

# **Guyana 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

There were reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

In July police shot and killed Gordon Sancho. Police officials alleged Sancho shot at them, forcing them to return fire, which killed Sancho. As of late September, an investigation into the case was underway.

### **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**

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. Independent news media were active and expressed a wide variety of views. Some members of media reported they faced discrimination and hostile personal verbal attacks in response to public inquiries. The ruling party monopolized state-owned media.

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

Members of the media reported the government leveraged access to state advertising funds to censor indirectly independent media outlets. Members of the press reported the government ignored their requests for information, which impeded their work.

### **b. Worker Rights**

#### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided for the right of association and allowed workers to form

and join trade unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law barred military and paramilitary members from forming a union or associating with any established union. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination by employers but did not specifically require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The Ministry of Labor was required to certify all collective bargaining agreements. Individual unions directly negotiated collective bargaining status.

By law, unions were required to have 40 percent support of workers, a provision the International Labor Organization (ILO) criticized. The government could declare strikes illegal if the union leadership did not approve them or if the union did not meet the requirements specified in collective bargaining agreements. Public-sector employees providing essential services could strike if they provided a one-month notice to the Ministry of Public Service and left a skeleton staff in place. The ILO noted public contracts did not contain required labor clauses that assured workers their wages, hours of work, and other conditions of labor were not less favorable than those established for other like work.

In February the government deemed a public-school teachers' strike illegal and threatened to withhold the teachers' salaries. In April the High Court ruled the strike was legal because the government did not engage in collective bargaining with the teachers.

The ILO also noted not all sectors deemed essential by the government adhered to international definitions, including the services provided by the Transport and Harbors Department and the National Drainage and Irrigation Board. Arbitration was compulsory for public employees, and such employees engaging in illegal strikes were subject to sanctions or imprisonment.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties for violation were small fines the government rarely applied. Penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights. Administrative and judicial proceedings regarding violations often were subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

## **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 provided for a national minimum wage, but there was a different minimum wage rate for the public sector and private sector. Minimum wage rates were set through Minimum Wages Orders made under the Labor Act and Wages Council Act. In sectors not covered by the act, wages could

be agreed upon by individual or collective agreement. Minimum wages for regular working hours of all full-time, private-sector employees were set nationally for hourly, daily, weekly, and monthly workers. The national minimum wage for regular working hours of full-time, public-sector employees was above the poverty income line. The private sector minimum wage was above the poverty line.

A normal workweek was 40 hours, distributed over no more than five days per week. The law prohibited compulsory overtime, and overtime work had to be paid according to rates set in the law or according to collective bargaining agreements in force where workers were unionized. There was provision for overtime pay.

Alleged violations of wage, hour, or overtime laws were common in the private security, construction, hospitality, restaurant, and mining sectors.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were not appropriate for the main industries. The law provided that some categories of workers had the right to remove themselves from unsafe work environments without jeopardizing their employment, and authorities effectively protected employees in these situations. OSH inspectors actively identified unsafe conditions and recommended procedures for addressing workplace hazards.

## **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The Ministry of Labour enforced wage, hour, and OSH laws. Local trade unions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported the Ministry of Labour did not effectively enforce OSH laws. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce the law effectively, and observers agreed the law was unevenly enforced. Penalties for violations for wage, hour, and OSH enforcement were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence, and were rarely imposed. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections but not to initiate sanctions. Ministry follow-up of labor inspection findings varied, and compliance among employers was also inconsistent. Trade unions criticized government delays and failure to act on wage and hour violations perpetrated by companies in the private sector and particularly in foreign-owned firms. In a number of hinterland mining areas, miners reported they never saw labor inspectors.

As of 2021, the Guyanese Bureau of Statistics reported the proportion of workers in informal employment was approximately 50 percent. The International Monetary Fund estimated the informal economy represented 35 percent of total economic activities. Informal-sector workers and part-time workers were covered by wage, hour, and OSH regulations and were subject to labor inspections; however, laws and regulations relating to wages and OSH were rarely enforced.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

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

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The constitution 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 generally observed these requirements.

There were reports of arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention. In January Terrence Sandy alleged police unlawfully arrested him in June 2023 and wrongfully detained him for more than two months. Sandy sued the government for 96 million Guyanese dollars (\$446,000). As of September, Sandy's suit was still underway.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem, due primarily to judicial inefficiency, staff shortages, and cumbersome legal procedures. Pretrial detainees accounted for 41 percent of the prison population. The average length of pretrial detention was three years for those awaiting trial at a Magistrates' Court or the High Court. This often exceeded the maximum possible sentence for the crime for which individuals were charged. In July

the government passed the Criminal Law Procedure (Paper Committal) Bill to reduce pretrial detention periods by replacing in-person hearings with written arguments by the defense and prosecution.

#### **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 prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

#### **b. Protection of Children**

##### **Child Labor**

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/>.

## **Child Marriage**

The legal age for marriage was 18. The law provided that children could marry at age 16 with parental consent or judicial authority, but observers reported these marriages rarely occurred. The government effectively enforced this provision.

## **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to migrants and other populations in need of protection.

## **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 for refugees. The government was not a signatory of the 1951 Convention on Refugees, and in the absence of national legislation and requisite government capacity, international organizations and NGOs assumed the main responsibility.

#### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

Excluding expatriates, the Jewish community had fewer than five members.

There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.