



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

Equatorial Guinea

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

1999

February 23, 2000

Equatorial Guinea is nominally a multiparty constitutional republic; however, in reality power is exercised by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema and the small Mongomo subclan of the majority Fang tribe, which has ruled since the country's independence in 1968. President Obiang, who has ruled since seizing power in a military coup d'etat in 1979, was elected to a 7-year term in February 1996 in elections that were marred by extensive fraud and intimidation. The President's Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) controls the judiciary and the legislature, the latter also through elections in March that were widely criticized as seriously flawed by the international community. The judiciary is not independent.

President Obiang exercises control over the police and security forces through the Minister of the Interior, who serves as President of the National Electoral Board as well. The Director General of National Security is the President's brother, Armengol Ondo Nguema. The security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

The majority of the population of approximately 470,000 lives by subsistence agriculture, supplemented by hunting and fishing. Barter is a major aspect of the economy, and the monetary sector is based on exports of petroleum, cocoa, and timber. Most foreign economic assistance has been suspended due to the lack of economic reform and the Government's poor human rights record. However, in October the Government of Spain, which suspended aid 6 years ago, signed a new cooperation agreement with the Government. Substantial oil deposits were first discovered in 1995, and exploitation began in 1996. However, the investment and other use of oil revenues lacks transparency despite repeated calls from international financial institutions and citizens for greater financial openness. Poor fiscal management and a lack of public accounting transparency in national finances undermine the country's economic potential. Little evidence is apparent that the country's oil wealth is being devoted to the public good.

The Government's human rights record remained poor. Serious and systematic human rights abuses continued, and the security forces committed a number of abuses. Citizens do not have the right to change their government in fair elections. There were reports of extrajudicial killings, both of prisoners in detention and of individuals in rural areas. Other principal abuses by security forces included: Torture; beating and other physical abuse of prisoners; arbitrary arrest and detention; incommunicado detention; extortion from prisoners; searches without warrants; the looting of private homes; and the confiscation of property without due process. Members of the security forces generally commit abuses with impunity. Prison conditions remained life threatening. Prisoners often are subjected to torture in order to extract confessions. The judicial system continued to fail to ensure due process and remained subject to executive pressures. The Government severely restricted freedom of speech and of the press. It continued to restrict the right of assembly and did not always respect the right of association. The Government continued to limit freedom of religion and freedom of movement. The Government encouraged the illegal capture and involuntary repatriation of its political opponents living abroad. There are no effective domestic human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), and in April the Government promulgated a new law that further restricted NGO's and appears to preclude them from functioning in the area of human rights. Violence and discrimination against women and foreigners remain serious problems. Discrimination against minorities, particularly the Bubi ethnic group continued. The Government continued to restrict labor rights; no labor unions exist, and strikes are prohibited. The abuse of workers' rights is a particular problem in the oil industry. Child labor persists, and forced prison labor is used.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were unconfirmed reports of extrajudicial killings by security forces both of prisoners in detention and of individuals in rural areas.

During the year, the Government did not prosecute for extrajudicial killings any members of the security forces, including those considered responsible for extrajudicial killings in prior years.

b. Disappearance

There were reports of disappearances; however, these were difficult to confirm. c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Fundamental Law (Constitution) mandates respect for the liberty and dignity of persons, but does not specifically prohibit torture or cruel or inhuman punishment, and members of the security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners. The level of these abuses is serious and, in the wake of the 1998 revolt, increased over previous years. A number of prisoners are still under sentence from the revolt, and reports of their abuse and torture continue to circulate. The Government does little to prevent excesses and routinely attributes any reported instances of torture to allegedly rogue elements.

Officials reportedly detained, interrogated, beat, and tortured opposition political activists (see Section 1.d.).

Police routinely stop citizens and members of the opposition at roadblocks and subject known members of the opposition in particular to searches and extortion. Local authorities also singled out foreigners from neighboring countries for harassment, intimidation, and extortion. Prison conditions are primitive and life threatening. Rations are inadequate, and sanitary conditions practically nonexistent. Prisoners sentenced following the 1998 revolt reported being fed bread and water only once every 2 days. Initially no food was allowed in from outside as is the custom. During the year both family visits and provisions reportedly were allowed.

Prison conditions ostensibly are monitored by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which normally makes recommendations to the Government. However, the head of the regional ICRC office, despite repeated attempts, was not granted access to any prisons or detention centers during the first 11 months of the year; he was granted access in December.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

There are nominal legal procedural safeguards regarding detention, the requirement for search warrants, and other protection of citizens' rights; however, these safeguards are ignored systematically by security forces, which continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily.

Police routinely hold prisoners in incommunicado detention. Foreigners from neighboring countries sometimes are targeted for arbitrary mistreatment and random arrest. These included visitors and residents from Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. Members of the security forces often resorted to such activities in order to extort money prior to national holidays.

Political detentions seldom lasted more than a few months. Following the 1998 revolt, approximately 500 ethnic Bubi reportedly were arrested and interrogated. Reliable information on the number and identities of detainees was not readily available. The majority of them were released, although 15 who were tried and sentenced to death had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment by President Obiang later in 1998. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of political detainees, although it is believed to be less than 100 persons.

During the year, the Government arrested opposition political activists on a number of occasions, especially around the time of the legislative elections and detained them without charge for periods up to several weeks. Officials reportedly interrogated, beat, and tortured them. In June three activists of the Republican Democratic Force (FDR) were arrested in Mongomo, supposedly for holding an unauthorized meeting, and were jailed in Bata. In September the Government arrested Placido Miko, secretary general of the opposition Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS) party in Bata and confiscated his computer and files. Although he was released a week later, he was given provisional liberty and told to report twice a month to the authorities in Bata. No formal charges were brought. It is estimated that some 90 opposition party members were arrested during the year and held for short periods. The Government uses the psychological effects of arrest, along with the fear of beatings and harassment, to intimidate opposition party officials and members.

During the year, government security forces on one occasion detained an employee of a foreign oil company for a short period for alleged irregularities in processing the import of equipment.

The Government does not force its citizens into exile; however, some persons have fled the country for political reasons.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The judiciary is not independent; judges serve at the pleasure of the President and are appointed, transferred, and dismissed for political reasons. Corruption is widespread.

The court system is composed of lower provincial courts, two appeals courts, a military tribunal, and a Supreme Court. The President appoints members of the Supreme Court, who report to him. Tribal elders adjudicate civil claims and minor criminal matters in traditional courts in the countryside.

The Fundamental Law and laws passed by the chamber of deputies provide for legal representation in trials and the right to appeal. In practice the authorities often do not respect these provisions. Civil cases rarely come to public trial. Cases involving national security are tried by the military tribunal.

The Government holds a number of political prisoners. In May 1998 the Government conducted a public trial before a military tribunal of 116 persons allegedly involved in the January 21, 1998, revolt on Bioko island. The defendants were charged with terrorism, undermining state security, and illegal possession of weapons. Many defendants claimed that the Government had obtained confessions from them by torture. However, the president of the military tribunal refused to allow defense lawyers to raise the question of torture, although a number of the accused bore unmistakable marks of recent physical abuse. The conduct of the trials drew universal criticism, although observers noted that some defendants might have been guilty of the offenses with which they were charged. The tribunal found 63 persons guilty on at least one charge, but acquitted 53 of all charges. It sentenced 15 convicted defendants to death, and sentenced the 48 others to terms ranging from 6 to 26 years in prison. The 15 condemned to death were the only defendants absent from the court when the sentences were announced. They were not executed, and President Obiang later commuted their sentences to life imprisonment, following petitions for clemency from foreign governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGO's).

Two members of the ruling Mongomo clan and of the banned Democratic Republican Forces (FDR) party, former Education Minister Felipe Ondo and former Planning Minister Guillermo Nguema remained in prison. They were convicted of libeling the State and sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment in 1998, after Equatoguinean security forces repatriated them involuntarily from Gabon with the consent of the Government of Gabon (see Section 2.d.).

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

The Government infringes on these rights. It does not enforce the law requiring judicial warrants for searches. Security forces regularly search homes and arrest occupants, and generally do so with impunity.

On several occasions the Government reportedly attempted to force opposition members or officials to join the ruling PDGE party. Moreover, the arrests of opposition members appeared to be a coordinated government campaign spread out over a wide area and designed to intimidate the opposition prior to the legislative elections and dissuade voters from voting for opposition parties. Detainees included members of the CPDS, the Union Popular, and the banned Partido Del Progreso. All were jailed in violation of the national pact signed between the Government and opposition parties in Malabo in 1997.

For lawyers, government employees, and some others, PDGE party membership is necessary for employment and promotion. Even in the private sector, many citizens claim that party membership is required in order to be hired. The party banner is displayed prominently with the national flag in government offices, and many officials wear PDGE lapel pins.

There is reportedly surveillance of members of the opposition parties and foreign diplomats.

According to credible sources, citizens living in rural areas are hesitant to associate with or even be seen with foreigners, due to the fear of repercussions from the authorities.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and the Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government severely restricted these rights in practice. Journalists practice self-censorship.

In April shortly before a national symposium on press liberty was scheduled, the Minister of the interior ordered the removal of the democratically elected president of the Press Association (ASOPGE), Manuel Nze Nzogo, even though the ASOPGE was a legally recognized NGO. The reason given was that its president was supposedly not properly qualified for the position.

The Government allows mild criticism of infrastructure, public institutions, and public sector mismanagement and permitted some increased criticism of minor administrative decisions. However, it permits no criticism of the President or the security forces. All journalists must be registered with the Ministry of Information. According to press sources, there are about a dozen independent reporters registered with the Ministry of Information. Between 30 and 40 reporters employed by the official party or government publications also are registered. Visiting foreign reporters must be accompanied by guides from the Ministry of Information.

Two general-interest newspapers appear regularly: La Gaceta, a Malabo-based publication with connections to the Government is published monthly. Human-interest stories dominate its domestic news coverage. Ebano, a publication of the Ministry of Information, appears about twice a month. Two new newspapers, El Tiempo and La Opinion were approved in September by the Ministry of Information and were authorized to begin publication in 2000.

The current press law, enacted in 1992, reportedly is based on Spain's 1967 Franco-era press law and authorizes government censorship of all publications. The Ministry of Information sometimes requires publishers to submit copy for approval prior to publication. All local publications exercise self-censorship and are subject to prior restraint. Few foreign publications are available for sale, and security forces reportedly peruse the contents of publications from Spain and confiscate literature critical of the Government.

Radio is the most important medium of mass communication. The Government continued effectively to monopolize domestic radio broadcasting. It owns and operates Radio Malabo. In 1998 the Government permitted the establishment of the country's first private domestic radio station, the FM station Radio Asonga. However, that station reportedly is owned by the Minister of Forestry, Environment, and Fisheries, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, the son of the President. The Government has not approved other applications to operate private radio stations, although several applications are pending.

The domestic television station is government controlled and broadcasts only a few hours a day. Foreign cable television is available, and offers the Cable News Network, French news, movies, sports events, and cartoons, but relatively few citizens can afford it. Satellite reception is increasingly available.

The Government generally withholds access to domestic broadcasting from prodemocracy opposition parties and rarely refers to what it calls the "radical" opposition in anything but negative terms when broadcasting the news.

Radio Exterior, the international short-wave service from Spain, often broadcasts news about the country and interviews with opposition politicians. It is virtually the only means for the opposition to widely disseminate its views and positions. Its editorials, like those of most of the Spanish media, are often highly critical of the Government. The Government regularly accused Radio Exterior of misrepresenting the situation in the country and in 1998 asked the Spanish Government to halt broadcasts that "may provoke problems."

Internet service is available, although access is expensive, and computer ownership is not widespread.

During the year the Government opened a National University, the country's only institution of higher learning. b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Fundamental Law provides for the right of assembly; however, the Government restricts this right in practice. Government authorization must be obtained for meetings of more than 10 persons in private homes for discussions that the regime considers political. Although the Government formally has abolished permit requirements for party meetings within party buildings, in practice opposition parties must inform the authorities in order to hold gatherings of any kind, regardless of location.

Security forces generally observe gatherings in public places, even small gatherings. The Government requires notification for public events and routinely denies permission to meet, effectively restricting the right of assembly.

The Fundamental Law provides for the right of association; however, the Government does not always respect this right in practice. Police routinely and systematically harass and jail members of opposition parties. Opposition party members complained of disruption of meetings and of roadblocks at which they are forced to pay soldiers in order to proceed.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Fundamental Law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limits this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the Government does not discriminate against any faith. However, the Ministry of Justice and Religion must approve a religious organization before its religious activities are allowed formally. The Government continued to restrict the freedom of expression of the clergy, particularly regarding any open criticism of the regime. The Government requires permission for any activities outside church walls, but in practice this nominal requirement does not appear to be a hindrance to organized religious groups.

The Government restricted the activities of the Catholic Church, of which most citizens are at least nominally members. The Government continued to detain throughout the year Father Eduardo Losha Belope, who is a priest, a Bubi, and the president of the Malabo chapter of the Catholic NGO, Caritas; security forces arrested him in February 1998 in connection with the January 1998 revolt. In July 1998, the Archbishop of Malabo, Laureano Ekua Obama, stated publicly that the Government now requires Catholic priests to obtain government permission before celebrating mass and commented that the Government does this because the church repeatedly criticized human rights violations, social injustice, and corruption in the country. The Archbishop also stated that government harassment made it very difficult to be a Catholic priest.

The Government relaxed some restrictions on religious activities by foreign missionaries in 1996. Missionaries in Bata and Malabo reported little government interference in their work, although there were increasing problems bringing in materials and equipment duty-free, which they had been allowed to do in the past.

There appears to be a marked official preference towards the Catholic Church. Religious study is required in schools and is usually, but not exclusively, Catholic.

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

In principle freedom of movement and travel throughout the country is provided for by law; however, the Government limits these rights in practice. Local police routinely demand bribes from occupants of cars, taxis, and other vehicles traveling outside the capital. The police routinely stop citizens and in particular known members of the opposition at roadblocks, subject them to searches, and extort money from them. Members of the Bubi ethnic group on the island of Bioko are unable to move about freely, according to credible sources. Roadblocks throughout the island prevent Bubis from traveling easily between villages.

All citizens are required to have permission to travel abroad, and members of opposition parties regularly are denied this permission and sometimes are interrogated or detained upon their return.

Government officials attempt to control the movements of all citizens by requiring exit visas or denying or confiscating passports. Those who depart Malabo without an exit visa must travel by canoe across 40 miles of open ocean to reach mainland Africa, and then they face possible immigration charges upon their return. However, several prominent members of opposition parties were able to travel abroad without hindrance. Prior to the legislative elections, resident diplomats were not allowed to travel around the country freely until the day before the voting.

During recent years, an average of one or two foreigners a year, from Mauritania, Nigeria, or the Congo, requested refugee or asylee status in the country. The Government provides first asylum and generally grants asylum requests, although security forces reportedly have harassed asylum seekers, few of whom have remained long in the country. There were no reports of the forced return of any foreigners to a country where they feared persecution.

The Government continued to attempt to neutralize opposition groups outside its borders by kidnaping its citizens living in other countries (see Section 1.e.).

Since September 1997, 12 Equatoguineans and their families, now in opposition to the Government, have been detained by Cameroonian security forces--ostensibly for their own protection --at a military base in Yaounde. The majority are former military officers, and all have refugee status granted by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. In October the Cameroonian press reported that two of the refugees escaped from the base and met with others to plot a coup attempt against the Equatorial Guinea regime. They subsequently were arrested in Douala and returned to the capital. In mid-October a number of senior-level visitors from Malabo to Cameroon reportedly requested their extradition to Equatorial Guinea, which the Cameroonian Government did not grant. All 12 refugees remain under loose detention at the military base.

The Government continued to demand that the Spanish Government repatriate Severo Moto, leader of the now-banned Popular Party, who led an attempt to overthrow the government by armed force in 1997 and whom the Government of Spain had granted asylum.

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

The Constitution nominally provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully; however, in practice there have been no free, fair, and transparent elections since independence in 1968. The President exercises complete power as head of state, commander of the armed forces, and leader of the government party, the PDGE. With the main exception of the Prime Minister, a Bubi, leadership positions within the Government in general are restricted to the President's Mongomo clan of the Fang ethnic group and its closest supporters. While there is an elected Chamber of Deputies, it is not representative and is dominated completely by the Government. The Minister of the Interior also acts as President of the National Electoral Board.

The February 1996 presidential election, in which President Obiang claimed reelection with 98 percent of the vote, was considered openly fraudulent by international observers. Some opposition politicians who campaigned were beaten and jailed. Voting was done in the open and without secrecy, with opposition parties allegedly being barred from access to polling areas. There were credible reports of widespread arrests and violence against opposition party members before the elections, as well as of beatings, roadblocks, stuffed ballot boxes, and the presence of security forces. Most opposition parties, claiming that it was futile to run amidst such blatant corruption, boycotted the election.

In 1997 the Government and 13 political parties promulgated a revised national pact following 3 months of debate. The pact calls for the creation of a multiparty electoral commission and an observance commission to monitor compliance with the agreement. The pact also stipulated an end to various political and electoral abuses and the extension of voting rights already nominally provided for in the Constitution. However, the Government has not abided by most of the pact's provisions. Opposition activists report that the Government has made virtually no effort to implement the pact. The Government's refusal to issue exit visas to opposition figures violates the pact's principle of freedom of travel. The continued arrests of CPDS, UP, and FDR activists further undermined the Government's claims that it abides by the pact, as did its continued restrictions on freedom of movement and the continued lack of access to government media by the opposition.

In 1998 the Government enacted a new electoral law that mandates the replacement of open voting by secret ballots in future elections but prohibits coalitions between political parties, which weakens the opposition by preventing the formation of any opposition umbrella groups.

The legislative elections that should have been held in the fall of 1998 were postponed until March 7. The new electoral census was completed in December 1998, but not all of the opposition parties agreed to sign it. International observers considered the election process to be seriously flawed. The UP and CPDS opposition parties won only 5 of the 80 seats, refused to take their seats in the new legislature, and called for the results to be annulled and new elections held.

Although there are no legal restrictions on the participation of women in politics; however, women remain seriously underrepresented in government positions. There are 4 women in the 41-member Cabinet, and 5 in the 80-member legislature.

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

There are no effective domestic human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGO's). No international human rights NGO has no permanent presence in the country. The Government does not recognize their reports or acknowledge their credibility.

The U.N. Special Rapporteur for Human Rights visited in March and December 1998 and ostensibly received the Government's cooperation. The Government made strenuous efforts to have the Rapporteur replaced and was successful early in the year. A new Rapporteur visited the country in November.

In April the Government promulgated a new law governing NGOs that is restrictive and identifies those specific areas in which they may operate: human rights is not one of these areas.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

While the Constitution condemns all forms of discrimination, both governmental and societal discrimination continued. These are reflected in traditional constraints on women's education and in restricted opportunities for professional and occupational achievement by ethnic minorities. The Government deliberately limits potential opportunities for ethnic minorities, and the Fang actively discriminate against the Bubi and other ethnic minorities.

Women

Societal violence against women, particularly wife beating, is common. The public beating of wives is forbidden by government decree, but violence in the home generally is tolerated. The Government does not prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence.

Although the Constitution provides for equal rights, women largely are confined by custom to traditional roles, particularly in agriculture. Polygyny, which is widespread among the Fang, contributes to women's secondary status, as does limited educational opportunity. On average women receive only one-fifth as much schooling as men do.

There is no discrimination against women with regard to inheritance and family laws, but there is discrimination in traditional practice. For an estimated 90 percent of women, including virtually all ethnic groups except the Bubi, tradition dictates that if a marriage is dissolved, the wife must return the dowry given her family by the bridegroom at the time of marriage, while the husband automatically receives custody of all children born after the marriage. The mother maintains custody of all children born prior to the marriage.

Similarly, in the Fang, Ndowe, and Bisio cultures, primogeniture is practiced, and as women become members of their husband's family upon marriage, they usually are not accorded inheritance rights. According to the law, women have the right to buy and sell property and goods, but in practice the male-dominated society permits few women access to sufficient funds to engage in more than petty trading or to purchase real property beyond a garden plot or modest home.

Children

No provisions for the welfare of children are legislated. The Government devotes little attention to children's rights or their welfare and has no set policy in this area. Education is compulsory up to the age of 18, but the law is not enforced.

People with Disabilities

There is no constitutional or legal provision for the physically disabled with respect to discrimination in employment or education. No legislation mandates access for the disabled to buildings or government services.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

There is no legal discrimination against ethnic or racial minorities, and the Government does not overtly limit their participation; however, the monopolization of political power by the President's Mongomo clan of the Fang ethnic group persists. In practice some members of minorities face discrimination because they are not members of the Fang ethnic group, or belong to a Fang subclan other than the President's. Minorities do not face discrimination in inheritance, marriage, or family laws.

Differences between the majority Fang ethnic group and the Bubi ethnic minority are a major source of political tension and often have erupted into violence. Bubis led the January 21, 1998, separatist revolt on Bioko, after which the Fang-dominated Government and the security forces intensified their longstanding institutionalized repression of the Bubis and allowed Fang vigilante groups to abuse Bubi citizens with impunity. Before independence the Bubis were a majority of the population on the island of Bioko (then Fernando Po), which was both administratively distinct from and more economically developed than the larger and more populous mainland (then Rio Muni), where the Fang were a majority. The two Spanish colonies were united 9 years before independence, after which many Fang migrated to Bioko, where Malabo, the capital, is located. The Fang dominated the united independent state; during the first decade after independence, misrule by Obiang's uncle, Macias Nguema, reduced the country's population by about one-third and devastated the economy.

Differences among clans of the Fang ethnic group, in particular resentment of the political dominance of the Mongomo clan, are also sources of significant political tensions and occasional violence; however, there were no reports of such violence during the year.

Several thousand citizens of Nigeria, Ghana, and Francophone Africa continue to reside in the country. Most are small traders and businesspersons. The police reportedly continued to harass them (see Section 1.d.).

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

Although the Constitution provides for the right to organize unions, the Government has not passed enabling legislation. In the small wage economy, no labor unions exist, although there are a few cooperatives with limited power. The law prohibits strikes. The Labor Code contains provisions to uphold worker rights, but the Government generally does not enforce them.

It generally is acknowledged that membership in the PDGE, the President's party, is a prerequisite for hiring and promotion, both in the public and private sectors (see Section 1.f.). Membership in a rival political organization is considered grounds for dismissal from any position, public or private. Opposition politicians who are not participating in the Government often claim to have been dismissed from their jobs after joining alternate political groups.

The country's major private employer, the oil industry, which is dominated by foreign firms, took steps to reduce government control of hiring in the industry. In previous years, international oil companies operating in the country hired Equatoguinean employees exclusively through a government agency, APEGESA, which screened applicants for positions and reportedly excluded those whom it considered unfriendly or indifferent to the PDGE. During the year, the oil companies ceased to use an exclusive contractor and hired primarily on the basis of testing designed to identify the best candidates for further training.

APEGESA in the past reportedly kept nearly two-thirds of employees' wages. Recent legislation mandates that oil workers receive at least 60 percent of their wages. Oil sector workers receive a much higher scale than elsewhere in the national economy, often 10 times the minimum wage. The Minister of Mines and Energy allegedly manages APEGESA. In the past, when several employees signed a petition complaining of ill treatment, they were fired.

The Government does not allow unions to affiliate internationally.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

There is no legislation regarding these rights or prohibiting antiunion discrimination. There is little evidence of collective bargaining by any group. The Government and employers set wages, with little or no participation by the workers. Employers must pay the minimum wages set by the Government, and most companies pay more than the government-established minimum.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law forbids forced or bonded labor (including that performed by children) and slavery, and there generally were no reports of these practices; however, convicted felons perform extensive labor outside prison without compensation, which is provided for by the law.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The legal minimum age for the employment of children is 18 years, but the Ministry of Labor does not enforce this law. The Government also does not enforce the law that stipulates mandatory education up to the age of 18. Underage youth perform both family farm work and street vending. The Labor Code prohibits forced or bonded labor by children, and there were no reports that it exists (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum monthly wage was approximately \$41 (27,000 CFA francs). The minimum wage is not sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The law prescribes a standard 35-hour workweek and a 48-hour rest period, which are observed in practice in the formal economy.

The Labor Code provides for comprehensive protection for workers from occupational hazards; however, the Government does not enforce this in practice. Employees who protest unhealthy or dangerous working conditions risk losing their jobs.

f. Trafficking in Persons

No law was known to prohibit trafficking in persons; however there were no reports that persons were trafficked in, to, or from the country.