

Jordan

Jordan made little progress in changing law or practice restricting the exercise of basic rights such as freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The National Agenda, a project initiated by King Abdullah II in 2005, recommended reforms but the government and parliament have not yet passed any of the promised legislation to enact them, such as a political parties bill, an election law, and amendments to the public assemblies, welfare societies, and journalism and publication laws.

The king appointed a new prime minister and cabinet in November 2005 and a new intelligence chief in December. The lower house of parliament, which must ratify laws and international agreements, approved four international human rights treaties in 2006, but did not initiate legislation or exercise effective government oversight.

A new counterterrorism law that maintains provisions allowing a military prosecutor to detain a suspect for up to seven days without charge, and expands prosecutorial powers to freeze bank accounts and restrict suspects' international travel, came into force November 1. The government withdrew its proposal in an early draft of the law to extend the time suspects could be held without charge to two weeks.

Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and the Death Penalty

The General Intelligence Department (GID) arrests suspects mostly in the name of counterterrorism and detains them at its own detention facility for prolonged periods (in excess of the permitted seven days), often without charge or on baseless charges. The GID routinely denies detainees access to legal representation, and allows family visits with considerable delay, if at all. Most security detainees allege torture and ill-treatment to extract confessions, in the form of beatings and psychological abuse such as mock executions, sleep deprivation, and prolonged solitary confinement.

Provincial governors detain persons they deem a “danger to society” under the crime prevention law without proof of criminal action. Such persons, who usually have committed prior offenses, remain in detention until they can meet a bail guarantee. If no guarantor comes forward, they remain imprisoned. In 2005 there were 513 such detentions.

2006 witnessed the most serious prison disturbances in recent years. An attempt in March to extract two convicts scheduled for execution, Yasir Furaihat and Salim Bin Suwaid, from their cells in Swaqa prison set Islamist inmates rioting in three prisons (the two were executed 10 days later). In Juwaida prison Islamists took prison officials hostage, but Islamic Action Front parliamentarians helped mediate a peaceful end. In April a search of a Qafqafa prison wing holding Islamists sparked violent clashes during which one prisoner died. Officials had rejected an offer of mediation. Following these incidents, prison officials put many Islamist detainees in prolonged solitary confinement and sharply limited the number and duration of visits as well as visitor eligibility and the items they could bring. In August Islamist prisoners in Swaqa prison went on hunger strike to demand better conditions, including an end to solitary confinement.

The execution of Furaihat and Bin Suwaid was for the 2002 killing of US diplomat Lawrence Foley. The State Security Court in 2006 passed death sentences on several other persons for involvement in terrorism, including Sajida al-Rishawi, an Iraqi woman who confessed to participating in the bombing of three hotels in Amman in November 2005.

In a positive move, the government in August amended four laws to reduce their penalties from death to hard labor.

Human Rights Defenders

Jordanian human rights organizations published reports highly critical of government policy and practice, and Jordan became the first Arab country to invite the UN special rapporteur on torture. The Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR) in July reported on torture, arbitrary detention, inhumane prison conditions, and a lack of judicial oversight. In response, the head of the Public Security Department sent the

organization a private letter accusing it of slandering public officials. As a consequence of the prison riots, officials denied a request by the Public Liberties Committee of the lower house of parliament for access to prisons, as well as a request by the AOHR and the Engineers' Association's human rights committee (which had visited other prisons between October and December 2005) to visit Jafr prison. Only the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) and the special rapporteur had access to Jafr prison and the GID detention facility. The NCHR and the AOHR called for the closure of Jafr—which the special rapporteur described as a “punishment centre”— and reported allegations of torture at the GID facility.

The government and parliament increasingly consulted human rights organizations on draft laws under discussion. The Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies advised on changes to the welfare societies law; the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists published detailed legal analysis regarding a draft journalism and publications law; and the NCHR presented its observations on the draft counterterrorism law. Parliament passed the counterterrorism law without taking these observations into account, however. The other two laws remain in draft, with parliamentarians so far rejecting the suggested changes that would make the laws compliant with international human rights standards.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

Criticisms of the king and the intelligence forces are strictly taboo and carry serious penalties. Articles of the penal code criminalize speech slandering public officials, criticizing the king, and harming relations with other states. Although government officials said that these laws would no longer be enforced, and would eventually be cancelled, criminal charges against government critics remained frequent.

For example, the military prosecutor at the State Security Court (SSC) in November filed charges, later dropped, of insulting the king and of causing sectarian strife against Adnan Abu Odeh, a former head of the Royal Court, for remarks he made in an interview with Al Jazeera. In a highly irregular trial, the SSC in August also found members of parliament Muhammad Abu Faris and Ali Abu Sukkar guilty of stirring up sectarian strife for their visit to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's wake, where Abu Faris

called al-Zarqawi (the Jordanian-born head of al Qaeda in Iraq), a martyr, but not the victims of his violence.

Security forces in April detained for six days *al-Sabeel* journalist ‘Izz al-Din Ahmad as he was returning from interviewing a senior Hamas member in Syria. Security forces in June and again in August briefly arrested Yasir Abu Hilalah, Al Jazeera’s Amman bureau chief, during interviews with relatives or supporters of al-Zarqawi. Intelligence officers detained Fahd al-Rimawi, chief editor of *al-Majd* newspaper, in May for several hours over an article the GID claimed contained false information. In September reporters covering a Human Rights Watch report on the intelligence forces’ use of arbitrary arrests and torture received intimidating phone calls from the GID.

The governor of Amman in May twice refused permission for an Islamic Action Front demonstration, the first entitled “Yes to the Right of Return, No to an Alternative Homeland,” and the second, on the occasion of Jordan’s independence day. In September the governor banned an Islamic Action Front demonstration to protest Pope Benedict XVI’s remarks regarding Islam. Jordanian law obliges organizers of public gatherings to seek permission from the relevant governor three days in advance. A governor can withhold permission without giving a reason.

Iraqi Refugees

Jordan hosts at least 500,000 Iraqi refugees, the majority of whom arrived after 2003 (only Syria hosts a comparable number of Iraqis). After Iraqis killed 57 people in the Amman hotel bombings of November 2005, Jordan’s traditional tolerance toward Iraqis eroded. Jordan’s government, which does not have an established mechanism to determine refugee status, shortened the length of tourist visas for Iraqis, deported visa overstayers, and prevented increasing numbers of Iraqis from entering. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Jordan only exceptionally recognizes Iraqis as refugees, instead providing applicants with asylum seeker cards. Jordan does not always respect asylum seeker status and the protection it entails against deportation. In 2006 Jordan barred Iraqi refugee children without residency permits from attending Jordanian public and private schools.

Migrant Worker Rights

Reports documenting abuses of mostly Southeast Asian migrants working in Jordan's Qualified Industrial Zones induced the government to increase the number of inspectors and to install an emergency hotline. Reported abuse included beatings, long working hours, withholding of passports and paychecks, pay discrimination based on sex or nationality, preventing workers from leaving the work site at any time, and denying medical care. The provisions of Jordan's labor code, including the right to unionize, exclude non-Jordanians as well as agricultural and domestic workers. In early October the governor of Zarqa had Bangladeshi workers detained for striking.

Key International Actors

The United States gave Jordan US\$510 million assistance in 2006 (compared to the European Union's €73 million). Jordan's dependence on US assistance led parliamentarians to approve a bilateral immunity agreement with the US in January that obligates Jordan not to surrender to the International Criminal Court US citizens (and non-citizens working for the US government) under Jordanian jurisdiction, even if the ICC seeks their extradition for genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity (US legislation in 2004 conditioned foreign economic assistance for ICC states parties on countries' ratifying such an agreement).

The United Kingdom concluded a memorandum of understanding with Jordan in 2005 under which Jordan undertook not to mistreat persons the UK deports to Jordan. Human Rights Watch has found that such promises do nothing to reduce the risk of torture or to satisfy the sending country's obligation not to deport people to the risk of torture. Jordanian officials have admitted that this agreement is not enforceable in court, leaving a rupture in UK-Jordanian relations as the highest sanction. The UK has not in the past strongly criticized human rights violations in Jordan. Abu Qatada, a Jordanian residing in the UK, has challenged his deportation to Jordan, claiming a risk of ill-treatment.