

**THE WORST  
OF THE WORST**  
**THE WORLD'S  
MOST REPRESSIVE SOCIETIES**  
**2004**

A Special Report to the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
United Nations Commission on Human Rights  
Geneva, 2004



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# Introduction

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Freedom House has prepared this report in conjunction with the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. We present our findings on countries and territories that represent the worst environments for political rights and civil liberties.

The reports are excerpted from the Freedom House survey *Freedom in the World 2004*. The ratings and accompanying essays are based on events from January through the end of November 2003. The 15 countries and three territories listed in this report are drawn from the total of 49 countries—a quarter of the world's total—that are considered to be Not Free and whose citizens endure systematic and pervasive human rights violations.

Each year, Freedom House surveys political rights and civil liberties in 192 countries and 18 major territories. Included in this report are the eight countries judged to have the worst records: Burma, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Turkmenistan. They are joined by two territories, Chechnya and Tibet, whose inhabitants suffer under intense repression. These states and regions received the Freedom House survey's lowest rating: 7 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties. Within these entities, state control over daily life is pervasive and wide-ranging, independent organizations and political opposition are banned or suppressed, and fear of retribution for independent thought and action is part of daily life. In the case of Chechnya, the rating partly reflects the fallout of a vicious conflict that has disrupted normal life, resulted in tens of thousands of victims within the civilian population, and saw the transfer in 2003 of some authority to a brutal indigenous regime linked to corrupt and criminal groups.

The report also includes seven other countries near the bottom of Freedom House's list of the most repressive: China, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Laos, Somalia, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. The territory of Western Sahara is also included in this group. While these states scored slightly better than the lowest

rated countries and territories, they offer very limited scope for private discussion while severely suppressing opposition political activity, impeding independent organizing, and censoring or punishing criticism of the state.

Massive human rights violations take place in nearly every part of the world. This year's "most repressive societies" include countries from the Americas, the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and East Asia; they represent a wide array of cultures and levels of economic development. This report from Freedom House to the United Nations focuses on states and regions that have seen some of the world's most severe repression and most systematic and brutal violations of human dignity. Our report seeks to focus the attention of the Commission on states and territories that deserve investigation and condemnation for their widespread violations.

The fundamental violations of rights presented in this report are all the more alarming because they stand in sharp contrast to the significant expansion of human liberty over the last three decades. In that period, dozens of states have shed tyranny and embraced democratic rule and respect for basic civil liberties. There has also been growing public support around the world for the values of liberal democracy including multiparty competition, the rule of law, freedom of association, freedom of speech, the rights of minorities, and other fundamental, universally valid human rights. According to our global survey *Freedom in the World* (whose findings can be accessed online at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)) in 2003, of the 192 countries in the world, 88 (46 percent) are Free and can be said to respect a broad array of basic human rights and political freedoms. An additional 55 (28 percent) are Partly Free, with some abridgments of basic rights and weak enforcement of the rule of law. In all, 2.8 billion people—44 percent of the world's population—live in Free states in which a broad array of political rights are protected.

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



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

In 2002, Freedom House and the U.S.-based Council on Foreign Relations sponsored an Independent Task Force on the United Nations. It recommended the establishment of a democracy caucus at the UN to promote the values of human rights and democracy and to ensure that countries committed to respect for these fundamental principles occupy leadership positions within the UN system. In the last year, a wide array of NGOs and NGO leaders from around the world have endorsed and pressed for the implementation of this idea.

We hope that in addition to addressing fundamental rights abuses by the most repressive states, the 2004 Geneva meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights will see concrete steps toward the creation of an effective democracy caucus. Democratic cooperation can best ensure that the attention of the UN Commission on Human Rights is properly focused on the countries with the world's worst human rights records, many of which, regrettably, have escaped criticism in recent years.

Freedom House distributes this information about the “most repressive societies” in the hope that it will spur the UN Commission on Human Rights to take determined and principled action to condemn and improve the deplorable situations in these countries. In this fashion, we hope we can support activists engaged in struggles for human dignity and freedom and hasten the day when dictatorships will give way to genuine pluralism, democracy, and the rule of law—the bedrock not only of political rights and civil liberties, but also of lasting economic prosperity.

Jennifer Windsor  
*Executive Director*  
Freedom House  
March 2004



# Burma (Myanmar)

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

A number of positive developments noted in Burma last year were not sustained in 2003. The increasing latitude granted by the ruling military junta to the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) was withdrawn in dramatic fashion in May, when supporters of the regime violently attacked an NLD convoy in northern Burma, leaving an unknown number of people dead, injured, or missing. Subsequently, party leader Aung San Suu Kyi and a number of NLD officials were placed under indefinite detention, NLD offices were once again shut down, and universities and schools were closed in a bid to suppress wider unrest. Following these setbacks, the tentative process of national reconciliation begun in 2000 has all but collapsed, and the junta continues to wield a tight grip over all aspects of Burmese life.

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

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

power after it was defeated in a landslide election by the NLD in 1990. The junta jailed dozens of members of the NLD, which won 392 of the 485 parliamentary seats in Burma's first free elections in three decades.

Than Shwe and several other generals who headed the junta refashioned the SLORC as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. The generals appeared to be trying to improve the junta's international image, attract foreign investment, and encourage an end to U.S.-led sanctions linked to the regime's grim human rights record. In late 2000, encouraged by the efforts of UN special envoy Razali Ismail, the regime began holding talks with Suu Kyi, which led to an easing of restrictions on the NLD by mid-2002. Suu Kyi was released from house arrest and was allowed to make several political trips outside the capital, and the NLD was permitted to re-open a number of its branch offices. Nevertheless, press reports continued to note that meaningful discussion between Suu Kyi and the junta over the future restoration of democracy was not forthcoming, leading many analysts to remain doubtful about the regime's intentions.

Suu Kyi's growing popularity and her revitalization of the NLD as a political force during the first half of 2003, especially in the sensitive ethnic minority areas, may have rattled hardliners within the regime. On May 30, a deadly ambush on an NLD convoy in northern Burma by SPDC supporters illustrated the lengths to which the SPDC would go to limit a NLD challenge. Suu Kyi and dozens of other NLD officials and supporters were detained, many in undisclosed locations, for several months following the attack. Suu Kyi's detention and the junta's subsequent crackdown led to international outrage. Japan, the country's largest aid donor, has suspended its aid program until Suu Kyi is released. In July, the U.S. government passed the Burma Freedom and Democracy Act, which bans Burmese imports into the United States, authorizes the president to aid Burmese democracy activists, freezes the regime's financial assets in U.S. banks, and imposes a widened visa ban on Burmese officials attempting to enter the U.S.

A major cabinet reshuffle in August left hardliner Than Shwe as head of state, while the more pragmatic intelligence chief Khin Nyunt was promoted to prime minister. Although the regime then announced a new "roadmap to democracy," it did not provide details of a proposed timetable for its implementation. As talks with ethnic communities and the SPDC have evolved, the NLD has been openly excluded from discussions. In September, Suu Kyi was released into house arrest following a major medical operation, in what some

analysts saw as a face-saving move to placate the international community. However, the fact that she remains a prisoner and the continuing crackdowns on the NLD cast doubt on the junta's claim that it remains willing to consider meaningful positive reform.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Burma continues to be ruled by one of the world's most repressive regimes. The junta rules by decree, controls the judiciary, suppresses nearly all basic rights, and commits human rights abuses with impunity. Military officers hold most cabinet positions, and active or retired officers hold most top posts in all ministries. Official corruption is reportedly rampant both at the higher and local levels.

Since rejecting the results of the 1990 elections and preventing the elected parliament from convening, the junta has all but paralyzed the victorious NLD party. Authorities have jailed many NLD leaders, pressured thousands of party members and officials to resign, closed party offices, harassed members' families, and periodically detained hundreds of NLD members at a time to block planned party meetings. After being allowed somewhat greater freedoms during 2002, the NLD was subjected to another crackdown in 2003. Besides the NLD, there are more than 20 ethnic political parties that remain suppressed by the junta. According to a report published in May by the International Crisis Group, ethnic minority groups feel that they are denied a role in national political life and do not have a chance to influence policy decisions that affect their lives.

The junta sharply restricts press freedom, owning or tightly controlling all daily newspapers and radio and television stations. It also subjects most private periodicals to prepublication censorship and restricts the importation of foreign news periodicals. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, those caught listening to foreign radio broadcasts can be arrested. Local media were forbidden to report on a banking crisis in February, and coverage of the May 30 disturbances was limited to pro-government propaganda. A number of journalists and writers remained in jail throughout the year as a result of expressing dissident views. Publishers faced additional difficulties when the price of newsprint rose by almost 50 percent following the imposition of U.S. sanctions in July, according to the BBC.

Ordinary Burmese generally can worship relatively freely. However, the junta shows preference for Theravada Buddhism, discriminating against non-Buddhists in the upper levels of the public sector and coercively promoting Buddhism in some ethnic minority areas. The regime has also tried to control the Buddhist clergy by placing monastic orders under a state-run committee, monitoring monasteries, and subjecting clergy to special restrictions on speech and association. A number of monks remain imprisoned for their pro-democracy and human rights work. Burma was once again designated a "country of particular concern" by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which noted systematic official discrimination against members of minority religious groups. A 2002 Human Rights Watch report alleged that the government had failed to protect Muslims from a significant increase in anti-Muslim violence, and that it had imposed restrictions on Muslim religious activities and travel.

Academic freedom is severely limited; teachers are subject to restrictions on freedom of expression and publication and are held accountable for the political activities of their students. Since the 1988 student pro-democracy demonstrations, the junta has sporadically closed universities, limiting higher educational opportunities for a generation of young Burmese. Most campuses were relocated to relatively isolated areas as a measure to disperse the student population. Following the clashes in May, the junta once again closed the country's high schools and universities, fearing student unrest. Two students were killed when the military violently suppressed a student demonstration held on May 31 to protest the attack on Suu Kyi, according to Amnesty International.

Authorities continued to infringe on citizens' privacy rights by arbitrarily searching homes, intercepting mail, and monitoring telephone conversations. Laws and decrees criminalize the possession and use of unregistered electronic devices, including telephones, fax machines, computers, modems, and software. The Internet, which operates in a limited fashion in the cities, is tightly regulated and censored.

Freedoms of association and assembly are restricted. An ordinance prohibits unauthorized outdoor gatherings of more than five people, and authorities regularly use force to break up peaceful demonstrations and prevent pro-democracy activists from organizing events or meetings. However, nearly all public sector employees, as well as other ordinary citizens, are induced to join the pro-junta mass mobilization organization, the Union Solidarity and

Development Association (USDA). Domestic human rights organizations are unable to function independently, and the regime generally dismisses critical scrutiny of its human rights record from international NGOs and journalists, although it did permit Amnesty International to visit for the first time in January. The few nongovernmental groups that are able to work in Burma generally work in health care and other nominally nonpolitical fields.

Independent trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes are illegal, and several labor activists are serving long prison terms for their political and labor activities. The regime continued to use forced labor despite formally banning the practice in October 2000, just days prior to an unprecedented call by the International Labor Organization (ILO) for its members to "review" their relations with Burma. The ILO and other sources report that soldiers routinely force civilians, including women and children, to work without pay under harsh conditions. Laborers are commandeered to construct roads, clear minefields, porter for the army, or work on military-backed commercial ventures. Forced labor appears to be most widespread in states dominated by ethnic minorities. A plan drafted jointly by the ILO and the junta during early 2003 that outlined measures to address the problem was tabled after the May 30 attack on the NLD.

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

A detailed report issued by Amnesty International in July raised a number of concerns regarding the administration of justice in Burma, including laws and practices regarding detention, torture, trial, and conditions of imprisonment. Prisons and labor camps are overcrowded, and inmates lack adequate food and health care. Amnesty International's 2002 annual report noted that torture during interrogation continues to be a problem, and that at least 73 political prisoners have died in custody since 1988. However, conditions in some facilities have reportedly improved somewhat since the junta began allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisons in 1999.

Although the junta announced in late July that 91 people arrested in the aftermath of the May 30 violence had been released, more than 1,300 political prisoners remain incarcerated, according to Amnesty International. Most are held under broadly drawn laws that criminalize a range of peaceful activities. These include distributing pro-democracy pamphlets and distributing, viewing, or smuggling out of Burma videotapes of Suu Kyi's public addresses. The frequently used Decree 5/96 of 1996 authorizes jail terms of up to 20 years for aiding activities "which adversely affect the national interest." In September, on the eve of another visit by Amnesty International, a handful of prisoners were released, almost all over the age of eighty.

The UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva condemns the regime each year for committing grave human rights abuses. Annual resolutions commonly highlight a systematic pattern of extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions; enforced disappearances; rape, torture, inhuman treatment, and forced labor, including the use of children; forced relocation and the denial of freedom of assembly, association, expression, religion, and movement; the lack of an independent judiciary; and delaying the process of national reconciliation and democratization. Some of the worst human rights abuses take place in Burma's seven ethnic-minority-dominated states. In these border states, the *tatmadaw*, or Burmese armed forces, often kill, beat, rape, and arbitrarily detain civilians with impunity. A report issued in May by Refugees International accused the army of practicing the "widespread and systematic" rape of ethnic minority women in a number of states. Soldiers also routinely destroy property and seize livestock, cash, property, food, and other goods from villagers.

Tens of thousands of ethnic minorities in Shan, Karenni, Karen, and Mon states and Tenasserim Division remain in squalid and ill-equipped relocation centers set up by the army. The army has forcibly moved the villagers to the sites since the mid-1990s as part of its counterinsurgency operations. Press reports suggested that the army continues to forcibly uproot villagers, and that approximately 1.5 million people have been internally displaced by such tactics. In addition, several million Burmese are estimated to have fled to neighboring countries, according to Refugees International. Thailand continues to host at least 135,000 Karen, Mon, and Karenni in refugee camps near the Burmese border, as well as hundreds of thousands more who have not been granted refugee status.

The junta has committed serious abuses against the Muslim Rohingya minority in northern Arakan state. Because the junta denies them citizenship, the Rohingyas face restrictions on their movement and the right to own land and



are barred from secondary education and most civil service jobs. More than 250,000 Rohingyas remain in neighboring Bangladesh, where they fled in the 1990s to escape extrajudicial execution, rape, forced labor, and other abuses, according to reports by Human Rights Watch and other sources. The UN High Commission for Refugees closed its offices on the border in July but serious problems remain. A number of ethnic minority groups complain of systematic discrimination at the hands of the regime, including a lack of representation in the government and military, economic marginalization, and the suppression of their cultural and religious rights.

The junta continues to face low-grade insurgencies waged by the Karen National Union (KNU) and at least five smaller ethnic-based rebel armies. A number of other rebel groups, however, have reached ceasefire deals with the junta since 1989, under which they have been granted effective administrative authority of the areas under their control. While army abuses are the most widespread, some rebel groups forcibly conscript civilians, commit extrajudicial killing and rape, and use women and children as porters, according to the U.S. State Department. A 2002 Human Rights Watch report documented the widespread use of child-soldiers by some insurgent groups, as well as by the Burmese army.

Criminal gangs have in recent years trafficked thousands of Burmese women and girls, many from ethnic minority groups, to Thailand and other destinations for prostitution, according to reports by Human Rights Watch and other groups. Although Burmese women have traditionally enjoyed high social and economic status, they are underrepresented in the government and civil service.



# China

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Political Rights:	7
Civil Liberties:	6
Status:	Not Free

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## Overview:

As China completed its biggest leadership shuffle since the 1970s, new party chief Hu Jintao and other top officials pledged to improve conditions for rural Chinese, who formed the vanguard of the Communist revolution but are now increasingly left behind in the Asian giant's wrenching transition to a market economy. Nevertheless, the new leaders are unlikely to offer bold initiatives to help China's ailing farmers-or its millions of unemployed urban factory workers-choosing instead to continue policies combining gradual reforms with large dollops of public spending. Carefully groomed and selected as they marched up the Communist Party ranks, Hu and his deputies are also unlikely to ease the party's iron grip on power.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949 under Mao Zedong after defeating the Koumintang, or Nationalists, in a civil war that began in the 1920s. Aiming to tighten party control, Mao led several brutal mass-mobilization campaigns that resulted in millions of deaths and politicized nearly every aspect of daily life. Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping emerged as China's paramount leader. Over the next two decades, Deng oversaw China's transformation from a hermetic, agrarian, and often tumultuous Communist society into an authoritarian state with a market-led economy, eager to sell its products abroad and expand its role in global affairs even as it trampled on internationally recognized human rights.

Deng and other leaders signaled their intent to maintain power at all costs with the 1989 massacre of hundreds of student protesters in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Following the crackdown, the party tapped Jiang Zemin, then Shanghai mayor and party boss, to replace the relatively moderate Zhao Ziyang as party secretary-general. Jiang became state president in 1993 and was widely recognized as China's new paramount leader following Deng's death in 1997.

Jiang continued Deng's policies of selling off state firms, encouraging private enterprise, and rolling back China's "iron rice bowl" welfare system. Having cast aside Mao's utopian goals, China's leaders appeared to agree that continued market reforms would be needed in order to boost living standards and stave off broad calls for political reform. They feared, however, that freeing up the economy too fast could increase social hardship in the near term and create a groundswell against the party.

The CCP's sixteenth party congress in November 2002 was carefully stage-managed to project an image of an orderly transfer of power to a younger generation of leaders. Hu became party secretary-general and, along with other new leaders, took control of the powerful, nine-member Politburo Standing Committee. However, Jiang, now 77, apparently solidified his position as leader of China even as Hu and other younger cadres took charge of day-to-day affairs. Jiang remained head of the Central Military Commission—effectively supreme commander of China's 2.5 million-strong armed forces—and stacked the Politburo Standing Committee with several proteges.

At the annual session of China's parliament in March 2003, the final pieces of the leadership shuffle came together. Hu, 61, replaced Jiang as state president, and Wen Jiabao, the party's third-ranking official, took day-to-day charge of the economy by replacing Zhu Rongji as prime minister. Late in the year, the new government appeared set to revise the constitution at the March 2004 legislative session to give greater protection to private property and allow the party to recruit private entrepreneurs.

In addition to planning constitutional reforms, Hu and other leaders took pains to nurture caring images. They promised better schools, more public works for rural Chinese, and efforts to revive the northeast industrial heartland. However, their initial handling of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that broke out in early 2003 was more Communist than compassionate. They initially stonewalled before finally taking steps against the viral outbreak, which killed

349 people before it was contained in June. Chinese authorities, meanwhile, continue to stifle any organized calls for political reform. Since 1998, courts have sentenced more than 30 leaders of a would-be opposition party, the China Democracy Party, to jail terms of up to 13 years.

The privatization of thousands of small- and medium-sized state-owned firms has thrown tens of millions of Chinese out of work in a society that lacks a viable system of pensions, health insurance, and unemployment benefits. These hardships are likely to increase as the government slashes tariffs and takes other steps to open up China's economy to trade and foreign investment to meet its commitments as a World Trade Organization (WTO) member. Analysts suggest that, at least in the short term, China's leaders will try to ease this transition by continuing to stoke the economy through massive, debt-accumulating public spending rather than take tough but painful measures to reform large, money-losing state enterprises or clean up ailing and corrupt state banks.

Meanwhile, in the countryside, home to 70 percent of the population-or roughly 900 million Chinese-farmers recently have staged thousands of protests against high and often arbitrary local government fees and taxes. China's WTO membership could make matters worse for many peasants if cheaper agricultural imports chip away at their incomes. Already, China has wide income gaps between its rural areas and cities and between its hinterland and booming coastal areas.

Rural China's woes have contributed to a "floating population," officially tallied at 80 to 130 million people, who have left their rural homes in search of work in cities. Urbanization is transforming this historically agricultural society by providing many rural migrants with modest but unprecedented opportunities, though their shaky legal status often makes migrants vulnerable to abuse by police and employers.

Corruption, meanwhile, has flourished in a country that has a rapidly expanding economy but has neither independent courts, regulators, and investigative agencies nor a free press to probe and punish wrongdoing. Chinese authorities have responded instead with brute force, in recent years executing hundreds, possibly thousands, of people for corruption.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Chinese citizens do not have the power to change their government democratically. Ordinary Chinese enjoy few basic rights, opposition parties are illegal, Chinese jails hold thousands of political prisoners, torture is widespread in prisons and detention centers, and the judiciary is used as a tool of political control. The CCP Politburo Standing Committee makes nearly all key political decisions and sets governmental policy. Party cadres hold almost all top national and local governmental, police, and military posts.

China's only real experiment with democracy has been at the local level, mainly with elections for village committees that cannot levy taxes and hold few executive powers. While party-backed candidates have lost some elections, "in general, the CCP dominates the local electoral process," and roughly 60 percent of those elected to the village committees are party members, according to the U.S. State Department's 2002 human rights report, released in March 2003. Elections in some areas have also been held for township governors, township and county-level people's congresses, local party secretaries, and the leadership of urban neighborhood committees, which help officials maintain order and provide services.

Press freedom is severely limited, and Chinese editors and reporters work under tight constraints. The government bars the media from advocating political reform, criticizing Beijing's domestic and foreign policies, reporting financial data that the government has not released, or covering internal party politics or the inner workings of the government. At the same time, officials often allow journalists to report on corruption and other ills that the party itself seeks to alleviate. All articles in private publications must be vetted by the government before publication.

As of May, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Chinese jails held 38 journalists, 15 of them for publishing or distributing information online. Other journalists have been harassed, detained, threatened, or dismissed from their jobs over their reporting. Officials also recently suspended or shut down some liberal magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses.

The government promotes use of the Internet, which it believes to be critical to China's economic development, but regulates access, monitors use, and restricts and regulates content. Amnesty International said in October that it knew of more than 40 Chinese who were detained or jailed for Internet-related offenses.

They included students, political dissidents, and Falun Gong practitioners. Some 59 million Chinese use the Internet, a government-funded group reported in 2002, and the number is growing rapidly.

Chinese face severe restrictions on religious practice. The government forces religious groups to submit to the tight control of state-sponsored bodies and cracks down on religious leaders and ordinary worshippers who reject this authority. For each of the five religions recognized by the government, the respective "patriotic association" appoints clergy and controls clerical education; monitors religious funding, membership, and activities; and controls publication and distribution of religious books and other materials. Beijing bars the Roman Catholic "patriotic association" and its member churches from recognizing the Vatican's authority in matters including the ordination of bishops. The five recognized religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Buddhism claims the most adherents.

The extent to which congregations must actually submit to these regulations varies by region. In many areas, unregistered Protestant and Catholic congregations-particularly those that are small and unobtrusive-worship freely. Elsewhere, however, zealous local officials sometimes break up underground services. They also at times fine, harass, detain, interrogate, beat, and torture underground church leaders and ordinary worshippers and raid, close, or demolish underground churches, mosques, temples, and seminaries, according to the U.S. State Department report and other sources.

In Xinjiang, officials limit the building of new mosques, keep tabs on mosques and their leaders, and restrict Islamic publishing and education. Officials recently have also shut down some Xinjiang mosques, burned some Uighur books and journals, and restricted the use of the Uighur language.

Many thousands of Falun Gong practitioners remain behind bars in China, with most apparently held without trial in "re-education through labor" camps. Several hundred Falun Gong adherents reportedly have died in detention because of torture, abuse, and neglect since Beijing's crackdown on the group began in 1999. "Anti-cult" laws developed to crush the Falun Gong, which combines qigong (a traditional martial art) with meditation, have also been used to sentence members of at least 16 other religious groups to long jail terms, the New York-based Human Rights Watch reported in 2002. Authorities at times also crack down on folk religions and unorthodox religious sects. Academic freedom is restricted by ideological controls on what can be taught and discussed at universities.

Workers, farmers, and others have held thousands of public protests in recent years over labor issues and wrongdoing by local officials. Chinese factory workers routinely take to the streets to protest hardships associated with economic restructuring. In spring 2002, tens of thousands of workers demonstrated in Liaoyang and other northeastern rustbelt cities over mass layoffs and low or unpaid wages, pensions, and severance pay. While the government often tolerates these types of protests as an outlet for pent-up grievances, security forces have also forcibly broken up many demonstrations, particularly those with overt political and social messages or where protestors became unruly.

China has hundreds of thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). All work in areas that, at least on the surface, do not challenge the government's authority, such as the environment and social welfare. Once registered, NGOs must report regularly to specific government departments.

Workers lack vigorous, independent unions, and enforcement of labor laws is poor. All unions must belong to the state-controlled All China Federation of Trade Unions, and several independent labor activists have been jailed for their advocacy efforts. Private factories often arbitrarily dismiss employees, pay workers below minimum wages, and force them to work overtime, sometimes without extra pay. Moreover, factory and coal mining accidents kill thousands of Chinese workers each year. Though workers lack the legal right to strike, officials frequently allow workers to strike or demonstrate over layoffs; dangerous working conditions; or unpaid wages, benefits, or unemployment stipends.

The government controls the judiciary. The CCP directs verdicts and sentences, particularly in politically sensitive cases, according to the U.S. State Department. Despite some recent criminal procedure reforms, trials are often closed and reportedly only one in seven criminal defendants has counsel. Officials often subject suspects to "severe psychological pressure" to confess, and coerced confessions are frequently admitted as evidence. Police frequently conduct searches without warrants and at times monitor telephone conversations and other personal communications to use as evidence against suspected dissidents.

Many political and ordinary criminal detainees lack trials altogether, detained instead by bureaucratic fiat in "re-education through labor" camps. These camps held as many as 310,000 detainees as of early 2001, and the number has likely grown since then, Amnesty International said in October. In a positive development, Chinese officials said in 2003 that they were abolishing another form of administrative detention called "custody and repatriation." This had



been used to detain some one million Chinese each year, many of them migrant workers. By law, at least, migrant workers now can no longer be detained and deported from cities for failing to carry proper papers.

In another gain for the rule of law, ordinary Chinese increasingly are able to bring suits against local governments and are occasionally winning damage awards. At the same time, property rights remain rudimentary. Many Chinese are forcibly relocated from their homes each year to make way for commercial development, often for meager compensation.

China executes thousands of people each year, more than all other countries combined, according to Amnesty International. Many are executed immediately after summary trials, raising serious questions about the fairness of their convictions and sentencing. As part of Beijing's national "Strike Hard" campaign against crime that began in 2001, many Chinese have been executed for nonviolent offenses such as corruption, pimping, "hooliganism," or the theft of rice or farm animals.

Moreover, "torture and ill-treatment continue to be widespread and [are] reported in many state institutions as well as in workplaces and homes," Amnesty International said in June. Courts recently have sentenced some officials convicted of torture to heavy jail terms, although most perpetrators go unpunished. Deaths of criminal suspects in custody because of torture continue to be reported.

By most accounts, Chinese prisons, re-education camps, and detention centers hold thousands of political prisoners, although the exact number is unknown. Conditions in Chinese prisons and labor camps for both political prisoners and common criminals generally are "harsh and frequently degrading," according to the U.S. State Department report. The U.S.-based rights activist Harry Wu and others have reported that forced labor is used widely in Chinese jails and labor camps.

Muslims and other minorities in China face discrimination in mainstream society in access to jobs and other areas, and the majority Han Chinese have reaped an outsized share of benefits from government programs and economic growth despite government initiatives to improve minority living standards. China's 55 ethnic minorities make up slightly less than 9 percent of the population, according to official 1995 figures. The government has tried to crush pro-independence movements among the seven million ethnic Uighurs and other, smaller, Turkic-speaking Muslim groups in China's northwestern Xinjiang province. Since the early 1990s, officials have detained "tens of thousands" of Uighurs and other

Muslims in Xinjiang, executing several for alleged separatist activities, the human rights group Amnesty International said in 2002. The government has used the U.S.-led campaign against terrorism to link even peaceful Uighur advocacy of independence to terrorism and to justify its repression of Uighur culture and religion. Authorities also have forcibly repatriated thousands of North Koreans in recent years, putting them at risk of execution or other severe punishment.

The economic reforms launched in the late 1970s have freed millions of Chinese from party control of their day-to-day lives. Increasingly, ordinary Chinese are becoming homeowners as housing once owned by government departments or state-owned enterprises is partially or wholly privatized. The national household registration and identification card system is eroding, meaning that Chinese are increasingly free to move around the country to live and work. Many now work for private firms, which account for about 30 percent of China's economic output. For those who still work for the state, the government took steps in 2003 to scale back the powers of the danwei-company-based, government-linked work units for state employees. Though the danwei still control certain aspects of daily life for state workers, the changes allow Chinese to marry, divorce, and sell their state-assigned housing without their employers' permission. The economic reforms have also lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of absolute poverty, although some 100 to 150 million still live in poverty, according to the World Bank.

Chinese women reportedly face serious discrimination in education and employment and are far likelier than men to be laid off when state firms are slimmed down or privatized. Despite government crackdowns, trafficking in women and children for marriage, to provide sons, and for prostitution remains a serious problem.

Chinese couples cannot freely choose how many children to have. In the name of stabilizing the country's population, a one-child policy is applied fairly strictly in the cities, though less so in the countryside. While urban couples generally are denied permission to have a second child, rural couples usually may have a second child if their first is a girl. Couples who have an unapproved child can be assessed stiff fines, fired from jobs, demoted or barred from promotion, denied access to social services, forced to pay higher tuition costs when the child goes to school, and occasionally have property destroyed. The use of forced abortions or sterilizations by local officials trying to keep within county birth quotas is believed to occur in occasional, isolated cases, though less frequently than in the past.

# Cuba

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

In the midst of growing popular discontent with the Cuban government, the authorities stepped up repression in 2003 against dissidents calling for free speech and other pro-democracy reforms. Dozens of political activists and independent journalists were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in April, while three men were executed following a failed attempt to flee to the United States. Meanwhile, Fidel Castro continued efforts to persuade the United States to end its four-decades-old embargo.

Cuba achieved independence from Spain in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War. The Republic of Cuba was established in 1902, but remained under U.S. tutelage due to the Platt Amendment until 1934. In 1959, Castro's July 26th Movement—named after an earlier, failed insurrection—overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who had ruled for 18 of the previous 25 years.

Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of some \$5 billion in annual Soviet subsidies, Castro has sought Western foreign investment. The legalization of the U.S. dollar since 1993 has heightened social tensions, as the minority with access to dollars from abroad or through the tourist industry has emerged as a new moneyed class, and the majority without access has become increasingly desperate.

Under Castro, cycles of repression have ebbed and flowed depending on the regime's need to keep at bay the social forces set into motion by his severe post-Cold War economic reforms. By mid-June 1998, after the visit of Pope John

Paul II five months earlier, the number of dissidents confirmed to be imprisoned had dropped nearly 400 percent. In February 1999, the government introduced tough legislation against sedition, with a maximum prison sentence of 20 years. It stipulated penalties for unauthorized contacts with the United States and the import or supply of "subversive" materials, including texts on democracy, by news agencies and journalists.

U.S.-Cuban relations took some unexpected turns in 2000. The story of the child shipwreck survivor Elian Gonzalez, who was ordered to be returned to his father in Cuba after a seven-month legal battle involving emigre relatives in Florida, received unprecedented media coverage. In response to pressure from U.S. farmers and businessmen who pushed for a relaxation of economic sanctions against the island, the United States eased the 38-year-old embargo on food and medicine to Cuba in October.

In June 2001, Castro, who was then 74, collapsed at a long outdoor rally near Havana. The incident centered attention on what might happen once the world's longest-ruling dictator passes from the scene. In November, Hurricane Michelle, the most powerful tropical storm to hit Cuba in a half-century, left a low death toll but a trail of physical destruction, devastating Cuban crops. In the wake of the storm, the U.S. permitted the first direct food trade with Cuba since the beginning of the embargo in 1962. The renewal of food sales in the wake of Michelle sparked further debate between farmers and others in the United States who want the embargo lifted and Cuban exile groups, and some democracy activists who demand even tougher sanctions.

In 2002, the Varela Project, a referendum initiative seeking broad changes in the four-decades-old socialist system, achieved significant support domestically. Its leader, Oswaldo Paya, was showered with international recognition. In May, project organizers submitted more than 11,000 signatures to the National Assembly demanding that a referendum be held in which Cubans could vote for fundamental reforms such as freedom of expression, the right to own private businesses, and electoral reform. A June visit by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter also added status and visibility to the protest movement. After Carter mentioned the project on Cuban television that month, the regime held its own "referendum" in which 8.2 million people supposedly declared the socialist system to be "untouchable." In October, more than 300 dissident organizations joined together as the Assembly to Promote Civil Society in preparation for a post-Fidel Castro Cuba. Composed of 321 dissident organizations ranging from human rights groups and independent libraries to labor unions and the

independent press, the civil society assembly said it would prepare for a post-Castro transition rather than seek reforms from the regime. Meanwhile, Castro faced serious popular discontent, particularly because of the failing sugar industry. In June 2002, the government closed 71 of Cuba's 156 sugar mills.

Although aging Cuban strongman Fidel Castro suffered another fainting spell on May 25, 2003, in Buenos Aires as he exited an inauguration event in Buenos Aires for Argentina's new president, there were few palpable signs during the year that his regime was any closer to collapsing, even though recovery from a 1990s depression faltered and discontent increased. In the midst of the worst rights crackdown in a decade, Cuba was re-elected to a seat on the UN Commission on Human Rights. Castro also continued his attempts to whet the appetites of U.S. farm state congressional delegations and enlist their help to break the four-decades-old embargo by diverting \$250 million from paying old debts to buy American agricultural products. He appeared to shrug off the decision by the European Union to review its policies toward Cuba because of human rights concerns. In June, the official newspaper *Granma* reported that one of Cuba's most visible black leaders, Esteban Lazo, had been promoted to the post of chief ideologist of the Cuban Communist Party.

In April, speedy one-day sham trials resulted in prison terms ranging from 6 to 28 years for 75 independent journalists, opposition party leaders, and human rights activists rounded up the previous month. After summary trials, the government also sent three men who hijacked a ferry in a failed effort to reach the United States to the firing squad, ending a three-year de facto moratorium on executions. In July, 12 Cubans attempted to sail a 1951 Chevy truck to freedom across the 90-mile Florida Straits. Just six months after the regime's heavy-handed crackdown on dissenters, Paya delivered more than 14,000 signatures to the National Assembly demanding a referendum for sweeping political changes.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Cubans cannot change their government through democratic means. Castro dominates the political system, having transformed the country into a one-party state with the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) controlling all governmental entities from the national to the local level. Communist structures were institutionalized by the 1976 constitution installed at the first congress of the PCC. The constitution provides for the national assembly, which designates the

Council of State. It is that body which in turn appoints the Council of Ministers in consultation with its president, who serves as head of state and chief of government. However, Castro is responsible for every appointment and controls every lever of power in Cuba in his various roles as president of the Council of Ministers, chairman of the Council of State, commander in chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), and first secretary of the PCC.

In October 2002, some eight million Cubans voted in tightly controlled municipal elections. On January 19, 2003, an election was held for the Cuban National Assembly, with just 609 candidates—all supported by the regime—vying for 609 seats. All political organizing outside the PCC is illegal. Political dissent, spoken or written, is a punishable offense, and those so punished frequently receive years of imprisonment for seemingly minor infractions.

The press in Cuba is the object of a targeted campaign of intimidation by the government. Independent journalists, particularly those associated with five small news agencies established outside state control, have been subjected to continued repression, including jail terms at hard labor and assaults by state security agents while in prison. Foreign news agencies must hire local reporters only through government offices, which limits employment opportunities for independent journalists. Twenty-eight journalists were among those arrested in April 2003.

In 1991, Roman Catholics and other believers were granted permission to join the Communist Party, and the constitutional reference to official atheism was dropped the following year. However, in October 2002, the U.S. State Department issued a report saying that Cuba was one of six countries that engaged in widespread repression of religion. The report said that security agents frequently spy on worshippers, the government continues to block construction of new churches, the number of new foreign priests is limited, and most new denominations are refused recognition. In a positive development, the regime now tolerates the Baha'i faith.

Cuban state security forces raided 22 independent libraries and sent 10 librarians to jail with terms of up to 26 years.

In Cuba, the executive branch controls the judiciary. The 1976 constitution concentrates power in the hands of one individual—Castro, president of the Council of State. In practice, the council serves as a de facto judiciary and controls both the courts and the judicial process as a whole. In 1999, the Cuban government showed some willingness to enhance anti-narcotics cooperation with the United States.

There are some 320 prisoners of conscience in Cuba, most held in cells with common criminals and many convicted on vague charges such as "disseminating enemy propaganda" or "dangerousness." Members of groups that exist apart from the state are labeled "counterrevolutionary criminals" and are subject to systematic repression, including arrest, beating while in custody, confiscation, and intimidation by uniformed or plainclothes state security agents. Of the 75 dissidents—considered by Amnesty International to be "prisoners of conscience"—who faced charges in April, not a single one was acquitted.

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

Freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence, education, and job are severely restricted. Attempting to leave the island without permission is a punishable offense. In the post-Soviet era, the rights of Cubans to own private property and to participate in joint ventures with foreigners have been recognized by law. Non-Cuban businesses have also been allowed. In practice, there are few rights for those who do not belong to the PCC. Party membership is still required for good jobs, serviceable housing, and real access to social services, including medical care and educational opportunities.

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





# Equatorial Guinea

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	6
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Despite the release in 2003 of a number of political detainees, more than two dozen others reportedly remained in custody during the year. Meanwhile, three banned opposition parties announced that they were forming a government in exile in Spain. Revenues from Equatorial Guinea's large oil sector continued to produce few benefits for the lives of most of the country's citizens.

Equatorial Guinea achieved independence in 1968 following 190 years of Spanish rule. It has since been one of the world's most tightly closed and repressive societies. President Obiang seized power in 1979 by deposing and murdering his uncle, Francisco Macias Nguema. Demands from donor countries for democratic reforms prompted Obiang to proclaim a new "era of pluralism" in January 1992. Political parties were legalized and multiparty elections announced, but in practice Obiang and his clique wield all power.

Following controversial elections in December 2002 in which President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo won a third term with nearly 100 percent of the vote, the administration of Equatorial Guinea announced the formation of a "government of national unity" that brought members of eight opposition parties into the cabinet. All eight parties are considered close to the ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea. The country's main opposition, the Convergence for Social Democracy party, declined to participate. Its leaders, who had boycotted the December elections, viewed the offer as a ploy to sideline the opposition's effectiveness. Despite these democratic overtures, real power remains in the hands of the president. Key cabinet positions are held by presidential relatives and loyalists.

The UN Human Rights Commission terminated the mandate of the special investigator for Equatorial Guinea in April 2002, saying it aimed instead to encourage the government to implement a national human rights action plan. No resolutions were tabled against the country in 2003, a course of action that drew complaints from international rights groups.

In August 2003, the government released 18 political detainees charged with trying to overthrow the government, but opposition leaders and human rights activists say more than 30 others remain in custody. The detentions resulted from a mass trial in May and June 2002 in which 68 people were convicted for plotting a coup against the government. The trial was condemned by human rights groups, and some defendants alleged that their statements were exacted under torture during incommunicado detention. Opposition figurehead Placido Miko Abogo of the Convergence for Social Democracy party was one of those given amnesty after he had served 11 months of a 14-year sentence. However, under the terms of the pardon, the government may re-arrest him at any time in the next 10 years.

Asserting the difficulty of operating within the country, in September 2003, three banned opposition parties—the Progress Party (PP), the Popular Action of Equatorial Guinea (APGE), and the Liberal Party (PL)—announced the formation of a government in exile in Spain.

Equatorial Guinea is the continent's third-largest oil producer and boasts one of the highest figures for per capita gross domestic product in Africa. The expanding oil sector has led to more jobs, but the lives of most people have yet to change. U.S. oil companies have invested at least \$5 billion in Equatorial Guinea since the mid-1990s. In a move that highlights the government's lack of transparency, President Obiang has declared the disposition of the country's oil revenues a "state secret."

The government continued to work with the World Bank in 2003 after a decade of rocky relations. The U.S. plan to reopen its embassy in the capital, Malabo, following an eight-year hiatus underlines the region's growing importance to American oil security. The Bank of Central African States estimates growth in 2003 at an impressive 14 percent, almost entirely due to soaring oil revenues.

**Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Equatorial Guinea's citizens are unable to change their government through peaceful, democratic means. Recent presidential and parliamentary elections have not been credible. The four main opposition challengers withdrew from the December 2002 poll, citing irregularities. The candidates said soldiers, police, and electoral officials were present at polling stations and were opening ballot envelopes after votes were cast. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo was declared the winner of his third 7-year term with 99.5 percent of the vote. The 1996 presidential election was neither free nor fair and was marred by official intimidation, a near total boycott by the political opposition, and very low voter turnout.

The 1999 parliamentary elections were also tainted by intimidation and fraud and were neither free nor fair. Many opposition candidates were arrested or confined to their villages prior to the polls. The ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) won 75 of 80 seats. In September 2003, the government announced that parliament would be expanded from 80 to 100 seats in elections scheduled for early 2004, although this is unlikely to significantly weaken the ruling party's dominance.

President Obiang wields broad decree-making powers and effectively bars public participation in the policy-making process. Most opposition parties are linked with the ruling party, and several remain officially banned. By moving the presidential election up two months and jailing political opponents, Obiang could be hoping to avoid controversy, such as the claims of fraud that followed previous elections.

Press freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, but the government restricts those rights in practice. Nearly all print and broadcast media are state run and tightly controlled. The 1992 press law authorizes government censorship of all publications. Mild criticism of infrastructure and public institutions is allowed, but nothing disparaging about the president or security forces is tolerated. Publications that irk the government are banned from the newsstands without explanation.

Foreign publications have become more widely available in recent years. The short wave programs of Radio France Internationale and Radio Exterior (the international short wave service from Spain) can be heard. A few small independent newspapers publish occasionally, but they exercise self-censorship, and all journalists must be registered. Journalists, political leaders, and association heads

have complained of increasing difficulties in accessing the Internet. They said illegal wiretapping had increased and that the country's sole Internet service provider allegedly monitors e-mail traffic closely.

About 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Freedom of individual religious practice is generally respected, although President Obiang has warned the clergy against interfering in political affairs. Monopoly political power by the president's Mongomo clan of the majority Fang ethnic group persists. Differences between the Fang and the Bubi are a major source of political tension that often has erupted into violence. Fang vigilante groups have been allowed to abuse Bubi citizens with impunity. The government does not restrict academic freedom.

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

Steps have been taken to reform the labor sector. The country's first labor union, the Small Farmers Syndicate, received legal recognition in 2000 and is independent. The government has ratified all International Labor Organization conventions. There are many legal steps required prior to collective bargaining.

The judiciary is not independent, and laws on search and seizure—as well as detention—are routinely ignored by security forces, which act with impunity. Civil cases rarely go to trial. A military tribunal handles cases tied to national security. Unlawful arrests remain commonplace. Prison conditions are extremely harsh, and abuse combined with poor medical care has led to several deaths.

Constitutional and legal protections of equality for women are largely ignored. Traditional practices discriminate against women, and few have educational opportunities or participate in the formal (business) economy or government. Violence against women is reportedly widespread. There is no children's rights policy.

# Eritrea

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	6
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

The government of President Isaias Afwerki continued its repressive policy of allowing no opposition or independent organizations in the political or civil sphere. A group of political dissidents and journalists imprisoned in 2001 remain in jail despite widespread international calls for their release. In 2003, the government also cracked down on various religious groups.

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

War with Ethiopia broke out in 1998. In May 2000, an Ethiopian military offensive succeeded in making significant territorial gains. Eritrea signed a truce with Ethiopia in June 2000 and a peace treaty in December 2000. The agreement provided for a UN-led buffer force to be installed along the Eritrean side of the contested border and further negotiations to determine the final boundary line. The war had dominated the country's political and economic agenda and reflected deeper issues of nationalism and political mobilization by a government that has long used the threat of real or perceived enemies to generate popular support and unity.

In May 2001, a dissident group of 15 senior ruling-party members publicly criticized President Isaias and called for "the rule of law and for justice, through peaceful and legal ways and means." Eleven members of this group were arrested in September 2001, allegedly for treason. Three members who were out of the country at the time escaped arrest and one withdrew his support for the group. The small independent media sector was also shut down, and 18 journalists were imprisoned. An increasingly unpopular policy of obligatory national service-with no conscientious objector clause-for extended and open-ended periods of time has also heightened tension. Critics call it "forced labor."

In addition to the war with Ethiopia, since 1993, Eritrea has engaged in hostilities with Sudan and Yemen and has also had strained relations with Djibouti. Eritrea's proclivity to settle disputes by the force of arms and the continued tight government control over the country's political life have dashed hopes raised by President Isaias's membership in a group of "new African leaders," who promised more open governance and a break with Africa's recent tradition of autocratic rule.

Eritrea's political culture places priority on group interests over those of the individual. This view has been forged in part by years of struggle against outside occupiers and austere attachment to Marxist principles. Eritrea's aggressive foreign policy has contributed significantly to regional instability and to a sense of victimization among Eritreans, which in turn affords a rationale for continued strong central government control.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Eritreans have never had the opportunity to choose their leaders through open, democratic elections. Created in February 1994 as a successor to the EPLF, the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) maintains a quasi-complete dominance over the country's political and economic life that is unlikely to change in the short- or medium-term future. No other political movements are permitted. Instead of moving towards creating a framework for a democratic political system, since the end of the war with Ethiopia, the PFDJ has taken significant steps backwards. The 2001 crackdown against those calling for greater political pluralism has chilled the already tightly controlled political atmosphere. National elections scheduled for December 2001 have been postponed indefinitely.

In 1994, a 50-member Constitutional Commission was established. In 1997, a new constitution authorizing "conditional" political pluralism with provisions for a multiparty system was adopted. The constitution provides for the election of the president from among the members of the National Assembly by a vote of the majority of its members.

In 2000, the National Assembly determined that the first elections would be held in December 2001 and appointed a committee that issued draft regulations governing political parties. These draft regulations have not been enacted, and independent political parties authorized by the constitution do not exist. Polls were supposed to have been held in 1998, but they were postponed indefinitely following the outbreak of hostilities with Ethiopia.

The new constitution's guarantees of civil and political liberties remain unrealized, as pluralistic media and rights to political organization continue to be absent. Amnesty International estimates the number of arrests of government critics at more than 300. Prison monitors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, have been denied access to the detainees.

Government control over all broadcasting and pressures against the independent print media have constrained public debate. The 1996 Press Law allows only qualified freedom of expression, subject to the official interpretation of "the objective reality of Eritrea." There is limited access to the Internet.

In its September 2001 crackdown, the government banned all privately owned newspapers while claiming that a parliamentary committee would examine conditions under which they would be permitted to re-open. According to Amnesty International, the newspapers were accused of contravening the 1996 Press Law, but their alleged offenses were not specified. In the days following the clampdown, the police in Asmara arrested 10 leading journalists. They had protested in writing to the minister of information concerning the arrest of members of the Group of 15 and the closure of the newspapers. Other journalists were arrested in 2002. Some of them began a hunger strike in April 2002 and were then transferred from prison to unknown places of detention. This action and the absence of nongovernmental human rights organizations have had a dissuasive effect on the development of other civil society groups.

According to independent groups such as Human Rights Watch, persecution of certain religious groups is increasing. Evangelical church groups are banned. In early 2003, several hundred members of a dozen Christian minority churches were arrested without any reason given, tortured, and detained without charge

for several weeks. A number of churches were closed down in May 2002 and ordered to register and submit details of members and any foreign funding, which most denied receiving. Dozens of Muslims have also been detained incommunicado since 1995 on suspicion of links with armed Islamist opposition groups.

Academic freedom is constrained, and high school students are required to spend their 12th grade year at a high school based at a military camp in Sawa, a city in the far western part of the country near the Ethiopian border.

The government has maintained a hostile attitude towards civil society and has refused international assistance designed to support the development of pluralism in society. The government controls most elements of civil life, either directly or through affiliated organizations. The civil service, the military, the police, and other essential services have some restrictions on their freedom to form unions. In addition, groups of 20 or more persons seeking to form a union require special approval from the Ministry of Labor.

A judiciary was formed by decree in 1993 and has yet to adopt positions that are significantly at variance with government perspectives. A low level of training and resources limits the courts' efficiency. Constitutional guarantees are often ignored in cases relating to state security. Arbitrary arrest and detention are problems. The provision of speedy trials is limited by a lack of trained personnel, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure. The use of a special court system limits due process.

Official government policy is supportive of free enterprise, and citizens generally have the freedom to choose their employment, establish private businesses, and function relatively free of government harassment. Until recently, at least, government officials have enjoyed a reputation for relative probity.

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



# Laos

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	6
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

With its command economy, Brezhnev-era politics, and sporadic political violence, Laos is likely to remain among the world's poorest and least developed countries for years to come. The Communist ruling party in 2003 continued to jail dissidents and showed few signs of speeding the pace of limited economic reforms introduced nearly two decades ago. Meanwhile, a string of attacks on buses in remote areas of this Southeast Asian nation killed at least two dozen people, while stepped-up attacks by Laotian forces against antigovernment rebels in the rugged north reportedly led to scores of civilian deaths.

Landlocked, mountainous Laos won independence in 1953 after being a French protectorate for six decades and occupied by the Japanese during World War II. Backed by Vietnam's Viet Minh rebels, Communist Pathet Lao (Land of Lao) guerrillas quickly tried to topple the royalist government in Vientiane. Following several years of political turmoil, Communist, royalist, and so-called neutralist forces in 1960 began waging a three-way civil war.

Amid continued internal fighting, Laos was drawn into the Vietnam War in 1964, when the United States began bombing North Vietnamese forces operating inside Laos. The Pathet Lao seized power in 1975 shortly after the Communist victory in neighboring Vietnam. The guerrillas set up a one-party Communist state under Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane's Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). By the mid-1980s, the Laotian economy was in shambles, reeling from the LPRP's central planning and tight political control and the legacy of civil war. In response, the LPRP in 1986 began freeing prices,

encouraging foreign investment, and privatizing farms and some state-owned firms. Partially unshackled, the economy grew by 7 percent a year, on average, from 1988 to 1996.

At the same time, the LPRP continued to reject calls for political reforms, jailing two officials in 1990 who called for multiparty elections. Meanwhile, Kaysone's death in 1992 ushered in a new strongman to lead the country. Veteran revolutionary Khamtay Siphandone, now 79, took the reigns of the all-powerful LPRP and later became state president.

Besides rejecting political change, Khamtay and other leaders also have been unwilling to pursue deeper economic reforms, including privatizing the large, creaking state firms that dominate the economy. They apparently fear that reducing the party's control over the economy could undermine its tight grip on power by giving ordinary Laotians more control over their daily lives.

Diplomats in Vientiane blamed the bus attacks in 2003 on ethnic Hmong rebels, although no group claimed responsibility and little hard evidence linked the insurgents to the attacks. The Hmong rebels are the remnants of an army that was backed by the U.S. CIA during the Vietnam War to fight Communist forces. The rebels are divided and poorly equipped, and experts caution that claims of heavy fighting in 2003 by a U.S.-based Hmong exile group were very likely exaggerated.

Late in the year, a group of several hundred rebels and their families remained surrounded by Laotian forces in Khouang Province, northeast of Vientiane, a situation first reported by Time Asia in May. The human rights group Amnesty International said in October that the holed-up rebels were unable to obtain food and that it had received reports of scores of civilian deaths from conflict-related injuries and starvation.

Laos is Southeast Asia's least developed country and depends on foreign aid and loans. Around four-fifths of Laotians are subsistence farmers, most of whom live on less than \$2 per day. Trade, tourism, and sales of hydroelectric power to neighboring Thailand are key sources of foreign revenue. The economy has yet to recover from the regional financial crisis that began in 1997, when the country's mainly Thai foreign investors pulled out in droves; most have not returned.

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## Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Laotians cannot change their government through elections and are denied most basic rights. The 1991 constitution makes the ruling LPRP the sole legal political party and gives it a leading role at all levels of government. The LPRP vets all candidates for election to the rubber-stamp National Assembly; elections are held once every five years. At the last election, in 2002, all but one of the 166 candidates for the assembly's 109 seats were LPRP cadres.

Laotian media are state controlled and parrot the party line. The law authorizes jail terms for journalists who step out of line and criminalizes most criticism of the state or LPRP. Two European journalists and their American interpreter, arrested in June while covering the insurgency, were released in July after being sentenced to 15-year prison terms for the killing of a village guard. Two Hmong assistants arrested with them remain jailed under long sentences. The government controls all domestic Internet servers, and authorities at times block access to Web sites that they consider pornographic or that are critical of the government.

Religious freedom is tightly restricted. Dozens of Christians recently have been detained on religious grounds, some for months, and several have been jailed for proselytizing or other peaceful religious activities. A campaign launched in some provinces in 1999 to shut churches and force Christians to renounce their faith appears largely over, though there continue to be sporadic reports of harassment of worshippers in those provinces. Moreover, local officials in some parts of Laos prevent Christians from celebrating major religious holidays, and some minority religious groups reportedly are unable to register new congregations or obtain permission to build new places of worship, according to the U.S. State Department's human rights report for 2002, released in March 2003. In this predominantly Buddhist society, the LPRP controls training for the Buddhist clergy and oversees temples and other religious sites. Recently, however, officials have permitted some Buddhist temples to receive foreign support, expand the training of monks, and emphasize traditional teachings rather than state doctrine.

Academic freedom is highly restricted. University professors generally cannot teach or write about democratization, human rights, and other politically sensitive topics.

Laos has some nongovernmental welfare and professional groups, but they are prohibited from having political agendas and are subjected to strict state control. Laotian trade unions have little influence, partly because they are state controlled but also because few Laotians are wage-earning workers. All unions must belong

to the official Federation of Lao Trade Unions, and workers lack the right to bargain collectively. Strikes are not expressly prohibited, but workers rarely stage walkouts. Most wage earners work for the government, although privatization is moving more workers into the private sector.

Laos's party-controlled courts do not provide fair trials or allow citizens to redress government rights abuses and other grievances. "The judiciary was subject to executive, legislative, and LPRP influence, was corrupt, and did not ensure citizens due process," according to the U.S. State Department report. The report noted, however, that officials appear to be easing somewhat their control of the courts. Security forces often illegally detain suspects, and some Laotians have spent more than a decade in jail without trial, according to a 2002 Amnesty International report. Prisoners are routinely tortured and receive inadequate food and health care. In addition, some must bribe jail officials to obtain their freedom once a court has ordered their release. Authorities continue to brook little dissent from ordinary Laotians. Laotian jails hold hundreds of short- and long-term political detainees, according to the U.S. State Department report. They also hold at least nine political prisoners who have been formally charged and tried.

Both Laotian forces and Hmong rebels reportedly have committed some killings and other human rights abuses related to the Hmong insurgency. The Hmong—one of the largest of several upcountry hill tribes in Laos—and other ethnic minorities face some discrimination in mainstream society and have little say in government decisions on how land is used and natural resources are allocated.

Ordinary Laotians enjoy somewhat greater freedom in their daily lives than they did in the years following the Communist takeover. Many now work for themselves or private employers rather than for tightly monitored state firms. Moreover, the government has scaled back its surveillance of the population, although intelligence agencies still keep tabs on some Laotians, and officials at times conduct searches without warrants.

Many Laotian women hold key civil service and private sector jobs, though relatively few are in the top ranks of government. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Laotian women and girls, mainly highland ethnic minorities, are trafficked each year for prostitution, mostly to Thailand.

# Libya

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Libya made significant progress in its bid to break out from international isolation with the lifting of UN sanctions in September 2003. Despite limited cooperation from Libya on the war against terrorism, the U.S. government opted to maintain its unilateral sanctions against Libya, citing concerns with Libya's possible development of weapons of mass destruction, its lingering ties to terrorism, and its abysmal human rights record. In June, Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi appointed a new prime minister and announced broad economic reforms.

Libyan independence dates to 1951, when King Idris assumed power following a UN resolution establishing Libya as an independent and sovereign state. French and British forces had occupied Libya during World War II. Prior to the Allied occupation, Libya had been an Italian colony since an invasion in 1912. In the previous centuries, Libya was under Ottoman rule.

In 1969, Colonel Qadhafi seized power at the age of 25 in a military coup that deposed the staunchly pro-West King Idris. Qadhafi railed against Western control of Libya's oil fields and the presence of foreign military bases in Libya. He ushered in a highly personalized style of rule that combines elements of pan-Arabism with Islamic ideals. Qadhafi purported to find a "third way" that rejects both Western-style democracy and communism.

In the years following Qadhafi's rise to power, Libya gained international pariah status with its sponsorship of various acts of terrorism, as well as its support of insurgencies throughout sub-Saharan Africa. During the 1980s, Libyan

meddling in the war in neighboring Chad proved to be a costly military failure. Libyan involvement in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland led the United Nations to impose sanctions on Libya in 1992. The sanctions included embargoes on air traffic and the import of arms and oil production equipment. The United States has maintained its own sanctions against Libya since 1981, citing Libyan sponsorship of terrorism.

Beginning in 1999, Qadhafi embarked on a strategy aimed at ending Libya's international isolation. He surrendered two Libyan nationals suspected in the Pan Am 103 bombing and agreed to compensate families of victims of the 1989 bombing of a French airliner over Niger. The Libyan government also accepted responsibility for the 1984 death of British police officer Yvonne Fletcher, killed by shots fired from the Libyan embassy in London. Qadhafi also expelled members of the Palestinian terrorist organization headed by Abu Nidal.

In response to Libya's surrendering of two terrorism suspects, the United Nations opted to suspend sanctions against Libya in 1999, although the permanent lifting of sanctions was withheld pending Libya's unequivocal renunciation of terrorism. The United States eased some of its restrictions by allowing for the limited sale of food and medicines to Libya, but maintained its travel ban as well as other restrictions. Britain opted to resume diplomatic ties with Libya, reopening its embassy in Tripoli in March 2001. The European Union followed suit by lifting sanctions, but maintains an arms embargo.

The two terrorism suspects went on trial in March 2000 at the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands, but under Scottish law. One of the suspects was found guilty of murder in January 2001 and sentenced to life imprisonment, while the other suspect was acquitted of all charges and freed. Following the trial, the United States and Britain repeated demands that Libya formally accept responsibility for the bombing, compensate the victims' families, and renounce terrorism.

In August 2003, the Libyan government struck a deal with the families of the Pan Am 103 bombing victims, offering to pay \$2.7 billion in compensation. The victims' families will be awarded roughly \$10 million each. In response, the United Nations voted to lift sanctions on Libya in September, removing a significant hurdle to Libya's reintegration into the global community. The Libyan government remains deadlocked with the French families of the victims of the 1989 UTA airliner bombing over Niger. Libya has already paid a total of \$33 million to the victims' families and proposed to pay an additional \$1 million per family, but the UTA families have said the compensation package is still too low.

The U.S. government continues to maintain unilateral sanctions against Libya. Washington remains concerned about Libya's potential links to terrorism as well as its long-range missiles and chemical weapons programs. These sanctions include a prohibition of U.S. investment in Libya, a ban on U.S. oil companies doing business in Libya, and a travel ban that forbids the use of American passports for travel to Libya. Libya has also remained on the U.S. government's list of state sponsors of terrorism. In addition, the United States maintains a freeze on Libyan assets. U.S. officials are discussing the possibility of extending the travel ban for only 90 days as opposed to the typical yearlong extension. This reduced period is intended to signal to the Libyan government that Washington might be willing to upgrade relations if Libya is more forthcoming on the issues of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Despite its oil wealth, the Libyan economy remains hobbled by inefficient state controls and corruption. Libya's rapid population growth has also led to rising unemployment, currently estimated at 30 percent. In addition, years of sanctions have taken a toll on the lucrative oil sector, with production down to 1.3 million barrels per day from 3.7 million barrels per day in the 1970s. Acknowledging the need for change, Qadhafi has authorized wide-ranging economic reforms. In June, the Libyan leader announced a plan to privatize the economy and promote direct foreign investment. In a bid to attract foreign investment, the exchange rate was liberalized and trade licenses were abolished to allow integration with the global market. Libya has also applied to join the World Trade Organization.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Libyans cannot change their government democratically. Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi rules by decree with little accountability or transparency. Libya's governing principles stem from Qadhafi's Green Book, a treatise that combines Islamic ideals with elements of socialism and pan-Arabism. Qadhafi rejects Western-style democracy and political parties, claiming instead that his country is a *jamahiriya*, or state of the masses. As such, Qadhafi calls for direct popular rule. The reality, however, is that power is tightly held by Qadhafi and a relatively small inner circle of advisors.

Libyans do not have the right to organize into different political parties. While people do play a role in popular congresses, they do not affect the balance of power that remains squarely in Qadhafi's control. Extra-governmental bodies,

including the revolutionary committees and people's committees, aid Qadhafi and serve as tools of repression. There is no significant legal opposition in Libya, and people's political choices are subject to the domination of Qadhafi and his esoteric political system.

Free media do not exist in Libya. The government severely limits freedom of speech and of the press, particularly any criticism of Qadhafi. The state owns and controls all print and broadcast media outlets and thereby maintains a monopoly on the flow of information. Satellite television is widely available, although foreign programming is censored at times. Internet access is limited, as there is only one service provider (owned by Qadhafi's son). However, reportedly, the number of Internet users is growing.

Freedom of religion is restricted, and the government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions in Libya, which is 97 percent Sunni Muslim. Islamic organizations whose teachings and beliefs differ from the official, government-approved version of Islam are banned. Academic freedom is severely restricted.

Freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion are severely restricted. Qadhafi maintains an extensive internal security apparatus. The Libyan leader is ruthless with suspected opponents and is able to quickly mobilize his multilayered security apparatus. These multiple and overlapping security services rely on an extensive network of informers that are present throughout Libyan society.

The judiciary is not independent. Security forces have the power to pass sentences without a trial, and the government has used summary judicial proceedings to suppress domestic dissent. Political trials are held in secret with no due process considerations. Arbitrary arrest and torture are commonplace. In October, Amnesty International called upon the Libyan authorities to release or grant new trials to 151 students and professionals who have been detained since 1998. They were charged with belonging to an unauthorized group, the Libyan Islamic Group, and have been denied access to a fair trial since that time.

The largely Berber and Tuareg minorities face discrimination. While women's status has improved in some areas like education and employment, discrimination continues in other areas where local traditions predominate. Female genital mutilation is still practiced in remote rural areas. Violence against women also continues to be a problem.



# North Korea

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Already isolated because of its nuclear saber rattling, North Korea's Stalinist regime further escalated what appeared to be a high-stakes game of blackmail. Having previously confessed to possessing a uranium enrichment program and having taken steps to fire up a mothballed reactor, Pyongyang in 2003 told U.S. officials that it possessed nuclear weapons and continued its bellicose rhetoric against Japan, South Korea, and the United States. It offered to scrap its nuclear weapons program in exchange for increased aid, diplomatic recognition, and a nonaggression pact with Washington.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula in 1948 following three years of post-War Soviet occupation. At independence, North Korea's uncontested ruler was Kim Il-sung, a former Soviet army officer who claimed to be a guerrilla hero in the struggle against Japan, which had annexed Korea as a colony in 1910. North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950 in an attempt to reunify the peninsula under Communist rule. Drawing in China and the United States, the ensuing three-year conflict killed as many as two million people and ended with a ceasefire rather than a peace treaty. Since then, the two Koreas have been on a continuous war footing.

Kim Il-sung solidified his power base during the Cold War, purging rivals, throwing thousands of political prisoners into labor camps, and fostering a Stalinist personality cult that promoted him as North Korea's "Dear Leader." The end of the Cold War, however, brought North Korea's command economy

to the brink of collapse, as Pyongyang lost crucial Soviet and East Bloc subsidies and preferential trade deals. Between 1993 and 2000, economic output shrunk by half, by some estimates.

With the regime's survival in doubt, Kim's death in 1994 ushered in even more uncertainty. Under his son, the reclusive Kim Jong-il, the regime has maintained its rigid political control but has taken modest steps to free up North Korea's centrally planned economy. During the initial years of Kim Jong-il's rule, the situation grew even bleaker as natural disasters, economic mismanagement, and restrictions on the flow of information combined to kill, according to the U.S. State Department, an estimated 1 to 2 million North Koreans between 1995 and 1997.

While the famine threat has receded thanks in part to foreign food aid, a 2002 UN study found that more than half the population suffered malnutrition. Moreover, North Korea's state-run health system has all but collapsed, hospitals lack adequate medicine and equipment, and clean water is in short supply because of electricity and chlorine shortages.

Against this backdrop, economic reforms launched in July 2002 have made life tougher for ordinary North Koreans by igniting inflation and increasing unemployment. The regime eased price controls and promised to raise salaries to offset the higher prices. It also gave factories more autonomy. Many of the promised salary hikes, however, have not materialized, and the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review reported in March that many factories, suddenly forced to pay their own way, have shut down.

In addition to liberalizing prices, the regime recently has also allowed farmers to set up small markets in cities, something it has quietly tolerated for decades in the countryside. These markets now sell consumer goods as well as food. Prospects appear dim, though, for more far-reaching market reforms. The regime is reluctant to take any measures that would grant North Koreans significantly greater control over their daily lives for fear of undermining its tight grip on power.

The latest crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons program began in October 2002, after Washington said that Pyongyang had admitted to having a program to produce enriched uranium, a component of nuclear bombs. This program apparently violated a 1994 deal under which North Korea had pledged to abandon its separate plutonium nuclear program. In return, Japan, South Korea, and the United States agreed to provide North Korea with two light-water nuclear reactors, which cannot be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

Escalating tensions further, North Korea in December 2002 threw out international inspectors monitoring its Yongbyon reactor, which was shuttered under the 1994 agreement because it could be used to produce plutonium. In 2003, Pyongyang not only made a series of boasts about its alleged nuclear capabilities and threatened to test a nuclear weapon, but also pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Washington has rebuffed Pyongyang's efforts to win concessions in return for dismantling its nuclear weapons program, insisting instead that Pyongyang disarm before any negotiated settlement, including a multilateral nonaggression commitment, is considered. For its part, China, North Korea's main patron, recently has appeared eager to reign in Kim Jong-il. Beijing fears that his brinkmanship could provoke Japan and South Korea into building nuclear weapons or even touch off a war that could send refugees streaming into China. Many analysts say, however, that the greatest threat from North Korea is its potential to sell plutonium to rogue states or terrorists for hard cash.

As 2003 ended, ordinary North Koreans faced another winter of hardship. They are among the most impoverished and tightly controlled people on earth, condemned to dehumanizing lives of extreme scarcity, subject to relentless indoctrination, and threatened with execution or incarceration in a labor camp for offenses as trivial as listening to foreign radio.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

North Korea is one of the most tightly controlled countries in the world. The regime denies North Koreans even the most basic rights; holds tens of thousands of political prisoners under brutal conditions; and controls nearly every facet of social, political, and economic life.

Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader, and a handful of elites from the Korean Worker's Party (KWP) rule by decree, although little is known about the regime's inner workings. Kim formally is general secretary of the KWP, supreme commander of North Korea's 1.1 million-strong army, and chairman of the National Defense Commission. The latter post officially is the "highest office of state" since the 1998 abolition of the presidency.

North Korea's parliament, known as the Supreme People's Assembly, meets only a few days each year and simply rubber-stamps the ruling elite's decisions. In an effort to provide a veneer of democracy, the government occasionally

holds staged elections for Parliament as well as for provincial, county, and city bodies.

In classic totalitarian fashion, officials subject the masses to intensive political indoctrination through the school system, the state-controlled media, and work and neighborhood associations. Radios and televisions are designed to receive only government stations.

Religious freedom is severely repressed. The government requires all prayer and religious study to be supervised by the state and severely punishes North Koreans for worshipping independently in underground churches. Officials have killed, beaten, arrested, or detained in prison camps many members of underground churches, according to foreign religious and human rights groups. Some reports suggest, however, that house churches often are tolerated if they do not openly proselytize or have contact with foreign missionaries.

The right to privacy is virtually nonexistent in North Korea. The state closely monitors North Koreans through informers as well as security checks on homes. Pyongyang also assigns to each North Korean a security rating that partly determines access to higher education, employment, and health services, as well as place of residence. By some foreign estimates, nearly half the population is considered either "wavering" or "hostile," with the rest rated "core."

North Koreans face death or long prison terms for any peaceful dissent. Some reportedly have been executed merely for criticizing the regime. Authorities have also executed some repatriated defectors, military officers accused of spying or other antigovernment offenses, and North Koreans who were forcibly returned by Chinese border guards after crossing into China.

The regime controls all trade unions and uses them to monitor workers; mobilize them to meet production targets; and provide them with health care, schooling, and welfare services. Strikes, collective bargaining, and other basic organized-labor activities are illegal. The law also bans independent civic, human rights, and social welfare groups.

North Korea's government-controlled courts serve mainly to help the regime control the population. The regime also runs a network of jails and "re-education through labor" camps that are notorious for their brutal and degrading treatment of inmates. Torture and ill treatment reportedly are widespread in these prisons and labor camps, as well as in detention centers where refugees who have been forcibly returned from China are held for interrogation. In camps for political

prisoners, inmates are kept on starvation diets, and up to three generations of a family are often imprisoned for life for the political crimes of a single member, according to an October report by the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, a bipartisan, Washington-based advocacy group. In detention centers for repatriated North Koreans, pregnant women are forced to have abortions or, in cases of advanced pregnancy, their babies are killed upon birth, the report said.

North Korean camps held some 200,000 political detainees in 2002, according to a U.S. State Department human rights report released in March 2003. In addition to maintaining camps for political prisoners, the regime reportedly has some 30 forced-labor camps for common criminals serving shorter terms, the report added. The number of ordinary prisoners is not known. Separately, the regime maintains special camps that detain orphaned and homeless children under inhuman conditions, according to refugees who have escaped from the camps into China.

Authorities have forcibly relocated "many tens of thousands" of North Koreans to the countryside from Pyongyang, including disabled persons and those considered politically unreliable, according to the U.S. State Department human rights report. The regime is also once again rigorously enforcing a permit system for travel outside one's home province after having relaxed it in the mid-1990s, the Far Eastern Economic Review reported in October, citing North Korean refugees in northeastern China.

Despite recent market reforms, North Korea's economy remains centrally planned. The government assigns all jobs, prohibits private property, and directs and controls nearly all economic activity. Besides being grossly mismanaged, the economy is hobbled by creaking infrastructure, shortages of energy and raw materials, and an inability to borrow on world markets or from multilateral banks because of sanctions and a past foreign debt default.

Little is known about how problems such as domestic violence or workplace discrimination may affect North Korean women. There were widespread reports of trafficking of women and girls among the tens of thousands of North Koreans who have recently crossed into China.



# Saudi Arabia

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Saudi Arabia continued to place severe restrictions on its citizens' political rights and civil liberties in 2003, even as hints of possible political reforms emerged in an eventful year for the kingdom. Throughout the year, the country faced threats to its internal stability from terrorist groups and calls for political reform from dissidents and regime opponents. The government of Saudi Arabia responded by offering several signs of possible limited political reforms: the approval of the formation of the first Saudi human rights organization, the first official sanction of a human rights conference in the kingdom, the establishment of a center for dialogue on reform, and announcements of local elections to be held next year.

In the 71 years since its unification in 1932 by King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia has been controlled by the Al-Saud family, with King Fahd, the current king, the fifth in the Al-Saud ruling dynasty. The Saudi monarchy rules in accordance with the conservative school of Sunni Islam. In the early 1990s, Fahd embarked on a limited program of political reform, introducing an appointed consultative council, or Majlis Ash-shura. This step did not lead to any substantial shift in political power. In 1995, King Fahd suffered a stroke, and since 1997, Crown Prince Abdullah has taken control of most power and decision making.

With the largest oil reserves in the world, Saudi Arabia is the world's leading oil producer and exporter. Saudi Arabia's oil wealth and importance to the global economy are key features impacting the country's external relations and shaping Saudi Arabia's internal politics by giving the Al-Saud dynasty unmatched wealth to maintain its control.

Saudi Arabia has been under intense scrutiny since the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States—15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens, and the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Ladin, is from a wealthy Saudi family. In 2003, the Saudi monarchy took some first steps to stop the flow of financial support to terrorist groups, agreeing for the first time to set up a joint task force with the United States to target suspected terrorist financiers. The government passed the country's first anti-money laundering law, making financing of terrorist organizations a punishable offense. Saudi Arabia banned all charities from sending money abroad without official approval, audited hundreds of domestic organizations, and closed dozens of charities for suspected involvement in terrorist financing. Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah traveled to Russia in the first high-level Saudi visit to Moscow in 75 years to discuss measures to cut off Saudi financing of separatists in Chechnya.

The threat of terrorist attacks has also posed a challenge to the stability of the Saudi regime. A triple suicide bombing that killed 35 people in Riyadh on May 12, 2003 was a wake-up call for the Saudi monarchy, leading to a crackdown that included the interrogation of thousands of Saudi citizens. In early November, another suicide attack left 18 more Saudis dead. The government fired numerous clerics for inciting hatred and preaching an intolerant version of Islam. The Saudi Interior Ministry, fearing that children might have been recruited by militants, made a public appeal to families to report any missing children.

The Saudi government's dominance of the economy, endemic corruption, and financial mismanagement has led to mounting economic woes, with the world's largest oil producer seeing a decline in real GDP per person over the last decade. Unemployment is estimated at 30 percent, and this year, the Saudi government recognized the growing problem of poverty by announcing a strategy to create jobs and build housing for the underprivileged.

Amid these growing economic difficulties and increased access to outside sources of information through satellite television and the Internet, pressure for political change has mounted. Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal announced this year a royal decree approving the establishment of Saudi Arabia's first nongovernmental human rights organization. During the summer, Saudi Arabia established the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue, which is aimed at starting internal discussions on political reform. In September, more than 300 prominent professionals, including 51 women, sent a petition to Crown Prince Abdullah demanding an elected legislature to replace the appointed consultative council, an independent judiciary, and the creation of civil society organizations to promote greater tolerance.



In October, Saudi Arabia organized the country's first human rights conference, a three-day event that examined human rights in an Islamic context. The conference, however, focused on double standards in Western countries rather than the massive human rights abuse problems within the kingdom. During this conference, protestors demanding political reform took to the streets, inspired by the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, a London-based group of Saudi dissidents who set up the first opposition broadcasting network in Saudi Arabia.

In the face of these demands to make its government more open and accessible, Saudi Arabia announced plans to hold local elections in 2004. In November, the Saudi regime said it would start televising 30-minute excerpts of weekly sessions of the Shura Council. Time will tell if these limited reform measures are the start of something broader and more consequential.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, and its citizens have no power to change the government democratically. The country's 1992 Basic Law declares that the Quran is the country's constitution. Saudi Arabia has a 120-member consultative Shura Council appointed by the monarch, but this council has limited powers and does not impact decision making or power structures in a meaningful way.

The country has never held elections for public office at any level. On October 13, 2003, the Saudi government announced it would hold its first elections to select half of the members of municipal councils in parts of the country in 2004. However, the government released few details about these planned elections, and several questions remained, such as whether or not women would be allowed to participate.

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

The Council of Ministers, an executive body appointed by the king, passes legislation which becomes law once ratified by royal decree. The Saudi monarchy has a tradition of consulting with select members of Saudi society, but this process is not equally open to all citizens. Corruption is one consequence of the closed nature of Saudi Arabia's government and society, with foreign companies

reporting that they often pay bribes to middle men and government officials to secure business deals.

Government authorities frequently ban or fire journalists and editors who publish articles deemed offensive to the country's powerful religious establishment or the ruling authorities. This year, Hussein Shabakshi, a journalist who advocated for elections, human rights, and women's equality in one of his weekly columns in the Saudi daily *Okaz*, was banned by the Saudi Ministry of Interior. Jamal Khasshogi, editor of the reformist newspaper *Al-Watan*, was fired for writing articles critical of the religious establishment.

Religious freedom does not exist in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and the location of the two holiest cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina. Islam is Saudi Arabia's official religion, and all citizens are required by law to be Muslims. The government prohibits the public practice of any religions other than Islam. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, it does not always respect this right in practice. Academic freedom is restricted in Saudi Arabia, and informers monitor classrooms for compliance with limits on curriculums, such as a ban on teaching Western philosophy and religions other than Islam.

Saudi citizens do not have any associational or organizational rights, and there is no freedom to form political organizations and to hold protests. In October, Saudi security officials detained hundreds of protestors calling for political reform. Trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes are prohibited.

The judiciary lacks independence from the monarchy. The king appoints all judges on the recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Council, and the monarchy serves as the highest court of appeal. The rule of law is regularly flouted by the Saudi regime, with frequent trials falling short of international standards. Secret trials are common, and political opponents of the Saudi regime are often detained without charge and held for indefinite periods of time. Allegations of torture by police and prison officials are frequent, though access to prisoners by independent human rights and legal organizations is strictly limited.

Although racial discrimination is illegal according to Saudi law, substantial prejudice against ethnic, religious, and national minorities exists. Foreign workers from Asia and Africa are subject to formal and informal discrimination and have difficulty obtaining justice.

Citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses, but much private enterprise activity is connected with members of the ruling family and the government. Although Saudi Arabia first joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1993, its slow process of privatization and economic reform has prevented it from becoming a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the past year, Saudi Arabia has taken steps to diversify its economic structures and establish government regulatory organizations to strengthen its market economy. The Saudi government passed a new foreign investment law that would ease restrictions on investment and announced plans to cut tax rates and custom duties. As a result, WTO head Supachai Panitchpakdi announced in 2003 that Saudi Arabia would likely be invited to join the WTO in early 2004.

Women are not treated as equal members of Saudi Arabian society. Women legally may not drive cars, and their use of public facilities is restricted when men are present. By law and custom, women cannot travel within or outside of the country without a male relative. Saudi laws discriminate against women in a range of matters including family law, and a woman's testimony is treated as inferior to a man's in court. The Committee to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue, a semiautonomous religious police force commonly known as the *mutawa'een*, enforce a strict policy of segregation between men and women and oftentimes use physical punishment to ensure that women meet conservative standards of dress in public.



# Somalia

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	6
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

A year of talks hosted by Kenya failed to make much headway in securing a lasting peace in Somalia and establishing an elected national government in 2003. Delegates to Somalia's Transitional National Government (TNG) missed deadlines to select members of parliament and schedule presidential elections. The three-year mandate of the TNG expired in August 2003, but it remained in place to prevent a power vacuum in the country. The president of the TNG, Abdiqassim Salad Hassan, and other key faction leaders have boycotted the Kenya talks since September 2003 following disagreements over the adoption of an interim constitution. The self-declared republic of Somaliland in the north has not participated in the TNG. Intermittent fighting among clan leaders and factions for control of Mogadishu and other areas claimed at least 200 lives in the last year. Concerns that Somalia harbors members of al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations further complicate the picture.

Somalia, a Horn of Africa nation, gained independence in July 1960 with the union of British Somaliland and territories to the south that had been an Italian colony. Other ethnic Somali-inhabited lands are now part of Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. General Siad Barre seized power in 1969 and increasingly employed divisive clan politics to maintain power. While flood, drought and famine racked the nation, the struggle to topple Barre has caused civil war, starvation, banditry, and brutality since the late 1980s. When Barre was deposed in January 1991, power was claimed and contested by heavily armed guerrilla movements and militias divided by traditional ethnic and clan loyalties.

Extensive television coverage of famine and civil strife that took approximately 300,000 lives in 1991 and 1992 prompted a U.S.-led international intervention. The armed humanitarian mission in late 1992 quelled clan combat long enough to stop the famine, but ended in urban guerrilla warfare against Somali militias. The last international forces withdrew in March 1995 after the combined casualty count reached into the thousands. Approximately 100 peacekeepers, including 18 U.S. soldiers, were killed. The \$4 billion UN intervention effort had little lasting impact.

The Conference for National Peace and Reconciliation in Somalia adopted a charter in 2000 for a three-year transition and selected a 245-member transitional assembly, which functions as an interim parliament. Minority groups are represented, and 30 of the members are women. A government security force in Mogadishu has been cobbled together from members of the former administration's military, the police, and militias.

The TNG and more than 20 rival groups signed a ceasefire in October 2002 in Kenya as a first step toward establishing a federal system of government. However, over the next year, the talks deadlocked when some faction leaders dropped out to form their own parallel talks in the Somali capital of Mogadishu. The TNG was intended to comprise all the country's various clans, but is opposed by a number of warlords, some of whom are allegedly supported by Ethiopia; Somalia and Ethiopia have been at odds over a long-running border dispute. A final meeting of Somali leaders, billed as a last-ditch "retreat," is planned in Kenya for the second week of December.

In November, the United Nations Security Council extended its mandate in the country until 2005. Despite an arms embargo, the Security Council noted a "persistent flow of weapons and ammunitions" to Somalia in 2003. In October, a Somali delegate to the TNG was murdered, along with two Kenyan associates, in what appeared to be a business deal gone sour. The police arrested a former Kenyan member of parliament in connection with the murders.

Somalia is a poor country where most people survive as pastoralists or subsistence farmers. The country's main exports are livestock and charcoal. Three years of drought have led to a humanitarian disaster in the Sool and Sanaag districts in Somaliland, as well as parts of Bari district in Puntland, where some 60,000 people faced food shortages in 2003. The TNG has unsuccessfully called on the international community to unfreeze the assets of Somalia's Al-Barakaat telecommunications and money-transfer company to help the country's battered

economy. Al-Barakaat was Somalia's largest employer, and hundreds of thousands of Somalis depended on it to receive money transfers from abroad. U.S. authorities froze the assets of Al-Barakaat in 2001 on suspicion that its owners were aiding and abetting terrorism, a charge the owners deny.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Somalis cannot change their government democratically. However, the 2000 elections marked the first time Somalis have had an opportunity to choose their government on a somewhat national basis since 1969. Some 3,000 representatives of civic and religious organizations, women's groups, and clans came together as the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development, following Djibouti-hosted peace talks, to elect a parliament in August 2000. The 245 members of the Transitional National Assembly (TNG) elected the president. More than 20 candidates contested the first round of voting for the presidency. The Inter-Governmental Authority chose the lawyers who drafted the country's new charter. Under the transitional constitution adopted by the TNG in 2003, the country's main clans will each receive a quota of the 351 parliamentary seats, although the process has bogged down in disputes over the nomination process.

Somaliland has exercised de facto independence from Somalia since May 1991. A clan conference led to a peace accord among its clan factions in 1997, establishing a presidency and bicameral parliament with proportional clan representation. Somaliland is far more cohesive than the rest of the country, although reports of some human rights abuses persist. Somaliland has sought international recognition as the Republic of Somaliland since 1991. A referendum on independence and a new constitution were approved in May 2001, opening the way for a multiparty system. Dahir Riyale Kahin of the ruling Unity of Democrats party emerged as the winner of historic presidential elections in 2003. Kahin had been vice president under Mohamed Egal, who died of kidney failure in 2002. Somaliland's constitutional court dismissed a challenge to the poll results filed by Kahin's rival, Solidarity Party candidate Ahmed Muhammad Silanyo, after ordering a recount. International observers from 14 countries declared the voting to be free and fair. Municipal elections in December 2002 also drew 440,000 people to the polls.

Puntland established a regional government in 1998, with a presidency and a single-chamber quasi legislature known as the Council of Elders. Political parties are banned. The traditional elders chose Abdullahi Yusuf as the region's first

president for a three-year term. After Jama Ali Jama was elected to replace him in 2001, Abdullahi Yusuf refused to relinquish power, claiming he was fighting terrorism. Yusuf seized power in 2002, reportedly with the help of Ethiopian forces.

Somalia's charter provides for press freedom. Independent radio and television stations have proliferated. Most of the independent newspapers or newsletters that circulate in Mogadishu are linked to one faction or another. Although journalists face harassment, most receive the protection of the clan behind their publication. The transitional government launched its first radio station, Radio Mogadishu, in 2001. There are three private radio stations and two run by factions.

Somalia is an Islamic state, and religious freedom is not guaranteed. The Sunni majority often views non-Sunni Muslims with suspicion. Members of the small Christian community face societal harassment if they proclaim their religion.

Several indigenous and foreign non-governmental organizations operate in Somalia with varying degrees of latitude. The charter provides workers with the right to form unions and assemble freely, but civil war and factional fighting led to the dissolution of the single labor confederation, the government-controlled General Federation of Somali Trade Unions. Wages are established largely by ad hoc bartering and the influence of clan affiliation.

Somalia's charter provides for an independent judiciary, although a formal judicial system has ceased to exist. Sharia (Islamic law) operating in Mogadishu has been effective in bringing a semblance of law and order to the city. Efforts at judicial reform are proceeding slowly. The Sharia courts in Mogadishu are gradually coming under the control of the transitional government. Most of the courts are aligned with various subclans. Prison conditions are harsh in some areas, but improvements are under way.

Human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killing, torture, beating, and arbitrary detention by Somalia's various armed factions remain a problem. Many violations are linked to banditry. Several international aid organizations, women's groups, and local human rights groups operate in the country. In October, two elderly British teachers with the humanitarian group SOS Children's Villages were shot dead in their home. That same month, an Italian aid worker was also killed. The Somali authorities have made arrests in both cases.



Although more than 80 percent of Somalis share a common ethnic heritage, religion, and nomadic-influenced culture, discrimination is widespread. Clans exclude one another from participation in social and political life. Minority clans are harassed, intimidated, and abused by armed gunmen.

Women's groups were instrumental in galvanizing support for Somalia's peace process. As a result of their participation, women occupy at least 30 seats in parliament. The country's new charter prohibits sexual discrimination, but women experience intense discrimination under customary practices and variants of Sharia. Infibulation, the most severe form of female genital mutilation, is routine. UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations are working to raise awareness about the health dangers of this practice. Various armed factions have recruited children into their militias.



# Sudan

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Long-elusive peace in Sudan finally seemed at hand at the end of 2003. While some fighting did take place throughout the year, including alleged massacres, the government and the main rebel group in the country's south agreed to sign a comprehensive peace agreement that would end nearly twenty years of continuous war that has claimed more than two million lives. Some internally displaced refugees returned to the south, and more humanitarian aid was delivered to war-affected areas. The United States hinted that sanctions against Sudan would be lifted if there was meaningful progress in the peace process and cooperation in the war against global terrorism. International enthusiasm over progress in the peace process, however, overshadowed the emergence of a new and separate battlefield in the country's west, which had claimed thousands of lives and generated a massive refugee crisis by the autumn. Hassan al-Turabi, a leading Sudanese Muslim cleric and former leader of the ruling governing party, was released from prison.

Africa's largest country has been embroiled in civil wars for 37 of its 47 years as an independent state. It achieved independence in 1956 after nearly 80 years of British rule. The Anyanya movement, representing mainly Christian and animist black Africans in southern Sudan, battled Arab Muslim government forces from 1956 to 1972. In 1969, General Jafar Numeiri toppled an elected government and created a military dictatorship. The south gained extensive autonomy under a 1972 accord, and for the next decade, an uneasy peace prevailed. Then, in 1983, General Numeiri restricted southern autonomy and

imposed Sharia (Islamic law). Opposition led again to civil war, and Numeiri was overthrown in 1985. Civilian rule was restored in 1986 with an election that resulted in a government led by Sadiq al-Mahdi of the moderate Islamic Ummah Party, but war continued. Lieutenant General Omar al-Bashir ousted al-Mahdi in a 1989 coup, and al-Mahdi spent seven years in prison or under house arrest before fleeing to Eritrea. Until 1999, al-Bashir ruled through a military-civilian regime backed by senior Muslim clerics including Hassan al-Turabi, who wielded considerable power as the ruling National Congress (NC) party leader and speaker of the 360-member National Assembly.

Tensions between al-Bashir and al-Turabi climaxed in December 1999; on the eve of a parliamentary vote on a plan by al-Turabi to curb presidential powers, al-Bashir dissolved parliament and declared a state of emergency. He introduced a law allowing the formation of political parties, fired al-Turabi as NC head, replaced the cabinet with his own supporters, and held deeply flawed presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2000, which the NC won overwhelmingly. Al-Turabi formed his own party, the Popular National Congress (PNC), in June 2000, but was prohibited from participating in politics. In January 2001, the Ummah Party refused to join al-Bashir's new government despite the president's invitation, declaring that it refused to support totalitarianism.

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

Al-Bashir began to lift Sudan out of international isolation by sidelining al-Turabi, who was seen as the force behind Sudan's efforts to export Islamic extremism. Although vice president Ali Osman Mohammed Taha—who replaced al-Turabi as Islamic ideologue—maintains a firm commitment to Sudan as an Islamic state and to the government's self-proclaimed jihad against non-Muslims, al-Bashir has managed to repair relations with several states, including Iran, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and even the United States. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, al-Bashir issued a statement rejecting violence and offered his country's cooperation in combating terrorism. Sudan had previously provided safe haven for Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network.

Sudan's civil war has pitted government forces and government-backed, northern Arab Muslims against southern-based, black African animists and Christians. The government also has sponsored the Popular Defense Force, a volunteer, militant Islamic militia that fights against southern rebels. Some pro-democracy northerners, however, have allied themselves with the SPLA-led southern rebels to form the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), while northern rebels of the Sudan Allied Forces have staged attacks in northeastern Sudan. Some southern groups have signed peace pacts with the government, but there is fighting among rival southern militias. A convoluted mix of historical, religious, ethnic, and cultural tensions has made peace elusive, while competition for economic resources has fueled the conflict. Past ceasefire attempts have failed, with Khartoum insisting on an unconditional ceasefire and the SPLA demanding the establishment of a secular constitution first. In 1999, Khartoum inaugurated an oil pipeline, helping to finance its war effort and ultimately bring greater urgency to the peace initiatives.

Throughout the war, the government has regularly bombed civilian as well as rebel targets. International humanitarian relief efforts have been hampered by ceasefire violations and have sometimes been deliberately targeted by parties to the conflict. The government has denied humanitarian relief workers access to rebel-held areas or areas containing large concentrations of internal refugees.

A peace plan proposed in December 2001 by former U.S. senator John Danforth called for "one country, two systems" in Sudan, with an Islamic government in the north and a secular system in the south.

The international community stepped up its mediation efforts in the civil war in 2002, in part to prevent Sudan from becoming a breeding ground for terror, as Afghanistan had prior to September 11, 2001. Peace talks under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which continued in 2003, focused on southern self-determination, borders, and the application of Sharia in the south.

In January 2002, U.S.-mediated peace talks between the government and rebels took place in Switzerland, leading to a breakthrough agreement affecting the Nuba mountain region, a 30,000-square-mile area in the heart of Sudan. The black Africans native to the Nuba region numbered more than one million in 1985, but have been reduced to some 300,000 today. The government has frequently bombed the region and enforced blockades preventing food, fuel, clothing, and medicine from entering.

While in 2002 the government agreed to extend the Nuba agreement and participated in further talks in Machakos, Kenya, rebels reported government-sponsored attacks in several towns and villages. The government also bombed southern villages with MiG fighters and helicopter gunships.

In the fall of 2002, the United States passed the landmark Sudan Peace Act, which recognized Sudan as guilty of genocide. The act authorized direct aid to the south to prepare the population for peace and democratic governance. It also specified sanctions against Khartoum if Sudan is deemed to be hampering humanitarian efforts or judged not to be negotiating in good faith. At the same time, the Canadian oil company Talisman quit drilling operations in Sudan after enduring years of pressure from human rights organizations. It also sold off its 25 percent stake in Sudan's Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company. Human Rights Watch has documented how the Sudanese government has used roads, bridges, and airfields built by international oil companies to wage war in the south, especially in the oil rich Western Upper Nile region. The report charges some of the companies with complicity in human rights abuses, claiming that executives ignored government attacks against civilian targets.

In 2003, substantive peace talks finally resulted in a relaxation of hostilities and the highest degree of optimism yet that a final resolution of the conflict was within reach. However, reports of fighting and massacres surfaced during the year. Canadian and U.S. nongovernmental groups reported a massacre by army regulars in a village in the upper Nile region, citing the discovery of the remains of approximately 2,000-3,000 villagers, including children.

Despite the massacre reports, U.S. President George W. Bush announced in April that the Sudanese government and the SPLA were negotiating in good faith. The Sudan Peace Act requires the president to determine the state of talks every six months. The U.S. State Department, however, reported to the U.S. Congress about possible war crimes in Sudan, including possible genocide in the Upper Western Nile region.

In October, the government and the SPLA agreed to sign a power-sharing agreement at the end of 2003. The deal would effectively end the war and begin a six-year transition period leading to a referendum on southern secession, during which time the government would withdraw 80 percent of its troops from the south. Outstanding issues included whether to extend Sharia law to the capital, Khartoum, home to many non-Muslim southerners and how to share profits accrued from southern oil fields.

In November, amidst ongoing negotiations and an overall improved security climate, refugees began returning to the south, raising the specter of an enormous logistical challenge and a potential health crisis. There are approximately 500,000 Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries and 3-4 million internally displaced people.

The United States still maintains sanctions against Sudan based on the country's human rights abuses and its apparent support for terrorism. Sudan tried to demonstrate its cooperation in the war against terrorism during the year. In May, security forces conducted a raid on an alleged terrorist training camp in Kardofan, killing four Saudi nationals. Seventeen other Saudis were arrested for taking part in weapons training exercises in a remote part of western Sudan. Thought to be possible al-Qaeda operatives, they were deported to Saudi Arabia. However, Sudan's commitment to combating terrorism was called into question in June, when Greek authorities operating in the Mediterranean Sea seized a vessel carrying 680 metric tons of explosives destined for a Sudanese port. The listed recipient, a Khartoum-based chemical company, turned out not to exist. Sudan claimed the explosives were for peaceful purposes.

In June, Sudanese Foreign Minister Osman Ismail met with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington to discuss the removal of Sudan from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. On the day of the meeting, Sudanese forces reportedly attacked ten villages in Eastern Upper Nile, killing at least 60 villagers and abducting several children.

In February, a separate war front opened in western Darfur province; armed conflict over competing land claims erupted between mostly Black agriculturalists and government-backed nomadic Arab militias, known as Janjaweed. The Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) rebel group was formed in defense of farmers and landowners, who demand greater regional economic rights and self-determination. Despite a ceasefire between the SLM and the government in November, attacks by Janjaweed against farming villages continued. The government said it no longer backed the Janjaweed, but it also restricted humanitarian access to the conflict areas. The United Nations reported that the fighting displaced 500,000 people, with many fleeing west to neighboring Chad. According to the United States, several thousand people were killed in the fighting.

In October, Hassan al-Turabi was released from prison. Analysts suggested that with the government now negotiating closely with the SPLA, there was little

need to continue holding al-Turabi, who, as a political rival to President Omar al-Bashir, had previously signed a peace deal with the rebel group.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Sudanese cannot change their government democratically. The December 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections cannot credibly be said to have reflected the will of the people. The major opposition parties, which are believed to have the support of most Sudanese, boycotted in protest of what they said were attempts by a totalitarian regime to impart the appearance of fairness. The EU declined an invitation to monitor the polls to avoid bestowing legitimacy on the outcome. Omar al-Bashir, running against former president Jafar Numeiri and three relative unknowns, won 86 percent of the vote. NC candidates stood uncontested for nearly two thirds of parliamentary seats. Voting did not take place in some 17 rebel-held constituencies, and government claims of 66 percent voter turnout in some states were denounced as fictitious. The president can appoint and dismiss state governors at his discretion.

There is little press freedom in Sudan. Journalists practice self-censorship to avoid harassment, arrest, and closure of their publications. There are several daily newspapers and a wide variety of Arabic- and English-language publications. While all of these are subject to censorship, some do criticize the government. Radio and television stations are owned by the government and are required to reflect government policy in broadcasts. Penalties apply to journalists who allegedly harm the nation or economy or violate national security. A 1999 law imposes penalties for "professional errors."

In March, state security police detained without explanation a journalist with the *Khartoum Monitor*, an English-language daily. This marked the beginning of yearlong harassment of the paper by the government. In July, the Sudanese Court of Crimes Against the State revoked the paper's publishing license because of a 2001 article on slavery in the country's south. Shortly afterwards, the paper's editor, Nhial Bol, was involved in a car accident, which many believed to be a deliberate attempt by the state to kill him. In October, Bol fled to Kenya and reported receiving death threats. The government also seized copies of the Arab-language *As-Sahafa* and closed the daily *Alwan* for "inciting sedition."

Islam is the state religion, and the constitution claims Sharia as the source of its legislation. At least 75 percent of Sudanese are Muslim, though most southern Sudanese adhere to traditional indigenous beliefs or Christianity. The



overwhelming majority of those displaced or killed by war and famine in Sudan have been non-Muslims, and many have starved because of a policy under which food is withheld pending conversion to Islam. Officials have described their campaign against non-Muslims as a holy war. Under the 1994 Societies Registration Act, religious groups must register in order to gather legally. Registration is reportedly difficult to obtain. The government denies permission to build churches and destroys Christian schools, centers, and churches. Roman Catholic priests face random detention and interrogation by police.

Emergency law severely restricts freedom of assembly and association. Students are forbidden to participate in political activities according to the Acts of Student Codes, introduced in 2002 after several university students in Khartoum were suspended for engaging in human rights activities, including organizing symposiums on women's rights and attending a conference on democracy. Other students have been expelled for organizing political activities, and security forces have forcefully broken up demonstrations. In November 2002, the government closed the University of Khartoum indefinitely after students protested attacks on dormitories by pro-government student militias. Several students were injured and arrested. The clashes erupted following student celebrations of the 38th anniversary of protests against Sudan's first military government and against the banning of the University Students Union four years ago, when opposition groups were poised to win campus elections. The student's union remained banned in 2003. While many international nongovernmental organizations operate in Sudan, the government restricts their movement and ability to carry out their work, which often includes providing essential humanitarian assistance.

There are no independent trade unions. The Sudan Workers Trade Unions Federation is the main labor organization, with about 800,000 members. Local union elections are rigged to ensure the election of government-approved candidates. A lack of labor legislation limits the freedom of workers to organize or bargain collectively. Equality of opportunity and business and property rights are generally restricted to Sudan's Arab, Muslim community.

The judiciary is not independent. The chief justice of the Supreme Court, who presides over the entire judiciary, is government-appointed. Regular courts provide some due process safeguards, but special security and military courts, which are used to punish political opponents of the government, provide none. "Special Courts" often deal with criminal matters, despite their use of military judges. Criminal law is based on Sharia and provides for flogging, amputation, crucifixion,

and execution. Ten southern, predominantly non-Muslim states are officially exempted from Sharia, although criminal law allows for its application in the future if the state assemblies choose to implement it. Arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture are widespread, and security forces act with impunity. Prison conditions do not meet international standards. In June, the Sudanese Organization Against Torture reported the arbitrary arrest and torture of several people, including students suspected of engaging in political activities or harboring SPLA sympathies. Early in the year, three men in northern Darfur accused of bank robbery were hanged after quick trials in which the accused were denied legal representation. Their appeals and attendant entreaties from the European Union went unheeded.

Serious human rights abuses by nearly every faction involved in the civil war have been reported. Secret police have operated "ghost houses"—detention and torture centers—in several cities. Government armed forces have reportedly routinely raided villages, burning homes, killing residents, and abducting women and children to be used as slaves in the north. Relief agencies have discovered thousands of people held captive in the north and have purchased their freedom so that they could return to the south. International aid workers have been abducted and killed. In 2002, the International Eminent Persons Group—a fact-finding mission composed of humanitarian relief workers, human rights lawyers, academics, and former European and American diplomats—confirmed the existence of slavery in Sudan. After conducting extensive research in the country, the group reported a range of human rights abuses, including what under international law is considered slavery. The report also addressed abductions and forced servitude under the SPLA's authority.

Although there has been no organized effort to compile casualty statistics in southern Sudan since 1994, the total number of people killed by war, famine, and disease is believed to exceed two million. Up to four million people are internally displaced due to government efforts to clear black Africans from oil fields or potential oil drilling sites. In recent years, the government has blocked aid shipments and relief workers to areas affected by war and prevented relief workers from reaching civilians.

Women face discrimination in family matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, which are governed by Sharia. Women are represented in parliament and hold 35 of the assembly's 360 seats. Public order police frequently harass women and monitor their dress for adherence to government standards of modesty. Female genital mutilation occurs despite legal prohibition, and rape is

reportedly routine in war zones. According to Amnesty International, women have less access to legal representation than men. President al-Bashir announced in January 2001 that Sudan would not ratify the international Convention on Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women because it "contradicted Sudanese values and traditions." Children are used as soldiers by government and opposition forces in the civil war.



# Syria

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

In the face of growing international pressure to end his government's sponsorship of militant terrorist groups and the fall of a sister Baathist government in neighboring Iraq, Syrian President Bashar Assad came under mounting domestic pressure in 2003 to reform the repressive and corrupt political system built by his father. Although some nominal political and economic reforms were introduced, government suppression of political and civil liberties continued, with dozens of people arrested during the year for peacefully expressing their opinions.

Located at the heart of the Fertile Crescent, the Syrian capital of Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world and once controlled a vast empire extending from Europe to India. The modern state of Syria is a comparatively recent entity, established by the French after World War I and formally granted independence in 1946. The pan-Arab Baath Party, which seized control of Syria 40 years ago, has long sought to extend its writ beyond Syrian borders. For all its pan-Arab pretensions, however, the Syrian government has been dominated by Alawites, adherents of an offshoot sect of Islam who constitute just 12 percent of the population, since a 1970 coup brought Gen. Hafez Assad to power. For the next 30 years, the Assad regime managed to maintain control of the majority Sunni Muslim population only by brutally suppressing all dissent. In 1982, government forces stormed the northern town of Hama to crush a rebellion by the Muslim Brotherhood and killed as many as 20,000 insurgents and civilians in a matter of days.

In 2000, Assad's son and successor, Bashar, inherited control of a country with one of the most stagnant economies and highest rates of population growth in the region, with unemployment estimated at more than 20 percent. In his inaugural speech, the young Syrian leader pledged to eliminate government corruption, revitalize the economy, and establish a "democracy specific to Syria, which takes its roots from its history and respects its society."

The first six months of Assad's tenure brought dramatic changes. Loose networks of public figures from all sectors of civil society were allowed to discuss the country's social, economic, and political problems in informal gatherings. Assad released more than 600 political prisoners, closed the notorious Mazzeh prison, allowed scores of exiled dissidents to return home, reinstated dissidents who had been fired from state-run media outlets and universities, and instructed the state-run media to give a voice to reformers. The "Damascus Spring" reached its zenith in January 2001 with the establishment of the country's first privately owned newspaper.

In February 2001, however, the regime abruptly reimposed restrictions on public freedoms and launched an escalating campaign of threats, intimidation, and harassment against the reform movement. By the end of the year, ten leading reformists had been arrested. In 2002, the "Damascus Ten" were sentenced to prison terms, while the security agencies arrested over a dozen additional journalists, human rights activists, and political dissidents. The regime's renewed assault on political and civil liberties initially elicited little criticism from Western governments, in part because of Assad's cooperation in the war against al-Qaeda. Economic reform also fell by the wayside as dozens of reform laws remained unimplemented or were put into effect half-heartedly; hopes for a much-needed influx of foreign investment faded.

The March 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, a country hitherto ruled by a rival branch of the Baath Party, posed serious problems for the Assad regime. The downfall of Saddam Hussein brought an end to Iraqi shipments of cut-rate petroleum supplies, which had helped the government weather dismal economic conditions without implementing major reforms. Scenes of Iraqis celebrating the downfall of a regime so similar to the one in Damascus inspired Syria's pro-democracy movement to reassert itself. In late May, nearly 300 intellectuals signed a petition demanding the release of all political prisoners, the cancellation of the state of emergency, and other political reforms.

After the fall of Baghdad, the government introduced a number of largely cosmetic social and political reforms. The requirement that Syrian school children wear military-style khaki uniforms was lifted and the ministry of education was given the authority to make decisions without prior approval from the Baath Party's education bureau. In June, the government decreed that Baath Party membership would no longer affect advancement in the civil service. On the economic front, Assad eased laws on foreign currency transactions, approved the establishment of the country's first private banks and universities, and announced plans to set up a stock market. In September, Assad appointed a new prime minister and cabinet ostensibly committed to economic reform.

Syrian relations with the United States rapidly deteriorated during the invasion of Iraq, when U.S. officials publicly accused Damascus of shipping weapons to the Iraqi military and sending "volunteers" across the border to fight coalition forces. The Bush administration also intensified its calls for Syria to stop sponsoring terrorist groups opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and abandon its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. In October, the Bush administration publicly endorsed an Israeli air strike on an alleged terrorist training camp outside of Damascus and announced its support for congressional sanctions on Syria.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

The Assad regime wields absolute authority in Syria and Syrians cannot change their government through democratic means. Under the 1973 constitution, the president is nominated by the ruling Baath Party and approved by a popular referendum. In practice, these referendums are orchestrated by the regime, as are elections to the 250-member People's Assembly, which holds little independent legislative power. The only legal political parties are the Baath Party and six small parties that comprise the ruling National Progressive Front (NPF).

Parliamentary elections in March 2003 were boycotted by five major opposition groups. All 167 of the NPF's candidates were elected, with "independent" candidates taking the remaining 83 seats. At least two people were arrested by the authorities for distributing pamphlets calling for a boycott.

Freedom of expression is heavily restricted. Vaguely worded articles of the Penal Code and Emergency Law give the government considerable discretion in punishing those who express dissent. The Penal Code prohibits the publication of information that opposes "the goals of the revolution," incites sectarianism, or

"prevents authorities from executing their responsibilities." The broadcast media are entirely state-owned, apart from a handful of non-news radio stations licensed in 2003. While there are some privately owned newspapers and magazines, a new press law enacted in September 2001 permits the government to arbitrarily deny or revoke publishing licenses for reasons "related to the public interest," and compels privately owned print media outlets to submit all material to government censors on the day of publication. Syrians are permitted to access the Internet only through state-run servers, which block access to a wide range of Web sites. Satellite dishes are illegal, but generally tolerated. In July 2003, the government revoked the publishing license of the country's leading independent newspaper, *Al-Doumari*. In May, the authorities released the Damascus bureau chief of the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, Ibrahim Humaydi, who had been arrested in December 2002 on charges of "publishing false information."

Although the constitution requires that the president be a Muslim, there is no state religion in Syria and freedom of worship is generally respected. The Alawite minority dominates the officer corps of the military and security forces. Since the eruption of an Islamist rebellion in the late 1970s, the government has tightly monitored mosques and controlled the appointment of Muslim clergy. Academic freedom is heavily restricted. University professors have been routinely dismissed from state universities in recent years due to their involvement in the pro-democracy movement and some have been imprisoned.

Freedom of assembly is largely nonexistent. While citizens can ostensibly hold demonstrations with prior permission from the Interior Ministry, in practice only the government, the Baath Party, or groups linked to them are allowed to organize demonstrations. In May 2003, according to the London-based Syrian Human Rights Committee, 11 people in Daraya, a suburb of Damascus, were arrested after they demonstrated against local corruption. All 11 were subsequently sentenced by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) to prison sentences ranging from three to four years. At least eight Kurdish activists who participated in a peaceful protest outside the Damascus headquarters of UNICEF in June were arrested and remained in prison at year's end.

Freedom of association is restricted. All nongovernmental organizations must register with the government, which generally denies registration to reformist groups. Three unregistered human rights groups have been allowed to operate in Syria, though individual members of the groups have been jailed for human rights related activities. In July 2003, Assad issued a presidential pardon for four members of the Syrian Human Rights Association arrested in 2002.



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All unions must belong to the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU). Although ostensibly independent, the GFTU is headed by a member of the ruling Baath Party and is used by the government to control all aspects of union activity in Syria. While strikes in non-agricultural sectors are legal, they rarely occur.

While regular criminal and civil courts operate with some independence and generally safeguard defendants' rights, most politically sensitive cases are tried by two exceptional courts established under emergency law: the SSSC and the Economic Security Court (ESC). Both courts deny or limit the right to appeal, limit access to legal counsel, try most cases behind closed doors, and admit as evidence confessions obtained through torture. Abdel Rahman Shagouri was arrested in February 2003 for distributing an email newsletter from a banned web site and remained in detention throughout the year awaiting trial before the SSSC. Fourteen people were arrested in August for attending a lecture about the state of emergency in Syria and charged by the SSSC with inciting "factional conflict." A July 2003 decree reportedly stipulated that economic crimes previously tried by the ESC will henceforth be tried by criminal courts, but it is not clear whether the ESC has been abolished.

The state of emergency in force since 1963 gives the security agencies virtually unlimited authority to arrest suspects and hold them incommunicado for prolonged periods without charge. Many of the several hundred remaining political prisoners in Syria have never been tried for any offense. The security agencies, which operate independently of the judiciary, routinely extract confessions by torturing suspects and detaining members of their families. Government surveillance of dissidents is widespread. At least seven opposition figures who returned from exile in Iraq in 2003 were arrested and detained upon their arrival in Syria, as were at least four exiles returning from other countries. Most were released within a few weeks, but a few reportedly remained in detention at year's end. One Syrian opposition figure who remained in Iraq, Riad al-Shouqfeh, narrowly escaped assassination on July 23. There were many reports of torture by the security forces during the year. In November, Maher Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian citizen released after ten months of detention by the authorities, publicly described the torture he experienced in captivity. According to Amnesty International, Kurdish activist Khalil Mustafa died two days after his arrest on August 8 as a result of torture.

The Kurdish minority in Syria faces cultural and linguistic restrictions, and suspected Kurdish activists are routinely dismissed from schools and jobs.

Some 200,000 Syrian Kurds are deprived of citizenship and unable to obtain passports, identity cards, or birth certificates, which in turn prevents them from owning land, obtaining government employment, or voting. The September 2001 press law requires that owners and editors-in-chief of publications be Arabs. At least thirteen suspected Kurdish activists were arrested and jailed in 2003. Two Kurdish organizers of a December 2002 demonstration against government discrimination were put on trial before the SSSC in late 2003 on charges of advocating Kurdish secession, but no ruling had been issued by year's end.

Although most Syrians do not face travel restrictions, relatives of exiled dissidents are routinely prevented from traveling abroad, and many Kurds lack the requisite documents to leave the country. Equality of opportunity has been compromised by rampant corruption and conscious government efforts to weaken the predominantly Sunni urban bourgeoisie.

The government has promoted gender equality by appointing women to senior positions in all branches of government and providing equal access to education, but many discriminatory laws remain in force. A husband may request that the Interior Ministry block his wife from traveling abroad, and women are generally barred from leaving the country with their children unless they can prove that the father has granted permission. Syrian law stipulates that an accused rapist can be acquitted if he marries his victim, and it provides for reduced sentences in cases of "honor crimes" committed by men against female relatives for alleged sexual misconduct. Personal status law for Muslim women is governed by Sharia (Islamic law) and is discriminatory in marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters. Violence against women is widespread, particularly in rural areas.

# Turkmenistan

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

The effects of the November 25, 2002 alleged assassination attempt against President Saparmurat Niyazov, which triggered a crackdown against suspected critics of the regime, continued to be felt in 2003. Among those arrested and convicted for their supposed involvement in the plot was Boris Shikhmuradov, an exiled prominent leader of the political opposition. The incident precipitated a series of wide-reaching repressive measures, including the reintroduction of the exit visa system, a new restrictive law on nongovernmental organizations, a broader definition of acts of treason, and increased surveillance of the movements of foreign nationals and Turkmen citizens. Meanwhile, Ashgabat's relations with Russia were strained over its unilateral abrogation of a dual citizenship agreement with Moscow, although the two countries also signed a lucrative energy deal.

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

Niyazov, the former head of the Turkmenistan Communist Party, was the sole candidate in elections to the newly created post of president in October 1990. After the adoption of a new constitution in 1992, he ran unopposed again and was reelected for a five-year term with a reported 99.5 percent of the vote. The main opposition group, Agzybirlik, which was formed in 1989 by leading intellectuals, was banned. In a 1994 referendum, Niyazov's tenure as president

was extended for an additional five years, until 2002, which exempted him from having to run again in 1997 as originally scheduled. In the December 1994 parliamentary elections, only Niyazov's Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), the former Communist Party, was permitted to field candidates.

In the December 1999 elections to the National Assembly (Mejlis), every candidate was selected by the government and virtually all were members of the DPT. According to government claims, voter turnout was 98.9 percent. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), citing the lack of provision for nongovernmental parties to participate and the executive branch's control of the nomination of candidates, refused to send even a limited assessment mission. In a further consolidation of Niyazov's extensive powers, parliament unanimously voted in late December to make him president for life. With this decision, Turkmenistan became the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States to formally abandon presidential elections.

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

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

Parliamentary and local elections, which serve essentially to reinforce the president's control over the country's legislative process, were held on April 6, 2003. Voters were provided with virtually no information about the candidates, who were selected by the authorities based on their loyalty to Niyazov and proof of their Turkmen ancestry several generations back. Official turnout was reported at over 99 percent.

Relations with Russia were strained following Ashgabat's unilateral withdrawal in late April from a 1993 dual citizenship agreement with Moscow. Less than two weeks earlier, the two countries had signed a protocol ending dual citizenship, at the same time that they adopted a long-term lucrative energy agreement. However, Russia maintained that the protocol was not retroactive and would not enter into force until ratified by Russia's parliament at some future date. After Turkmen authorities set a deadline of June 22 for the selection of either Russian or Turkmen citizenship, many Russians holding dual citizenship reportedly frantically applied to leave Turkmenistan or risk automatically becoming Turkmen citizens. Meanwhile, the protocol provoked strong opposition from members of Russia's parliament and the media, who accused Moscow of having sold out its people in exchange for the purchase of Turkmen natural gas.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Citizens of Turkmenistan cannot change their government democratically. President Saparmurat Niyazov enjoys virtually absolute power over all branches and levels of government. In recent years, the government has undergone a rapid turnover of personnel as Niyazov has dismissed many officials whom he suspects may challenge his authority.

The country has two parliamentary bodies: the unicameral Mejlis (Assembly), composed of 50 members elected by popular vote for five-year terms, and the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council), officially described as the country's highest representative body, composed of both elected and appointed members. Neither body enjoys genuine independence from the executive. In August 2003, the Halk Maslahaty approved changes to the constitution stipulating that its approximately 2,000 members would remain in permanent session, rather than meeting only about once a year to address major issues, as was previously the practice. Following the November 2002 assassination attempt on Niyazov, the president announced early parliamentary elections for April 2003. The 1994, 1999, and 2003 parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair.

Niyazov has established an extensive cult of personality, including erecting monuments to his leadership throughout the country. In 1994, he renamed himself Turkmenbashi, or leader of the Turkmen. He has enacted bizarre decrees, including ordering the renaming of the days of the week and months of the year after himself and his mother.

Only one political party, the Niyazov-led Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, has been officially registered. Opposition parties have been banned, and their leading members face harassment and detention or have fled abroad. In September 2003, four prominent opposition groups in exile met in Prague, Czech Republic, where they pledged to unite as the Union of Democratic Forces. Their goal is the replacement of Niyazov's government with one based on democratic principles. Some analysts have cited the wave of post-assassination attempt reprisals as the impetus for the long-divided opposition to put aside enough of their differences to join forces.

Freedom of speech and the press is severely restricted by the government, which controls all radio and television broadcasts and print media. Reports of dissenting political views are banned, as are even mild forms of criticism of the president. In September 2003, Saparmurat Ovezberdiev, a correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the producer of a controversial local radio program in Ashgabat, was arrested and detained for three days and threatened with a 30-year prison sentence. In November, he was beaten by two men believed to be agents of the state security service. Subscriptions to foreign newspapers are severely restricted. Some Russian television programs are available, although their broadcast is delayed to allow time for Turkmen censors to review content. Foreign journalists have few opportunities to visit Turkmenistan and are often limited to certain locations. The state-owned Turkmentelekom is the only authorized Internet provider in the country.

The government restricts freedom of religion through strict registration requirements and other measures. Only Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians have been able to meet the registration criterion of having at least 500 members. Members of religious groups that are not legally registered by the government, including Baptists, Pentecostals, Jews, and Jehovah's Witnesses, have been fined, beaten, and imprisoned by security forces. In November 2003, a new law on religion was adopted which criminalizes religious activities by bodies that are not registered with the Ministry of Justice.

The government places significant restrictions on academic freedom. The works of various writers reportedly have been placed on a blacklist because of their interpretation of Turkmen history. The *Rukhnama*, a quasi-spiritual guide allegedly authored by Niyazov, is required reading throughout the school system and has largely replaced many other traditional school subjects. In February 2003, Niyazov signed a decree on foreign exchange restrictions for most students studying abroad. The decision, which will severely limit the ability of students to complete their studies, appeared to reflect the authorities' fears that those studying abroad are potential dissenters.

The state security services regularly monitor the activities of citizens and foreign nationals, limiting open and free private discussion. Security officers use such surveillance techniques as wiretapping, the interception of mail, and the recruitment of informers. As part of the post–November 25 crackdown, Niyazov reportedly directed law enforcement bodies to carefully monitor people's conversations in public places and called on people to assist the police by informing on their fellow citizens.

While the constitution guarantees peaceful assembly and association, these rights are restricted in practice. Public demonstrations against state policies are extremely rare. In Ashgabat, all public gatherings—and even private events such as weddings—must be registered in advance with city authorities.

Unregistered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) face harassment and criminal prosecution for their activities. After the November 25 alleged assassination attempt, the authorities increased their monitoring and harassment of civil society activists across the country. In March, the director of the Dashoguz Ecological Club, Farid Tukhbatullin, was sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly having heard about the upcoming plot against Niyazov while attending a human rights conference in Moscow and failing to alert the authorities. After the case received widespread international condemnation, Niyazov pardoned Tukhbatullin in April, but only after he "repented" his alleged crime. In November 2003, a new law on NGOs entered into force that stipulates that unregistered groups are subject to confiscation of their property, while violators of the law may face up to one year in prison.

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

The judicial system is subservient to the president, who appoints and removes judges for five-year terms without legislative review. The authorities frequently deny rights of due process, including public trials and access to defense attorneys. In early 2003, the government broadened the definition of treason to cover a wide range of activities, including attempting to undermine the public's faith in the president's policies and failing to inform the authorities of a wide range of crimes. Those arrested and sentenced for their complicity in the alleged assassination attempt against Niyazov suffered ill treatment or torture and were convicted in closed trials; many of their relatives were targeted for harassment and intimidation. Human Rights Watch condemned as a violation of due process the fact that parliament, rather than the courts, sentenced three alleged organizers of the attack to life in prison. Although officials stated that approximately 70 people were arrested in the course of the investigation, human rights groups insisted that at least 200 had been detained.

Police abuse of suspects and prisoners, often to obtain confessions, is reportedly widespread, and prisons are overcrowded and unsanitary. In October 2003, Niyazov signed his annual prisoner pardon, granting amnesty to some 7,000 convicts. However, those convicted in the November 25 alleged assassination plot were excluded from the possibility of amnesty as part of their sentences.

Employment and educational opportunities for ethnic minorities are limited by the government's policy of promoting Turkmen national identity and its discrimination against non-ethnic Turkmen. The revocation of the Russian-Turkmen dual citizenship agreement in 2003 increased Russian emigration from Turkmenistan. In early 2003, Niyazov reportedly ordered the forced relocation of part of the Uzbek population living along the border with Uzbekistan and their replacement with ethnic Turkmen. The decree appeared to be connected to a plan to relocate so called "unworthy" people from regions along the Uzbek border after Uzbeks came under suspicion following the alleged assassination attempt against Niyazov.

Freedom of movement is severely restricted, with citizens required to carry internal passports that note the bearer's place of residence and movements into and out of the country. Since the November 25 alleged assassination attempt, travel within the country is more closely monitored, with travelers having to pass through various identity check posts. In February 2003, the exit visa system, which officially had been abolished in January 2002, was reintroduced for Turkmen citizens. Obtaining exit visas is difficult for most nonofficial travelers and allegedly often requires payment of bribes to government officials. Those



banned from travel abroad include young men of conscription age. In March, the State Service for the Registration of Foreign Citizens was established to monitor the activities of foreign visitors. Foreigners would be required to stay only in pre-approved hotels and check in within 24 hours of arrival in the country. Anyone breaking these and other related rules would be subject to a heavy fine and risk deportation.

A continuing Soviet-style command economy and widespread corruption diminish equality of opportunity. Profits from the country's extensive energy exports rarely reach the general population, most of whom live in poverty.

Traditional social and religious norms mostly limit professional opportunities for women to the roles of homemaker and mother, and anecdotal reports suggest that domestic violence is common. Women under the age of 35 reportedly are not eligible for exit visas unless they have at least two children.



# Uzbekistan

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	6
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Throughout 2003, Uzbekistan continued its repressive policies against human rights defenders, independent journalists, opposition political activists, and suspected members of banned Islamic groups in an attempt to silence dissent. Despite limited gestures toward greater political openness—including allowing two unregistered opposition political groups to hold meetings—the government's policy toward critics of the regime remained essentially unchanged. During the weeks surrounding a key meeting in Tashkent of representatives from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the authorities harassed or detained political dissidents and relatives of religious prisoners. While lifting restrictions on the convertibility of the national currency, the government resisted most international pressure to adopt reforms to the country's largely centrally planned economy.

Located along the ancient trade route of the famous Silk Road, Uzbekistan was incorporated into Russia by the late 1800s. The Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic was established in 1924, and its eastern region was detached and made a separate Tajik Soviet republic five years later.

On December 29, 1991, more than 98 percent of the country's electorate approved a popular referendum on the Uzbekistan's independence. In a parallel vote, Islam Karimov, former Communist Party leader and chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the successor to the Communist Party, was elected president with a reported 88 percent of the vote. The only independent candidate to challenge him, Erk (Freedom) Party leader Mohammed Solih, charged election

fraud. Solih fled the country two years later, and the party was forced underground. The opposition group Birlik (Unity) was barred from contesting the election and later refused legal registration as a political party, and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and other religious-based groups were banned entirely. Only pro-government parties were allowed to compete in elections to the first post-Soviet legislature in December 1994 and January 1995. A February 1995 national referendum to extend Karimov's first five-year term in office until the year 2000 was allegedly approved by 99 percent of the country's voters.

The government's repression of members of the political opposition and of Muslims not affiliated with state-sanctioned religious institutions intensified following a series of deadly bombings in Tashkent in February 1999. The authorities blamed the attacks, which they described as an assassination attempt against Karimov, on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an armed group seeking the overthrow of Uzbekistan's secular government and its replacement with an Islamic state. The state justified its increasing crackdowns against moderate secular and religious groups under the pretext of fighting violent Islamist organizations, including the IMU.

Of the five parties that competed in the December 1999 parliamentary election, which was strongly criticized by international election observers, all supported the president and differed little in their political platforms. In the January 2000 presidential poll, Karimov defeated his only opponent, Marxist history professor Abdulhasiz Dzhalalov, with 92 percent of the vote. Uzbekistan's government refused to register genuinely independent opposition parties or permit their members to stand as candidates. Meanwhile, in August 2000, the IMU engaged in armed clashes with government troops in Uzbekistan; the following month, the U.S. government placed the IMU on its list of international terrorist organizations for its ties to Osama bin Laden's terrorist network, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. As part of its declared effort to prevent renewed invasions by the IMU, Uzbekistan subsequently placed land mines along portions of its borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, leading to protests by both governments and reports of accidental deaths of civilians in the region.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, Uzbekistan became a key strategic ally of the United States in its military operations in Afghanistan. Tashkent's decision to permit the deployment of U.S. troops on its territory for search-and-rescue and humanitarian operations was widely seen as an effort to obtain various concessions from the West, including economic assistance, security guarantees, and reduced criticism of its poor human

rights record. In March 2002, the United States and Uzbekistan signed a Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework, in which both countries agreed to cooperate on economic, legal, humanitarian, and nuclear proliferation matters. Uzbekistan's continued collaboration with the U.S.-led antiterrorism campaign in 2002 led to American commitments of increased financial assistance in exchange for promises from Karimov of political reforms. However, there was little evidence at year's end of substantive changes to the Uzbek government's repressive policies.

In early May 2003, the EBRD held its annual meeting in Tashkent, the first large-scale EBRD function in Central Asia. The choice of the meeting venue, which traditionally serves as a showcase for the host nation, stirred considerable controversy. In March, the EBRD set a one-year deadline for compliance with three broad benchmarks for reform in Uzbekistan: greater political openness and freedom of the media, free functioning of civil society groups, and implementation of the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. While welcoming these benchmarks, international human rights and political observers criticized the EBRD for failing to use its leverage to press Karimov for more concrete economic and political change. The observers noted that in the weeks surrounding the meeting, police intensified harassment of human rights defenders and relatives of religious prisoners in an attempt to prevent them from staging public protests about government abuses. In late November, Human Rights Watch concluded that Uzbekistan had made no real progress toward meeting the EBRD benchmarks.

Despite continued pledges by Karimov to implement economic reforms, the government took only limited steps to loosen its tight control over the country's economy. In October, Uzbekistan finally announced plans to ease restrictions on the convertibility of the national currency, the som, after years of pressure from international financial institutions. However, some analysts predict that pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserves will soon lead to a growing spread between the official exchange rate and the black market rate.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Citizens of Uzbekistan cannot change their government democratically. President Islam Karimov and the executive branch dominate the legislature and judiciary, and the government severely represses all political opposition. The national legislature largely confirms decisions made by the executive branch.

The 1994-1995 and 1999 parliamentary elections and the 2000 presidential poll, in which only pro-government candidates could participate, were neither free nor fair. In a January 2002 nationwide referendum, 91 percent of voters allegedly approved amending the country's constitution to extend the presidential term from five to seven years. Karimov's current term in office will therefore end in 2007, rather than in 2005. In a parallel vote, 93 percent of voters officially supported replacing the country's 250-member single chamber legislature with a bicameral parliament. Independent observers raised serious doubts about the validity of the referendum, citing the presence of police in polling stations and the fact that some people had been able to vote on behalf of several individuals. In April 2003, parliament adopted legislation providing former presidents immunity from prosecution and lifelong state-funded security for them and their immediate family.

No genuine political opposition groups function legally or participate in the government. A 1997 law prohibits parties based on ethnic or religious affiliations and those advocating subversion of the constitutional order. Members of unregistered secular opposition groups, including Birlik and Erk, are subject to discrimination, and many are in exile abroad. In a small gesture towards opening political life in the country, the authorities allowed both Erk and Birlik to hold open meetings in Tashkent in 2003. However, in an indication that this development did not represent a fundamental change in the authorities' policy toward the opposition, neither group was allowed to register officially as a political party. In addition, police briefly detained two Erk members a week before its meeting, searching their homes and seizing books, computers, and various documents. Corruption is reportedly widespread throughout various levels of government, with bribery a common practice to obtain lucrative positions.

The state imposes strict limits on freedom of speech and the press, particularly with regard to reports on the government and President Karimov. The government controls major media outlets and newspaper printing and distribution facilities. The country's private broadcast and print media outlets generally avoid political issues, are largely regional in scope, and suffer from administrative and financial constraints. Although official censorship was abolished in May 2002, the responsibility for censoring material was transferred to newspaper editors, who were warned by the State Press Committee that they would be held personally accountable for what they publish. Self-censorship is widespread, while the few journalists who dare to produce probing or critical

reports of the authorities face harassment, physical violence, and closure of their media outlets. The government has blocked a number of non-Uzbek news Web sites, and access to controversial information on the Internet remains extremely difficult.

The year saw a renewed crackdown on the media in Uzbekistan. In a case that attracted international attention, independent journalist and human rights activist Ruslan Sharipov, who had written widely on government corruption, was sentenced on August 13, 2003 to five and a half years in prison on charges of homosexuality—which is a criminal offense in Uzbekistan—and sexual relations with a minor. Sharipov reportedly confessed to the charges under duress, citing concerns for the safety of his mother and legal defenders, and was tortured while in custody. In September, an appeals court reduced his prison sentence to four years. On August 28, Sharipov's attorney, Surat Ikramov, was abducted and assaulted by a group of masked men; Ikramov had been helping to organize a peaceful protest outside of parliament scheduled for the following day. Authorities reportedly used politically motivated charges to detain or arrest other journalists, including Tokhtomurad Toshev, editor of the newspaper *Adolat*; Oleg Sarapulov, an assistant to an independent journalist; Ergash Babajanov, a journalist and member of Birlik; and Khusnutddin Kutbiddinov and Yusuf Rasulov, correspondents with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America, respectively.

The government exercises strict control over Islamic worship, including the content of imams' sermons, and is suspicious and intolerant of followers of Muslim organizations not sanctioned by the state. Many members of such groups have been arrested or imprisoned on charges of anti-constitutional activities, often under the pretext of the government's fight against militant Islamists. Muslim prisoners are frequently tortured for their religious convictions or to compel them to renounce their beliefs. Authorities have targeted members of the banned Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Islamic Party of Liberation), an international movement calling for the creation of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim world. Suspected members have been forced to give confessions under torture, and their family members have been subjected to interrogation, arrest, and extortion.

The government permits the existence of certain mainstream religions, including approved Muslim and Jewish communities, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church and some other Christian denominations. As of June 2003, the authorities had registered some 2,100 religious congregations and organizations.

However, the activities of other congregations are restricted through legislation that requires all religious groups to comply with burdensome state registration criteria. Involvement in religious activities carried out by unregistered groups is punishable by fines or imprisonment, and meetings held by such groups have been raided and participants interrogated and arrested. The 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations prohibits activities including proselytizing and private religious instruction, and requires groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials.

The government grants academic institutions a degree of autonomy, though freedom of expression remains limited, according to the 2003 U.S. State Department country report on human rights practices. While professors generally are required to have their lectures pre-approved, implementation of this restriction vary, the report stated; university professors reportedly practice self-censorship.

Open and free private discussion is limited by the mahalla committees, a traditional neighborhood organization that the government has turned into an official system for public surveillance and control. According to a 2003 Human Rights Watch report, the mahalla committees maintain files on those considered to be overly pious in their religious expression and alert the police of so-called suspicious religious and other activities.

Although nonpolitical associations and social organizations are usually allowed to register, complicated regulations and governmental bureaucracy make the process difficult. Unregistered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), do not exist as legal entities and can face difficulties operating. In a positive development, Yuldash Rasulov, an HRSU member, was released from prison in January 2003 under a December 2002 presidential amnesty. Rasulov, who had helped people persecuted for their religious beliefs, was sentenced to seven years in prison in September 2002 on charges of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and distributing extremist literature. Other human rights activists endured arrest, beatings, and intimidation throughout the year. On August 20, Mutabar Tajibaeva, the leader of a human rights group called Yuraklar, was beaten by a group of women while attending a demonstration against local law enforcement officials in the Ferghana Valley; Tajibaeva believes that the authorities organized the attack.

Despite constitutional provisions for freedom of assembly, the authorities severely restrict this right in practice. Law enforcement officials have used force to



prevent demonstrations against human rights abuses in the country, and participants have been harassed, detained, and arrested. In recent years, there have been some small protests by family members of people jailed for allegedly being members of violent Islamic groups. Larger protests by merchants were staged across the county in response to new costly regulations that the government had imposed on them; some clashes between police and demonstrators were reported.

The Council of the Federation of Trade Unions is dependent on the state, and no genuinely independent union structures exist. Organized strikes are extremely rare. However, according to an August 2003 article by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, workers at two large factories in the city of Ferghana held several strikes that month to protest unpaid wages; most of the promised concessions from management reportedly failed to materialize, and workers were pressured or threatened.

The judiciary is subservient to the president, who appoints all judges and can remove them from office at any time. Police routinely physically abuse and torture suspects to extract confessions, which are accepted by judges as evidence and often serve as the sole basis for convictions. Law enforcement authorities reportedly often plant narcotics, weapons, and banned religious literature on suspected members of Islamic groups or political opponents to justify their arrest. Executions are regarded as state secrets, and relatives are sometimes not informed until months after the execution has occurred.

Prisons suffer from severe overcrowding and shortages of food and medicine. The Jaslyk prison camp is notorious for its extremely harsh conditions and ill-treatment of religious prisoners. Inmates, particularly those sentenced for their religious beliefs, are often subjected to ill treatment or torture, and Human Rights Watch has documented a number of torture-related deaths in custody during the last few years. An estimated 6,000 to 7,000 political prisoners are being held in Uzbekistan's penal institutions.

Although racial and ethnic discrimination is prohibited by law, the belief that senior positions in government and business are reserved for ethnic Uzbeks is widespread. Some members of minority groups have declared themselves to be ethnic Uzbeks in an effort to improve their employment and other opportunities.

The government severely limits freedom of movement and residence within the country and across borders. There are widespread restrictions on foreign travel, including the use of a system of exit visas, which are often issued selectively.

Permission is required from local authorities to move to a new city, and the authorities rarely grant permission to those wishing to move to Tashkent. Bribes are often paid to obtain the necessary registration documents.

Widespread corruption, bureaucratic regulations, and the government's tight control over the economy limit most citizens' equality of opportunity. There has been little reform in the country's large and predominantly centrally planned agricultural sector, in which the state sets high production quotas and low purchase prices for farmers. In October 2003, the authorities adopted tough measures to prevent impoverished farmers from smuggling cotton—one of Uzbekistan's top exports—to neighboring countries for higher prices. A government decree issued the same month requiring that non-food items be sold in stores rather than less costly market stalls and that merchants use expensive cash registers sparked angry protests by merchants in a number of towns.

Women's educational and professional prospects are restricted by traditional cultural and religious norms and by ongoing economic difficulties throughout the country. Victims of domestic violence are discouraged from pressing charges against their perpetrators, who rarely face criminal prosecution. According to a 2003 Human Rights Watch report, mahalla committees enforce government policy to prevent divorce by frequently denying battered wives access to the police or courts and holding them responsible for the abuse they experience. The trafficking of women abroad for prostitution remains a serious problem.

# Vietnam

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	6
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

Vietnam's authoritarian rulers continued in 2003 a crackdown, begun two years earlier, that has seen dozens of religious and political dissidents detained or jailed. Many are ethnic minorities from the Central Highlands region who protested for greater religious freedom or tried to flee to Cambodia. Authorities have also targeted urban intellectuals who used the Internet to call for political reforms or share information with overseas Vietnamese.

Vietnam won independence from France in 1954 after a century of colonial rule followed by occupation by the Japanese during World War II. At independence, the country was divided into the Western-backed Republic of South Vietnam and the Communist-ruled Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north. Following a decade-long war that killed tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, North Vietnam defeated the U.S.-backed South in 1975 and reunited the country in 1976.

Victorious on the battlefield, the Communist government proved unable to feed its people. The centralized economy grew at anemic rates, and fertile Vietnam had to import rice. The government responded with reforms in 1986 that dismantled collectivized farms and encouraged small-scale private enterprise. Spurred by the reforms, Vietnam's economy grew by 7.6 percent a year on average, and output doubled between 1991 and 2000, according to World Bank figures. The Southeast Asian nation is now the world's second-biggest rice exporter.

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in 2001 signaled its intent to continue market reforms, but at a gradual pace, when it tapped as its new party leader Nong Duc Manh, now 62, who is known for stressing pragmatism over ideology. In choosing Manh, a northerner, and then in 2002 reelecting Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and state President Tran Duc Luong, the party also preserved the leadership troika's traditional balance between northern, central, and southern Vietnam.

While economic liberalization has muddled along, political reforms have been ruled out entirely, as evidenced by Vietnam's May 2002 parliamentary elections. The CPV vetted all candidates for the 498-seat body, and the number of nonparty lawmakers shrank to 51 from 68.

The government's latest crackdown on dissent began in 2001 after several thousand mainly Christian hill tribesmen held protests in the Central Highlands demanding greater religious freedom, increased land rights, and political autonomy for the region. More than 70 hill tribesmen, known as Montagnards, are serving lengthy prison terms for participating in protests or trying to flee to Cambodia, according to the New York-based Human Rights Watch. The organization released what it said were letters by church leaders in Dak Lak province detailing recent rights violations by officials, including beatings of church leaders, destruction of churches, and widespread confiscation of villagers' farmland. Hill tribesmen routinely complain that their lands increasingly are being converted by lowland Vietnamese into plantations for coffee and other cash crops.

Meanwhile, urban intellectuals seeking political reforms continued to be arrested, sentenced to long jail terms, placed under house arrest, or otherwise harassed by Vietnamese authorities.

Vietnam's leadership continues to be divided over the pace and depth of privatization and other market reforms. Moderates see deep-rooted reforms as the ticket to modernizing the impoverished country and creating enough jobs to stave off social unrest. Hard-liners, though, fear that further loosening the state's control over the economy will undermine the tight grip on power held by the ruling CPV. They realize that farmers, who now work for themselves, and other private sector workers cannot be monitored as easily as those who depend on the state for their livelihood. Moreover, while the government has sold off thousands of small firms, privatization of large companies would very likely throw millions out of work, possibly leading to a social backlash.

## Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Ruled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) as a single-party state, Vietnam is one of the most tightly controlled countries in the world. The CPV's powerful Central Committee is the peak decision-making body in Vietnam, and the National Assembly generally follows the party's dictates when it comes to passing laws. Assembly delegates, however, influence legislation, question state ministers, air grassroots grievances, and, within limits set by the party, debate legal, social, and economic matters. They also regularly criticize officials' performance and governmental corruption and inefficiency. The party-controlled Fatherland Front, however, vets all assembly candidates and allows only CPV cadres and some independents to run.

Eager to portray itself as representing the masses, the regime not only allows the National Assembly to be used as an outlet for grassroots complaints, but also has tried to address bread-and-butter concerns with a 1998 decree that directs local officials to consult more with ordinary Vietnamese. In many provinces, however, complaints by villagers reportedly get bogged down in the bureaucracy.

The leadership increasingly also allows farmers and others to hold small protests over local grievances, which often concern land seizures. Thousands of Vietnamese also try to gain redress each year by writing letters to or personally addressing officials. In addition to land matters, citizens complain about official corruption, economic policies, governmental inefficiency, and opaque bureaucratic procedures. In an October speech to the National Assembly, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung acknowledged "public discontent" with officials, "especially due to corruption, wastefulness, embezzlement of state property, harassment of people, dishonesty, fraud, and weak discipline."

The government made a show of addressing these concerns in 2003 in Vietnam's largest-ever corruption case, which involved an organized-crime empire in the south. The three-month trial of 155 officials and organized-crime figures ended in June with 16 officials receiving prison terms for taking bribes and other offenses and a southern gang leader and five of his cronies sentenced to death for murder and other gangland-related crimes. The Berlin-based Transparency International's 2003 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Vietnam in a six-way tie for 100th place out of 133 countries rated.

All media in Vietnam are tightly controlled by the party and government. Officials have punished journalists who overstepped the bounds of permissible reporting by jailing or placing them under house arrest, taking away their press

cards, or closing down their newspapers. The media also are kept in check by a 1999 law that requires journalists to pay damages to groups or individuals that are found to be harmed by press articles, even if the reports are accurate. At least one suit has been filed under this law, although it was withdrawn. While journalists cannot report on sensitive political or economic matters or openly question the CPV's single-party rule, they sometimes are allowed to report on high-level governmental corruption and mismanagement.

The regime tightened its control over Internet use in May by formally banning Vietnamese from receiving or distributing antigovernment e-mail messages and by setting up a special body to monitor Internet communications and prosecute violators. The government also requires owners of domestic websites to submit their website content to the government for approval. Authorities also block nearly 2,000 Internet Web sites, according to the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres.

The regime sharply restricts religious freedom by regulating religious organizations and clergy and cracking down on independent religious groups and their leaders. All religious groups and most individual clergy must join a party-controlled supervisory body, one of which exists for each religion that the state recognizes—Buddhism; Roman Catholicism; Protestantism; Islam; Cao Daiism, a synthesis of several religions; and the Hoa Hao faith, a reformist Buddhist church. Besides registering, religious groups must get permission to build or refurbish places of worship; run religious schools or do charitable work; hold conventions, training seminars, and special celebrations; and train, ordain, promote, or transfer clergy.

As a result of these regulations, religious groups generally have trouble expanding schools, obtaining teaching materials, publishing religious texts, and increasing the number of students training for the clergy. Cao Daiists have largely been barred since 1975 from ordaining new priests, although some new priests recently have been ordained, while Protestants are generally prohibited from training new clergy. In a positive development in this area, officials in January agreed to allow Protestants in southern Vietnam to reopen a long-closed seminary, according to Compass Direct, a U.S.-based news service that reports on persecution of Christians. Meanwhile, the government effectively maintains veto power over Vatican appointments of Roman Catholic bishops in Vietnam.

The regulations particularly affect groups that are unable or unwilling to obtain official recognition, including some Buddhist and Hoa Hao religious bodies from the former South Vietnam and underground Protestant house churches.

Unregistered groups are considered illegal and often face harassment. For years, the government has tried to undermine the independent Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV). Officials have released several prominent UBCV monks in recent years, but continue to harass church members. Buddhists make up three-quarters of Vietnam's population, although it is not known how many belong to the UBCV.

Amnesty International said in 2002 that several members of the Hoa Hao faith recently had been jailed on charges that the London-based rights group believes are linked solely to their religious practices. Ethnic minority, underground Protestant worshippers in the Central Highlands and northwestern provinces also face severe abuses. Local officials in some provinces reportedly at times jail worshippers, forbid Protestant gatherings, withhold government food rations from believers, and bar children of Protestant families from attending school beyond the third grade.

Vietnamese officials reportedly launched a new campaign in February to convince ethnic minority Protestants in at least some northwestern provinces to renounce their faith, providing incentives such as money or goods to those who abandon their religion. Hmong and other ethnic minority Protestants, particularly in the northern provinces of Lao Cai and Lai Chau and in the Central Highlands, have complained for years that they are at times jailed, harassed, or otherwise pressured by local officials to abandon their religious faith. At the same time, unregistered religious groups in some parts of Vietnam are allowed to worship with little or no interference.

Academic freedom is limited, as university professors must stick to party views when teaching or writing on political topics.

Despite the many restrictions on their rights, ordinary Vietnamese, particularly those living in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, increasingly are free of government intrusion into their daily lives. The regime continues to rely on informers, block wardens, and a household registration system to keep tabs on individuals, but this surveillance is now directed mainly at known dissidents rather than the entire population.

Human rights organizations and other private groups with rights-oriented agendas are banned. Trade unions remain state-controlled, although hundreds of independent "labor associations" are permitted to represent many workers at individual firms and in some service industries. In any case, the vast majority of Vietnamese workers are small-scale farmers in rural areas who are not unionized

in any way. Enforcement of child labor, workplace safety, and other labor laws is poor. Workers frequently have taken matters into their own hands, staging dozens of strikes in recent years, generally against foreign and private companies.

Vietnam's judiciary is subservient to the CPV with the party closely controlling the courts at all levels and exerting strong influence over political and other high profile cases. According to Amnesty International, even in ordinary criminal cases, defendants often lack sufficient time to meet with their lawyers and to prepare and present an adequate defense. Defense lawyers cannot call or question witnesses and sometimes are permitted only to appeal for leniency for their clients. While defendants have a constitutional right to counsel, Vietnam's scarcity of lawyers often makes this right impossible to enforce. Moreover, many lawyers reportedly are reluctant to take human rights and other sensitive cases because they fear that later they will be hit with sudden tax audits or otherwise harassed.

Police at times beat suspects and detainees. Vietnamese jails tend to be overcrowded and provide inmates with insufficient food and poor sanitation. Inmates generally are required to work, but receive little or no wages. Amnesty International said in 2002 that it had documented dozens of cases of Vietnamese prisoners who were denied adequate medical care, shackled as a form of punishment, or held in solitary confinement for long periods.

The death penalty is applied mainly for violent crimes, but sometimes also against Vietnamese convicted of nonviolent crimes, including economic and drug-related offenses. Of the 931 people sentenced to death between 1997 and 2002, for example, 310 were convicted of offenses involving illegal narcotics, according to official statistics. It is not clear how many of these sentences actually have been carried out.

While the government has long cracked down on dissent, the actual number of political prisoners is unknown. The latest crackdown has targeted, among others, Vietnamese who use the Internet to criticize the government or share information with overseas Vietnamese groups. Since 2001, at least 10 Vietnamese Internet dissidents have been arrested, with 6 of them sentenced to long jail terms after unfair trials, Amnesty International said in November. They include Pham Hong Son, who was sentenced in June to 13 years in prison on espionage charges. He was arrested after sending an article on democracy to friends and senior party cadres. Authorities in early 2003 also arrested and beat some of the more than 100 Montagnards who recently were forcibly returned to Vietnam



after crossing into Cambodia, Human Rights Watch said in March. The government denies holding any prisoners on political grounds.

In addition to facing restrictions on religious freedom, Vietnam's ethnic minorities face unofficial discrimination in mainstream society, and local officials reportedly sometimes restrict minority access to schooling and jobs. Minorities also generally have little input into development projects that affect their livelihoods and communities.

Vietnamese women increasingly work in universities, the civil service, and the private sector, though in the latter they continue to face unofficial discrimination in wages and promotion. Many women reportedly are victims of domestic violence. Despite some governmental initiatives to protect women, trafficking of women and girls, both within Vietnam and to China, Cambodia, and other countries, continues unabated.



# China (Tibet)

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

China continued its tight control over Tibet in 2003, jailing dissidents, managing the daily affairs in major Buddhist monasteries and nunneries, and carrying out the first known case of a possibly politically motivated execution in many years.

China's occupation of Tibet has marginalized a Tibetan national identity that dates back more than 2,000 years. Beijing's modern-day claim to the region is based on Mongolian and Manchurian imperial influence over Tibet in the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. Largely under this pretext, China invaded Tibet in late 1949 and, in 1951, formally annexed the Central Asian land. In an apparent effort to undermine Tibetan claims to statehood, Beijing split up the vast region that Tibetans call their traditional homeland. It incorporated roughly half of this region into four different southwestern Chinese provinces beginning in 1950. The rest of this traditional homeland was named the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965.

The defining event of Beijing's rule so far took place in 1959, when Chinese troops suppressed a local uprising by killing an estimated 87,000 Tibetans in the Lhasa area alone. The massacre forced the Tibetan spiritual and political leader, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, to flee to Dharamsala, India, with 80,000 supporters. More recently, Mao's Cultural Revolution devastated Tibet. China jailed thousands of monks and nuns, and nearly all of Tibet's 6,200 monasteries were destroyed.

As resistance to Beijing's rule continued, Chinese soldiers forcibly broke up mainly peaceful protests throughout Tibet between 1987 and 1990. Beijing imposed martial law on Lhasa and surrounding areas in March 1989 following three days of antigovernment protests and riots during which police killed at least 50 Tibetans. Officials lifted martial law in May 1990.

In a flagrant case of interference with Tibet's Buddhist hierarchy, China in 1995 detained six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and rejected his selection by the Dalai Lama as the eleventh reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second-highest religious figure. Officials then stage-managed the selection of another six-year-old boy as the Panchen Lama. Since the Panchen Lama identifies the reincarnated Dalai Lama, Beijing potentially could control the identification of the fifteenth Dalai Lama. The government has also tried to control the identification and education of other religious figures.

Since the 1989 demonstrations led to a blanket repression of dissent, Tibetans have mounted few large-scale protests against Chinese rule. In addition to jailing dissidents, Chinese officials have stepped up their efforts to control religious affairs and undermine the exiled Dalai Lama's religious and political authority. Foreign observers have reported a slight easing of repression since late 2000, when Beijing tapped the relatively moderate Guo Jin-long, a veteran party official, to be the TAR's Communist Party boss. Guo replaced Chen Kui-yan, the architect of recent crackdowns. Guo, who reportedly is in poor health, was replaced in 2003 by one of his deputies, Yang Chuan-tang.

Chen's departure in 2000 may have been linked to Beijing's anger over the escape to India in late 1999 of the teenager recognized by the Dalai Lama, and accepted by China, as the seventeenth Karmapa. The Karmapa is the highest-ranking figure in the Karma Kargyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. Beijing had interfered in the Karmapa's selection and education as part of an apparent effort to create a generation of more pliant Tibetan religious leaders.

China in recent years has made a series of goodwill gestures that may be aimed at influencing international opinion on Tibet. Beijing has freed several Tibetan political prisoners before the end of their sentences. It also hosted visits by envoys of the Dalai Lama in 2002 and again in 2003, the first formal contacts between Beijing and the Dalai Lama since 1993. Neither side gave details of the meetings, although the two sides' positions on the purpose and desirability of holding more structured talks in the future are known to be far apart. Since

1988, the Tibetan government-in-exile's official policy has been to seek negotiations on genuine autonomy for Tibet, having dropped earlier demands for independence. China's official statements, however, suggest that it is willing to have contacts with the Dalai Lama, but not to hold negotiations with him on Tibet's political future.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Under Chinese rule, Tibetans enjoy few basic rights and lack the right to determine their political future. The Chinese Communist Party rules the TAR and traditional Tibetan areas in nearby Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces through appointed officials whose ranks include some Tibetans. No Tibetan, however, has ever held the peak post of TAR party secretary. In a leadership shuffle in the spring of 2003, Jampa Phuntsog, formerly vice chairman of the TAR People's Congress, became chairman of the TAR regional government, while his predecessor in that post, Legchog, was named chairman of the TAR People's Congress. The most powerful Tibetan Communist official, Ragdi, was made vice chairman of China's National People's Congress.

China controls the flow of information in Tibet, tightly restricting all media and regulating Internet use.

Chinese officials permit Tibetans to take part in many religious practices, but since 1996, they have also strengthened their control over monasteries under a propaganda campaign that is aimed largely at undermining the Dalai Lama's influence as a spiritual and political leader. Under this "patriotic education campaign," government-run "work teams" visit monasteries to conduct mandatory sessions on Beijing's version of Tibetan history and other political topics. Officials also require monks to sign a declaration agreeing to reject independence for Tibet, denounce the Dalai Lama, not listen to Voice of America radio broadcasts, and reject the boy whom the Dalai Lama identified as the eleventh Panchen Lama.

The intensity of the patriotic education campaign recently has died down somewhat. Chinese officials say that the campaign ended in 2000 while acknowledging that patriotic education continues at some monasteries and nunneries. In any case, hundreds of monks and nuns have been expelled from monasteries or have left voluntarily since the campaign began.

In addition to trying to coerce monks and nuns to renounce their beliefs, the government oversees day-to-day affairs in major monasteries and nunneries through state-organized "democratic management committees" that run each establishment. Authorities limit the numbers of monks and nuns permitted in major monasteries, although these restrictions are not always enforced. Officials have also restricted the building of new monasteries and nunneries, closed many religious institutions, and demolished several others. Tibetans who are state workers or Communist Party cadres face restrictions on religious practice that are stricter in some years than others. State workers also face constant pressure not to show any form of loyalty to the Dalai Lama.

In universities, professors cannot lecture on politically sensitive topics, and many reportedly are required to attend political education sessions. Moreover, independent trade unions, civic groups, and human rights groups are illegal.

Tibetan political dissidents face particularly severe human rights abuses. Security forces routinely arrest, jail, and torture dissidents to punish nonviolent protest against Chinese rule, according to the U.S. State Department, the London-based Tibet Information Network (TIN) watchdog group, and other sources. The party-controlled judiciary has jailed many Tibetans for distributing leaflets, putting up posters, holding peaceful protests, putting together lists of prisoners, possessing photographs of the Dalai Lama, and displaying Tibetan flags or other symbols of cultural identity.

Chinese jails held some 150 Tibetan political prisoners as of February 2003, many of them in China's Sichuan and Qinghai provinces, according to TIN. The group said that it also had unconfirmed reports of 10 to 20 additional political prisoners. The overall number of Tibetan political prisoners has declined recently, and the pattern of arrests has changed. Political arrests inside the TAR have declined sharply since 1996, TIN says, while arrests of Tibetans on political grounds outside the TAR have increased, particularly in Kardze in the traditional Tibetan area of Kham, now part of China's Sichuan province. Forty Tibetan political prisoners have died since 1987 as a result of prison abuse, according to TIN.

In the first known case in many years of a Tibetan being executed on possibly politically motivated grounds, former monk Lobsang Dhondup, 28, was executed in January 2003. He had been convicted in a closed trial in connection with a series of bombings in Sichuan province that killed one person. Official Chinese accounts said that leaflets calling for Tibetan independence were found at the

scene of at least one explosion. A senior lama, Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, 53, received a suspended death sentence in the same case.

In jails and detention centers throughout Tibet, security forces routinely beat, torture, or otherwise abuse inmates and detainees. "Poor conditions of detention coupled with widespread torture and abuse make life extremely harsh for all those jailed in Tibet," the human rights group Amnesty International said in 2002. In one of the most notorious cases of prison abuse in recent years, officials responded to protests at Lhasa's Drapchi Prison in 1998 by torturing and beating to death nine inmates, including five nuns and three monks. Forced labor reportedly is used in some prisons, detention centers, "re-education through labor" camps, and prisoner work sites, according to the U.S. State Department's human rights report for 2002, released in March 2003. Prisoners often receive some payment and can earn sentence reductions for their work.

Because they belong to one of China's 55 recognized ethnic minority groups, Tibetans receive some preferential treatment in university admissions and governmental employment. Tibetans, however, generally need to learn Mandarin Chinese in order to take advantage of these preferences and for many private sector jobs. Many Tibetans are torn between a desire to learn Chinese in order to compete for university slots and jobs and the realization that increased use of Chinese threatens the survival of the Tibetan language. Chinese has long been the main language of instruction in high schools and many middle schools and reportedly is now being used to teach several subjects in a number of Lhasa primary schools.

Tibetans reportedly are facing increased difficulties in obtaining passports. Up to 3,000 Tibetans, many without valid travel documents, cross the border into Nepal each year. Many seek to study or settle in India.

In the private sector, employers favor Han Chinese for many jobs and give them greater pay for the same work. Tibetans also find it more difficult than Han Chinese to get permits and loans to open businesses.

Thanks in part to subsidies from Beijing and favorable tax and other economic policies, living standards have improved somewhat in recent years for many Tibetans. Much of Tibet's recent growth, however, has been concentrated in urban areas and the state sector, thereby largely bypassing most Tibetans, who are mainly rural. Han Chinese have been the main beneficiaries of the growing private sector and many other fruits of development. This is seen most starkly in Lhasa and other Tibetan cities where Han Chinese and members of China's

Muslim Hui minority run most small businesses. Moreover, the flow of ethnic Han and Hui into Tibet in recent decades has altered the region's demographic makeup and helped to marginalize Tibetan cultural identity.

Tibetan women are subject to China's restrictive family planning policies, which are somewhat more lenient towards Tibetans and other ethnic minorities. Officials generally limit urban Tibetans to having two children. They also frequently pressure party cadres and state workers to have only one child. While farmers and herders often have three or more children, reports in recent years suggested that local officials in certain counties were limiting these rural Tibetans to two children.



# Morocco (Western Sahara)

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Political Rights:	7
Civil Liberties:	6
Status:	Not Free

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## Overview:

Prospects for a settlement of the dispute in Western Sahara remained low in 2003 despite a renewed call for negotiation by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Significant differences continue to divide the principal parties to the conflict, Morocco and the Polisario. Amnesty International noted an increase in reports of torture or ill-treatment used against Sahrawi activists. While human rights groups welcomed the Polisario's release of 243 Moroccan prisoners of war, they reiterated calls for the repatriation of the 914 remaining prisoners.

Western Sahara was a Spanish colony from 1884 until 1975, when Spanish forces withdrew from the territory following a bloody two-year conflict with the Polisario Front. Moroccan claims to the territory date to Moroccan independence in 1956. Mauritania also laid claim to the southern portion of the territory. In 1976, Morocco and Mauritania partitioned the territory under a tripartite agreement with Spain, but the Polisario declared the establishment of an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and fought to expel foreign forces. Mauritania renounced its claims to the land and signed a peace agreement with the Polisario in 1979, prompting Morocco to seize Mauritania's section of territory.

In 1991, the United Nations brokered an agreement between Morocco and the Polisario that called for a ceasefire and the holding of a referendum on

independence to be supervised by the newly created Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). However, the referendum, initially scheduled for January 1992, was repeatedly postponed after Morocco insisted that the list of eligible voters include an additional 48,000 people who, according to the Polisario and most international observers, were Moroccan nationals.

In the ensuing years, Morocco has attempted to cement its hold on Western Sahara by offering incentives such as free housing and salaries to Sahrawis who relocated from the territory to Morocco. At the same time, the Moroccans have repeatedly rebuffed UN attempts to broker a lasting solution to the conflict. Upon ascending the Moroccan throne in 1999, King Muhammad made some important gestures toward reconciliation including releasing prisoners and allowing limited activity for Sahrawi human rights groups.

In his October 16, 2003 report to the Security Council, Annan advised Morocco to accept by January 1, 2004 a peace plan proposed by Special Representative James Baker. The proposed plan would make the territory a semiautonomous part of Morocco during a four- to five-year transition period. A referendum would then let residents choose independence, continued semiautonomy, or integration with Morocco. The addition of a third option, continued semiautonomy, weighs in Morocco's favor by allowing residents who cannot fathom integration with Morocco an option short of independence. While initially opposed, the Polisario, under intense pressure from Algiers, has accepted the plan. The Moroccan government continues to voice its opposition to the plan, saying it cannot accept any referendum in which independence is an option. Instead, the Moroccans have called on Algeria to negotiate an end to the conflict. The Algerian government has ruled out bilateral talks, calling on Rabat to accept the peace plan.

Earlier this year, both Morocco and the Polisario agreed to a package of confidence-building measures promoted by MINURSO and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The measures include limited telephone and personal mail services. The exchange of family visits constitutes a third element of the confidence-building measures. However, implementation of the confidence-building measures has been problematic, with both parties unable to agree to the terms of limited phone and mail service. Family visits have yet to be included as an agenda item in discussion between the parties.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

Sahrawis have never been able to elect their own government. The Moroccan government organizes and controls local elections in the Moroccan-held areas of the territory. Only Sahrawis whose views are consonant with the Moroccan government hold seats in the Moroccan parliament. In general, political rights for residents of Western Sahara remain severely circumscribed.

Freedom of expression remains very restricted. Moroccan security forces reportedly closely monitor the political views of Sahrawis. Police and paramilitary forces resort to repressive measures against those suspected of supporting the Polisario and independence. Private media and Internet access are virtually nonexistent.

The overwhelming majority of Sahrawis are Sunni Muslim, and the Moroccan authorities generally respect freedom of worship. Restrictions on religious freedom in Western Sahara are similar to those found in Morocco. Academic freedoms are severely restricted.

Freedom to assemble or to form political organizations is quite restricted. For example, Sahrawis are largely unable to form political associations or politically oriented nongovernmental organizations. On June 18, 2003, the Sahara branch of the Forum for Truth and Justice, a human rights organization, was dissolved on the charge that the group had undertaken illegal activities that could disturb public order and undermine the territorial integrity of Morocco. Nonviolent demonstrations are often dispersed with excessive force by security forces, particularly in the form of beatings.

Little organized labor activity occurs. The same labor laws that apply in Morocco are applied in Moroccan-controlled areas of the territory. Moroccan unions are present in these areas, but not active.

The civilian population living in Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara is subject to Moroccan law. International human rights groups have reported that activists in the territories have been tried and imprisoned on politically motivated charges. Several reported being tortured during detention. Indeed, arbitrary killing, arrest, and incommunicado detention by Moroccan security forces continue. The Polisario released 243 Moroccan prisoners of war in September, but continues to hold 914 Moroccan prisoners. The UN secretary-general reiterated demands that the Polisario release the remaining prisoners, who are currently held in six detention centers in Tindouf, Algeria, as well as in Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara.

## **Morocco (Western Sahara)**

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Freedom of movement within Western Sahara is limited in militarily sensitive areas, within both the area controlled by Morocco and the area controlled by the Polisario. UN monitors maintain that Sahrawis living in the territory under Moroccan control had difficulty obtaining Moroccan passports. As in Morocco itself, women are subjected to various forms of legal and cultural discrimination. Female illiteracy is very high, especially in rural areas.

# Russia (Chechnya)

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<b>Political Rights:</b>	7
<b>Civil Liberties:</b>	7
<b>Status:</b>	Not Free

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## Overview:

In 2003, the inhabitants of Chechnya continued to be victimized by a debilitating, long-term civil war that has included acts of terrorism, disappearances, and war crimes perpetrated by various parties to the conflict. Human rights groups estimate that over 150,000 fatalities have occurred since war in Chechnya began in 1994 and hundreds of thousands have been wounded and displaced.

A small Northern Caucasus republic covered by flat plains in the north-central portion and by high mountains in the south, Chechnya has been at war with Russia for most of its history since the late 1700s. In February 1944, the Chechens were deported en masse to Kazakhstan under the pretext of their having collaborated with Germany during World War II. Officially rehabilitated in 1957 and allowed to return to their homeland, they remained politically suspect and were excluded from the region's administration.

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

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

Following incursions into neighboring Dagestan by renegade Chechen rebels and deadly apartment bombings in Russia which the Kremlin blamed on Chechen militants, then-Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin launched a second military offensive on Chechnya in September 1999. Russian troops conquered the flat terrain in the north of the republic, but progress slowed considerably as they neared heavily defended Grozny. Amid hostilities, Moscow withdrew recognition of Maskhadov.

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

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., Moscow defended its actions in Chechnya as part of the broader war on global terrorism, asserting a connection between Chechen separatists and terrorists linked to Osama bin Laden. No connections have been proven.

Prominent Russian and Chechen leaders met in Liechtenstein in August 2002 to discuss a peace plan. However, progress toward peace remained elusive, as Chechen rebels have continued to engage in guerilla warfare against Russian troops. In an ordeal covered live by Russian television, a group of Chechen rebels stormed a Moscow theater on October 23, 2002, taking 750 people hostage. Over 120 hostages died, most from the effects of a sedative gas that Russian troops used to incapacitate the rebels. Russian authorities reported that all 41 of the rebels had been killed.

Reliable estimates suggest that at least 5,000 Chechens, mostly civilians, died as a result of the conflict in 2003. Independent military analysts believe

approximately 1,200 Russian troops were killed during the year. In addition, rights groups estimate that an average of 50 people disappear each month, usually as a result of abductions believed to originate with Russian forces.

While some 85,000 Russian troops are estimated to remain in Chechnya, in 2003, Russian officials attempted to demonstrate to the international community that authority is being ceded to Chechens. In an effort to deflect international criticism and domestic unease about the protracted conflict, Russia's government seeks to transfer significant responsibility for policing and governing to Chechen leaders who favor remaining part of the Russian Federation. In 2003, this strategy came in two stages: a highly-touted and highly-tainted referendum and an election to determine Chechnya's executive and legislative leadership.

The March 23, 2003 referendum on a new Chechen constitution took place in the absence of open and free media, with opponents of the referendum and opponents of its questions effectively silenced. Russian government social and humanitarian agencies were mobilized to pressure Chechens to participate. On the day of the vote, Russian soldiers and Chechen police forced villagers to take part in the vote. Ballot security was put in the hands of the Russian military, which transported ballots to and from polling stations. Such direct involvement by the Russian military placed the accuracy of the ballot tabulation under question. According to current law, Russian military and police personnel serving on the territory of any Russian political entity are entitled to take part in a local vote.

Chechnya's Moscow-appointed administration said results indicated a voter turnout of 85 percent, with 96 percent of voters in favor of ratifying the Kremlin-backed constitution. Yet an independent survey of voter sentiments conducted by the Russian rights group Memorial found that 80 percent of the indigenous population opposed the referendum. Local rights groups reported largely empty polling places, contrary to official local state-radio reports, which claimed long lines of voters.

After the referendum, Russian authorities moved quickly toward presidential and legislative elections, which were held on October 5, 2003. A poll conducted by the independent Public Opinion polling group in the summer of 2003 showed only 14.4 percent of the population favoring the Kremlin-backed candidate, Akhmad Kadyrov. When the official results were tabulated, Kadyrov was said to have won with 81 percent of the vote and a voter turnout that was said to be nearly 88 percent. The absence of leading alternative candidates, the

disqualification of a leading competitor by the courts, the resignation of rival candidates after Kremlin pressure, and reported physical threats paved the way for Kadyrov's tainted victory. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe criticized the elections for not offering voters significant choice and the U.S. government judged them as "seriously flawed." Journalists who monitored the election reported sparse participation and many virtually empty polling places.

Kadyrov is a former mufti who served as the civilian administrator of the region before the elections. There are numerous credible reports that he and his associates are involved in corruption and the diversion of Russian aid for private gain. Chechen, Russian, and international monitoring groups worry that the transfer of some authority to Kadyrov will empower brutal and corrupt leaders and will result in a further deterioration of human rights.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

The resumption of war in Chechnya in 1999 led to the total evisceration of the political rights of Chechens. Residents of the republic currently do not have the means to change their government democratically. Claims by the Russian government that they were returning the region to democratic rule by means of a March 2003 referendum lack credibility. The referendum was orchestrated by the Kremlin, with no opportunity for debate, widespread vote rigging, and official results which indicated a voter turnout of 85 percent and nearly unanimous support for a new constitution. According to domestic and international analysts, the results were heavily doctored. The subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections of October 5, 2003 did not resemble a competitive democratic political process. Candidates representing a genuine alternative were not on the ballot and other pro-Russian candidates were forced off the ballot as a result of political pressure and intimidation. Political debate was stifled in an atmosphere of repression and censorship. Moreover, the official election results are believed to reflect widespread falsification. Under the authoritarian rule of President Akhmad Kadyrov, there is no party pluralism and politicians who advocate Chechen state independence are unable to work openly and freely.

The previous presidential elections in 1997—conducted by separatist authorities—were characterized by international observers as reasonably free and fair. President Aslan Maskhadov fled the capital city in December 1999, and the parliament



elected in 1997 ceased to function. In June 2000, President Putin enacted a decree establishing direct presidential rule over Chechnya, appointing Kadyrov, a Muslim cleric and Chechnya's spiritual leader, to head the republic's administration. The new "elected" president is linked to a network of criminal Chechen groups and is denounced by Maskhadov and separatist Chechens as a traitor. Some pro-Moscow Chechens distrust him for his support for the republic's independence during the first Chechen war.

The disruptive effects of the war severely hinder news production and the free flow of information. Russian state-run television and radio broadcast in Chechnya, although much of the population remains without electricity. The local administration of President Kadyrov effectively controls all other broadcast and most print media, which predominantly reflect official viewpoints. There are three licensed television broadcasters, whose content is pro-regime. The Chechen rebel government operates a Web site with reports about the conflict and other news from its perspective. The editors of an independent weekly, *Groznskiy Rabochy*, left Chechnya in 1999. The paper is now edited in Moscow and has limited distribution in Chechnya amid increased government restrictions on media coverage of the conflict. The paper's editor reports that there is widespread self-censorship by reporters who fear violent reprisals from rebels and pro-government forces.

The Russian military imposes severe restrictions on journalists' access to the Chechen war zone, issuing accreditation primarily to those of proven loyalty to the Russian government. Few foreign reporters are allowed into the breakaway republic and when they are allowed entry, access is restricted by military and police authorities as journalists covering the war must be accompanied at all times by military officials.

Most Chechens are Muslims who practice Sufism, a mystical form of Islam characterized by the veneration of local saints and by groups practicing their own rituals. The Wahhabi sect, with roots in Saudi Arabia and characterized by a strict observance of Islam, has been banned. Since the start of the last war in 1994, many of the republic's schools have been damaged or destroyed, and education in Chechnya has been sporadic. Most schools have not been renovated and continue to lack such basic amenities as textbooks, electricity, and running water.

Some charitable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in humanitarian, cultural and social issues are allowed to operate. An important

but small Western-supported NGO, the LAM Center for Complex Research and Popularization of Chechen Culture, conducts activities in Russia to promote inter-group understanding and makes small grants to a small network of embattled NGOs. However, associational and trade union life is dominated by pro-regime organizations and any groups and NGO activists that are viewed as sympathetic to the cause of Chechen independence are subject to persecution. In the face of the ongoing conflict, some Chechen NGO activists have left the region and are now working among refugees in the neighboring republic of Ingushetia.

Amid widespread conflict, the rule of law is virtually nonexistent. Civilians are subject to harassment and violence, including torture, rape, and extra-judicial executions, at the hands of Russian soldiers. Senior military authorities have shown disregard for these widespread abuses. There are worries that the new police and security structures under the control of President Kadyrov are likely to contribute to additional widespread rights abuses. According to a report in Britain's *Guardian* in October 2003, Kadyrov has assembled a well-paid private army of 4,000 former rebels, policemen, and hired guns. Chechen rebel fighters have targeted Chechen civilians who have cooperated with Russian government officials or who work for the pro-Moscow administration.

Extra-judicial killings, disappearances, and other war crimes are rarely investigated and even more rarely punished. In an unprecedented development, on July 25, 2003, a military court in Rostov-on-Don, Russia found Russian Colonel Yuri Budanov guilty of kidnapping and murdering a Chechen woman and sentenced him to 10 years in a maximum security prison. The court concluded that Budanov was sane at the time he killed the 18-year-old woman three years ago. In December 2003, a Russian military court initiated the trial of four soldiers for murders alleged to have been committed in the Shattoi region of Chechnya in January 2002.

Russian troops engage in so-called "mopping-up" operations in which they seal off entire towns and conduct house-to-house searches for suspected rebels. During these security sweeps, soldiers have been accused of beating and torturing civilians, looting, and extorting money. Thousands of Chechens have gone missing or been found dead after such operations. In 2002, Chechnya issued new rules for troops conducting sweeps, including identifying themselves and providing a full list of those detained, but rights activists have accused federal troops of widely ignoring these rules. Human rights groups report the ongoing operation of illegal filtration camps by Russian authorities and Kadyrov's security

forces. The camps detain and "filter" out Chechens suspected of ties to rebel groups, with filtration often used as a euphemism for murder.

While precise estimates by independent monitoring agencies are unavailable, close approximations suggest that at the end of 2003, there were nearly 100,000 refugees in camps outside of Chechnya. Many were living in appalling conditions in tent camps, abandoned buildings, or in cramped quarters with friends or relatives. They are under intense pressure to return to their war-ravaged conflict zone despite ongoing concerns for personal security, as well as a lack of employment and housing opportunities. There were tens of thousands of additional internally displaced persons inside the region and well over 100,000 additional long-term homeless.

Travel to and from the republic and inside its borders is severely restricted. After the resumption of war, the Russian military failed to provide safe exit routes from the conflict zones for non-combatants. Bribes are usually required to pass the numerous military checkpoints.

Widespread corruption and the economic devastation caused by the war severely limit equality of opportunity. Ransoms obtained from kidnapping and the lucrative illegal oil trade provide money for Chechens and members of the Russian military. Much of the republic's infrastructure and housing remains damaged or destroyed after years of war, with reconstruction funds widely believed to have been substantially misappropriated by corrupt local authorities. In the capital city of Grozny, the long-term conflict has devastated civilian life, with over 60 percent of all buildings completely destroyed. Much of the population ekes out a living selling produce or other goods at local markets. Residents who have found work are employed mostly by the local police, the Chechen administration, the oil and construction sectors, or at small enterprises, including cafes. There are signs of an emerging struggle between what is referred to as the "Kadyrov clan" and other corrupt economic interest and criminal groups.

While women continue to face discrimination in a traditional, male-dominated culture, the war has resulted in many women becoming the primary breadwinners for their families. Russian soldiers reportedly rape Chechen women in areas controlled by federal forces.



# Appendix A: Table of Independent Countries

## *Freedom in the World 2004*

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating	Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating
Afghanistan	6	6	Not Free	Chad	6	5	Not Free
Albania	3	3	Partly Free	Chile	1▲	1	Free
Algeria	6	5	Not Free	China (PRC)	7	6	Not Free
Andorra	1	1	Free	Colombia	4	4	Partly Free
Angola	6	5	Not Free	Comoros	5	4	Partly Free
Antigua and Barbuda	4	2	Partly Free	Congo (Brazzaville)	5▲	4	Partly Free
Argentina	2▲	2▲	Free	↑ Congo (Kinshasa)	6	6	Not Free
↓ Armenia	4	4	Partly Free	Costa Rica	1	2	Free
Australia	1	1	Free	Cote d'Ivoire	6	5▲	Not Free
Austria	1	1	Free	Croatia	2	2	Free
Azerbaijan	6	5	Not Free	Cuba	7	7	Not Free
Bahamas	1	1	Free	Cyprus(G)	1	1	Free
Bahrain	5	5	Partly Free	Czech Republic	1	2	Free
Bangladesh	4	4	Partly Free	Denmark	1	1	Free
Barbados	1	1	Free	Djibouti	5▼	5	Partly Free
↓ Belarus	6	6	Not Free	Dominica	1	1	Free
Belgium	1	1	Free	Dominican Republic	3▼	2	Free
Belize	1	2	Free	East Timor	3	3	Partly Free
Benin	2▲	2	Free	↑ Ecuador	3	3	Partly Free
Bhutan	6	5	Not Free	Egypt	6	6	Not Free
Bolivia	3▼	3	Partly Free	↓ El Salvador	2	3	Free
↑ Bosnia-Herzegovina	4	4	Partly Free	Equatorial Guinea	7	6	Not Free
Botswana	2	2	Free	Eritrea	7	6	Not Free
Brazil	2	3	Free	Estonia	1	2	Free
Brunei	6	5	Not Free	Ethiopia	5	5	Partly Free
Bulgaria	1	2	Free	↓ Fiji	4	3	Partly Free
Burkina Faso	4	4	Partly Free	Finland	1	1	Free
Burma	7	7	Not Free	France	1	1	Free
Burundi	5▲	5	Partly Free	↓ Gabon	5	4	Partly Free
Cambodia	6	5	Not Free	The Gambia	4	4	Partly Free
↓ Cameroon	6	6	Not Free	Georgia	4	4	Partly Free
Canada	1	1	Free	Germany	1	1	Free
Cape Verde	1	1▲	Free	Ghana	2	2▲	Free
Ctrl African Republic	7▼	5	Not Free	Greece	1	2	Free

## Appendix A: Table of Independent Countries

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating	Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating
Grenada	1	2	Free	Netherlands	1	1	Free
↓ Guatemala	4	4	Partly Free	New Zealand	1	1	Free
Guinea	6	5	Not Free	↓ Nicaragua	3	3	Partly Free
Guinea-Bissau	6	4▲	Partly Free	Niger	4	4	Partly Free
↓ Guyana	2	2	Free	Nigeria	4	4▲	Partly Free
↓ Haiti	6	6	Not Free	North Korea	7	7	Not Free
↓ Honduras	3	3	Partly Free	Norway	1	1	Free
Hungary	1	2	Free	Oman	6	5	Not Free
Iceland	1	1	Free	Pakistan	6	5	Not Free
India	2	3	Free	Palau	1	1▲	Free
Indonesia	3	4	Partly Free	Panama	1	2	Free
Iran	6	6	Not Free	Papua New Guinea	3	3▼	Partly Free
Iraq	7	5▲	Not Free	Paraguay	3▲	3	Partly Free
Ireland	1	1	Free	Peru	2	3	Free
Israel	1	3	Free	Philippines	2	3	Free
Italy	1	1	Free	Poland	1	2	Free
↓ Jamaica	2	3	Free	Portugal	1	1	Free
Japan	1	2	Free	↑ Qatar	6	6	Not Free
Jordan	5▲	5	Partly Free	Romania	2	2	Free
Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free	↓ Russia	5	5	Partly Free
Kenya	3▲	3▲	Partly Free	Rwanda	6▲	5	Not Free
Kiribati	1	1	Free	Saint Kitts and Nevis	1	2	Free
Kuwait	4	5	Partly Free	Saint Lucia	2	1	Free
Kyrgyzstan	6	5	Not Free	St Vincent and the Grenadines	1	2	Free
Laos	7	6	Not Free	Samoa	2	2	Free
Latvia	1	2	Free	San Marino	1	1	Free
Lebanon	6	5	Not Free	Sao Tome and Principe	2	2	Free
Lesotho	2	3	Free	Saudi Arabia	7	7	Not Free
↑ Liberia	6	6	Not Free	Senegal	2	3	Free
Libya	7	7	Not Free	↓ Serbia and Montenegro	3	2	Free
Liechtenstein	1	1	Free	Seychelles	3	3	Partly Free
Lithuania	1	2	Free	Sierra Leone	4	3▲	Partly Free
Luxembourg	1	1	Free	Singapore	5	4	Partly Free
↑ Macedonia	3	3	Partly Free	Slovakia	1	2	Free
Madagascar	3	3▲	Partly Free	Slovenia	1	1	Free
Malawi	3▲	4	Partly Free	Solomon Islands	3	3	Partly Free
Malaysia	5	4▲	Partly Free	Somalia	6	7	Not Free
Maldives	6	5	Not Free	South Africa	1	2	Free
Mali	2	2▲	Free	South Korea	2	2	Free
Malta	1	1	Free	Spain	1	1	Free
Marshall Islands	1	1	Free	Sri Lanka	3	3▲	Partly Free
Mauritania	6	5	Not Free	Sudan	7	7	Not Free
Mauritius	1	2	Free	Suriname	1	2	Free
Mexico	2	2	Free	Swaziland	7	5	Not Free
Micronesia	1	1▲	Free	Sweden	1	1	Free
Moldova	3	4	Partly Free	Switzerland	1	1	Free
Monaco	2	1	Free	Syria	7	7	Not Free
Mongolia	2	2	Free	Taiwan (Rep. of China)	2	2	Free
Morocco	5	5	Partly Free	Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free
Mozambique	3	4	Partly Free	Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free
Namibia	2	3	Free	Thailand	2	3	Free
Nauru	1	1▲	Free	Togo	6	5	Not Free
Nepal	5	4	Partly Free				

## Appendix A: Table of Independent Countries

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating
↓ Tonga	5	3	Partly Free
Trinidad and Tobago	3	3	Partly Free
Tunisia	6	5	Not Free
Turkey	3	4	Partly Free
Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free
Tuvalu	1	1	Free
Uganda	5▲	4	Partly Free
Ukraine	4	4	Partly Free
United Arab Emirates	6	6▼	Not Free
United Kingdom†	1	1	Free
United States	1	1	Free
Uruguay	1	1	Free
Uzbekistan	7	6	Not Free
Vanuatu	2▼	2	Free
↓ Venezuela	3	4	Partly Free
Vietnam	7	6	Not Free
Yemen	5▲	5	Partly Free
↑ Zambia	4	4	Partly Free
↓ Zimbabwe	6	6	Not Free

PR and CL stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating.

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

↑↓ up or down indicates a trend arrow.

† excluding Northern Ireland

The freedom ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

NOTE: The ratings in this table reflect global events from January 1, 2003, through November 31, 2003.





# Appendix B:

## Methodology

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The preceding reports were excerpted from the forthcoming 2004 edition of *Freedom in the World*, an annual Freedom House survey that monitors the progress and decline of political rights and civil liberties in 192 countries and 18 select related and disputed territories. The survey rates each country and territory on a seven-point scale for both political rights and civil liberties, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free, and then assigns each country and territory a broad category status of Free (for countries whose ratings average 1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0). Those countries and territories which received scores of 6 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties, 7 for political rights and 6 for civil liberties, and 7 for both political rights and civil liberties are included in the group of "most repressive societies." Within these groups are gradations of freedom that make some more repressive than others.

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

The *Freedom in the World* ratings are not only assessments of the conduct of governments, but are intended to reflect the reality of daily life. Freedom can be affected by state actions as well as by non-state actors. Thus, terrorist movements or armed groups utilize violent methods which can dramatically restrict essential freedoms within a society. Conversely, the existence of non-state activists or

journalists who act courageously and independently despite state restrictions can also positively impact the ability of the population to exercise its freedoms.

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

For a more detailed analysis of last year's survey methodology, please consult the methodology chapter from *Freedom in the World 2003*. The methodology for the forthcoming survey edition will be published in *Freedom in the World 2004*.

# Appendix C:

## About Freedom House

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Founded in 1941 by Eleanor Roosevelt and others, Freedom House is the oldest non-profit, non-governmental organization in the United States dedicated to promoting and defending democracy and freedom worldwide. Freedom House supports the global expansion of freedom through its advocacy activities, monitoring and in depth research on the state of freedom, and direct support of democratic reformers throughout the world.

**Advocating Democracy and Human Rights:** For over six decades, Freedom House has played an important role in identifying the key challenges to the global expansion of democracy, human rights and freedom. Freedom House is committed to advocating a vigorous U.S. engagement in international affairs that promotes human rights and freedom around the world.

**Monitoring Freedom:** Despite significant recent gains for freedom, hundreds of millions of people around the world continue to endure dictatorship, repression, and the denial of basic rights. To shed light on the obstacles to liberty, Freedom House issues studies, surveys, and reports on the condition of global freedom. Our research is meant to illuminate the nature of democracy, identify its adversaries, and point the way for policies that strengthen and expand democratic freedoms. Freedom House projects are designed to support the framework of rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Supporting Democratic Change:** The attainment of freedom ultimately depends on the actions of courageous men and women who are committed to the transformation of their societies. But history has repeatedly demonstrated that outside support can play a critical role in the struggle for democratic rights. Freedom House is actively engaged in these struggles, both in countries where dictatorship holds sway and in those societies that are in transition from autocracy

## **Appendix C: About Freedom House**

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to democracy. Freedom House functions as a catalyst for freedom by working to strengthen civil society, promote open government, defend human rights, enhance justice, and facilitate the free flow of information and ideas.