



Tree of Life  
by Charles  
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United States Department of State

## 2006 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom

“There is no more fundamental issue for the United States than freedom of religion and religious conscience. This country was founded on that basis, and it is at the heart of democracy.”

*Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice  
March 2006*

### **Our Nation's Heritage, A Universal Right**

Religious freedom is the inalienable right of individuals and groups to choose or change beliefs as their consciences dictate and to be free from intimidation, restrictions and biases based on those beliefs. America's founders enshrined the free exercise of religion and freedom from state control in the First Amendment to the Constitution. International human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, establish the right of religious freedom for all people. United States foreign policy promotes religious freedom in accord with U.S. national heritage and internationally recognized principles.

### **Our Commitment**

In keeping with U.S. history and international norms, the United States will continue to stand with those seeking the freedom to choose, believe and practice their faith without intimidation and hindrance.

### **Promoting Change And Advancing Liberty**

Promoting religious freedom has become an increasingly crucial international goal with the rise of extremism. The challenge before all free nations is to confront elements that encourage intolerance or hatred of religious groups, to promote respect for all faiths, to advance opportunity for individuals to openly practice their beliefs, and to preserve the dignity of every individual or religious group. In the last year, positive actions around the world have included:

- Continued efforts by governments in countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam to remove legal or societal barriers to the free, unrestricted expression and practice of religious faith.
- Intervention by national governments in several countries, including India and Bangladesh, when societal attitudes toward minority religious groups led to discrimination and physical threats.

### **Our Efforts To Promote Religious Freedom**

The 197 country and area reports in the 2006 *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* survey the government and societal treatment of all known religious groups, and discuss U.S. Government efforts to promote religious freedom in each country.

Appointed by President Bush in 2001, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford III spearheads U.S. engagement with other governments on religious freedom. U.S. officials up to the highest levels engaged extensively in countries where severe violations of religious freedom occur. When those violations continue, the Secretary of State designates a nation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the IRF Act. In 2005, the Secretary re-designated Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam as CPCs. The Office of International Religious Freedom leads Department efforts to craft strategies worldwide to promote religious freedom, produce the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, train foreign service officers, and provide information to assist in assessing refuge or asylum policies based on religious persecution.

Over the last year, the U.S. Government has:

- Successfully advocated the release of prisoners held in several countries because of their spiritual convictions, including Afghanistan and Vietnam.
- Outlined and clarified with the Government of Saudi Arabia policies to remove intolerance from school textbooks and curricular materials.
- Co-sponsored a successful U.N. General Assembly resolution on North Korea that addressed restrictions on religious freedom.
- Co-sponsored a successful U.N. resolution on Iran that specifically addressed religious freedom.

