



# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

## Equatorial Guinea

### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

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Equatorial Guinea nominally is a multiparty constitutional republic; however, in practice 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 was elected in elections in March 1999 that were criticized widely by the international community as seriously flawed. The judiciary is not independent.

President Obiang exercises control over the police and security forces through the Minister of the Interior, who also serves as President of the National Electoral Board. The Director General of National Security is the President's brother, Armengol Ondo Nguema. While civilian authorities generally maintain effective control of the security forces, there were some instances in which the security forces acted independently of government authority. The security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

The majority of the population of approximately 474,000 lives by subsistence agriculture, supplemented by hunting and fishing. Unemployment and underemployment are very high. Barter is a major aspect of the economy, and the monetary sector is based on exports of petroleum, cocoa, and timber. The per capita income during the year was \$2,822 (2,116,500 CFA francs). The per capita GDP for 2000 was \$2,000 (1,502,940 CFA francs). Earnings from offshore oil exploitation are approximately \$194 million (25.9 billion CFA francs) per year. However, the investment and other use of oil revenues lacked transparency despite repeated calls from international financial institutions and citizens for greater financial openness. Poor fiscal management and a lack of transparency in public accounting of national finances have undermined the country's economic potential. There is little evidence that the country's oil wealth is being devoted to the public good. Most foreign economic assistance was suspended due to the lack of economic reform and the Government's poor human rights record. However, China, Cuba, France, and Morocco resumed aid during the year; Spain resumed aid in 1999.

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses; however, there were improvements in some areas. Citizens do not have the ability to change their government peacefully in fair elections. The security forces committed numerous abuses, including torture, beating, and other physical abuse of prisoners and suspects; however, unlike in

previous years, the security forces did not commit such abuses against opposition political members. Members of the security forces generally commit abuses with impunity. Unlike in previous years, however, the Government did not attempt to control opposition groups outside its borders by kidnaping citizens living in other countries. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. There were reports that prison authorities tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners; however, unlike in the previous year, such abuse, combined with a continuing lack of medical care, did not result in the deaths of prisoners. Prisoners often are tortured to coerce confessions. Security forces used arbitrary arrest, detention, and incommunicado detention. The judicial system repeatedly failed to ensure due process and remained subject to executive pressures. The Government restricted the right to privacy, and security forces conducted searches without warrants. The Government severely restricted freedom of speech and of the press; however, freedom of speech improved marginally during the year. The Government continued to restrict the rights of assembly and association. It continued to limit freedom of religion and freedom of movement. There were no effective domestic human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), and the Government denied the requests of international NGO's to visit the country. In 1999 the Government promulgated a law that further restricted NGO's and precluded them from functioning in the area of human rights. Violence and discrimination against women remained serious problems. Discrimination against ethnic minorities, particularly the Bubi ethnic group, and foreigners continued. During the year, the Government restricted labor rights; however, the first legally recognized labor union was created. 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. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

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

There were reports during the year that prison authorities tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners; however, unlike in the previous year, such abuse, combined with a lack of medical care, did not result in the deaths of prisoners.

The Government did not prosecute any members of the security forces considered responsible for extrajudicial killings in previous years, nor is it likely to do so.

#### b. Disappearance

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

Unlike in previous years, the Government did not attempt to control opposition groups outside its borders by kidnaping citizens living in other countries.

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

The law mandates respect for the liberty and dignity of persons, but does not prohibit specifically torture or cruel or inhuman punishment, and members of the security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused suspects and prisoners. The level of these abuses is serious. The Government does not provide medical care to prisoners or detainees.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that officials detained, interrogated, beat, and tortured opposition political activists.

Unlike in previous years, the Government did not attempt to control opposition groups outside its borders by kidnaping citizens living in other countries. Such individuals reportedly were detained, questioned, and tortured before being released.

Local authorities singled out foreigners from neighboring countries for harassment such as verbal intimidation and extortion. Several thousand citizens of Nigeria, Ghana, and Francophone Africa continue to reside in the country; most are small traders and businesspersons (see Section 5).

During the year, the Special Representative of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) reported that in June 2000, government authorities arrested and accused of suspected involvement in an alleged coup plot Augusto-Mba Sa Oyana (see Section 1.d.). Sa Oyana denied the accusation and refused to sign a confession; he then was hung head down from a pole while officials beat the soles of his feet until he fainted.

Before the 2000 municipal elections, four members of the Republican Democratic Force (FDR) were arrested and tortured for suspected involvement in an alleged coup plot (see Section 1.d.). One of the detainees, Gabriel Nve Manana, was beaten and tortured until he was unable to walk; he reportedly was suffering from injuries to his kidneys and to his hand when he was released.

In 2000 District Judge Jose Luis Abaga Nguema reportedly raped Milagrosa Obono Ndong, a Convergence for Social Democracy Party (CPDM) voting station representative, during her detention in Evinayong. According to the Government, it investigated the allegation and determined that Milagrosa Obono Ndong's claims were untrue and politically motivated. No further action was taken by year's end.

During the campaign period prior to the 2000 municipal elections, there were reports that government security forces beat and detained opposition politicians daily (see Section 3).

The National Commission on Human Rights of Equatorial Guinea (CNDH), an official Parliamentary organization, reported in 1999 that the general conditions of jails and prisons in the country were harsh and life threatening and that inmates were not provided with food, medical care, working toilets, drinkable water, clean and healthful living space, and minimum equipment, such as beds. For example, the CNDH found the prison in Bata to be in an advanced stage of deterioration and unfit for human habitation. The prison had no food, medical care, or sanitation facilities; beds and blankets were not provided. However, there were credible reports during the year that conditions have improved in some facilities, such as Black Beach prison in Malabo, where prisoners are provided with beds.

The 1999 report on prisons of the CNDH, found that male and female prisoners were not held in separate facilities, nor were adult and juvenile prisoners. The CNDH also reported that prisoners and prison authorities sexually assaulted female prisoners. Pretrial detainees and political prisoners were not held separately from convicted prisoners.

There have been reports that prison authorities tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners, and that such abuse, combined with a lack of medical care, resulted in the deaths of prisoners. The CNDH reported in 1999 that there was a lack of medical care, but stated that the prisoners were not mistreated; Amnesty International reported in 2000 that eight prisoners died as a result of torture and lack of medical assistance in 1999. Furthermore, the U.N. Special Representative reported in November 1999 that in October 1999, Dingo Sepa Tobache died at the Malabo prison as the result of injuries caused by beatings and mistreatment by guards during his incarceration.

In November 1999, the U.N. Special Representative reported that when he visited the Malabo prison, he witnessed eight persons being held in cells measuring 4.92 feet by 2.3 feet. A ninth prisoner normally held in the same cells had been hospitalized a few days earlier for a serious illness. The

Special Representative was told that these prisoners were among those sentenced to death for the January 1998 alleged revolt, but whose sentences later were commuted to life imprisonment. The U.N. Special Representative confirmed that the nine persons were held in those cells permanently and were not allowed outside; that they received no medical care, although all of them were suffering from illnesses due to the prison conditions and the torture that they had suffered before trial; that their food was inadequate; and that they were allowed no contact with their families. All of the prisoners were in poor physical condition. The Special Representative also confirmed that the Bata Gendarmerie detained and tortured Dr. Antimo Oyono Mba and Dr. Joaquin Mbana Nchama of the Popular Union (UP) by beating them on the soles of their feet.

In its 1999 study, the CNDH noted that prisoners were exploited as virtual slaves by local judges and by administrators of the prisons. Prisoners told the investigators that they were used habitually as labor for others and as workers on construction projects for certain officials, without pay or other compensation. The U.N. Special Representative found that Juan Obiang Late, a man detained at the police headquarters in Bata, was taken from the jail to do work for an official in 1999. Judges also reportedly used prisoners as domestic workers.

In March 2000, the 41 Bubi prisoners, who were convicted of crimes associated with the 1998 alleged revolt and formerly held at Malabo prison, were moved to a mainland prison at Evinayong. The prison is approximately 300 miles from their homes, which made it difficult or impossible for their families to bring them medicines and food or provide moral support (see Sections 1.a. and 1.e.). An ICRC representative visited the 41 prisoners in 2000 and during a 2-week visit in May and June to the country's prisons.

There are no local NGO's other than the government-controlled CNDH; as a result, there are no local NGO's that visited prisons or promoted prisoners' rights. Prison conditions are monitored by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which historically has made recommendations to the Government. In May and June, the ICRC visited all of the country's prisons over a 2-week period. The head of the regional ICRC office was not granted access to any prisons or detention centers during the first 11 months of 1999. In October 1999, a government body recommended that the Government enter into a dialog with the ICRC; as a result, the ICRC director was granted access in December 1999 to the prisons under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice.

#### 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 and with impunity.

Police routinely hold prisoners in incommunicado detention. Foreigners from neighboring countries sometimes are targeted for arbitrary mistreatment and random arrest. In previous years, these included visitors and residents from Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. Members of the security forces extorted money from them; however, reportedly such incidents were reduced during the year, and most checkpoints on the road from Luba to Malabo and within Malabo were removed (see Section 2.d.).

On May 13, airport police detained a journalist when he returned from attending a press seminar in Namibia (see Section 2.a.).

Security forces often detain individuals "on orders from superiors" without any further formality.

During the year, the Special Representative of the UNCHR reported that on June 17, 2000, government authorities arrested Augusto-Mba Sa Oyana, a citizen and resident of Spain who was born in the country, for alleged involvement in a coup plot. Sa Oyana was tortured and kept

incommunicado at Black Beach prison until August 18, 2000 (see Section 1.c.). Government authorities did not inform Sa Oyana's wife of the arrest, denied that Sa Oyana was in detention, and did not respond to diplomatic inquiries on his behalf. After several weeks, government authorities admitted that Sa Oyana was in detention but said they considered him a citizen and, therefore, had not responded to the Government of Spain's diplomatic inquiries. Sa Oyana escaped and fled to the Spanish diplomatic compound, and after negotiations between the Government and Spanish authorities, he was permitted to return to Spain. According to the U.N. Special Representative, Sa Oyana was not brought before a judicial authority during the 60 days he was in detention, and he never was charged.

Security forces detained relatives of prisoners or criminal suspects in an attempt to force the prisoners or suspects to surrender. For example, in August 2000, after Sa Oyana's escape from Black Beach Prison, his cousin Jesus Miguel Ondo Miyone, also a citizen of Spain, was arrested and detained. The U.N. Special Representative reported that, according to Ondo Miyone, the authorities told him he would remain in detention until Sa Oyana returned to the country and surrendered.

During the year, authorities detained members of political opposition parties for short periods (see Section 2.d.). According to the U.N. Special Representative, a government official detained Antonio Eusebio, an official with the opposition Social Democracy Convergence Party (CPDS), for 24 hours. In April 2000, Eusebio was detained for several days in the district capital and physically mistreated because of his affiliation with the opposition. Jaime Ndong Edu, Secretary of the CPDS District Association, was detained for 3 months in Nsork-Esebekang and allegedly forced to renounce being an opposition member. Francisco Mba Obiang, CPDS representative in Akurenam, was detained allegedly in Bata. Amancio-Gabriel Nse Angue, Secretary for Organization and Civil Society of the CPDS, was detained for several hours in Akurenam for receiving visits in his home from CPDS members.

The U.N. Special Representative also reported that four members of the FDR were arrested and tortured on charges of involvement with an alleged coup plot before the 2000 municipal elections (see Section 1.c.). Gabriel Nve Manana y Oba (arrested on April 18, 2000), Marcelo Seme Nze (arrested on May 24, 2000), Ruben Sima (arrested on May 29, 2000), and Romualdo Angue Nbons (arrested on May 29, 2000), were held incommunicado at Black Beach prison, according to the U.N. Special Representative. Nve Manana and Seme Nze claimed that their legs were broken during torture (see Section 1.c.). Nve Manana reportedly was released by year's end; however, it was unknown whether the other three detainees had been released. In 2000 Nigel Rodley, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture, wrote to the Government requesting information about the four FDR detainees. Rodley had not received a response from the Government by year's end, according to the U.N. Special Representative.

In April 2000, Nve Maana was arrested and detained for nearly 9 months allegedly for giving monetary assistance to the wife of an imprisoned relative (see Section 1.c.). Following a traditional council at Mongomo presided over by the President, Nve Maana was restricted indefinitely to the environs of Mongomo, which is remote geographically from his family and job. Four other men reportedly are restricted to Mongomo with Nve Maana after similar periods of detention without trial. In all cases, friends and family believe that the reason for the detention and movement restrictions had to do with help given to a friend who was identified with the opposition.

Authorities often detain both men and women for failure to repay a dowry following the dissolution of a marriage; however, only divorced women or their responsible male relatives are imprisoned for not repaying a dowry. These cases arise from customary law, where the amount of money or goods due is set by traditional courts.

During the year, government security forces on occasion detained employees of foreign oil companies.

Unlike in previous years, the Government did not attempt to control opposition groups outside its borders by kidnaping citizens living in other countries. Such individuals reportedly were detained, questioned, and tortured before being released.

Security forces responsible for arbitrary arrest and detention and other abuses were not held accountable for their actions. The U.N. Special Representative noted that some executive officials closely related to the security apparatus of the Government are treated as being above the law.

In September 2000, authorities in Bata arrested Francisco Nsue Masie, the Director of Public Works and son of former president Macias Nguema, and others and charged them with conspiracy against the State; they were transferred to the prison in Malabo. There were unconfirmed reports that these detainees were tortured (see Section 1.c.). Nsue Masie and the others remained in custody at year's end, pending a trial.

After receiving orders from their superiors, authorities detained Teodoro Abeso Nguema and Juan Obiang Late in November 1999 at the Bata prison. According to Nguema, both men were detained because they copied an article on the health of President Obiang from the Internet (see Section 2.a.).

In September 1999, authorities arrested and detained Placido Miko Abodo, Secretary General of the opposition CPDS. Miko was held for a week, and upon his provisional release, he was told to report to the authorities in Bata twice a month; however, no formal charges ever were made against him. At year's end, Miko's case reportedly remained in the hands of a military examining magistrate.

Political detentions seldom lasted more than a few months. It was difficult to estimate the number of political detainees, although it was believed to be less than 100 persons. The Government used the psychological effects of arrest, along with the fear of beatings and harassment, to intimidate opposition party officials and members.

The Government uses forced internal exile, including against the five men reportedly restricted to Mongomo. The Government does not use forced external exile; however, some persons have fled the country for political reasons. During the year, President Obiang urged exiled opposition figures to return to the country and to legalize their parties. Florentino Ecomo Nsogo, a leader in the Party of Reconstruction and Social Wellbeing, was the first to return after spending 10 years in exile in Spain.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for judicial independence; however, the judiciary is not independent. Judges serve at the pleasure of the President, and they 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 and take their orders from him in practice; the President is the most powerful member of the judicial branch. Tribal elders adjudicate civil claims and minor criminal matters in traditional courts in the countryside.

There are no objective criteria for the selection of judges below the Supreme Court; the law allows the Ministry of Justice to undertake periodic inspections and name judges. A government investigation noted in its 1999 report that some judges are absent regularly from their posts, resulting in delays in judicial proceedings. As a result of absences by judges, prisoners remain in detention at police stations awaiting hearings for longer than the 72 hours prescribed by law and the jails available become even more overcrowded and unsanitary (see Section 1.d.). In the past, some persons were detained indefinitely as an alternative to formal arrest, trial, and imprisonment; however, there were no reports of such abuse during the year.

Since 1999 the Minister of Justice and a Special Commission on Corruption have been investigating judicial corruption, in particular, the diversion of \$7 million (5.25 billion CFA francs) from judicial budgets. In January 2000, the President removed the entire Supreme Court, as well as a number of other judges. A subsequent investigation resulted in the implication and replacement of the President of the Supreme Court, two other justices, and the Secretary of the Court. Five other Supreme Court justices were not implicated and were returned to their positions or promoted to other positions. The President of the Constitutional Court, one justice, and an attorney also were implicated and removed from their positions.

The Constitution and laws 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. Cases that are essentially political in nature frequently are referred to military courts, even when the defendants are civilians and the charges are not related to the military. The Code of Military Justice permits persons who disobey a military authority to be tried in a military tribunal whether or not they are military personnel. The military courts do not provide for due process or other procedural safeguards, and their proceedings are not made public. For example, the case of Placido Mico, the civilian opposition leader, was heard in secret by a military judge (see Section 1.d.). Two other FDR members, Mariano Oyono Ndong and Carmelo Biko Nguia, were tried in 1999 by a military tribunal; they were released during the year.

During the year, as a result of weak courts, the Parliament's Complaints Commission became the de facto third branch of "judicial authority," although it has no formal legal jurisdiction. According to local media, the Parliament's President was acting as a court of last resort.

In 1998 Attorney Jos Ol Obono defended Martin Puye; after Puye died in prison, his family sought the attorney's assistance in recovering his body. Obono tried to help the family and as a result was arrested, charged with offenses and sentenced to 5 months and 1 day in prison even though the prosecutor withdrew the charges for lack of evidence. The judge of the Court of Appeal ruled that Obono should have refused to meet with his late client's family in order not to violate his professional ethics.

The Government holds a number of political prisoners. In May 1998, a public trial of 116 persons reportedly involved in the January 1998 alleged revolt on Bioko took place before a military tribunal; 63 persons (of whom 2 died shortly after the trial) were convicted of at least 1 charge and sentenced to between 4 and 26 years; 15 were sentenced to death, but later their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Many defendants claimed that the Government coerced confessions from them by torture. Father Eduardo Losoha Belope, a Catholic priest who was the head of the Catholic Relief Services on Bioko, was among those sentenced (see Section 2.c.). In January he was released from prison under an amnesty, which released all women and invalids. Twenty of those convicted remained imprisoned at Evinayong at year's end (see Section 1.c.); local church organizations were providing assistance to them.

During the year, former Education Minister Felipe Ondo and former Planning Minister Guillermo Nguema were released from prison. In 1998 Ondo and Nguema were convicted of libel against the Government and sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment after security forces repatriated them involuntarily from Gabon with the consent of the Government of Gabon.

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

The law prohibits such actions; however, the Government does not respect these prohibitions in practice. In previous years, security forces regularly searched homes and arrested occupants without warrants, and they generally did so with impunity; however, there were no reports of such actions during the year.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of government surveillance of members of the opposition parties and foreign diplomats.

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.

## 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.

Freedom of speech has improved marginally in recent years. Citizens appear willing to speak their minds, and 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. Expatriates dependent on the good will of the Government do not voice complaints about the frequent government abuses against them. These practices range from the police demanding bribes for imaginary offenses to city, provincial, and federal officials extorting money for "licenses" for which there is no statutory basis. Complaints about official conduct in the country are accompanied with a request not to be identified to avoid reprisals.

There are five general-interest newspapers that were published regularly: La Gaceta, a Malabo-based monthly publication with informal connections to the Government; El Correo Guineo Ecuatoriano, a bimonthly newspaper published by the Gaceta group; La Opinion, an opposition newspaper published every 2 to 3 weeks; El Tiempo, an opposition newspaper; and Ebano, a publication of the Ministry of Information, Tourism, and Culture, which appears approximately twice a month. Students at the National University published a magazine, AYO; the Guinean-Hispano Cultural Center also published a monthly cultural review, El Patio. The PDGE published La Voz del Pueblo, and the opposition CPDS published La Verdad. Although no laws or regulations were published during the year, La Gaceta has a contract with the Government to regularly publish laws and regulations adopted by the administration.

All journalists must be registered with the Ministry of Information. According to the Ministry of Information, there were 18 independent reporters registered, and between 35 and 45 reporters employed by the official party or government publications at year's end. In previous years, visiting foreign reporters were required to be accompanied by guides from the Ministry of Information; however, during the year, at least four foreign reporters with various publications traveled and reported independently in the country.

The law authorizes government censorship of all publications. Press sources and the Ministry of Information both confirmed that the Ministry sometimes required publishers to submit copy for approval prior to publication during the year. In addition all local publications exercised self-censorship and were subject to prior restraint. During the year, there was a significant increase in the availability of foreign publications, including publications from the United States, United Kingdom, France, Spain, and a variety of African countries. Unlike in previous years, security forces did not confiscate literature from Spain that was critical of the Government.

In February Malabo Mayor Gabriel Mba Bela ordered the shutdown of the Press Association (ASOPGE). Although Mba Bela did not justify his order, the press had criticized him for imposing a new regulation on city taxis prior to the order. In April 1999, shortly before a national symposium on press liberty was scheduled, the Minister of the Interior ordered the removal of the democratically elected president of ASOPGE, Manual Nze Nzogo, even though the ASOPGE was a legally

recognized association. The reason given was that Nzogo supposedly was not qualified for the position; he was not reinstated to his position during the year, and ASOPGE was inactive.

In December 2000, Equatorial Guinean Administrative Council President Manuel Nze Nzongo removed La Opinion Managing Editor and President of ASOPGE Pedro Nolasco Ndong from his position as editor. Nze Nzongo cited Ndong's mismanagement of La Opinion as his reason. On May 13, Pedro Nolasco Ndong was detained at the airport in Malabo when he returned from a press seminar organized by UNESCO in Namibia for World Press Freedom Day. Police confiscated a report on press freedom in the country since 1991, all the paperwork from the conference, and extorted \$100 (75,147 CFA) from him. The report and the paperwork were returned after Reporters Without Borders, an international NGO, wrote a letter of protest on his behalf to the Minister of Interior. Nolasco Ndong discussed these incidents openly and filed an application to start another print publication. His articles continued to appear in El Patio.

In late 2000, the Government delegate of Mongomo district ordered the seizure of copies of both La Opinion and El Tiempo for reporting negative news on the country's leadership. Readers and vendors were fined between \$13 and \$26 (10,000 and 20,000 CFA).

Radio is the most important and influential medium of mass communication. During the year, the Government continued to dominate effectively domestic radio broadcasting. It owns and operates the state-run station Radio Malabo. The President's son, Teodorino Obiang Nguema, who also is Minister of Forestry, Environment, and Fisheries, owns the only private local radio station, Radio Asonga. The Government has not approved the one or two other applications for private radio stations that have been pending for several years.

In June security forces shut down Radio Asonga for criticizing the Government. General Antonio Mba Ngeuma, the owner and operator's uncle, shut down the station after Obiang Nguema released a press statement discussing his dissatisfaction with some of the new members of his father's government, particularly members of the security forces. The Government closed Radio Asonga's stations in both Bata and Malabo, as well as the television station that is incorporated into the Bata radio station. After resolving what likely was a family dispute, Radio Asonga reopened within a week of its closure.

The only domestic television station is government-controlled and broadcasts only a few hours a day. Television Asonga, owned by President Obiang and run by his son in coordination with Radio Asonga, broadcasts by cable only in Bata. 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 increasingly is available.

The Government generally withholds access to domestic broadcasting from opposition parties and rarely refers to the opposition in anything but negative terms when broadcasting the news; however, in February Television Asonga granted a 30-minute interview to opposition leader Placido Miko, and aired segments of the CPDS congress in Bata.

International electronic media is available and includes Radio France International, which broadcasts in Malabo, and Radio Exterior, the international short-wave service from Spain. Radio Exterior often broadcasts news about the country and interviews with the opposition politicians. It is virtually the only means for the opposition to disseminate its views and positions widely. Its editorials, like those of most of the Spanish media, frequently are highly critical of the Government. The Government regularly accused Radio Exterior, sometimes with justification, of misrepresenting the situation in the country.

Internet service is available, although access is expensive, and computer ownership is not widespread. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of censorship or arrests for possessing material retrieved from the Internet. According to Teodoro Abeso Nguema, authorities detained

Nguema and Juan Obiang Late in 1999, at the Bata prison, because they copied an article on the health of President Obiang from the Internet (see Section 1.d.).

The Government generally respects academic freedom, and unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of limits on academic freedom or freedom of expression by the academic community. In 2000 students at the National University wrote a letter to the rector complaining about their food and housing. The students were brought before the President in March, publicly berated for their lack of gratitude for free accommodations, and then immediately evicted from the student housing.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution 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 Government 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 monitor gatherings in public places, even small gatherings. The Government required notification for public events; however, unlike in previous years, it did not routinely deny permission for such events.

During the year, the Government lifted restrictions on meetings of the Catholic Church or affiliated organizations, except the Catholic NGO Autonomous Rural Development (DAR). The Government continued to require that the DAR in the diocese of Ebibeyin inform the locally appointed official delegate each time that it had a board meeting. The DAR complied with the requirement and received permission to meet, but the local delegate insisted on being present during the meetings. The DAR refused to hold meetings with the delegate present, and consequently it did not meet during the year (see Section 2.c.).

The Constitution provides for the right of association; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. The law prohibits the formation of political parties along ethnic lines. The law does not permit NGO's to defend or promote human rights; (see Section 4); however, no groups were prosecuted during the year for attempting to promote human rights.

Police continued to harass and detain members of opposition parties; however, there were fewer reports of such harassment than in previous years (see Section 1.d.). Reportedly the Government bribed members of the opposition. Opposition party members complained of disruption of meetings and of roadblocks at which they were forced to bribe soldiers in order to proceed.

The law prohibits coalitions between political parties; however, in 2000 five opposition groups formed a coalition (see Section 3).

There are 12 political parties that the Government calls "opposition parties;" 11 have allied themselves with the ruling PDGE. These opposition parties are advertised by the Government as examples of the country's multiparty democracy. During the year, the Government permitted the independent opposition CPDS party to hold a party congress in Bata. The Government also paid money owed to the CPDS by law so that it would have funds for the congress.

The Progress Party (PP) remains illegal due to a criminal sentence imposed on its leader Severo Motto in 1997 for having attempted a coup in 1996. In 2000 after the Supreme Court upheld the order banning the PP, party leaders petitioned the presidency to overrule the ban, arguing that a coup attempt would have been the act of Motto, not the PP. The presidency invited the PP to organize a new political party under another name; however, the PP did not do so by year's end. Persons identified with the PP are unable to find employment. The Democratic Republican Front (FDR) has been seeking recognition since 1995 without success. During the year, FDR party leader Felipe Ondo

Obiang, former Minister of Education, was released from custody. The Independent Democratic Socialist Party (PIDS) still was seeking recognition. The law prohibits ethnic political parties, and the Bubi-dominated Movement for Self-determination of Bioko (MIAB) was banned.

In previous years, the Government reportedly attempted to force opposition members or officials to join the PDGE party (see Section 3); however, there were no reports of such action during the year.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government limited this right in some respects.

The law includes a stated official preference towards the Catholic Church and the Reform Church of Equatorial Guinea due to their traditional roots and historic influence in the social and cultural life of the populace. For example, a Roman Catholic Mass normally is part of any major ceremonial function such as the October 12 national day. In the past, the Government restricted the activities of the Catholic Church; however, there were no reports of restrictions during the year. As of January, the Government no longer required that Catholic priests obtain government permission before celebrating Mass. This restriction had been put in place in previous years because of the Catholic Church's repeated criticisms of human rights violations, social injustice, and corruption in the country.

A religious organization must be registered formally with the Ministry of Justice and Religion before its religious activities are allowed. While religious groups must be approved and registered in order to function legally, there were no reports during the year that the Government had refused to register any group. However, information regarding the exact procedure for registering a religious denomination was not available. The approval process usually takes several years, but such delay apparently is due primarily to general bureaucratic slowness and is not the result of a policy designed to impede the operation of any religious group. The exact number of registered denominations is not available.

The Government continued to restrict the freedom of expression of the clergy, particularly regarding any open criticism of the Government. The Government requires permission for any religious activities outside the church building, but in practice this requirement did not appear to hinder organized religious groups.

The Government required that the Catholic NGO DAR in the diocese of Ebibeyin inform the local delegate each time that it had a board meeting. The DAR complied with the requirement and received permission to meet, but the local delegate insisted on being present during the meetings. The DAR refused to hold meetings with the delegate present, and consequently it did not meet during the year.

Religious study is required in schools and is usually, but not exclusively, Catholic. During the year, some schools considered banning a number of Jehovah's Witnesses students from class after their teachers complained that the students would not sing the national anthem. Discussions between the Minister of Justice and Religion and the students' parents resolved the issue.

In February 1998, security forces arrested a priest, Father Eduardo Losoha Belope, a member of the Bubi ethnic group and president of the Malabo chapter of the Catholic nongovernmental organization Caritas, in connection with the January 1998 revolt. Father Belope was one of the Bubi prisoners transferred in 2000 from Bioko island to Evinayong on the mainland (see Sections 1.c. and 1.e.); in January he was released as part of a government amnesty.

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

The law provides for these rights; however, the Government limited these rights in practice. Local police routinely extort bribes from occupants of cars, taxis, and other vehicles traveling outside the

capital. The police routinely stopped citizens at roadblocks, subjected them to searches, and extorted money from them. Police and soldiers continued to target citizens of Cameroon, Gabon, and Nigeria. The Government justified these roadblocks as customs controls to compensate for its inability to control the country's borders effectively. In November 1999, the Special Representative concluded that these roadblocks effectively restricted the freedom of movement of members of the opposition and prevented them from either leaving or returning to their hometowns. During the 2000 municipal elections and the 1999 legislative election, the Government used roadblocks to identify and detain some members of opposition political parties. In 2000 the Government eliminated a number of military roadblocks on the island of Bioko between Malabo and Luba and also in the vicinity of Bata on the mainland.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that the Government restricted the movement of opposition political party members to their town of residence or of origin.

All citizens are required to obtain permission to travel abroad from the local Police Commissioner, and some members of opposition parties were denied this permission. Those who do travel abroad sometimes were interrogated upon their return (see Section 2.a.). Government officials attempt to control the movements of citizens by refusing exit visas or denying or confiscating passports. However, several prominent members of opposition parties were able to travel abroad without hindrance during the year, including CPDS Secretary General Placido Miko.

Unlike in previous years, the Government did not attempt to control opposition groups outside its borders by kidnaping citizens living in other countries. Such individuals reportedly were detained, questioned, and tortured before being released.

In previous years, the Government demanded that the Spanish Government repatriate Severo Motto, leader of the banned PP Party (see Section 2.b.), who led an attempt to overthrow the government by armed force in 1996 and to whom the Government of Spain had granted asylum in 1997. However, the Government reportedly made no such requests during the year.

During the year, President Obiang urged exiled opposition figures to return to the country and to legalize their parties. Florentino Ecomo Nsogo of the Party of Reconstruction and Social Wellbeing (PRBS) was the first to return after 10 years of exile in Spain (see Section 1.d.).

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In recent years, an average of one or two persons requested refugee status in the country. The Government provides first asylum and generally grants asylum requests; the Government cooperates with the UNHCR. The police reportedly continued to harass several thousand citizens of Nigeria, Ghana, and Francophone Africa, most of whom are small traders and businesspersons (see Section 5).

There were no reports of the forced return of any persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Aquilino Nguema Ona Nchama, former Secretary General of Social and Democratic Union (UDS), a legal opposition party close to the ruling PDGE, had the status of political refugee in Gabon under the auspices of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Nchama told the U.N. Special Representative that three members of the Gabonese security forces abducted him in May 2000 on behalf of the Government, which had paid Gabon \$266,311 (200 million CFA.) to assist in Nchama's extradition to Malabo. Spanish authorities reportedly intervened, and the extradition was stopped. Gabon expelled Nchama, who found refuge in Spain.

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

The Constitution 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 exercised complete power as head of state, commander of the armed forces, and leader of the government party, the PDGE. Leadership positions within the Government in general were restricted to the President's Mongomo clan of the Fang ethnic group and its closest supporters. The elected Chamber of Deputies was dominated completely by the Government. The Minister of the Interior also acted 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 called 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 in the Constitution. However, the Government has not abided by most of the pact's provisions. Opposition activists reported that the Government made virtually no effort to implement the pact. The Government's refusal to issue exit visas to some 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 (see Sections 2.a. and 2.d.).

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. Nevertheless, in 2000 five opposition groups including the CPDS, Front for Democratic Opposition (PSD), PP, Progressive Democratic Alliance (ADP), and the Popular Union (UP) joined to form the Front of Democratic Opposition (FOD). At year's end, the Government had not responded to this action.

The legislative elections that should have been held in the fall of 1998 were postponed until March 1999. The new electoral census was completed in December 1998, but not all of the opposition parties agreed to sign it due to irregularities, such as the inclusion of the underaged, the dead, and nonresidents, and the exclusion of opposition party members. The three opposition parties initially called for a boycott of the polls to protest preelection irregularities; however, all but one of the parties, the CPDS, ultimately participated in the voting. One CPDS candidate was elected; however, he continued to refuse to take his seat during the year.

International observers considered the legislative election process to be seriously flawed. The elections were characterized by numerous irregularities and by restrictions on the ability of the opposition to campaign. Roadblocks impeded the opposition's ability to travel; and opposition leaders were detained intermittently and sometimes were mistreated, tortured, or assessed stiff fines. The UP and CPDS opposition parties won 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.

Significant segments of the political opposition either remained banned or had yet to be recognized by the Government by year's end, including the FDR, the PP, the PIDS, and the MIAB (see Section 2.b.).

The percentages of women or minorities in government or politics do not correspond to their percentages of the population; however, there are no legal restrictions on the participation of women

or minorities in politics. 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 NGO's. In 1999 the Government promulgated a law that restricted NGO's and identified specific areas in which they may operate; human rights is not one of these areas. The Government required that the Catholic NGO DAR in the diocese of Ebibeyin inform the local delegate each time it had a board meeting (see Section 2.c.).

No international human rights NGO is resident in the country; however, the Government claimed that it has invited Amnesty International and several European NGO's to establish themselves in the country.

During the year, the UNCHR Special Representative Gustavo Gallon made repeated requests for permission to visit the country. The Minister of Justice reportedly advised the Ministry of External Relations that a visit by the Special Representative was not convenient until the UNCHR signed a technical assistance agreement with the Government. The UNCHR has stated that the Government must show its commitment to reform by complying with nontechnical recommendations made repeatedly by the UNCHR over the last 20 years before a technical assistance pact can be signed.

The President of the African Commission on Human Rights of the African Union (AU) has made seven unsuccessful attempts to obtain an official invitation to visit the country.

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

The Constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination; however, both governmental and societal discrimination against women and ethnic minorities continued.

##### Women

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

Many prisons do not have separate areas for men and women, and women are subjected to sexual abuse from both the authorities and other prisoners while in detention (see Section 1.c.).

The massive influx of single foreign men in the petroleum sector has contributed to an increase in prostitution.

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 opportunities.

There is no discrimination against women in formal inheritance and family laws; however, in the Fang, Ndowe, and Bisio cultures, primogeniture is practiced, and because women become members of their husband's family upon marriage, they usually are not accorded inheritance rights. When her husband dies, the widow either remains with his family in a dependent, marginalized position or she returns the dowry and leaves with nothing.

There is discrimination against women 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 (or her father or brother) must return the dowry given her family by the bridegroom at the time of

marriage. In many instances, the woman has no money or property after the divorce with which to repay the dowry, and, as a result, is incarcerated (see Section 1.d.). Tradition also dictates that if a girl's family accepts a dowry from a man, she must then marry him, regardless of her wishes. If the marriage does not take place the family is required by tradition to return the dowry, which they sometimes cannot do. This can lead to imprisonment of the bride or a family member for the debt. A 2000 study by CNDH found that as many as 20 persons were detained solely for failure to repay dowries. According to the Government, all 20 were released, and no one was incarcerated for such offenses during the year. Government representatives visited villages during the year to encourage local officials, village chiefs, and the police to encourage the substitution of gifts for cash to eliminate the problem of dowry repayment. If a marriage dissolves, the husband also automatically receives custody of all children born after the marriage, while the mother maintains custody of all children born prior to the marriage.

According to the law, women have the right to buy and sell property and goods; however, 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 until the age of 14, but the law is not enforced. In practice boys are expected either to complete an additional 7 years of secondary school or to finish a program of vocational study following primary education. Pregnancy and the requirement to assist in agricultural work make this level of education less likely for girls. The 1999 report by the U.N. Special Representative noted that only 12 percent of girls reach the secondary level of education compared with more than 24 percent of boys. Only 9 percent of girls finish fifth grade. In 1998 only 24 percent of girls completed primary education. Generally women have only one-fifth the educational level of men. In 1999 only 1.8 percent of the national budget was committed to education. Children suffer poor health and a high mortality rate.

There was no societal pattern of abuse directed against children. When children or adolescents are arrested, they are imprisoned with adults (see Section 1.c.). There were no reports of abuse by guards or other inmates.

Child labor is common particularly on family farms and businesses (see Section 6.d.).

#### Persons with Disabilities

There is no constitutional or legal provision to protect persons with disabilities from discrimination in employment, education, or the provision of other state services; however, there is no evidence of discrimination against persons with disabilities in practice. The law does not mandate access for persons with disabilities to buildings.

#### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Discrimination against ethnic or racial minorities is not legal, and the Government does not overtly limit their participation in politics; however, the monopolization of political power by the President's Mongomo clan of the Fang ethnic group persists. In practice some members of ethnic minorities face discrimination because they are not members of the Fang ethnic group, or belong to a Fang subclan other than the President's. Ethnic 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 source of political tension and historically have erupted into frequent violence. Bubis allegedly led the January

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 and repression by Obiang's uncle, Macias Nguema, reduced the country's population by approximately 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, also were sources of significant political tensions and in past years, of occasional violence; however, there were no reports of such violence during the year.

Several thousand citizens of Nigeria, Ghana, and Francophone Africa continued to reside in the country. Most are small traders and businesspersons. The police reportedly continued to harass them as well as harassing asylum seekers on an individual basis (see Section 1.c.).

## Section 6 Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides for the right to organize unions, and during the year, the Small Farmers Syndicate (OSPA) became the first legally recognized labor union. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Government never has allowed the registration of unions; as a result, the Equatorial Guinea Trade Union, which was founded in 1990, has been forced to carry out its activities in secret. There are a few cooperatives with limited power. The law stipulates that a union must have at least 50 members who are from a specific workplace and located in the same geographic area to register; this effectively has blocked union formation. Since 1992 the CPDS has tried unsuccessfully to legalize its affiliated Union Sindical de Trabajadores (UST). An independent union, Sindicador Independiente de Servicios (SIS), initially applied for registration twice in 1995 with subsequent reapplication in 1996, but the Government denied SIS's applications. Although SIS's registration met the requirements of the law, the authorities denied it.

The 1992 Law of Associations and Syndicates provides that a separate law be enacted to govern unions for civil servants; however, this law has not been enacted. The law guarantees the right to strike. The Labor Code contains provisions to uphold worker rights, but the Government generally does not enforce them, in part because of inadequate staffing in the Ministry of Labor.

Membership in the PDGE generally 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 claimed to have been dismissed from their jobs after joining alternate political groups.

During the year, the country's major private employer, the oil industry, which is dominated by foreign firms, continued to take steps to reduce government control of hiring in the industry. The companies employed methods ranging from public advertising of jobs and objective testing to screening of applicants by non-Equatoguineans only, in their attempt to eliminate the former political bias in the hiring process.

During the year, the Government ratified the six remaining International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions, including Convention 87 on freedom of association and Convention 111 on

nondiscrimination in employment (see Sections 6.b., 6.c., and 6.d.). In May an ILO team met with the Government to discuss reform of the country's labor laws and ILO assistance for labor inspectors; however, no subsequent action was taken by year's end.

#### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law guarantees workers the right to organize and bargain collectively; however, there are many legal requirements before collective bargaining is permitted, which limits unions' ability to organize. There is no evidence of collective bargaining by any group; however, the Labor Ministry sometimes mediates labor disputes (see Section 6.e.). The Government and employers set wages, with little or no participation by workers. Employers must pay the minimum wages set by the Government, and most companies pay more than the government-established minimum wage (see Section 6.e.). During the year, the Government ratified six ILO conventions, including Convention 98 on the right to organize and bargain collectively (see Sections 6.a., 6.c., and 6.d.).

There is no law prohibiting antiunion discrimination. Apart from the Labor Ministry, workers have few other places to seek redress. Members of the National Assembly reportedly try to mediate employee-worker disputes over wages or dismissals. However, parliamentarians can only rely on moral authority in reaching agreements.

There are no export processing zones.

#### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law forbids forced or compulsory labor and slavery; however, detainees and convicted felons perform extensive labor outside prison, including for prison officials, without compensation (see Section 1.c.). During the year, the Government ratified six ILO conventions, including Conventions 29 and 105 on forced labor (see Section 6.a., 6.b., and 6.d.).

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor by children, and there were no reports that it occurred.

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

The legal minimum age for the employment of children is 14 years, but the Ministry of Labor does not enforce this law, and child labor is common particularly on family farms and businesses. 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. While the Ministry of Labor is responsible for the enforcement of labor legislation, the Government does not have a comprehensive policy on child labor.

During the year, the Government ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor, which the Chamber of Deputies had approved in 2000 (see Sections 6.a., 6.b., and 6.c.).

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor by children, and there were no reports that it occurred.

#### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum monthly wage ranges from \$100 (75,000 CFA) per month for unqualified workers to \$1,000 (750,000 CFA) per month for oil sector professionals. Oil sector workers receive a much higher scale than elsewhere in the national economy, often 10 times the minimum wage. The mandated minimum wage in the oil sector is twice the minimum wage in commercial enterprises. 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.

In January several employees of the Malabo city administration sought payment of overdue wages and asked for assistance from the Labor Ministry. An inspector from the Labor Ministry called a meeting with the workers and asked the Malabo city administration to send a representative. The Mayor of Malabo, a senior PDGE official, came to the meeting, berated the Ministry inspector for meddling, refused to discuss the case, and warned the inspector to drop the case. The Labor Ministry reportedly took no further action on the case.

The Labor Code provides for comprehensive protection for workers from occupational hazards; however, the Government does not enforce this in practice. The Government has seven labor inspectors in Malabo and five based in Bata, which was an insufficient number to oversee local industry. The Government began training more inspectors during the year.

Employees who protested unhealthy or dangerous working conditions risked losing their jobs

#### f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons, and there were reports that the country increasingly was being used as a transit point for trafficked persons. A 1998 UNICEF study also stated that the country is a source for traffickers that feeds the domestic labor market in urban centers of countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon.