidov, the former governor of Andijon, faced charges in connection with the unrest. Obidov had been removed from the post before the uprising, but he had been linked to the businessmen whose trial sparked the violence. Also in October, Karimov removed Andijon governor Saidullo Begaliev, who was in power during the uprising, charging that he had taken insufficient measures to resolve social and economic problems in the province.

On the international front, Uzbekistan's relations with the United States, the EU, and their allies remained chilly even as Karimov actively sought to improve ties with Russia, China, and a number of regional powers. Uzbekistan formally exited GUUAM, an alliance formed by Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Armenia, and Moldova, and rejoined the pro-Russian Collective Security Treaty Organization (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). Karimov also hosted India's prime minister and visited Pakistan. In a sign of close cooperation, Russia's

Federal Security Service (FSB) announced in March that it had extradited to Uzbekistan 19 suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. And in July, the pro-Kremlin youth group Nashi established a branch organization in Uzbekistan. In October 2006, however, a European Union delegation visited Uzbekistan amid reports that the EU was considering a review of sanctions imposed against Uzbekistan after the violent suppression of dissent in Andijon in 2005. A group of EU experts visited Andijon in December 2006. Despite the Uzbek government's reported willingness to "discuss" the Andijon events with EU representatives, sanctions remained in place at the end of the year.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Uzbekistan is not an electoral democracy. President Islam Karimov and the executive branch dominate the legislature and judiciary, and the government severely represses all political opposition. The national legislature largely confirms decisions made by the executive branch. The 1994–95, 1999, and 2004 parliamentary elections and the 2000 presidential poll, in which only progovernment candidates could participate, were neither free nor fair. In a January 2002 nationwide referendum, 91 percent of voters allegedly approved amending the country's constitution to extend the presidential term from five to seven years. Karimov's current term in office will therefore end in 2007, rather than in 2005.

In a parallel 2002 vote, 93 percent of voters officially supported replacing the country's 250-member, single-chamber legislature with a bicameral parliament consisting of a 120-seat lower house (with members elected by popular vote for five-year terms) and a 100-member upper house, or Senate (with 84 members elected by regional councils and 16 appointed by the president). Independent observers raised serious doubts about the validity of the referendum, citing the presence of police in polling stations and the fact that some people were able to vote on behalf of several individuals. In April 2003, the parliament adopted legislation providing former presidents with immunity from prosecution and lifelong, state-funded security for them and their immediate families.

Parties based on ethnic or religious affiliations and those advocating subversion of the constitutional order are prohibited. Only five parties, all progovernment, have been registered, and no genuine political opposition groups function legally or participate in the government. Members of unregistered secular opposition groups, including Birlik and Erk, are subject to discrimination, and many are in exile abroad. The Sunshine Uzbekistan opposition movement was effectively smashed in 2006 with the conviction of its leader, businessman Sanjar Umarov, on a variety of economic charges.

Corruption is widespread in the government apparatus, with bribery a common practice to obtain lucrative positions. Uzbekistan was ranked 151 out

of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

While Uzbekistan's constitution provides nominal guarantees of free speech, legislation imposes limits on freedom of speech and the press, particularly with regard to reports on the government and Karimov. The government controls major media outlets and newspaper printing and distribution facilities. The country's private broadcast and print media outlets generally avoid political issues, are largely regional in scope, and suffer from administrative and financial constraints. Although official censorship was abolished in May 2002, the responsibility for censoring material was transferred to newspaper editors, who were warned by the State Press Committee that they would be held personally accountable for what they publish. Self-censorship is widespread, while the few journalists who dare to produce probing or critical reports face harassment, physical violence, and closure of their media outlets. The government has blocked a number of news websites registered outside of Uzbekistan that publish materials critical of Uzbek authorities, and access to controversial information on the internet remains extremely limited.

In the aftermath of the violence in Andijon in May 2005, the authorities intensified their attacks on independent and foreign media representatives still operating in the country, a policy they continued in 2006. In December 2005, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was forced to close its Tashkent bureau when the Justice Ministry refused to extend its accreditation. A *Deutsche Welle* correspondent lost his accreditation in March 2006 for what the Uzbek authorities deemed an inaccurate story. In September, dissident journalist Jamshid Karimov, a nephew of Karimov's, was reportedly held in a psychiatric hospital. And in October, Uzbek independent journalist Ulughbek Haydarov, a former correspondent for the London-based Institute for War & Peace Reporting, was sentenced to a six-year prison term for extortion.

The government permits the existence of certain mainstream religions, including approved Muslim and Jewish communities, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church and some other Christian denominations. However, the activities of other congregations are restricted through legislation that requires all religious groups to comply with burdensome state registration criteria. Involvement in religious activities carried out by unregistered groups is punishable by fines or imprisonment, and meetings held by such groups have been raided and participants arrested and interrogated. The 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations prohibits activities including proselytizing and private religious instruction, and requires groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials.

The government exercises strict control over Islamic worship, including the content of imams' sermons, and is suspicious and intolerant of followers of Muslim organizations that are not sanctioned by the state. Many members of such groups have been arrested or imprisoned on charges of anticonstitutional

activities, often under the pretext of the government's fight against militant Islamists. Muslim prisoners are frequently tortured for their religious convictions or to compel them to renounce their beliefs. Authorities have targeted members of the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir, a radical but officially nonviolent international movement calling for the creation of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim world. Suspected members have been forced to give confessions under torture, and their family members have been subjected to arrest, interrogation, and extortion. The authorities reportedly followed the wave of 2004 suicide bomb attacks with a new crackdown against religious Muslims, as well as believers of other faiths, including Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses. This policy of repression accelerated after the May 2005 killings in Andijon; Human Rights Watch documented 194 religious believers convicted by November 2005. In November 2006 the U.S. State Department added Uzbekistan to its list of countries of "particular concern" for violations of religious freedom.

The government limits academic freedom, according to the U.S. State Department's 2006 human rights report. While professors generally are required to have their lectures preapproved, implementation of this restriction varies. Nevertheless, university professors reportedly practice self-censorship. Corruption is widespread in the educational system, with bribes commonly required to gain entrance to exclusive universities and to obtain good grades.

Open and free private discussion is limited by the *mahalla* committees, traditional neighborhood organizations that the government has turned into an official system for public surveillance and control. According to Human Rights Watch, committee members went door to door to warn residents not to speak with journalists or foreigners in the wake of the 2005 Andijon killings.

Freedom of association is restricted. Unregistered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), do not exist as legal entities and can face difficulties operating. After the unrest in Andijon, the government intensified its crackdown on civil society organizations and human rights activists in order to suppress any possible challenges to the regime. The Uzbek authorities have been particularly interested in closing NGOs that receive funding or other support from the United States and the EU—groups that the Karimov regime associates with popular protests that led to the overthrow of the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in recent years. In 2006, court decisions led to the temporary or permanent closure of such foreign-funded organizations as Freedom House (January); the Eurasia Foundation (March); the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (March); the American Bar Association's Europe and Eurasia Division of the Rule of Law Initiative (April); Counterpart International (May); Central Asian Free Exchange (May); the American Council for Collaboration in Education and Language Study (June); Global Involvement Through Education (June); the Urban Institute (July); Winrock International

(July); Crosslink Development International (August); and Partnership in Academics and Development (September).

Despite constitutional provisions for freedom of assembly, the authorities severely restrict this right in practice. Law enforcement officials have used force to prevent demonstrations against human rights abuses in the country, and participants have been harassed, arrested, and jailed. The May 2005 crackdown in Andijon, in which hundreds of unarmed demonstrators were reportedly slain alongside a much smaller number of armed men, was only the most egregious of the government's recent acts of repression. The Council of the Federation of Trade Unions is dependent on the state, and no genuinely independent union structures exist. Organized strikes are extremely rare.

The judiciary is subservient to the president, who appoints all judges and can remove them from office at any time. Police routinely abuse and torture suspects to extract confessions, which are accepted by judges as evidence and often serve as the basis for convictions. Law enforcement authorities reportedly often plant narcotics, weapons, and banned religious literature on suspected members of Islamic groups or political opponents to justify their arrest. According to Human Rights Watch, the trial of those accused of organizing the May 2005 unrest in Andijon "violated international fair-trial standards." The similarity of the confessions of the defendants—all of whom pleaded guilty—and their consistency with the prosecutor's indictment raised serious concerns that they had been coerced or tortured into confessing. The defendants were denied access to effective legal counsel, and the prosecution failed to present credible evidence in support of the indictment.

Prisons suffer from severe overcrowding and shortages of food and medicine. The Jaslyk prison camp is notorious for its extremely harsh conditions and ill-treatment of religious prisoners. Inmates, particularly those sentenced for their religious beliefs, are often subjected to abuse or torture, and Human Rights Watch has documented a number of torture-related deaths in custody during the last few years.

Although racial and ethnic discrimination is prohibited by law, the belief that senior positions in government and business are reserved for ethnic Uzbeks is widespread.

The government severely limits freedom of movement and residence within the country and across borders. Restrictions on foreign travel include the use of exit visas, which are often issued selectively. Permission is required from local authorities to move to a new city, and the authorities rarely grant permission to those wishing to move to Tashkent. Bribes are often paid to obtain the necessary registration documents.

Widespread corruption, bureaucratic regulations, and the government's tight control over the economy limit most citizens' equality of opportunity. There has been little reform in the country's large and predominantly centrally planned agricultural sector, in which the state sets high production quotas and

low purchase prices for farmers. A series of government regulations and decrees over the last few years have placed increasing restrictions on market traders and their ability to operate.

Women's educational and professional prospects are restricted by traditional cultural and religious norms and by ongoing economic difficulties throughout the country. Victims of domestic violence are discouraged from pressing charges against perpetrators, who rarely face criminal prosecution. The trafficking of women abroad for prostitution remains a serious problem. According to a 2005 investigation conducted by journalists from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting, women have been forced to undergo hysterectomies and contraception implants under a secret order from the Health Ministry to reduce the birth rate among rural women. Local authorities frequently use schoolchildren as free or cheap labor to harvest cotton; many children work long hours in unhealthy conditions, often receiving inadequate food and water.

↓Zimbabwe

Population: 13,100,000

Capital: Harare

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Trend Arrow: Zimbabwe received a downward trend arrow due to increasingly violent crackdowns on the opposition, growing militarization of state agencies and functions, and a deterioration in conditions for thousands of people displaced by Operation Murambatsvina.

Overview:

In 2006, Zimbabwe suffered from a further deterioration of political rights and civil liberties amid a near-total collapse of the country's economy. Throughout the year, longtime President Robert Mugabe and members of his government explicitly warned against demonstrations by the opposition, labor unions, and civic groups. Attempts at such protests prompted the large-scale deployment of security forces, the use of excessive force, mass arrests, and physical abuse of detainees. The government expanded its crackdown on the country's few remaining independent media outlets, employing new technologies to jam radio broadcasts and introducing new legislation to monitor and intercept internet-based communications. The political opposition, led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) continued to be racked by divisions in 2006. Little progress was made in the resettling of hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans affected by Operation Murambatsvina, a politically tinged slum-clearance effort. Zimbabwe's economic crisis worsened significantly in 2006, with inflation reaching a high of over 1,200 percent in September despite a forced devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar that same month. The crisis put the price of basic goods—including food and fuel—out of the reach of most Zimbabweans.

In 1965, a white-minority regime led by Prime Minister Ian Smith unilaterally declared independence from Britain in what was then Rhodesia; the resultant state was considered illegal and was subjected to extensive sanctions by the United Nations. A guerrilla war led by black nationalist groups, as well as

sanctions and diplomatic pressure from Britain and the United States, contributed to the end of white-minority rule in 1979 and the recognition of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980. Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), initially brought to power in relatively democratic elections, have ruled the country since then.

Zimbabwe was relatively stable in its first years of independence, but from 1983 to 1987, the government violently suppressed resistance from the country's largest minority group, the Ndebele, to dominance by Mugabe's ethnic Shona majority. Severe human rights abuses—including the deaths of between 10,000 and 20,000 civilians—accompanied the struggle, which ended with an accord that brought Ndebele leaders into the government. Opposition to Mugabe's government spurred widespread unrest in the 1990s. In 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), an alliance between trade unions and other civil society groups, was created to lead the political opposition.

In February 2000, the MDC helped defeat a referendum on a draft constitution that would have greatly expanded executive power. Parliamentary elections in June 2000 were deemed by observers to be fundamentally flawed prior to balloting. Candidates and supporters of the MDC faced violence and intimidation, including rape. A constitutional provision empowering Mugabe and allied traditional leaders to appoint one-fifth of the members of Parliament helped to ensure ZANU-PF's majority in the legislature. Voter registration, identification procedures, and tabulation of results were judged highly irregular by independent observers. The state-controlled media offered limited coverage of opposition viewpoints, and ZANU-PF used substantial state resources in campaigning. After the poll, Mugabe issued a pardon for thousands of people—most associated with ZANU-PF—for crimes committed during the election campaign, including assault, arson, forced evictions, kidnapping, torture, rape, and attempted murder.

In March 2002, after months of political violence aimed at MDC supporters, Mugabe claimed victory in a deeply flawed presidential election that failed to meet minimum international standards for legitimacy. The election pitted Mugabe against the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai, a popular union leader. Following the vote, the United States and the European Union imposed travel and arms-sales sanctions on the government, and the country was suspended from the Commonwealth. Mass protests and strikes called by Tsvangirai in 2003 were crushed by security forces. In August 2004, the MDC announced that it would suspend its participation in parliamentary and local elections because it believed there was no hope of a fair poll.

Prior to the March 2005 parliamentary elections, the government enacted two new electoral laws—the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) Act and the Electoral Act—in order to adhere to Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocols. However, the ostensibly independent ZEC was highly partisan, and it did not begin operating until two months before the

elections, leaving much of the electoral process to discredited institutions. Furthermore, despite some improvements, the Electoral Act granted the ZEC powers to employ security forces, retained biased residency requirements for voters, denied most expatriates the right to vote, and created an Electoral Court staffed by a deeply compromised judiciary.

Despite its 2004 announcement, the MDC did participate in the March 2005 parliamentary polls. However, the run-up to and conduct of the elections did not allow for a free or fair contest. Reports by local and international human rights groups asserted that MDC candidates and supporters were subjected to violent intimidation and harassment—including arbitrary arrest—throughout the country and were restricted from campaigning openly in rural areas dominated by ZANU-PF (particularly parts of Mashonaland and Manicaland). Security forces and ZANU-PF youth militias also restricted opposition assemblies and rallies in Harare and Bulawayo. As in previous elections, ZANU-PF used government food stocks as a political weapon, denying supplies to some MDC supporters and promising it to other citizens in exchange for votes. In addition, according to Human Rights Watch, “the processes of registering voters, delimiting electoral districts, and providing for inspection of voters’ rolls were conducted in a non-transparent and discriminatory way.” Though the opposition’s access to the media had improved from that of previous elections, equal and fair coverage was denied. Finally, among international monitoring groups, only African monitors believed to be sympathetic to ZANU-PF were allowed to observe the elections.

The elections resulted in a substantial victory for ZANU-PF. It garnered 78 elected seats, which, along with the 30 seats effectively appointed by Mugabe, gave the ruling party a two-thirds majority and the ability to amend the constitution. The MDC won only 41 of 120 elected seats. While observers from the SADC, the African Union, and South Africa deemed the elections reflective of the will of the people, local observers such as the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network were very critical of the vote. The MDC claimed to have discovered major discrepancies in vote tallies in over 30 constituencies. Citing 11 of these constituencies and claiming to have won 94 elected seats, the MDC challenged the ZEC’s results and threatened a court battle; however, no legal petition was filed. According to the International Crisis Group, the government escalated its crackdown on opposition supporters and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) after the elections.

Mugabe and ZANU-PF used their two-thirds parliamentary majority to enact a far-reaching Constitutional Amendment Bill in September 2005. Among other provisions, the bill abolished freehold property titles by nationalizing all land, denied landowners any legal recourse regarding expropriated land, brought all schools under state control, and empowered the government to seize the passports and travel documents of people deemed a threat to national interests.

Furthermore, the bill reintroduced an upper legislative house, the Senate; Mugabe had abolished the Senate in 1987, along with the post of prime minister. Elections to the new Senate—consisting of 50 directly elected members, 6 presidential appointees, and 10 traditional chiefs—were held in November 2005, and ZANU-PF secured 59 out of 66 seats. The MDC, deeply split over whether to participate in the elections, fielded just 26 candidates and won 7 seats. Only 15 to 20 percent of voters turned out for the balloting. The Senate, estimated to cost about \$60 million annually, was widely considered to be a superfluous body created to reward Mugabe's supporters in the ruling party.

In May 2005, the government began implementing a politically tinged slum-clearance effort known as Operation Murambatsvina (OM), translated as Operation Restore Order or Operation Clear the Filth, in which police arrested some 10,000 people in and around Harare and destroyed unauthorized street stalls and informal dwellings. The operation soon spread to almost every urban area and rural business center in Zimbabwe, resulting in the destruction (mostly by bulldozer) of tens of thousands of informal businesses and dwellings, including entire suburbs of Harare (Hatcliff Extension, Mbare, Joshua Nkomo, Porta Farm, and White Cliff Farm) and Bulawayo (Killarney and Ngozi Mine). Domestic and international human rights groups accused the security forces of arresting and fining people arbitrarily and using excessive force that directly resulted in at least three deaths. Initially moved into transit camps outside of the cities, many displaced residents were forced to return to the rural areas "from which they came," as designated on national identity cards.

According to the United Nations, approximately 700,000 people were made homeless by the operation, and another 2.4 million were affected directly or indirectly. Wintry conditions, large transportation expenses, lack of medicines, and national food shortages exacerbated the hardships faced by the displaced, particularly vulnerable groups like children, the old and infirm, and those suffering from HIV/AIDS. In addition, the government actively prevented civic groups and aid agencies from gaining access to the displaced. In December 2005, Mugabe drew international censure by rejecting a UN offer to supply tents as temporary shelter for the displaced. He claimed that living in tents was contrary to Zimbabwean culture. That month, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting the government's denial of assistance and protection—including international food and housing aid—to victims of OM, noting that many of the displaced were living in the open, in rudimentary shelters made from debris of demolished structures, or in "tiny rooms with family members who have agreed to shelter them."

The government defended OM as a necessary effort to restore law and order to the country's cities by enforcing licensing requirements and city ordinances and by removing sources of "illegal activities." However, many of the destroyed vendor stalls, flea markets, and informal settlements had in fact been approved by government officials. Many analysts maintain that the

operation was designed to impose control over urban areas that had proved to be MDC strongholds and sources of antigovernment agitation. Nevertheless, some of the townships targeted by the operation were built on land confiscated from white landowners and populated by ZANU-PF supporters.

Victims of OM saw little improvement in basic living conditions in 2006. Upon initiating the campaign, government officials had announced ambitious plans—dubbed Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle, or Better Life—to build new housing projects for the urban poor in place of the destroyed dwellings. However, according to numerous human rights organizations, these projects remained mostly incomplete, and failed to benefit people displaced by OM. In August, the church-based Solidarity Peace Trust (SPT) reported that the government had built almost no new dwellings for those displaced by OM, and that many were returning to the destroyed urban areas to crowd into surviving dwellings or build new structures. In September, Amnesty International reported that “contrary to government statements almost none of the victims of Operation Murambatsvina have benefited from the rebuilding, with only 3,325 houses constructed—compared to the 92,460 homes destroyed...and construction has ground to a halt in many areas.” The group also noted that most constructed houses were incomplete (“lacking doors, windows, floors, and even roofs”) and lacked basic water and sanitation facilities. Many houses and land plots had been allocated not to victims of OM but to civil servants, police officers, and soldiers, the report said. Amnesty noted that, in the investigated areas, army officers led most interministerial committees charged with allocating constructed houses, and that the process was driven by political status or bribes.

The government’s seizures of white-owned farmland, which began in 2000, precipitated the collapse of Zimbabwe’s economy, since the commercial farming sector had accounted for the majority of the country’s exports, foreign exchange, and jobs. Much of the seized land went to ZANU-PF officials, Mugabe loyalists, and war veterans without a farming background. The country’s gross domestic product has fallen more than 35 percent since the land reform began, making Zimbabwe the world’s fastest-shrinking economy in a country without an active war or insurgency. The triple-digit inflation that has plagued Zimbabwe in recent years increased rapidly in 2006, peaking at over 1,200 percent in September. As a result, a bundle of basic goods cost Zimbabweans 13 times as much as it did the year before. The government controls the prices of many major commodities and food staples, and state-linked companies dominate many sectors, exacerbating the shortages of key imports, most notably fuel. In December, the Department of Social Welfare reported that living standards had dropped by 150 percent since 1996. Unemployment is estimated at 80 percent. Furthermore, in both 2005 and 2006, Zimbabwe narrowly escaped expulsion from the International Monetary Fund with last-minute payments on arrears. The country’s dire political and economic

situation has resulted in the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans.

In an attempt to control the country's hyperinflation and regulate currency exchange, Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono in August 2006 announced a 1,000 percent devaluation in the Zimbabwean dollar, allowing only 16 working days for the old currency to be exchanged for new denominations. He also mandated that individuals could exchange just Z\$100 million (US\$1,000) a day, and security forces were deployed to arrest people who had been "hoarding cash" for exchange on the black market. Because of hyperinflation and Zimbabwe's unreliable banking sector, many people had kept their money at home, and unofficial foreign currency traders were the prime conduits for foreign exchange transactions in the country. Over 2,000 people were detained and more than Z\$20 billion (US\$200,000) was officially reported as seized by police officers, soldiers, and members of ZANU-PF's youth militias. They were widely accused of heavy-handedness and illegal cash seizures. Furthermore, rural Zimbabweans who had not heard of the devaluation were taken advantage of by urbanites who bought large amounts of livestock with the soon-to-be-defunct currency.

In December 2005, the government agreed to allow the UN World Food Program to distribute food aid to over three million people through June 2006, and in March 2006, Zimbabwe's Millers Association warned that the country—once one of Africa's major sources of agricultural exports—had only two weeks' worth of wheat remaining. In April, the government banned international agencies from carrying out crop estimates in the country. The domestic Zimbabwe Peace Project reported in September that food, humanitarian, and educational aid was being distributed on political grounds.

In April 2006, the SPT and local media reported that security forces had taken control of food production by small-scale farmers in the south; the government said the army was ensuring that farmers were selling maize to the state-controlled Grain Marketing Board. The grain board announced in September that soldiers would be deployed throughout the country's agricultural regions to collect grain. Farmers were not legally allowed to sell grain to any other buyer, though many farmers, citing nonpayment by the state, claimed they had no option but to do so.

Zimbabwe in December 2005 became the first Southern African country to register a decline in HIV prevalence (from 24.6 to 20.1 percent). The drop was largely attributed to changes in sexual behavior, particularly the increased use of condoms. However, in July 2006 Human Rights Watch reported that only 25,000 of some 350,000 Zimbabweans in need of antiretroviral drugs had access to treatment, and that "abusive government policies"—including forced evictions, official tolerance for domestic violence, and increased hospital fees—were blocking wider access to treatment and increasing the threat of infection.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Zimbabwe is not an electoral democracy. Recent presidential and legislative elections have been marred by political violence and intimidation (perpetrated by security forces and ZANU-PF youth militias), a discriminatory electoral framework, biased media coverage, and the unscrupulous use of state resources. President Mugabe and ZANU-PF have dominated the political landscape since independence in 1980, overseeing at least 16 amendments to the constitution—including the elimination of the post of prime minister—that have expanded presidential power. Mugabe has on several occasions invoked the Presidential Powers Act, which enables him to bypass normal governmental review and oversight procedures. Presidential elections are held every six years. In December 2006, ZANU-PF delegates to the party's annual conference approved a plan to postpone presidential elections—originally scheduled for 2008—until 2010, extending Mugabe's rule by two years (Mugabe has vowed to retire at the end of his current presidential term). The postponement will require another constitutional amendment.

From 1987 to 2005, Zimbabwe had a unicameral legislature. In September 2005, an upper house (Senate)—disbanded by a 1987 constitutional amendment—was reconstituted with a new amendment. It consists of 50 directly elected members, 6 presidential appointees, and 10 traditional chiefs. The lower chamber (House of Assembly) comprises 120 elected seats and 30 seats filled by various Mugabe appointees; elections are held every five years. ZANU-PF loyalists make up 72 percent of the House of Assembly and over 89 percent of the Senate. In October 2006, the ruling party handily won two parliamentary by-elections, though local observers claimed that the polls were marred by violent intimidation and flawed voter registration.

The MDC had until recently represented a significant oppositionist force in Zimbabwe. However, a debate over whether the MDC should contest elections for the newly created Senate in 2005 led to a split in the party, and 26 MDC members registered as candidates in defiance of party leader Tsvangirai. After Tsvangirai expelled the 26 dissidents, they and their supporters formed a “pro-Senate” MDC faction led by MDC secretary-general Welshman Ncube. In February 2006, the pro-Senate faction elected Arthur Mutambara, a former student leader and scientist who had been living abroad, as its leader. Tsvangirai was reelected president of his faction the following month. Later in the year, the two leaders both made gestures toward reconciling and presenting a united front against Mugabe; in July, they met in public for the first time at a convention called by the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance to form a broad opposition coalition. Still, relations between the factions remained acrimonious. MDC Member of Parliament (MP) Timothy Mubawu of the Tsvangirai faction was charged in July with organizing a violent attack on MDC MP Trudy Stevenson of the Mutambara faction.

Mugabe continued to direct government officials and security forces to crack down on opposition activity in 2006. In March, security forces uncovered a small arms cache at the home of Peter Hirschmann, a former Rhodesian soldier and alleged member of the shadowy rebel Zimbabwean Freedom Movement (ZFM), and 11 people were arrested for allegedly trying to organize a coup. Several MDC officials were among those arrested, although the party denied any connection to Hirschmann, the ZFM, or the uncovered arms. Security Minister Didymus Mutasa vowed to “physically eliminate” the accused plotters, who in turn accused the police of physical abuse and torture. However, all except Hirschmann were later released because of a lack of evidence. Also in March, Mubawu was arrested for insulting Mugabe. Mutambara and 60 of his supporters were detained in May while en route to a by-election campaign march in a Harare suburb.

Corruption is rampant throughout the country, including at the highest levels of government. A profound lack of transparency in government tenders and other operations has allowed graft to thrive. Patronage is crucial to ZANU-PF’s grip on power, and the party owns a wide range of businesses that profit its leaders. ZANU-PF and government officials have been allocated many of the properties seized from white farmers. Anticorruption prosecutions are almost exclusively motivated by political vendettas, and reports of extensive corruption and nepotism have contributed to the stark decline in public and investor confidence in Zimbabwe’s economy. The government hailed its August 2006 currency reform as a crackdown on corrupt officials and money traders. In November, Mugabe blocked the release of a Finance Ministry report detailing the use of fraudulent contracts and invoices by cabinet ministers and ZANU-PF officials to exploit Zisco, the country’s sole steel company. Zimbabwe was ranked 130 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International’s 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression and of the press is severely restricted in Zimbabwe. The country’s draconian legal framework includes the recently amended Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Bill. The AIPPA requires all journalists and media companies to register with the government-controlled Media and Information Commission (MIC), gives the information minister sweeping powers to decide who can work as a journalist, and mandates prison sentences of up to two years for journalists working without accreditation. In January 2006, freelance journalist Sidney Saize was detained for three days on charges of practicing journalism without a license and filing a “false story” for Voice of America (VOA). Authorities use a range of restrictive legislation—including the Official Secrets Act, the AIPPA, and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA)—to harass journalists. Section 15 of the POSA and Section 80 of the AIPPA criminalize the publication of “inaccurate” information, and both laws have been used to intimidate, arrest, and prosecute journalists. The new

Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Bill increases prison sentences for similar violations to a maximum of 20 years. Journalists are routinely subjected to verbal intimidation, physical attacks, arrest and detention, and financial pressure by the police, authorities, and supporters of the ruling party. Foreign journalists are rarely granted visas to file stories from Zimbabwe, and local correspondents for foreign publications, particularly those whose reporting has portrayed the regime in an unfavorable light, have been refused accreditation or threatened with lawsuits and deportation.

The government dominates the print media. Coverage in state-controlled dailies such as the *Chronicle* and the *Herald* consists of favorable portrayals of Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF party and attacks on government critics. The *Daily News*, the country's only independent daily, was shuttered in 2003 for not adhering to the AIPPA and continued to be denied a license by the MIC in 2006. Constitutional challenges to the AIPPA by the affiliates of the *Daily News* have proven unsuccessful. In January 2006, the weekly *Financial Gazette* withdrew an article suggesting that the MIC was controlled by intelligence officers after the commission threatened the newspaper with revocation of its license.

The state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) runs all broadcast media, which are seen as mouthpieces of the regime. The prohibitive costs of satellite services that provide international news programming place them out of reach for most Zimbabweans. In December 2005, police and government officials raided the Harare office of the independent Voice of the People (VOP) radio station, confiscating equipment and files and arresting three employees. Six members of the VOP's board of trustees were also arrested and charged with broadcasting without a license. In order to circumvent Zimbabwe's restrictive laws, VOP broadcasts locally produced programs into the country from the Netherlands. In 2005, the government began using Chinese-supplied technology to jam these shortwave broadcasts, along with those of the London-based oppositionist radio station SW Radio Africa and VOA.

In April 2006, the government introduced new legislation, the Interception of Communications Bill, that would allow government officials to intercept electronic communications to prevent a "serious offense" or a "threat to national security." The bill would require internet service providers (ISPs) to pay the cost of surveillance. In August, media advocates and ISP representatives uniformly opposed the bill at a parliamentary hearing. While technology for implementing the legislation was already undergoing tests, officials said in November that the bill would be amended to reflect the concerns of the parliamentary legal committee.

Freedom of religion is generally respected, although church attendance is becoming increasingly politicized. Zimbabwe's economic crisis has propelled a recent boom in attendance, and church groups such as the Solidarity Peace

Trust and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance have been at the forefront of opposition to the Mugabe government. However, church involvement has also increased among high-ranking members of the ostensibly socialist ZANU-PF—some of whom have even been ordained as lay preachers—and church groups such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the newly formed Ecumenical Peace Initiative are widely perceived as progovernment. In June 2006, cancellation of the country's traditional National Prayer Day by the ZCC after a meeting with Mugabe sparked a war of words between religious organizations from across the political divide.

Academic freedom is limited. Security forces and ZANU-PF thugs harass dissident university students, who have been arrested or expelled for protesting against government policy. The Constitutional Amendment Bill passed in September 2005 brought all schools under state control. In 2006, the Zimbabwe Peace Project reported that school heads loyal to ZANU-PF were distributing education aid based on parents' political loyalties.

The nongovernmental sector is small but active. However, NGOs, particularly those dealing with human rights issues, have faced increasing legal restrictions and extralegal harassment. Public demonstrations and protests are severely restricted under the 2002 POSA, which requires police notification—in practice, police permission—to hold public meetings and demonstrations. Such meetings are often deemed illegal and broken up, and participants are subject to arbitrary arrest by security forces (including intelligence officers) and attacks by ZANU-PF militias. The POSA also allows police to impose arbitrary curfews and forbids criticism of the president. The Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Act, originally introduced by the Rhodesian government and revived in 2002, sets out restrictive registration and funding requirements for NGOs. In December 2004, Parliament passed the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, which retains the PVO Act's more repressive provisions while increasing scrutiny of groups that “promote and protect human rights” and explicitly prohibiting such groups from receiving foreign funding. Following the model of the MIC, the act also establishes an NGO Council with which organizations must register or risk criminal charges. While Mugabe has yet to sign the legislation, in March 2006 Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa said that hurdle would be overcome by year's end.

As a result of these restrictions, mass action campaigns organized by the opposition in 2005 and 2006 failed to gain much traction and resulted in widespread arrests and beatings of protesters. In April 2006, the government responded to Tsvangirai's announcement of a new campaign of “peaceful democratic resistance” by increasing salaries for security forces, setting up police and army roadblocks, and issuing threats of violence. In September, the country's largest labor federation, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), called for a rolling protest campaign against deteriorating living conditions. When the ZCTU was joined by other civil society organizations and

major opposition parties, the government deployed thousands of security personnel in Harare, Bulawayo, and other urban centers. Some 500 people were arrested across the country, including almost the entire ZCTU leadership. Several union leaders—including President Lovemore Motombo and Secretary-General Wellington Chibhebhe—were severely beaten in custody. Security forces continued to disrupt demonstrations by the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) group and arrest demonstrators; in three years of protests, some 900 WOZA activists have been detained for violating the POSA, including more than 400 protesting high prices and unemployment in Harare and Bulawayo in February 2006.

The right to collective labor action is limited under the Labor Relations Act, which allows the government to veto collective bargaining agreements that it deems harmful to the economy. Strikes are allowed except for industries declared “essential” under the act. Because the labor movement provides the most organized resistance to Mugabe’s authoritarian rule, it has become a particular target for repression. Mugabe has used his presidential powers to declare strikes illegal, and labor organizers frequently face government harassment. The government has created a rival union umbrella organization, the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions, to try to undermine the ZCTU.

While some courts have struck down or disputed government actions, increasing pressure by the regime has substantially eroded the judiciary’s capacity to act independently. The accused are often denied access to counsel and a fair, timely trial. However, several journalists have recently been acquitted of criminal charges by magistrates, as have several MDC activists. The MDC’s Tsvangirai was acquitted of treason charges in December 2004 by the high court, and another set of treason charges was dropped in August 2005. Nonetheless, the government has repeatedly refused to enforce court orders and has replaced senior judges or pressured them to resign by stating that it could not guarantee their security. The judicial system has been burdened by the vacancy of nearly 60 magistrate posts, which has caused a backlog of some 60,000 cases. In January 2006, Judge Benjamin Paradza was convicted of corruption by the high court and subsequently fled the country, claiming that he was being targeted for issuing antigovernment rulings. In September, after several magistrates refused to take the case for fear of violent reprisals, Justice Minister Chinamasa was cleared of attempting to bribe a witness in the trial of Security Minister Mutasa, who stands accused of inciting political violence.

In general, security and military forces are accountable to the government but abuse citizens with impunity. Security forces often ignore basic rights regarding detention, searches, and seizures. The government has taken no clear action to halt the rising incidence of torture and mistreatment of suspects held by police or security services. War veterans and ZANU-PF militants operate as de facto enforcers of government policies—including land redistribution—and have committed human rights abuses such as assault,

torture, rape, extralegal evictions, and extralegal executions without fear of punishment. In June 2004, the government passed the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Amendment Act, which allows police to hold suspects accused of economic crimes for up to four weeks without bail; human rights activists contend that the act contravenes the right to presumption of innocence. Security forces in 2006 took on increased roles in crop collection, food distribution, and enforcement of government monetary policy. In March, the government announced plans to set up a Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission with a mandate to receive, investigate, and redress human rights complaints. Human rights activists greeted the announcement with skepticism.

Prison conditions are harsh and life-threatening. The country's 42 prisons have an intended capacity of roughly 16,000 inmates, but house about 21,000. Such overcrowding, along with a major shortage of funds, has contributed to a rise in HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis infections, food shortages, and the deterioration of already poor health and sanitation facilities. Deaths in prisons are often caused by disease, poor sanitation, or beatings by guards. Many prisoners rely on family members for food. Pretrial detention is a major problem, with some inmates being held for over 10 years without trial. Women and juveniles are housed separately from men, and pretrial detainees are generally held in separate, common cells.

The state has extensive control over travel and residence. In December 2005, the government, using powers granted by the September 2005 Constitutional Amendment Bill (CAB), seized the passports of two prominent government critics, newspaper owner Trevor Ncube and MDC official Paul Themba Nyathi. The high court later ruled the seizure illegal because the government had yet to pass implementation legislation for the new powers. Foreign critics are routinely expelled or prevented from entering the country. In December 2006, the Registrar-General ceased printing new passports, citing the unaffordable cost of the imported paper required for the documents.

Property rights are not respected in Zimbabwe. Operation Murambatsvina saw the eviction of hundreds of thousands of urban dwellers from their homes and the destruction of thousands of residential and commercial structures, many of which had been approved by the government. Fewer than 600 white-owned farms remain out of the 4,500 that existed when the land invasions started in 2000. Any avenues of legal recourse for expelled farmers were closed with the enactment of the CAB in September 2005. In an apparent reversal, the government in May 2006 offered expelled farmers the chance to bid for new land holdings, and in August, Mugabe called for an end to ongoing farm invasions. In September, the government promised to withdraw settlers from foreign-owned farms occupied after 2000.

The ruling party, which is dominated by the majority Shona ethnic group, continues to encourage political and economic discrimination against the minority Ndebele people. The Ndebele tend to be marginalized politically, and

their region (Matabeleland, an opposition stronghold) lags behind in economic development. Restrictive citizenship laws discriminate against Zimbabweans with origins in neighboring African countries. Despite divisive government actions and statements, including explicitly racist justifications for land seizures, relations between the remaining white minority and the black majority are relatively peaceful.

Women enjoy extensive legal protections, but de facto societal discrimination and domestic violence persist. Women serve as ministers in national and local governments and hold seats in Parliament. Joyce Mujuru is second vice president of Zimbabwe and a possible successor to Mugabe. In April 2006, the World Health Organization reported that Zimbabwean women's life expectancy of 34 years was the world's shortest and was four years shorter than that of Zimbabwean men. Sexual abuse is widespread, including the use of rape as a political weapon. A recent upsurge in gender-based violence spurred renewed calls for the enactment of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill, which has lingered in Parliament for seven years. In 2005, the domestic NGO Girl Child Network recorded an average of 700 rapes per month of girls under 16 years of age. The prevalence of customary laws in rural areas undermines women's civil rights and access to education. Traditional practices such as polygamy and *lobola*—the negotiated price a groom must pay to marry a bride—remain legal, and there were reports of girls being offered as settlements in interfamily disputes. A December 2004 report from UNICEF noted a gap between the existence and the implementation of many laws relating to women's and children's rights. Homosexuality, decried as un-African by Mugabe, is illegal in Zimbabwe.

China

Tibet

Population: 5,300,000 [This figure from China's 2000 census includes 2.4 million Tibetans living in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and 2.9 million Tibetans living in areas of eastern Tibet that, beginning in 1950, were incorporated into four Chinese provinces.]

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

While the Chinese government continued to extol the economic benefits that its Western Development Program was bringing to the region, notably the new Qinghai–Tibet railway, concerns have been raised that the resulting increase in the number of Han Chinese traveling to Tibet would further jeopardize the region's distinct culture and future prospects for autonomy. Separately, in September 2006, a foreign television crew recorded footage of Chinese soldiers shooting and killing Tibetans who were trying to flee across the border into Nepal.

China's occupation of Tibet has marginalized a Tibetan national identity that dates back more than 1,600 years. Beijing's claim to the region is based on imperial influence during China's Mongol and Manchu dynastic periods in the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. Communist China invaded central Tibet in 1950 and, in 1951, formally annexed Tibetan territory. In an effort to undermine Tibetan claims to statehood, Beijing split up the lands that had traditionally comprised Tibet, incorporating the eastern portion into four different Chinese provinces. The core central and western portions, which had been under the administration of the Dalai Lama's government, were designated the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965.

The defining event of Beijing's rule took place in 1959, when Chinese troops suppressed a major uprising in Lhasa, following widespread fighting over the previous three years. A reported 87,000 Tibetans were killed in the Lhasa area alone. The massacre forced the Tibetan spiritual and political leader, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, to flee to India with some 80,000 supporters. During the next six years, China closed 97 percent of the region's monasteries and defrocked more than 100,000 monks and nuns. During Chinese

Communist leader Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966–76), nearly all of Tibet's 6,200 monasteries were destroyed.

Resistance to Beijing's rule continued and was ruthlessly suppressed throughout Tibet. Under reforms introduced in 1980, religious practice was allowed again—with restrictions—and tourism was permitted in certain areas. Protests resumed in 1987, and some 200 mostly peaceful demonstrations were mounted over the next six years. Four large-scale protests against Chinese rule took place in Lhasa. After three days of antigovernment protests in March 1989, martial law was imposed on the city and the surrounding areas; it was not lifted until May 1990.

In addition to jailing dissidents, Beijing in the mid-1990s stepped up efforts to control religious affairs and undermine the exiled Dalai Lama's authority. In 1995, six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was detained by the authorities and his selection by the Dalai Lama as the eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama was rejected. The Panchen Lama was the highest religious figure to have remained in Tibet after the mass exodus in 1959. Beijing then orchestrated the selection of another six-year-old boy as the Panchen Lama. Since one of the roles of the Panchen Lama is to identify the reincarnated Dalai Lama, Beijing could control the eventual selection of the fifteenth Dalai Lama. Beijing has also tried to manipulate the identification and education of other religious figures.

In recent years, the Chinese government has made a series of goodwill gestures that may be aimed at influencing international opinion on Tibet. Several Tibetan political prisoners have been freed shortly before the end of their sentences. China hosted envoys of the Dalai Lama in 2002, the first formal contacts between Beijing and the Dalai Lama since 1993, and the fifth round of the ongoing dialogue was held in February 2006. Since 1988, the Tibetan government-in-exile has sought to negotiate genuine autonomy for Tibet, having dropped earlier demands for independence. While official statements suggest Beijing is willing to have contacts with the Dalai Lama, the government disputes his view that an autonomous Tibet should include territory that has been incorporated into Chinese provinces and rejects his aspirations for a democratically elected government within the autonomous area. Other Tibetan groups remain firmly in favor of independence.

At September 2005 celebrations marking the fortieth anniversary of the TAR, the Chinese government praised the achievements of the past 40 years, particularly the economic development, social progress, and stability brought by the Western Development Program. The central achievement of the program is the Qinghai–Tibet railway, inaugurated in July 2006, which links Lhasa with five major Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Xining, Chengdu, and Guangzhou. Within five years, the railway will be extended from Lhasa to the urban centers of Shigatse and Nyingtri. The Chinese leadership has asserted that it will boost trade, create jobs, and raise living standards. Tourism revenue is expected to

exceed \$700 million by 2010, and the number of visitors is set to jump from 1.8 million in 2005 to 10 million by 2020. The Chinese government is also eager to exploit the region's rich natural resources, inviting international companies to carry out oil and gas exploration.

While many Tibetans have benefited from such development, particularly the infrastructural improvements, the changes have disproportionately benefited Han Chinese. Scholars predict that the new railroad will increase Han Chinese migration to the TAR, heightening ethnic tensions and Tibetan fears of cultural assimilation.

Meanwhile, Beijing continues to tighten political control over the region, jailing dissidents and restricting freedoms. The ongoing disregard for human rights was vividly illustrated in September 2006, when a foreign television crew recorded footage of Chinese soldiers shooting and killing Tibetans who were trying to flee across the border into Nepal.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Tibet is not an electoral democracy. The Chinese government rules Tibet through administration of the TAR and 10 Tibetan autonomous prefectures in what were traditional Tibetan areas in nearby Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan Provinces. Under the Chinese constitution, autonomous regions have the right to formulate their own regulations and implement national laws and regulations in accordance with local conditions. In practice, the TAR mirrors the rest of China and is governed through the local legislature or people's congress system, with representatives sent annually to attend the National People's Congress in Beijing. Unlike China's provinces, which are run by a governor, autonomous regional governments have the post of chairman, usually held by a member of the largest ethnic group. Jampa Phuntsog, an ethnic Tibetan, has served as chairman of the TAR government since 2003, but few of the other senior positions are held by Tibetans. No Tibetan has ever held the top post of TAR Communist Party secretary. Zhang Qingli, a Han Chinese, was appointed to the post in May 2006. The authorities in the TAR continue to strictly limit basic freedoms guaranteed under the Chinese constitution.

Corruption remains a problem in Tibet. In October 2006, Tibet University students demonstrated against official corruption and discrimination in the allocation of civil service jobs to predominantly Han Chinese, a major cause of discontent among ethnic Tibetan graduates. International concerns have also been raised about criminal organizations using the new Qinghai-Tibet railway to smuggle endangered plant and animal species.

China controls the flow of information in Tibet, tightly restricting all media and regulating internet use. Tibetan-language radio programming by Voice of America, Radio Free Asia (RFA), and the Norway-based Voice of Tibet are jammed along with their Chinese-language counterparts. Increased

availability of the internet in urban areas has provided some Tibetans with more access to information, although people must show identity cards before using the internet in public facilities.

An update to the 2000 restrictions on internet content was introduced in late September 2005 as a way of preventing the distribution of uncensored information through websites or e-mail, including all news related to “politics, economics, military affairs, foreign affairs and social and public affairs.” This ban includes any information relating to Tibetan independence, the government-in-exile, and human rights abuses. In April 2005, the Tibet Culture Website was closed down, and in October 2006, a series of online blogs written by Tibetan poet and intellectual Oeser were also closed by the Chinese authorities. A media clampdown under way throughout China is being enforced all the more strictly in ethnic minority areas, including Tibet.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2005 human rights report, issued in March 2006, the government’s record on respect for religious freedom “remained poor.” While some religious practices are tolerated, officials “forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence.” Possession of pictures of the Dalai Lama can still lead to imprisonment. Communist Party members and senior officials in Tibet must adhere to atheism and cannot practice a religion. The Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) continue to control who can and cannot study religion in the TAR. Officials allow only boys over the age of 18 to become monks, and they are required to sign a declaration rejecting Tibetan independence, expressing loyalty to the Chinese government, and denouncing the Dalai Lama. Since 1996, Beijing has strengthened control over monasteries under a propaganda campaign intended to undermine the Dalai Lama’s influence as a spiritual and political leader. The government announced the end of this “patriotic education campaign” in 2000, but government-run “work teams” continue to visit monasteries to conduct mandatory sessions. In 2005, 40 out of 50 nuns practicing at the Gyarak Nunnery were expelled for refusing to participate in such sessions. Since Zhang Qingli was appointed Communist Party secretary in Tibet in May 2006, he has called for an intensification of the “patriotic education” campaign for monks and nuns.

The government manages the daily operations of monasteries through Democratic Management Committees (DMCs) and the RABs. The government approves all committee members so that only “patriotic and devoted” monks and nuns may lead DMCs. Since 1995, laypeople have also been appointed to these committees. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2005 human rights report, released in March 2006, Beijing claims that Buddhist monasteries are associated with proindependence activism in Tibetan areas. As a result, spiritual leaders have encountered difficulty reestablishing historical monasteries, facing a lack of funds, restrictions on monastic education, and denial of government permission to operate religious institutions.

In universities, professors cannot lecture on certain topics, and many must attend political indoctrination sessions. The government restricts course materials, prohibiting information deemed “politically sensitive,” in order to prevent campus-based political and religious activity. According to the U.S. State Department, students at Tibet University are barred from religious practice.

Independent trade unions, civic groups, and human rights groups are illegal. Some international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on development and health care operate in Tibet, under highly restrictive agreements signed with Chinese government agencies. However, cumbersome registration requirements and the clampdown on NGOs following the “color revolutions” in some former Soviet republics in 2003–05 make it increasingly difficult for these organizations to operate.

While some progress has been made in establishing the rule of law in other parts of China, the judicial system in Tibet remains abysmal, with most judges lacking any legal education. There is a lack of access to legal representation, and trials are closed if the issue of “state security” is invoked. In January 2005, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, a senior lama sentenced to death in December 2002, had his sentence, which had been temporarily suspended, formally commuted to life in prison under pressure from the international community. In a trial that Human Rights Watch said “lacked any pretense of due process,” he was found guilty in 2002 of causing explosions and inciting separatism. His alleged co-conspirator, Lobsang Dondrup, was executed in January 2003.

Following the September 2006 videotaping of Chinese soldiers shooting Tibetan civilians, there has been a crackdown on people trying to flee across the border to Nepal. In October 2006, some 53 Tibetans were detained for allegedly acting as guides for asylum seekers.

Although the Chinese government allowed the UN Human Rights Commission’s Special Rapporteur on torture, Manfred Nowak, to visit Tibet in December 2005, political dissidents continue to face particularly severe human rights abuses. Security forces routinely engage in arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and execution without due process, punishing even nonviolent protests against Chinese rule. Former detainees who manage to escape overseas after release, such as Jigme Gyatso, recount stories of torture and forced confessions.

Owing to strictly controlled access to the TAR, it is difficult to determine the exact number of political prisoners. According to the 2006 annual report of the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, there were a total of 103 known political detainees, down from 145 in 2004. However, 24 political detentions took place in 2005, an increase from 15 in 2004. In January 2006, two monks and three nuns were sentenced to up to three years’ imprisonment for distributing posters critical of the Chinese government. Separately, Phuntsog Nyidron was permitted to travel to the United States for

medical treatment in March 2006, having served 14 years in prison for participating in a peaceful political protest.

As members of one of China's 55 officially recognized "minority" groups, Tibetans receive preferential treatment in university admissions. However, the dominant role of the Chinese language in education and in careers in government, business, and academia limits opportunities for many Tibetans. Furthermore, the illiteracy rate among Tibetans (over 47 percent) remains five times greater than that of Han Chinese (around 9 percent). In the private sector, employers favor Chinese for many jobs, especially in urban areas. Tibetans find it more difficult than Chinese to obtain permits and loans to open businesses.

China's restrictive family-planning policies are more leniently enforced for Tibetans and other ethnic minorities than for Han Chinese. Officials limit urban Tibetans to having two children and encourage—but do not usually require—rural Tibetans to stop at three children.

Morocco

Western Sahara

Population: 380,000

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 6

Status: Not Free

Overview:

The Polisario Front made little progress during 2006 in its push to secure Western Sahara's independence from Morocco, which continued to offer only autonomy for the territory. However, the two sides maintained their long-standing ceasefire. UN-sponsored visits between Sahrawis living in camps in Algeria and family members in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara were restarted in November 2006 after a five-month suspension.

Western Sahara was ruled by Spain for nearly a century until Spanish troops withdrew in 1976, following a bloody guerrilla conflict with the pro-independence Polisario Front. Both Morocco and Mauritania claimed the phosphate-rich region and partitioned it after Spain's withdrawal, with Mauritania receiving the southern third. Rejecting the arrangement, the Polisario declared an independent state, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, and continued its guerrilla campaign. Mauritania renounced its claim to the region in 1979, and Moroccan troops filled the vacuum by annexing the entire territory.

Moroccan and Polisario forces engaged in a low-intensity conflict until the United Nations brokered a ceasefire in 1991. The agreement called for a referendum on independence, to be supervised by the UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). However, the vote has yet to take place, with the Polisario and Morocco disagreeing about who is eligible to participate.

Since the annexation, Morocco has moved to assert its control by encouraging Moroccans to move to the region, providing financial incentives and rewards for doing so. The Moroccan authorities have also encouraged Sahrawis to move to Morocco. While Morocco has attempted to improve relations by releasing Sahrawi prisoners in recent years, it still detains Sahrawi activists and demonstrators on a regular basis.

In 2004, the Polisario accepted the UN Security Council's so-called Baker plan, which called for up to five years of autonomy followed by a

referendum on the territory's status. However, Morocco rejected the plan. The Polisario in August 2005 agreed to release its remaining 400 Moroccan prisoners of war; Morocco continued to hold smaller numbers of Sahrawi prisoners.

In 2006, Morocco's King Mohamed VI said on several occasions that he was willing to grant autonomy to Western Sahara, but insisted that independence was out of the question. The king claimed that if Western Sahara were granted independence, it would cause regional instability and become a lawless haven for terrorists.

In positive news, the United Nations refugee agency in November resumed flights facilitating family visits between Sahrawis living in camps in Tindouf, Algeria, and relatives living in Western Sahara. The flights, carried out intermittently since 2004, had been suspended for the previous five months. In October, the UN Security Council extended MINURSO's mandate through April 2007, and reaffirmed its commitment to finding a "mutually acceptable" solution that "will provide for the self-determination" of the people of Western Sahara.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Moroccan authorities organize local elections and ensure that leaders of the Sahrawi independence movement are excluded from both local leadership and representation in the Moroccan parliament.

Morocco's constitution guarantees press freedom but, in practice, little exists in Western Sahara. Although there were fewer reported instances of government interference with press access to Western Sahara in 2006, Moroccan authorities continue to exercise control over who enters and reports on the region. The restrictions are particularly evident when there are local riots or demonstrations against Moroccan rule. Moroccan and international reporters are subject to expulsion or detention if the government objects to their work or they enter the region without permission. Western Sahara's population is extremely poor and has little access to independent media or the internet.

Sahrawis, like the vast majority of Moroccans, are Sunni Muslims, and Moroccan authorities generally respect their freedom of worship. There are no major universities or institutions of higher learning.

Moroccan officials restrict the ability of Sahrawis to form political organizations or assemble in public places. Demonstrations and riots are a regular occurrence in Western Sahara's towns and villages, and Moroccan authorities often arrest those involved. In October 2006, the Moroccan government disbanded the Groupements Urbains de la Surete (GUS), a security force formed in 2004 that was accused of human rights violations during riots and demonstrations in Laayoune in 2005. The force's 5,000 members would be reassigned to other security units. Sahrawis are subject to Moroccan laws,

including labor laws, but little organized labor activity takes place in the poverty-stricken region.

Particularly during the 1961–99 reign of Morocco's King Hassan II, the current king's father, Sahrawis who opposed the regime were summarily detained, killed, tortured, and "disappeared." While thousands of Moroccan dissidents suffered under Hassan's rule, Sahrawis who defied him faced even harsher scrutiny. While the political situation is different today, Sahrawis who oppose Morocco's sovereignty are still detained, and torture has not ceased under King Muhammad.

International human rights groups have for decades criticized the behavior of Moroccan authorities in Western Sahara. A September 2006 report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was highly critical of Morocco's record in the territory. The report was intended to be distributed only to Algeria, Morocco, and the Polisario, but was leaked to the press in October. Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission, founded in 2004 to examine government abuses under Hassan, did not hold scheduled public hearings in Western Sahara. Few Sahrawis had the opportunity to testify publicly before the commission.

Both the Polisario and Moroccan authorities restrict freedom of movement in potential conflict areas.

Sahrawi women face much of the same cultural and legal discrimination as Moroccan women. Conditions are generally worse for women living in rural areas where poverty and illiteracy rates are higher.

Russia

Chechnya

Population: 1,200,000 (Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Russian Federation, 2007, Inter-Agency Transitional Workplan for the North Caucasus. The population of Chechnya according to the 2002 Russian census was approximately 1,100,000.)

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Overview:

Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov was promoted to the Chechen premiership in March 2006 and continued to strengthen his hold on power in the republic. Critics like investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered in October, have claimed that Kadyrov and his security forces torture suspected rebels, many of whom disappear without a trace. Rebel violence declined as Kadyrov consolidated his position, and two important rebel leaders were killed during the year, but the larger region remained unstable.

Chechnya, a small, partly mountainous North Caucasus republic, has a history of armed resistance to Russian rule dating to the czarist period. In February 1944, the Chechens were deported en masse to Kazakhstan after Soviet leader Joseph Stalin accused them of collaborating with Nazi German forces. Officially rehabilitated in 1957 and allowed to return to their homeland, they remained politically suspect and were excluded from the region's administration.

After winning election as Chechnya's president in October 1991, former Soviet air force Major General Dzhokhar Dudayev proclaimed Chechnya's independence. Moscow responded with an economic blockade. In 1994, Russia began assisting Chechens opposed to Dudayev, whose rule was marked by growing corruption and the rise of powerful clans and criminal gangs. Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent 40,000 troops into Chechnya by mid-December of that year and attacked the capital, Grozny. As casualties mounted in the widening conflict, Russian public opposition increased, fueled by criticism from much of the country's then-independent media. In April 1996, Dudayev was killed by a Russian missile.

A peace deal that was signed in August 1996 resulted in the withdrawal of most Russian forces from Chechnya. However, a final settlement on the republic's status was put off until 2001. In May 1997, Russia and Chechnya reached an accord recognizing the newly elected president, Aslan Maskhadov, as Chechnya's legitimate leader.

Following incursions into neighboring Dagestan by renegade Chechen guerrillas and deadly apartment bombings in Russia that the Kremlin blamed on Chechen militants, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin launched a second military offensive in Chechnya in September 1999. Russian troops conquered the flat terrain in the north of the republic, but progress slowed considerably as they neared heavily defended Grozny. During the hostilities, Moscow withdrew its recognition of Maskhadov as president.

Russia's indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets caused some 200,000 people to flee Chechnya, with most heading to the tiny neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia. After federal troops finally captured Grozny in February 2000, the Russian military focused on rebel strongholds in the mountainous southern areas. Russian security sweeps led to regular atrocities in which civilians were beaten, raped, or killed, while Russian forces were subject to almost daily bombings and sniper attacks by rebels. The renewed campaign enjoyed broad popular support in Russia, fueled by the media's now one-sided reporting in favor of the official government position.

As the war persisted and atrocities increased, some Chechen fighters engaged in terrorist acts. In a crisis covered live by Russian television, a group of Chechen rebels stormed a Moscow theater in October 2002, taking 750 people hostage. Ultimately, more than 120 hostages died, most from the effects of a sedative gas that Russian troops used to incapacitate the rebels. Russian authorities reported that all 41 of the rebels had been killed.

A March 2003 referendum on a new Chechen constitution took place in the absence of free media and public debate. Chechnya's Moscow-appointed administration claimed a voter turnout of 85 percent, with 96 percent of participants backing the new charter. However, an independent survey of voter sentiments by the Russian human rights group Memorial found that 80 percent of the indigenous population opposed the referendum. Memorial and a number of other human rights groups pointed to a variety of irregularities in the voting, including intimidation by Russian troops, grenade attacks, multiple votes cast by some individuals, and tens of thousands of Russian troops being allowed to vote. Accordingly, the outcome did not reflect the real intentions of the local population.

Kremlin-backed candidate Akhmad Kadyrov won the Chechen presidency in October 2003 elections. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said the elections had not offered voters a significant choice, and the U.S. government deemed them "seriously flawed." Chechen rebels assassinated Kadyrov in a May 2004 stadium bombing. In

subsequent elections in August, Alu Alkhanov, Chechnya's interior minister since 2003, won with a reported 74 percent of the vote. The official voter turnout was 85 percent, but journalists observing the process called that figure wildly inflated. Despite Alkhanov's election, a great deal of de facto control remained in the hands of Kadyrov's son, Ramzan Kadyrov, who could not become president until he turned 30.

In September 2004, Chechen and other anti-Russian guerrillas carried out a terrorist attack in the neighboring republic of North Ossetia, capturing a school in the town of Beslan. More than 330 people—half of them children—died when the hostage standoff ended in chaotic violence. Putin, who had succeeded Yeltsin as president in 2000, used the attack to justify the further centralization of power in Russia as a whole, replacing the direct election of regional governors with a system of presidential appointments. Meanwhile, some families of the Beslan victims criticized the government in Moscow for its inability to prevent terrorist attacks and for covering up the negligence and corruption that contributed to the debacle.

In March 2005, Maskhadov, the separatist leader, was killed in an operation conducted by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). His death came weeks after the rebels declared a unilateral ceasefire in February, in an unsuccessful bid to convince the Russian government to enter peace negotiations. Putin responded to the ceasefire by ordering an expansion of the conflict. The assassination of Maskhadov, who had been elected in a relatively fair ballot in 1997, was a serious blow to the more moderate faction in the separatist leadership and significantly reduced the chances for a negotiated settlement.

Maskhadov's replacement as rebel leader was the little-known Abdul-Khalim Saidulayev, the former head of a religious court. During his tenure, the conflict increasingly spread beyond Chechnya's borders into the surrounding North Caucasus region. Separatist forces launched a two-day attack on Nalchik, capital of the republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, in October 2005. According to official estimates, 33 police officers and 12 civilians were killed in the fighting, along with 92 guerrillas.

Saidulayev was killed on June 17, 2006; his vice president, Doku Umarov, then became the rebel leader. Umarov vowed to continue Saidulayev's effort to spread the fight to other regions of Russia while continuing to target Grozny's pro-Moscow regime. The rebels suffered a major loss with the death of infamous guerrilla commander Shamil Basayev in a July 10 explosion, which the Russian government claimed was part of a special forces operation. Basayev, who had taken responsibility for the Moscow and Beslan hostage raids among other attacks, was the key link between many of the disparate Islamist, terrorist, and criminal elements within the rebel movement. Despite Russian assertions to the contrary, the vast majority of the rebels' financing came from criminal activity inside Russia, not foreign sponsors. By the end of 2006, the rebels

controlled only small areas in the republic's mountainous south, and major guerrilla actions within Chechnya had become less common as Kadyrov sought to crush or co-opt the remaining rebel fighters.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

While the 1997 presidential elections—conducted by the republic's separatist authorities—were characterized by international observers as reasonably free and fair, the resumption of war in 1999 led to the total evisceration of Chechens' political rights. President Maskhadov fled the capital in December 1999, and the parliament elected in 1997 ceased to function. In June 2000, Russian president Putin enacted a decree establishing direct presidential rule over Chechnya. There is no party pluralism and politicians who advocate Chechen independence are unable to work openly and freely.

The Russian government's claims to have returned the republic to democratic rule with a March 2003 constitutional referendum lacked credibility. The referendum was orchestrated by the Kremlin with no opportunity for debate, and widespread vote rigging was reported. In the subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections of October 2003, candidates representing a genuine alternative were not on the ballot, and debate was stifled in an atmosphere of repression and censorship. The Russian president recommends a candidate for the Chechen presidency, who then must be approved by the Chechen parliament. The Chechen president effectively serves at the pleasure of the Russian president. The bicameral legislature consists of the 21-member Council of the Republic and 40-member Popular Assembly. The members serve four-year terms.

The president elected in 2003, Akhmad Kadyrov, was assassinated in May 2004. Although Alkhanov won the presidency under similarly undemocratic circumstances later in 2004, Ramzan Kadyrov, who was appointed prime minister in March 2006, now wields the most power in the republic. Kadyrov headed his father's security service, and reconstituted it as the Akhmad Kadyrov Special Purpose Regiment in 2004. His men are reportedly involved in abductions, disappearances, extortion, trading in contraband, and the maintenance of unsanctioned prisons and torture chambers. Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya said in April 2006 that she had evidence of torture by Kadyrov's group, including one witness who had been tortured by Kadyrov himself. The Russian human rights group Memorial and Human Rights Watch have made similar charges, which Kadyrov has denied. His fighters have clashed with police in neighboring Dagestan and Ingushetia, and with Alkhanov's guards.

Kadyrov's strong-arm rule has helped the Kremlin consolidate more effective control over the republic, crushing rebel resistance and beginning the rebuilding process. Kadyrov reached the age of 30 in October 2006, the

minimum required to be president, leading to growing friction with Alkhanov. Kadyrov benefits in this struggle from his extensive control over the current Chechen parliament, which was elected in November 2005. He has begun building a personality cult and seeks increasing autonomy from the Kremlin.

Corruption is rampant in Chechnya. Kadyrov's critics have reported that he forces public-sector employees to make "voluntary" contributions to a fund named after his father. Corruption in the North Caucasus education system makes it prohibitively expensive for many youth to get the kind of training they want, threatening stability and economic development, according to a World Bank report. Federal funds designated for rebuilding Chechnya traditionally have been diverted to a variety of other purposes due to extensive corruption. On November 15, Sultan Isakov, the head of the agency responsible for providing compensation to people who lost property in the fighting, was arrested for allegedly soliciting a bribe.

Information in Chechnya is tightly managed. Kadyrov's financial resources allow him to control all local broadcast and most print media, which provide extensive coverage of his activities. There are three licensed television broadcasters, whose content is pro-government. Russian state-run television and radio continue to broadcast in Chechnya, although much of the population remains without electricity. The rebel movement operates a website with reports about the conflict and other news from its perspective. The October 2006 Moscow murder of Politkovskaya, a special correspondent for Moscow-based *Novaya Gazeta*, silenced one of the few remaining journalists brave enough to travel in Chechnya without official escorts and collect evidence of abuses by Russian troops and the pro-Moscow Chechen government. Kadyrov had publicly expressed his hatred of her.

The Russian military imposes severe restrictions on journalists' access to the widening Caucasus conflict area, issuing accreditation primarily to those of proven loyalty to the Russian government. Few foreign reporters are allowed into Chechnya, and when they are granted entry, journalists covering the conflict must be accompanied at all times by military officials. Because of the devastating effects of the war, including damaged infrastructure, internet usage is negligible.

Most Chechens are Muslims who practice Sufism, a mystical form of Islam. Ramzan Kadyrov openly calls for giving this form of Islam a central role in Chechen public life. He has also called on women to wear headscarves. The strict Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam, with roots in Saudi Arabia, has been banned by the Russian government.

Since the start of the fighting in 1994, many of the republic's schools have been damaged or destroyed, and education in Chechnya has been sporadic. Most schools have not been renovated and continue to lack such basic amenities as textbooks, electricity, and running water.

Some charitable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on humanitarian, cultural, and social issues are allowed to operate, but they face increasing Russian government criticism and pressure. Human rights groups, particularly those that deal with sensitive issues such as torture and other forms of abuse by police and the security services, have been subjected to growing scrutiny by the authorities. In 2006, the federal government introduced extensive reporting requirements, greatly increasing the workload for NGOs. The International Committee of the Red Cross in September 2004 suspended its visits to detainees because there were too many obstacles to conducting them properly. Attempts to resume the visits in 2006 failed. Kadyrov suspended the activities of the Danish Refugee Council for several weeks in February and March 2006 to protest the publication of Danish cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. In October of that year, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Manfred Nowak, postponed a planned visit because the Russian government would not let him make unannounced trips to detention centers or interview detainees in private. Also that month, the authorities closed the Nizhny Novgorod-based Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, a humanitarian organization involved in building mutual understanding between Russians and Chechens and monitoring human rights abuses in the republic. Labor union activity is almost nonexistent as a result of the devastation of the Chechen economy and widespread unemployment.

The rule of law is extremely weak. Extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and other serious crimes are rarely investigated and even more rarely prosecuted. There has been some progress in a few high-profile cases. After juries in the Russian city of Rostov twice refused to convict Captain Eduard Ulman and three other members of a Russian Military Intelligence (GRU) special unit for killing six Chechens in January 2002 even though they had admitted to the slayings, the Constitutional Court ruled in April 2006 that a military tribunal would hear their case. Jury trials are set to be introduced in Chechnya in 2007, allowing Chechen juries to hear cases against people accused of committing crimes in the republic. The European Court of Human Rights has stepped in when Russian courts refuse to hear cases. In July 2006, the Strasbourg-based court found Colonel General Aleksandr Baranov, currently the commander of Russian military forces in the North Caucasus, responsible for the disappearance and presumed death of Khadzhi-Murat Yandiyev, a prisoner detained in Chechnya in 2000. The decision was the first on a disappearance in Chechnya and could open the way for similar cases. Memorial estimates that as many as 5,000 people have vanished during the second Chechen war and notes that the problem is not being addressed by the authorities. In November, the Court found Russia responsible for the disappearances and presumed death of an additional three individuals in Chechnya.

The Chechen police forces are led by commanders who have allegedly committed murder and abductions. Civilians are subject to harassment and

violence, including torture, rape, and extrajudicial execution, at the hands of Russian soldiers, and senior Russian military authorities have disregarded such abuses. Human rights groups report that while disappearances had previously been concentrated in Chechnya, the practice has now spread to neighboring Ingushetia. Chechen rebels have captured Russian soldiers during combat, enslaving them, trading them among themselves, and ultimately selling them back to their families.

Russian troops engage in so-called mopping-up operations in which they seal off entire towns and conduct house-to-house searches for suspected rebels. During these security sweeps, soldiers have been accused of beating and torturing civilians, looting, and extorting money. Thousands of Chechens have gone missing or been found dead after such operations.

While many refugee camps have been closed and Chechens who fled the violence have been pressured to return to their homes, tens of thousands of refugees still remain outside of Chechnya. Many who return live in appalling conditions in tent camps, abandoned buildings, or cramped quarters with friends or relatives. There are tens of thousands of additional internally displaced persons inside the republic and well over 100,000 long-term homeless, many of them orphaned children and teenagers. Travel to and from the republic and inside its borders is severely restricted.

Widespread corruption and the economic devastation caused by the war severely limit equality of opportunity. Ransom obtained from kidnapping and the lucrative illegal oil trade provide money for Chechens and members of the Russian military. Much of the republic's infrastructure and housing remains damaged or destroyed after years of war, with reconstruction funds widely believed to have been substantially misappropriated by corrupt local authorities. In the capital city of Grozny, the long-term conflict has devastated civilian life, with more than 60 percent of all buildings completely destroyed. Much of the population ekes out a living selling produce or other goods at local markets. Residents who have found work are employed mostly by the local police, the Chechen administration, the oil and construction sectors, or small enterprises. The success of Kadyrov's government in pushing forward rebuilding efforts has improved the overall economic situation.

With the rise of Ramzan Kadyrov, who emphasizes traditional values, women face increased discrimination in this Islamic, male-dominated culture. At the same time, the war has resulted in many women becoming the primary breadwinners for their families. The war has taken a heavy toll on children, many of whom suffer from various psychological traumas. Children, who accounted for up to 40 percent of casualties during the war, continue to suffer from poor living conditions, including lack of access to education and health care.

Table of Independent Countries- *Freedom in the World 2007*

Trend Arrow	Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating
	Afghanistan	5	5	Partly Free
↑	Albania*	3	3	Partly Free
	Algeria	6	5	Not Free
	Andorra*	1	1	Free
	Angola	6	5	Not Free
	Antigua and Barbuda*	2	2	Free
↓	Argentina*	2	2	Free
	Armenia	5	4	Partly Free
	Australia*	1	1	Free
	Austria*	1	1	Free
↓	Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free
	Bahamas*	1	1	Free
↓	Bahrain	5	5	Partly Free
	Bangladesh*	4	4	Partly Free
	Barbados*	1	1	Free
	Belarus	7	6	Not Free
	Belgium*	1	1	Free
	Belize*	1	2	Free
↑	Benin*	2	2	Free
	Bhutan	6	5	Not Free
	Bolivia*	3	3	Partly Free
	Bosnia-Herzegovina	3 ▲	3	Partly Free
	Botswana*	2	2	Free
↓	Brazil*	2	2	Free
	Brunei	6	5	Not Free
	Bulgaria*	1	2	Free
	Burkina Faso	5	3	Partly Free
↓	Burma	7	7	Not Free
	Burundi*	4 ▼	5	Partly Free
	Cambodia	6	5	Not Free

	Cameroon	6	6	Not Free
	Canada*	1	1	Free
	Cape Verde*	1	1	Free
	Central African Republic*	5	4	Partly Free
	Chad	6	6 ▼	Not Free
	Chile*	1	1	Free
	China	7	6	Not Free
	Colombia*	3	3	Partly Free
	Comoros*	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
	Congo (Brazzaville)	6 ▼	5	Not Free
	Congo (Kinshasa)	5 ▲	6	Not Free
	Costa Rica*	1	1	Free
	Cote d'Ivoire	7 ▼	6	Not Free
↑	Croatia*	2	2	Free
	Cuba	7	7	Not Free
	Cyprus*	1	1	Free
	Czech Republic*	1	1	Free
	Denmark*	1	1	Free
	Djibouti	5	5	Partly Free
	Dominica*	1	1	Free
	Dominican Republic*	2	2	Free
	East Timor*	3	4 ▼	Partly Free
	Ecuador*	3	3	Partly Free
↓	Egypt	6	5	Not Free
	El Salvador*	2	3	Free
	Equatorial Guinea	7	6	Not Free
↓	Eritrea	7	6	Not Free
	Estonia*	1	1	Free
↓	Ethiopia	5	5	Partly Free
	Fiji	6 ▼	4 ▼	Partly Free
	Finland*	1	1	Free
	France*	1	1	Free

	Gabon	6	4	Partly Free
↓	The Gambia	5	4	Partly Free
	Georgia*	3	3	Partly Free
	Germany*	1	1	Free
	Ghana*	1	2	Free
	Greece*	1	2	Free
	Grenada*	1	2	Free
	Guatemala*	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
	Guinea	6	5	Not Free
	Guinea-Bissau*	4 ▼	4	Partly Free
	Guyana*	2 ▲	3	Free
	Haiti*	4 ▲	5 ▲	Partly Free
	Honduras*	3	3	Partly Free
↓	Hungary*	1	1	Free
	Iceland*	1	1	Free
	India*	2	3	Free
	Indonesia*	2	3	Free
↓	Iran	6	6	Not Free
	Iraq	6	6 ▼	Not Free
	Ireland*	1	1	Free
	Israel*	1	2	Free
↑	Italy*	1	1	Free
	Jamaica*	2	3	Free
	Japan*	1	2	Free
	Jordan	5	4	Partly Free
	Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free
↓	Kenya*	3	3	Partly Free
	Kiribati*	1	1	Free
	Kuwait	4	4 ▲	Partly Free
↓	Kyrgyzstan	5	4	Partly Free
	Laos	7	6	Not Free
	Latvia*	1	1	Free
	Lebanon	5	4	Partly Free

	Lesotho*	2	3	Free
	Liberia*	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
	Libya	7	7	Not Free
	Liechtenstein*	1	1	Free
	Lithuania*	1	1	Free
	Luxembourg*	1	1	Free
	Macedonia*	3	3	Partly Free
	Madagascar*	4 ▼	3	Partly Free
	Malawi*	4	3 ▲	Partly Free
↓	Malaysia	4	4	Partly Free
↑	Maldives	6	5	Not Free
	Mali*	2	2	Free
	Malta*	1	1	Free
	Marshall Islands*	1	1	Free
	Mauritania	5 ▲	4	Partly Free
	Mauritius*	1	2 ▼	Free
	Mexico*	2	3 ▼	Free
	Micronesia*	1	1	Free
	Moldova*	3	4	Partly Free
	Monaco*	2	1	Free
	Mongolia*	2	2	Free
	Montenegro*	3	3	Partly Free
	Morocco	5	4	Partly Free
	Mozambique*	3	4	Partly Free
	Namibia*	2	2	Free
	Nauru*	1	1	Free
	Nepal	5 ▲	4 ▲	Partly Free
	Netherlands*	1	1	Free
	New Zealand*	1	1	Free
	Nicaragua*	3	3	Partly Free
	Niger*	3	3	Partly Free
	Nigeria	4	4	Partly Free
	North Korea	7	7	Not Free
	Norway*	1	1	Free

	Oman	6	5	Not Free
	Pakistan	6	5	Not Free
	Palau*	1	1	Free
	Panama*	1	2	Free
	Papua New Guinea*	3	3	Partly Free
	Paraguay*	3	3	Partly Free
	Peru*	2	3	Free
↓	Philippines*	3	3	Partly Free
	Poland*	1	1	Free
	Portugal*	1	1	Free
	Qatar	6	5	Not Free
↑	Romania*	2	2	Free
↓	Russia	6	5	Not Free
	Rwanda	6	5	Not Free
	Saint Kitts and Nevis*	1	1	Free
	Saint Lucia*	1	1	Free
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*	2	1	Free
	Samoa*	2	2	Free
	San Marino*	1	1	Free
	Sao Tome and Principe*	2	2	Free
	Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not Free
	Senegal*	2	3	Free
	Serbia*	3	2	Free
↓	Seychelles*	3	3	Partly Free
	Sierra Leone*	4	3	Partly Free
	Singapore	5	4	Partly Free
	Slovakia*	1	1	Free
	Slovenia*	1	1	Free
	Solomon Islands	4 ▼	3	Partly Free
	Somalia	7 ▼	7	Not Free
	South Africa*	2 ▼	2	Free
	South Korea*	1	2	Free
	Spain*	1	1	Free

	Sri Lanka*	4 ▼	4 ▼	Partly Free
	Sudan	7	7	Not Free
	Suriname*	2	2	Free
	Swaziland	7	5	Not Free
	Sweden*	1	1	Free
	Switzerland*	1	1	Free
	Syria	7	6 ▲	Not Free
	Taiwan*	2 ▼	1	Free
	Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free
	Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free
	Thailand	7 ▼	4 ▼	Not Free
	Togo	6	5	Not Free
	Tonga	5	3	Partly Free
	Trinidad and Tobago*	2 ▲	2	Free
	Tunisia	6	5	Not Free
	Turkey*	3	3	Partly Free
	Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free
	Tuvalu*	1	1	Free
	Uganda	5	4	Partly Free
	Ukraine*	3	2	Free
	United Arab Emirates	6	5 ▲	Not Free
	United Kingdom*	1	1	Free
	United States*	1	1	Free
	Uruguay*	1	1	Free
	Uzbekistan	7	7	Not Free
	Vanuatu*	2	2	Free
	Venezuela*	4	4	Partly Free
	Vietnam	7	5	Not Free
	Yemen	5	5	Partly Free
	Zambia*	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
↓	Zimbabwe	7	6	Not Free

PR and CL stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

▲ ▼ up or down indicates a change in Political Rights or Civil Liberties since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a trend arrow.

*indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

NOTE: The ratings reflect global events from December 1, 2005, through December 31, 2006.

Table of Related Territories- *Freedom in the World 2007*

Trend Arrow	Country and Territory	PR	CL	Freedom Rating
	China Hong Kong	5	2	Partly Free
	United States Puerto Rico	1	1	Free

Table of Disputed Territories- *Freedom in the World 2007*

Trend Arrow	Country and Territory	PR	CL	Freedom Rating
	Armenia/Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh	5	5	Partly Free
	China Tibet	7	7	Not Free
	Cyprus Northern (Turkish) Cyprus	2	2	Free
	Georgia Abkhazia	5	5	Partly Free
	India Kashmir	5	5	Partly Free
	Israel Israeli-Occupied Territories Palestinian Authority- Administered Territories	6 4 ▲	5 6 ▼	Not Free Partly Free
	Moldova Transnistria	6	6	Not Free
	Morocco Western Sahara	7	6	Not Free
	Pakistan Kashmir	7	5	Not Free
	Russia Chechnya	7	7	Not Free
	Serbia Kosovo	6	5	Not Free
	Somalia Somaliland	5	4	Partly Free

Freedom in the World Methodology

The reports from “The Worst of the Worst: The World’s Most Repressive Societies” were excerpted from the forthcoming 2007 edition of *Freedom in the World*, an annual Freedom House survey that monitors the progress and decline of political rights and civil liberties in 193 countries and 15 select related and disputed territories. The survey rates each country and territory on a seven-point scale for both political rights and civil liberties, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free, and then assigns each country and territory a broad category status of Free (for countries whose ratings average 1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0). Those countries and territories which received scores of 6 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties, 7 for political rights and 6 for civil liberties, and 7 for both political rights and civil liberties are included in the group of “the worst of the worst.” Within these groups are gradations of freedom that make some more repressive than others.

A change in a country’s or territory’s political rights or civil liberties rating from the previous year is indicated by an arrow next to the rating in question, along with a brief ratings change explanation preceding the country or territory report. Freedom House also assigned upward or downward “trend arrows” to certain countries and territories which saw general positive or negative trends during the year that were not significant enough to warrant a ratings change. Trend arrows are indicated with arrows placed before the name of the country or territory in question, along with a brief trend arrow explanation preceding the report.

The *Freedom in the World* ratings are not only assessments of the conduct of governments, but are intended to reflect the reality of daily life. Freedom can be affected by state actions as well as by non-state actors. Thus, terrorist movements or armed groups use violent methods which can dramatically restrict essential freedoms within a society. Conversely, the existence of non-state activists or journalists who act courageously and independently despite state restrictions can positively impact the ability of the population to exercise its freedoms.

The survey enables an examination of trends in freedom over time and on a comparative basis across regions with different political and economic systems. The survey, which is produced by a team of in-house regional experts, consultant writers, and academic advisors, derives its information from a wide range of sources. Most valued of these are the many human rights activists, journalists, editors, and political figures around the world who keep us informed of the human rights situation in their countries. *Freedom in the World’s* ratings and narrative reports are used by policy makers, leading scholars, the media, and

international organizations in monitoring the ebb and flow of freedom worldwide.

For a more detailed analysis of last year's survey methodology, please consult the methodology chapter from *Freedom in the World 2006*. The methodology for the forthcoming survey edition will be published in *Freedom in the World 2007*.



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Freedom House is an independent private organization supporting the expansion of freedom throughout the world.

Freedom is possible only in democratic political systems in which governments are accountable to their own people, the rule of law prevails, and freedoms of expression, association and belief are guaranteed. Working directly with courageous men and women around the world to support nonviolent civic initiatives in societies where freedom is threatened, Freedom House functions as a catalyst for change through its unique mix of analysis, advocacy and action.

- **Analysis.** Freedom House's rigorous research methodology has earned the organization a reputation as the leading source of information on the state of freedom around the globe. Since 1972, Freedom House has published *Freedom in the World*, an annual survey of political rights and civil liberties experienced in every country of the world. The survey is complemented by an annual review of press freedom, an analysis of transitions in the post-communist world, and other publications.
- **Advocacy.** Freedom House seeks to encourage American policymakers, as well as other governments and international institutions, to adopt policies that advance human rights and democracy around the world. Freedom House has been instrumental in the founding of the worldwide Community of Democracies, has actively campaigned for a reformed Human Rights Council at the United Nations, and presses the Millennium Challenge Corporation to adhere to high standards of eligibility for recipient countries.
- **Action.** Through exchanges, grants, and technical assistance, Freedom House provides training and support to human rights defenders, civil society organizations, and members of the media in order to strengthen indigenous reform efforts in countries around the globe.

Founded in 1941 by Eleanor Roosevelt, Wendell Willkie, and other Americans concerned with mounting threats to peace and democracy, Freedom House has long been a vigorous proponent of democratic values and a steadfast opponent of dictatorships of the far left and the far right. The organization's diverse Board of Trustees is composed of a bipartisan mix of business and labor leaders, former senior government officials, scholars, and journalists who agree that the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad is vital to America's interests abroad.



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