

Suriname 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom.

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.

As of year's end, former President Desire Bouterse, convicted in 2019 and sentenced to 20 years in prison for the extrajudicial killing of 15 political opponents in 1982, was a fugitive from the law, with an outstanding INTERPOL Red Notice after failing to report to prison to serve his sentence. Convicted of the same crime, Bouterse's former bodyguard Iwan Dijksteel

was also a fugitive at year's end with an INTERPOL Red Notice outstanding. Coconvicted individuals Bennie Brondenstein, Stephanus Dendoe, and Ernst Gefferie reported to prison in January to begin serving their 15-year prison sentences after the Appellate Chamber of the Court of Justice upheld their convictions.

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. While there were no formal restrictions on the press, actions by government and nongovernment actors impeded the ability of independent media to conduct their work. High-ranking government officials publicly criticized media reporting. Officials also filed cases against the press for libel or slander for articles published. Media representatives expressed concern on multiple occasions throughout the year regarding potential threats to freedom of the press by members of the government.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Media outlets stated that unknown actors, whom they suspected represented possibly foreign social media companies, the government, or political opposition, restricted the outlets' ability to reach customers on social media. Media outlets reported unknown actors repeatedly hacked their accounts and social media pages, and unidentified social media users filed mass complaints with the platform companies, leading social media sites, particularly Facebook, to issue warnings and suspend their accounts. Facebook banned local outlet *Starnieuws* from live streaming for one month after finding that *Starnieuws* violated its policies.

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

Media outlets complained journalists had limited access to government officials or information, and government officials criticized journalists, unfairly excluded them from press events, or invited for press events to only have the government fail to show up. Some media outlets and individual journalists reported they practiced self-censorship due to government intimidation.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, the right to bargain collectively, and the right to strike. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination, required that workers terminated for union activity be reinstated, and prohibited employer interference in union activities. Labor laws did not cover undocumented foreign workers.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws involving the private sector. Penalties for violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike were commensurate with those for analogous violations such as civil rights violations, and penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

In isolated cases, private employers refused to bargain under or recognize collective bargaining rights, but the unions usually pressured the employers to negotiate. There were some reports companies exploited legislative gaps and hired more contract employees than direct-hire staff to perform core business functions to cut costs.

The government itself (the largest employer in the country) was not bound by these laws, since it deemed labor laws applied only to private employees,

not civil servants.

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 that was above the poverty income level.

The National Wage Council, which included representatives from the government, employers, and unions, annually advised the government on a minimum hourly wage. In March, the National Assembly approved an amendment to the minimum wage law. Under this amendment, the council was required to provide its advice on a new minimum wage by December 31, but no later than March 31, 2025. Council members' terms were also increased to six years to retain expertise.

The law provided for a workweek of more than 40 hours. Work above 45 hours per week on a regular basis required government permission, which was routinely granted. The law required premium pay for such overtime work, prohibited excessive overtime, required a 24-hour rest period per week, and stipulated paid annual holidays. Overtime was generally limited

to four hours per day, for a maximum 12-hour workday. During the holiday seasons, the retail sector had a blanket permit allowing for work up to 15 hours a day, including seven hours of overtime per week.

There were multiple reports of employers paying less than the minimum wage in almost all sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health

The government set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that generally were appropriate for the main industries in the country. OSH experts did not proactively identify unsafe conditions but responded to workers' complaints. Larger employers had their own OSH staff, who set safety standards. Workers in the formal sector could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and authorities effectively protected employees in this situation. Workers in the informal sector were not able to remove themselves from these situations without risk to their employment.

The International Labor Organization noted a high number of serious or fatal occupational accidents occurred during the year. Most fatal occupational accidents were in the mining sector. Workers in the informal sector, particularly in small-scale mining, often were exposed to dangerous conditions and hazardous substances such as mercury.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

Inspectors in the Occupational Health and Safety Division in the Ministry of Labor did not effectively enforce wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties for violations were commensurate with similar crimes such as fraud or negligence, but penalties were not always applied against violators.

The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance with labor laws or the minimum wage law. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

Reliable information was not available, but observers estimated 15 percent of the working-age population worked in the informal economy, where there was limited enforcement of labor laws. In some areas, particularly the interior of the country, enforcement was nonexistent.

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 any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in

court. The government generally observed these requirements.

Courts continued to experience months-long, and in some high-profile cases years-long, delays, prolonging the detention of those awaiting trial.

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 law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports government officials employed them. Authorities initiated criminal proceedings against police officers, prison guards, and other security forces accused of mistreatment, beatings, and unnecessary use of force against suspects during arrests and detention. One case continuing at year's end involved 13 members of different security forces who were accused of

beating detainees and using excessive force following the February 2023 riots.

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

Parental permission to marry was required until the age of 30. The marriage law set the minimum age of marriage at 15 for girls and 17 for boys, provided parents of the parties agreed to the marriage. The government did not uniformly enforce the law. Children in certain tribal communities often married at an age younger than that set by the law. In accordance with traditional practice, these marriages often were not registered.

In August, the National Assembly amended the civil code, including updating marriage legislation to set the minimum age for marriage at 18, with parental permission for both boys and girls ending at age 21. The government postponed implementation of the law to allow the government to educate stakeholders on the changes.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated 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.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees. The country solely relied on UNHCR to register asylum seekers.

Resettlement

Refugees were not eligible for citizenship, but the government accepted refugees for resettlement on its territory. The government offered a path to citizenship for permanent resident aliens.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was a Jewish community of approximately 100 persons. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.