

Equatorial Guinea 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports the government of Equatorial Guinea or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings or enforced disappearances.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; transnational repression against individuals in another country; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including censorship; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; and prohibiting independent trade unions or significant or systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

In most cases, the government did not take steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

In January 2023, Julio Obama Mefuman of the Movement for the Liberation of Equatorial Guinea Third Republic (MLGE3R) died in prison. MLGE3R claimed security officials tortured Obama Mefuman during his detention and he died as a result, but it acknowledged he also had severe chronic illness exacerbated by his abuse in prison. The minister of foreign affairs stated during a national press conference that Obama Mefuman died in a hospital following an illness.

No office investigated this death.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

Although the constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, the government used extensive legal powers to restrict media activities.

Individuals generally chose not to criticize the president, his family, other high-ranking officials, and security forces due to the risk of reprisal. The government attempted to impede criticism by continuing to monitor the

activities of opposition members and others. In some cases, authorities reprimanded individuals, removed them from their jobs, or both. Most individuals on social media assumed the government was monitoring their activity, and activists reported electronic surveillance of their personal email accounts. Many individuals avoided discussing certain sensitive topics on the telephone due to concerns of monitoring.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

The law gave the government considerable authority to restrict media content through official prepublication censorship, and established criminal, civil, and administrative penalties for violation of its provisions. Activists and commentators reported media self-censorship.

Media remained weak and under government influence or control. A limited number of independent media outlets were active and expressed a variety of views but not without restriction.

The only publishing facility available to newspapers was located at the Ministry of Information, Press, and Radio, where officials censored printed materials.

Persons close to the president, including his son, the vice president, owned the few private media outlets; the vice president owned the only private broadcast media. Starting a newspaper was a complicated process

governed by an ambiguous law and impeded by government bureaucracy; creating a digital presence was less onerous. Accreditation was cumbersome for both local and foreign journalists.

The government owned the only national radio and television broadcast system. Journalists who worked for these entities could not report freely.

The government denied or left pending requests by political parties to establish private radio stations.

The time-consuming nature of the visa application process effectively dissuaded some foreign journalists from visiting the country. In other cases, the government prevented reporters from obtaining visas.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided workers the right to establish unions, affiliate with unions of their choice, collectively bargain, and strike. The law did not prohibit antiunion discrimination. The law required a union to have at least 50 members from a workplace to register, however, effectively blocking most union formation, as most businesses were small. The government generally did not allow unions to organize, and never authorized a strike. In view of the general absence of union recognition, there were no reports of government enforcement of laws respecting their establishment or

operation.

Authorities refused to recognize unions such as the Workers Union of Equatorial Guinea, the Independent Service Union, the Teachers' Trade Union Association, and the Rural Workers Organization. Most often those seeking to organize were co-opted into existing political party structures by means of pressure and incentives.

Penalties for violations of the freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike were commensurate with those for analogous violations such as civil rights violations but were never enforced.

Labor local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) faced restrictions and were unable to operate. Authorities reportedly allowed one labor organization to be registered.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law required a minimum wage for all sectors.

The standard work week was eight hours a day and 48 hours a week for

daytime work, six hours a day and 36 hours a week for night work, and seven hours a day and 42 hours a week for mixed day and night work. Offshore work in the oil and gas sector was 44 hours a week.

Alleged violations of wage, hour, and overtime laws were common in the agriculture, fisheries, and private security sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were not appropriate for the main industries in the country; they did not provide for protection of workers from occupational hazards. The government did not proactively identify unsafe conditions or respond to workers' OSH complaints.

The law permitted workers to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

Violations of OSH standards were common in the construction sector.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Ministry of Labor and Job Promotion oversaw wage, hour, and OSH laws but did not effectively enforce those laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators. The ministry conducted some workplace inspections, but the small number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance, although inspectors had the authority to

make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. When inspectors found violations, the government required some employers to correct the problem, pay fines, or pay reparations to the employees, but most employers were able to renegotiate the findings or pay bribes to eliminate the penalty.

The informal sector employed most workers and was estimated at 32 percent of GDP in 2017. Labor laws did not apply in the informal sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

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. The government rarely observed these requirements.

The law required arrest warrants unless a crime was in progress or in cases affecting national security. Members of the security forces frequently arrested persons in violation of the warrant requirement, and there were credible reports that in cases where no crime had been committed

individuals were detained at the order of a senior executive branch official. A detainee had the right to a judicial determination of the legality of detention within 72 hours of arrest, excluding weekends and holidays, but this determination often took longer, sometimes several months. NGOs indicated most detainees were not charged and judges typically failed to issue a writ of habeas corpus within the 72-hour limit.

The law prohibited incommunicado detention, but local police chiefs did not always respect this prohibition, and individuals detained in connection with civil society groups or political opposition movements were frequently held incommunicado.

There were numerous reported cases of arbitrary arrests. The government arbitrarily arrested immigrants, opposition members, activists, and others. Many detainees complained bribes had to be paid to obtain release.

Police detained foreign nationals and took them into custody even when they provided proper documentation. Police raided immigrant communities. Reliable sources reported police abused, extorted, or detained legal and irregular immigrants during raids. Diplomatic representatives in the country noted the government made foreign nationals vulnerable to abuse through harassment, abuse, extortion, detention, and not renewing residence and work permits in a timely manner.

In February 2023, authorities arrested two South African employees of an oil and gas servicing company, and despite insufficient evidence, charged them with drug trafficking offenses. Many commentators considered the arrests a retaliation by the vice president against South Africa, as earlier that February, South African courts had seized a yacht and two residences in Cape Town to pay a judgement against the vice president for arbitrarily detaining a South African businessperson in 2013. The workers were convicted in June 2023 and remained in prison pending appeal.

Lengthy pretrial detention remained a problem and was often politically motivated. Inefficient judicial procedures, corruption, and lack of monitoring contributed to the problem. While reliable statistics were lacking, pretrial detention reportedly equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime for a number of detainees.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

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

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports government officials employed them. According to political opposition leaders and NGOs, police tortured activists, members of opposition parties, and former government officials accused of corruption. Lawyers and other observers who visited prisons and jails reported serious abuses, including beatings, sleep deprivation, use of car batteries to shock and inflict pain, and withholding of food, liquids, and medical treatment.

Police reportedly beat and threatened detainees to extract information or to force confessions. Local civil society organizations claimed security forces tortured detainees in every prison in the country, including Black Beach Prison in Malabo, the capital city, and in several Ministry of Interior locations, with increasing prisoner transfers between Malabo and prisons on the mainland to avoid domestic and international scrutiny.

Opposition groups reported credible allegations of torture by security forces against Spanish citizens.

In March, authorities rearrested activist and lawyer Anacleto Micha, filed new charges, and reportedly moved him to Oveng Ansen Prison in

Mongomo. In 2023, authorities reportedly abused him in pretrial detention and in prison. After the March arrest, local observers expressed concern he could be subjected to more abuse.

Impunity was a significant problem within the security forces, particularly the national police, municipal police, gendarmes, and the army and navy.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor.

Child Marriage

The minimum age for marriage was 14. Child marriage occurred, especially in rural areas. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Gender Equality operated programs to deter child marriage.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government did not generally cooperate with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. There were no organizations that provided protection and assistance. UNHCR did not maintain an office in the country.

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees.

The government reportedly deported several hundred citizens of Cameroon, some of whom said they were fleeing terrorist and rebel attacks at home.

The government indicated the deportees were economic migrants.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish community was small, likely fewer than 100 persons. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.

e. Instances of Transnational Repression

The government engaged in acts of transnational repression.

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, or Coercion

Local activists reported the government surveilled activists abroad to disrupt their travel and dissuade them from criticizing the government.

In January, government officials and government-backed media sources posted videos online purportedly showing a political opponent in a compromising situation in a hotel in France. The political opponent later admitted he was in the videos and had engaged in the compromising

behavior. He said the government orchestrated the surveillance to harass and discredit him and his political activities.