

Kiribati 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

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

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

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

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

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.

Media outlets were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction, although observers noted most views expressed did not oppose the government as most major media were state-owned, including the weekly newspaper *Uekere*, Radio Kiribati, and Television Kiribati.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

An independent journalist reported harassment by the government that had begun in 2020 and continued during the year, allegedly in retaliation for their negative coverage of the government's decision to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China, as well as coverage of allegations of corruption by government officials.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct strikes, and bargain collectively. The government did not

control or restrict union activities, although unions had to register with the government. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination at the time of hiring and while employed, but it did not specifically provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The government effectively enforced the laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. Penalties for violations included fines or imprisonment and were commensurate with other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. There were no reports of lengthy delays or appeal processes during dispute resolution, and the government regularly applied penalties against violators.

The law allowed for compulsory arbitration in a wider range of cases than generally recommended in international standards. Similarly, the definition of essential services, in which the right to strike was limited, included a broader range of sectors than did international standards. Penalties for unlawful strikes in both essential and nonessential sectors included imprisonment and a fine.

Employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. In keeping with tradition, negotiations generally were nonconfrontational. There were no known collective-bargaining agreements and no instances reported of denial of the right to strike. There were no reports of antiunion discrimination.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibited and criminalized all forms of forced labor. There were no confirmed reports during the year that traffickers exploited domestic or foreign victims in the country or that traffickers exploited nationals as victims abroad.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The national minimum wage for employees of local businesses and companies was above the poverty level. Most of the working population worked in the informal, subsistence economy, where the law was not enforced. The Public Service Office set wages in the public sector, which comprised approximately 80 percent of employment in the formal economy.

The law set the workweek at 40 hours. The law provided for paid annual holidays for all employees except casual workers and 12 weeks for maternity leave, but it left the determination up to individual employment contracts, which were then submitted to the Ministry of Employment and Human Resource for documentation. Public-sector employees worked 36.25 hours per week, with overtime pay required for additional hours. No law or regulation governed the amount of overtime an employee could work. Workers in the service and hospitality industry worked excessive hours; 14 or more hours per day was the norm.

Occupational Safety and Health

The Ministry of Employment and Human Resource was responsible for enforcing basic occupational safety and health (OSH) standards; these were appropriate for the main industries in the country. Employers were liable for workers' expenses related to on-the-job injuries. By law workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without threat to their employment. The ministry conducted labor inspections; there were no work-related injury complaints in the year to October. Violations of OSH law and regulations were common in the informal and private sectors. The ministry did not proactively identify unsafe conditions.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government generally enforced minimum wage and safety regulations in the formal sector, but enforcement of overtime regulations was weak. Penalties for violations included fines commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud and negligence; however, it was not known whether penalties were applied against violators of minimum wage, overtime, and occupational safety and health laws. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions, and the number of inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance.

An estimated 80 percent of the working population worked in the informal

sector, involved in agriculture, fishing, food preparation and sales, and home-based activities. The government did not enforce labor standards in the informal economy.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

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 persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

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

There were no confirmed reports during the year that traffickers exploited domestic or foreign victims in the country or that traffickers exploited nationals as victims abroad.

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 reports that 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 minimum age for marriage was 21, or 17 with the permission of a parent or guardian. The law was generally respected in urban areas; however, 18 percent of women ages 20 to 24 reported they were first married or in a union before age 18, and 2 percent reported they were first married or in a union before age 15.

c. Protection to Refugees

There were no requests for asylum or refugee status.

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government had no formal system for providing protection to refugees. The principal immigration officer had wide discretionary authority to permit foreigners to stay in the country.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was no permanent Jewish community, and there were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.