

# 1993 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
U.S. Department of State, January 31, 1994

Bhutan is an absolute monarchy, ruled by the Wangchuck dynasty of hereditary monarchs since 1907. Located in the Himalayas between India and Tibet, the small Kingdom has been able to escape domination by any external power since the 10th century. There is no written constitution or bill of rights. King Jigme Sinhye Wangchuck, on the throne since 1972, has continued social and political reforms begun by his father, but progress has been disrupted over the past half decade by civil strife involving ethnic Nepalese. Buddhists constitute between one-half and two-thirds of the population; another third, mostly from the southern districts, is of Nepali-Hindu ethnic origin.

The Royal Bhutan Police, a force of about 5,000, assisted by the Royal Bhutan Army, with approximately 7,000 lightly armed men, and a militia of about 10,000, maintains internal security.

An estimated 90 percent of Bhutan's 600,000 population are largely illiterate and live in rural areas on subsistence agriculture in a mainly barter economy. India is Bhutan's main trading partner and principal source of foreign exchange. Despite some positive actions, including the Government's authorization of periodic prison visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and implementation of certain legal reforms, there remained serious concern about the Government's human rights practices, including implementation of the 1985 Citizenship Act, related measures to strengthen Bhutanese culture; the failure to prosecute security force members who committed rape, torture, and other abuses in the name of enforcing citizenship laws; and the status of 85,000 ethnic Nepalese refugees from southern Bhutan currently in camps in eastern Nepal.

The 1985 Citizenship Act targets the ethnic Nepalese minority, whose growing percentage of the population was perceived by the ruling Drukpa Buddhists as a threat to their culture. Under the Act, tens of thousands were declared to be illegal immigrants and forcibly evicted from Bhutan. Others fled

\*Bhutan and the United States do not have diplomatic relations, and U.S. officials travel there infrequently. Since few independent observers have visited southern Bhutan, information on Bhutanese practices affecting human rights is often incomplete.

voluntarily in the face of officially sanctioned pressure, including arbitrary arrests, beatings, rape, robberies, and other forms of intimidation by police and the army. The Bhutan People's Party (BPP) and the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), organized by ethnic Nepalese in exile, continued to press for democratic reforms and resist government policies they argue would suppress their ethnic and cultural identity. The Government outlawed the BPP in 1990, accusing it of killing government officials, destroying government property, and kidnaping or attacking southerners who did not support its cause.

Other human rights abuses included: denial of the right of citizens to change their government; limitations on the right to a fair trial; restrictions on peaceful association and assembly, and worker rights; and traditional cultural practices that result in some discrimination against women.

## RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including

Freedom from:

#### a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no independent confirmations of such killings. A government report charged ethnic Nepalese dissident groups with responsibility for 17 murders between August 13, 1992, and June 5, 1993. Bhutan's government-controlled weekly newspaper described numerous incidents during 1992 and 1993 in which unidentified attackers killed and mutilated government officials and civilians living in the south. Among the victims were Dattaram Sharma, a former government official stabbed to death in August 1992, and Dil Maya Dungal, the daughter of a village headman who suffered gunshot wounds when armed men raided the family's home. A substantial but undetermined number of the attacks the Government has identified as incidents of terrorism appear in fact to have been the work of armed robber gangs taking advantage of unsettled conditions on the Indo-Bhutan border.

#### b. Disappearance

Over the past 3 years, police and army forces have arrested thousands of ethnic Nepalis suspected of supporting the dissident movement, some of whom were held incommunicado and consequently were thought to have "disappeared." According to a 1993 government report, 1,592 accused "antinationals" were subsequently released under official amnesties. Bhutanese human rights groups claim many other detainees outside the Thimphu area are still unaccounted for and presume these people are being held without charge. They also charge that some may have been "disappeared" by government security forces. The Government denied such disappearances ever took place and accused dissident groups of kidnaping over 200 people during the last 3 years, including 24 between August 13, 1992, and June 5, 1993.

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

According to human rights groups, there were continuing reports from ethnic Nepalese refugees in India and Nepal of hundreds of cases in which police or army forces had allegedly beaten, raped, and robbed suspected supporters of the dissident movement and their families. In a survey of 1,781 refugee families living in camps in Nepal conducted by the Human Rights Organization of Bhutan (HUROB), 204 respondents stated they had left Bhutan because a family member had been beaten or tortured. Twenty-one respondents claimed to have been raped, and 383 said they left Bhutan because they had been threatened with or feared rape. HUROB, the People's Forum for Human Rights, Bhutan (PFHRB), and the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center (SAHRDC) published dozens of affidavits from victims of rape and torture who fled to the refugee camps in Nepal. Several nongovernmental organizations in Nepal are providing rehabilitation services to torture victims among the ethnic Nepali refugees.

In the aftermath of widespread arrests in 1990 and 1991, prison conditions were poor, with inadequate sanitation, unhealthy food, and endemic overcrowding. Several detainees were alleged to have succumbed to harsh prison conditions. Responding to pressure from Amnesty International (AI), the Government ended the use of shackles in 1992, and periodic ICRC prison visits beginning in 1993 also contributed to a marked improvement in conditions of detention.

The abuses committed by government forces in southern Bhutan were a consequence of government policies intended to reduce the presence of ethnic Nepalese. These policies created a climate in which intimidation of ethnic Nepalese was encouraged and physical abuse tacitly condoned. A 1993 survey of victims of violence in the refugee camps, prepared by a consultant to an international refugee agency, found that most alleged incidents of torture in southern Bhutan took place in 1990 and 1991. This finding is consistent with reports that abuse by government forces peaked during the year following the September 1990 disturbances led by the BPP. The consultant found that reported rapes continued at a high rate into 1992; however, there were few reported cases of rape and torture in 1993. The Government flatly denied such abuse ever occurred. Since October 1993, newly arriving refugees have reported incidents of intimidation and abuse which indicate another deterioration of the situation in Bhutan. While the influx to camps has remained low, cases accepted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the grounds of persecution (as opposed to family reunion claims) have doubled to 66 percent.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

Bhutanese law contains no guarantees against arbitrary arrest. The Government said that 17 "confirmed terrorists" were arrested by the security forces between January 1, 1992, and May 21, 1993, and that another 55 "terrorists" were caught by village volunteers and handed over to police during the same period. The Government released no information about what happened to these detainees or when they might be tried. Past treatment of other such detainees suggest that their detention may be arbitrarily prolonged.

The November 1992 session of Bhutan's National Assembly produced a new national security law that eliminates the mandatory death penalty for treason. Government officials previously cited the death penalty requirement, and their desire to avoid executions, as an excuse for delay in trying those held on charges related to the unrest in the south. In late 1992, judgments were handed down against 37 people charged with treason and various other "antinationals" activities. Thirty-two defendants were found guilty and given sentences ranging from 9 months to life in prison. As of late 1993, about 200 "antinationals" were still in detention pending trial on charges related to political unrest in southern Bhutan. Most were housed at a prison camp in Chemgang, a mountainous area outside Thimphu. Evidence suggests that incommunicado detention is no longer a problem.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The judicial system consists of district courts and a High Court in Thimphu. Minor offenses and administrative matters are adjudicated by village headmen. Criminal cases and a variety of civil matters are adjudicated under a 17th-century legal code, revised in 1959, which applies to all Bhutanese regardless of ethnic origin. Judges appointed by and accountable to the King are responsible for all aspects of a case, including investigation, filing of charges, prosecution, and judgment. After appeal to the High Court, a final appeal may be made to the King who traditionally delegates such matters to the Royal Advisory Council. The legal system does not provide for jury trials or the right to a court-appointed defense attorney.

The Bhutanese legal system has no provision for lawyers or solicitors, although it does allow for the appointment of a "jambi" (a person well-versed in the law) if the defendant so desires. Questions of family law, such as marriage, divorce, and adoption, are resolved separately according to traditional Buddhist law for the majority of Bhutanese and Hindu law in areas where persons of Nepalese extraction predominate.

Tek Nath Rizal, an ethnic Nepali, former member of the Bhutan National Assembly and Royal Advisory Council, and founder of PFHRB, was held for over 3 years pending trial. Rizal was abducted in November 1989 from eastern Nepal, where he fled after clashing with the King of Bhutan over ethnic Nepalese rights. The Government accused Rizal of orchestrating an "antinationals campaign" and on December 29, 1992, formally charged him with conspiracy, sedition, and treason. Rizal waived his right to a jambi and defended himself at his trial. On November 16, Tek Nath Rizal was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment under the National Security Act of 1992. The Government found him guilty of violating the National Security Act by carrying out harmful activities against the Tsa Wa Sum (King, country, and people). Rizal was granted a conditional clemency on November 19 which provides for his release as soon as the southern problem is resolved. Rizal is the only internationally recognized political prisoner in Bhutan.

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

There are no written guarantees of privacy, but Bhutanese cultural traditions are highly respectful of personal privacy. These traditions were undermined by the Government's emphasis on promoting national integration. A royal decree issued in 1989 made Drukpa national dress compulsory for all citizens. Anyone found violating the decree may be fined or sentenced to jail for a week. Although enforcement of the decree has become lax, it is still observed during business hours in southern towns like Phuntsholing and Geylegphug. According to human rights groups, police regularly conduct house-to-house searches for suspected dissidents without explanation or legal justification.

## Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including

### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

With an adult literacy rate reliably estimated at around 30 percent, Bhutan's population is relatively unaffected by the print media. Kuensel, the Government's weekly newspaper, with a circulation of 10,000, is the country's only regular publication. Indian and other foreign newspapers are available, but authorities confiscate and censor editions carrying articles critical of the royal family or government policies. Bhutan has no television broadcast service. In 1989 the Government ordered the dismantling of about 20 television satellite dishes which were being used to distribute illegally television transmissions from neighboring countries as well as through satellite technology. Many Bhutanese continue to receive television transmissions from neighboring countries as well as through satellite technology.

The government radio station broadcasts each day in the four major national languages (Dzongkha, the language of the western highlands; Nepali; English; and Sharchop). Indirect criticism of the King is permitted in the National Assembly and is sometimes covered in the Kuensel. The Government banned the Nepalese language as a medium of instruction in Bhutanese schools at the end of 1990. Many schools in the south were closed in the aftermath of the 1990 disturbances or converted into army camps and detention centers. The Government reported that most had reopened by mid-1993, but outside observers are only able to confirm the reopening of about half the schools. The ban on instruction in Nepali remains.

### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

There are no written guarantees of these freedoms. Bhutanese may engage in peaceful assembly and association only for purposes approved by the Government. Although the Government allows civic and business organizations, there are no political parties. The BPP and BNDP, organized by ethnic Nepalese exiles from Bhutan, have been labeled "terrorist and antinational" and according to the Government "have no standing inside the country." Both parties advocate a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy and claim wide support in southern Bhutan.

### c. Freedom of Religion

Buddhism is the state religion. The Government subsidizes monasteries and shrines and provides aid to about a third of the Kingdom's 12,000 monks. The monastic establishment enjoys statutory representation in the National Assembly and Royal Advisory Council and is an influential voice on public policy.

Citizens of other faiths, largely Hindus, enjoy freedom of worship but may not proselytize. Under Bhutanese law, conversions are illegal. The King has declared major Hindu festivals to be national holidays, and the royal family participates in them. It is illegal for foreign missionaries to proselytize in the Kingdom, but international Christian relief organizations and Jesuit priests are active as teachers and in other humanitarian activities.

### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

Some Bhutanese enjoy considerable freedom of movement, but many reports indicate that ethnic Nepalis face substantial restrictions on their ability to travel inside Bhutan. For many years, Bhutanese seldom traveled inside or outside the Kingdom, but the construction of roads and the establishment of air links with neighboring countries have encouraged travel. Bhutan's southern border with India is open, and people residing in the immediate areas freely cross this border. Indians from other regions who enter Bhutan by airplane or stay in hotels must have visas and fall under the cap set by the Government limiting the admission of tourists to 4,000 per year. By treaty, Bhutanese are free to reside and work in India.

Since early 1988, Bhutan has sought to reduce the ethnic Nepalese population by implementing a 1985 act that significantly tightened the requirements for transmitting citizenship. Until 1985, citizenship was transmitted as long as the father was a Bhutanese citizen under the 1958 Nationality Law of Bhutan (which granted citizenship to all ethnic Nepalese adults who owned land and had lived in Bhutan for at least 10 years). The 1985 act raised this standard by requiring that both parents be Bhutanese citizens in order to transmit citizenship. Residents of Bhutan who could not satisfy this new requirement were retroactively declared illegal immigrants.

People losing their citizenship under the 1985 act may apply for naturalization but only after satisfying a rigorous set of standards, including proficiency in the Dzongkha language and proof of residence in Bhutan during the previous 15 years. Exile political groups complain that the law makes unfair demands for documentation on largely illiterate people in a country that has only recently adopted basic administrative procedures. They claim that many ethnic Nepalese whose families have been in Bhutan for generations were expelled because they were unable to document their claims to residence. The Government denies this and asserts, for example, that the word of village elders is an acceptable substitute for written documentation. Refugee groups dispute this statement and report that village elders are not present when citizenship interviews are carried out.

The 1985 Citizenship Act also provides for the revocation of citizenship of any naturalized citizen who "has shown by act or speech to be disloyal in any manner whatsoever to the King, country, and people of Bhutan." The Bhutanese Home Ministry, in a circular notification dated August 17, 1990, advised that "any Bhutanese national leaving the country to assist and help the antinationals shall no longer be considered as a Bhutanese citizen....such people's family members living under the same household will also be held fully responsible and forfeit their citizenship." Human rights groups charge this provision was widely used to revoke the citizenship of ethnic Nepalese who were subsequently exiled from southern Bhutan. In 1993 growing numbers of refugees reported their citizenship was revoked under this provision.

Arrivals of refugees from Bhutan in the eight camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its cooperating agencies in Nepal peaked during 1992. By mid-1993, arrivals had fallen to slightly more than 100 per month, reflecting tightened screening at the Nepalese border and an apparent reduction in official pressure on the ethnic Nepalese. By September 1993, 85,000 were registered in the UNHCR camps, of whom about 66,000 arrived during 1992. Between 5,000 and 15,000 more are believed to have left Bhutan and settled with family members in India. The total outflow of approximately 100,000 people is equal to about 15 percent of Bhutan's population.

Many refugees, especially those who arrived in Nepal during 1991 and 1992, claim to have been pressured to leave by local authorities. These pressures include the threat to confiscate property, denial of public services, and physical intimidation. For much of 1993, refugees reported leaving Bhutan because of increasing depopulation in southern districts, feelings of apprehension and insecurity, the loss of their jobs after it was discovered that they had family members who had fled the country, and the wish to be reunited with relatives already living in the camps. As the year drew to a close, however, refugees increasingly reported incidents of persecution—including beatings, destruction of homes, and eviction at gunpoint—as the reason for fleeing. Expulsions appear to continue under the government circular described in Section 1.f. which provides for the exile of persons whose family members have joined the "antinationals" movement.

The Government claims that those who were expelled are Nepalese or Indian citizens who came to Bhutan to work after the 1958 Nationality Law was issued. It also claims the majority of those arriving in Nepal have left voluntarily after selling their land and property. There are credible reports that these "voluntary emigrants" were compelled to sign away their property by government officials. In July Nepal and Bhutan agreed to form a joint committee to settle the problem of the refugees. However, the King and other Bhutanese officials have repeatedly stated they will accept responsibility only for "bona fide Bhutanese nationals who have been forcibly evicted." Documentation requirements are to be determined by the joint committee. However, the Government of Bhutan has made clear that it plans to accept few repatriates.

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

Citizens of Bhutan do not have the right to change their government. Bhutan is an absolute monarchy, with sovereign power vested in the King. The Government has resisted democratic changes. Decision making is centered in the Palace and involves only a small number of officials in the civil and religious establishment. Although the present King and his father have made attempts to integrate women and some southerners (ethnic Nepalese) into the body politic, the system is still dominated by the male members of an aristocracy of Mahayana Buddhist ancestry. Political parties do not exist, and the Government discourages their formation. The BPP, founded in June 1990, was outlawed the following September after widespread protests by ethnic Nepalese in southern Bhutan. The Government claimed the BPP was a terrorist organization, responsible for murders, kidnappings, and destruction of government property in the south. The Government also outlawed the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP), founded in February 1992 by former government officials of ethnic Nepalese origin.

The National Assembly, formed in 1953, is composed of 105 members elected by limited franchise (heads of family in Hindu areas, village headmen in Buddhist regions), 12 elected by the monastic establishment, and 33 high-level government officials appointed by the King. Its principal functions are to enact laws, approve senior government appointments, and advise the King on matters of national importance. It also provides a forum for presenting grievances and rectifying cases of maladministration. Voting is by secret ballot, with a simple majority needed to pass a measure. The King cannot formally veto legislation, but he may return bills to the Assembly for further consideration. The members occasionally have rejected the King's recommendations or delayed their implementation, but the King has always had enough influence to persuade the Assembly to approve legislation he considers essential or to withdraw proposals he opposes. Government officials may be questioned by the Assembly, and ministers may be forced to resign by a two-thirds vote of no confidence.

## Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Just as it does not permit political parties, neither does the Government permit local human rights groups. At least three groups led by ethnic Nepalese exiles, HUROB, PFHRB, and the Association of Human Rights Activists - Bhutan (AHURA), monitor the human rights situation in southern Bhutan and collect depositions from refugees in Nepal. These groups also campaign internationally to put pressure on the Bhutanese Government and conduct human rights education among the refugees in the camps. These groups report human rights violations by dissident groups but only rarely. The Government accuses HUROB, PFHRB, and AHURA of working for antinationals.

The Government's attitude toward international human rights and humanitarian groups continued to show signs of improvement in 1993. ICRC representatives visited prisons near Thimphu three times in 1993. The Government had an ongoing dialog with Amnesty International (AI) focused on recommendations in an AI report issued in December 1992. These recommendations included the abolition of shackles, establishment of a mechanism to hold security forces accountable for torture, and ratification of the Convention Against Torture. Although shackles appear to have been abandoned by government security forces, much more needs to be done. The Government continues to deny visas to international groups and individual investigators.

## Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

### Women

Bhutan has developed neither a rigid caste system nor customs that sequester or disenfranchise women. Family land is divided equally between sons and daughters, and dowry is not practiced, even among ethnic Nepalese Hindus. A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) study found that boys and girls in Bhutan receive equal treatment as regards nutrition and health care. This equality of treatment is reflected in data showing little difference between sexes in child mortality rates.

Among urban Bhutanese, girls are given "equal or near equal opportunities" to pursue education, UNICEF found. This pattern of parents seeking education for their children, regardless of sex, appears to apply among both Hindu and Buddhist families. Nationwide, however, government data indicate that girls account for only about 40 percent of the school population. Although traditional cultural patterns place girls in a lower status than boys, girls are still cherished, since in Bhutanese society it is they who care for the parents when they reach old age.

The sexes mix freely, and polygyny is sanctioned as long as the first wife gives her permission. Marriages may be arranged by partners themselves as well as by their parents, and divorce is common. Legislation has been enacted in recent years making marriage registration compulsory and favoring women in matters of alimony. About 10 percent of government employees are women. In rural areas, the division of labor follows strict gender lines, and women in unskilled jobs are generally paid slightly less than men.

Rape was made a criminal offense in Bhutan in 1953, but that law had weak penalties and was poorly enforced. The National Assembly in its July 1993 session adopted a revised Rape Act with clear definitions of criminal sexual assault and enhanced penalties. In cases of rape involving minors (which reportedly is a growing problem in Bhutan), sentences range from 5 to 17 years. In extreme cases, a rapist may be imprisoned for life.

The National Women's Association of Bhutan was formed by the National Assembly in 1981 to promote improvements in the socioeconomic status of women. It now functions as an independent nongovernmental organization.

### Children

Children enjoy a privileged position in Bhutanese society and benefit from international development programs focused on maternal and child welfare. The Government's 1992 5-year plan estimates the primary school enrollment rate at 66.9 percent in 1990, based on an estimated population of 104,000 children between the ages of 6 and 12. Bhutan's health care system combines internationally funded medicine with traditional spiritual and ritual remedies. The child mortality rate in 1984 was 21.1 percent. In 1990, 84 percent of Bhutanese children had received required immunizations.

### National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic Nepalese first came to Bhutan in large numbers at the turn of the century. These migrants were granted Bhutanese citizenship for the first time under the Citizenship Law of 1958 (see Section 2.d.). The Government contends there was large-scale illegal immigration which went undetected by the Government until the census carried out in 1988. The discovery that ethnic Nepalese were on the verge of becoming a majority prompted the Government to launch an aggressive campaign to reassess Bhutanese (Drukpa) culture and tighten immigration. If no action was taken, the ruling elite feared, Bhutan's Buddhist society would be overwhelmed by the Hindu ethnic Nepalese, as happened in neighboring Sikkim (which was annexed by India in 1974).

Early efforts at halting the unfavorable demographic trends focused on limiting immigration and attempting to assimilate the existing ethnic Nepalese. Attempts at assimilation included financial incentives for intermarriage, education for some students in regions other than their own, and direction of economic development funds to the south. By 1989 assimilation gave way to policies aimed at "Bhutanization." Measures intended to preserve a national identity required the wearing of Bhutanese dress, made the teaching of Dzongkha compulsory, and banned instruction in Nepalese. Under the 1985 Citizenship Act, tens of thousands of ethnic Nepalese were declared to be illegal immigrants and forcibly evicted from the country. Still more fled the country in the face of officially sanctioned pressure (see Sections 1.c. and 2.d.).

International pressure on Bhutan increased during 1992, as concern spread about the ballooning refugee population in Nepal. In response, the Government tried to stem the outflow of migrants from southern Bhutan. A royal decree was issued making it a criminal offense to forcibly evict any citizen, and three government officials were convicted on charges related to intimidation of ethnic Nepalese. Ethnic Nepalese also were excluded from paying rural taxes and contributing labor for development projects in 1992. By that time, however, the exodus had gained momentum; thousands of ethnic Nepalese were unquestioned claims to Bhutanese citizenship moved to India or the refugee camps in Nepal to be reunited with family members and escape a climate of fear and uncertainty in southern Bhutan.

By law southerners may own land and establish business in the north, and northerners have the same right in the south. Nonetheless, it is reportedly still difficult for ethnic Nepalese (except government officials) to buy property in Buddhist areas. Ethnic Nepalese have been required to produce "No Objection Certificates" issued by the police for admission to schools and for jobs. For example, a November 6 advertisement in the national newspaper requires students seeking to enter a driving school to produce a "No Objection Certificate." Admission to a course for a postgraduate certificate in education requires a "No Objection Certificate." These certificates continue to be required despite claims by the Government that they would be abandoned. In fact, these certificates are used to prevent ethnic Nepalese citizens from taking jobs or educational slots in many districts of Bhutan.

Exile student groups accuse the Government of revoking the scholarships of Nepalese students who were accused of supporting the dissident movement. Government critics claimed families with ties to the Palace and senior levels of the Government are strongly favored in their access to government employment and state scholarships for foreign education. The Government contends that it has made a serious effort to send qualified minority candidates for education overseas. To defend its hiring practices, it cites data on government employment showing that as of 1991 nearly half of the civil service was filled by ethnic Nepalese. Of 213 students sent to India for study between 1985 and 1991, it says, 127 were southern Bhutanese.

### People with Disabilities

Bhutan has not passed legislation mandating accessibility for the disabled. There is no evidence of official discrimination against people with disabilities, but neither is there evidence of official efforts to assist the disabled.

## Section 6 Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

Trade unionism is not permitted, and Bhutan has no labor unions. There is no right to strike. Bhutan is not a member of the International Labor Organization.

### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

There is no collective bargaining or legislation addressing labor-related issues pertaining to industry, which accounts for about 25 percent of the gross domestic product but only a minute fraction of the total work force. The Government affects wages in the manufacturing sector through its control over parastatal wages.

There are no export processing zones.

### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Government uses a system of compulsory labor taxes to compensate for its low financial tax base. Under various development schemes, a typical urban or rural family of 8.5 persons could be liable for up to 40-compulsory days of labor each year.

### d. Minimum Age for Employment of Children

There are no laws governing the employment of children. Children are not employed in the industrial sector, but many assist their families in the traditional economy. In road building, for instance, eligibility for employment is by height, not age. Although most workers are at least 15 years of age, a UNICEF study suggested children as young as 11 are sometimes put to work with road building teams.

### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

As noted above, there is no legislation addressing labor issues. There is no legislated minimum wage, standard workweek, or health and safety standards. Labor markets are highly segmented by region, and monitoring wage developments is inhibited by the preponderance of subsistence agriculture and the practice of barter. The salaried labor market is the government service, which has an administered wage structure last revised in 1988. Only about 18 industrial plants employ more than 50 workers. Apart from a few of these larger plants, the entire industrial sector consists of home-based handicrafts and some 60 privately owned small or medium-scale factories producing consumer goods. A predominantly agricultural country, Bhutan's rugged geography and land laws that prohibit a farmer from selling his last 5 acres result in a predominately self-employed agricultural labor force.