

SAMOA 2013 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Samoa is a constitutional parliamentary democracy that incorporates traditional practices into its governmental system. In July 2012 parliament re-elected Head of State Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi. The unicameral parliament, elected by universal suffrage, includes the heads of extended families (matai). Charges of campaign bribery marred the 2011 parliamentary elections. Authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were allegations that some police committed human rights abuses.

The principal human rights problems were poor prison conditions and domestic violence against women.

Other human rights problems included police abuse, lack of accountability of and adherence to the rule of law by village “fonos” (councils of matai), abuse of children, and discrimination against women and nonmatai.

The government took steps to prosecute officials who committed abuses. There were no cases of reported impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

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

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The constitution prohibits such practices, and the government generally observed these prohibitions. Nevertheless, there were some allegations of police abuses. In September 2012 an anonymous letter addressed to the prime minister and also sent to the media accused the police force, including police staff at Tafaigata Prison, of

widespread wrongdoing and corruption. Later in the month the police's Professional Standards Unit (PSU) began an investigation into the allegations made in the letter. At the end of 2012, the attorney general extended the investigation to gather further evidence. In September, largely as a result of the anonymous letter, a commission of inquiry, led by the ombudsman, began to address the numerous complaints of corruption and misconduct between police and prisoners. The government suspended the police commissioner and assistant commissioner pending completion of the inquiry, which continued at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions overall were harsh and remained below international standards.

Physical Conditions: As of 2012 there were approximately 430 inmates in the prison system, including 23 women and 37 juveniles. The Tafaigata men's prison, the country's most crowded, had 23 cells of various sizes, including eight century-old concrete cells that measured approximately 30 feet by 30 feet and held 26 to 30 inmates each. Authorities made only basic provisions for food, water (including potable water), and sanitation. Cell lighting and ventilation remained poor. Lights remained on from dusk until 9 p.m. Each cell had one toilet and one shower facility shared communally.

The separate Tafaigata women's prison had five cells that were approximately 15 feet by nine feet, and each held four to six inmates. There was also a separate holding cell for female inmates awaiting trial and a security cell. Physical conditions, including ventilation and sanitation, generally were better in the women's prison than in the men's prison.

Authorities housed juveniles (under 21 years of age) at the Olomanu Juvenile Center, where physical conditions generally were better than in adult facilities. Authorities housed the 37 juveniles in three separate buildings, and they lived as a community in a 300-acre compound.

Police held overnight detainees in two cells at police headquarters in Apia and one cell at Tuasivi. The cells had good lighting, sanitation, and ventilation.

Information on prison deaths was not available.

Administration: Police kept prisoner files on sentencing and parole. Courts regularly used community service hours and suspended sentences as alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders.

The law mandates the Office of the Ombudsman receive and investigate complaints of prisoners and detainees on problems of inhuman overcrowding, status and circumstances of juvenile offenders, and improvement of pretrial detention, bail, and recordkeeping procedures. Prisoners also could lodge complaints with the police department's PSU. The ombudsman continued an investigation begun in 2012 of allegations of police abuse of prisoners.

Officials permitted prisoners escorted hospital visits for medical checks as necessary. A room at police headquarters served as a medical clinic, but no doctor or nurse was assigned to the facility.

Regulations require prisoners at all facilities, including the juvenile facility, to do manual labor approximately 40 hours per week. Prisoners generally performed agricultural work and cooked food for inmates and prison staff.

The government permitted family members and church representatives to visit prisons weekly, often on Sundays when families could bring food and clothing.

Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees religious observance and allowed them to submit complaints to judicial authorities and request investigation of alleged inhuman conditions. Authorities investigated such allegations and documented the results in a publicly accessible manner. Generally, the government investigated and monitored prison and detention center conditions.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers, including the Red Cross and diplomatic missions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national Samoan Police Force (SPF) maintains internal security. Local councils enforce rules and security within individual villages. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the SPF, and the government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the SPF during the year. A lack of resources and capacity limited police effectiveness.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The Supreme Court issues arrest warrants based on compelling evidence. The law provides for the right to a prompt judicial determination regarding the legality of detention, and authorities generally respected this right. Officials inform detainees within 24 hours of the charges against them, or they are released. There is a functioning bail system. The government allows detainees prompt access to a lawyer of their choice, or the government provides a lawyer for indigent detainees upon request at court. The government did not hold suspects incommunicado or under house arrest.

Pretrial Detention: Due to staff shortages, some Supreme Court and district court judges faced a backlog of pending cases. Pretrial detainees at the Tafaigata compound were on average detained for six months or more.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. A trial judge examines evidence and determines if there are grounds to proceed. Defendants have the presumption of innocence and by law cannot be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Trials are public except for trials of juveniles, which only immediate family members may attend. Only the most serious offenses, such as murder, manslaughter, and rape, employ juries (also known as assessors). Defendants have the right to be present, to timely consultation with an attorney, to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges, including interpretation services if necessary, and to adequate time and facilities to

prepare a defense. Defendants may confront witnesses, present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, access government-held evidence, and appeal a verdict.

Village councils handled many civil and criminal matters, but the councils varied considerably in decision-making styles and the number of matai involved in the decisions. The law recognizes the decisions of the local council and provides for limited appeal to the Lands and Titles Court and the Supreme Court. The nature and severity of the dispute determine which court receives an appeal. A further appeal may be made to the Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court has ruled that the local councils may not infringe upon villagers' freedom of religion, speech, assembly, or association.

The government continued a review of the Village Fono Act to determine whether the act gives the local councils excessive authority to limit individual rights under a broadly defined "public order" exception. In March the country's Law Reform Commission submitted a report to the parliament regarding amendments to the act. The commission stated that in its judgment the act does not violate the constitution but recommended amending the act to allow greater consideration for religious freedom principles in the decision-making capacity of the local councils. Parliament had not acted on the recommendations by year's end.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights violations.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The laws prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions. There was little privacy in villages, where there could be substantial societal pressure on residents to grant village officials access without a warrant. There were reports of some village councils banishing individuals or families from villages (see section 2.d.).

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech and press. The law stipulates imprisonment for any journalist who, despite a court order, refuses to reveal a confidential source upon request from a member of the public, but there was no court case invoking this law.

Press Freedoms: In 2011 the government ordered the Law Reform Commission to examine the need for a body to regulate the media and make recommendations for the establishment of such a body. The commission submitted a final report from this inquiry to the prime minister in June 2012. The report recommended establishing a body of representatives from media organizations and the public to regulate the media, but, as of year's end, the government had not established a council.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: A 2012 law on tourism development authorizes the Samoa Tourism Authority (STA) to exercise "lawful controls" over publication by any person of information about the tourism industry deemed prejudicial to a public perception of the country. Under this law violators are subject to a fine or imprisonment for up to three months if they fail to retract the information or to publish a correction when ordered to do so by the STA. As of year's end, the STA had not exercised this authority.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the internet or credible reports that the government monitored e-mail or internet chat rooms without appropriate legal authority. Internet access was readily available in and around Apia and throughout most of the country via cellular technology, but the high cost of access limited internet activity for much of the population. According to the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 13 percent of the population used the internet in 2012.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government generally did not restrict academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/rpt/.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. Traditional law governs villages, however, and village councils regularly banned citizens from village activities or banished citizens from the village for failing to conform to village laws or obey local council rulings. Cases of village banishment rarely were made public. Of those cases that became known during the year, reasons for banishment included murder, rape, adultery, and unauthorized claims to land and matai title. There were reports of villages banning religious activities of villagers who do not belong to the "designated" village faith. In some cases civil courts overruled banishment orders, and some village councils reportedly refused to observe those orders. Some banished persons were accepted back into the village after performing a traditional apology ceremony.

Foreign Travel: In September the government banned seven villages from taking part in the Recognized Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme for two to four years. The RSE permits Samoan residents to work for several months of the year in New Zealand and Australia. The government indicated the ban was a corrective measure imposed because of inappropriate and in some cases illegal actions of residents of those villages on previous RSE trips, but the ban also affected residents of the designated villages who had not engaged in such activities.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The country's laws provide for the granting of refugee status, but the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. No requests arose during the year.

Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right through periodic, free, and generally fair elections based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Observers considered fair the general elections held in 2011. The Human Rights Protection Party retained government for the seventh consecutive term. For the first time in the country's independent history, a second party, the Tautua Samoa Party, received enough votes to form an official opposition. Following the elections eight electoral petitions were filed on various grounds of bribery, treating, and gifting during a campaign. Of the eight electoral petitions submitted to the Supreme Court, one was withdrawn, three were dismissed, and four resulted in orders to conduct by-elections because the four winning candidates were found guilty of various charges of bribery, treating, and gifting during a campaign. All by-elections took place in 2011.

Political Parties: While the constitution gives all citizens above age 21 the right to vote and run for office, by social custom candidates for 47 of the 49 seats in parliament are drawn from the approximately 17,000 leaders of extended families, and the families select those to be candidates. Although both men and women may become family leaders, only 10.5 percent were women. Matai control local governments through the village councils, and appointment to the councils rather than direct election determines their titles.

Participation of Women and Minorities: In June parliament passed the Constitution Amendment Bill 2013, which requires that parliament include at least five female representatives starting with the next general election in 2015. If, for example, no women win seats in the next election, five parliamentary seats would be added to the current 49 and would be filled by the five highest female vote-getters.

There were two women in the 49-member parliament: One was the minister of justice and the other was associate minister of women, community, and social development. A woman served as governor of the central bank. Four women served as chief executive officers of government ministries, and seven as general

managers of government corporations. One woman served as a Supreme Court judge, and two as district court judges.

The political rights of citizens who are not of ethnic Samoan heritage are addressed by reserving two parliamentary seats for at-large members of parliament, known as “individual voters” seats. One at-large cabinet minister and parliamentarian was of mixed European-Samoan heritage. Citizens of mixed European-Samoan or Chinese-Samoan heritage were represented well in the civil service.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. Penalties ranged from several months to several years of imprisonment if convicted. There were some reports of government corruption during the year.

Corruption: The law provides for an ombudsman to investigate complaints against government agencies, officials, or employees, including allegations of corruption. The ombudsman may require the government to provide information relating to a complaint. The Attorney General’s Office prosecutes criminal corruption cases on behalf of the Public Service Commission. The Ombudsman’s Office and the Public Service Commission operated effectively during the year. The Ombudsman’s Office is known to include academics and other members of civil society on its commissions of inquiry.

Whistleblower Protection: The law protects the rights of public service employees, including the ability to report occurrences of illegality within the workplace. Officials implemented the law with varying degrees of success, as most disclosures were sent to the Public Service Commission anonymously for fear of repercussions, despite the protections in the law. The anonymous nature of many such allegations hampered the ability of the Public Service Commission to investigate effectively the alleged abuses.

Financial Disclosure: Although public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws, codes of ethics applicable to boards of directors of government-owned corporations encouraged such disclosure.

Public Access to Information: By law government information is subject to disclosure in civil proceedings, unless the information is considered privileged or

its disclosure would harm the public interest. There is no formal process to request government records outside of such court actions.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Observers considered the Office of the Ombudsman generally effective and able to operate free from government or political party interference. The government usually adopted its recommendations.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status, and the government generally respected these provisions in practice. The constitution does not address sexual orientation or gender identity. The society publicly recognizes the transgender Fa'afafine community, although members of the community reported instances of social discrimination. Sodomy, and therefore male same-sex sexual activity, is illegal. Politics and culture generally reflected a heritage of matai privilege and power, and members of certain families of high traditional status possessed some advantages.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal, but there is no legal provision against spousal rape. The penalties for rape range from two years' to life imprisonment, but a life sentence has never been imposed. Many cases of rape went unreported because societal attitudes discouraged such reporting. In recent years, however, authorities noted a rise in the number of reported cases of rape. This development appeared to be a result of efforts by government ministries and local NGOs to increase awareness of the problem and the need to report rape cases to police. The courts treated rape seriously, and the conviction rate generally was high.

The constitution prohibits abuse of women, but societal attitudes tolerated their physical abuse within the home. Social pressure and fear of reprisal typically

caused such abuse, although common, to go unreported. Village councils typically punished domestic violence offenders, but only if the abuse was considered extreme (that is, visible signs of physical abuse). Village religious leaders are also permitted to intervene in domestic disputes. When police received complaints from abused women, the government investigated and punished the offender, including by imprisonment. Domestic violence is charged as common criminal assault, with penalties ranging from several months to one year in prison. The government did not keep statistics specifically on domestic abuse but acknowledged the problem as one of considerable concern. The Ministry of Police and Prisons had a nine-person Domestic Violence Unit, which worked in collaboration with NGOs that combated domestic abuse. NGO services for abused women included public antiviolence awareness programs, shelters, confidential hotlines, in-person counseling, and other support.

Sexual Harassment: No law specifically prohibits sexual harassment, and there were no reliable statistics concerning its extent. The lack of legislation and a cultural constraint against publicly shaming or accusing someone, even if justifiable, likely caused sexual harassment to be underreported. Victims had little incentive to report instances of sexual harassment, as to do so could jeopardize one's career or family name.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. The National Health Service, private hospitals, the Ministry of Health's public awareness programs, general practitioners, and various health care centers provided information and access to contraception and access to maternal health services, which included skilled attendance during childbirth, prenatal care, and essential obstetric and postpartum care.

Discrimination: Women have equal rights under the constitution and statutory law, and the traditionally subordinate role of women was changing, albeit slowly. The Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development oversees and helps secure the rights of women. To integrate women into the economic mainstream, the government sponsored numerous programs, including literacy and training programs for those who did not complete high school.

The law prohibits employment of women between midnight and 6:00 a.m. unless the commissioner of labor grants special permission. Citizens generally observed this regulation.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived by birth in the country if at least one parent is a citizen. The government also may grant citizenship by birth to a child born in the country if the child would otherwise be stateless. Citizenship also is derived by birth abroad to a citizen parent who either was born in the country or resided there at least three years. Births were not always registered immediately, and some were not registered for many years. Legally, children without a birth certificate are not allowed to attend primary schools, but this was not strictly enforced.

Child Abuse: Law and tradition prohibit the severe abuse of children, but both tolerate corporal punishment. Although no official statistics were available, press reports indicated a rise in cases reported of child abuse, especially incest and indecent assault cases, which appeared to be due to citizens' increased awareness of the need to report physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children. The government aggressively prosecuted such cases.

The law prohibits corporal punishment in schools. In September the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture stated that the minimum punishment for a teacher convicted of corporal punishment of a student would no longer be a fine, but a one-year prison term. The government did not prosecute any cases under this new policy as of year's end.

Forced and Early Marriage: The minimum age of marriage is 18 for a man and 16 for a woman. Consent of at least one parent or guardian is necessary for a man under age 21 or a woman under age 19 to marry. Early marriage does not generally occur.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The minimum age for consensual sex is 16 years. The law has separate penalties for sexual relations or connections with children under age 12 and children between ages 12 and 15. The maximum penalties are life and 10 years' imprisonment, respectively. There is no specific criminal provision regarding child pornography, but such cases can be prosecuted under a provision of law that prohibits distribution or exhibition of indecent material. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for two years.

The Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration and the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with NGOs, carried out educational activities to address domestic

violence and inappropriate behavior between adults and children and promote human rights awareness. Sexual abuse of children remained a problem.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

Anti-Semitism

The country had no organized Jewish community, and there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

There were no confirmed reports of human trafficking during the year.

Persons with Disabilities

There is no law pertaining specifically to the status of persons with disabilities or regarding accessibility for them. Tradition dictates that families care for persons with disabilities, and this custom was observed widely in practice.

In December 2012 the death of a man with mental disabilities in Tafaigata Prison raised concerns about the treatment of persons with mental disabilities while in police custody. The man initially was transported to the National Hospital for treatment but was subsequently transferred to police custody because of his erratic and violent behavior and held in a jail cell, where he was later found dead. The investigation into the cause of his death continued at year's end.

Some children with disabilities attended regular public schools, while others attended one of three schools designed specifically to educate students with disabilities. Many public buildings were old, and only a few were accessible to persons with disabilities. Most new buildings provided better access, including ramps and elevators in most multi-story buildings.

The Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development has responsibility for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

“Sodomy” and “indecency between males” are illegal, with maximum penalties of seven and five years’ imprisonment, respectively, but these provisions were not actively enforced with regard to consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults.

Although the pre-existing law was not enforced for decades, the Crimes Act 2012, which came into effect in May, decriminalizes the act of “impersonating a woman.”

Although there were no reports of societal violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity, there were isolated cases of discrimination.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There were no reports of societal violence or discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law, including related regulations and statutory instruments, protects the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, to conduct legal strikes, and to bargain collectively. There are certain restrictions on the right to strike for government workers, imposed principally for reasons of public safety.

Workers legally have unrestricted rights to establish and join organizations of their own choosing.

The Public Service Act 2004 states that a public sector employee who engages in a strike or any other industrial action “is taken to have been dismissed from ...employment.” It is an inherent constitutional right for private sector employees to strike. However, there were no private-sector strikes during the year.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws, and the government generally respected freedom of association. The Public Service Association functioned as a union for all government workers, who made up approximately

8,000 of the approximately 25,000 workers in the formal economy. Unions generally conducted their activities free from government interference.

Workers exercised the right to organize and bargain collectively. The Public Service Association engaged in collective bargaining on behalf of government workers, including bargaining on wages. Arbitration and mediation procedures were in place to resolve labor disputes, although such disputes rarely arose.

There were no known instances of antiunion discrimination during the year.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, and the government generally enforced such laws. There is an exception in the constitution for service required by Samoan custom. A key feature of the matai system is that nonmatai men perform work within their village in service to their families and the village as a whole. Most persons did so willingly; however, the matai may compel those who do not participate.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits employing children under age 15 except in “safe and light work.” The law does not apply to service rendered to family members or the matai, some of whom required children to work for the village, primarily on family farms. The law prohibits any student from being engaged in light or heavy industrial activity within school hours of 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The law, however, does not ban vending by children under age 14. The law prohibits children under age 15 from work that could harm their physical or moral health.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor refers complaints of illegal child labor to the attorney general for enforcement, but no cases were prosecuted during the year.

There were no reliable statistics available on the extent of child labor. Children frequently were seen vending goods and food on Apia street corners. The government has not definitively determined whether this practice violates the country’s labor laws, which cover only persons who have a place of employment. Although the practice may constitute a violation of the law, local officials mostly tolerated it. The extent to which children were required to work on village farms varied by village, although anecdotal accounts indicated the practice was quite

prevalent. Younger children primarily worked doing household chores, yard work, and light work such as gathering fruits, nuts, and plants. Some boys began working on plantations as teenagers, helping to gather crops such as coconuts and caring for animals. Some children reportedly were employed in domestic service.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/ocft/tda.htm.

d. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There were two minimum wages: 2.00 tala (WST) (\$0.89) per hour for the private sector, and WST 2.65 (\$1.18) for the public sector. Approximately three quarters of the working population worked within the subsistence economy and had no formal employment. The Bureau of Statistics 2008 Poverty Report placed the national average of the basic needs poverty line at WST 54 (\$24) per person per week or WST 494 (\$221) per household per week.

The provisions of the labor act cover only the private sector. A separate law, the public service act, covers public sector workers. The laws stipulate a standard workweek of no more than 40 hours, or eight hours per day (excluding mealtimes), and prohibit compulsory overtime. For the private sector, overtime pay is specified at time and a half, with double time for work on Sundays and public holidays and triple time for overtime on such days. For the public sector, there is no paid overtime, but compensatory time off is given for overtime work. There generally are nine paid public holidays per year.

The law establishes certain rudimentary safety and health standards for workplaces, which the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor is responsible for enforcing. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor had 11 labor inspectors. The law also covers persons who are not workers but who are lawfully on the premises or within the workplace during work hours. Safety laws do not generally apply to agricultural service rendered to the matai or to work done within individual family homes.

Independent observers reported that safety laws were not enforced strictly, except when accidents highlighted noncompliance. Work accidents were investigated when reports were received. Many agricultural workers, among others, were inadequately protected from pesticides and other dangers to health. Government education and awareness programs addressed these concerns by providing appropriate training and equipment to some agricultural workers.

The commissioner of labor investigates reported cases of hazardous workplaces. Information was not available on specific government investigations during the year. Government employees are covered under different and more stringent regulations, which were enforced adequately by the Public Service Commission.

The Labor and Employment Relations Act of 2013, which passed in April, contains specific provisions with respect to leave entitlement, termination, employee contracts, and fundamental rights, including establishment of a national tripartite forum.