

MALI 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mali is a constitutional democracy. In 2013 President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita won the presidential election, deemed free and fair by international observers. The inauguration of President Keita and the subsequent establishment of a new National Assembly through free and fair elections ended a 16-month transitional period following the 2012 military coup that ousted the previous democratically elected president, Amadou Toumani Toure. The restoration of a democratic government and the arrest of coup leader Amadou Sanogo restored some civilian control over the military.

Civilian authorities did not always maintain effective control over the security forces.

Despite the peace accord signed in June 2015 between the government, the Platform of northern militias, and the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), violent conflict between CMA and Platform forces continued throughout the northern region. Terrorist groups not party to the peace process--including Ansar al-Dine, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front (FLM)--carried out attacks against the military, armed groups, and civilian targets throughout the northern and central regions.

Abuses committed against civilians during violent clashes between Platform and CMA fighters in and around the region of Kidal constituted the most significant human rights problem. Abuses included arbitrary detention, destruction and seizure of property, and killing of civilians. Violent clashes in the city and region of Kidal targeted rival fighters and civilians, resulting in deaths, injuries, arbitrary detentions, disruption of humanitarian assistance, and property loss. The inability to resolve the violence delayed implementation of the peace accord in the north, which prolonged the lack of basic services. Violent clashes in February and March in the Menaka area between armed elements allied with CMA and Platform forces also targeted civilians and resulted in numerous deaths.

Other human rights problems included arbitrary killings by government forces; disappearances; abuse of detainees, including torture; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary detentions; judicial lack of independence and inefficiency; restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and association; official corruption; rape of and domestic violence against women and girls; female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C);

human trafficking; societal discrimination against black Tuaregs, who were subjected to slavery-related practices; discrimination based on sexual orientation; and discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS and albinism. Authorities and employers often disregarded workers' rights, and exploitative labor, including child labor, was common.

The government made little or no effort to investigate, prosecute, or punish officials who committed violations, whether in the security forces or elsewhere in the government, and impunity was a problem. Coup leader Sanogo, first arrested in 2013, remained under arrest awaiting trial. Sanogo's trial began in Sikasso in December, but the presiding judge accepted a defense motion to delay the trial until early 2017. While the International Criminal Court convicted one person on a war crimes charge relating to the destruction of religious sites in Timbuktu, impunity for serious crimes committed in the north continued.

Despite the June 2015 peace accord, elements within the Platform--including the Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-defense Group (GATIA), the Arab Movement for Azawad-Platform (MAA-PF), and the Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Forces and Movements (CMFPR)--and elements in the CMA--including the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), and the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)--committed serious human rights abuses, including summary executions, sexual violence, torture, and use of child soldiers. Extremist groups, including affiliates of AQIM, killed civilians and military force members, including peacekeepers. The government, in collaboration with French military forces, conducted counterterrorism operations in the north leading to the detention of extremists and armed group elements accused of committing crimes. Reports of abuses rarely led to investigations or prosecutions.

Chadian peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) were accused of numerous human rights abuses in Kidal Region, including killings, abductions, and arbitrary arrests (see section 1.g.).

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

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings (see section 1.g.).

According to MINUSMA, for example, government forces in April or May summarily executed three individuals arrested on terrorism-related charges. The international nongovernmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch documented the killing of 10 detainees in the central part of the country during the year.

Armed groups who signed the peace accord and violent extremist groups committed numerous arbitrary killings related to internal conflict. Approximately 165 persons, including several civilians, were killed during clashes between the CMA and GATIA from July through September. GATIA reportedly received equipment and logistical support from the government during this period. Terrorist elements, including AQIM affiliates, launched frequent attacks, killing civilians as well as national and international security force members.

Attacks by bandits and extremist Islamist groups increasingly expanded from the traditional conflict zone in the north to the Mopti and Segou regions. These attacks targeted government and international security force members.

Chadian members of MINUSMA allegedly killed civilians. In May Chadian soldiers attached to MINUSMA reportedly arrested several civilians after a May 18 attack by Ansar al-Dine. One of the arrested men, a herder, died in Chadian custody.

There was limited progress in the prosecution of suspects, including coup leader Sanogo, in the forced disappearance, torture, and killing of 21 Red Berets, including former junta member Colonel Youssouf Traore, following a mutiny in 2013. The case was initially brought to trial in December. Following a defense objection to the admissibility of DNA evidence, however, the trial was suspended until 2017 pending new DNA analysis.

b. Disappearance

There were several reports of disappearances.

Human rights observers were unable to verify the whereabouts of dozens of prisoners purportedly detained in connection with the northern conflict due to possible unreported deaths in custody, alleged surreptitious releases, and suspected

clandestine transfer of prisoners to the government's intelligence service, the General Directorate of State Security (DGSE). Human rights organizations estimated the DGSE held 60 unacknowledged detainees.

There was limited progress in the prosecution of the suspects, including coup leader Sanogo, for the forced disappearance, torture, and killing of 21 Red Berets, including former junta member Colonel Youssouf Traore, following a mutiny in 2013 (see section 1.a.).

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

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, but there were reports that soldiers employed them against individuals with suspected links to extremist groups including Ansar al-Dine, al-Murabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front (see section 1.g.). There were reports that Islamist groups perpetrated sexual violence.

According to MINUSMA, government forces tortured eight detainees and subjected seven to abuse between March and September.

Human Rights Watch noted allegations of torture by military forces, particularly against members of the Fulani ethnic group in the central part of the country. In one incident military personnel arrested 11 local Fulani following attacks in the Mopti Region during the first half of the year. According to human rights observers, three of the 11 died during detention at the Nampala military base, and others showed signs of torture. No charges were brought by year's end against the soldiers reportedly responsible.

The case against a soldier who allegedly raped a 13-year-old girl in August 2014 remained open. The military released the suspect in September 2014 and, at year's end, had not responded to requests by the civilian prosecutor to produce the suspect for trial. Despite the military's lack of cooperation, the prosecutor continued to pursue the case.

There was limited progress in investigations into the disappearance, torture, and killing of 21 Red Berets in 2012 (see section 1.a.).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening due to overcrowding and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

Physical Conditions: As of September 8, the Bamako Central Prison held 1,445 prisoners in a facility designed to hold 400. Detention conditions were better in women's prisons than in those for men. Authorities held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. Authorities detained persons arrested on charges related to terrorism in the high-security division of Bamako Central Prison and in Koulikoro. Authorities may hold arrested individuals for up to 72 hours in police stations, where there were no separate holding areas for men, women, or children.

During the year 27 prisoners and detainees died. The National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH), an independent entity within the Ministry of Justice, attributed the deaths to unhealthy prison conditions. Approximately half of the 27 died from heart attacks; the remainder died from malaria, HIV/AIDS, and dehydration.

Inadequate security mechanisms and a general lack of resources prevented authorities from maintaining control of prisons.

Prison food, when provided, was insufficient in both quality and quantity, and medical facilities were inadequate. Lack of sanitation continued to pose the most significant threat to prisoners' health. Buckets served as toilets. Not all prisons had access to potable water. Ventilation, lighting, and temperature were comparable with many poor urban homes.

Administration: Prison recordkeeping was inadequate, and authorities took no action during the year to improve it. Authorities did not use alternative sentencing for nonviolent offenders.

There were no prison ombudsmen. Authorities, however, permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints, either directly or through the Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic, to judicial authorities without censorship to request investigation of credible allegations of inhuman conditions. Although prisoners made verbal complaints during CNDH prison inspections, prisoners filed no formal complaints due to illiteracy, lack of knowledge regarding complaint mechanisms, skepticism regarding the utility of making such complaints, and fear of retaliation. The CNDH, charged with visiting prisons and ensuring humane conditions, visited prisoners in Bamako Central Prison within one week of request. The CNDH did not regularly visit prisons outside of Bamako, and its last visit to a military

detention center occurred in 2012. The government's Directorate for National Penitentiary Administration investigated and monitored prison and detention center conditions. Detainees had reasonable access to visitors and could observe their religious practices.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted visits by human rights monitors, and human rights organizations conducted visits during the year. The government required NGOs and other monitors to submit a request to the prison director, who then forwarded it to the Ministry of Justice. The Malian Association for Human Rights visited prisons in Kati, Bamako, and other locations outside the north. Human rights observers with MINUSMA and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regularly visited the centers holding CMA and Platform members. ICRC officials also visited prisons in Bamako, Sikasso, Koulikoro, Gao, and Timbuktu.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law generally prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. Nevertheless, government security forces and Platform and CMA forces detained and arrested numerous individuals in connection with the ongoing northern conflict, particularly in the wake of clashes in Kidal and terrorist attacks in the Timbuktu, Mopti, and Segou regions (see section 1.g.).

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Security forces include the National Police, the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA), the National Gendarmerie, National Guard, National Police, and the DGSE. FAMA, the National Gendarmerie, and the National Guard are administratively under the Ministry of Defense, although operational control of the National Guard and National Gendarmerie is shared with the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection. Police officers have responsibility for law enforcement and maintaining order in urban areas, while gendarmes have that responsibility in rural areas. The army occasionally performed domestic security operations in northern areas where police and gendarmes were absent. The National Guard has specialized border security units, which were largely ineffective. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection include maintaining order during exceptional circumstances, such as national disasters or riots. The DGSE has authority to investigate any case and temporarily detain persons at the discretion of its director general. It usually did so only in terrorism and national security cases.

The National Police lacked resources and training. Corruption was a problem, and traffic police officers frequently arrested and released drivers in exchange for bribes.

MINUSMA's mandate includes ensuring security, protecting civilians, assisting the reestablishment of government authority, and the rebuilding of the security sector. The mission worked to expand its presence, including through longer-range patrols, in northern regions beyond key population centers, notably in areas where civilians were at risk. MINUSMA's mandate also includes providing specific protection for women and children affected by armed conflict and addressing the needs of victims of sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict. MINUSMA's role extended to anticipating, preventing, mitigating, and resolving issues related to the northern conflict by monitoring violence, assisting in investigations, and reporting to the UN Security Council on abuses or violations of human rights or international humanitarian law committed in the country.

The French military counterterrorism operation Barkhane continued. The operation had a regional focus, undertaking counterterrorism activities in Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger. Approximately 1,000 soldiers conducted counterterrorism operations in collaboration with FAMA in northern Mali.

Civilian authorities failed at times to maintain effective control over the security forces. Particularly in the north, there were many reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year. Mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption by security forces generally were not effective.

A commission of inquiry established in 2014 by the Ministry of Defense investigated security force killings to determine whether they constituted violations of the military code of justice or of criminal law. The commission referred cases involving human rights abuse to the prosecutor general for criminal trial. By year's end, however, the commission had completed no investigations into alleged human rights abuses committed by soldiers redeployed to the north.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires judicial warrants for arrest. The law requires police officers to charge suspects or release them within 48 hours. While police usually secured warrants based on sufficient evidence and a duly authorized official issued the

warrant, this did not always occur. The law provides for the transfer of detainees from police stations to the prosecutor's office within 72 hours of arrest, but authorities sometimes held detainees longer in police stations. Authorities may grant detainees, who have limited rights of bail, conditional liberty, particularly for minor crimes and civil matters. Authorities occasionally released defendants on their own recognizance.

Detainees have the right to a lawyer of their choice or a state-provided lawyer if indigent. Nevertheless, a shortage of lawyers--particularly outside Bamako and Mopti--often prevented access to legal representation.

Arbitrary Arrest: Human rights organizations reported widespread allegations of arbitrary arrest and detention. In many cases gendarmes detained suspects on DGSE orders and then transferred them for questioning to the DGSE, which generally held suspects for hours or days. The transfer process itself, however, sometimes took more than a week, during which time security services did not inform detainees of the charges against them. Authorities did not provide released detainees transport back to the location of their arrest, a trip that often required several days of travel. These detentions often occurred in the wake of attacks by bandits or terrorists and targeted members of the ethnic group suspected of carrying out the raids.

In the wake of July 19 attacks in Nampala near the Mauritanian border, the DGSE detained several Fulani individuals. Critics claimed the government had no evidence to support the charges and that authorities detained the individuals simply because they were Fulani.

On May 4, Bamako's Court of Appeals tried Lieutenant Mohamed Ouattara--a paratrooper arrested in 2014 along with Amara Sylla, Souleymane Sangare, Dramane Traore, and Thierry Diarra--for allegedly planning to threaten the president's safety. The court sentenced Mohamed Ouattara and Amara Sylla to five years' imprisonment, acquitted Dramane Traore, and sentenced Souleymane Sangare to life in prison. Diarra still awaited trial at year's end.

Pretrial Detention: The law provides for trial for charged detainees within three months for misdemeanors and within one year for felonies, but lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. Judicial inefficiency, the large number of detainees, corruption, and staff shortages contributed to the problem. Individuals sometimes remained in prison for several years before their cases came to trial. Approximately 70 percent of inmates awaited trial.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The law allows detainees to challenge the legal basis or arbitrary nature of their detention in court. They were promptly released if they win the challenge, but the law does not provide for compensation.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but the executive branch continued to exert influence over the judicial system. Corruption and limited resources affected the fairness of trials. Bribery and influence peddling were widespread in the courts, according to domestic human rights groups.

There were problems enforcing court orders. Sometimes judges were absent from their assigned areas for months at a time. Village chiefs and justices of the peace appointed by the government decided the majority of disputes in rural areas. Justices of the peace had investigative, prosecutorial, and judicial functions. These traditional systems did not provide the same rights as civil and criminal courts.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. Nevertheless, proceedings often were delayed, and some defendants waited years for their trials to begin. The law presumes defendants are innocent and have the right to prompt and detailed information on the charges against them, with free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals. Except in the case of minors and sensitive family cases, trials generally were public.

Defendants have the right to communicate with an attorney of their choice (or to have one provided at public expense in felony cases and those involving minors). When a court declares a defendant indigent, it provides an attorney at public expense and the court waives all fees. Administrative backlogs and an insufficient number of lawyers, particularly in rural areas, often prevented prompt access. Defendants and their attorneys have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, access government-held evidence, confront witnesses, and present one's own witnesses and evidence. The government generally respected these rights. Defendants may not be compelled to testify against themselves or confess guilt and may appeal decisions to the Appellate Court and the Supreme Court. The law extends these rights to all citizens.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

As of September 29, authorities had detained 474 persons in connection with the conflict in the northern and central parts of the country. Some of those detained were believed to be political prisoners. The government typically detained conflict-related prisoners in higher-security facilities within prisons and provided them the same protection as other prisoners. International human rights and humanitarian organizations had access to most of these centers, but not to detainees held in facilities operated by the DGSE.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights violations. They may appeal their cases to the Economic Community of West African States' Court of Justice and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. In cases of traditional slavery, there were reports that civil court orders were sometimes difficult to enforce.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

g. Abuses in Internal Conflicts

The military, formerly separatist forces including the MNLA, HCUA, and MAA; northern militias that shared interests with the government including GATIA; and extremist organizations including AQIM, the Macina Liberation Front, and al-Murabitoun committed serious human rights abuses in the northern and central parts of the country. These included arbitrary killings, abuse, and disappearances. Most military abuses targeted Fulani, Tuareg, and Arab individuals and were in reprisal for attacks attributed to armed groups associated with those ethnicities. Jihadist groups, the CMA alliance of the MNLA, HCUA, and MAA, and militias in the Platform, such as GATIA, held hostages and used child soldiers.

Government and French troops targeted terrorist organizations--including AQIM, Ansar al-Dine, and al-Murabitoun--that were not party to the peace talks or

resulting accord, although they maintained links to armed groups participating in the peace process.

Ethnic Fulani (also known as Peulh) in the central Mopti and Segou regions reported abuse by government forces. According to Human Rights Watch, on January 8, soldiers allegedly executed two Fulani men taken into custody near Karena. Human Rights Watch also documented 20 cases of torture or severe mistreatment of detainees during the year. Most military abuses that targeted Fulani, Tuareg, and Arab persons were in reprisal for attacks attributed to armed groups associated with those ethnicities.

Attacks by armed groups that signed the 2015 accord were sporadic and localized for much of the year. In February and March, battles between different tribal groups in the Menaka area included attacks that targeted civilians. The most serious fighting occurred in July, in the Kidal Region, between CMA and Platform forces and resulted in the deaths of 165 persons, including civilians.

Terrorist groups continued their activities in the north and central parts of the country. In September the International Criminal Court convicted and sentenced Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi to nine years' imprisonment; al-Mahdi was a member of Ansar al Dine who pleaded guilty to war crimes relating to the intentional destruction of religious and historic buildings in Timbuktu in 2012. Impunity for serious crimes committed in the north continued, however, including for crimes carried out by terrorist groups.

The government lacked sufficient resources to pursue and investigate cases in the north. Security conditions also inhibited judicial investigations in the north. In its December 2015 report, the CNDH criticized prisoner exchange agreements that resulted in the release of suspected perpetrators of human rights violations.

Killings: The military, ex-rebel groups, northern militias whose interests aligned with the government, and terrorist organizations killed persons throughout the country, but primarily in the northern and central regions.

Unidentified individuals or groups were responsible for many attacks. On August 7, unidentified armed individuals targeted and killed a family member of the mayor of Karena.

Intercommunal violence related to disputes over transhumance (seasonal migration) and cattle grazing occurred between Dogon, Bambara, and Fulani in the

Mopti Region, Bambara and Fulani in the Segou region, and between various Tuareg and Arab groups in the regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal (see section 6).

Numerous attacks on MINUSMA peacekeepers resulted in deaths and injuries. On February 12, seven Guinean peacekeepers died as a result of an attack on their camp in Kidal. Ansar al-Dine claimed responsibility for the attack, which injured 30 other peacekeepers. On May 19, five Chadian soldiers attached to MINUSMA died and three were wounded when their convoy vehicle struck an improvised explosive device (IED) in Kidal Region. On May 29, five Togolese MINUSMA peacekeepers were killed during an attack in Sevare. August attacks against MINUSMA soldiers in the Kidal Region killed one Chadian soldier and injured six others.

Abductions: On January 7, AQIM forces kidnapped a Swiss missionary in Timbuktu; she remained in captivity at year's end.

In May the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) took custody of two children who had been apprehended along with their father by Chadian MINUSMA forces in Kidal Region. The children appeared to have been beaten.

Following July 21-22 fighting in Kidal, CMA forces captured five civilians and GATIA forces captured four. Numerous reprisal attacks against civilians occurred in the two months after the fighting.

On September 2, unidentified gunmen kidnapped the deputy mayor of Boni; he remained in captivity at year's end.

Child Soldiers: In 2013 the government and the United Nations signed a protocol agreement to protect children associated with armed conflict. The protocol established a procedure to transfer such children to an interim care center operated by UNICEF. At year's end the interim care center remained open and hosted one former child soldier, while authorities reportedly had reunited the other detained children with their families.

With the support of MINUSMA, in 2013 MAA and MNLA leaders signed an agreement prohibiting the recruitment of children and allowing MINUSMA to screen their troops in September 2014. No subsequent official screenings occurred, and MINUSMA continued to observe children in the ranks of the CMA, the umbrella organization that includes the MAA and MNLA.

According to MINUSMA, between January and May, GATIA recruited 29 children.

Most children recruited were boys, but reports indicated girls might also have been recruited and later forced to serve as sex slaves.

Also see the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: Attacks on international organizations and peacekeepers occurred.

In April members of Ansar al-Dine kidnapped four ICRC workers north of the city of Kidal in retaliation for the arrests of several terrorism suspects by members of Barkhane, the French military counterterrorism operation. The ICRC workers were released the day after Barkhane freed the terror suspects.

On April 29, unidentified assailants attacked a Danish Refugee Council convoy between Dorey and N'Tillit, injuring three humanitarian workers.

Since 2013, when MINUSMA's mission began, more than 100 MINUSMA personnel have been killed.

A July UN Mine Action Service report noted 279 IED incidents since July 2013, resulting in 119 deaths and 453 persons injured. The report noted 69 IED incidents during the first six months of the year, resulting in 40 deaths and 90 persons injured.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, but the government occasionally restricted those rights.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: In March, Ousmane Diarra, a writer and librarian at the French Institute in Bamako, claimed he was threatened for making comments on Islamic extremism and the politicization of Islam. The threats reportedly were made by telephone, through intermediaries, and on the street.

Press and Media Freedoms: A 2000 press law imposes fines and prison sentences for defamation. It also criminalizes offenses such as undermining state security, demoralizing the armed forces, offending the head of state, sedition, and consorting with the enemy.

In January a journalist working in Djenne, Mopti Region, reported receiving death threats via text messages from an unknown sender due to his radio presentation on reducing the risk of Islamic radicalization among youth.

The government continued investigating radio host Mohamed Youssouf Bathily, known as Ras Bath, for “demoralizing the armed forces” and other charges. Bathily’s supporters claimed the charges were politically motivated.

Two French journalists complained government security forces targeted them, including by firing tear gas directly at them, while they covered August 17 protests against the arrest of Ras Bath.

Violence and Harassment: In March a radio presenter in Mopti Region claimed he was beaten by two unidentified gunmen, who accused him of encouraging his audience to denounce jihadist activities during his talk show. The gunmen reportedly threatened to kill the announcer if he continued to talk about Islamist activities in Mopti Region.

Journalists had difficulty obtaining military information deemed sensitive by the government and often were unable to gain access to northern locations.

Financial considerations also skewed press coverage. Most media outlets had limited resources. Journalists’ salaries were extremely low, and many outlets could not pay the transportation costs for their journalists to attend media events. Journalists often asked event organizers to pay their transportation costs, and the terms “transportation money” and “per diem” became euphemisms for a pay-for-coverage system, with better-financed organizations often receiving better press coverage.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted access to the internet on August 17, when authorities blocked social networks, including Facebook and Twitter, after violent protests

occurred following the arrest of popular radio host Ras Bath. The government restored access to the sites August 20.

There were no credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. There were numerous internet cafes in Bamako, but home internet access remained limited due to the expense. Outside Bamako access to the internet was very limited. According to the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 8 percent of residents had access to the internet at home in 2015.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly, but the government did not always respect this right. For example, on July 12, three protestors in Gao were killed and approximately 30 injured when national police fired into a crowd protesting the installation of interim authorities in the city.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association, although the law prohibits associations deemed immoral. The government generally respected freedom of association except for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

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

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing humanitarian assistance, including some protection services, to internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

In-country Movement: While in-country movement was not formally restricted, the army established checkpoints to maintain security, and the unstable security situation limited freedom of movement. The populations of Gao, Kidal, Timbuktu, and parts of Mopti feared leaving the cities for security reasons, including the threat from roadside bombs (see section 1.g.). Conditions at the beginning of the year encouraged some refugees and IDPs to return to their homes in the north, but subsequent incidents of insecurity slowed the rate of returns. The government facilitated travel to the north for IDPs who lacked the means to pay for their travel.

Police routinely stopped and checked citizens and foreigners to restrict the movement of contraband and verify vehicle registrations. The number of police checkpoints on roads entering Bamako and inside the city increased after a rise in extremist attacks across the country. Journalists often complained that the government, citing security concerns, did not allow them to move freely in the north during military operations.

Internally Displaced Persons

The Commission on Population Movement, led by the International Organization for Migration, estimated the country had 39,182 IDPs as of July 31, a 37-percent decline from the previous year. Fighting in late July in Kidal, however, led to reports of as many as several thousand Tuareg IDPs, who left Kidal on instruction of GATIA forces. Humanitarian access in the northern regions generally improved following the June 2015 signing of the Peace Accord, although insecurity related to terrorism and banditry remained a challenge in much of the country.

The Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection registered IDPs, and the government provided them assistance. IDPs generally lived with relatives, friends, or in rented accommodations. Most IDPs resided in urban areas and had access to food, water, and other forms of assistance. As many as half of all displaced families lacked official identity documents needed to facilitate access to public services, including schools for children, although identification was not required for humanitarian assistance. Aid groups provided humanitarian assistance to IDPs residing in the south and north as access permitted.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. A national committee in charge of refugees operated with assistance from UNHCR. A 2012 tripartite agreement between Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, and UNHCR allows for repatriation of the estimated 1,040 Ivoirian refugees and 69 Ivoirian asylum seekers remaining in Mali. According to UNHCR, as of March 31, there were 13,539 registered refugees residing in the country, the majority of whom were Afro-Mauritanian refugees expelled from Mauritania in 1989 and their children. At a meeting between UNHCR and ministers from the Economic Community of West African States, the government committed itself to assisting all Mauritanian refugees who wished to integrate locally with a declaration of intention to facilitate their naturalization. In March 2015 the government issued birth certificates to nearly 8,000 refugee children born in the country as part of its commitment to facilitate local integration for Afro-Mauritanian refugees, allowing them to access public services, sign employment contracts, buy and sell land, set up companies, and borrow from banks.

Temporary Protection: The government's Office of International Migration is responsible for providing temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. The National Commission for Refugees adjudicates refugee or asylum claims and provides temporary protection pending a decision on whether to grant asylum.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, and citizens exercised that right.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2013 President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita won the presidential election, deemed free and fair by international observers. Legislative elections also occurred in 2013, and independent domestic and international observers characterized them as credible and transparent. In the areas where they were conducted, communal elections held on November 20 were largely considered free and fair. Security concerns in some northern and central parts of the country

prevented the holding of communal elections in 58 of the country's 703 communes.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There are no laws limiting the participation of women in the political process, and women participated. Cultural factors, however, limited women's political participation. A law passed in November 2015 requires that at least 30 percent of the slots on party election lists be reserved for female candidates and that 30 percent of high-level government appointees be women. The law was not fully implemented by year's end. Female candidates met the 30-percent threshold for the November 20 communal elections, but not all candidate lists contained at least 30 percent female candidates. There were only 14 women in the 147-member National Assembly and seven women in the 34-seat cabinet led by Prime Minister Modibo Keita. There were four women on the 33-member Supreme Court and two women on the nine-member Constitutional Court.

The National Assembly had at least 16 members from historically marginalized pastoralist and nomadic ethnic minorities representing the eastern and northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal. The prime minister's cabinet included pastoral and nomadic ethnic minority members.

Four members of the National Assembly were members of northern armed groups, including two Tuaregs from Kidal associated with the HCUA, one Tuareg from Kidal associated with GATIA, and one member from Gao associated with the MAA. National Assembly members previously allied with Ansar al-Dine ended their association with the group following the French intervention in 2013.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year.

Corruption: Corruption in all sectors of the administration was widespread. Authorities did not hold police accountable for corruption. Officials, police, and gendarmes frequently extorted bribes. There were reports of uniformed police or individuals dressed as police directing stopped motorists to drive to dark and isolated locations where they robbed the victims.

During the year an anticorruption agency initiated an investigation into charges that Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Martin Pierre Dakono, Deputy CEO Hamidou Coulibaly, and accountant Moussa dit Almamy Sofara of the Mutual Savings and Loan of Education and Culture mismanaged up to 1.4 billion CFA francs (\$2.4 million) from the worker's pension fund.

Financial Disclosure: The constitution requires the president, prime minister, and other cabinet members to submit annually a financial statement and written declaration of their net worth to the Supreme Court. The Court of Accounts, a section within the Supreme Court, is responsible for monitoring and verifying financial disclosures. There are no sanctions for noncompliance. The Court of Accounts requires officials to identify all assets and liabilities when they start and complete their terms and provide yearly updates throughout their tenure. Officials are not required to submit disclosures for their spouses or children. The agency responsible for receiving financial disclosures was not operational by year's end, and few officials had filed. In 2014 President Keita submitted his annual financial statement and written declaration of net worth to the Supreme Court, although he filed no subsequent financial updates. Although the constitution calls for financial filings to be public, this did not occur.

Public Access to Information: The law provides for public access to government information, and the government generally granted such access to citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media. Journalists, however, had difficulty accessing information on military procurement, contracts, or operations deemed sensitive by the government. The national budget was available to the public upon request. If authorities refused requests for information, persons could appeal to an administrative court, which must respond within three months. The government generally respected these rules, although officials sometimes requested bribes to provide requested information. The government may refuse a request by citing national security.

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

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials generally were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The CNDH is an independent institution funded by the Ministry of Justice. The government continued to provide the commission with a headquarters and small staff. Other human rights organizations criticized the CNDH as ineffective and lacking autonomy. They stated the Ministry of Justice had too much control over the CNDH budget and the commission's large membership, which included several state representatives, impaired its ability to produce honest critiques of the government.

The commission of inquiry established by the National Assembly in 2014 to investigate violence between the government and armed groups in Kidal had not released a report on its findings by year's end.

The Ministry of Defense established at least three commissions of inquiry in 2014 to investigate forced disappearances perpetrated by the military in 2012. None of the commissions had released any public reports by year's end.

The Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission, created in 2015 to accept evidence, hold hearings, and recommend transitional justice measures for crimes and human rights violations stemming from the 2012 crisis, had not initiated any investigations by year's end.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape and provides a penalty of five to 20 years' imprisonment for offenders, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Rape was a widespread problem. Authorities prosecuted only a small percentage of rape cases since victims seldom reported rapes due to societal pressure, particularly because attackers were frequently close relatives, and fear of retaliation. No law specifically prohibits spousal rape, but law enforcement officials stated criminal laws against rape apply to spousal rape. Police and judicial authorities were willing to pursue rape cases but stopped if parties reached an agreement prior to trial. Information on convictions was not available.

Domestic violence against women, including spousal abuse, was prevalent. Most cases went unreported. Spousal abuse is a crime, but the law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence. Assault is punishable by prison terms of one to five years and fines of up to 500,000 CFA francs (\$850) or, if premeditated, up to 10 years' imprisonment. Police were reluctant to intervene in cases of domestic

violence. Many women were reluctant to file complaints against their husbands because they feared husbands would interpret such allegations as grounds for divorce, were unable to support themselves financially, sought to avoid social stigma, or feared retaliation or further ostracism. The governmental Planning and Statistics Unit, established to track prosecutions, did not produce reliable statistics.

Many NGOs operating shelters for abused female domestic laborers faced difficulties due to the absence of support from their usual foreign partners.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is legal in the country and, except in certain northern areas, all religious and ethnic groups practiced it widely, particularly in rural areas. Although FGM/C is legal, authorities prohibited the practice in government-funded health centers.

Parents generally had FGM/C performed on girls between the ages of six months and nine years. The most recent comprehensive FGM/C survey, conducted by UNICEF in 2010, indicated 89 percent of girls and women between ages 15 and 49 were excised, and 74 percent of girls and women in the same age group had at least one daughter who was excised. Government information campaigns regarding the dangers of FGM/C reached citizens throughout the country, and human rights organizations reported decreased incidence of FGM/C among children of educated parents.

Sexual Harassment: The law does not prohibit sexual harassment, which routinely occurred, including in schools, without any government efforts to prevent it.

Reproductive Rights: Women's ability to make decisions regarding reproduction was limited, and many lacked information on sexual and reproductive health. Women faced pressure to defer to their husbands and family on reproductive matters, including the number, spacing, and timing of pregnancies. Women often did not have access to contraception and skilled attendance during childbirth, including essential obstetric and postpartum care. According to the *2013 Demographic and Health Survey* (DHS), the most recent comprehensive survey on the subject, 10 percent of women used a modern method of contraception, and the unmet need for family planning was estimated at 26 percent. According to the DHS, in 2013 the maternal mortality ratio was 368 deaths per 100,000 live births, and a woman's lifetime risk of maternal death was one in 26. Major factors contributing to maternal mortality included lack of access to skilled medical practitioners, lack of family support for pregnant women seeking to visit health centers, and unsafe abortions. Many women and girls gave birth at home with only

family members or traditional birth attendants who lack clinical background present. The 2013 DHS indicated skilled health personnel attended 55 percent of births.

Discrimination: The law does not provide the same legal status and rights for women as for men, particularly concerning divorce and inheritance. Women are legally obligated to obey their husbands and are particularly vulnerable in cases of divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Women had very limited access to legal services due to their lack of education and information as well as the prohibitive cost.

While the law provides for equal property rights, traditional practices and ignorance of the law prevented women from taking full advantage of their rights. The marriage contract must specify if the couple wishes to share estate rights. If marriage certificates of Muslim couples do not specify the type of marriage, judges presume the marriage to be polygynous.

Women experienced economic discrimination due to social norms that favored men, and their access to education and employment was limited (see section 7.d.).

The Ministry for the Promotion of Women, the Family, and Children is responsible for ensuring the legal rights of women.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from either parent or by birth within the country.

The government did not register all births immediately, particularly in rural areas. According to UNICEF the government registered 81 percent of births in 2014. The government conducted an administrative census in 2014 to collect biometric data and assign a unique identifying number to every citizen. The process allowed the registration of children not registered at birth, although the number of new birth certificates assigned was unknown. Several local NGOs worked with foreign partners during the year to register children at birth and to educate parents about the benefits of registration. In March 2015 the government approved the issuance of birth certificates for 7,807 children born in the country to Afro-Mauritanian refugees as part of the government's commitment to facilitate their local integration.

Education: The constitution provides for tuition-free universal education, and the law provides for compulsory schooling from ages seven through 16. Nevertheless, many children did not attend school. Parents often had to pay their children's school fees as well as provide their uniforms and supplies. Other factors affecting school enrollment included distance to the nearest school, lack of transportation, shortages of teachers and instructional materials, and lack of school feeding programs. Girls' enrollment was lower than that of boys at all levels due to poverty, cultural preference to educate boys, early marriage of girls, and sexual harassment of girls.

The conflict resulted in the closure of schools in the regions of Gao, Kidal, Timbuktu, Mopti, and Segou, and many schools were damaged or destroyed because rebels sometimes used them as bases of operations. The 2015-16 school year showed progress in these regions; 296 schools were closed as of May 31, a decrease from 454 at the same point in 2015, according to data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The number of schools closed in Mopti Region, however, increased from 67 to 111 between May 2015 and May 2016.

Child Abuse: Comprehensive government statistics on child abuse did not exist, but the problem was widespread. Citizens typically did not report child abuse, according to UNICEF. Police and the social services department in the Ministry of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action investigated and intervened in some reported cases of child abuse or neglect, but the government provided few services for such children.

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum age to marry without parental consent is 16 for girls and 18 for boys. A 15-year-old girl may marry with parental consent if a civil judge approves. Authorities did not effectively enforce the law, particularly in rural areas, and underage marriage was a problem throughout the country. According to 2010 data from the UN Population Fund, 55 percent of women between ages 20 and 24 were married by age 18.

In some regions of the country, girls married as young as 10. It was common practice for a 14-year-old girl to marry a man twice her age. According to local human rights organizations, judicial officials frequently accepted false birth certificates or other documents claiming girls below age 15 were old enough to marry. NGOs implemented awareness campaigns aimed at abating child marriage.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): See information for girls under 18 in the women's section above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits the sexual exploitation of children, including prostitution. Penalties for the sexual exploitation of both adults and children are six months to three years in prison and a fine of between 20,000 and one million CFA francs (\$34 and \$1,700). Penalties for convicted child traffickers are five to 20 years in prison. Penalties for indecent assault, including child pornography, range from five to 20 years in prison. The country has a statutory rape law that defines 18 as the minimum age for consensual sex. The law, which was inconsistent with the legal minimum marriage age of 15 for girls, was not enforced. Sexual exploitation of children occurred. The Division for Protection of Children and Morals of the National Police conducted sweeps of brothels to assure that individuals in prostitution were of legal age and arrested brothel owners found to be holding underage girls.

Child Soldiers: See section 1.g.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: Some prostitutes and domestic workers practiced infanticide, mainly due to lack of access to and knowledge about contraception. Authorities prosecuted at least two infanticide cases during the year.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html.

Anti-Semitism

There were fewer than 50 Jews, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution and law do not specifically protect the rights of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, the judicial system, or in the

provision of other state services. There is no law mandating accessibility to public buildings. While persons with disabilities have access to basic health care, the government did not place a priority on protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and few resources were available. Many such individuals relied on begging.

Persons with mental disabilities faced social stigmatization and confinement in public institutions. When an investigative judge believed a criminal suspect had mental disabilities, the judge referred the individual to a doctor for mental evaluation. Based on the recommendation of the doctor, who sometimes lacked training in psychology, the court then either sent the suspect to a mental institution in Bamako or proceeded with a trial.

The Ministry of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The ministry sponsored activities to promote income-earning opportunities for persons with disabilities and worked with NGOs, such as the Malian Federation of Associations for Handicapped Persons, that provided basic services. Although the government was responsible for eight schools countrywide for deaf persons, it provided almost no support or resources.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Societal discrimination continued against black Tuaregs, often referred to as “Bellah.” Some Tuareg groups deprived black Tuaregs of basic civil liberties due to traditional slavery-like practices and hereditary servitude relationships.

There were continued reports of slave masters kidnapping the children of their Bellah slaves, who had no legal recourse. Slave masters considered slaves and their children as property and reportedly took slave children to raise them elsewhere without permission from their parents. The antislavery organization Temedt organized workshops throughout the country to convince communities to abandon the practice of keeping slaves. The government has taken no action to establish punishment for practicing slavery.

Intercommunal violence led to frequent clashes between members of the Fulani ethnic group and, separately, members of the Bambara and Dogon communities. Self-defense groups representing these communities were reportedly involved in attacks.

For example, on May 6, in Malemana, Segou Region, attacks by Bambara and Fulani resulted in at least 26 deaths. In August reprisal clashes between Bambara farmers and Fulani herders in Kareri, Segou Region, resulted in seven deaths. A delegation from the Ministries of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, National Reconciliation, and Territorial Administration visited the area to encourage dialogue and reconciliation.

According to MINUSMA, conflict in May between Fulani and Bambara communities in the Mopti and Segou regions displaced approximately 800 Fulani civilians.

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

The law prohibits association “for an immoral purpose.” There are no laws specifically prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. There were no known LGBTI organizations in the country, although some NGOs had medical and support programs focusing specifically on men having sex with men. The law prohibits lesbians and gay men from adopting children.

NGOs reported LGBTI individuals experienced physical, psychological, and sexual violence, which society viewed as corrective punishment. Family members, neighbors, and groups of strangers in public places committed the majority of violent acts, and police frequently refused to intervene. Most LGBTI individuals isolated themselves and kept their sexual identity hidden. An NGO reported that LGBTI individuals frequently dropped out of school, left their places of employment, and did not seek medical treatment to hide their sexual identity and avoid social stigmatization.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS occurred. The government implemented campaigns to increase awareness of the condition and reduce discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Mob violence was a problem. For example, in April a mob destroyed the city of Kidal’s only airport during a protest against the presence of international forces in

the city. The attackers reportedly were angered by French arrests of persons accused of terrorism.

Discrimination continued against albinos. Muslim religious leaders known as marabouts perpetuated the widespread belief that albinos contained special powers that others could extract by bringing a marabout the blood or head of an albino. The albino rights organization run by prominent Malian singer Salif Keita noted that men often divorced their wives for giving birth to an albino. The lack of understanding of albinism contributed to albinos' lack of access to sunblock, without which they were highly susceptible to skin cancer.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

All workers--except members of the armed forces, certain civil servants, and public employees such as judges and officials--have the right to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct strikes. There are restrictions imposed on the exercise of these rights. The law provides that workers must be employed in the same profession before they may form a union. A worker may remain a member of a trade union only for a year after leaving the relevant function or profession. Members responsible for the administration or management of a union must reside in the country and be free of any convictions that could suspend their right to vote in national elections. The government may deny trade union registration on arbitrary or ambiguous grounds.

The minister of labor has the sole authority to decide which union is representative for sectorial collective bargaining and to approve sectorial collective agreements. Employers have the discretionary right to refuse to bargain with representative trade unions. The law allows all types of strikes and prohibits retribution against strikers. For strike action to be lawful, the parties to a dispute must exhaust the mandatory conciliation and arbitration procedures set out in the labor code. Regulations require civil servants and workers in state-owned enterprises to give two weeks' notice of a planned strike and to enter into mediation and negotiations with the employer and a third party, usually the Ministry of Labor and Public Service. The law does not allow workers in "essential services" sectors to strike, and the minister of labor can order compulsory arbitration for such workers. The law defines "essential services" as being services whose interruption would endanger the lives, personal safety, or health of persons, affect the normal operation of the national economy, or affect a vital industrial sector. For example,

the law requires striking police to maintain a minimum presence in headquarters and on the street. The government, however, has not identified a list of essential services. Participation in an illegal strike is punishable by harsh penalties, including dismissal and loss of other rights except wages and leave.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The government did not effectively enforce relevant laws. Penalties for violating antiunion discrimination provisions were not sufficient to deter violations. The Ministry of Labor did not have adequate resources to conduct inspections or perform mediation. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

Authorities did not consistently respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, although workers generally exercised these rights. The government did not always respect unions' right to conduct their activities without interference. Although unions and worker organizations were independent of the government and political parties, they were closely aligned with various political parties or coalitions. The Ministry of Mines intervened to facilitate negotiations between labor and management over the closure of the Loulo gold mine. Officials have not renegotiated some collective agreements since 1956.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but forced labor occurred. The law prohibits the contractual use of persons without their consent, and penalties include a fine and 10 years' imprisonment with compulsory hard labor. Penalties increase to 20 years' imprisonment if a person under age 15 is involved. Penalties were seldom enforced and therefore were not sufficient to deter violations. According to NGOs, the judiciary was reluctant to act in forced labor cases. The government made little effort during the year to prevent or eliminate forced labor, although it did allocate initial funding to its antitrafficking action plan. Following a 2014 national conference on the artisanal mining sector, the government established a commission that met twice monthly to develop measures to more effectively combat violations in the sector, including forced labor.

Most adult forced labor occurred in the agricultural sector, especially rice production, and in gold mining, domestic services, and in other sectors of the informal economy. Forced child labor occurred in the same sectors. Corrupt

religious teachers forced boys into begging and other types of forced labor or service (see section 7.c.).

The salt mines of Taoudeni in the north subjected men and boys, primarily of Songhai ethnicity, to a longstanding practice of debt bondage. Employers subjected many black Tuaregs to forced labor and hereditary servitude, particularly in the eastern and northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal (see section 6).

See also the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

While the labor code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 with certain exceptions, a law pertaining to child protection sets the minimum employment age at 15. The law, however, permits children between ages 12 and 14 to engage in domestic or light seasonal work and limits the number of hours they may work. No child may work more than eight hours per day under any circumstance. Although the government's Hazardous Occupations List prohibits certain activities by children under age 18, the law permits children ages 16 or 17 to perform certain hazardous activities, as long as they receive adequate specific instruction or vocational training in the relevant field of activity. The law conflicts with the protections provided in the Hazardous Occupations List, leaving the possibility for children to work in hazardous activities. Girls between ages 16 and 18 may not work more than six hours per day. The law applies to all children, including those who work in the informal economy and those who are self-employed.

Responsibility for enforcing child labor laws is shared between the Ministry for the Promotion of Children and Women through the National Committee to Monitor the Fight against Child Labor, the Ministry of Justice through different courts, the Ministry of Security through the Morals and Children's Brigade of the National Police, the National Social Security Institute through its health service, and the Ministry of Labor through the Labor Inspectorate. Interagency coordinating mechanisms were ineffective, inefficient, and cumbersome. Authorities often ignored child labor laws or did not effectively enforce applicable laws. Resources, inspections, and remediation were not adequate, and the penalties for violations were not sufficient to deter violations.

Child labor, particularly in its worst forms, was a serious problem. Child labor was concentrated in the agricultural sector, especially rice and cotton production,

domestic services and other sectors of the informal economy, gold mining, and forced begging organized by Quranic schools.

Approximately half of children between ages seven and 14 were economically active, and employers subjected more than 40 percent of them to the worst forms of child labor. Many were engaged in hazardous activities in agriculture. Child trafficking occurred. Employers used children, especially girls, for forced domestic labor. Employers forced Black Tuareg children to work as domestic and agricultural laborers.

Child labor in artisanal gold mining was a serious problem. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, at least 20,000 children worked under extremely harsh and hazardous conditions in artisanal gold mines. Many children also worked with mercury, a toxic substance used in separating gold from its ore. Following a summit on artisanal mining in 2014, the government launched a commission that met twice a month to develop measures to improve conditions in the sector and to mitigate violations, such as child labor.

An unknown number of primary school-age children throughout the country, mostly under age 10, attended part-time Quranic schools funded by students and their parents. Only the Quran was taught in these schools. As part of their work requirement, Quranic masters (marabouts) often required their students, known as “garibouts” or “talibes,” to beg for money on the streets or work as laborers in the agricultural sector.

The Ministry of Labor and Public Service conducted few surprise or complaint-based inspections in the formal sector. Insufficient personnel, low salaries, and lack of other resources hampered enforcement in the informal sector. Prosecutors in Bamako had several pending investigations of potential abuse charges against marabouts who used children solely for economic purposes.

Also see the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The labor law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, gender, religion, political opinion, nationality, or ethnicity, but not that based on age, disability, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, social status, HIV-positive status, or having other communicable diseases. The government’s Labor

Inspection Agency is responsible for investigating and preventing discrimination based on race, gender, religion, political opinion, nationality, or ethnicity, but the law was not effectively enforced. Penalties were insufficient to deter violations. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to gender, sexual orientation, disability, and ethnicity (see section 6). The government was the major formal sector employer and ostensibly paid women the same as men for similar work, but differences in job descriptions permitted pay inequality. There were cases where employers from southern ethnic groups discriminated against individuals from northern ethnic groups.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage is 28,465 CFA francs (\$48) per month, but it did not apply to workers in the informal and subsistence sectors, which included the majority of workers. The government supplemented the minimum wage with a required package of benefits, including social security and health care. In January the government increased the salaries of public sector workers after coming to an agreement with the largest national workers' union, UNTM. In August banks and insurance companies also increased their employees' salaries.

The legal workweek is 40 hours, except for the agricultural sector, where the legal workweek ranges from 42 to 48 hours, depending on the season. The law requires a weekly 24-hour rest period, and employers must pay workers overtime for additional hours. The law limits overtime to eight hours per week. The law applies to all workers, including migrants and domestics, but it was routinely ignored in the informal sector.

The law provides for a broad range of occupational safety and health standards in the workplace. Workers have the right to remove themselves from work situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment and to request an investigation by the Social Security Department, which is responsible for recommending remedial action where deemed necessary. Authorities, however, did not effectively protect employees in these situations. With high unemployment, workers often were reluctant to report violations of occupational safety regulations.

The Ministry of Labor and Public Service did not effectively enforce these standards, and the approximately 60 inspectors it employed lacked the resources to conduct field investigations. Many employers did not comply with regulations regarding wages, hours, and social security benefits. The ministry did not conduct

any inspections in the three northern regions, where the government has suspended services since the 2012 occupation of those regions by terrorist organizations. Penalties were insufficient to deter violations, and no government agencies provided information on violations or penalties. Labor inspectors made unannounced visits and inspections to work sites only after labor unions filed complaints.

Working conditions varied, but the worst conditions were in the private sector. In small, family-based agricultural endeavors, children worked for little or no remuneration. Employers paid some domestic workers as little as 7,500 CFA francs (\$13) per month. Violations of overtime laws were common for children working in cities and those working in artisanal gold mines or rice and cotton fields. Labor organizations reported employers used cyanide and mercury in gold mines, posing a public health risk to workers exposed to them. Inspectors lacked the resources to assemble credible data on dangerous workplaces.