

Djibouti 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Djibouti during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; arbitrary arrest or detention; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including censorship and enforcement of criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; and trafficking in persons, including forced labor.

The government seldom took credible steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, or punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

There was one report that the government or its agents committed an arbitrary or unlawful killing during the year.

On January 31, Abdoukader Obakar Houmed died while in Dikhil police custody on drug-related charges. His death triggered protests, and credible domestic human rights organizations attributed the death to torture. The government assigned a state prosecutor to investigate the death and sent senior officials, including the prime minister, to ease public tension. The government-mandated National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) also conducted an independent investigation. At year's end, the investigative efforts had not produced a report. A week after Houmed's death, all five policemen on duty at the Dikhil station at the time of the incident were reassigned to different posts. Houmed's family did not receive compensation from the government.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

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

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports that government officials employed them. There were credible reports that security forces arrested and abused journalists, opposition members, and demonstrators.

Impunity was a problem, especially in the security sector. The government seldom took steps to identify, investigate, or prosecute officials in the security forces for abuses. Additionally, the limited space for media and civil society offered few tools to identify, report, and fight impunity.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

International and national human rights organizations reported prison conditions remained harsh, and overcrowding was a problem.

Abusive Physical Conditions: The country had one central prison, Gabode, in the capital and a smaller regional prison in Obock, as well as small jails supervised by local police or gendarmes. Prison conditions were harsh due to overcrowding and inadequate sanitary conditions. Prisons exceeded their original planned capacity by almost double.

Administration: During visits to prisons, the CNDH provided an anonymous survey to inmates where they could report alleged mistreatment and human

rights abuses. The CNDH did not identify human rights abuses in the prisons.

Independent Monitoring: The CNDH visited prisons and detention facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but the government seldom respected these provisions.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law required arrest warrants and stipulated the government could not detain a person beyond 48 hours without an examining magistrate's formal charge; however, the government reportedly did not respect the law, especially in rural areas. Authorities could hold detainees for another 48 hours with the prior approval of the public prosecutor. The law stated officers should promptly notify detainees of the charges against them, but there were delays.

The law contained a provision for bail, but authorities rarely made use of it. Detainees had the right to prompt access to an attorney of their choice, but that right was not widely known and detention facility officials rarely informed detainees of this right. In criminal cases, the state provided attorneys for indigent detainees. In instances of unlawful detention,

detainees could be granted court-ordered release but no compensation.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports of security officials arbitrarily arresting journalists, bloggers, opposition members, and demonstrators.

For example, authorities detained Nasser Abdillahi Boulaleh, a Belgian-Djiboutian dual national and member of an opposition political party, at the airport on June 8 upon his arrival from Belgium but did not specify the reason for his arrest. After 10 days of detention at an unknown location, police deported him to Belgium.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem, and the length of pretrial detention frequently equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime. Prisoners often waited two or more years for their trials to begin. Judicial inefficiency and a lack of experienced legal staff contributed to the problem.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, but the judiciary lacked independence and was inefficient. There were reports of judicial corruption. Authorities did not consistently respect constitutional provisions for a fair trial.

Trial Procedures

The law provided for the right to a fair and public trial; however, the

judiciary did not fully enforce this right.

The law required that all persons, including those charged with political or national security offenses, be tried within eight months of arraignment, but there were reports the government did not respect this right. Although the law required the state to provide detainees with free interpretation when needed, such services were not always made available. Indigents had a right to legal counsel in criminal and civil matters but sometimes did not have legal representation. Defendants had the right to appeal, although the appeals process was lengthy.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

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

The constitution and law prohibited such actions, but there were reports the

government failed to respect these prohibitions. The law required authorities to obtain a warrant before conducting searches on private property, but the government did not always respect the law. Government critics claimed the government monitored their communications and kept their homes under surveillance.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law allowed for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, provided the exercise of these freedoms complied with the law and respected “the honor of others.” The government reportedly did not respect these rights. The law included prison sentences for media offenses.

Freedom of Expression: Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately faced reprisals. For example, on April 12, authorities arrested Ahmed Ali Mohamed, a member of a political opposition party not recognized by the government. Mohamed had published an online video documenting violence between Eritrean asylum seekers and security personnel, describing the event as ethnically motivated. The Ministry of Interior filed a complaint against Mohamed for dissemination of false news

to incite violence in the regional capital of Obock. After a judge sentenced Mohamed to 13 months of detention, authorities released him on May 4.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other

Media, Including Online Media: Media law and the government's harassment and occasional detention of journalists resulted in widespread self-censorship. Some opposition members used pseudonyms to publish articles.

Printing facilities for mass media were government-owned, which created obstacles for those wishing to criticize the government. The principal newspaper, *La Nation*, maintained a monopoly on authorized print media. Privately owned or independent newspapers were distributed on an irregular basis.

The government owned the only radio and television stations. The official media generally did not criticize government leaders or policy. Foreign media broadcast throughout the country. Cable news and other programming were available via satellite.

The National Communication Commission, a branch of the Ministry of Communication, issued identification cards to journalists and licenses to political parties and private citizens, allowing them to operate social media accounts. Political parties, journalists, and private citizens critical of the government were not issued licenses or identifications cards, which limited

their ability to express themselves freely online. Foreign media outlets and journalists, including the BBC and *al-Jazeera*, were not required to obtain a domestic license, but registered directly with the Ministry of Communication.

Libel/Slander Laws: The government used laws against libel, slander, and defamation to restrict public discussion and retaliate against political opponents.

On May 16, authorities arrested Yasmine Ahmed Guedi, whose father was killed in a 1987 terrorist attack, for posting an online video addressed to the president in which she demanded compensation for her father's death. Guedi claimed the families of the other attack victims, all foreigners, had received compensation from the government. On May 25, she was sentenced to six months' detention for defaming the president.

Internet Freedom

There were few government restrictions on access to the internet, although the government monitored social networks to prevent demonstrations or overly critical views of the government. Djibouti Telecom, the state-owned internet provider, blocked access to websites of the Association for Respect for Human Rights in Djibouti, a domestic nongovernmental organization (NGO), and the independent streaming platform *Voice of Djibouti*, which criticized the government.

The government continued to block access to Facebook and Instagram; the block was put in place in 2021. Nonetheless, government officials continued to use Facebook as the primary platform to disseminate information.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. Some opposition members alleged security forces routinely canceled or disrupted their meetings and other political events.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Although the constitution provided for freedom of assembly, the government restricted this right. The Ministry of Interior required permits for assemblies but did not grant them to opposition groups.

Freedom of Association

The constitution and law allowed for freedom of association, provided community groups registered and obtained a permit from the Ministry of Interior. The government harassed and intimidated opposition parties, human rights groups, and labor unions (see sections 2.a. and 7.a.).

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

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

In-country Movement: Due to a continuing border dispute with Eritrea, certain areas in the north of the country remained under military control.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government collaborated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. By law, refugees had the same rights to public services and employment as citizens, and the government actively implemented the law.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for granting asylum or refugee status. Asylum seekers from southern Somalia and Yemen were *prima facie* considered eligible for asylum or refugee status. An interagency commission reviewed all other asylum claims, and UNHCR participated as an observer. Ethiopian and Eritrean asylum seekers claimed discrimination in the refugee status determination process and cited lengthy delays in processing.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to a limited number of individuals who may not qualify as refugees, primarily unaccompanied child migrants.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The government, however, deprived many citizens of this ability by suppressing the opposition and refusing to allow several opposition groups to form legally recognized political parties. The formal structures of representative government and electoral processes had little relevance to the real distribution and exercise of power.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections, last conducted in February 24 legislative polling, were reported by regional observers as fair and free of major abuses and irregularities. Most opposition parties boycotted the election and only one opposition coalition participated. There were restrictions on political parties to be listed on the ballot, and the Ministry of Interior denied the registrations of the Alliance of Movement for Democratic Alternative and Unified Democratic Center on the

grounds they had not paid requisite registration fees.

International observers from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union, the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation commented on the security and the peaceful atmosphere of the elections. For the first time, the government invited diplomatic missions to observe the polling.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The government did not recognize most active opposition parties. Members of those political parties and other opposition members were occasionally arrested and detained. While membership in a political party was not required for government jobs, civil servants who publicly criticized the government faced reprisals at work, including suspension, dismissal, and nonpayment of salaries. Government-imposed fees on political parties to enter legislative and presidential elections were prohibitive: candidates were required to pay a fee of Djiboutian francs 500,000 (\$2,820) to enter legislative elections and up to five million Djiboutian francs (\$28,200) to enter presidential elections. These fees were not collected from members of the majority party. The fees were supposed to be reimbursed if a candidate received at least 5 percent of total votes; however, the government did not issue reimbursements in the past, further discouraging opposition parties from participating in elections.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable

Groups: No laws limited the participation of women or members of historically marginalized groups in the political process, but cultural factors limited their active participation.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for official corruption, and while the government arrested officials for corruption, others engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The government did not enforce the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

Corruption: The National Anti-Corruption Commission led the fight against low-level corruption. Government officials held multiple meetings on preventing corruption and money laundering.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

The government generally allowed a few domestic human rights groups that

dealt with matters authorities did not consider politically sensitive to operate without restriction by conducting limited investigations and sometimes publishing findings on human rights cases. Many other domestic and international human rights groups were subject to scrutiny and government reprisal.

On March 14, authorities expelled the vice president of the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Alexis Deswaef, a Belgian national, after he had been in the country for two days on a fact-finding mission. An FIDH program officer was denied entry to the country two days earlier. Deswaef's delegation had meetings with United Nations offices, diplomatic missions, civil society organizations, and members of the opposition. A Ministry of Interior statement claimed the delegation had acquired tourist visas under false pretenses and lacked appropriate objectivity because of its 2017 deposition filed against the government on behalf of an opposition group at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The government did not recognize FIDH's local partner, the Djiboutian Human Rights League. The CNDH denounced FIDH for "politicizing human rights" and described the visit as inappropriate, unprofessional, and reflective of a conflict of interest.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Ministry of Justice and Penitentiary Affairs (Ministry of Justice) was the government ministry tasked with safeguarding human rights. The CNDH, the government's human rights

organization, served as a watchdog for human rights abuses. Its members included technical experts, representatives of civil society and labor unions, religious groups, the legal community, the Ombudsperson's Office, and the National Assembly. By law, the commission was a permanent institution with trained staff and regional offices. The CNDH was generally regarded by observers as ineffective. Although nominally independent, CNDH actions often aligned with government decisions.

The Ombudsperson's Office held responsibilities that included mediation between the government and citizens on topics such as land titles, issuance of national identity cards, and claims for unpaid wages. Written records of the ombudsperson's activities were sparse, and it was unclear what actions the organization took to promote human rights.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law included sentences of up to 20 years' imprisonment for rape of women or men but did not address spousal rape. The law prohibited "torture and barbaric acts" against a spouse, specifying penalties of up to 20 years' imprisonment. The law specifically enumerated protection against domestic violence, harmful cultural practices, and discrimination. The government enforced these laws effectively.

The government continued to address gender-based violence. The National Union of Djiboutian Women (UNFD), a nonprofit organization chaired by the first lady, worked with the government to empower and protect women from violence. The UNFD's Cellule d'Ecoute (Listening Committee) addressed gender-based violence against women and girls and worked in partnership with various government ministries. The committee referred cases of abuse to the Ministry of Justice and divorce cases to the council on sharia. The National Gendarmerie had a special unit for cases of gender-based violence. Nonetheless, officials at the Ministry of Justice reported survivors of rape and domestic violence often avoided the formal court system in favor of settlements between families. The government maintained a support fund for survivors of violence and integrated care centers to provide them with medical care and psychosocial support.

The UNFD placed a full-time staff member in each refugee settlement to provide support for domestic violence survivors in these communities.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law prohibited FGM/C, but rates remained high. The law set the punishment of FGM/C at five years' imprisonment and a substantial fine, and NGOs could file charges on behalf of victims. The law also provided for up to one year's imprisonment and a substantial fine for anyone failing to report a completed or planned FGM/C to the proper authorities. The government enforced the law when cases were reported to authorities.

A 2019 study from the Ministry of Women showed a significant decrease of the FGM/C prevalence rate for girls from birth through age 10, from 94 percent in 1994 to 21.2 percent in 2019. According to the study, the prevalence rate remained higher in rural than in urban areas, with 37.9 percent and 13.2 percent prevalence rates in those areas, respectively.

The government supported efforts by international and national NGOs to provide training and education concerning the harmful effects of FGM/C. Additionally, the country's religious leaders took a stance against FGM/C. Despite the government's efforts, major obstacles included high rates of illiteracy, difficulty of enforcement, and deep-seated societal traditions.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: Anecdotal information suggested sexual harassment was widespread, and victims were reluctant to report cases. Although the government made statements to underscore such harassment was illegal, it did not effectively enforce the law.

Discrimination: The constitution provided for equal treatment of citizens regardless of gender, but women experienced legal discrimination in areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

Legal restrictions for women included limitations on employment in occupations requiring certain levels of physical strength. A decree adopted on the proposal of the ministers of labor and of health, at the suggestion of

the National Council for Labor, Employment, and Vocational Training, determined the jobs and categories of businesses prohibited for women, pregnant women, and young persons, and the age limit to which the restrictions applied. Harassment and discrimination resulted in a secondary role for women in public life and fewer employment opportunities in the formal sector.

The government made women's empowerment one of its top priorities, as illustrated by increasing the number of women in high-profile government positions. A presidential decree required women to hold at least 25 percent of all high-level public service positions. The government also promoted women-led small businesses, including expanded access to microcredit.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. Women could access modern methods of family planning without the consent of their husbands or male partners. By law, the government offered access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, including emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis for the clinical management of rape, but there was no information available on survivor use of reproductive health information or health facilities.

UNICEF's 2020 statistics, the latest available data, indicated a maternal death rate of 234 deaths per 100,000 live births, with rates higher outside of Djibouti City. A lack of facilities impacted access to skilled health personnel.

Home births were the norm in rural areas. There were no social, legal, or cultural barriers related to menstruation or access to menstruation hygiene, and they had a limited impact on the ability of women and girls to participate in society, particularly education. Pregnancy or motherhood status did not represent a barrier to girls' education.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The constitution prohibited discrimination based on language, race, gender, and religion. The governing coalition included representatives of all the country's major clans and ethnic groups, with minority groups also represented in senior positions. Nonetheless, there was discrimination based on ethnicity in employment and job advancement. The Somali Issas, the majority ethnic group, controlled the ruling party, the Union for a Presidential Majority, and shared political power with the Afar ethnic group. There were multiple rival subclans, and discrimination based on ethnicity and clan affiliation remained a factor in business and politics.

Children

Child Abuse: The law prohibited child abuse. The government enforced the law effectively. On March 8, a high-profile child abuse investigation resulted in the perpetrator receiving a 10-year prison sentence on charges of aggravated violence on a child and possession of pornographic videos.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: Although the law set the minimum legal age of marriage at 18, it provided that “marriage of minors who have not reached the legal age of majority is subject to the consent of their guardians.” Child, early, and forced marriage occasionally occurred in rural areas. The government, as well as the UNFD, worked with women’s groups throughout the country to protect the rights of girls, including the right to decide when and whom to marry.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law provided for three years’ imprisonment and a substantial fine for the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The sale, manufacture, or distribution of all pornography, including child pornography, was prohibited, punishable by one year’s imprisonment and a substantial fine. The government enforced these laws effectively. The law did not specifically prohibit statutory rape, and there was no legal minimum age of consent.

The law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The law considered child sex trafficking as an aggravating circumstance for which the penalties significantly increased. The law was enforced.

Antisemitism

Observers estimated the Jewish community at fewer than 30 persons, the majority of whom were foreign military members stationed in the country. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law did not explicitly criminalize lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) status or sexual conduct between consenting adults. Nonetheless, LGBTQI+ status and conduct were considered taboo.

Violence and Harassment: There was a societal pattern of discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons, although no official cases of violence were available for citation. LGBTQI+ persons, as any other citizens, could file a complaint of harassment or assault to authorities or the CNDH. Social and religious intolerance of LGBTQI+ status was so pervasive that LGBTQI+ persons feared social shunning and extreme discrimination from family members or the community if their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics were disclosed.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state or nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex

characteristics. There was a societal pattern of discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons, although no official cases were available for citation.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition was not available.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: Although no official cases were available for citation, strong societal taboos against LGBTQI+ conduct or identity made it difficult to accurately assess the scope or nature of such practices, or whether they took place at all.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: Although there were no laws or other restrictions, strong social discrimination made it difficult for LGBTQI+ persons to assemble, associate, or express themselves freely and publicly.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not routinely access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The government did not mandate access to government services and accessibility to buildings for persons with disabilities, and buildings were often inaccessible. The law provided persons with disabilities access to health care and education, but it was not effectively enforced. Although the government did not always provide information and communication on disability concerns in accessible formats, the CNDH and the Ministry of

Justice implemented mandatory sign language interpretation for deaf persons during judicial proceedings.

The constitution did not prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities. Authorities held prisoners with mental disabilities separately from other pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners and provided some psychological treatment or monitoring. Families could request confinement in prison for relatives with mental disabilities who had not been convicted of any crime but were considered a danger to themselves or those around them. Aside from psychiatric services administered to prisoners with mental disabilities in Gabode Prison, there were no treatment facilities for persons with mental disabilities and only one practicing psychiatrist in the country.

The government's National Agency of Handicapped Persons conducted awareness-raising campaigns, coordinated with NGOs to organize seminars and other events, and encouraged social service providers to improve their systems to serve persons with disabilities better.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution and law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, with limitations that fell significantly short of

international standards for trade unions, including the requirement for obtaining prior authorization from the Ministry of Labor. The law provided the right to strike after giving advance notification, allowed collective bargaining, and fixed the basic conditions for adherence to collective agreements. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required employers to reinstate workers fired for union activities. The economic free zones (EFZs) operated under different rules, and labor law provided workers fewer rights in the EFZs.

The law provided for the suspension of the employment contract when a worker held office in a trade union. The law also prohibited membership in a trade union if an individual had prior convictions, regardless of whether the conviction was prejudicial to the integrity required to exercise union office. The law provided the president with broad discretionary power to prohibit or restrict severely the right of civil servants to strike, based on an extensive list of “essential services” that could exceed the limits of international standards.

The procedure for trade union registration was lengthy and complicated, allowing the Ministry of Labor virtually unchecked discretionary authority over registration. The government also required unions to repeat this approval process following any changes to union leadership or union statutes, meaning each time there was a union election, the union was required to reregister with the government.

The government neither enforced nor complied with applicable law, including the law on antiunion discrimination. The government did not levy penalties commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination.

The government harassed and intimidated labor unions, and limited their ability to register members, thus compromising the ability of labor groups to operate. The government did not allow the country's two independent labor unions to register as official labor unions. Two government-backed labor unions with the same names as the independent labor unions, sometimes known as "clones," served as the primary collective bargaining mechanisms for many workers. Members of the government had close ties to the government-backed labor unions. Only members of government-backed labor unions attended international and regional labor meetings with the imprimatur of the government. Independent union leaders stated the government suppressed independent representative unions by tacitly discouraging labor meetings.

Collective bargaining sometimes occurred and usually resulted in quick agreements. The tripartite National Council on Work, Employment, and Professional Training, which included representatives from labor, employers, and government, examined all collective bargaining agreements and played an advisory role in their negotiation and application.

On March 3, authorities seized the passport of Aden Mohamed Abdou, a

unionist and political opposition leader, after his participation in a February workshop sponsored by IGAD in Addis Ababa. The government had opposed his participation in the conference. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a letter to IGAD's executive secretariat asking that Abdou's invitation be revoked, and the minister of labor and the ambassador to Ethiopia, present at the conference, blocked his participation. Other labor union representatives, in solidarity, boycotted the conference. After a two-day halt, Abdou asked that the conference continue without him. Upon his return, immigration officers seized his passport and, as of December, the passport remained in their custody. Abdou submitted a formal complaint to the UN Human Rights Council with support from the International Labor Office in Geneva.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The national minimum wage for the public sector was above the World Bank poverty income level. The law did not mandate a minimum wage for the private sector, but it provided that minimum wages be established by common agreement between employers and employees. The legal workweek was 40 hours over five days, a limit that applied to workers regardless of gender or nationality. The law mandated a weekly rest period of 48 consecutive hours and the provision of overtime pay at an increased rate fixed by agreement or collective bargaining. The law stated that combined regular and overtime hours could not exceed 60 hours per week and 12 hours per day. Penalties for abuses were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud. The law provided for paid holidays.

Occupational Safety and Health: The government set appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that covered the country's main industries. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remained with OSH experts and not the worker. The law did not provide workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment. Migrants were especially vulnerable to hazardous working conditions, particularly in the construction sector and at ports. Hazards included improper safety equipment and inadequate safety

training.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing OSH standards, wages, and work hours; however, enforcement was ineffective. Penalties for violations of the law were commensurate with those for crimes such as negligence but were rarely applied against violators.

According to the Labor Inspectorate, workers typically reported improper termination, not abuses of safety standards. The most common remedy for violations was for the labor inspector to visit the offending business and explain how to correct the violation. If the business corrected the violation, there was no penalty. Inspectors had authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. By law, migrant workers who obtained residency and work permits should enjoy the same legal protections and working conditions as citizens, but the law was unevenly enforced. The estimated size of the informal sector was approximately 40 percent. The government did not enforce labor laws in the informal sector.